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Gender, Place and Inequality: A Case Study of Media Institutions in a Tier-4 Chinese City

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Certificate of original authorship

I, Shan Huang declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

China's transition from socialism to a market economy has important implications for gender equality. Existing research indicates that as an integral part of society, the role of media, especially visual mass media, is crucial in the reflecting and shaping of gender relations. But so far, there has been little attention paid to how the inequalities between big and small cities and between developed and less developed regions manifest in media practices and operations, and there is an even more conspicuous absence of research on how spatial inequality has shaped gender practices in the media. Consequently, it is not clear from existing research whether local media institutions in less developed regions do better or worse in producing gender-related news compared to their counterparts in the developed coastal metropolitan areas and regions in China. This study is concerned with the relationship between gender, media and spatial inequality in China. This thesis pursues this conceptual agenda by reporting on an extensive case study of a municipal-level television station and a newspaper in an inland Chinese province. More specifically, it asks how gender relations have changed in reform-era China through the prism of media institutions, media content, and media practices. I first explore the extent that Chinese local media institutions participate in reshaping gender relations and how female media practitioners negotiate their gendered roles and expectations on daily basis. I then analyse the content of Chinese local media coverage of gender issues in order to generate a more comprehensive assessment of the level of gender-awareness in Chinese media at local levels. This study also contributes to the discussion of the conditions of female media workers in Chinese media workplaces, especially those in less developed small media institutions. The study integrates media content analysis with institutional analysis, and uses a range of research methods, including

participant observation, semi-structured interviews, individual case studies, and discourse analysis. ■

Chapter 1

Research Aims, Questions, and Scope: An introduction

I studied journalism in Henan University in China in 2010. As a freshman, I returned during a summer break to my hometown, a small city in a Northern province of China, and applied for an internship in the city's television station. Since I was a child, I remember watching the city news program that followed the CCTV news every night with my parents. However, my experience of this one-month internship changed my views on journalism as a profession. On the first day, the manager, through the HR department, tried to place five interns into different departments. The male journalists who came to the HR office to 'claim' their internships clearly preferred the male interns among us. I was assigned to follow a male journalist reporting on education, but I was not given any opportunity to do any reporting of my own. I watched how he interacted with interviewees and accepted their dinner invitations as well as 'red envelops (monetary reward)', while I did errands for him such as buying cigarettes. One day, when he could not make it on time to do the reporting, the photographer asked me to step in. I memorised the transcript, did what was expected and saved the day. This was my first opportunity to report the news on television. At that time, I had no knowledge about what 'gender inequality' or 'feminism' meant, nor did I know that what I experienced was gender bias. But the memory of this experience has stayed with me. I then went on to study for a master's degree in the UK, and subsequently worked in a coastal city in China, but I have

always wondered if the small television station in my hometown might have changed.

While talking with journalists in my hometown, I noticed they frequently used the more colloquial language term '*da chengshi*' (major city) to describe the higher scale metropolises in China, but referred to their city as a '*xiao difang*' (small place). My experiences of having grown up in a small city of the northern inland province of Henan, then working in a metropolitan city of Guangdong, and studying in Sheffield in UK and a global city such as Sydney have sensitised me to the importance of how the size and scale of place – concepts which normally interest geographers – shapes cultural sensibility and practice. I therefore often wonder whether the different scales of place in China also play a role in shaping gender relations.

But the question of what shapes gender relations is a complex one. In her 2010 article 'From State Dominance to Market Orientation: The Composition and Evolution of Gender Discourse', Xiaoying Wu, China's foremost scholar of feminism and sociology at the China Academy of Social Science, outlined what she refers to as the 'triple constraints on gender'. X. Wu (2010) argues that when it comes to gender construction in China, there are three fundamental elements: the state, the market, and traditional culture. These three components are "sometimes in confrontation and sometimes allied, playing different roles in constructing social gender at different times" (X. Wu, 2010, p. 154). In light of this, the question of how Wu's triple constraints operate in the local media in a small city like my hometown to shape gender related policy, practices and discourses seems to present a productive line of inquiry.

In this thesis, I engage with Wu's tripartite framework and her concept of 'culture' in a number of specific senses (X. Wu, 2010), including the local/regional aspect of culture, the historical/traditional aspect of culture, and the moral/ethical aspect of culture. I'm pursuing each of these cultural

dimensions through the prism of gender, sexuality, and women's place in society. First, from the local/regional aspect of culture, I look at spatial dimensions of gender, regional differences, dialectics, local customs, and shared values. How do these cultural factors inform media practice in relation to gender issues? And How do these cultural factors influence people's gender-related decision-making processes? Second, the main cultural factor of the historical/traditional aspect of culture is patriarchy. In this thesis, I examine how traditional cultural factors are used in institutional arrangements and status identification to uphold men's central position and control of women. Third, the moral/ethical aspect of culture includes personal ethical judgement and organizational ethical culture, such as people's culture norms about women's obligations to family and society, and sexual harassment issues in media institutions. In this thesis, I consider how the ethical values guide to gendered behaviour on personal level and at the organizational level. How do these moral cultural factors influence people's decision, such as their opinions about marriage and career development?

Now studying gender and media in an Australian university and having followed the #MeToo movement with interest, these idle questions have taken on a more intellectual dimension. It also seems to me that more than ever before, there is an urgent need to get some answers to these questions. In this study, I have chosen P City as a case study in order to examine its municipal newspaper and television station, and to analyse gender implications through the 'scale of place' on its institutional arrangements, contents, and media practice (employee).

By conducting an extensive case study of municipal level media institutions in an inland Chinese province, and by conducting comparisons of news reports from small local newspapers and their counterparts in Chinese Tier-1 cities, this study tests a hypothesis: that the local media are more conservative regarding

gender issues than media in coastal and developed metropolitan areas and regions in China. More importantly, it aims to identify the key reasons why this may be the case, should this hypothesis turn out to be true. In other words, my main objective is to understand the social, economic and cultural factors which inform regional and provincial media practices in relation to gender issues. More specifically, engaging with the geographic concept of scale, and through the prism of Xiaoying Wu's 'triple constraints' (2010), I address the following three sets of questions:

1. How do local media institutions negotiate the tension between the demands of the market and the state and the various feminist positions within those institutions? In negotiating this tension, what (dis)advantages does local media face in Tier-4 cities in comparison with metropolitan and national media?
2. How do the triple forces – state, market and culture – shape the ways in which gender issues are represented in local media? In this regard, what are the major similarities and differences between coastal and developed media environments and inland local media environments?
3. How do political, economic and cultural factors affect the ways in which female professionals work in local media? Do these women have less gender awareness or fewer opportunities to pursue gender equity in comparison with their counterparts in the metropolitan media?

My study uses a number of research methods: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, a longitudinal ethnographic case study, and discourse content analysis. These research methods allowed me study prioritise

individuals within media organisations by examining their narratives and behaviours and the roles they play in shaping organisational norms and cultures (Jenkins & Finneman, 2018). In other words, while I tried to record participants' statements faithfully and accurately, I did not take what they said as necessarily objective accounts of their own experiences. Instead, I regard their statements as cultural narratives through which they – and I as a researcher – can make sense of their actions, behaviours and personal and professional decision making. I have also tried to show how these cultural narratives constitute the organisational norms and cultures of local Chinese media, which in turn shape the ways in which gender relations are negotiated in the workplace and constructed in the media.

This thesis consists of five further chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 2 focuses on the backgrounds of the case study place P City, methodology and research defintions in the study. I describe the research approaches used in this study and the process for method practice in the field.

Chapter 3 the literature review critically outlines the salient scholarly insights in the field of gender and media in both the West and China. It starts with an overview of the relevant studies in the development of the women's movement and feminism in Maoist and post-Mao China, with particular reference to Chinese feminism within the powers of the state and market. The chapter then identifies key thoughts on gender and media representations of women, again both in the West and the context of China, and presents findings from studies which focus on gender inequality in media workplaces. The aim of this review of the Western and Chinese literature is to identify the similarities and differences that exist in these two different cultural/national contexts from the points of view of media production, institutions and practices.

The empirical findings from the case study of the local media institutions in P City come from an examination of gender practices through three prisms: 1)

institutional and organisational cultures of media production; 2) the experiences of individual media professionals; and 3) news content. Each of these is pursued in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, respectively. Chapter 4 outlines how reforms and the market economy have impacted the workplace gender norms, policies and practices in the media in P City. I ask how state and market forces have interacted to (re)shape, challenge and reinforce patriarchal and traditional gender norms in local media organisations; what changes have been brought to local media institutions by media commercialisation; and how these changes have affected women's positions in the news narratives and their employment in local media industries. I also aim to contextualise these questions through an extended example of a marriage matchmaking fair held by the local newspaper in P City.

Moving from institutions to individuals, Chapter 5 explores the situations, experiences and perspectives of women journalists working in the local traditional media. Through a discourse analysis of the statements provided by four women journalists and observations of their work and interactions in their daily lives, I tried to identify the social and cultural factors that shape their narratives, but equally importantly, how they challenge or reproduce the unequal gender and regional inequalities that underscored their statements. Focusing on the experiences of these individuals, I discuss how they negotiate their gender identity not only within their media workplaces in P City, but also in their personal lives. I ask how their professional capacities and constraints shape their decision-making about career, family and self-development; the factors that shape their gender awareness; and the extent to which the scale of place where they live and work determines the level of their gender awareness. In addition to the interviews, and with their consent, I also draw on their posts on social media accounts, include WeChat and Weibo.

Moving from media profession to media content, Chapter 6 asks how the media in P City approach gender issues, and how political, economic and cultural forces intersect to shape the ways in which stories about women and gender-related issues are reported. Using the #MeToo movement and its Chinese responses as an analytic catalyst, I look especially at the discourse of sexual harassment news as portrayed in the sampled metropolitan and local newspapers. Six newspapers were chosen from three Tier-1 cities – Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou – to compare their news coverages with the local P City newspaper on three alleged sexual harassment cases that happened during the #MeToo movement in 2018. At the centre of this analysis lie the tensions between:

- the developing online stories and the attitudes of the traditional media;
- the imperatives of political control from the state and the commercial needs of an increasingly competing market; and
- the cultural values and media professionals among different scale of places in a special inequality context.

By examining how newspapers of different 'scale of place' approach and frame similar allegations of sexual harassment, Chapter 6 discusses the intrinsic connection between 'scale of place' and news reports on gender-related issues. More specifically, this discussion aims to shed light on the possibly different ways in which the state, the market and Chinese culture – the tripartite forces identified by feminist sociologist Xiaoying Wu– interact and intersect to (re)produce gender inequality.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this study. It summarises the main findings, highlights the key contributions, clarifies the scope and limitations of this research and explores some possibilities for further research on gender and media studies in the Chinese context.

As mentioned earlier, my interest in pursuing this study is personal as well as intellectual. While I take a critical approach in this study of media institutions and media professionals in order to develop a critique of gender inequality in my analysis of media content, my fieldwork has taught me the importance of appreciating the forces that shape local practices. It is my hope that the following chapters can be read as my journey of learning to engage with a globally intelligible scholarly language in order to understand and better account for the media practices of a city that I thought I knew very well. ■

Chapter 2

Gender, Media in the P City: Background and Methodology

2.1 Reform of the media system and its impact on local media

To address the research questions which are outlined in the Introduction, I must start with an account of what is missing in the existing literature about the continuities and transformations in China's media structure in recent decades. Most of the studies of the Chinese media and communication in the socialist era have focused on the national level and not explored central–local dynamics and tensions. A large number of newspapers and television stations serving the many inland and less developed regions are sparsely represented in both English and Chinese academic studies (Xin Zhang, 2006). This is despite the fact that Chinese media, mirroring the political structure, also feature a four-tier structure – national-provincial-municipal-county – and that geographers have clearly outlined this structure's various kinds of spatial inequalities (Cartier, 2013; Liao & Wei, 2012; L. J. C. Ma, 2005; Oakes, 2000). Even so, how it shapes and impacts on media is still little understood. In response to this blind spot in the research, Wanning Sun (2012a) has argued for the need for a 'spatial turn' in Chinese media studies in order to fully understand the impact and implications of reform, advocating for a 'break it up' and 'tear it apart' approach that goes below the national level and looks at regional media practices (p. 18). Drawing on insights from cultural geographers, Sun argues that the stratifications are "both spatial and informational, with people living in remote, mountains, rural, and ethnic minority-dominated areas bearing the brunt of China's uneven and

unequal development of media and communication" (Wanning Sun, 2012a, p. 22). With the growing spatial disparities between rural and urban, the inland and the coastal, and the smaller cities and booming metropolises, Wanning Sun (2013) argues that local-level television stations have remained an "invisible sector in studies of Chinese television … betraying an urban, technological and class-based bias in scholarship" (p. 64). Xin Zhang (2006) also found that most studies of Chinese television had set their research focuses on the national-level media outlets or television stations in the more-developed regions of Eastern and Central China. Xin Zhang (2006) points out that one limitation is that "most studies to date have tended to look at the Chinese media as a whole, but few have explored the great diversity and complexity of Chinese society and broadcasting structure" (p. 30).

According to Esarey (2005), in the late 1970s, Chinese media went through a process of decentralization, whereby the state transferred the power of media ownership, management and economic viability to lower levels of the state hierarchy. This resulted in the growth in the number of newspapers and television stations. In December 1978, the Third Plenum of the Communist Party's 11th Central Committee Encouragement set guidelines to allow for lower levels of the state apparatus to start their own news organisations in order to develop the economy after the Cultural Revolution. On March 8, 1979, the Central Propaganda Department held the National News Work Meeting:

> In an address by then director of the Central Propaganda Department, Yaobang Hu advocated lifting restrictions on intellectual inquiry and encouraged the media to be more proactive and original, while strengthening the centralization of the party leadership and unity in party ranks. Party committees of provinces, autonomous regions, self-administered cities, cities, planned cities (*jihua danlie shi*), districts (*zhou*), counties and county-level cities were urged to start newspapers to

> increase the flow of information for economic development and to rebuild the power of the propaganda system. Beginning in 1980, the establishment of new 'party papers' sparked the meteoric rise in the number of media outlets that would lead to a fivefold increase in the number of newspapers by 1985, and an eightfold increase in the number of newspapers by the end of the decade. (Esarey, 2005, p. 40)

The number of television stations in China also increased during the 1980s. Before the economic reforms in the late 1970s, broadcasting provisions were centralised at the national and provincial levels. Municipal and county-level stations primarily provided transmission services for provincial and central programs, but without self-programming capacities (Y. Zhao, 2008). The number of television stations grew rapidly after 1983, when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) announced a crucial policy of decentralization of television and radio broadcasting systems into 'four levels': central, provincial, municipal, and county (Esarey, 2005; Y. Huang, 1994; Shengming Huang & Zhou, 2003). The municipal and county local governments were given authority to build full-scale radio and television stations using their own resources, because the central state was incapable of providing the large amount of financial investment needed for increased national television coverage (Y. Zhao, 2008). Subsequently, the Chinese media system was composed of four lengthwise media systems (national level, province level, prefectural level, and county level) and three transverse media systems (newspaper, radio, and television) (Shengming Huang & Zhou, 2003). The different levels of media institutions are affiliated with the CCP and present different discourse powers, accountability, and coverage areas.

Since the 1980s, the spread of cable technology has created another wave of television channel multiplication at both the provincial and municipal levels (Y. Zhao, 2008). Moreover, satellite technology now enables provincial channels to

be broadcast nationally, and residents of China to have free access to dozens of channels, including those of other provinces and cities (Wanning Sun, 2013; Y. Zhao, 2008). These channels operate as financially independent units but they are also affiliated with government authorities at various levels. Competition between the profit-oriented media institutions for programming and advertising increased across the regions (Y. Zhao, 2008). In recent years, losing advertising revenue and attracting professionals have become the main concerns faced by many Chinese municipal-level television stations in less-developed, small cities (Xie, 2017; Yang, 2015). Both the growing spatial inequality and the competition with provincial and national channels have contributed to the difficulties of Chinese local television stations, especially the inland, semi-rural and less cosmopolitan county and city stations.

Starting in 2001, the 'four-level' system changed to 'three levels' of television stations. The central government has cut the number of stations of the non-capital cities with lower GDP and cancelled some self-produced channels in county-level televisions that had only the transmitting function (Shengming Huang & Zhou, 2003). But very few county television stations followed this policy (Wusan Sun, 2006; Xiaoling Zhang, 2007). In fact, some economically developed counties like Haiyan County in Zhejiang Province still maintain fully operating county-level media outlets, including television and radio channels with self-produced local contents, and established an internal reference paper and a newspaper targeted oversea Chinese fellows, which contribute a great amount of revenue for local county government (Xiaoling Zhang, 2007).

After the central leadership reduced the number of print media and television stations, city- and county-level media institutions came to constitute a significant proportion of the media outlets in the Chinese news industry (Esarey, 2005). China's communication system dictates that all newspapers and television stations are state owned. Their administrative rankings are

determined by the government agencies that supervise them at various levels (Y. Zhao, 2004a). According to official data, by 2018 there were more than 2,000 county-level and up to 300 city-level broadcasting and television stations in China. There were also more than 800 city-level and county-level newspapers, which made up about 48 per cent of all published newspaper titles in China (General Administration of Press and Publication, 2019; J. Zhang, 2020). These city- and county-level publications are the lowest level of the CCP-controlled state media.

Almost every city and county in China has its own television and radio station, and most cities have at least two CCP-led newspapers – a daily newspaper and an evening paper (Esarey, 2005). Constituting the major part of China's newspapers publications, the traditional Party newspapers include two main types: the CCP and government propaganda-oriented morning papers (*ribao*), and the CCP-led but more market- and reader-oriented evening newspapers (*wanbao*). These Party newspapers are affiliated with the various propaganda departments of the CCP, and their editorial policies follow the directions of its committees and governmental bodies at various levels (C. Huang, 2001; Y. Zhao, 2008).

Compared with the morning papers, the market-oriented evening papers enjoy a certain degree of freedom, with some space available for soft and human-interest content, although under a set of guidelines (C. Huang, 2001). Although some of their news content and television programs are drawn from media sources and television stations at higher levels, they also produce their own programs, including news, current affairs, lifestyle and entertainment content for their local audiences. Due to their locally relevant content, these local television programs tend to have grassroot audiences from lower socio-economic groups (Wanning Sun, 2013).

Under the technological revolution pressures and political drive, most legacy news media in China joined the path to media convergence with the impact of the Internet and social media (Li et al, 2020). Shiyi Ivy Zhang (2012) also noticed the disparity between central-level and local Chinese news sites in their convergence efforts. With the state subsidy, the central-level sites can develop multiplatform and multimedia services as well as original products and services. However, local news sites face more challenges in the market due to their size, lack of state subsidy, investment, human resources and advanced technology. In the era of media convergence in China, they focus on providing local news and information while forging partnerships with bigger businesses to sustain their advertising platform.

While there has been a lack of attention on how spatial inequality manifests itself in media practices and operations, there is an even more conspicuous absence of research into how it has shaped gender practices in the media. In fact, when reviewing the literature on Chinese media, I found only a small number of studies from a gender perspective (e.g. Bu, 2006; Bu & Liu, 2000; Liu & Bu, 1997; Meng, 2009; H. Wang, 2016, 2019). Most of these tended to study media institutions in developed urban areas and regions and were based on research and interviews with female journalists in the large metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Nanjing, and Chengdu (Y. Chen, 2009; Kuhn & Shen, 2012; Lin, 2010; Wallis, 2006; M. Shen, 2002). In contrast, the ways in which gender issues manifest in local and regional level media – particularly in the northern, inland, rural, and semi-rural areas – have received little scholarly attention. The perspectives and experiences of women journalists in a number of Chinese small media institutions in less developed regions therefore remain largely undocumented. Some scholars have questioned whether the elite media in more advanced areas are in fact representative of Chinese media overall and have called for more research on Chinese local media in less developed regions

(Keane, 2002; X. Yu & Sears, 1996; Xin Zhang, 2006). These concerns inform the rationale for my study of gender practices in media institutions in a lower-tier city in a less economically developed province in northern inland China.

2.2 Media, gender and 'scale of place'

Since my concern with spatial inequality and the difference between media practices in top-tier cities and bottom-tier cities, the notion of scale is central. And this is where insights from geographers have become useful. What geography is also instructive in making sense of the politics and economics of defining 'the local'. In geography studies, 'scale' is used from a spatial perspective and as lens for analysing spatial relations: "It is a representation, arena, scaffolding and organisation of socio-spatial formation" (L.J.C. Ma, 2005, p. 480). Furthermore, Howitt (2002) has provided a more detailed and comprehensive explanation, arguing that the geographic concept of scale is constituted by at least three interacting aspects – size, level, and relation. First, the notion of size involves taking into account the temporal amount of space and number of people when mapping a scale. Second, the idea of 'scale as level' is commonly understood as the nested hierarchical ordering of space – from global to national, regional and local. Third, the concept of 'scale as relation' is important for considering the scale boundaries and the cross-scale relation, which L.J.C. Ma (2005, p. 480) summarised as the relation that

> sees social processes at a locality as a consequence of both local, extra-local and trans-scalar relations, and scale boundaries are seen as porous through which social, economic and political forces may flow across places of different areal sizes and levels.

Feminist scholar Linda McDowell (1999) reminds us that despite our increasing mobility and global connectedness we still live in spatially fixed and geographically restricted sites or places. Texts, contents and images from media

and the Internet are received and processed by people in different places and communities with varied social attachments and distinctions. These places are "constructed through sets of complex, intersecting social relationships that operate at variety of levels and which are affected by beliefs and attitudes, images and symbols" (McDowell, 1999, p. 30). In this study, I draw on such conceptual insights to explore if and how the size and scale of place (especially between Tier-1 and Tier-3 or Tier-4 cities) informs not only the media content and practices of Chinese media professionals but also their levels of gender awareness.

The potential influence that the 'scale of place' might have on media and gender equality – in media content, in media organisations, and with regard to media access and use – needs careful assessment. This study tries to explore new ways of thinking about gender equality and Chinese media-related practices. It asks if and how spatial hierarchy in the administrative sense constitutes a key factor shaping gender practices, sensibility, and awareness of local media. This will expand our knowledge of how various factors contribute to increasing gender equality and which of them are necessary and/or sufficient, as well as the societal consequences of the lack of gender equality in the mainstream media. In doing so, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive, grounded understanding of the relationship between gender and place, and of how spatial hierarchy shapes gendered dynamics in and through the different levels of media in China.

2.3 Defining the 'local' and locating site of fieldwork

What constitutes the 'local media' is not always easily agreed upon, but one thing that is clear is that media practices in China to a large extent determined by the scale of the place. Depending on researchers' purposes and the frameworks of their studies, the 'local' is variably defined in both English- and

Chinese-language research studies. Among the English-language case studies of Chinese local media, the term 'local media' has been used to refer to a municipal television station in Chongqing city (Xin Zhang, 2006); a county-level television station (Wusan Sun, 2006); and a community closed-circuit cable television station in the 1990s (M. Wu, 1998; X. Yu & Sears, 1996). In the Chinese academic literature, a provincial daily newspaper was used as case study for local media reporting on targeted poverty alleviation (Yue & Ding, 2020); the various media outlets in Tibet are also considered as local media participate in the international communication (D. Zhou, 2013); and in a large number of Chinese media studies, 'local media' refers to city-level and county-level traditional media which take the road of media convergence under the challenge from social media (Shu, 2017; Junjie Yang, 2016; B. Yu, 2020).

In existing research, the scales of 'local media' range from the provincial to the city, county and community media levels. In this study, I adopt the definition of 'local media' proposed by Xin Zhang (2006), who argued that 'local media' were initially identified with media institutions below the Chinese provincial level:

> The provincial-level media are placed at an intermediate level and are subject to conflicting demands, focusing on them is particularly apt when examining the nature of the relationship of 'local', 'national' and 'international' within Chinese media outlets. (Xin Zhang, 2006, pp. 30-31)

The local traditional media institutions include those at the city level and county level, and are often referred to as '*dishiji meiti*' (prefecture-level media); '*difang meiti*' (local media); '*defang tai*' (local television); and '*dishiji baozhi*' (local newspaper). These levels of media institutions important sections of the Chinese media system. Due to their locations in the vast inland regions, they serve enormous rural audiences. However, as many of the CCP's media institutions are positioned at the lower levels of the hierarchy structure, these local media

are struggling to both fulfil their political functions for the government's propaganda imperatives and meet their commercial needs as profit-driven media outlets (Xin Zhang, 2006; Y. Zhao, 2008).

In a study of the city-level Chongqing Television in Southwest China (a new first-tier city whose municipality is directly under the control of the central government), Xin Zhang (2006) explored the role of the 'local' by using official documentation and interviews with employees. That study found that the local television personnel tended to be pragmatic about their understanding of the concept of 'local' in regard to their relationships with the national and international media, their professional identities, and their relations with their audiences; they used the concept of 'local' to define targeted markets, programs with local dialects and local values, and sometimes 'low quality' programs for 'local audiences' (Xin Zhang, 2006). These findings have been helpful for refining my understanding of the process of commercialisation in media institutions at lower levels than Chongqing Television, but my study goes beyond the municipal level and focuses on media institutions that are even further down the geographic 'food chain'.

As for the lowest county-level media outlets, Xiaoling Zhang (2007) identified three mechanisms by which the state controlled these local media outlets: their institutional and structural 'Party-owned' nature; their affiliation to the local government; and the strong social network in the region. These mechanisms restrain the outlets' abilities to provide public space and engage in critical debate (Xiaoling Zhang, 2007).

In a study of a town-level television station in Northern China, Wusan Sun (2006) illustrated how the town's government mobilised its political power to win over the administrative rights of the town's television from the city's Broadcasting and Television Bureau. This conflict demonstrates the fixed hierarchical structure of the Chinese media system and its affiliations with local

government in various levels. With 'town' at the bottom of the Chinese administrative system, a town TV station is at the bottom of the country's broadcasting system. Even though the town being researched had limited resources for producing its own content and therefore heavily relayed content from above, it was constricted by the government and higher-level media (Wusan Sun, 2006).

