

State-Run Feminism in China: Who Has Been Empowered?
A Critical Discourse Analysis on Women of the Year (2017-2021) in China Women's News

Congcong Chen, The London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom

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Abstract

Being a country with profound patriarchal traditions, the media environment remains conservative on feminism and gender-related issues in China, despite prevalent feminist movements worldwide. This sphere is increasingly scrutinized when Xi took power, who has displayed a strongman leadership to further centralize the overall dominance. Nevertheless, there is still space to negotiate women's rights and gender-related issues. One example is China Women's News (CWN), the official publication of All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) - the one and only state-sponsored organisation on women's affairs. It is particularly discovered that there is a special column on CWN called *Women of the Year*, which presents 10 most outstanding female figures annually as role models who have made extraordinary achievements and demonstrated women's empowerment. However, considering the institutional association between CWN and the nation-state, there might be implicit ideological connotations underneath the high-profile acknowledgements, given the social reality where most women still suffer from systematic discrimination and under/misrepresentation. This study conducts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) on the media discourse of *Women of the Year*, deciphering its ideological implications through the examination of texts as a site where women, media and state interplay with each other. This study also invites more research on the challenges women are confronted with in media representations and in the reality, to contribute to broader social justice.

Keywords: Media Representation, State feminism, China Women's News

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Introduction

On 2022.04.12, The Communist Youth League (*Gong Qing Tuan Zhongyang*), a youth movement organization affiliated to the China Communist Party (hereafter CCP), released a post on its social media Weibo, attacking ‘extreme feminism’ as a ‘rampant and toxic tumour’ which provokes gender antagonism. This post has triggered explosive denouncement from the public, interrogating their right to encroach the discursive domain of women.



Figure 1: The Communist Youth League attacking ‘extreme feminism’ on Weibo¹

China has been a country with prevailing patriarchal traditions over its long history, and the public space for discussing women’s rights is overtly asymmetrical. Official parties such as above are squashing such discussions among citizens, while taking a proactive role in dominating relevant topics.

However, the authority also seeks to incorporate gender equality and pro-women values into national propaganda as a way of securing leadership. The complicated ideological formation is well practiced by the government-run organisation All-China Women’s Federation (hereafter ACWF), and their official media China Women’s News (hereafter CWN). One notable example is a column called *Women of the Year*, where 10 women are selected annually for their extraordinary achievements in various fields as role models. On one side, these selected women have reified women’s empowerment. On the other, they are also endorsements of the nation-state’s interests and the party’s policies.

Departing from the representational duality, the research conducts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) on CWN’s *Women of the Year* column (2017-2021), inspecting how the official media represent these commendable models, and what ideological overtones are embedded in association with broader social backgrounds.

¹ Source : <https://www.weibo.com/3937348351/Lo9zyhPn5>

Literature Review

1. Discursive Power of Media and the Chinese Context

It has been thoroughly studied that media, as a primary channel of information flow, plays a crucial role in delivering discourses by creating a representation of the world; and such discursive power is constructivist rather than textual, not only seeks to mirror certain parts of social reality, but also to reconsolidate or reshape them (Chouliaraki, 2008; Hall, 2016; Fairclough, 2003; Bryman, 2012).

Discursive power is usually imbalanced, which grounds the mechanism of ideology, as made familiar by Althusser (1971) to describe how power relations are reproduced via discursive systems. On one side, media discourse serves for presenting, naturalizing and making the public accept existing dominant social ideologies and hierarchical relations via 'systems of representation' (Fowler, 1991; Hodge & Kress, 1993). On the other side, media itself can supply powerful lexical and syntactic structures that can formulate and convey its own logic and ideologies, which is desired by other social powers such as political parties (Meng, 2018).