Because of the limited resources and capabilities of the lowest level media outlets for producing their own content, for this study I chose a higher-level media outlet (prefecture level) that would have more resources and be able to produce content with gender implications. And the findings from the prefecture-level media institution could also shed light on the county and town media institutions in the rural areas and pave the way for the further studies on the local level media in China.

Given the rapid development of urbanization in China in recent years, the tier system has gained wide popularity in Chinese media, and some scholars now use it to refer to various groups of cities. Such widely accepted categories and classifications, which inform both ordinary people and media, can be traced to a system published by the China Business Network, a large media group in Shanghai. Since 2017, this organisation has published online a yearly ranking of Chinese cities based on five measurement indices: business resource concentration; urban hub pivotality; people's activity; lifestyle diversity; and future plasticity. According to the China Business Network (2020), the 337 cities studied are divided into six tiers, with four cities belonging to Tier-1: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen (colloquially known as 'Bei-Shang-Guang-Shen'). These Tier-1 cities represent the most developed urban areas in China, with large populations, high levels of economic development, and cultural and political influence. A new batch of 15 cities called 'New first-tier cities' (*xin*

yixian chengshi) are the rapidly developing economic centres. Another 30 cities are categorised as Tier-2 cities.

The provincial capitals account for the most of the New first-tier and Tier-2 rankings. The remaining small cities are classified as Tier-3 (70 cities) and Tier-4 (90 cities), and most county-level cities are classified as Tier-5 (128 cities). This tier system has been widely used in media publications and referred to by Chinese academics for various purposes, including commerce, transportation, tourism, and education (Jia, et al., 2019; Xue, et al, 2020; Zhang, et al., 2016). The National Bureau of Statistics also use the tier system classification in its analysis of housing prices (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018; W. Wang, 2017). In this study of less-developed places, I conducted my fieldwork in a small city in Henan Province: P City[1], which is classified as Tier-4 according to the China Business Network system, but belongs to Tier-3 in the classification of the National Bureau of Statistics. In the rest of this thesis, I refer to Tier-1 cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou as top-tier cities and P city as a bottom-tier city.

Using the criteria outlined above regarding the size and scale of a place, P City belongs to either Tier-3 or Tier-4. It is located in semi-rural inland Henan province. China is a vast country comprising 34 provinces and autonomous regions. In terms of regional cultural differences, its provinces are further differentiated between those with southern and northern worldviews (Cartier, 2001); and between the coastal, economically developed and more urbanised regions, such as Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang, and the inland and land-

[1] In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, pseudonyms are used for the city and the media institutions, and the specific information related to the city or the media institutions are protected

locked regions that are traditionally considered to be agrarian, and less developed, such as Shanxi, Guizhou, and Henan.

In the formation of Chinese civilization, the cultural creation and historical inheritance of the Central Plains culture (*zhongyuan wenhua*) has had an extremely important position and function (Y. Fan, 2006). Although Henan is not geographically in the far northern region of China (see Figure 1.1), its worldview, accent and cultural sensibility is usually considered to be northern, and, as such, it is a quintessential part of the land-locked middle-kingdom culture that has informed the culture of 'traditional China'. Henan Province is considered the birthplace of the more than 5,000-year-old Chinese civilization (Dong, 2014). It has been crucial to the Central Plains cultural characteristics of orthodox and conservative conceptions that have been impacted by Confucianism and by a deeply rooted farming consciousness that has limited its competitive and innovative abilities (S. Zhao, & Ding, 2005).

Figure 2.1 The geographical location of Henan Province in China

Sourced: https://jbh.17qq.com/article/doncmldpv.html (accessed 5 June 2020)

Henan Province has 18 prefecture-level cities. With Zhengzhou as the capital city (having moved from Tier-2 to the New first-tier in 2017), the province comprises a few other sizable tier cities including Luoyang, Nanyang, Xinyang, Shangqiu, followed by several other cities further down the scale, including Xuchang, Kaifeng, as well as P City in the fourth tier. According to the *Henan Statistical Yearbook 2018,* P City ranked around the middle of the GDP among 20 cities, with a population of five million people (about half of whom are rural population) in an area of some 7,000 square kilometres (Henan Statistics Bureau, 2018).

The P City television station and P City newspaper group are located at the two ends of the main street of the city. I was able to travel easily between these two workplaces by catching a single bus. Upon my first return visit since my apprenticeship days, my first impressions of these two buildings were that, compared to nearby buildings, they were old and small, with crowded parking for cars at the front door. This was because they had never been rebuilt or renovated and still did have on-site parking. When the P City Television and Broadcasting (PTV) network was founded in 1991, its television programs could reach five other counties and cities in the same province and had an audience of about 5 million people. As is the case with all Chinese local television stations of this scale and level, PTV is a public institution (*shiye danwei*) that receives government funding and functions as a public service facility. Those who work there have 'officially approved positions' (*shiye bianzhi*), which is lower in status than the 'civil servants' (*gongwuyuan*) working in government funding departments. With increasingly dwindling funds from the government, it now has a staff of over 600 people, including about 260 classified as journalists, 80 technical support staff, and 50 administration staff.

Officers in the various departments and programs occupy 10 floors within the PTV building. A staff person told me that when the television station was built a decade ago, it was one of the highest buildings in P City. Due to the difficult financial situation several years ago, the ground floor office was rented out commercially for public. The limited space and resources means that some staff do not even have a working desk, and several journalists in one office have to share one Internet-connected computer. PTV has found itself in further dire circumstances in recent years because of bad management, corruption of its former chief directors, and lack of formal leadership. Each of the separated programs and departments has had to manage its 'own revenue and expenditure' (*zishou zizhi*) in this public institution.

In addition, in recent years protracted delays and unpaid salaries and insurance for employees in several municipal and county-level television stations, especially in Tier-3 and Tier-4 cities, have resulted in several protests by journalists over unpaid salaries. Calling themselves 'the Party's mouthpiece', these protesters have asked the government to pay them so that they could 'eat', 'survive', and 'support their ageing parents'. They argued that even though they were working hard to 'perform their duty to defend the rights of people in the society, their own right to be paid for their labor is no longer guaranteed' (see banners in Figure 2.2). One interviewee showed me some photographs and a video he took during the collective PTV strike in 2018. Although it shows that local journalists were worried about their job, some employees I interviewed thought differently: "I am not too worried, because this is a Party's media, the government would not let it disappear". According to PTV employees, television and radio programming was severely and adversely impacted by the arrival of the Internet and digital media, which reduced audiences, especially the younger generation. The consequent loss advertising revenue increased the

difficulties of the small traditional media in the bottom tier (Xie, 2017; S. I. Zhang, 2010).

Figure 2.2 Photos of Chinese journalists' protests for unpaid salaries happened in Qiqihar City Television (left), and Daqing City Daily newspaper (right).

The original photos were censored online, these pictures were screenshots by the author on Chinese social media Sina Weibo in June, 2018

In contrast to PTV, the situation with the P City newspaper is better. The *P City Daily* was first published in the 1950s, the same year that the government established P City. Like other traditional CCP newspapers, the *P City Daily* newspaper is strictly controlled by the local government, filling its pages with straightforward CCP and government information in a top-down way. In 1994, in order to meet the needs of the market, the *P City Daily* newspaper launched its evening edition: the *P City Evening* newspaper as a supplementary paper. As

mentioned earlier, the evening papers have more freedom to represent general interests and voice ordinary people's experiences and feelings through local content (C. Huang, 2001). With a combined daily circulation of 120,000, the *P City Daily* and the *P City Evening* paper cover the five million residents of this northern bottom-tier city. The price of a one-year subscription to the *P City Daily* in 2019 was 396 yuan (about 80 Australian dollars), and for the *P City Evening* newspaper it was 268 yuan (about 54 Australian dollars). Besides selling on newsstands and through individual subscriptions, collective and institutional subscriptions from CCP office accounts and work units are the main parts of their total circulation, especially for the *P City Daily*. The CCP has a rule that, based on its office population numbers, each government institution must subscribe to the local daily newspaper, the upper-level CCP papers such as the provincial *Henan Daily*, and the CCP's central official daily newspaper, *Renmin ribao*.

During my research fieldwork in the newspaper workplace, I noticed that journalists and editors of P City's newspapers work to different time schedules. Journalists usually work on a flexible timetable; they go to the news sites in the early morning, write their reports at the sites and then send them to the editor. Editors start their daily work in the afternoon, about 3 p.m. Each editor is in charge of one page of that day's edition. Along with some of their own journalists' reports on the city news pages, editors use news released online by mainstream media as their information sources for national and international news, and for the entertainment and sports pages. While in the editors' room of the *P City Evening* newspaper, I saw editors select news from some of the big Chinese news websites, namely, *Renmin* newspaper (national official media), *Pengbai* news (leading digital media), *Xinjing* newspaper (professional market-oriented press), and *Nanfang dushi* newspaper (market-oriented tabloid press).

Editors regard these news websites as 'safe' and 'reliable' to refer to because

they are run by the state media or metropolitan media organisations. In the Chinese newspaper industry, as a result of media convergence, it is common for the 'wholesaling' of news through wire services and for news stories to then be used by a wide range of 'retail' news organisations (H. Wang et al, 2018). There are also copyright issues to be dealt with; for example, the *P City Daily* has copyright access to the *Xinhua* news site only. Newspapers often receive demands from authors or organisations to withdraw photos or articles, or else pay a fine.

In comparison with national and metropolitan papers, municipal-level newspapers in the bottom tier cities like P City face additional resource limitations. Unlike metropolitan newspapers that publish every day, the *P City Daily* and the *P City Evening* newspaper do not publish Sunday editions. Furthermore, they cannot afford well-designed official websites where readers can access the online issues. In terms of official social media such as WeChat, the *P City Daily* has only one account and, like the majority of individual accounts, it is allowed by the Tencent company to post on WeChat only once each day, and it cannot change the content after posting. In contrast, some WeChat accounts of media organisations in the big cities, as I have observed, can publish more than once each day. For instance, the *Guangzhou Daily* newspaper usually posts three times a day, at morning, afternoon and late evening. In times of emergency, such as when the typhoon Mangkhut happened in Guangdong province in September 2018, the *Guangzhou Daily* used its official WeChat account to broadcast timely news and information. P City's media organisations do not have this level of resources.

In China, media at various levels are under the CCP's ideological control and censorship. In their coverage of major events, they observe strict guidelines involving regular and specific orders on what to report and what to avoid, and on the appointment and monitoring of personnel at the managerial and editorial

levels (Y. Zhao, 2004a). The media in the bottom-tier level always remember they are '*dang mei*' (the Party's media) and the local journalists remember their surname is 'the Party' (*xing dang*). The local media outlets are directly affiliated with CCP authorities at various levels, and their key leading management and editorial personnel are appointed by their affiliated provincial and municipal Party committees (Y. Zhao, 2004a). The censorship from above and their own self-censorship work together to determine the topics and issues that are 'sensitive' to cover and those that are 'safe'. The *P City Daily*'s editors have to stay late every night waiting for the notes and directions from the government office and the upper-level CCP organisations to do a final check of their page layout before sending it to print. As well, the PTV station has a special recording room for officials to watch and censor its daily local news programs.

While local newspapers and television stations follow these strict rules and orders from above and try to 'form the popular expression' to their audiences, the main part of their daily reports are related to local government officials. Many journalists and editors in P City's newspapers believed that their work is for the CCP and government officials. Typical reports of Party matters – meetings, activities, achievements of Party and government institutions – dominate the front pages. The most important job of the local media journalist is following the government leaders in order to write these reports. One female journalist said to me:

> I don't think many local people will buy the newspaper to read, especially the young people. They may be interested in the [the city's] evening paper, but definitely not the daily newspaper. If it is not for my job, I won't event watch these local government news.

Another journalist joked that their work is to keep the mayor's 'diary'. There is a print note in the desk of each journalist and editor to help them check the correct ranks and names of government leaders and units. The social media

accounts of the local news media post the same reports as the local government daily papers. The first top news of the daily posts from the official WeChat account is 'the news of secretary and mayor'.

With their small budgets and relative lack of resources, city-level newspapers and television stations tend to focus mainly on reporting local news. Because they do not have the same sources and journalists as the big metropolitan media outlets, online news websites from mainstream media outlets become their main sources of national and international news. But are budget and resource limitations the only factors shaping how gender equality in local media?

2.4 Research approaches and methods

Even though the focus of my study is distinctively local, I draw on and engage with existing scholarship on the continuity and change in how the formation of gender discourses. An obvious transformation in gender discourse was observed by Xiaoying Wu (2010) when Chinese society moved from being state-dominated to market-orientated after the reforms and opening up in 1978. The state had long been the 'dominate official position', especially during the pre-reform period, but then became challenged by marketization, which "changed the content and form of state discourse and led to an alliance of market discourse with traditional discourse" (X. Wu, 2010, p. 150). Traditional culture is an important basic element in China, with a long history and a strong influence. Patriarchy is the core of traditional discourse, with its focus on the biological differences between man and woman and the rationality of the sexual division of labor. Wu also noted that the traditional cultural component is complex and controversial as various interest groups have used it at different times in history to promote opposing claims for their needs.

Media discourse is seen as a crucial site where different powers and meanings are articulated and contested. Xiaoying Wu's triple-constraint approach provides an apt analytical framework for my case study of P City's media organisations. Adapting her approach, in this study I ask how each of these three elements – state, market and traditional culture – works at the institutional, professional, and content levels, which are the three key dimensions of my study. Also, through comparative analysis of how the state, market and traditional culture work together to shape the media practices of both big cities and small places, I hope to identify the possible differences and similarities that may exist between the media of the various spatial scales.

Much of my fieldwork activity can be described as participation observation. I conducted two fieldwork trips in 2019, the first in March and the second in August, to engage in participant observation. I spent about two months in the P City's media institutions – the P City Television station and the P City newspaper group – for observations and interviews. As suggested by Jenkins and Finneman (2018), participant observation and interviews are useful methodologies for examining activities in a newsroom, the goal being to generate data that make media practitioners, scholars, and the general public more aware of the limitations placed upon women employees in the newsroom. The goal of participant observation at a media workplace is to provide an intersubjective experience of news making that will enable the researcher to observe and interact with the news worker in the site, to understand and experience their daily activities, languages, beliefs, and relations in the originations, groups and culture (Babbie, 2016; Brennen, 2017; Deacon et al., 2007). For gender studies in particular, Jenkins and Finneman (2018) suggest that adopting observational methods could help to address research questions such as "how women behave in the newsroom, how they interact with male and female colleagues, and the rules and norms governing their appearance,

discourse, and behaviours" (p. 169). While this study is mainly concerned with the female media workers of an inland provincial media institution, including female journalists, presenters, editors, and administrative personnel, the experiences of male colleagues and directors will also be included where relevant for purposes of comparison.

A challenge during participant observations can be how to record and document what the researchers' might hear and see in an organisation without interrupting it (Brennen, 2017; Creswell, 2014). I proposed a list of research questions in the first-year of my candidature based on the literature review of both Western and Chinese media studies. I had approached the television station and the newspaper through a friend who has connections to the managers, and received their approval for formal access to conduct my research in their workplaces. I recorded my observations of female media workers' narratives and behaviours in their daily work in field notes during breaks. At the end of each day, I recorded and transcribed these daily observation notes into my computer.

Through participant observation I aimed to get a sense of what female journalists' say and do, and how these narratives and actions respond to the organisations' norms and other discourse practices. I was motivated to address a number of questions, including:

- What working environments do female media practitioners work in?
- How do women negotiate gender relations on a day-to-day basis in their work?
- What major obstacles confront women in their pursuit of gender equality?

The participant observations were conducted over two fieldwork periods. The first fieldwork trip was from March to April in 2019, in the P City television station. During this month, I went to different news departments five or six days

a week, and participated in as many organisational activities and events as possible, including watching a female anchor working in the studio, and a workplace event for the International Women's Day. I gained research approval from the senior-level management of both institutions, and disclosed my researcher identity and purpose to all employees in the workplaces I entered. I was allowed to observe their weekly meetings and offline events. The second stage was from August to September 2019, in the *P City Daily* newspaper office. I spent weeks in different locations such as the editors' rooms, the journalists' newsroom, and the advertising department. The activities I participated also included following journalists when reporting in the city; observing offline marriage matchmaking events of the advertising department; and staying with editors in the newsroom until midnight.

Self-reflexivity is a quality indicator in qualitative research and ensures transparency (Cameron, 2011; Lincoln, 1995). "The insights of participant observation are based not only on what is said but also that which is left unsaid and demonstrated only through action" (Shah, 2017, p. 52). For instance, I noted how some interviewees lower their voice when talking about things they considered 'sensitive'. I recorded in detail my research subjects' statements, non-verbal expressions, and body language etc. All these became useful and important fieldwork data.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted open-ended interviews with 22 media workers in the local media institutions (12 from PTV and 10 from the *P City Daily* newspaper). These allowed me to gain additional in-depth insights on individual perspectives. The interview is a purposeful conversation between a researcher and participant to learn about the latter's experiences and perspectives (Brennen, 2017). With the questions prepared, semi-structured interviewing gives some space for participants to determine the importance of the topics (Longhurst, 2003). The researcher can then understand experiences of

others and reconstruct events that they themselves do not participate in. When data on particular experiences cannot be gained directly by other means, the interview can play a role by extending the interviewer's intellectual and emotional reach across time, space, race, sex, and geographical divisions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Since the research questions were related to the perceptions of Chinese female media employees, I used semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data regarding the internal perspectives and experience of 14 female workers within a patriarchal context. There were also eight interviews with male employees in order to gain their perspectives on the female employees' experiences. The respondents were diverse in term of their age, gender, education and occupation. The interviewees included journalists, editors, anchors, advertising personnel, HR staff, senior editors, program directors and senior managers. Each interview lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. I also conducted follow-up interviews with some participants. Most of the interviews took place in their workplaces, although some were conducted in restaurants and cafés. Because some women journalists were very busy in their daily news reporting, I also resorted to other forms of contact, such as mealtime conversations, chatting in the dressing room, and social media contact outside the workplace. I also used social media contact after I left P City.

The participants were sampled with regard to their working, marriage, and maternity situations. All of them were informed about the purpose of the research and agreed to attend the interviews. I outlined some topics and questions before conducting interviews in the field, and drew on some of the items proposed by Jenkins and Finneman (2018, p. 169):

> female journalists' descriptions of their work environment, the ways they are treated by male co-workers and male sources, their career advancement opportunities, the advantages and disadvantages of being a

female journalist, the challenges of balancing family and work lives, and their views of the state of women in journalism generally.

All interviews started with some basic individual information questions, such as "What is your job title?" and "How long have you been worked in this media institution?" Then I followed up with the following prepared open-ended questions:

- What are your workplace's practices regarding job contracts, basic salary and real income, and its policy on maternity leave?
- Do you experience gender discrimination with your job arrangements? Do women journalists themselves choose work on 'soft content'?
- What are the obstacles that female workers face in their careers?
- Do the HR and the management department practise gender discrimination in recruitment?
- Do female and male reporters and presenters experience ageism and physical discrimination in similar ways during their careers?
- Do you experience sexual harassment in the workplace?
- What are the roles of the Women's Federation and other women's organisations in the workplace?

I conducted the interviews in Mandarin and recorded them on my cell phone. I personally translated the interviews quoted in this study into English. I have used pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of interviewees. But making sense of what my informants said and incorporating their statements into my study would require more than just translation from Chinese to English. I realised soon enough that for a variety of cultural reasons, discussions about issues related to gender inequality and especially sexual harassment would never be straight forward or free from ambiguity. In fact, from time to time, my

interviewees were merely reporting on the gossip or hearsay they came across, rather than giving evidence based on their own personal experiences. This does not mean that what they said to me was unimportant. What people say anecdotally about gender issues (even though these statements may not be reliable or verifiable, and can sometimes be rumors) warrant serious consideration, because, as scholars argue, the unreliability, discrepancies, and imprecise language reveal a lot about gender politics and levels of gender consciousness (Yingying Huang, 2017).

In other words, I could both treat what these interviewees said as unreliable yet significant empirical data, and subject their words to further discourse analysis. Yingying Huang (2017) used an example of her fieldwork research with HIV-positive Chinese women to demonstrate the importance of paying attention to the different meanings and implications in Chinese language context between the interviewees and researchers. During interviews on their intimate relationships and sex lives, the interviewees had different interpretations and expressions when using the Chinese term '*zhao nanren*' (looking for a man) in a joking way: sometimes it means company, and sometimes it means sex. Throughout my research, I became increasingly aware that sexual harassment, sexual assault, misogyny, and sexism do not necessarily translate easily from experience into language. Furthermore, English expressions such as sexual harassment, misogyny, and sexism may not find precise equivalences in the Chinese context.

In addition to interview and on-site participant observation, I also conducted a series of longitudinal ethnographic case studies with four women media workers from PTV and the *P City Daily* newspapers. Starting from my first fieldwork session in 2019, I maintained close contact and conducted repeated interviews with these women over the two-year period, including following their working routines, visiting their families, chatting with them,

shopping and eating together, attending yoga classes, and interacting through social media. These four individuals fitted within a range of age groups, job categories, years of working, education backgrounds and marital status. Though not intended to be representative, these cases studies offered me glimpses into the lives of women journalists working in the local media workplaces in the bottom tier cities in China. Their experiences revealed how woman journalists in a local media institution fulfilled their professional roles as a journalist and their private roles as daughter, wife and mother. How did they respond to gender challenges and obstacles in their working environment? What factors shaped their decisions about their careers, families, and their own individual expectations? How did they negotiate gender norms in their daily work and life? Furthermore, I adopted the conceptual notion of 'spatial imagination' (Wanning Sun, 2006) to explore how these individuals talked about the top-tier cities, and how they practiced mobility and made decisions to either leave (or not leave) P City or move upwards.

In addition to participant observation and interviews, I also employed critical discourse methods to critically analyse the construction of meaning in the statements provided by interviewees as well as news articles covering gender issues. I also analysed available documents such as annual reports and internal reports that were available online or provided by the managers in the institutions. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach that views language as a form of social practice and examines how texts reproduce social and political domination (J. Chang & Ren, 2017; Fairclough, 1995, 2010; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Van Dijk, 2008). CDA aims to uncover how texts are constructed within its power and social relations. It has also been used in media research to distinguish 'summarising what' media publication writes about a subject from 'analysing why' they write about it in this way (Richardson, 2007, p. 20). News production of the mass media is typically a

discursive reconstruction practice (J. Chang & Ren, 2017). According to Carvalho (2008):

> As the media representation of social problem is, to a large extent, a function of the discursive construction of events, problems and positions by social actors, the discursive strategies that they employ in a variety of arenas and channels 'before' and 'after' journalistic texts need to be examined. (p. 161)

> Discursive strategies are forms of discursive manipulation of reality by social actors, including journalists, in order to achieve a certain effect or goal. (p. 169)

> A key task in analysing journalistic discourse is to understand how the discursive strategies of each (relevant) social actor are reproduced, challenged or excluded. (p. 170)

Behind the social construction of news, journalists adopt discursive strategies that involve framing, selection and composition in the production of news texts (Entman, 1993). In the context of China, the state (as the owner of the media) also participates in the construction of the subject and production of news contents with news producers through a set of discursive mechanisms that include editorial guidelines, audience positioning, news values in operation, institutional relations with affiliated government agencies, and selective engagements in public discussion (J. Chang & Ren, 2017). As suggested by Carvalho (2008), "The analyst has to learn to identify ideological standpoints from relatively subtle mechanisms and devices. Looking at alternative constructions of the same reality (such as different media reports) is a helpful strategy" (p. 171). In this study, CDA enabled me to engage with the Chinese

news texts on gender issues at a deeper level by recognising forms of knowledge and relations of power in specific reports. It also enabled me to consider the statements from the individuals I interviewed as socially and culturally constructed narratives, and in turn to shed more light on the politics of gender and relations.

Silence, absence, concealment and omission, as well as what's said/published/represented, are essential parts of discourse analysis, all of them relating to individual agency (Schröter & Taylor, 2017). Foucault (1976) recognised silence as a discursive element and an agent of power: "The make-up of discourse has to be pieced together, with things both said and unsaid, with required and with forbidden speech" (Foucault, 1976, p. 133, cited in Ward & Winstanley, 2003). It is important to look for what is present in the news and what is obscured, and also to examine the creation of certain meanings through inclusion and exclusion.

In their study of the experiences of sexual minorities in the workplace in the UK, Ward and Winstanley (2003) suggested that understanding silence and the things unsaid in a research study, and the given context with relation to both the researcher and the respondent, play indispensable parts in research analysis. In studies about women's body and gender issues in the Chinese context, sexuality and gender scholar Yingying Huang (2018) has noted that 'privacy' and 'sensitivity' in cultural construction have resulted in the absence of certain gender issues, such as menstruation and extra-marital affairs, which became 'unspeakable' topics in her fieldwork. Yingying Huang demonstrates that the use of language is underscored by unequal power relations. Certain topics and matters, especially pertaining to sexual or intimate matters, became 'unspeakable' because some of her interviewees were either culturally discouraged from speaking up, or, more importantly, felt that they "did not know how to speak properly" (Yingying Huang, 2018, p. 166). In my study, I

also paid attention to the 'unspeakable' in the interviews and the significance of the gaps and 'absences' in the published news articles, and, more importantly, the possible social and cultural reasons behind these absences. ■

Chapter 3

Women Journalists, Gendered Media, and Spatial Inequality: Literature Review

After the concept of 'gender' was introduced from the West to China through the 1995 United Nations (UN) Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing, Chinese scholars developed varying opinions about Chinese translations of the keyword 'gender' (Min, 2003). Most of them agreed on the use of the phrase 'social gender' (*shehui xingbie*), instead of a direct translation of 'gender' (*xingbie*) (X. Wu, 2018). But scholars such as Xiaojiang Li were opposed to this, arguing that the focus on social gender instead of sex might suit the Western context but would not be suitable for Chinese society, which has traditionally repressed the body and sex in its culture (Min, 2003). Instead, Chinese scholars tended to choose more politically neutral phrases; for example, 'feminism' was translated into 'women's ism' (*nüxing zhuyi*) rather than 'women's right' (*nüquan zhuyi*), because of the political sensibility of the word 'rights' (X. Wu, 2018).