Notably, ideology is firstly conceptualized as a means of 'state apparatus' (Althusser, 1971), to which China is an exceptional testimony. The authoritarian nature of Chinese media is 'the organ of central state' whose function is to reflect CCP's doctrine, signal political power, and shape the public's value system in accordance with nationalist ideology (Chomsky, 1997; Sun & Chen, 2015; Meng, 2018; Jaros & Pan, 2018).

Fuch (2015) has characterized Chinese media as a three-fold linear, top-down structure to dominate discursive power. Media system is controlled across individual, institutional and societal levels, where the identity of participants and the ways of representations are heavily censored and monitored. The production and circulation of media contents are dominated by political and economic elites (Jaros & Pan, 2018), which leaves little scope for contest from the general public (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), especially in sensitive topics such as feminist appeals.

2. Women and the State: State Feminism Under Patriarchal Capitalism

The profound patriarchal system of China can be dated back to feudal times, as the dominant Confucianism advocates a benevolent patrilineal hierarchical order. Women are regulated to obey all male roles around them - father, husband and son (Barlow, 2004; Dillon, 2021), excluded from public sphere but constrained in domestic space carrying housework (Meng & Huang, 2017).

However, when global women movement burgeoned in the 19th and 20th century, there was also an influx of feminist awareness in the traditionally patriarchal society. Nevertheless, it has been penetrated by scholars such as Barlow (2004) and Wang (2005, 2010) that Chinese female movements have never been an independent practice but affiliated to segmented nationalist grounds since the very beginning - reformist, revolutionist, and the CCP, all patronizing women in exchange of their support to take over the country (Barlow, 2004; Hong Fincher, 2018).

This is even more manifest after the establishment of PRC in 1949 and the CCP seized power, since when an officially recognised **state feminism** came into being. Unlike western liberal feminism which strives for women's individual rights and autonomy (Fraser, 1997), state feminism 'portrays a paradoxical image of a state patriarch championing women's liberation' (Wang 2005, p. 519), which entails different expectations of women at different times, with a consistent requirement of their contribution to the country.

At socialist construction times, women were officially granted equal rights as men, with Chairman Mao famously declaring 'women hold up half the sky' (Barlow, 2004; Wang, 2010). However, basic rights such as entering labour force did not mean self-fulfilment but the responsibility to shoulder necessary agricultural and industrial production for nation's development as 'mandatory labour cisterns', while at the same time be 'a good socialist wife' (Davin, 1979; Tsai 1996; Zuo, 2013).

Then after the Opening and Reform in 1978, the relationship between women and the state has new interpretations. On one hand, market economy reform has opened new opportunities for women. The class of professional women began to grow in size and influence (Dillon, 2021). On the other hand, the state's priority of economic development and the global neoliberalization have further disfranchised women (Wallis et al., 2018), where women are confronted with a dual oppression of patriarchal capitalism – implicit discrimination in workplace, as well as the burden of traditional domestic roles (Eisenstein 1984; Ueno, 1989; Meng & Huang, 2017).

Since Xi's strongman leadership, the Party has been centralizing power and 'no aspect of Chinese society, economy, culture or politics should escape from being guided, controlled and sometimes repressed by the CCP (Lai, 2016; Zeng, 2016; Brødsgaard, 2018; Gore, 2021). Pro-status quo nationalism is emphasised, which entails sustaining social stability, and make people faithful to their already powerful country, with the ultimate ambition to legitimize CCP's authority (Linehan, 2018).

The shrinking political environment also triggered more conservative gender relations. Recently, Chinese propaganda has revived the family rhetoric as an approach to secure authority and found social stability. Women's status suffers severe backlash such as being urged to return to domestic areas as virtuous, obedient roles.

3. All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and China Women's News (CWN): Institutionalized State Feminists

State feminism and its peculiar ethos are usually articulated with a specific government-run organisation as a remarkable symbol- All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), which was established in March 1949 under the leadership of CCP. As the only state-sponsored organisation on women's issues, ACWF provides invaluable resources to investigate the relationship between women and the state.