The practices of translation point to the importance of localising Western perspectives when applying them to China. On the one hand, Western feminism has had an important impact on the development of Chinese feminism, with researchers pointing to similarities between Chinese women and their Western counterparts in terms of their gendered experiences (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; L. Li et al., 2017). On the other hand, China's distinct cultural and social contexts call for a critical understanding of the extent to which Western feminism's emphases, frameworks, organisational development processes, and identities

apply to China (Y. Liu & Zheng, 2019). Furthermore, researchers working in the Chinese context now have the opportunities and challenges to both creatively engage with and critically re-evaluate the research paradigms, perspectives and frameworks of Western feminism. By conducting a critical literature review of this scholarship on gender and media – both inside and outside China – this chapter is a step towards these objectives.

This is a two-pronged critical review. In the first part, I review the literature on media and gender, including media representation of woman, and the structural constraints and professional obstacles to woman journalists in the workplace. I first examine a range of Chinese studies undertaken at different points in time as well as the literatures of other countries' newsrooms in different contexts. I then explore the following limitations to this approach:

- the limitation of a media-centric approach in both China and the West;
- the limitation of applying Western feminist media studies perspectives to China;
- the lack of spatial perspective, including a consistent failure to consider how scale of place shapes unequal relations between places and regions, and how, in turn, this spatial inequality impacts on gender inequality.

In the second part, I will discuss how these limitations can be addressed to some extent by also drawing on and engaging with pertinent knowledge about women and gender that is available in studies of the historical, social, cultural, and political contexts in China.

Part one: Media and gender

The media play an important role in informing and communicating with the public by selecting and representing the reality and changes of the world (Happer & Philo, 2013). They have symbolic influence on the shaping and legitimizing of existing social and political relations and divisions so that these can be perceived as normal or as issues needing public debate; unequal gender relations are an example (Gallagher, 2015). The media are "fundamental to the ways in which women's status and gender inequalities are reflected, understood and potentially changed" (p. 1). Ideally, media should contribute to promoting gender equality in their coverage, however, they are "still, in large part, doing the opposite" (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2015, p. 3).

Key angles from which to approach gender and media include the gendered experiences of female workers, institutional studies, gender and media content, and the experience of female audiences (Y. Chen, 2001). Related studies have been concerned with the differences of gender roles in media representations (Bu, 2006; Y. Chen, 2009; Gallagher, 2001; B. Liu & Bu, 1997; Ross, 2014), and there is growing research into female newsmakers (Dashti & Mesbah, 2016; J. Feng, 2012; Kanagasabai, 2016; North, 2016a, 2016b; M. Shen, 2002; H. Wang, 2016, 2019). In this first section of Part One, I provide a comparative juxtaposition of studies of representations of women in Western and Chinese media, and I compare how Western and Chinese scholars write about representations of women. I then move on to institutional and individual perspectives in order to give a sense of the relationship between social change and the situation of female media workers in China over the past four decades.

1. The media's representations of women

Over the past 40 years or so, an increasing number of studies on gender and media have mostly focused on how women are represented in the media (Bu,

2006; Ross, 2014). Since 1995, the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) has measured the changes in gender relations in global news media content at five-year intervals by adopt both qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings presented in the 2015 GMMP report on data from 114 countries (not including China) reveal that "the rate of progress towards media gender parity has almost ground to a halt over the past five years" (Macharia, 2015, p. 8). Only 10% of the news stories across all media sampled in the 2015 GMMP report were women-centred stories, which was the same proportion found in 2000. In 2015 only 4% of the news stories challenged gender stereotypes, with no improvement compared with previous reports (Macharia, 2015). A slow rise in women's visibility in the news was observed during the period of 1995 to 2005, but this was followed by 'one stagnation' until 2015 (Gallagher, 2015, p. 1). As noted by Ross and Carter (2011), although some positive improvements of women's representation in the news have been observed by the GMMP in relation to news actors, sources and journalists, the continued reduction of the visibility of women' voices, experiences and expertise suggests that, compared to men, women's lives and contributions are devalued by the world's news media. The GMMP is an important project for understanding the international media's attitudes to gender equality, but it may not be able to provide adequate information about China's media.

In China, the causes and implications of inferior social positions facing Chinese women in the media are distinct from the West (Y. Chen, 2009; Van Zoonen, 1992). Although Chinese women have been supported by the socialist state and have the same political, economic, and cultural rights and work responsibilities as men (Y. Chen, 2009), they are still disadvantaged because the "structure of the patriarchal system has remained untouched" (Jin et al., 2006, p. 615).

In the Maoist period, women were called upon to join the public labour force of the collective system (Leung, 2003). With its 'gender-erasure' policy, women were portrayed by the state propaganda through images that emphasised the masculinisation of women by denying their feminine identities (Y. Chen, 2009; Leung, 2003). The most commonly featured women's roles on magazine covers in this period were 'Iron maidens' (*tieguniang*) and 'female models' (*nümofan*) (Y. Feng, 1992). This suppression of femininity was highest during in the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), with a single work-role image of women presented in the media (Hooper, 1998).

Since the economic reform and opening-up of the post-Mao era, market forces have greatly changed the depictions of Chinese women in the media and other discourses. The scenario has become more complex and paradoxical. On the one hand, there is a clear shift in the media's representation of women through images that are more feminine (Evans, 1997). On the other hand, scholars have documented that the under-representation and misrepresentation of women in the mass media is still common (Chongshan Chen, 2016; Y. Chen, 2009). In 1996, the media monitoring project of eight Chinese mainstream newspapers led by the *China Women's News* found that males were more likely be presented in most news reports as major and dominant characters (Chongshan Chen, 2016). Men accounted for 91% of quoted news sources and appeared in 71% of news photos, and they were more likely to have leading roles in positive news, with women portrayed in subordinate roles such as family members and secretaries (Chongshan Chen, 2016). Some studies indicated that women's issues and the women's movement accounted for negligible proportions of Chinese mass media news and television programs (An, 2000; Bu & Liu, 2000; Y. Chen, 2009; B. Zheng & Chen, 2004). Chinese women's roles and values were undermined in consumer culture by being

portrayed as 'flower vases' in magazines and other commercial advertising and as 'housewives' in public discourse (Hooper, 1998).

Despite a growing phalanx of commercial media in China, the state and the official press still hold sway in influencing the thoughts and actions of ordinary Chinese (Bu, 2006). While the representations of women are more varied and diverse than in the past, they also are often stereotyped and contradictory. After analysing news content of three state-run Chinese newspapers (*People's Daily*; *China Women's News*; and *China Daily*), Wallis (2006) identified three discursive representations of Chinese women in the official Chinese press, namely, 'worker', 'housewife', and 'consumer (and objects to be consumed)' (pp. 99-103). These terms highlight how "the government press emphasises the equality of Chinese women while simultaneously positioning them as inferior to men" (Wallis, 2006, p. 94), and how "these mediated images of the 'correct' Chinese woman have indeed shifted according to the needs of the state and the market" (p. 98).

These findings resonate with those of Y. Luo and Hao (2007), who found that the portrayals of Chinese women on the covers of China's official English-language women's magazine *Women of China* had been paralleled by the country's changes of economic policy and political ideology: "The interlocking of party control and societal influences has determined the typical images of 'Chinese Women' suited to particular periods of time in contemporary Chinese history" (p. 281). Such arguments help us to understand the ways the relationship between the media and society influences the media representations of women in the Chinese context.

Scholars have argued that media commercialisation has become a double-edged sword for Chinese women (Y. Chen, 2009; H. Wang, 2016). It has brought more job opportunities in the media for women and increased the possibility of

their achieving economic independence, but at the same time it has introduced new challenges in regard to gender disparity in media workplaces (H. Wang, 2016). Y. Chen (2009) has observed that Chinese feminism has broadened its visibility in the traditional mainstream media because of commercialisation; however, "There is a contradiction between market-oriented news values (news that can sell well is better news) and feminist demands (news should consider underprivileged women's interests)" (p. 106). In the media industry, commercialisation has not significantly changed women's positions or opened up for them previously male-dominated fields of work. In other words, media commercialisation has actually reinforced gender stereotypes instead of challenging the gender order (Y. Chen, 2009; H. Wang, 2016). It is worth noting, however, that the data of these studies were mainly collected from journalists of media institutions in top-tier cities. In this study, I ask similar questions but situate them in the context of Tier-4 cities: How do media in Tier-4 cities represent women? Do these media tend to be more liberal or conservative?

2. Institutional perspectives of gender inequality in media workplaces

Although increasing numbers of women have entered the media industry worldwide, men still dominate newsrooms and the culture of journalism is still shaped by masculine values. According to the 2015 GMMP report, there were more women reporters in 2015 than in 1995, but since 2005 the percentage of stories reported by female reporters had been steady at 37% (Macharia, 2015) . Additionally, Gallagher (2001) points to the limitations of analysing women's place in the media industry by only focusing 'on the bylines in the news', arguing that 1) this approach cannot adequately show women's place in the media management structure; 2) some of the most important issues that define and limited women's employment in the media cannot be tackled; and 3) this

approach cannot trace women's place within the overall media hierarchy (p. 129). Thus, the condition of women in media workplaces might be better understood by monitoring their employment patterns and tracing their place within the overall media hierarchy. Gill (2011) has argued that sexism exists in the contemporary media workplace and functions through "the invalidation and annihilation of any language for talking about structural inequalities" (p. 63), even by those most adversely affected by them, and it is necessary to follow the dynamics of discrimination since the potency of sexism lies in "its very unspeakability" (p. 63). I will now outline how these "unspeakable inequalities" (Gill, 2011, p. 62) can manifest themselves in numerous ways.

1) Sexist recruitment processes

Both in China and internationally, sexism sometimes happens at the beginning of women's careers in the media profession. There has been a global trend of feminisation of journalism education (Hanna & Sanders, 2007; Sparks & Splichal, 1989; H. Wang, 2016; W. Wu, 2000). Females outnumbered males undertaking journalism education in universities in 13 of the 22 countries analysed by Splichal and Sparks (1994). According to the *China Journalism Yearbook 1983–1995*, the number of undergraduates in journalism majors in China's universities grew sixfold from 1,068 in 1981 to 6,526 in 1995, female students outnumbered male students in journalism major (W. Wu, 2000). In 2015, there were about 700 Chinese universities providing journalism and media-related majors, and more than 220,000 undergraduates (Hu & Leng, 2016). In some Chinese universities, the proportion of male to female students major in journalism was 1:5 (Hongfa Zhang, 2014). However, despite this trend, studies have revealed that the journalism workforce in many Western counties is still male dominated (Ross, 2014; Splichal & Sparks, 1994; Weaver, 1998). Ross (2014) reported that female interviewees in Europe complained about the

continued existence of 'informal' recruitment processes that against women entering the media industry. In the case of China, it seems that media HR departments have "a standard not a criterion written in job ads" – their first preference is for males (H. Wang, 2016, p. 500). The 'appearance requirement' term might be used when a female journalist come to the HR interview: she should be young, with 'a pretty face and a slim figure'; but this standard would not apply to male employees. Many women journalists feel "powerless to fight back since they are the ones who want the job" (H. Wang, 2016, p. 500).

2) Woman-unfriendly salary systems and job contracts

After interviewing women journalists from different media organisations in several major Chinese cities, Haiyan Wang (2016, 2019), a prominent media scholar in China who also had previously worked in the Chinese media, observed that today's Chinese news organisations have most of their journalists on yearly contracts, rather than using the quota system. Contract employees' incomes are made up of a fixed base salary plus monthly bonuses that depend on their performances. Feelings of insecurity and uncertainty are commonly shared by these journalists. Although the pressures from the job contract and salary system are gender-neutral, women journalists face more pressures than men because they were also expected to fulfil family roles as wife, mother and daughter. According to H. Wang (2016), many female workers, not just journalists, have found that getting married and having children have had a negative influence on their career. The salary system affects women's income during maternity leave, and they tend to have children later and take less maternity leave time. When women journalists return to the workplace after maternity leave, the media institutions might not allow them to continue their previous work, and some may face demotion. As for department managers, they do not prefer female employees of childbearing age because their own

career performance and income bonuses are largely dependent on the overall performance and efficiency of the journalists under their supervision (H. Wang, 2016). Although there is research on the differences between male and female employees in media organisations worldwide in regard to salary systems, types of contract, basic salaries and real incomes, and maternity leave policies, for example (Gallagher, 1995), no studies have done research on how gender disparity operates in a similar ways in the media organisations of the bottom tier cities, and other smaller-scale towns in China.

3) Gender discrimination in job arrangements

Although increasing numbers of women are entering the media workforce, scholars worldwide have noticed that there is still gender discrimination in terms of the job arrangements of the soft and hard media stories (Macharia, 2015; North, 2016b; Ross & Carter, 2011). Men would be the majority in political, foreign, financial, and sports coverage, for example, while women would be assigned 'softer' topics such as human interest and social issues, which are seen as less prestigious in the journalism industry (Svensson & Wang, 2013; Van Zoonen, 1998a). Harp and Tremayne (2006) examined the gender disparity of political blogs and found women accounted for only 10 percent of the top political bloggers. This lack of women's voices in political discourse reveals a public/private patriarchal dichotomy related to gender: women are best suited for/belong with the private/domestic sphere, and men to the public sphere. Harp and Tremayne (2006) argued that the historical influence of this gendered division of public/private sphere is reinforced in everyday life and limits women's potential.

Some alternative perspectives were found in comparison studies of the newspaper workforce in Canada. Robinson (2005) found that although females

were disproportionately found in the less important news beats in 1975, in the 20-year interval since then, they had moved up in status to just below the editor/publisher. Looking into this improvement of women's position in the media workforce, Robinson (2005) argued that "culture set broad guidelines for what women and men should do in a given society" (p. 65).

Similar gendered job divisions also happen in China. H. Wang (2016) notes that male journalists are more likely to be assigned to cover the 'hard news' beats such as the political and economic news, but women journalists are more likely be assigned to report health, education, and culture news, which are viewed as less-important 'soft news' beats (H. Wang, 2016). Males also dominate some of the 'powerful' types of journalism work in China, such as investigative journalism and editorial writing (Svensson & Wang, 2013). Y. Chen (2001) has also looked at job arrangements in Chinese media organisations. In the departments of one organisation she found that women were more likely to be placed in administration and soft content production, which were considered 'suitable' for women's characters. Future research might probe into this and ask whether women themselves prefer administration and soft news jobs, or do editors and managers prefer men to report on politics and economics.

4) The 'glass ceiling' in promotions

Even though for decades more women than men have been entering journalism training programs in universities, there are proportionately fewer females in senior journalism positions than males because of the invisible barrier to their promotions formed by the 'glass ceiling' effect (Creedon & Cramer, 2007). A number of researchers have found this lack of gender balance in newsrooms, especially in the key senior media positions. Ross (2014) conducted a study of 99 major media organisations across the EU Member States and Croatia in 2012 and found there were fewer women than men in the operational and strategic senior

positions such as senior managers, CEOs and board members. In the UK, the 2010 Creative Media Workforce Survey undertaken by the Skillset (2010), which covers the entire British audio-visual industries, demonstrated that despite a great influx of women into journalism training courses and news workplaces, there was a pronounced gender imbalance of the top management positions, with men accounting for 78 percent of the company owners and 61 percent of the managerial and executive producers.

Similarly in China, studies have documented the clear gender imbalance in the institutional structure of some Chinese newsrooms, where the proportion of Chinese women at the executive and managing levels is generally still quite low. A survey from Guangzhou in 2005 showed that only 18.7 percent of the executive positions in the print media were held by women (F. Lin, 2010). A study of 11 news organisations in China by the international Women's Media Federation in 2011 found that women hold a mere 7.7 percent of the top management positions and 13.4 percent of the senior management positions (H. Wang, 2016). Women media workers in Beijing and Guangzhou also experienced gender stereotyping and the 'glass ceiling' effect that prevented them from achieving higher positions (Cui, 2017). However, these data from the international and national studies are insufficient for understanding the factors limiting women's abilities to attain senior management positions in newsrooms in Chinese bottom-tier cities? This study aims to explore both the dynamics of promotion for women journalists in Chinese local media organisations and the obstacles that influence their career decisions.

5) Gender policy in the workplace

Some media institutions have tried to improve the gender imbalance within their organisations. In 2008, the Inter Press Service (IPS) started a 'gender mainstreaming' policy with a goal to normalise both the employment of women

at all levels of the organisation and the news coverage of women-related issues (Geertsema, 2009). The IPS started by recruiting more female workers to achieve gender balance, and they adopted several methods to implement the gender mainstreaming project, including workshops for gender training; gender and media training manuals; and continued monitoring and evaluation. However, the decision-making positions and the overall organisational structure of IPS were still dominated by men. The IPS project points to the difficulty of achieving gender mainstreaming in a news organisation.

Most media institutions still lack gender equality policies. The previously mentioned study by Ross (2014) of 99 media organisations across the EU Member States and Croatia showed that less than one in five media organisations had gender equality policies and formal mechanisms to monitor those policies in the workplace, and only nine of them had an Equality or Diversity Department:

> Some media organisations told researchers that they had no need to develop gender-specific policies as they had never had any complaints. Such complacency in the face of ongoing and well-documented gender discrimination is hard to understand, but without a clear commitment to equality (in all its forms) from senior management, staff will always be vulnerable to discriminatory practices, both explicit and unintentional. (p. 328)

The situation in China seems even more problematic. A study conducted by the International Women's Media Federation (International Women's Media Foundation, 2011) reported that none of the 10 newspapers and one radio station they surveyed in China had adopted a policy on gender equality. The common lack of gender policies in current Chinese media organisations has also

been confirmed in a study that included interviews with several women journalists from various media companies (Svensson & Wang, 2013).

6) Unions and NGOs for woman journalists

Although equality-based NGOs and unions in the West have played an important role in providing support for women in the workplace (Ross, 2014), in China the women's associations and trade unions function differently from autonomous NGOs in the West (Y. Chen, 2009; Fincher, 2014; B. Liu, 2005). In authoritarian regimes like China, civil society organisations are banned from operating without official approval and supervision, and only a small number of grassroots NGOs struggling to survive in major cities (Spires, 2011). For Chinese journalists generally, there are the government-organised national associations, including the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (*quanguo zonggonghui*) and the All-China Journalists' Association (*quanguo xinwengongzuozhe xiehui*); and for women journalists in particular, there are the All-China Women's Federation (*quanguo funü lianhehui*) and the Women Journalists' Association (*nü jizxie*), both of which have local branches in regions and institutions (Fincher, 2014; H. Wang, 2016). Due to their subordinate position to the Party-state, these organisations function similar to the Communist Party organs, with limited degrees of autonomy to address gender issues (Fincher, 2014; Howell, 1996, 2003; Kaufman, 2012). In fact, "the peculiarity of a Women's Federation that contributes to bolstering male supremacy is matched only by the ways that the country's official Labor Federation often serves more to control than to empower workers" (Fincher, 2014, p. 18).

Rather than promoting gender equality and providing real benefits to women, the Women's Federation has in fact played an important role in

reinforcing patriarchy values and pressures on women according to the needs and lead of the party-state. When the CCP adopted its 'one-child policy' in the 1980s, all levels of the Women's Federation were assigned the primary responsibility of enforcing this population control policy, including the monitoring of women's reproductive lives and forcing women to have abortions (Fincher, 2014). Moreover, after the goal was changed to stimulate population growth, the Women's Federation became the main participant in the 'leftover women' campaign, which, led by the Xinhua news website from 2007, encouraged women to marry in their twenties (Fincher, 2014).

Some women journalists in China said they did not find these organisations helpful and would not likely seek assistance from them (H. Wang, 2016). Moreover, such official associations are "likely to become an apparatus for reinforcing gender inequality in the workplace" (H. Wang, 2016, p. 499). One Chinese female media worker told a researcher in H. Wang's study (2016) that at an International Women's Day one year the Women's Federation of her news organisation hosted a '*Qi'pao* Show', asking all female workers to wear Chinese traditional clothes – *Qi'pao* – to work on that day and all the staff to select the "most beautiful babies" (p. 499). Y. Chen (2009) argued that the influence from feminism on journalism in present-day China is mainly bottom-up because of the strict state control of the development of media NGOs in China (White, Howell, & Shang, 1996). Moreover, Lee and Regan (2009) point out the scarcity of women's organisations that can provide legal aid to the large number marginalised and disadvantaged women in rural China.

3. Cultural obstacles

The sexism prevalent in the Chinese newsroom culture also contributes to gender inequality. Scholars have documented sexist cultures in newsrooms

around the world, including Australia (North, 2007), Africa (Opoku-Mensah, 2004), the Caribbean (de Bruin, 2004), Korea (Y.-J. Kim, 2006), Europe (Ross & Padovani, 2016), the US (Weaver, 1997) and so on. The proportion of women journalists in China has been slowly increasing as a result of the commercialisation and diversification of the Chinese media (Svensson & Wang, 2013). In 1995, women accounted for 33 percent of the total number of Chinese journalists in a national survey (C. Chen, Zhu, & Wu, 1998). This increased to 40.9 percent in a 2003 national survey (B. Zheng & Chen, 2004), and by the end of 2017, 48.4 percent of the national registered journalists with a press card were women (The All-China Journalists Association, 2018). These improved statistics on women joining the media workforce in China do not mean that gender discrimination has been eliminated. In fact, as outlined next, cultural obstacles in sexist newsrooms and internal obstacles from individuals' perspectives can be examined from a number of angles.

1) Family and children responsibilities

Women worldwide are mostly responsible for looking after children and families. From their research in urban China, Yuping Zhang, Hannum, and Wang (2008) found that gender gaps in employment and earnings have a close relation to the family-work conflict, which occurs when a married woman or mother wants to pursue her role in the workplace, even with significant disadvantages, but is substantially constrained by her familial caring role. This issue is echoed in other Asian studies (Y. Kim, 2012; W. K. M. Lee, 2000; Tsui & Lee, 2012). In studies of women journalists, most interviewees said they found it hard to balance their family duties and the stress of work (Kanagasabai, 2016; North, 2016b; H. Wang, 2016). In India, Kanagasabai (2016) found that many young female journalists did not take the available maternity leave or even mention the need for childcare because they believed their managers would

think they were not career oriented or ambitious about their jobs; for a woman to take her job seriously, she would be expected to prioritise her work over her family in order to further her career. This prevailing expectation in the Indian media industry devalues women's labor and is intended to "force them out when they want to start a family" (p. 671). It also contributes to reducing the percentages of middle-aged and older women in Indian newsrooms.

The study by H. Wang (2016) mentioned earlier found that in order to keep their jobs most female journalists in China tend to either marry and have children late or not get enough time off after giving birth. In a survey by North (2016b), many women journalists in Australia also mentioned that childcare responsibility is a main reason for the under-representation of women in senior positions. As journalists and mothers, they find it difficult to work the hours the job requires while spending time with their children. Many respondents stated that without the operational support of flexible work arrangements and childcare facilities in the workplace, mothers would be forced to "scale down their ambition" for promotions and career opportunities (North, 2016b, p. 13). Applying Butler's (1988) theory of performativity to understand women's experiences in newsrooms, Jenkins and Finneman (2018) argue that in male-dominated organisations like media workplaces, if women journalists fail to "do their gender right" by fulfilling their 'double-blind' gender roles involving childcare responsibilities, they will be punished through the lack of promotion opportunities (p. 166).

Women journalists in China face stereotypical expectations about both their social role and their professional role (H. Wang, 2019). A woman's success is seen through the lenses of her beauty, husband and children; being a successful working woman means sacrificing her family. But a successful man can have both career and family (L. Liu, 2003). Women journalists often consciously or subconsciously internalise these stereotypes and accept them as the 'correct'

ways of being a woman. Family-work tensions are often the reasons that some women journalists remain single or are divorced, or eventually leave the profession (H. Wang, 2019).

When the Chinese government abolished the 'one-child' policy in 2015 to address the aging population and the declining birth rate, it encouraged married couples to have a second child. Some feminists raised concerns about potential for intensified discrimination in the workplace and other disadvantages towards women if no supportive policies were in place (Shengwei Sun, 2016). There has been little research conducted on women journalists' opinions and experiences in relation to this change of reproductive policy in China, or on the comparison between male and female opinions on the topic.

2) Age discrimination and physical appearance

Ageism and appearance discrimination towards female presenters have been found in media workplaces, especially in television broadcasting. Based on data from the UK, Ross and Carter (2011) reported an increase in the number of younger female anchors represented on the screen compared with the informal distribution of presenters in each age category in the past. More importantly, as their ages increased, female anchors seemed to fade away from the news-anchoring scene. There was a severe under-representation of women aged between 50 and 64 years, and women older than 65 years had completely disappeared from the television screen, both as anchor and reporter. Additionally, the 2015 GMMP report (Macharia, 2015) similarly shows a global pattern in which the age of 50 years is a dividing line between the younger female presenters and the male-dominated news-anchoring on screen. Today's women presenters seem to employed for the ability to "be sugary, read the autocue and smile", and they can lose their value if they "begin to fail the

attractiveness test by celebrating too many birthdays" (Ross & Carter, 2011, p. 1157).

The fact that the age discrimination is connected with physical appearance is another obstacle faced by today's female presenters and reporters. Engstrom and Ferri (1998) conducted a survey of 128 American female television news anchors about the career obstacles they faced and compared the findings with similar research by Ferri and Keller in 1986. The results showed that after 20 years, physical appearance continued to play an influential role in female reporters' work. However, rather than fight against this gendered career barrier, these women anchors recognised it as a challenge they must deal with by themselves. More importantly, some female anchors mentioned that the remarks about their appearance seemed to "come from both sides of the camera", meaning both managers and audiences would focus on their appearance rather than their professional ability and competence (Engstrom & Ferri, 1998, p. 794). These age and appearance discriminations in the media newsroom revealed that women bear "the burden of 'looking good' more so than men do", which also "illustrates a gender social attitude that women are valued for their looks rather than their skills" (Engstrom & Ferri, 1998, p. 798).