On one hand, the organisation commits to 'steadfastly protecting the rights and interests of the mass women'. They have indeed carried out commendable achievements to improve gender awareness and support women, such as providing educational and vocational training, engaging women in social production (Longwe, 1991; Wang, 2005). On the other, the organisation firmly adheres to party's lead and propagates a positive image of the CCP (Howell, 1996, 2004; Wang, 2005). As self-proclaimed, ACWF should 'Listen to the Party's

words and follow the Party's lead' (Wang, 2010), 'being a good daughter of the party' (Zhou, 2019). This submission has been intensively reinforced under Xi's era, as they must 'follow the wise guidance of Xi' (Sintomer & Zhou 2019). As Wang (2005) pointed out, it seems to be the party-state, through ACWF, that defines women's rights and interests.

ACWF also launched its official publication on 3 October 1984, CWN (*Zhongguo Funv Bao*), which is essentially controlled by both the Propaganda Ministry of the Central Party Committee and the State Press and Publication Administration (SPPA). The official media provide key material to interpret the Party and state's ideological inclinations on gender issues. As concluded from a systematic content analysis by Chen (2006), CWN follows dual-representational route of ACWF, advocating women's rights and gender equality while broadcasting nation-state propaganda. For example, it usually ascribes women's liberation to the Party's leadership and follows the Party's prominent principle of positive propaganda, while hedging systematic gender discriminations.

Research Design

Illuminated by the social function of media in China, the relationship between women and the state, as well as the unique positioning of ACWF and CWN, this study discovered a special column on CWN - Women of the Year, across 2017-2021, the second term of Xi's governance when a series of transformations take place across all aspects of China. While women are confronted with repressive space in general, these women receive rather high-profile acknowledgement. Their representations could uncover enormous social values and ideologies resided in the intricate relations between state interest and women's appeals.

The research question will then be: what ideology is indicated through the propaganda discourse of these women of the year? It can be further narrowed down into 1) Who are Women of the Year? 2) How do the official media of CWN construct the discourse of Women of the Year? 3) What power relations and ideologies are conveyed through the representations of Women of the Year? Afterwards, the theoretical cornerstones might also become handle to instigate actions for more social justice.

With the intention to deconstruct media discourses and their ideological propensities, this research employs qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA) on its targeted material. CDA provides a three-fold approach for such kind of analysis, 'not only interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex' (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). It firstly investigates the textual microstructure which relates how discourse is enacted, naturalized, and rationalized through linguistic and semiotic elements such as vocabulary, sentence patterns, rhetoric, and genres to 'lexicalize' the world (Van Dijk, 1988; Fairclough, 2003, p.218). Secondly, it looks at the interlevel, structural practices to see how different discourses, genres and styles draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize each other and articulated together (Fairclough, 2003, p.18). Finally, it analyses societal 'superstructures' (Hall, 2016), where various power relations are contesting within discourses to shape our understanding of reality, texture our personal and social identity, and affect existing social dominance order (Fairclough 1995; Dijk, 1996; Wodak & Meyer, 2008: 11).

The theoretical and practical delineation make CDA congruous with this study. By examining how representations on these female role models are composed, and then how the passages resonate one another, a multivalent ideology repertoire related to broader social backgrounds can be sketched and inspire future research.

Results and Interpretation

Overview



Figure 2: Women of the Year (2021), China Women's News²

Women of the Year (2017 - 2021) is to celebrate women who have made extraordinary achievements in their specific areas. These women are represented under the discursive strategy of 'focalization' (Fairclough, 1995), who are hailed as symbols of women's empowerment in a feverish tone: 'They have changed the world, warmed the world, ignited the world; make us moved by them, proud of them, praise for them!' (CWN, 2019).