In a Chinese study, female journalists shared their experiences of being judged by their appearance and exposed to different forms of sexist language and treatment in the newsroom (Svensson & Wang, 2013). In their offices some male colleagues would remark on the women's appearance, make judgements about their clothing, hair, and bodies, and leave pornographic images on their computer screens. They seemed not to care about their female colleagues' thoughts and were often unconscious of the harm they caused; they just wanted to have some 'fun' from this behaviour (H. Wang, 2016). Through these normalised daily newsroom practices the male colleagues not only displayed

their prestige and power in the workplace but also objectified and subordinated women journalists (H. Wang, 2016, 2019).

However, compared with the Western studies, there is relatively little data available on discrimination in the Chinese media industry such as the ageism faced by Western female news anchors. It remains to be seen if in small media institutions in Tier-3 or Tier-4 cities, which have fewer professional staff than in the metropolitan or higher-level media, women media workers face such discrimination more than their counterparts in the big cities.

3) Sexual harassment

Many studies have demonstrated how work-related sexual harassment can be both physical and non-physical. Women are more likely to be victims of certain types of sexual harassment if they work in traditionally male occupations or environments such as police stations (Brown, 1998), law firms (Laband & Lentz, 1998), and sports media (Pedersen et al., 2009). Male workers "view their workplaces as unique environments, where sexual harassment can be excused; women who want to work in these traditionally male environments are expected to 'play by the boys' rules or not play at all" (Walsh-Childers et al., 1996, p. 578). A survey of 288 female newspaper workers in the male-dominated media in the US revealed that more than two-thirds had experienced non-physical harassment and about 17 percent had experienced physical harassment at least once in their career (Walsh-Childers et al., 1996). The harassers were most likely be their news sources, co-workers, and supervisors. While most of the newspaper organisations had policies about sexual harassment that both female and male workers were aware of, these women journalists still felt powerless to do anything about it.

A large national online survey of female journalists working in the Australian news media was conducted in 2012 by North (2016a). Of the 577 female journalists participating, 57.3 percent had experienced sexual harassment in the previous five years. Most of these respondents said the experience affected their confidence in daily work, but they still chose not to make formal reports due to fear of victimisation or retaliation: "Many women believe that they should 'work it out themselves' and sexual harassment is the price they have to pay for working in male-dominated media industry" (North, 2016a, p. 495).

Studies conducted over the past decade have suggested that workplace sexual harassment happens in China on a similar scale to other countries. In 2009, the Beijing-based Maple Women's Psychological Counselling Centre conducted a study of 1,500 people in three major Chinese cities (X. Wang et al., 2009). The Centre found that as many as 80 percent of respondents had encountered sexual harassment in some form. In 2017, a survey conducted by Guangzhou Gender Centre found that 69 percent of the 6,000 university students and graduate respondents had experienced harassment in some form (Wei, 2017). A recent workplace sexual harassment survey of 233 young people in the first-tier cities conducted by the 074 Work Women Law Hotline found that 70 percent of the women respondents have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace (X. Lin, 2018). In the Chinese media industry, the situation is more severe. A post-#MeToo survey done by a former journalist Xueqin Huang (2018) found that more than 80 percent of Chinese women journalists have experienced varying degrees of sexual harassment in the workplace, but fewer than 4 percent reported the encounter to their company or the police; the majority choosing to remain silent. While the #MeToo movement has been censored in China, a wave of disclosed personal experience posts on social

media has raised discussion of sexual harassment in campuses and workplaces (Q. Zhou & Qiu, 2020).

However, little research attention focuses on the less developed regions in China. Journalists in small-scale, Tier-3 and Tier-4 places and rural regions could also be vulnerable to sexual harassment in the workplace. Is there a clear understanding of various forms of sexual harassment? Or do they have any policies or organisations from which they might seek help or support? Such questions remain largely unanswered.

4) Professional identity and gender consciousness

Researchers have considered the interconnection between journalists' daily practices, their professional and gender identities, and media production (Y. Chen, 2009; de Bruin, 2000). Journalist's identities and preferences, both individual and professional, are believed to affect how they evaluate and produce the news content from the same news event but in different social and cultural contexts (J. Chang & Ren, 2017). From a global perspective, Weaver (1998) found that journalists' rankings of professional roles and values can differ across regions. Two decades later, Weaver and colleagues observed significant changes in the thinking of US journalists due to the impact of digital media, for instance, an increased focus on "investigate government claims" but less concern about "get information to public quickly" (Weaver et al., 2019, p. 118). Studies on Chinese journalists have documented changes in their roles since the economic reforms. In other words, their role as the mouthpiece of the Party has been downplayed and their role as information providers has grown (Pan & Lu, 2003; Y. Zhao, 2000; H. Zhou, 2000; J.-H. Zhu et al., 1997). But since most of these journalists were sampled from national-level media institutions in major cities, these findings may not represent the situations in local media situations.

Van Zoonen (1998b) found that when it comes to the question of professional identity, female journalists "have a more fragmented and contradictory professional identity" than male journalists (p. 45). As a strategy to counter gender discrimination and to survive in the male-dominated work environment of the advertising industry in South Korea, some female professionals actively adopted sex-appeal aesthetics by producing stereotypical and sexist ads; "Their intervention for gender equality was collapsing into an embrace of globalised post-feminist sensibility" (Fedorenko, 2015, p. 487).

In the first half of the 20th century, a group of professional women journalists *(nübaoren)* in China published several women's periodicals ('by women', 'for women' and 'about women') in major city centres (including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Toyoko) to introduce feminist topics and negotiate with nationalism, patriarchy, and the CCP to define and defend women's interests, needs and concerns in the public space (J. Feng, 2014; Y. Ma, 2010). Their works impacted the women's movement in China and continue to influence gender discourses in Chinese society (Y. Ma, 2010). With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, equal rights for women and men were incorporated in the Chinese constitution. However, studies on Chinese women journalists have revealed different opinions about gender inequality in the workplace. A national survey of Chinese women media workers in 1995 showed that males expressed higher levels of agreement than females when asked if equality had been realised in the workplace in the form of promotion opportunities and decision making (Chongshan Chen & Bu, 1996).

Given this history, the findings of more recent studies on Chinese journalists and gender awareness, conducted in various places, are not surprising. In 2001, a survey of female media workers in Shanghai revealed that more than half of respondents believed there was (or possibly was) gender bias against women in the media industry (Y. Jia, 2001). In 2008, a survey of more than 300 women

journalists in Yunnan province showed that about 75.3% of them had strong gender equality awareness and believed there was inequality in the news industry (Chongshan Chen, 2016). About 50 percent of these participants agreed that women journalists had fewer opportunities for promotion and further study than male journalists; more than 17 percent believed there was gender bias in recruitment; and less than 10 percent had reported sexual harassment in the workplace, a superior's intervention on a female employee's marriage and reproduction, or having to do the same work as males but with less payment. A similar study by M. Shen (2002) in Jiangsu province explored the levels of gender awareness of both male and female media personnel working in broadcasting stations, television channels, and newspaper and magazine offices. Although the overall data demonstrated that television workers generally showed the least awareness of gender equality, some female program editors and workers showed high sensitivity towards it in their programs and columns and tried to change the traditional gender relations in reporting by interviewing female news sources.

The interviewed journalists in these studies were from major media institutions in the big cities or developed areas in China that have more feminist ideological resources, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The local media institutions in Tier-3 or Tier-4 cities may not have journalists who can work specifically on women's news due to their smaller sizes and audiences. So, how do local journalists in the bottom-tier regions practice their professional identities and gender consciousness when they cover women related news? Do they have any strategies that enable them to work with state and market forces as a local media? This study will explore these questions to better understand the gender sensibility and awareness of media workers in local media organisations in rural areas.

4. Summary of Part One

China's media and gender studies mirror those in the West. Despite the increasing numbers of female workers entering the media industry globally, women continue to be under-represented and misrepresented in the workplace as they deal with gender stereotyping and struggle to balance family and work tensions. However, most Chinese media research to date has been conducted in large media organisations in the first-tier and other major cities and focused on national-level media outlets. There have been few studies on women journalists and media institutions in lower-scale places, such as the local media of the bottom-tier cities or counties. Nor has there been much research on whether the state and the market impact the local and big-city media organisations in similar ways. Would studies of media in Tier-4 cities and semi-rural places in China uncover patterns that are comparable to the national or major media institutions? Would such studies show that female media professionals in rural and Tier-4 cities have more or less professional autonomy than those in the big cities? As demonstrated in Chapter 2, these local media account for a large number of media institutions in China and reach audiences that mostly live in small cities and rural regions.

With the market reforms and economy growth in China, female media practitioners, like other women in society, face with new problems and are subject to greater gender inequality (Haiyan Wang, 2019). Gender-based inequality in labour division, recruitment, pay, employment, and promotion also persists in the labour market and in other professions (Chen, Hao &Baird, 2017), and Chinese women still face with obstacles and traditional gender norms, such as the work-care tensions, gender discrimination in the marriage market, and sexual harassment issues (Cook & Dong, 2011; Fincher, 2014; Lin &Yang, 2019). Through the prism of media approach, this study attempts to

enrich current women/gender research about Chinese women and gender issues with a focus on understanding gender relations in China (Zurndorfer, 2018). In this study, I use female media practitioners in a Tier-4 city as an example to broaden our understanding of gender equality issues in other professions, and to offer an angle to better understanding women's situation more broadly in contemporary China.

The international and Chinese-context studies reviewed in this chapter have provided me with a useful a framework and perspective for this study of lower level media institutions in the less developed regions in China and of women journalists in the Chinese media industry.

Part two: Gender inequality and spatial inequality in china.

1. A brief history of feminism and the feminist movement in China

Gender studies in China have been influenced by feminism in the West and for decades have been in a process of localisation (X. Wu, 2018). Embedded within contemporary political and cultural relations, Chinese feminism has had a different evolution process compared with feminism in the West. As Wallis (2015) observed, women in China experienced the changing gender understanding and recognition that are closely linked with China's social development and historical evolution. Thus, it is important to take into account the socio-cultural context in which feminist engagement has emerged, developed and changed in China over the decades.

The first waves of the women's liberation movement in China arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the midst of national salvation and modernisation (B. Wang, 2017). Women's issues such as education opportunities, promotion of monogamy and opposition to foot-binding were

first discussed by the male intellectual reformers in the Constitutional Reform and Modernisation movement. But this movement only attracted a small group of women, and these activities ended with its failure (X. Li & Zhang, 1994). In 1919, the debates on women's issues were again brought to public attention by male intellectuals during the May Fourth movement, and extended to women's equal rights in marriage and employment opportunities (X. Li & Zhang, 1994). Although the keywords 'feminism' and 'women's rights' were first used in the movements as competing proposition (Sudo & Hill, 2005), these intellectuals treated women's problems as symbolic of the weakness of the nation and the feudal system (X. Li & Zhang, 1994; Wendy, 1998). Only a small group of urban and educated women participated in this feminist movement and were affected by it; women in the rural regions and countryside were mostly excluded (Y. Li, 2000).

After its establishment in 1921, the CCP openly promoted its firm commitment for equality between women and men during the revolutionary period (B. Wang, 2017). Since the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949, the government has actively published a series of policies to promote gender equality and the status of women, including the setting up of an official administrative department, the All-Women's Federation, to promote state policies. The official discourse of the socialist state supports gender equality and the liberation of women in the public sphere (Tan, 2017). In line with Mao Zedong's famous quotation of 'woman as half sky', the Constitution of 1950 and the implementation of the new Marriage Law and the Land Law gave Chinese women legal equal rights with men in regard to marriage and divorce, and educational and labour-force opportunities (X. Li & Zhang, 1994; Y. Li, 2000). For the needs of economic development, the new government promoted campaigns to encourage women to participate in the industrial and agricultural labour force, which contributed to the relocation of a large number of Chinese

women from rural areas to city, and from densely-populated cities to distant sparsely populated areas, especially for light industries that used mostly female labour (Y. Li, 2000).

Scholars have argued that rather than adopt the Western term 'feminism' due to the Western bourgeois concerns, the CCP identifies Chinese feminism as 'women's liberation' (*funü jiefang*), as Chinese women can only achieve emancipation through participation in social labour (Howell, 2003; X. Li & Zhang, 1994; Z. Wang, 2017). Gender scholar Zheng Wang (2017) uses the terms 'socialist feminism' to refer the CCP-led women's liberation and 'socialist feminist' to the feminists who joined the Party to do 'women-work' (*funü gongzuo*). The idea of 'socialist feminism' has been criticised by feminist scholars for overemphasising class oppression and proletarian liberation while overlooking structural inequalities and the patriarchy (Stacey, 1983; Tan, 2017; Z. Wang, 2017). However, unlike the feminist movements in the US, which focus on the unequal rights between men and women in the public and private spheres, the CCP-led Chinese feminist movements emphasise the gendered division of labour (B. Zhu & Li, 2015). The different Chinese feminism frameworks, development processes, and traditional cultural factors such as Confucian values and the expectation of women's obedience have also resulted in the different ways most Chinese people regard gender equality (Leung, 2003; Y. Liu & Zheng, 2019; B. Zhu & Li, 2015).

From a socialist perspective, with state support for women to leave the domestic sphere and have socially productive work, women's problems will be solved and their liberation achieved along with the end of class struggle (Y. Chen, 2009). Although Chinese women have benefitted significantly in education and labour-force participation from the socialist state's reduction in gender inequalities, the process has not been consistent and women have been negatively impacted (Y. Chen, 2009). For instance, women experienced setbacks

in higher educational opportunities and labour-force participation rates during the Cultural Revolution period (Y. Li, 2000).

Market reforms and the opening-up policy since the late 1970s have dramatically changed China's economy and improved overall living standards. However, the impacts of these reforms on Chinese women were not all positive and introduced new problems (Y. Li, 2000; L. Zheng, 2019). In particular, the female infanticide issues that emerged with the 'one-child' birth control policy proved the low status of women in society (X. Li & Zhang, 1994). Under the pressures of these reforms, women faced discrimination in political participation and in employment, with significantly lower wages compared to men. Some problems that seemed to disappear decades ago with the Marriage Law were brought back by these economic reforms, such as commercial marriage, prostitution, gender gaps in educational opportunities, all of which were more apparent in the rural areas of China (X. Li & Zhang, 1994; Y. Li, 2000; Jinghao Zhou, 2003).

The booming consumer culture since the mid-1990s facilitated the shift of gender ideology from the erasure of gender differences to the polarisation of gender difference. This reflects the shift from the Maoist period, when women wore uniform colors and outfits to maximise the use of female labor, to the post-Mao era, when the biological differences between men and women in discussions of women's work and status in society were highlighted (Jie Yang, 2011). The shift is revealed by comparing the official slogans in different eras: the Cultural Revolution slogan, "Whatever men can do, women can do too" shows how the Socialist state ignore the gender difference, "using men as the yardstick to evaluate women" (Y. Li, 2000, p. 33); in the post-Mao era, the slogan "Men stay at work; women go home" emerged as the market economy led to a reduction in labor and massive layoffs (mostly targeted at women) at state-owned enterprises in the 1990s (Jie Yang, 2011, p. 335).

Scholars have also noted that along with the developing consumer capitalism in the post-Mao era, there has been an increase in the sexualisation, commodification and objectification of women's bodies as sexual objects in media representations (Evans, 2008; Jie Yang, 2011). In the meantime, the newer realm of the Internet has created more space for alternative notions of sexuality and gender in China (Wallis, 2015). Research questions in such studies are wide-ranging: from how Chinese cyberspace provides a platform for distribution of the LGBT-themed films (Shaw & Zhang, 2018), and how the Internet and online communities play an important role in opening up the culture queer desire and fantasy onto Chinese mainstream media (J. J. Zhao, 2019; X. Zheng, 2019); to how female and male rural migrants use mobile phones and digital media to negotiate their gender experiences (T. Liu, 2019; Wallis, 2013).

In 1995, the United Nations (UN) Fourth World Women's Conference was held in Beijing. This conference was an important landmark in the history of feminism and gender studies in China. Chinese scholars see it as a watershed in the development of gender studies in China since it introduced the concept of 'gender' and related theories from the West (Y. Chen, 2009; Du, 2008; Tong, 2008), and most Chinese feminists regard it as the start of Chinese contemporary feminist activism (S. Chen, 2019). It adopted the 'gender mainstreaming' strategy as part of the Beijing Platform for Action to promote gender equality and women's rights (Z. Wang, 2017). Under the relatively loose political control of the period, about a dozen of the first group of women's rights NGOs with foreign funds emerged as the conference introduced non-governmental organisations to China (S. Chen, 2019; Han, 2018). Groups also emerged in remote areas such as Xishuangbanna, in Yunnan Province (Howell, 2003). This first group of NGOs kept a low-file and collaborated with the government in order to survive and provide help to rural women in local areas (S. Chen, 2019; Q. Wang, 2018).

With the implementation of The Regulation for Registration and Management of Social Organisations 1998, the party-state started to tighten government control over civic organisations, demanding that they must operate under official supervision and be punished for receiving international funds (Han, 2018; Howell, 2003). Most women's rights NGOs went underground and since the late 1990s have operated in small-scale and self-funded ways (Han, 2018). Howell (2003) also noticed that most of China's women's organisations have remained largely located in major cities such as Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Xian, focussing on the needs of urban, educated women. The situations of women's organisations in the rural and remote areas have not been explored in these studies. In recent years, most NGOs have turned to the Internet and social media platforms to promulgate their agendas and networks (Han, 2018; Mao, 2020; B. Wang & Driscoll, 2019).

The Chinese feminists that emerged in the 2010s in parallel with the country's digital media expansion were seen as the second wave or new generation of feminists (T. Liu, 2019; Q. Wang, 2018). Compared with their predecessor Chinese feminists of the 1990s, the younger generation are more grassroots, social media and technology savvy, well informed by Western feminist ideologies and aligned with international feminism; instead of being affiliated with established organisations, they are becoming bolder as they criticise and challenge them (J. Li & Li, 2017; Y. Liu & Zheng, 2019; Tan, 2017; B. Wang & Driscoll, 2019; Q. Wang, 2018).

Unlike Western feminist activists who often use social media campaigns to supplement their offline movements, young Chinese feminists are more dependent on the Internet and social media to disseminate information and build communities due to the government's tight control on collective activism (B. Wang & Driscoll, 2019; Zeng, 2020). Apart from their online networking and activist strategies, young feminists have also organised offline activities and

protests such as the 2012 'Occupy Men's Room' campaign in Guangzhou to arouse public attention on women's need for more space in public restrooms (J. Li & Li, 2017); and the 'Injured Bride' protest on Valentine's Day in the same year when three female activists wore bloodstained wedding dresses and walked on a Beijing street to protest against domestic violence (Tan, 2017). The most widely known action happened in 2015, when the authorities arrested and accused five female feminists (known as China's 'Feminist Five') of 'disturbing public order' for planning to hand out stickers to against sexual harassment in Beijing's public transport on International Women's Day; this received lots of attention from within the nation and also from Western countries (Fincher, 2016).

As Tan (2017) points out, the state has tightened its control over social activism under Xi's leadership of the CCP with the establishment of new government branches charged with internal security. This administration has attempted to contain and suppress feminist activism and collective action, both online and offline, by deleting feminist posts and shutting down activists' social media accounts (Fincher, 2016). In early 2016, the Chinese government shut down a renowned women's legal aid center – the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition in Beijing – which for two decades had provided legal aid and advice for women experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace, domestic violence etc. (The International Service for Human Rights, 2016). On the eve of the International Women's Day in 2017, one of the most influential feminists social media accounts, Feminist Voices, was banned by the censors of the Weibo platform because it had earlier posted an article about a planned women's strike on International Women's Day to protest against President Trump of the United States. The banishment was punishment for this 'sensitive and illegal information' (Fincher, 2018; Han, 2018).

Under Xi's leadership, Chinese authorities have pushed for a revival of the Confucian values of stable family and social order for the 'harmonious society' (J. Chang et al., 2018). According to S. Chen (2019), "At his first meeting with the ACWF leadership, Xi Jinping stated that the goal of the party's 'women-related work' should be 'upholding Chinese traditional family virtues'" (p. 33). The ACWF has followed this guidance and launched activities such as "The Most Beautiful Family Competition [to] advertise stereotypical feminine values such as taking care of elders and children" (S, Chen, 2019, p. 33).

These changes of policies and directions have not only suppressed the Chinese feminist movement, they have also declared Western feminism a 'foreign threat'. In May 2017, the Party-state and the All-China Women's Federation both expressed in the mainstream media that China needs to guard against Western feminism's ideological infiltration and interference in China's women's issues (L. Chen & Zhang, 2017). After the #MeToo movement started in the West, the state-led English-language newspaper *China Daily* published an article titled 'Weinstein case demonstrates cultural differences', which emphasised the cultural differences regarding sexual harassment issues: "Chinese men are taught to be protective of their women. Behaving inappropriately toward women, including harassing them sexually, contradicts every Chinese traditional value and custom" (Hassan, 2017).

However, feminists' protests such as the 'Feminist Five' incident and the 'Occupy Men's Room' campaign have generated some hard-earned positive results such as

- broader public attention and improved policies and laws (Q. Wang, 2018);
- the national-and local-level authorities promising to increase the ratio of women's toilets to 3:2 (Xiao, 2017);
- the passing of the first anti-domestic violence law in 2015 (Q. Wang, 2018);

- government-funded campaigns against sexual harassment beginning in 2017, with advertisements appearing in the subway stations of Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and Shenzhen (Lü, 2017); and
- the Ministry of Education stating in 2019 that it was prepared to establish mechanisms to prevent and deal with sexual harassment in campuses (Y. Wang, 2019) (but so far no concrete actions have been taken).

This historical account of the development of feminism and feminist activities in China illustrates how they are perceived and practiced differently, depending on the scale of places. As mentioned earlier, today's women's rights NGOs in China are largely based in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou and actively use online platforms to promote their agendas under heavy censorship. Offline feminist activism also happens mostly in big cities but among young, educated urban women. Hence women and men who live in smaller remote and rural places in China may be less exposed to the feminist activities, information and useful resources than those in the major cities.

2. Maintaining social stability: the party-state's censorship of feminism issues

Perhaps the most striking distinction in regard to feminism in China is the overriding role of the Chinese state. In the same way that the CCP was the progenitor of women's liberation movement in the earlier decades of socialism, it has remained the key political and moral arbitrator regarding what is permissible in the decades of economic reform. As an authoritarian regime, the Chinese one-party state constantly censors online comments and offline activities (Fu, 2017). This censorship is primarily aimed at maintaining the regime's power and restricting the spread of information that may lead to collective action (King et al., 2013). Since the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, maintaining the stability (*weiwen*) of the Chinese political system

has become the top priority of the party-state (Hassid & Sun, 2015; He, 2018):

> Deng Xiaoping stressed the importance of stability; Jiang Zemin identified stability as one of the three most important national tasks; and Hu Jintao stated that stability is the foundation of building the "harmonious society" (He, 2018, p. 9).

By testing Internet filtering of topics among the different counties, Faris and Villeneuve (2008) found that the 'women's rights' was targeted as one of the most sensitive political topics to be blocked in China. Rather than treating the arrival of Western feminism as a social issue about women, the state sees this as evidence of Western influence, and justifies censorship and crackdown for this political and ideological reasons. Feminism is classified as a sensitive subject that has the potential to undermine social stability (Y. Liu & Zheng, 2019); it is another ideological concern about the West that has the potential to challenge the legitimacy of the state .

While social media in China can provide more opportunities for Chinese feminists' visibility and networking, strict censorship and continuous political intervention have become major issues for feminist activism in cyberspace (B. Wang & Driscoll, 2019). These include Internet censorship by means of 'the Great Firewall' that blocks access to foreign websites such as Facebook and Google; keyword filtering for sensitive online contents; and active human censors who manually monitor and delete sensitive online posts (King et al., 2013). Some feminist social media accounts have been forcibly suspended or shut down, and their online posts, articles and pictures abruptly deleted (Han, 2018; B. Wang & Driscoll, 2019). In order to survive this tight censorship environment, Chinese feminist groups normally adopt an adaptable campaign strategy that mobilises individual participation in public spaces through exhibitions, workshops, lectures, and salons, instead of radical protests or dissent (Han, 2018; Zeng, 2020).

Researchers have documented media strategies that are commonly employed by Chinese feminists to counter online censorship. Some organisers of Chinese feminist social media accounts said they frequently self-censor the contents of their posts before putting them online in order to increase their visibility (Han, 2018). B. Wang and Driscoll (2019) illustrate how some feminist media groups in China communicate and connect with mainstream media to reach broader audiences for support. Young feminists have also creatively used bodily performances as visual expression in collective campaigns to counter the harsh online censorship (Tan, 2017). Taking the recent #MeToo movement as an example, Chinese feminism activists have adapted and reinvented a series of counter-censorship strategies to prevent their visibility and engagement from being censored on the Internet. These include the use of hashtag campaigns, blockchain technologies, building online archives, image modification, and transforming words and coded language with playful puns (Zeng, 2020; L. Zheng, 2019). The crackdown and censorship on #MeToo and other feminism activities in China demonstrate the fragilities and vulnerabilies of bottom-up, grassroot feminist engagement and the lack of safe communicative spaces in this authoritarian country (L. Zheng, 2019).

Although the Internet and social media have become the main battlegrounds for Chinese feminists, some scholars have expressed concerns about the inequality of access to them. As Tan (2017) points out, most participants in media-based feminist activism are college-educated women in major cities, and their impact could be limited by the unequal access to media caused by the class and geographical differences found in China. Internet and digital media use also reflects structured inequalities in terms of age groups, education levels, incomes and locations, as well as the gender gaps that disadvantage women's access to the Internet (Pan et al., 2011). For instance, while about 80% of Internet users in authoritarian countries like China have university education backgrounds, only

around 2 to 3% know how to utilise anti-censorship tools to get around online restrictions (F. Shen & Zhang, 2018). Thus, the online connectivity of those Chinese feminists who do not have higher levels of education and who live in small cities or rural areas will be even less. L. Zheng (2019) suggests such inequalities need more academic attention.

The case of the China's #MeToo campaign is a case in point. After considering the disparity of the individuals who participated in this campaign based on their educational backgrounds, rural and urban locations, socio-economic conditions etc., Zeng (2020) points out that one of its major limitations was that it did not reach out to certain marginalised groups on a wider scale. Most participants involved in this campaign are well-educated, media-savvy 'elites' with certain amounts of social capital (Zeng, 2020). However, due to the wide social and spatial disparities in China, the marginalised groups in the less developed cities and the rural areas are neglected in this fight, and their voices still "struggle to be heard" (Zeng, 2020, p. 186). In order to achieve a meaningful change in gender politics, Chinese feminist elites need to reach a wider social sphere by expanding feminist activism from the major cities to the lower-scale places. This study contributes to this research gap by exploring how the #MeToo movement played out in Tier-3 and Tier-4 cities, and analysing the relations between local traditional media and the online feminism movement.

3. Spatial inequality in China

My earlier experiences with local Chinese media have sensitised me to the question of how gender equality is related to spatial equality. Geographers tell us that inequality in China is necessarily related to its geography (e.g. Cartier, 2013). The uneven geography of reform in China has led to the uneven development between regions, including the gaps between south and north,

west and east, coast and inland, urban and rural areas (Cartier, 2013; C.C. Fan, 1995; S. Wang & Hu, 1999). Instead of eradicating these inequalities, Chinese economic reform has given rise to even more dramatic disparities in less developed areas (Fleisher et al., 2010). The official data show that in 2019 more than one-third of China's provinces had fallen short of their growth targets for the year, and China's 12 coastal provinces (out of 31) accounted for 65% of the country's GDP (E. Chan, 2019). Major regional disparities have always existed between China's coast and its interior; the cities and the countryside; registered urban residents and internal migrants; and between women and men (K. Chan et al, 2008; United Nations Development Programme 2008).

My case study, P City, is usually described as a prefecture-level city (*dijishi*). China's contemporary administrative/spatial system is structured in four basic vertical administrative levels: province, prefecture, county, and town (Jingxiang Zhang & Wu, 2006). The structural hierarchy of the rank-ordered system defines territories not only as urban and rural, but also according to their different levels of administrative power, the positions of their officials, the power relations among the different levels (Cartier, 2015, 2016). The administrative divisions are subject to adjustment by the central government in terms of political and economic arrangements, and the state retains the strategic power to re-rank, enlarge or merge existing cities, and to establish or eliminate others (Cartier, 2015).

Since the late 1970s, cities have been focused on as the main driving forces of economic reform. China has significantly restructured its urban administrative/spatial system through major administrative changes at the city level (L. J. C. Ma, 2005). As demonstrated by geographer Laurence J. C. Ma (2005), the idea of the city (*chengshi* or *shi*) in China is complex and it plays an important role in the relations between urban and rural places. With the

adoption of the system of 'city administering county', the prefecture-level cities have become spatially integrated, city-centered economic regions with greatly expanded rural counties. "The system was canonised in the 1978 constitution, which officially made the *shi* a hybrid territorial and administrative entity consisting of both urban and rural administrative units" (L. J. C. Ma, 2005, p. 486).

According to the China City Statistical Yearbook (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020), China has a total of 672 administrative cities, including four municipalities directly under the central government, 15 province-level cities (*zhixiashi*), 278 prefectural-level cities (*dijishi*), and 375 county-level cities (*xianjishi*). Based on their populations only, the State Council (2014) divided the city sizes into 'five categories and seven grades' (*wulei qidang*). A more widely used tier system that classifies Chinese cities based on factors that include economic development, GDP, political influence, and population size (Hong Zhang et al., 2016) was mentioned in the Chapter 2. There are no official Chinese government definitions for tiers or lists of the cities in the tier system, but Chinese media and the public have come to a consensus that the tier classifications refer to the development levels of the principal Chinese cities, especially the big Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities.

China's urban administrative/spatial system has a stricter hierarchical structure than the West (L. J. C. Ma, 2005). In the Chinese context, the political and economic relations between different places are significantly affected by their administrative classes, levels or ranks (L. J. C. Ma, 2005). For this reason, L. Cheng and Bruns (2009) indicated the importance of recognising the vast differences between regions and localities when conducting research in China. When conducting a study of a cell phone SMS news service in China, they first considered the potential difference in cell phone usage between people in the

economic and administrative metropolises and those in less developed and remote regions, because "a research focus only on the outstanding examples of booming Chinese economy may well distort the overall picture" (L. Cheng & Bruns, 2009, p. 3). They found the state's policy for the vast regions of the country to be relatively uniform. They also suggested a case study conducted in the lower level cities in the less developed regions could "offer insights which may be understood as representative for much of the rest of China" (L. Cheng & Bruns, 2009, p. 3). My research is a response to this statement. While not necessarily aiming to produce findings that represent most of China, my case study may shed some new light on how spatial inequality and spatial differences impact on gender and media in the inland, less economically developed, central regions of China.

4. Summary of Part Two

This literature review provides a picture of how the feminist movement started in China, how Western feminist concepts and theories were adopted by Chinese feminists and scholars, and how the new generation of feminists promotes their agenda through digital media despite the heavy censorship from the state. It illustrates the different stages of the development of 'gender equality' among Chinese people when influenced by state and market forces, as well as traditional cultural values (Leung, 2003). For women in the bottom-tier regions and rural areas, there is a sense that they are still 'waiting' for the advantages of feminism. Women in these regions have been cut off from the women's rights organisations in the lower level cities because of policy changes and lack of funds, and they are more vulnerable to setbacks in social and economic development (Jie Yang, 2011). The disparities in access to the Internet and

digital media may also be creating differences in rural people's gender awareness. More research needs to be undertaken into these matters.

It is important to engage with the global feminist media framework, but this review has uncovered at three limitations that arise when applying Western perspectives to the Chinese context without taking into account China's distinct situation: 1) lack of attention to spatial inequality; 2) lack of attention to the role of the state; and 3) lack of attention to how the state intersects with market and culture. Overcoming these limitations will require drawing on both area studies and media studies, which is what my study aims to do. ■

Chapter 4

Gender inequality, women and local media: an institutional perspective

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, China's media, mirroring China's political structure, are operated at the national, provincial, municipal, and county levels (Wanning Sun, 2012b). In this chapter I broaden my scope to include the bottom-tier places in China, with a particular focus on local female news workers in small media institutions. In doing so, I find H. Wang's (2019) framework, which outlines the obstacles to Chinese women journalists' career progression by dividing them into institutional levels (i.e. women's organisations and trade unions), organisational levels (i.e. job contracts and salary systems), cultural levels (sexist newsroom culture) and self-disciplinary obstacles, very useful. Following this framework, this chapter mainly focuses on the institutional and organisational aspects, paying attention to the changes in the local media and the obstacles confronting local female news workers. I first explore how the nation-wide media reforms impacted women in the Chinese media and ask what gender implications this may have on women in local-level media institutions.

In particular, I examine both the emergence of what is often referred to as 'soft news' and the growing importance of advertising to the survival of the media. I also outline a number of tendencies, all of which have resulted in the objectification of women to various extents. These tendencies range from representing women as both feminine sexualised figures in the media, to the

increasingly common practice of expecting female media professionals and other staff to procure advertising or cultivate clientele by ways of displaying their feminine (if not sexualised) qualities.

I then outline the obstacles that stand in the way of women's career advancement in local newsrooms, from gender-biased recruitment to the lack of gender policies and association support in the workplace. The final section, which is a case study of a municipal matchmaking fair held by the local newspaper, aims to give specific context to the institutional and organisational issues discussed in the chapter, and to critically analyse how the government and newspapers represent gender expectations and use gender issues for profit.

4.1 Media commercialisation and gender implications in the local media

Whether they are at national, provincial or local levels, China's mainstream media can be divided into two types: state-owned official media, and market-oriented commercial media (B. Wang & Driscoll, 2019; Y. Zhao, 2008). While both are under the state control, the overwhelming majority of Chinese media have become increasingly market oriented as a result of marketisation (Y. Zhao, 2008). Since the reform and opening-up in the late 1970s, commercialisation has brought dynamic changes and tensions to the process of media reform by introducing market forces (Pan, 2000; H. Wang et al., 2013; Y. Zhao, 1998). Media and communication scholar Yuezhi Zhao (1998), whose *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line* has become indispensable for understanding the intricate nexus between Chinese media, the Party-state, and the economic reforms in the PRC, examined the tensions, contradictions, and complicities involving the CCP logic and market logic during the first two decades of economic reforms. Zhao argued that as the

reforms have unfolded market forces have become important in the Chinese media system; rather than operate in total opposition to the Party-state, the media often form interdependent relations for the same interests (Y. Zhao, 2008).

For media institutions, commercialisation has increased the competition for audience and readership. Traditional local media at the bottom rung of the four-tiered Chinese media system have struggled to survive as a result of fierce competition and threats from national and provincial media, and, as ICT developed, from online media. According to Y. Zhao (2008), the Party-state unleashed a series of policies aiming to reform and streamline local media, including:

- the 1996-2003 closure of most county-level newspapers;
- the downsizing of municipal and county-level broadcasting;
- the merging of local cable networks with province-wide cable networks;
- county-level television stations no longer having self-programmed entertainment; instead they were to have two hours of local news and feature programs, and transmission for news programs from higher level media institutions; and
- the introduction of a wave of press conglomeration and recentralisation to merge small local media institutions.

Economic reforms have changed the status of the press in post-Mao China and been prioritised over political reforms by traditional media outlets (Hong, 1998). When the state cut financial funding and public subscriptions, the Chinese media were compelled to turn to the market for profit and compete for readers. However, these media outlets are still owned and ideologically controlled by the Party when it comes to published content and personnel appointments (Hong,

1998). This divorce between ideological and financial dependences has led to two tendencies among the Chinese media (Hong, 1998). First, they have resorted to increasing their human interest content in order to promote readership and ultimately to maximise advertising revenue. Examples are the publishment of semi-market oriented municipal evening papers as a 'supplement of the daily newspaper', and the evening paper started to publish their daily issues in the morning like the daily papers in order to compete with the metro papers (C. Huang, 2001). Second, some outlets have started to supplement their core business by providing other types of services, effectively operating like a media conglomerate (Hong, 1998). As a result of this transformation, China's media system is moving from state-subsidised and Party-controlled propaganda organs to "advertisement-based and market-driven capitalistic media enterprises under Party ownership" (Y. Zhao, 2004a, p. 205).

Commercialisation has had a profound impact on media outlets in places of lower geographic scale, many of which have had to transform from public institutions to commercial companies to make a profit. In the case of P City, in 2007 its television station merged its cable and broadcast operations, while separating out its commercial department into a business company. In 2012, the *P City Daily* newspaper founded the P City Newspaper Media Group (*baoye chuanmei jituan*), separated its departments of reporting and editing from the operations department, and started its own advertising and printing companies. While the *P City Daily* newspaper remains, in terms of the institutional system, a public institution (*shiye tizhi*) and receives government funds, the *P City Evening* paper has been transformed into various enterprises. It has become a market player, self-financing and adopting a more flexible payment system for its staff (basic salary plus hourly rate).

However, from a feminist perspective, studies conducted with female journalists in top-tier cities have identified the contradictions and limitations of

commercialisation for improving gender stereotyping of women in the Chinese media industry (Y. Chen, 2009; H. Wang, 2016). H. Wang's (2016) study identified and analysed three sources of gender inequality in Chinese journalism: 1) women-unfriendly commercial contracts and salary systems, 2) the weaknesses of women's associations and trade unions, and 3) a dominant newsroom culture of sexism. As the state reduces support and funding for social welfare services and this commercialised culture deepens, Chinese women will be subject to greater gender inequalities (H. Wang, 2016).

As for the transformation of news production in Chinese journalism, Y. Chen (2009) analysed in-depth interviews with 25 journalists who covered women's news in Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. The author noted the possible influence of feminism on individual journalists to bring more gender-sensitivity strategies to their news, but also argued that the gender consciousness of journalists cannot be assumed to result in media openness, competition, and commercialisation, since the state and market do not intentionally foster journalists' gender consciousness. In fact, the state and market have much more influence on mass media than feminism in China (Y. Chen, 2009). However, both Y. Chen's (2009) and H. Wang's (2016) studies were conducted with female journalists working in first-tier major cities.

4.1.1 Soft news

Over the past few decades, journalism as a whole has undergone many changes that have had gendered consequences (Carter et al., 1998). English-language scholarship in feminist media studies has given much thought to the gender division associated with what is often called 'hard' and 'soft news' (Reinemann et al., 2011). 'Hard news' is understood as important, time-sensitive stories with high levels of newsworthiness that require immediate publication; 'soft news',

by contrast, focuses on human-interest events that are less newsworthy but connect with audiences' emotions (North, 2016c). In addition to news topics, presentation styles distinguish the softer news content from the harder (Reinemann et al., 2011).

Research in journalism has identified a parallel and paradoxical process. On the one hand, journalism is believed to have gone through a softening process (Patterson, 2000); on the other hand, there is a "quest for the professionalisation of journalism" (H. Wang, 2016, p. 492). Significantly, this bifurcation in journalism is gendered (North, 2016c; H. Wang, 2016). The expansion of soft news has been identified as one of the reasons for the increased number of women being recruited in the news industry (Van Zoonen, 1998b). In her article 'One of the Girls? The Changing Gender of Journalism', feminist and media scholar Liesbet van Zoonen (1998a) argued:

> The increased attention to 'human interest' news, a greater care for audience needs and desires, and a less detached and rational mode of reporting are three elements that female news journalists have expressed in many research projects as typical for their role conception. (p. 41)

The transformation of increasing soft and human-interest content is a paradox for women journalists. It has opened up the profession for women, with newsrooms needing to assign more female journalists and editors to work on the entertainment content targeting women audiences. At the same time, soft news is not considered 'serious' journalism in the news hierarchy and women are undervalued in these genres. As in many other countries, Chinese scholars have found that women journalists in China are usually assigned to report 'soft news' topics such as health, education, entertainment, lifestyle and fashion – which are considered 'suitable' for women's personalities – while men report on most of the 'hard news' topics and have opportunities to become investigative

reporters and editorial writers (Y. Chen, 2001; Svensson & Wang, 2013; H. Wang, 2016).

Besides the gendered demarcation of soft/hard journalism, feminist media studies scholars not only point out the gender biases against female journalists and the stereotypes in women's news representations, but also that men are twice as likely to be used as news sources than women (De Swert & Hooghe, 2010; Ross, 2007). While men are privileged in news as the authoritative experts, business persons or politicians, women are more likely to speak on topics traditionally regarded as of specific interest to women, such as education and consumer issues, thereby "further consolidating traditional gendered binaries of 'male/public/professional vs. female/private/personal' which undermine women's value in society" (Ross & Carter, 2011, p. 1160). Despite the increase of personalised, entertaining, emotional and sensational news, the value of soft news is questionable because of its contribution to a dumbing down of news and society (Nguyen, 2012).

To a considerable extent, these tendencies identified by feminist media studies scholars in the English-language literature are also present in China. Facing market competition and cuts in state subsidies due to market-oriented reforms, Chinese media outlets rely heavily on advertising revenue in metropolitan papers, evening papers, tabloids, and weekend editions (Y. Zhao, 1998). Marketability has become an important component along with news selection. As with provincial and metropolitan media institutions, the local Party media have increased human interest and soft content to lure readers and increase advertising revenues through photo news, social news, human-interest stories, and sensationalism in news reporting styles. Studies of international news media indicate that they often localise foreign news to suit the interests and needs of their own audiences in different geographic areas and cultural contexts (Clausen, 2004; C.-C. Lee et al., 2002; H. Wang et al., 2013).

Entertainment reporting is a flourishing field of the journalism industry. The *P City Evening* paper, as a market-oriented evening newspaper that needs to sell papers and attract more advertisers, turned the international #MeToo movement with Hollywood celebrities into an eye-catching, colour-printed, back-page entertainment news item. These human-interest stories and gossip about celebrities show how highly commercialised China's culture industry has become. However, one important difference between the media in China and the West is Party censorship. The P City television station director said in a speech: "Local media have to follow 'two lines': baseline and survival line. The baseline is the Party line to follow the direction from the party-state; the survival line is generating revenue for the employees" (meeting in July 2019). According to Y. Zhao (2004b), "Far from being inherently antithetical to Party propaganda, market mechanisms have actually helped neutralise dissent at a time when the bottom line is the Party line" (p. 66). With the aim to serve both the state and the market, local media seek to find the balance between the 'Party line' and the 'bottom line', between the need to toe the official line and the need for commercial success.

As advertising becomes an important regulative power in the market-oriented media structure, increasing numbers of journalists are working in outlets dedicated to the informational and entertainment needs of affluent urban consumers, which are the advertisers' most sought after audience (Y. Zhao, 2004b). Small media organisations in Tier-3 and Tier-4 cities are desperate to increase soft content in order to drive circulation and generate commercial advertising. In the case of P City, the *P City Daily* newspaper published its first evening paper in 1994 with up to 32 pages focussed on entertainment and daily life-related news. The P City television station increased its self-made programs to 400 hours, including education, health, relationships, sports, cosmetic and lifestyle.

However, some of the changes and struggles over the years have implications for the gendered media representations female journalists and their newsroom practices. As Y. Zhao (2004a) argued, the market-oriented Chinese media system has both class and gender bias; it tends to "marginalise radical perspectives and issues of concern to groups that do not constitute media advertisers 'most needed consumers', namely the small political and economic elite and the mostly urban middle class" (p. 207). The news beat of women's issues is generally regarded as unimportant and irrelevant. In one of my observations of the PTV newsroom, I saw editors select news from the Internet for the evening news program. Two female editors selected a piece about the legislation of domestic violence, but a male editor rejected it and recommend a news story about car accident involving children. In the end, the car accident news story was selected by the male director. Domestic violence, as an important gender-related issue, had to give way to other stories that were more eye-catching. The market imperative has encouraged local media outlets and journalists to go for more 'soft' contents, and portray women and gender issues from the needs of the market. Furthermore, by declining the domestic violence news the male editor and male director reinforced the potency of sexism and what Gill (2011) called "the invalidation and annihilation of any language for talking about structural inequalities" (p. 63).

News journalism that prioritises 'human interest' topics and follows market logic further promote and reinforce gender stereotypes. Gendered representations can be revealed through examination of news coverages. My fieldwork suggests the actions of marketing-based imperative in the local media of Tier-4 cities can be much more blatant than in the metropolitan media. The *P City Evening* newspaper still uses the word '*meinü'* (beautiful woman) in its headlines to attract the attention of readers. Large illustrations of actresses or female models can always be found in the entertainment and sports pages, and

in colour print on the back cover. This emphasis on outward appearance is revealed in the recurring words and pictures about beautiful and youthful women. Such media production and consumption aim to satisfy the 'male gaze', as women and sex have always been "a big selling point for the commercial media all around the world" (Gallagher, 2001, p. 24).

Advertising has also been criticised for reproducing gender stereotypes and for its objectifying and sexualising portrayals of women (Fedorenko, 2015). Cross-cultural studies reveal that the trend to sex-role stereotyping has been occurring in Chinese media commercials over recent decades (H. Cheng, 1997; Nelson & Paek, 2005; Paek et al., 2011; Siu & Au, 1997). The rise of consumerist culture brought on by the economic reform recognises and reinforces the gendered representations and divisions in the domestic sphere. For instance, women are more likely to appear in private spheres and family roles among the visual images in magazines, billboards, and television advertising (Y. Chen, 2009; H. Cheng, 1997; Hooper, 1998). In P City, the contents and commercials related to kitchens, education, and cosmetics appearing in local newspapers and on television target a specific female audience by using the words and images of 'mother' or the personal pronoun 'she' in Chinese. These news content and commercials draw on stereotypical gendered assumptions about family structure and consumption roles (Shao et al., 2014). Such perceptions of women being primarily responsible for household matters and nurturing children reflect and encourage traditional social expectations.

The very limited social and public roles given to women in advertising reinforce particular gendered ideas of what it means to be a desirable woman (Shao et al., 2014). In my fieldwork in P City, I noticed some advertisements for a local plastic surgery clinic that appeared in the city newspaper and on television (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

Figure 4.1 The plastic advertising billboard in front of the P City Daily newspaper station with the daily newspapers posted in another side

Pictured by the author during fieldwork in August, 2019.

To protect the anonymity of interviewees, identifying details and information of the place in the photo were removed

Figure 4.2 The advertising promoting plastic surgery business appeared in PTV channel of the same clinic

This picture is screenshot by the author during the fieldwork in August, 2019.

To protect the anonymity of interviewees, identifying details and information of the place in the photo were removed

Because it seemed ubiquitous in the local media of P City, the image of this young, thin, perfect-looking female model showing her body in these commercials left a lasting impression on me. As a woman, when I look at such advertisements, I find myself unconsciously comparing my body with the model's. Studies have proved the overuse of highly idealised stereotypical women's images in advertisements can lead to possible harmful social consequences and gender discrimination (Shao et al., 2014). In the 'Love Bible' section of the *P City Evening* newspaper I saw an article titled 'Teach you how to express love on the Chinese Valentia's Day', which advised men to buy roses and red wine for single women (see Figure 4.3); and another 'What should men and women pay attention to when dating?' reminded women to be careful about their choice of makeup and clothing for the first date and suggested men should pay the bill (Figure 4.4). These gendered representations in the content depict the stereotypical roles of men and women. As J.M. Chan (1993) argued, the market-oriented reformation has attempted to place women in a new type of exploitation called "commercialisation without independence" (p. 16). Women's voices, perspectives, and work are devalued in the ensembles of visual, textual and auditory signs used in news and advertising portrayals of women (Shao et al., 2014).

恋爱宝典 七夕节表白方法攻略

七夕是中国传统情人节，是一年中最浪漫的日子，是情侣爱情表白的最佳时机，已成为情侣必过的节日之一。在七夕节来临之际，小编奉上七夕节求爱表白方法攻略温情套餐。单身男女快来看，什么样的表白才更容易收获爱情。祝恋人在一年一次的七夕节里情意久久！

攻略一：鲜花

“送花真是没有创意！”可别这么说，女孩子就喜欢鲜花，而且是多多益善，尤其是作为七夕节礼物。当然，七夕节的鲜花少不了红玫瑰，不过你完全可以送符合她性格的花哟。如果她是个温柔纯洁的女孩子，可以送束百合给她，如果她高贵迷人，那么就送紫罗兰或者郁金香，如果她活泼可爱，那么不用说，波斯菊是最适合送给她的花。

别忘了，不但要送花，还要在花束内夹上你的卡片，才显得你是有备而来，卡片上最好亲自写几句甜蜜的话。鲜花会凋零，你的手迹却可以成为她永久保存的珍藏。如果你想给她一个惊喜，那么就不要在卡片上写落款，也不要亲自交给她，做她七夕节这天的神秘倾慕者吧，她会一整天都得意地偷偷笑喔。如果你不能鼓起勇气向她表白，那么就用鲜花做你的开场白吧。

攻略二：情书

没想到吧？情书其实是特别有效的撒手锏哟。如果你对自己的文字能力还比较自信，那么试试这一招吧，绝对会给他(她)留下永难磨灭的印象。什么《情书大全》《制胜情书手册》看都不要看，一定要真心实意地写属于你自己的情书。如果被对方发现，你是从其他地方抄来的陈词滥调，不但不能加分，反而会让你在他(她)心中的形象大打折扣。因为这样显得不真诚。只要是你自己写的，哪怕幼稚点也没关系，勇敢的情人到哪里都会受欢迎的。现在网上的竹简情书很热销，回归二千年前纯朴的古老浪漫情书，象征着一份千年不变的誓言。

攻略三：心动蜡烛

送花，太老套？情书，太费功夫？那么这支蜡烛一定可以打动他(她)。前提是，你们要有已经计划好的约会。约好他(她)，然后带着一支彩色小蜡烛(大小以能隐蔽地携带为合适)，还有打火机，去赴约吧。

攻略四：美酒

微妙的酒精，最适合在七夕节这一天营造气氛喔！不要太烈，红酒是最佳选择，也可以选别种果酒，总之，看起来浪漫是最重要的。口味要选稍甜，香槟也是不错的选择。如果你们平时约会就喝一点酒，那么这次更要好好挑选一种美酒。如果平时很少有机会一起喝酒，那么就利用这次机会，酝酿“美酒+鲜花”的气氛。小酒微醺的时刻，鼓起勇气，把心底的话说出来，就算失败了，也可以推罪给酒精，一句“我好像有点醉了”，化解尴尬的场面。

（网摘）

Figure 4.3 A news article called 'Teach you how to express love on the Chinese Valentine's Day' in the P City Evening paper on 6 August 2019

Sourced from the online vision of the P City Evening paper, screenshot by the author

男生女生相亲要注意哪些?

第一步:相亲前的准备

对相亲对象,你至少对对方有最起码的了解:身高、年龄、家庭、婚姻经历、工作等。

这些最简单的资料,如果你认真分析,可以在一定程度上有依据地"猜测"他的一些行为习惯和性格。从理性上你心里大概就会有一定的概念,相亲时会着重看对方的某些方面;从感性上讲,只要对方有着一两种你看中的品质,你会很期待相亲那天。

如果条件允许,你可以多从侧面了解对方的生活,这样一来,如果你了解到他/她很优秀,你很中意,你只有进行针对性的准备,才能让对方同样也满意你!