The corpus consists of 5 articles (1 per year), 10 figures each. Their identity, profession and age can vary a lot: there are youth award-winning athletes, middle-aged administrative officers and senior scientists, portraying a multiplicity of outstanding Chinese women with different specialities. Meanwhile, considering CWN as an official media affiliated to CCP and the central government, they are also carriages of mainstream ideologies alongside pro-women values.

² Source : http://paper.cnwomen.com.cn/html/2022-01/01/nw.D110000zgnfb_20220101_1-4.htm

1. Progressive Feminist Sensibility

Educated and Professional

According to the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report Data³, women's status in China is rising from 107th to 102nd, still lagging among 146 countries worldwide. The statistics elicit another ironic fact that China ranks as low as 123rd in secondary education enrolment rate, while comes first in tertiary education – i.e., girls reach a seemingly 'equal' terminal from a very asymmetrical beginning with their own efforts.

Taking this societal background into account, one of the most conspicuous progresses reflected on 'Women of the Year' is advocating education and career development for women and girls.

Women are now highly praised for their academic or professional achievement, reversing the entrenched feudal notion of 'ignorance is the best virtue of women'. It also reveals a rectification of traditional patriarchal bias that women should remain in domestic areas, while encouraging them to enter all sectors of public sphere has been accommodated in the mainstream ideology.

Specifically, there are senior political figures, such as Carrie Lam (2017), the first female Chief Executive of Hong Kong since the handover; successful entrepreneurs such as Yang Lijuan (2018), the COO of Haidilao; outstanding scientists, who have received national (Su Donglin & Wu Huiming, 2019) and international (Zhang Miman, 2018) awards especially in STEM subjects, breaking the stereotype that women are inferior in this area. To exemplify, when introducing Ye Shuhua (2021), 'Mother of Beijing Time' and the first female director of an astronomical observatory encouraging women to break the glass ceiling', the texts particularly quote Ye's own speech:

She talked about the power of women in astronomy, citing examples of outstanding women in politics and science, as well as the work done by the astronomy community to promote gender equality. She believes that gender equality does not mean making women stronger than men, but rather equal access to opportunities. (Appendix 1)

Similar quotes include the world-renowned AI expert Li Feifei's (2021) words on gender equality:

Diversity in AI is an extremely important issue, and there is a need to bring women into AI as well as other technical fields still dominated by men. (Appendix 5)

By referring to their own speeches, which is a common contextual discursive practice, the texts intend to extract an idea that women can also make outstanding professionals of any discipline, no less intelligent or capable than men.

³ World Economic Forum (2022), <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022>

The Alternative Beauty

Among various social expectations of women, beauty has been an ongoing obsession. This is especially magnified by the neoliberal logic where merchants collude with mass media such as commercial magazines to objectify women in the name of self-pleasure. However, CWN sees through the pitfall. In the representations of Women of the Year, they often use the word ‘most beautiful’, but with alternative meanings and provide a disruptive interpretation sphere.

For example, they have praised the ‘most beautiful volunteer’ Du Chengcheng (2018) who tells movies for the blind, ‘most beautiful Hunan women’ Zhou Xiufang (2018) who has contributed greatly to poverty alleviation. In recommending Yang Xiukai (2017), a dedicated rural cadre, CWN calls her ‘black rich beauty’. In the case of weightlifting gold-medallist Li Wenwen (2021), CWN features her ‘proudly proclaimed every fat girl has her own dream’, challenging the traditional, beauty ideal of white skin and slim figure.

Rediscovering a more inclusive definition of beauty accounts for an integral part of women’s emancipation, which would liberate them from appearance anxiety. The discourses on CWN and their chosen ‘models’ declare that women can also be considered as beautiful by self-fulfilment, dedicated spirit and impressive contribution, rather than how they look.

Empowering Women for Broader Emancipation

A universal feminist appeal is not merely concerned about women, but about enabling more disempowered groups to revolt against their subaltern status resulted from oppression and exploitation (Longwe, 1991). This is also expounded by applauding women who have not only strived for their own right but made contributions to the general social public.

This is especially instantiated by Zhang Guimei (2020), the ‘lightning principal’ who has lit up the dreams for numerous village girls.

Many years ago, witnessing the tragedy of poor girls dropping out of school time and again, Zhang Guimei had a dream in her heart to run a free high school, so that mountain girls can receive education. Being misunderstood, even satirized, ridiculed, Zhang Guimei never gave up, but finally turned the impossible dream in the eyes of others into reality. (Appendix 4)

Another example is Su Mingjuan (2017). She is a beneficiary of Project Hope, a public welfare campaign to support education for children in poverty. After growing up, she becomes an active advocator and practitioner for charity activities in education and poverty alleviation:

Su has set a positive example and made greater contributions, summoning more people to pay attention to Project Hope and devote themselves to public welfare. (Appendix 1)

These discourses ameliorate a limitation of the Western over-emphasis on individual rights, which is even worsened under the neoliberal logic. Rather, CWN associates female empowerment with a more poignant goal which should generate sustainable effects on a broader society.

2. Nation-State Connotations

Aside from conveying some universally acknowledged feminist values, these discourses also imply nationalism and pro-state ideologies in subtle or explicit ways. Over the 5 years, the kernel of CCP's propaganda is 'China dream', with optimism and enthusiasm about its future of 'great rejuvenation' (Ferdinand, 2016). Women of the Year also become epitome of these ideological maneuvers.

The Ubiquitous Party-State

Published by ACWF under the leadership of CCP, the Party is eulogised almost everywhere in Women of the Year. An emblematic case is Qu Duyi (2021), introduced under the title '100-year-old Lady Standing Firmly with the Party', canonizing her faith in the party as supremacy. Going through the main text, it would be realized that Ms Qu has also been an outstanding journalist, translator and diplomat. However, these professional achievements are overshadowed by her association with the Party:

Qu, daughter of early Party leader Qu Qubai [...] Qu and her mother were detained in prison for four and a half years, during which she persevered her communist beliefs, and sworn to join the Party... Qu once said, "When I joined the Party, I knew I had to fight for communism for the rest of my life. (Appendix 5)

Another representative figure is Meng Wanzhou (2021), CFO of China's telecommunication giant Huawei. Ms. Meng faced detention and criminal charge by the US and Canada. She and Huawei are acknowledged by Chinese government as national symbols in the US-China conflict over digital technology (Dillon, 2021):

During more than 1,000 days of illegal detention in a foreign country, Meng was elegant, decent and smiling every time she appeared in public, because she firmly believed that the great CCP, the powerful motherland of China and more than 1.4 billion Chinese people would always be backing her firmly.[...] Returning homeland, she said with a moving tongue: "Where there is a five-star red flag, there is a lighthouse of faith, and if faith had a colour, it must be Chinese red!" (Appendix 5)

Meng is always shaped as an innocent citizen of 'political persecution against Chinese citizens', 'unreasonably detained for 1,028 days without violating any Canadian law', implying that the US is to blame for the US-China dispute, and using terms such as 'female warrior' with 'strong backbone and unyielding faith' to describe her affiliation to China which aims at generating greater nationalism among the general public.

Endorsement of Economic Policies

Since marketization reform, one of the most significant measurements of success in China becomes wealth. Economic indicators are also means to secure the dominance of CCP. However, what decides the legitimacy is not economic performance per se, but the public perceptions of it -as they are shaped and mediated by ideological contestation. This is why discursive power matters which bridges economic performance and political legitimacy (Holbig, 2018).

Hereafter, economic status also becomes a trendy yardstick when commending *Women of the Year*. However, it is also not economic performance alone that makes them excel, but with a significant prerequisite to demonstrate cohesion with the country's economic policy. For example, the success story of Yang Lijuan (2018), CEO of Haidilao, is a symbol of how the reform and opening policy enables many people with opportunities. Key elements such as her oversea experiences in Singapore and the US are emphasized to have 'broadened the possibilities of life and self-fulfilment' (Appendix 2).