第二步:注意第一印象

守时、着装、礼仪……就是第一印象最直接的体现。建议在相亲时男方提前10-15分钟到,点好饮料茶品;女方提前3-5分钟到最为合适。着装上,男生要简洁大方,如果天气、场合适宜,可以尝试穿得正式一点,一般不建议戴首饰。女生看个人喜好,可以化淡妆亦可以不化妆,衣帽鞋袜要干净整洁,可以戴一两件首饰。切记不要化浓妆,会给人一种妖艳而不真实的感觉。在相亲过程中,90%以上是男方占据话题主导,那么建议男方事先精心准备几个幽默笑话,用以调节气氛。在触及比较私密的话题时,一定要注意语气的缓和和适可而止。

第三步:相亲期间费用问题

个人觉得最好还是男方付。如果你的条件不算太好,可以选择消费低一点的地方,如果女方条件和你差不多的,多半不会嫌弃,更多的是觉得你实在,会过日子。另外也可以采用AA制付费方式。这种方式需要男女双方事先商量。

第四步:相亲之后的联系

无论男生还是女生,不能对相亲抱很大的期望,但是也不能抱着随便玩玩的心态。相亲之后,觉得有必要发展,那么继续和对方保持联系和交流。同时,请你们记住,你的生活中不只有恋爱,还有朋友、工作和家人。你不能对别人太热情,但是也请一定不能忘了他/她的存在。

相亲中的小技巧:

1.初次见面,最合适的第一句开场白:你好,很高兴认识(见到)你!

2.不自卑,也不自傲。保持自信,谈吐自然,不要总盯着对方看,也不要一直不看对方。

3.建议在相亲前就在网络上互相了解,觉得合适再见面更好。

4.聊天时不要老说你父母怎么样,对方看重的是你怎么样。

5.上进心和稳重感,是多数女生选择另一半的硬指标。

6.懂得理解对方并且有孝心,是多数男生选择女友的硬指标。

7.初次见面,最好把手机调成振动,并且告诉同事你暂时有事;如果你频繁接电话,会让对方觉得你根本不重视他/她。

8.如果方便,双方在相亲前可以互相发送生活照(一定提醒对方,非PS照片)。

相亲,其实是一种很微妙的感觉。感觉对了,一切都不是问题。最后,希望大家都能找到心仪的另一半!

(网文)

Figure 4.4 A news article called 'What should men and women pay attention to when dating?' in the P City Evening paper on 10 May 2019

Sourced from the online vision of the P City Evening paper, screenshot by the author

The increasing proliferation of digital, social and mobile media has changed the traditional habits of news consumption and challenged the traditional media's place in society (Westlund, 2013; Wolf, 2015). The news genre in particular has undergone a profound transformation due to technological change, including speed of news flow, news-writing styles, and editorial practices (Pavlik, 2000). The growing importance of 'soft' journalism and its increasingly diversified nature suggest that the multiple social functions of news in general are becoming "more consumer-oriented, intimate and fiction-inspired" (Steensen, 2011, p. 60).

An editor in the social media department of PTV showed me how she transformed a daily newspaper report into a shorter vision with a language style that fitted the social media platforms. The title is important, because it decides whether people will click on it. She titled one news post on TikTok (*Douyin*, a short-video platform) 'A story of a *baifumei* (a fair-skinned, rich and beautiful woman) trapped in internet loan' to draw more online clicks. In the video, a young actress played two characters (a fashionable woman as a victim, and a policewoman) in order to teach people how to avoid online loan fraud. The emphasis on using women's images and entertainment content as eye-catching features was intended to bring more coverage and representation of women at the expense of reinforcing gender stereotypes.

In my fieldwork conversations with many local journalists in P City, an often-expressed view was that production of soft-content journalism is a suitable profession for women because it is compatible with traditional cultural expectations of women, especially for young women living in a small place. One senior female journalist of the *P City Daily* told me: "I would never want my son to choose journalism major in the future, because this is not a promising career. I want him to study law in college. But if I had a daughter, it is OK for her to become a journalist who writes soft news".

According to my interviewees, women have advantages in writing news contents of 'human interest' because of their capacity for emotional involvement and for producing entertainment. And many of them seemed to take it for granted that hard journalism is the domain of men. This gender disparity in the allocation of stories has ramifications for the deep-seated gender culture in the news industry (North, 2016c). For instance, there are unwritten rules that women journalists are not allowed to conduct interviews with a male mayor; and the pages of sports and international news have to be edited by males. Women are further devalued in the process by being assigned to reporting 'soft news', therefore making it harder for them to claim professionalism (H. Wang, 2016). For example, when PTV started organising a 'new media' department in 2018, the managers assigned eight women journalists and one male director to run this office. A female journalist told me this is because the managers think women are more familiar with and interested in social media and contents on the Internet. It is also more of a 'desk job' that does not require going outside and doing real reporting, which they prefer men to do. So, in a way, this reinforces the tradition of women belonging in the inner space and men in the public sphere. This journalist was unwilling to work in this department because it is not an important department in the station and she would have certainly lost promotion opportunities compared to those who write privileged, highly valued hard news stories. Those who work in the hard news areas "rise up the ranks more quickly than those who write less-important soft news stories" (North, 2016c, p. 369).

If a woman journalist were to concentrate on reporting soft news, she would be dismissed as a less competent media professional and more likely be relegated to lower career positions in the newsroom (H. Wang, 2016). An example is the PTV anchor team, in which females outnumber males. The HR director stated that female presenters have to meet the standards of being slim

and beautiful in front of the camera, but males look trustworthy if they are older. The conventional pairing of an attractive (young) female presenter with an older male presenter has been regarded by many feminist media scholars as an 'unhelpful' global issue in terms of content and presentation, as it is always the man in charge with the serious contents and the woman dose the 'fluffy stuff' (Ross & Carter, 2011). The image of the female anchor is the embodiment of yet another feminine stereotype: "physical appearance above the average, but not too beautiful, otherwise audience will be distracted" (interview with one male producer at PTV). The emphasis on female anchors' physical beauty suggests that women's physical attractiveness is more important than their professional qualities as a journalist (Barnes, 2005; Van Zoonen, 1998b).

A profession with a largely female workforce often has under-valued status in news work arrangements. In March 2020, I talked on WeChat with a female PTV anchor and asked whether she produced any news program related to the coronavirus. She said she was given a task to produce a program to promote public activities after the national lockdown and quarantine in China, with the aim of encouraging people to come out and stimulate the economy. Two days later, she sent me a link to her news program. It showed her visiting city parks and gardens, talking about the beauty of the Spring season while boating on the river, and giving photo tips on the blossoming flowers.

4.1.2 Reform in the employment system

For many decades, Chinese local Party media institutions that are public service units (*shiye danwei*) as well as individuals recruited by public institutions have usually been provided with an 'iron rice bowl' (*tie fan wan*), which means lifetime employment regardless of performance and cradle-to-grave welfare provided by the work unit (Child, 1996; Warner, 1995). Staff members have

officially approved and guaranteed positions (*bianzhi*) (Burns, 2003). The *bianzhi* system usually refers to the fixed number of permanent personnel positions in all the state-financed units and organisations, based on their functions in the public sector and their responsibility to the government (Brødsgaard, 2002). According to their population sizes and developed levels, cities in different tiers have been permitted to establish varying number of agencies (*jigou*). The first-tier cities began with 60 agencies in 1993, compared with about 50 agencies for second-tier cities and 40 for third-tier cities (Burns, 2003).

The *bianzhi* system is an important part of the Chinese bureaucratic structure, and the CCP uses it to control Party patronage and sustain social stability in the nation. The CCP has thus faced tension between the need to maintain as many official positions as possible for political patronage and the need to cut positions for the sake of developing an agile and viable economy, which is considered to be crucial to the Party's efforts to maintain social stability (Burns, 2003). Scholars have argued that the government's downsizing reforms in the 1990s have not been considered as particularly successful; in fact, many poor local governments in China are employing more employees in their institutions than the number of official positions they declare (*chaobian*) (Brødsgaard, 2002). From my fieldwork in P City, I found that the 80% of *bianzhi* staff – that is, staff within the system – in the PTV and P City newspaper are above 40-years old, the average age being about 50 years. The hundreds of *chaobian* employees and the aging of the local media's *bianzhi* staff are seen as hindrances to structural reform.

In line with the media marketisation reforms, Chinese media organisations now have two types of employment relationships: the market system and the quota system (same with the *bianzhi* position) (H. Wang, 2016). The post-1992 Party decision to wean the media off state subsidies, along with intensified market competition fuelled by the proliferation of media outlets and online

media (Y. Zhao, 2004b), pressured traditional local media to cut costs. One of the most significant strategies was a reduction in the numbers and wages of journalistic staff (Sparks et al., 2016). According to research on journalists in the major cities, there have been more journalists employed in the market system than in the quota system since the late 1990s in Guangzhou (F. Lin, 2010). Interviewees in H. Wang's study (2016) from Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Chengdu had their first types of contract since entering the workforce after 1992. This transition from the quota system to the market system in the big cities has been slowly adopted in smaller-scaled places. The P City television station and newspaper both ended their last recruitments of official positions around 2005 and had not arranged public recruitment at the time of this current study. New employees who have been hired in recent years have been put on renewable contracts and no longer enjoy the benefits of lifelong employment. The current staff of local media outlets have several different statuses and contracts, including civil servant, *bianzhi* staff, employment contract, and temporal contract.

Although the ownership of Chinese media has been changing from totally state-owned to half public and half private, the government still determines the appointment of the management team in the Party's media organisations (M. Wang & Jiang, 2016). As city-level Party organisations, the newspaper and television station of P City have permanent employees of parent Party organs in their key editorial and management positions. However, most of the journalists and editors in the local media are performance-based contract workers and, similarly to the employees in the major media outlets in the first-tier cities, they do not have such status and security. As Y. Zhao (2004b) observed in Chinese newsrooms:

> The main chunk of their income comes not from the job position per se, but the quantity and quality of their output. Although journalists are

> given more operational autonomy, they are subjected to rigorous financial reward and punishment schemes based on management-determined 'quality' classifications for each item. (p. 50)

Contract journalists' incomes are made up of a small amount of the basic wage and plus 'bonuses' that depend on their monthly performances (H. Wang, 2016). Under this salary system, they have to work hard on the quantity and quality of the reporting tasks in order to earn the bonus and hence a decent income. In the lobby of the *P City Daily* newspaper office there is a display window showing every article ranked by the chief editor with scores from 1 to 5 for its news quality (such as word length, importance, pictures). Many local journalists complained about the low incomes in small media institutions in bottom-tier cities, even though they face the same pressures as their counterparts in the major cities.

During my fieldwork in P City I found that low income is one reason that the local media in small places have high attrition rates and difficulties in attracting high-quality journalism graduates and professionals. I also found that the complex types of employment in local media workplaces produce conflicts of interest among personnel groups and hinder young contracted employees, especially women, from moving up the hierarchical ladder. While the senior staff are pursuing positions of political power, most employees in the lower levels are working for income. In the last 10 years, PTV saw three leadership corruption scandals, and in 2017 the revenue of the station dropped 60%, causing average salaries to be lower than the minimum income standard in the province. The staff went on strike over wages in 2018. One journalist wrote a poem and posted it in the lobby accusing corruption of the PTV leadership, the forming of cliques for private gain, the giving and receiving of bribes, and engaging in illicit sexual relations with female employees.

In order to advance their careers, female media employees not only have to fulfil daily work tasks, but also put effort on maintaining relations with clients and managers. These efforts include attracting advertising and investments, attending social engagements, drinking within the male circle, and even using sex to advance their careers. The changing labour conditions in the Chinese media context and the hostility towards women's career progression form a potential 'glass ceiling' that prevents women from reaching top management positions. More importantly, the contract and salary systems are seen as woman unfriendly. H. Wang (2016), for example, suggests the system has doubled the pressures on women, who are expected to fulfil their family and child-bearing roles at the same time, forcing them to face precarious situations in the workforce. In my interviews with female journalists in P City, I found that many are afraid to take maternity leave because it affects their potential advancement opportunities as well as their incomes. Maternity leave varies in different provinces and regions in China. PTV and the *P City Daily* newspaper both follow the regional policy of Henan province government, which is that female employees have the legal right to six months of maternity leave and male employees are allowed one month of parental leave.

With the changing of the 1979 one-child policy in 2016, female workers with a second child have three months postnatal leave, but her partner does cannot have parental leave. In reality, no male employee would take paternity leave in the media institutions in P City because his ability to take it is largely influenced by the workplace culture and his superior's attitude (Lai, 2020). I interviewed female journalists who would not use the full maternity leave they are entitled to because if they took it they would only have the basic salary of only about 800 yuan without any bonus. A senior journalist work in the *P City Daily*, MX told me that when she had her first child she lost a promotion to the professional title

she deserved and now, as she is getting older, she was struggling to decide whether she should consider a second child.

4.1.3 Female journalists engage in promoting advertising activities

In China, as in the rest of the world, traditional media industries have come under threat with the widespread use of mobile phones and the prevalence of the instant messaging and social networking applications like Weibo and WeChat. For media operators, there was once a premium for owning the scarce resource such as a commercial printing press or a broadcast license. This scarcity ensured viability as it gave the operators a level of exclusivity over advertising revenue. Those resources have been replaced by the abundance of low-cost digital media and no-cost (to users) social platforms that deliver the news and much more. Traditional media such as television and newspapers are losing their unique roles of providing instant news and information both to their audience and advertisers. Once-loyal audiences can now freely and easily access news from their phones, and advertisers have followed them to the digital platforms. These factors have contributed to the traditional media's losing their unique attractiveness in the news market and hence their declining revenues (Sparks et al., 2016).

Traditional television stations and newspapers, such as those in P City, not only have to contend with the consequences of media commercialisation, which has brought more pressure and competition from the 'big media' in top-tier cities, they also have to compete with social media and free online news. From 2000, the *P City Daily* has responded to these challenges by adopting a number of strategies: a news website with digital newspaper versions; a 'text newspaper' (*shouji bao*) that texts messages on mobile phones; a local news App; official

social media accounts; a new department of 'News Media' to post news on social media; and a campaign of customers' self-made short videos.

In 2019, under the direction from the Xi national leadership, the local media started the innovation and reorganisation called 'media convergence (*rong meiti*) internal mechanism reform'. Each channel uses a WeChat public account to promote its 'dissemination capacity' and 'influence', using live streaming on municipal big events, and, more recently, the PTV presenters have started commercial livestreaming to sell products. However, from my observations of these online platforms, they are not intended to open a space for promoting public debate or interacting with news and affairs through these digital technologies. There are no 'comments' spaces on the news websites, and the comments section under their Weibo and WeChat social media accounts were deliberately closed.

Faced with falling revenues from circulation and advertising, the newspaper industries and television stations have been experimenting with new sources of income such as grey income, soft advertising, and off-line events (Sparks et al., 2016). Besides advertising on their newspaper pages, the *P City Daily* and the *P City Evening* newspapers have started providing 'soft ads' (*ruanguang*) as a publicity service for corporations or local government agencies. For a cost about 20,000 to 30,000 yuan, an agency can buy a whole page in the daily paper, full of the articles and pictures that a journalist will write especially for it. These pages and articles do not clarify that the content is sponsored and thus blur the boundary between news content and paid advertising. For the agency, this is a good way to promote their works to the local government and local people. And for the newspaper, it increases their advertisement income. Journalists become the real 'sellers' who close the deals for the newsroom and earn lucrative bonuses for themselves. In order to increase both their incomes, media

organisations and journalists maintaining favourable relations with official sources for news activities and sponsorships (Y. Chen, 2009).

For employees in most Chinese media, their economic benefits are directly related to the profits generated by their newspapers and TV stations. Apart from their monthly salaries, Chinese journalists' living standards are largely determined by the indirect benefits from their work, which include bonuses, expense allowances, subsidised housing, and cars (Akhavan-Majid, 2004). Compared with the US press industry, Chinese journalists tend to maintain a very close historical relation with both the government and commercial corporations (Sparks et al., 2016). There is a well-established tradition that journalists receive direct financial rewards or 'red envelopes' from interviewees and clients, either for publishing positive stories or for spiking unfavourable material (Sparks et al., 2016). Y. Zhao (1998) has criticised this situation:

> Journalists, with their monopolistic access to state-controlled media resources, their overall cynicism towards the Party's propaganda operations and their job-mandated connections with the business sector (after all, they are required to promote the market economy), become one of the most readily co-opted intellectual groups. Their rental-seeking activities encompass a wide range of unethical and illegal practices, from receiving cash, stocks and shares, holidays and other bribes in exchange for publishing promotional material as news, to soliciting advertising by publishing promotional material and moonlighting as publicists for business clients, to selling an entire page or broadcasting block to business and government clients, and to overt extortion. (pp. 72-93)

However, these 'extra incomes' are important contributions to the local media journalists' annual incomes. After writing a 'sponsored article' for a restaurant in the *P City Evening* paper, one junior female journalist told me she would have

a 6,000 RMB bonus income because of it, which is triple her basic monthly salary: "If I could have one article like this one every month then I do not need to worry about my incomes". Without these bonuses, the average basic monthly income for newspaper and television journalists in P City is around 1,700 yuan, which is lower than the minimum wage set by the province and insufficient to cover their living expenses, even in a Tier-3 or Tier-4 city such as P City. The pursuit of bonuses and indirect incomes has therefore become an inevitable and important part of these journalists' daily work.

Besides trading their content space and attracting more advertisement, another common trend in the Chinese newspaper industry and television stations is to get involved in other commercial activities or directly run non-media businesses to raise additional revenue (Hong, 1998). By using their brands and reputations, these outlets extend their advertising services and promote other activities for revenue growth (Sparks et al., 2016; H. Wang & Sparks, 2019). For example, the major party-owned newspaper, *People's Daily*, has invested in non-media 'sideline' businesses, such as real estate, construction, hotels and apartment buildings, tourism, and telecommunications (Akhavan-Majid, 2004). Such non-media investments have developed into important sources of income for traditional Chinese media, as the income produced may exceed that of the core press-related businesses (Hong, 1998; Sparks et al., 2016).

Since 2009, PTV has organised the annual city motor show, and the *P City Daily* has hosted the annual matchmaking market in the city square. These events are the most important income sources for these local media institutions; for example, the two-day motor show in 2018 brought 600 million RMB in revenue for the station. Women journalists working on the event played an important part in attracting investments and in the planning process. In Section 4.3. of this chapter, I analyse a case study of the *P City Daily*'s annual

matchmaking fair to explore how the government and media represent women in the marriage market while making a profit from this event.

My fieldwork observations suggest that some journalists have transitioned from journalism to public relations (PR), mostly as event organisers. And it is the female employees that are usually assigned to the work of organising PR events for purposes of procuring advertising deals. PR work is considered 'suitable' for women, who are believed to have better communication skills and be better at building connection with the people who run companies. The journalists I interviewed said their managers set targets for journalists to bring 'sponsored contents' each month, and this has become a task that every journalist has to finish in order to have a high income and advance their career. In order to accomplish these tasks, journalists have to build and maintain their personal relations with the government departments and business sectors.

Some interviewees, both male and female, said women journalists have 'natural' advantages, such as language expression, carefulness and patience, and they should/could ultilise their 'female' advantages to promote their careers. However, this expression, 'using advantages', also implies that women use sex to achieve their objectives. This stereotype further devalues women in the sexist culture within/outside the local newsroom. Female journalists complain that it is hard for them to socialise and entertain (*yingchou*; work-related banqueting and entertaining; Zurndorfer, 2016) within male work circles. Entertaining clients and leaders takes lot of time after work, and involves drinking and smoking over dinner in restaurants. At the same time, they are expected to take care of their own children and families. The expectations of women journalists can be paradoxical. On the one hand, they are expected to fulfil feminine roles as the main caregiver in the family, and on the other hand, their workplaces expect them to give up these priorities in order to survive as a professional. As one of my interviewees told me, if a married female journalist often appears at the

dinner or function with a group of men, she will be discussed behind her back and she may be seen as behaving inappropriately. A common, though seldom articulated, perception is that the women who work in local television usually get jobs because they are pretty, and that within and outside the workplace, speculation about their private lives is freely shared, including rumours about some female journalists and anchors having sexual relationships with real estate owners and the former TV station directors. Such sexist stereotypes and cultural expectations of female media workers provide a glimpse of how these women struggle while working in the local newsrooms.

As discussed earlier, the basic salary incomes for most employees in the media institutions in P City are relatively low. Yet, when I first visited the PTV station and P City newspaper newsroom buildings, there were lots of fancy cars in the parking lot. I was surprised and wondered how staff with such low incomes could afford personal cars. It soon became apparent that while most journalists take 'journalism' in the media institution as their 'day job' (*zhu ye*), many have a second job to augment their income (*fu ye*; literally, 'moonlighting'). Journalists in Tier-3 and Tier-4 cities have moonlighting jobs that may or may not be related to their profession (e.g. online businesses on WeChat). Being a casual wedding host is also a popular form of moonlighting for TV hosts and broadcasters in P City; however, this job market is more open to male hosts as they are usually preferred at wedding ceremonies in China.

Another popular form of moonlighting among local media workers is tutoring high school students who are preparing for college entrance exams. Each year, millions of high school students in China participate in the Chinese National College Entrance Examination (NCEE; also called *gaokao*) to gain entry to ranked higher education schools. For the higher arts education selection and admission process, a pre-exam for applicants to demonstrate their artistic capacity is a prerequisite (Leng, 2015). For these applicants, apart from the

NCEE, they also have to attend examinations on arts skills and related knowledge (*yikao*) (Leng, 2015), which include art design major, performing arts major, broadcasting and hosting major, playwriting and directing major, etc. These independent examinations are usually held separately by colleges that offer related arts programs, and are sometimes held by college unions in the provinces (Q. Liu & Peng, 2015). Because these arts majors have lower requirements on the NCEE scores than the academic courses, a number of high school seniors and their parents choose this path because they may have a higher chance to achieve an academic breakthrough and enrol into a better college through *yikao* (L. Chang, 2012). In the meantime, some aspects of arts majors' applications have been criticised for being a shortcut for college degree, instead of reflecting an interest in the arts (L. Zhou, 2017), and for corruption within the exams (Q. Liu & Peng, 2015).

Most applicants choose to participate in various 'Pre-Exam Training Courses' (*kaoqian ban*) to improve their capabilities to take the art examinations (Leng, 2015). The journalists in the PTV and newspaper play an important part in running the media major-related tutoring courses for two art majors examinations: broadcasting and playwriting. Their day job in the city television is their best promotion advertisement for their private classes, with some journalists even naming their class the 'PTV's Training Class'. The television station tolerates this practice among its employees. By turning their professional work experiences into a source of income, journalists in P City also arrange hosting and modelling classes for pre-school children with talent and interest.

A female PTV journalist who has been running a business with several co-workers for more than 10 years told me that each year their pre-*yikao* training courses could have about 50 high school students from P City. Most of them have no practical background in broadcasting or film directing but can be trained to participate in the examination through their intensive course between

three and six months before the *yikao*. A number of students in P City went to colleges through these training classes run by the employees of PTV, and then come back to work as a journalists or editors in their hometown.

4.2 Gender problems and stereotype in local media organisations

Using H. Wang's (2016, 2019) analysis of the obstacles facing women journalists from institutional, organisational, cultural and self-disciplinary levels, this section explores the institutional and organisational obstacles to women's careers in local media outlets to see whether H. Wang's findings might apply to female journalists working in bottom-level media organisations.

4.2.1 Gender bias in recruitment

In the past 20 years, the numbers and proportions of female media workers in China have substantially increased. The first large national survey on women media workers was conducted in 1995. Targeting all news organisations (above the county level) in mainland China, this survey showed that women accounted for 33% of the total number of Chinese journalists (Chongshan Chen & Bu, 1996). However, data from recent studies show a considerable increase since then. The increase in the number of the press card holders in China can be seen from the annual reports on the development of Chinese media published by The All-China Journalists' Association (2018): by December 2017, among 231,564 press card holders, 112,018 (or 48.40%) were women. But while about half the workforce was female, males still dominated the decision making levels of management (H. Wang, 2016). What's more, the increase the numbers of women did not necessarily lead to improved practices in the newsroom. This shows a pyramid structure of a feminised workforce at the bottom and male managers at the top.

The 1996 national survey measured woman journalists' situations in different regions in the developed, less developed, and under-development areas of China (Chongshan Chen & Bu, 1996). The data show fewer women journalists than men in the economically and culturally developed regions that had media institutions and colleges, while women outnumbered men in the less developed regions. But the data from the 2000s show a different pattern: women made up 37.1% of the total in the 2001 Shanghai survey (Y. Jia, 2001), 43.8% in the 2005 Guangzhou survey (F. Lin, 2010), and 43.2% in the 2013 Shanghai survey (Shanghai Journalists' Association, 2014). These statistics may not have counted women who are strictly speaking professional journalists in China (i.e. they have a press card issued by the state's General Administration of Press and Publication) (Hassid, 2011), since the authors did not clarify this in the studies. In the case of the media organisations in P City, female employees accounted for 39% by 2019, yet only about 35% of the total employees in the local media had a press card. These women without a card could be employed in non-news production, such as advertising, attracting sponsorship, organising events etc. The uneven distribution of women journalists could be caused by various reasons, such as population density; economic development levels; cultural influences; and the numbers of journalism colleges and institutions (Chongshan Chen & Bu, 1996). These factors would also determine whether the major cities and developed areas could provide more opportunities and attractions for women journalists than less developed regions.

In an annual report of 2016, the *P City Daily* stated that the 'lack of human resources' was one of the major factors restraining the local media's development:

> Because municipal media have a low level of development, and lack of news source for important comprehensive news report, working and living conditions also cannot be compared with metropolises, especially

> compared with coastal areas and advanced area newspapers. [P City] newspaper has obvious shortage of technology-support staff and management, and we cannot attract and retain talent long-term mechanism.[2]

The media need to relax the requirement regarding education and work experiences when assessing applications. However, although the local media institutions can lower their recruitment standards, they would still face the difficulty of hiring highly qualified graduates from the metropolises to work in a bottom-tier, less-developed city like P City. Like other local stations, PTV also finds it hard to have enough well-trained and politically reliable hosts who can maintain "correct guidance to public opinion" (Y. Zhao, 2004a, p. 192). On the other hand, working in a city television or newspaper is a relatively attractive option in the eyes of some graduates and their parents who live in that city. Due to the difficulty of hiring qualified talent, PTV and the newspaper have tended to hire employees with local connections. Some managers I interviewed said some employees lacked professionalism and were hired despite not having a background in journalism.