In the contemporary era when the country is invigorating innovation and high-tech industry, economic models are also those who have presented excellent works under new policies, with a shifting focus on younger generation who is regarded to have more innovative potential.

Veya (2020), known as 'Queen of E-commerce', whose achievement in live-streaming shopping business is narrated under the theme of the state's prioritized mission 'poverty alleviation':

Encouraged by the party-state, she has been engaged in live broadcast to spread public welfare since 2018, helping with poverty alleviation through e-commerce, driving the sales of agricultural products in poor areas to nearly 30 million.
(Appendix 4)

The association is also explicit in highlighting her position in the government-run organisation National Youth Federation, and mentioning her won the National Dedication Award for Poverty Alleviation at the National Poverty Alleviation Award Commendation Conference.

The highlight here is Xi's important exposition of poverty alleviation, which has now been a crux of Chinese Dream and a proof of China's wisdom, and as such the guide to direct practices across all social spheres (Wang, et. al., 2019). As analysed above, this is also frequently incorporated in discourse admiring female power.

Representing China on Global Stage

Another tactile characteristic of Xi's China is a more assertive international strategy. He is introducing a 'major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,' shifting from keeping a low profile to a more active, robust and ambitious style (Sørensen, 2015; Ferdinand, 2016), aspired to exert leadership in a new global order (Klimeš & Marinelli, 2018).

In political practice, he on one hand has worked to prevent the influx of foreign ideas and influences via strengthened media censorship, and on the other spared mighty efforts on discursive strategies such as encouraging citizens to 'tell Chinese story well' on the international stage to augment Chinese soft power, especially in a seemingly depoliticized gesture from ethno-cultural identity (Sørensen, 2015).

Women of the Year also selected influential 'Chinese storytellers', among which YouTuber Li Ziqi (2019) is a representative. The texts feature her global fame and the identity as an officially-recognized ambassador of China's soft power from the façade of 'cultural exportation':

Her videos capture the idyllic life and the charm of traditional Chinese culture. The farming girl wearing rough Chinese clothes can simply master everything with traditional Chinese skills...People around the world are beginning to understand and appreciate the 'interesting and beautiful' traditional Chinese culture, praise the diligence and intelligence of Chinese people as well as this country...She 'hasn't praised a word for China, but told the Chinese story quite well'. (Appendix 3)

These paragraphs mention many traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as clothing and food, the 'common, shared repertoire of concepts' (Hall, 2016) reflect the normative lineage of contemporary Chinese politics that imbues propaganda messages with cultural symbols (Brady 2012; Link, 2015) to establish a positive national image.

Another frequently mentioned group is award-winning athletes in international competitions. In the tribute of women athlete delegation in the Tokyo Olympics (2021), it writes:

In the summer of 2021, Chinese female athletes have left unforgettable memories in Tokyo. Inside the battle field, they demonstrate the spirit of courage, persistence and diligence; outside the battle field, they become cute and frank, calm and confident [...] They illustrate a diverse image of China's new-generation female athletes to the world. (Appendix 5)

Sports also play an instrumental part in building Chinese image and comprehensive power. Xi has also made a series of important speech about how sports provide significant spiritual power to unite Chinese people and achieve national rejuvenation of Chinese Dream (Zhang & Zhang, 2016).

3. Discursive Strategy: Expanding Overlaps and Mitigating Conflicts

Summarizing from above, it is manifest that the official media of CWN, under the leadership of the party-state, is impulsively accommodating women's empowerment into the discursive package of nation-state interests. This discursive strategy can be further unwidened by reiterating some previously mentioned cases: celebration of female athletes, while mainly to show national strength, is also acknowledging their striving spirit. This is also a liberation from traditional gender norms in China which do not support girls in 'aggressive' sport because they are supposed to be gentle (Mu & Peng, 2019).