My conversations with P City media workers suggest that most employees in PTV and P City newspapers are local people or had a reason to move there. To many of them, P City is their hometown, where their families and parents reside. Unlike journalists in the big cities working for their self-development, most people work in small television stations and newspapers are there for family reasons. They come to work without a very strong attachment to their professional orientation. While for big media organisations experience and educational background are the main requirements, '*guanxi*' (Chinese

[2] The annual report was provided by the interviewee, the original text is in Chinese, translated by the author Shan Huang.

indigenous construct 'personal connection'; X. Chen & Chen, 2004) is common in the enrolment of small media organisations. According to the manager of human resources at PTV, more than half of the new employees are relatives or children of senior employees. He said that journalists of small-city television stations and newspapers mostly work there with a public service mentality, believing that being a journalist or an editor is to have a 'feminine' job, which, just like other jobs such as teachers and nurses, is stable and suitable for women, despite the low income.

In February 2019, the Chinese government published a notice addressing gender discrimination in recruitment and prohibiting employers from asking applicants about their marital or childbearing status or to take a pregnancy test during the hiring process (W. Wu, 2019). While it is still unclear how the government will implement and enforce this new policy, some scholars have argued that rather than seeing this as a sign of wanting to empower women, it is part of a broader effort to encourage women's willingness to have children and reverse the declining birth rate (Lü, 2019). TA, the chief editor of *P City Daily* said to me that he prefers to hire male applicants over females because men find it easier to work overtime or at night and travel for reporting tasks, and compared with male employees, women cannot work with full energy and be flexible with their time.

In order to attract as many applicants as possible, in the last recruitment at P City paper in 2015, the managers decided to expand the requirement of the educational background and major from media and journalism only, to Chinese and history majors. Even so, among 10 new employees, there was only one male, because male candidates did much less well than women in exams. Despite this, the chief editors were reluctant to hire the women. Male managers in particular aligned themselves with traditional cultural beliefs that that women should take the main responsibilities of caring for their family, children,

and elders. Indeed, TA stated that female journalists and editors are 'troublesome' in the managers' eyes because they will get married in their 20s and soon have a first child, and their 30s have a second child, which means the company has to give them two periods of mandatory maternity leave. Thus, to hire a male employee is a better deal for the local managers, who are more focused on the economic imperative of making profit as a market-driven company than are the Party's big-city media outlets.

4.2.2 Job rank and work arrangement

The process of application and recruitment is only part of the story as far as gender disparity is concerned. The statistics of women's employment in the media institutions in P City reveal a similar picture to national and international research on gender imbalance in media structures, especially the higher management levels (Creedon & Cramer, 2007; Cui, 2017; F. Lin, 2010; H. Wang, 2016). Based on my fieldwork, PTV and P City newspaper have about the same number of employees, around 400 in a total of each institution. Female employees made up about 38% to 39% of the whole personnel, however, the number of women is inversely proportional to the level of management positions. Within their departments, the higher the position the less the opportunity for a woman to occupy it. In the middle-level management positions of PTV, there were seven women among the 23 departmental directors; and eight women of 26 departmental vice-directors. Although the director of the station said that they are open for fair competition for the positions, only a third of the middle management levels positions were occupied by women, and there was no woman in the executive or on the decision-making board.

The gender ratio among the management personnel in the P City newspaper was similar. Women accounted for about 23% of the departmental directors and vice-directors. Of the nine positions in the senior editorial management team, only two vice-presidents were women. However, women were in less important positions, having been appointed by municipal Party committees from other government departments. In these local media outlets women were mostly in subordinate positions and men were in the leading roles. This system determines the effect on the media's presentation of gender equality and stereotypes, especially on sensitive gender issues. At PTV, women were underrepresented in technical jobs, such as operating a video recorder. All photo journalists and camera operators were male. As the manager of human resource at the PTV said: "Woman just cannot do this type of work (physically)".

Differential treatment of women is more obvious in a newspaper newsroom. The front page of the *P City Daily* is its most important section. Five male editors are in charge of it; female editors are in charge of the pages deemed less prestigious, such as entertainment and education news pages. My fieldwork in P City supports the general consensus about gender and media: politics, economics, and crime and order are often considered as 'masculine', whereas culture and education are often considered as 'feminine' (Van Zoonen, 1998a; Steiner, 2012). There is arguably a status differential between the 'feminine' and 'masculine' news beats. In the newsroom, the 'masculine' news beats are traditionally considered more prestigious than the 'feminine' ones, and thus male journalists would be more valued and rewarded in the male-dominated newsrooms: "Differences in the news contents of male and female reporters overall, then, maybe due less to the reporters' conscious effort to cover different issues and more to the types of beats that they were assigned" (Craft & Wanta, 2004, p. 135).

Women journalists often face the dilemma between their identity as journalist and sensibility as women of whether to handle the 'feminine' news beats: "They would be trusted to do those jobs, yet those duties may undermine their capability to build up journalistic authority in the long run" (Tsui & Lee, 2012, p. 372). Journalists working on the political pages are more likely to keep in contact with government officials and senior editors, and such contacts may bring benefits to their opportunities for career and personal gain. As North (2016c) found with women journalists in Australian newsrooms, many interviewees in my study also noted the gendered nature of occupation allocations and their possible effects on career promotions.

The political news in P City is its media's most important content. A female journalist told me that there was a rule that female journalists must not follow the mayor doing the interviews, in case it causes 'trouble' or rumours of her being potentially associated with the mayor. In the *P City Evening* paper, the unwritten rule was that the entertainment section should always be in the hands of a female editor and the international news section and sports pages should be edited by a male. DJL, female senior editor of the *P City Evening* paper, said they have male editors for information news and female editors for soft news because the gender of the editors has an impact on the choice of topics. ZZ became an editor of the *P City Evening* paper in 2012, she has a Bachelor's degree in sports journalism and two years' experience in Beijing on sports news reporting. However, she did not have a chance to cover the sports page she is interested in. Regardless of the gender culture in their newsrooms, the managers of P City's media outlets have been campaigning for open competition that is based on performance and ability, with the aim of encouraging employees' initiatives.

While only a few of the female journalists in P City might ever interview the mayor or cover municipal court news, they occupy most of the soft news

positions and work in the administration and post-production offices. Some told me they were satisfied with soft news reporting because they are 'family-centred' women. This suggest there is less capacity for female media professionals in small media institutions of bottom-tier cities to juggle family and career.

4.2.3 Gender policy and women's associations

Women's chances for gender equity are also shaped by the organisations and associations that advocate for them. In China, there is only one national labour organisation, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), and one national women's organisation, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) (*zhonghua quanguo funü lianhehui*), which has local branches at different levels of the state administration to oversee labour and gender issues. For Chinese journalists, the All-China Journalists' Association (*zhongguo jixie*) and the Women Journalists' Association (*nü jizxie*) have many local branches too. Unlike the NGOs and worker unions in the West, these associations and unions have 'Chinese characters' (Spires, 2011). In the Chinese media industry, all formally employed journalists "become a member of the journalists' association and trade union; female journalists automatically become members of the women journalists' association and women's federation" (H. Wang, 2016, p. 498).

Given their top-down natures, these organisations are perceived as state organisations that work to promote harmonious work relations rather than represent the interest of workers/journalists in cases of labour disputes and discrimination (Svensson & Wang, 2013). In fact, many people I interviewed in P City said these associations did not have any real influence in their work and they were unlikely to seek help from them if needed. I interviewed LJ, the president of the Women's Federation (WF) at the PTV station, who said all the

three members of the WF were working part-time, including herself. She said they did not have real capacity because they received no funds from the local government or the station. In the past, the WF used to give female employees some daily supplies each year. However, at 2018's International Women's Day, they only organised for female workers to play some easy sports games in the lobby in order to have a news report on that day.

Across the nation, the roles and functions of the ACFTU and the WF have been marginalised and weakened in journalism workplaces (Y. Chen, 2009; H. Wang, 2016). The ACWF is defined as "no more than an organ of the party-state", and their 'women-work' (*funü gongzuo*) always "subordinated to the Party's 'central work'– never becoming a Party priority" (Z. Wang, 2005, pp. 520–521). Z. Wang and Zhang (2010) used two different terms 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' to describe the distinctions between women's NGOs and the WF:

> The 'bottom-up' refers to women's NGOs that initiate their own actions and make their activist decisions independent of the state. The 'top-down' refers to the state feminism embodied by the Women's Federation that has the official power to place women's issues on the agenda of different levels of administrations. (p. 62)

Since the introduction of market-driven reforms, these organisation have become "a kind of 'socialist' decoration that is still hanging on the wall but is dying and very much forgotten" (H. Wang, 2016, p. 500). Following the #MeToo campaign in 2018, many sexual harassment allegations received attention in Chinese social media. However, both local media working institutions in P City have no official policies or regulations to cope with gender discrimination and sexual harassment in their workplaces.

The secretary of the discipline inspection commission at PTV shared the story of one female journalist who had been harassed and followed into a toilet

by a male colleague. She went to the secretary's office and asked for justice from the management, but since this male colleague was a relative of one senior editor the station did not dismiss him. The managers met with all the staff and reported this misconduct without disclosing names. A few months later both resigned from their jobs because of the pressure from people in the workplace. The management did not have proper procedures to deal with the allegations from the female employee. Nor did she know where she could report the issue or that she could seek help from the WF or the Trade Union.

Lower-level city branches of the ACWF put more focus on working with women in rural areas, where they sponsor projects to improve rural women's employment and increase household income. On some occasions, they may have adverse effects on 'promoting gender equality'. I looked into the 2019 annual activities report on the website of the P City's branch of the WF. A major event they arrange every year is the promotion of 'village good wife' title. The article described the experiences and qualities of that year's winner as a good daughter-in-law, a good mother who nurtured her children, and a housewife who frugally managed her household. In other words, the ACWF was promoting these three qualities as essential for a 'good wife'. In another case at that year's International Women's day, the WF arranged for women to show their cooking skills and posted on the Internet photos of women with their dishes.

The rights and working conditions of female journalists in media institutions in P City are not included in the work plans of its branch of the WF. LJ, the local director of the WF, said they organised ultrasounds twice a year for every married female worker at the PTV station to make sure none is pregnant. Since the adoption of the two-child policy in 2016, if a female employee plans to have a second child, they need to apply to the WF and then wait for approval. Without supportive policies and trade unions in the workplace, Chinese women

journalists' rights remain unprotected and they become what H. Wang (2016) called "naked swimmers" without "protective vests" (that is, the state, the market, the NGOs, and trade unions) and without political or legal support to fight with the sexist newsroom cultures (p. 503).

4.3 Municipal newspaper's annual matchmaking fair

4.3.1 State intervention in love life

Since the 1990s, despite diminishing gender disparities in education, China has witnessed dramatically widened urban gender gaps in its labour force participation, unemployment rates, and incomes (Catalyst, 2020; A. X. Wu & Dong, 2019). The improvements of women's education have contributed to the delaying of marriages, which endangers the Chinese government's population planning goals (Fincher, 2014). Early in 2016, the government abolished its one-child policy and aggressively promoted a new 'two-child' policy, expanding reproductive autonomy in order to get people to marry and have children, and addressing the challenges of an ageing population, declining fertility and the diminishing labour pool. However, the expected rise in births failed to materialise, with reports of a growing unmarried population and falling birth rates. According to figures from the Ministry of Civil Affairs, in 2019, there were 9.47 million marriage registrations – a decrease of 6.2% from the previous year. The marriage rate has been declining steadily from 2014 and this was in the first time had dropped below 10 million (Shaolong Sun, 2020).

The authorities adopted a range of discursive and practical approaches to stimulate both marriage and birth rates for social-political stability. For a long time, the party used state media campaigns to promote marriage for social stability and have children for population growth, such as 'leftover women'

(Fincher, 2014) and the eugenics campaign '*yousheng youyu*' (Greenhalgh, 2010). In December 2016, President Xi Jinping reinforced traditional family values when he presented the 'civilised household', saying: "Families are the cells of society. Society will be stable if we have peaceful families; society will be harmonious if we have happy families; society will be civilised if we have civilised families" (Xinhua News Agency, 2016). The government stresses Confucian values of traditional cultural and family rituals and reiterates the belief that marriages contribute to a stable and harmonious society. Moreover, on 6 August 2018, the international edition of the party-run *People's Daily* ran a commentary titled 'Childbirth is both a family matter and a national matter' (Yiqi Zhang, 2018). However, despite the adoption of the two-child policy, discrimination against women in terms of employment has worsened. Instead of supporting working parents and adopting policies to combat gender discrimination, the government and state media now have public campaigns about the virtue of 'women returning home' (Song, 2016). The state news agency Xinhua posted an article in February 2016 saying society should encourage women to quit their jobs and become stay-at-home mothers: "It would not only be beneficial to the growth of children, the stability of the family, but also have a positive effect on the society" (Jing Zhou, 2016).

The Party and authorities have since put intense pressure on single young women to commit themselves to marriage and child-rearing, creating a panic by calling unmarried women over the age of 27 as 'leftover women'. Born after 1980, these women have benefitted from the one-child policy and the reduction in educational gender inequality, and become increasingly become career focused to achieve professional success in the workplace. By shaming these 'leftover' women, the Chinese state propaganda has become a kind of state interference into its citizens' love lives. In her book *Leftover Women*, Leta Hong Fincher (2014) lists a series of 'state and government interventions' from local

and national levels over recent decades. Since 2008, the Nanjing and Ningbo cities' local population planning commissions have planned 'interventions' to resolve the 'marriage problem' of the growing numbers of 'urban leftover women'. In Zhejiang province, Pinghu city's WF branches arranged matchmaking events in 2012 for 'highly educated, high-quality leftover women to speedily find conjugal happiness'.

The first-tier metropolises also joined the trend. The Shanghai Women's Federation, Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau, and the government-affiliated Shanghai Matchmaking Agency Management Association have collaborated to organise matchmaking fairs for educated single women and men since 2011 (Fincher, 2014). In 2017 the Communist Youth League of China organised mass blind-date events for thousands of young party members to find life partners and teach them the 'correct attitude' toward love and marriage (Qian, 2017). Since then, government-sponsored, mass matchmaking fairs have spread to other big and small cities in China (Xinhua Net, n.d.).

4.3.2 Using the newspaper's brand to make a profit

Local media strictly follow the orders and guidance of the Party-state to manage communication for social stability and stay away from or remain silent on sensitive topics. One way of steering away from politically sensitive topics but still demonstrating adherence to the Party is to engage in activities which promote stability. And no domain offers a better catalyst for this than arranging a matchmaking fair.

> From the government's perspective, married couples are much less likely to cause trouble. As any Communist Party publication will tell you, marriage and family form 'the basic cell of society' and 'a harmonious family is the foundation of a harmonious society'. (Fincher, 2014, p. 23)

The Communist Party has thus adopted a series of the 'soft' ideological measures to promote marriage, including media campaigns and government-sponsored matchmaking (Fincher, 2014). An article in the P City Daily on 8 April 2016 to promote its offline dating event said: "By organising this event, the *P City Daily* showed the social responsibility as a mainstream media, and their supports to the construct harmonious society and development of the city". Since 2009, the direction from the state and the support of the local government has allowed the newspaper build a 'brand' for this annual matchmaking fair held in the city square in April or May.

The *P City Daily* has called this fair one of the biggest 'public benefit activities in the city'. The Municipal Labour Union, the Municipal corporation, the Municipal Women's Federation, the Municipal Disabled Person's Federation were nominal sponsors of the 2019 event. The dating event was open to all single divorced and widowed people over 18 years of age living in P City and local counties. With the local people trusting the *P City Daily*, the director of the event said: "Our advantage is that we can give local people a safe and accountable dating platform". However, the reason for organising the fair is to bring in advertising income to cope with the cut in funds from the state and local governments. For the local government, the annual matchmaking fair is a win-win cooperation that both fulfils people's needs and saves government expenditure. For the *P City Daily* newspaper group it has become its most profitable advertising project.

It would be a mistake to assume that the media in the P City took on the organisation of holding matchmaking fairs solely to please the government and maintain social stability. Like other commercial business mentioned earlier in this chapter, the local media institutions are also effectively turning this initiative into an income-generating scheme. Under the pressures from the media commercialisation, local media need sources to overcome the cut from

subsidy and drop of advertisement. The newspaper uses its distribution network to operate business to selling consumer goods, such as fresh milk delivery by the *P City Evening* paper, and provide publicity services to public bodies and corporations, such as the 'soft ads' in the *P City Daily*. All these activities are heavily depend on the reputation of the newspaper's title (Sparks et al., 2016).

Applications to participate in the matchmaking fair need to provide copies of their identity information and academic diplomas. This vetting helps young people and their parents to not worry about problems like scams or fake marriages (L. Wang, 2017). Compared to matchmaking businesses that are simply trying to make money, the newspaper and government seem to offer a more trustworthy option. Over the years, membership fees, advertising, and sponsorships have contributed to the newspaper's matchmaking revenues. The 2019 fair brought around 300 million RMB to the newspaper, which is more than the total amount of the print advertising it received that year. In other words, holding a matchmaking fair ticks the boxes of satisfying both the 'Party line' and the 'bottom line' (Y. Zhao, 1998). It is therefore worthwhile asking who stands to benefit from such events, and what kinds of cultural assumptions underscore them.

Due to the success of this event over the years, the newspaper has now set up a 'Dating Event Office' within the adverting department, with four full-time employees to arrange the dating events, some of which are held monthly or on special days such as Valentine's day, the Chinese Valentine's day and 'Single's Day' (11 November), and other activities like two-day dating trips on the weekend. Participants can register at the *P City Daily* newspaper office, through WeChat, or in enterprise unit groups. The newspaper files are divided into gender and age groups, from 18 to 70. People can come to the office and look through the files for themselves or their children. At the 2019 fair there were

over 3,000 registered single men and women, and it attracted over 60,000 people in the city square. Single men made up 55% of participants, with the director saying a possible reason is that "women are shy (than men) to come in person". This seems consistent with the country's sex ratio imbalance, which has created a demographic crisis of millions of men unable to find wives, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (C. Li, 2018). Besides working with local wedding businesses, the director was thinking about how to promote a larger brand of their event for larger areas. The director said she tried to contact with the organiser of the largest China Wedding Exposition, which holds events in the major cities, but they refused her proposal for cooperation and argued that P City is too small and they only work in provincial capitals.

4.3.3 Gender norms: setting up the standards of the 'ideal wife'

The matchmaking fair initiative in P City would not have had much chance of succeeding if local media had not tapped into the deep-seated cultural sensibility and moral values of the ordinary people there. To a considerable extent, this means tapping into the patriarchal ideas of what an ideal woman should be like and how she should behave. Matchmaking fairs should be a place that single men and women can equally look for marriage partners, but the sexual objectification and exploitation of women can be seen both on the event site and in news reports. At the 2019 three-day Mass Matchmaking Fair, there were 30 voluntary female matchmakers on site to help with the registration progress. Each registrant had to provide their age, job, income, education background, a photo and self-introduction, and their standards for a spouse. Their information sheets were divided into eight sections according to gender and age groups: 'Youth and Charm' (age from 20 to 30); 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' (age from 30 to 40); 'mature women and men' (age from 40) and

older single people and non-local single people. The generation born since the 1990s were the primary targets at the matchmaking fair, but their parents were the ones who come to the site for their single children. Some young people said they refused to participate because this is a small city and they were worried some acquaintance would recognise them on the site.

The information exhibition shelves were only a small section of the fair. People also walked through the many commercial stands of the 'City Wedding Exhibition' (*hunbo hui*). The *P City Daily* organised this commercial market with local companies, including wedding service companies, pre-wedding photo companies, wine brands, fitness clubs, real estate companies, and household decoration companies. These companies would try to attract people through modelling shows, complimentary gifts, and prize draws.

While people might think a dating event held by the government is safe and trustworthy, women do not get a voice in these patriarchal markets and are subject to even greater gender inequality. At the opening ceremony, along with the speeches given by all-male local government representatives, the *P City Daily*, a sponsor, and a single male represented all the participants, with only one female from the local Women's Association giving a speech. And the ceremony ended with a one-hour female fashion show on the centre stage of the city square. The organiser displayed these women's bodies as a promotion for the event, and subjected women to the public discourse of an open municipal marriage market. In addition, several shops had beautiful young women dressed as 'angels' and 'traditional Chinese brides' standing out front to attract the attention of the crowd. Following this male-centric market logic, women had become sexual objects in the public marriage market and the display of women's bodies was to present an image of the 'ideal wife'.

The roles of the women journalists also be seen through the event. Adding another feature of the 2019 fair, the *P City Daily* hired a 'beautiful' female anchor to livestream on several Chinese online platforms, including Douyin, Huoshan, and WeChat, to attract online traffic to this event. I have watched her livestreaming videos online. In the three days live streaming, she changed into different traditional Chinese costumes, interviewed with people on the site, and interacted with the online audience. As discussed earlier, a woman journalist is more likely be assigned to report on soft entertainment news, such as in this matchmaking event.

In recent years, more and more journalists and anchors have appeared in the livestream commercial activities of the P City newspaper and PTV, such as promoting cars and commercial industries. One male director of PTV said that they were trying to 'brand' their anchors to generate profits for local media in the P City. The P City newspaper used one whole page titled 'The newspaper in the first-time used new technology and a beautiful anchor to live-streaming the dating event'. After introducing the new devices, the journalist interviewed the female anchor, describing her height, 'delicate makeup', 'sweet voice', 'born in 1994', and also attached a big photo in the centre of the page. These discourses directly highlight the physical appearances and objectify women through the 'male gaze'. In other words, in the case of the matchmaking fair, it is not just the single women looking for a man who are disadvantaged, the women journalists are also exploited and objectified. This is a typical example of trivialising a woman reporter's talents but getting her to dress up in a costume and report soft content. 'A beautiful anchor' in this event could be seen as one of the newspaper's promotion strategies to attract attention and, more importantly, profit.

In that day's paper, the *P City Evening* newspaper had a special section with eight pages to cover this matchmaking fair. These pages are full of reports with

eye-catching titles about the women high standard of appearance, for example, 'A high appearance level lady attracts many mothers' claim of kinship'; and 'A beautiful volunteer been mistaken as a female guest been frequently accosted'. Interviews with the parents showed the range of appearances demanded for potential marriage partners. One man's mother said to the journalist: "Her appearance has to be above the average". The son replied: "I'm 30, so I could find someone in her 20s, so we are not in a rush". Another mother said: "It is true, my daughter-in-law is six years younger than my son, and she is tall and beautiful".

The double standard with regard to single men and women reveals that Chinese men continue to enjoy a privileged position in today's society, despite the high sex-ratio imbalance: "It is easy to see the rationale for a campaign playing on the natural insecurities of single women instead, to pressure them to marry some of the of actually existing 'leftover' men" (Fincher, 2014, p. 22). In studies that investigated the partner choice criteria of Chinese women and men, it was indeed found that men put more emphasis on women's appearance, while women put more emphasis on men's economic status (To, 2015). However, in the *P City Evening* reports, most single women of prime marriageable age and their parents emphasised that they did not ask about a man's economic status. Two mothers said to the journalist: "We do not ask men's family condition and material request, we only want [our daughters] to find an eligible marriage partner". In their words, there are clearly different attitudes and expectations towards single men and women: the unmarried woman and her parents will lower their requests just because she is a woman.

Meanwhile, some news stories play on and exploit the anxiety in young single people, especially women in their 20s, to push them into the marriage market. One report titled 'College student born in 1996 start to blind date' with a subtitle 'The 80s are more anxiety':

> This 23-year-old young woman who just graduated said: "(because I started at a young age so) I can take my time to choose a good spouse. If I was in my 30s, men will be the ones to take the initiative to choose me, I don't want that". This woman is very rational when she faced a life choice. Compared with another woman aged 33, "I spend too much time on my work, now it is too late to consider my marriage issue. My parents always say I set my standards too high and urge me. Now many friends are getting married and I am worried. Some men found my age is old for them. I should be early on dating, otherwise, I would not be in this situation". (the *P City Evening* paper article in April 2019)

In this article, the author set up a false dichotomy between single women in their 20s and 30s. And the article implied that men have a preference for younger women. It encouraged women to use their youth as their 'capital' in the marriage market and to best leverage this by rushing into the marriage market in their early 20s. Some stories appearing in the newspaper or the WeChat post of the matchmaking fair used the parents' points of view to enhance the angst and despair of 'leftover' women:

> One mother dragged her daughter to the event: "she likes to stay at home, she can stay a whole week. You have nothing to be shamed, you are 30! If you did not hurry up, there will have no good men left for you. Are you expecting a good husband to fall from the shyness? If you didn't grab this opportunity then how can you find your husband?" her mother said her daughter is a teacher, 170cm, pale skin, slim figure, not a talker, naivete, careful, reliable, good at cooking, and her mother laughs: "anyone who married her will be a blessing". (WeChat article in September 2019)

> (The author) interviewing the parents: "when my daughter in college we told her do not to date. But now she has been joined the workforce for years, aged near 30, haven't found an eligible partner, we keep all our hopes in this event". (WeChat article in November 2019)

> Many older working women missed marriage opportunity. They have talent, are proud and arrogant, and are idealistic, dreaming about prince charming. They set many requirements but the reality is different from their dream; some strong women are disappointed in love life and even thinking about stay single. While you are happy and unrestrained being single, your parents are so worried that they have no appetite for food and cannot sleep at night (because of you). (the *P City Evening* newspaper article in August 2018)

These stories both highlight the tensions and pressures confronting unmarried young people by evoking the patriarchal culture's assumptions about marriage, the gender roles available to women, and the normative relationship between husband and wife. Career-focused women are devalued in these texts and the '30-year-old leftover women' stories are used to enhance the pressure. These discourses reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and stoke fear among unmarried women in their 20s and 30s so that they will give up the pursuit of higher education or professional advancement; rather than pursue personal achievements, women should prioritise cultivating and enhancing their sexual attraction for the marriage market. By emphasising traditional domestic roles and reproductive capabilities, the media objectify women in these news discourse and limited women's role to the private sphere.