It is also the case of outstanding scientists, but the other way round. Encouraging women to break the glass ceilings in the scientific and technology sphere also replies to China's ambition to be a world leader in this area. This is why women like Li Feifei are gaining exponential exposure, whose research areas are advanced sectors such as AI and IoT. They are seen as vital to ensure future competitiveness against the backdrop of a new industrial revolution (Kania, 2019).

On the other side of these hyper-visible Women of the Year, we should also not neglect those who are oblivious. There are no feminist activists, no sexual minority such as LGBTQ+ communities who are also indispensable in feminism appeals and gender equality in Chinese mainstream media according to the party's instruction. It suggests that feminist values are exclusive to those acknowledged by the party-state for their fidelity to the country, while those questioning the regime could face the allegation to be 'extreme feminists' under the discursive dictatorship.

Conclusion

By applying the threefold practice of CDA to the honoured group of Women of the Year on the official-backed media CWN, the system to 'translate' discourse on women into that of nation-state interests can be clearly identified (Fairclough, 1995), unfolding a multilateral landscape of women's status, gender order, mainstream ideology, as well as social norms and values.

On the textual level, these articles take on an overall positive, complimentary tone, downplaying concrete individual life of these women but highlighting abstract national values; the distinction between factual and evaluative statements is blurred (Fairclough, 1995). Women's self-fulfilment is subtly inserted in parallel with nation-state interests.

From the interdiscursive dimension, many Women of the Year are awarded after receiving recognitions from other official parties, as reflected on relevant quotes and reported speeches which resonate one another to consolidate certain ideological assumptions (Fairclough, 2003). Deliberate selection of women from different backgrounds is also observational evidence of politicising everyday life (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999), where diverse stories jointly validate the mutual ideological legitimacy.

This study particularly spotlights the societal facet to see how everyday discursive practices balance and intersect with juxtaposed power relations in China. On one hand, there exists a social consensus on some progressive feminist appeals, such as encouraging women to receive education and enter the public sphere. On the other hand, the 'speaker' of CWN, or ACWF, suggests a superiority of nation-state interest which all inscriptions of womanhood must subordinate to. This contradiction becomes more acute under Xi, the iron leader strengthening patriarchal underpinnings of his authoritarianism (Hong Fincher, 2018). CWN and ACWF can only propose a compromised state feminism led by the party-state, curtailing any individual pursuit that is considered treacherous of official agenda (Barlow 2004), which is significantly insufficient for broader emancipation goals.

Discussion

Despite the heuristic attempt, this study also leaves considerable space for future improvement out of its indigenous deficiency. For example, it inevitably carries 'preexisting' biases (Matthes & Kohring, 2008, p.262) based on the analyst's individual stance, which needs complementary perspectives. Extensive researches can also look for other representational semiosis, such as visual images that embed social cultural implications (Rose, 1996; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

It should also be reminded that, social researchers should bear the rudimentary mission of inspiring real-world social justice. In this case, it is recognised that women have enjoyed vast improvement in terms of social status, opportunities in life and work today (Dillon, 2021). However, there is still a long way to go, as the envision of state feminists such as ACWF is inadequate to realize the goal of general emancipation: women should not only be circumscribed national subjects, and a greater number of marginal groups rather than these elites should not be made invisible. Future research could then encourage advances towards a more universal arena.

Appendix

CWN, Women of the Year,

1. 2017
http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-01/02/c_1122198080.htm
2. 2018
<http://news.cnhubei.com/xw/gn/201901/t4208999.shtml>
3. 2019
https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_5466856
4. 2020
https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao_10633813
5. 2021
http://paper.cnwomen.com.cn/html/2022-01/01/nw.D110000zgfnb_20220101_1-4.htm

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Website Resources

China's State Council, <http://www.gov.cn/>

All-China Women's Federation, <https://www.women.org.cn/>

World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/>