According to the comments from the director and the parents, for young single men, a house and a stable job are the most common requirements. For

women, the market prefers a young age, an attractive physical appearance, and an ability to provide traditional wifely duties. These expectations resonate with China's deeply engrained patriarchal values and contemporary cultural norms that would have males be strong, active and rational, and females the opposite (Evans, 2008; Wallis, 2015). These cultural conventions emphasise physiological differences and gender roles that limit women's agency and life choices.

By ignoring women's capacity in education and the workplace, the newspaper-organised matchmaking fair makes no efforts to challenge the patriarchal norms. The director said that women with higher education degrees are hard to find a match for in the small city. Most of single female applicants with a masters degree wrote in their information sheet that they required their partner have only a college degree. Women's accomplishments and self-achievement have been devalued in the marriage market. Even though a woman's maturity is usually a reflection of her higher socioeconomic status, she would still be disadvantaged in any patriarchal marriage market.

The domestic role and nurturing aspect of the modern Chinese women still persists in the traditional feminine ideals of womanhood (Hung & Li, 2006). Studies and surveys conducted with Chinese urban males found that there are the unique qualities when they think about their ideal wife: 'softness' (gentle; *wenrou*); 'domesticity' (skilled in domestic crafts, e.g. cooking and cleaning); 'nurturance' (take care of children; puts her interests after their own) (Croll, 1995; Evans, 2000; Hung & Li, 2006). Women are exposed to these multiple feminine ideals and traditional cultural beliefs at the matchmaking fairs. Rather than challenge these limiting stereotypes, women are further devalued in a male-dominated marriage market that commodifies women and intensifies gender inequity. It is therefore a good example whereby the state, market and patriarchal culture – what Xiaoying Wu (2010) calls the 'triple' factors shaping

gender and discourses in China – together work to the detriment and disempowerment of women.

I suggest that these events in China use the prevalent patriarchal social order to exploit women's anxiety as they attempt to navigate the marriage market. The news discourses of 'leftover' women and traditional femininity and domesticity limit women's value and encourages them to leverage their youth, body and gender for the sake of marriage. As A.X. Wu and Dong (2019) observed, in the new structure of power in contemporary China "the alignment of the post-socialist state's agenda, market forces, and rekindled patriarchal values has culminated in a gendered marriage market that emphasises hypergamy, institutionalising women's sexuality as their means to economic security" (p. 8).

By manipulating patriarchal norms in gender relations, these local events enact traditional role expectations of women and enhance hegemonic masculinity through sexuality and economic activity. Rather than serving the interests of single women and men, the newspaper's main intended outcome is the considerable revenue from advertising. In other words, the post-socialist state, market forces, and patriarchal traditional values come together in a gendered matchmaking event by institutionalising women's sexuality as a means to maintain social stability and economic security.

4.4 Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have presented the changes brought by commercialisation to local media and the gendered implications of the correlations between the state, market and traditional culture. The changes brought by the media reforms now enable the state, the market and the patriarchy to interact in new ways. Although the media outlets in China are still owned and controlled by the state,

their economic basis has changed from complete dependence on state subsidies to increasing reliance on commercial revenues from advertising and non-media business operations. The dual compulsions of state control and commercial imperatives have significantly changed news content and advertising styles. Media in smaller cities seem to allow these 'triple factors' to interact more seamlessly without facing challenge or criticism from feminists. Gender inequality, women and media can be explored through a number of prisms – content, individual experience, as well as institutional, which this chapter has done. And I will move on to discussing the other two aspects in the following chapters. ■

Chapter 5

Gender awareness, agency and women media professionals: An account of four individuals

5.1 Introduction and conceptual framework

While the institutional and organisational accounts in Chapter 4 tell us a lot about the inequitable treatment of women in the media in P City, it is also important to approach the issue of gender inequity from the perspectives of the women media practitioners' lived experiences. It will be instructive to consider how their attitudes to gender issues are formed at the nexus between their public lives and personal circumstances, that is, between their identities as women on the one hand, and their identities as media practitioners on the other. In this chapter, I draw on Kabeer's (1999) concept of a woman's agency and empowerment to examine the tension between women media professionals' individual agency and the structural obstacles that hold them back from full exercise of that agency.

For Kabeer, women's employment status represents a measurement of empowerment, and the process of women's empowerment is about the ability to make strategic life choices by incorporating three inter-related dimensions: 'material and human and social resources', 'agency', and 'achievements of well-being outcomes' within the structural parameters of individual choice. As Y. Kim (2012) notes, in parts of Asia the operation of individual choice by women is regulated and constrained by social structures and persisting patriarchal cultures that continue to influence women's workforce participation and create

inequality, insecurity and a precarious self. More particularly in Chinese newsrooms, the internal obstacles involve women's levels of agency or self-discipline (H. Wang, 2019). This is reflected in women journalists' conformity to social stereotypes and expectations about how women should behave. Chinese women journalists often consciously or subconsciously internalise these stereotypes and accept them as 'correct' ways of being a woman, and hence either adjust their behaviour accordingly or choose to leave the profession.

Women journalists are both the producers and 'consumers' of daily news . They are journalists in public life as well as mothers, daughters, and wives at home. For these reasons, it is important to ask how Chinese women journalists think about gender equality in their daily working environments, and if their preferences and attitudes will impact the final form of the media content they produce (Y. Chen, 2009). It is also important to ask how their personal circumstances shape their thinking about gender issues. And most pertinent to my research, it is important to gauge the level of gender awareness among the women journalist cohort I studied – those who work in media organisations in the P City – as well as to ask if their capacity to exercise gender-based agency is less than their counterparts in big metropolitan media organisations.

Wei Bu (1998), a leading media scholar specialising in women and children and Chinese media, argues that because Chinese women did not experience the difficult process of fighting for rights in the same way as Western women, most Chinese female media workers lack gender consciousness to varying extents. She argues that with the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chinese women gained the rights to work and marry freely. While this argument applies to a certain period in history, questions about gender sensibility and awareness are much more complex in the contemporary era.

M. Shen (2002) used a combination of survey (212 media workers), focus group (40 workers at the production line and middle gatekeepers), and in-depth interviews (leaders of provincial radio and television bureau) to examine the level of gender awareness of media workers from broadcasting stations, television channels, newspapers and magazines in Jiangsu Province. That study used four indicators to measure media professional's gender cognition levels: awareness of the gender concepts; recognition of the degree of women's social value; cognition of traditional gender roles; and perception of gender stereotypes in mainstream media. Shen found that the reporters on women's news or the activities of local Women's Federation showed a strong attitude towards gender inequality in their daily work. They actively promoted gender equality issues and spoke on behalf of women's interest in their reports by interviewing female news sources and thereby encouraged change in traditional gender relations in the media. However, most respondents expressed lower levels of gender awareness and would not consider gender issues in their reporting. Television workers showed the least awareness of gender equality; they ranked the professional principle 'promote gender equality' below 'promote spiritual civilization', 'audiences' needs', 'obey higher authorities', 'viewing and rating', and 'personal interest'.

Journalist's gender awareness and opinions on women's issues have a direct effect on their judgment and selection of news (Y. Chen, 2009). Based on interviews with 25 journalists who had experience in covering women's news in major media outlets, Chen highlighted how these journalists actively practised multiple discourses under the media transformation, and between the party's journalist's identity and gender consciousness in their professional work: "Journalists with gender consciousness know how to package their own perspectives to make them more acceptable. As active agents, they need to work with state and market, and adapt to and challenge them" (p. 102). In one

example, a journalist reported that the local Women's Federation had distributed free condoms to female migrant workers in the Pearl River Delta. The published news not only mentioned the efforts by the Women's Federation to provide sex education and decrease sexually transmitted diseases among migrating people, but also gave sensational headline elements such as "sex, condoms, increase of prostitution, and young, beautiful, female migrant workers with little school education and far from their homeland" (p. 105). Journalists covering women's news have to negotiate the relations between the news value of feminism and the combined forces of the market-driven media and the male-dominated state. This thesis explores the extent to which women journalists exercise their judgement and participate in decision making about whether or not to report particular news.

It is worth noting that there is a distinction between Chinese journalists' professional awareness of the official discourses and positions regarding gender and their own individual gender awareness. In Y. Chen's (2009) study, both male and female journalists complained about the pressures on women in society, but they changed their attitude to be consistent with the state's policy when referring to their own professional roles in the media. They may have had different levels of awareness of gender issues, but their work identity as the 'Party's journalist' seemed to impact their gender sensibility. These studies provide a useful analytical framework for my research on female journalists working in small, lower-level media organisations in bottom-tier cities who negotiate their gender identities and experiences in their daily work.

This chapter is based on material from my longitudinal ethnographic study of four female media workers in PTV station and *P City Daily* newspaper. These women come from different age groups, family backgrounds and marital status, and to some extent their stories may be seen as representative of women journalists in municipal media outlets in Tier-4 cities generally. I met these

media workers during my two-month participant observation in the newspaper and television buildings in P City in 2019. During two fieldwork trips, I met each of the women at least twice and spent as much time as possible interacting with them. I talked with them in their offices and over lunches or dinners. I also followed and observed them preparing in their broadcasting studios and doing reports outside. We talked about a range of topics: their personal experiences; love lives; cosmetics and makeup; their diverse experiences as journalists; the tension between professional and private lives; their struggles to navigate both the gender and journalism fields simultaneously; and their perceptions of gender inequalities within the local media workplaces.

After my fieldwork in P City, I also maintained close contact with them via WeChat and Weibo. Their daily posts on their personal social media accounts also became a source of research data. I also interviewed and observed some of their male colleges. Drawing on Kabeer's (1999) notions of individual choice and agency, I profiled these women in the hope of answering the following questions:

- How do female journalists make decisions about their careers against the backdrop of a general climate of gender discrimination in the workplace?
- Do living and working in bottom-tier cities produce lower levels of gender awareness among media journalists, or is it simply that these women have similar levels of gender consciousness as their big-city counterparts but structural constraints in the media organisations in bottom-tier cities do not allow them to exercise agency in expressing their gender consciousness at work?
- To what extent are they able to reconcile the tension between living and working in a bottom-tier city and their agency and level of gender awareness?

5.2 WY's view on the female anchor occupation as the 'rice bowl of youth'

The position of a news anchor is worth considering from the perspective of gender. As Van Zoonen (1998a) observed, "Within the new contexts of 'human interest', emotional involvement and entertainment, anchoring the news has actually become a suitable profession for women which accords well with traditional cultural expectations of women" (p. 43). Media commercialisation has opened up opportunities for women journalists, thanks to the increasing recognition that traditional and social media can cultivate female readers and audiences. However, "the tendency to relegate women to particular functions and beats within the press has not completely disappeared" (Joseph, 2004, p. 136).

The experience of WY is instructive. Born in 1994, she joined PTV as a news anchor in 2016 after graduating from the local college in P City. She was one of the new anchors in a team of 10 presenters. I first met her in an office she shared with the other three anchors who host PTV's most important daily program, the city evening news. Two male anchors and two female anchors form couples to cover the program. Anchoring is an important job position, and WY was awarded it after a selection contest based on professional abilities and appearance. The producers said it is hard for a small television station to keep good hosts.

WY told me the station offers better deals to male hosts in order to 'keep' them. The older male host had the '*bianzhi*' (state-financed official position in the institutions) after working more than 10 years, and one young male host was offered a house so that he could bring his family to P City. The station does not offer young, able female hosts similar sorts of contractual offers, since it is not

afraid of losing women reporters. There are always more female hosts than males graduating from university and the hosting competitions are usually full of young and beautiful female anchors, while male hosts are more difficult to find.

WY said she was not satisfied with this job in her hometown. Her monthly salary of 4,000 yuan was not enough for a young modern woman who carried a luxury handbag. Nor was she subsidised for her makeup and clothes. A friend of hers in Beijing had a salary of 10,000 yuan per month. Most importantly, she considered the job in a Tier-4 city's television did not have prospects: "This is a job you can see your retirement with one look". She was still looking for job opportunities in Beijing and other large cities.

A young female journalist might come back to work in a stable job in her hometown after going to college in another city. LU, a personnel administrator at PTV, said working at the station was a good for women graduates who wanted secure work near their homes. However, such jobs do not attract male graduates because of the low salaries and prospects. He said that unlike men, women do not prefer to fight for life in the big cities, and that working in this TV station is stable and leisurely. As well, compared to private firms and companies, municipal television jobs are not only easier, they do not need much professional experience. Since a small municipal television station in a bottom-tier city does not need the same numbers of professionals as provincial or national stations, graduates with various university majors are also welcome to join the PTV workforce. As well, the children and relatives of employees make up one-third of the total personnel of PTV.

According to LU, although a female TV host may need to meet some strict conditions, such as a good voice and appearance, she can become a journalist or editor by learning from others in the workplace. And while a journalist at a

large TV station needs to compile news reports every day, in small stations a journalist can rest for 10 days without their salary being affected. At the same time as there are fewer work pressures on journalists in small TV stations, there are lower levels of program content and a lack of innovation.

After our initial meeting, I invited WY to another interview over dinner. I noticed she did not eat much, and she explained she was on a diet so as to look good on camera. She shared some gossip she had heard in the office: a previous female host was fired by her managers after they had asked her to change to some behind-the-scenes work: "They felt she is old, and there are some younger female hosts are available, so they have the options to choose them". But this female anchor was only about 40-years old. That WY took this gossip seriously reveals how much she was affected by the sexist and ageist practice of judging a woman's performance and merit by her physical attractiveness.

Steiner (2017) reminds us that sexism and 'look-ism' often intersect with ageism: "Especially in television, one major and ongoing problem is the emphasis on women's physical attractiveness, which determines who gets hired, how their talents get used, and how long they last" (p. 11). Some PTV interviewees, including men, expressed the view that a TV host's job is the 'rice bowl of youth' (*qingchufan*) for women. This term refers to jobs that emphasise youth, body and appearance rather than skills and knowledge, such as fashion models, bilingual secretaries and public relations girls (Z. Zhang, 2000). This socioeconomic phenomenon, which started with the market economy, still influences the symbolic value of feminine youth and beauty in the local media institutions of this bottom-tier city. According to some interviewees, when women reporters reached their 30s and have children, they are not suited to appearing in front of the camera. The HR director of PTV said: "After a woman journalist gets married, it is not good for them to '*paotou loumian*' (show in the spotlight)". In his opinion, it is better for a woman journalist with a family to

stay away from the camera and put more time into taking care of family responsibilities. But he did seem to pay attention to how this gendered suggestion might make professional women anxious about their appearance and age.

I asked WY whether she felt this unequal treatment of men and women in the workplace was fair. She said, "It is, kind of. But you can do nothing, things just work like this". Instead of showing a strong attitude against the unfair treatment in her working situation, WY chose to grin and bear it. She also told me it is common for male leaders to ask some female workers, especially those who are new employees and unmarried, to company them to dinners and functions. When she joined the station, she was asked by one leader to attend a 'business dinner':

> When I walked in, I was shocked, there are nine men in the room and I'm the only woman. I really do not like drinking but what else can you do? They are your bosses! After that time, my mother was angry and she wanted to come to the station and talk to my leaders, I did not let her. But now I always use some excuses to refuse those things. I know some women coworkers use these chances as opportunities to get ahead, it is their choice, but I want to keep my distance.

WY told me another female TV host who was her senior in their office kept a good relationship with these male leaders and would not refuse to attend these 'business dinners'. She had a special contract that included a higher salary and other benefits. When I talked with this senior host, she was unwilling to talk about this topic, saying it was a personal choice and no one else's business. The '*yingchou*' – attending functions in order to keep bosses happy – was a common issue mentioned by several interviewees both in the television station and newspapers of P City. Local female journalists showed conflicted attitudes

towards these events. While for some they were opportunities for advancement, WY showed her attitude by declining them, even though she could do nothing about changing this situation in the workplace.

WY enjoys relatively high living standards because has wealthy parents. She has a Mercedes Benz car that cost 450,000 yuan (about 65 thousand Australian dollars), which her parents gave her when she started working. She told me that her salary is obviously not enough to cover her living standards even in this Tier-4 city, but her parents are happy and is satisfied with this job because it helps her in the marriage market. She has a second job as teacher giving private lessons. This kind of teaching is common at PTV, as discussed in Chapter 4. She said it is important and useful to have the extra income to support her travels abroad and post traveling photos in her friends' circle. Chinese women, especially the younger generations, are keen to improve their economic conditions for a secure economic status and identity as middle-class women. Rather than challenging male socioeconomic hegemony, Chinese women are "seeking a kind of emotional security and 'economy independence' made possible by the middle-class lifestyle" (J. Chang et al., 2018, p. 334).

Being in her mid-20s, WY was already facing pressure about marriage: "Everyone thought the 24-year-old woman should start to choose a marriage partner and have children, but I don't think family and children should be women's main concerns, but my views are accepted by other people". WY was clearly feeling the constraints of existing gender norms and was trying to improve her hosting ability and professional skills by taking online English class and looking for the job opportunities in other cities. Beijing was her first choice; otherwise, the provincial capital was her second goal. Her dissatisfaction with the status quo, combined with her friends' stories of working in Beijing, were increasing her 'restlessness' (*zaodong*) and stimulating her desire to live in a top-tier city (Wanning Sun, 2006, p. 245).

WY is an example of someone who has both a reasonable level of gender awareness and career aspirations for a more fulfilling job in a bigger city, but at the same time as she feels 'stuck' in this bottom-tier city, she is prepared to take advantage of her privileged family circumstances and youthful looks to make the most of her current job. She is not a total victim of a patriarchal media culture. Doing what she can to take advantage of 'rice bowl of youth' hosting job, she seems to be an example of compromised agency. Her case also suggests that it is not so much her lack of gender awareness but more the institutional and organisational sexist culture at the local television station that constrains her aspirations to realise her full potential there.

5.3 MX's 'glass ceiling' and work-family balance

MX is a senior female journalist at the *P City Daily*. She comes from a nearby county, went to the best college in the provincial capital, and has a master's degree in journalism. She worked at the biggest provincial newspaper for several years but she changed her job when she followed her husband to P City. She has been working there for six years. Several editors recommended her to me as a good interview subject because of her ability and because she was one of a few women who had managed to cover local government hard news. MX enjoys a relatively high job position and income compared with other female journalists around her age. But when comparing herself with male colleagues, she said they would have needed less time to reach the higher positions, and some at her level did not have a master's degree or even a journalism education background.

Because she has a gender-neutral sounding Chinese name, MX shared her experience of being called 'brother' (*ge*) by people who did not know her when they greeted her on social media. People tend to think a journalist (with a

gender-neutral name) who is reporting local government related news would be a man. MX posted this conversation on her WeChat account:

> This is the second time in this month that I have been called as 'brother' (*ge*). Does my news report look like man's writing? I think my writing style is quite soft! I am often taken by interviewees as a male journalist, when they met me in person and they still don't believe it: "oh, I cannot believe you are a woman".

While women have to give more time and effort to be hard news and senior reporters, female journalists outside of the newsroom are regarded as less competent than males because of the traditional views that women belong in the private domain (Carter et al., 1998). MX's experiences as one of the few senior women journalists who report on the 'hard news' in the P City newspaper suggest this general distrust happens quite often. But rather than consider the possibility of gender stereotyping, she questioned herself and her writing style.

MX likes to post her daily work and the life of her son on WeChat, sometimes several times a day. These posts include her news articles, photos during interviews, and stories of working overtime in the office. One day, MX posted on WeChat that she brought her son with her when interviewing for news reports in a village on the weekend. She told me: "You have to let leaders know your work, otherwise they won't remember you". But some people don't support her posts. Another female journalist told me she took MX's behaviour as an ostentatious flaunt: "I blocked MX's WeChat account because I do not want to see her posts. She is so bragging about her work, and she is just a show-off for the managers". MX is an example of a woman who is trying so hard to be accepted and more visible that she behaves more like a man. Would her colleague criticise a male colleague for 'bragging'? And what does the

colleague's criticism of MX say about her own view of women: that women should be demure and modest?

Although more women recruits can now be found in local media institutions, female workers still face obstacles in their career advancement that are similar to those of their counterparts in other Chinese metropolises. For instance, at PTV women are considered physically unsuited to operating professional equipment or carrying video recorders: "Women cannot do this type of work" was the explanation given by the director of PTV. However, many journalists now use their cell phones to take good quality photos and record footage when they interviewing. Instead of needing one person to take notes and write the report, and another to carry the camera (mostly male), women journalists can now conduct news reports just with their cell phones.

Even though a bottom-tier city's newsroom might now be less competitive, women still have to challenge gender bias when climbing up the professional ladder. MX said that although they are given a job based on professional abilities and performance, leaders still prefer males because they can engage in social events, which are needed in political institutions. MX said it was difficult to join males' networks and the male-dominated newsroom culture. As a women director, she believes that the junior journalists in her department would prefer a male director. She recalled the selection of one year of the best journalists in the *P City Daily* newspaper as the most sexist thing that had happened in her career. As the head of a department, MX recommended one male journalist in her department as a candidate but he did not get accepted by the male management team. She told me:

> It is all because I am a woman. This is sexist. Compare with other departments of male directors, the management will value their decision than mine. I feel so sorry for that male journalist. I am sorry that he has

> me, a female director, as his boss. Otherwise, he will win the award because he is so hard-working.

When she was a junior journalist, MX would prefer a male boss to a woman because it gave her more security in the workplace. As a female director for three years, she still feels a lack of self-confidence when dealing with male directors. Because she cannot join the male networks by drinking and smoking with them, the only thing she can do is work hard. There are factors beyond professional ability that women themselves cannot overcome to reach the higher-level positions in their workplaces.

With the tendency towards the feminisation of journalism, commercialisation promotes women to enter the media workforce. However, the employment opportunities it generates for women tend to be limited in both scope and potential (Joseph, 2004). As mentioned in Chapter 4, one journalist at the *P City Daily* newspaper told me there was a rule that woman journalists could not be assigned to follow the mayor doing the interviews, in case it might cause 'trouble' for the mayor, thus implying that women are the bane of men. This unwritten 'rule' is gender biased and devalues women's professional work. Women are being looked down upon and unequally treated when they want to approach 'masculine' news beats.

As a journalist who had also worked at the *Henan Provincial Daily*, MX talked about the differences she observed between that paper and the *P City Daily*:

> In the small place, people have this preconceived notion that female journalist will have some unethical relations with the major and party secretary, it is their narrow thought. In the *Henan Provincial Daily* they never have such rule, you can see there are many famous and outstanding female journalists in charge of covering the government

> leaders' political reports. But for me, I won't want to do this job, because covering the mayor's news means I will have a busy schedule and have no time for my children.

Comparing the working experiences of the provincial and local media, MX's opinion about the *P City Daily*'s rule of no female reporters with the mayor indicated that the cultural context of P City is more conservative than the provincial capital; women restrict active communication with male colleagues and leaders to avoid gossip. As Wallis (2015) stresses, there is a correlation between official corruption and the sex scandals involving local male officials and young anonymous women that appear in Chinese media, and the hypermasculine political and business culture in Chinese society generally: "These scandals are routinely attributed to 'corruption' with little or no discussion of the underlying gendered power differentials revealed by the scandals" (p. 235). M. Chen (2011) also note the traditional social pressures caused difficulties for Chinese female entrepreneurs to freely participate in business activities like men, including entertaing the clients: "[It] is often regarded as inappropriate as a woman's activity. The women themselves perceived that such activities might turn them rather too quickly into targets of gossip and slander" (p. 181). The unwilling *yingchou* and gossip of female journalists in P City's newsrooms reflect their unspoken gendered structures, but most women journalists tend not to question the systemic gender inequalities.

At the personal level, a Chinese women journalist's pursuit of career progression is also constrained by the domestic roles assigned to her by society, her family, and even herself, including not just housework but also pregnancy and child and elder care (Carter et al., 1998). Due to the gendered division of labour within households, most women have to deal with tension between their professional roles and their private roles as daughter, wife and mother (Tsui &

Lee, 2012). However, there is lack of supportive policies such as maternity leave for female employees in media workplaces.

Workers at the *P City Daily* do not have the same 'freedoms' as those at the PTV station, especially the editors, who start at 3 p.m. and work until midnight or as late as 2 a.m. During my observation of the editors' room, I saw some female editors use video to chat with their young child to comfort them to go to bed at night. One said: "Good boy, listen to your grandmother, mom will be home after you asleep". MX told me that under the 'two-child' policy, the managers at the *P City Daily* would not usually let female employees have their full maternity leave when they had their second child:

> Your boss will give you a call when you reached the end of three-month maternity leave and talk to you about some working stuff. Then you will know it is their way to tell you it is time for you to come back to work.

She said that when she had her first child, her six-month maternity leave affected her promotion and the newspaper's leadership gave her position to a male colleague, so now she was considering when would be a good time to have her second child. However, some people have different opinions about the 'two-child' policy. One senior PTV editor said opening the one-child policy did not have much effect on female workers' career because, as a small television station, PTV does not have the highly mobile personnel of the big institutions in the top-tier cities.

While MX is fortunate because her parents live with her to help with her son, she posted on her WeChat account:

> I gradually understood why so many women have become full-time mothers. The reason is that time is not enough to do your job while spending time educating children. I really do not know how someone managed to take care of both sides, this is really hard.

In fact, the improved status of young woman has in reality been obtained on the basis of a loss of rights for elders, especially females. A study of dozens of families in Shanghai by Y. Shen (2011) found that the acquisition of rights by a mother is not the result of losing rights by a father, but is instead the result of a compromise on rights by grandparents, especially grandmothers. Some grandmothers have taken on most of the childcare work so that the mothers can give more time to their professional careers. In other families, where the couples don't get the help of the older generation, the pressures of household affairs are still quite substantial for mothers. Gender inequality is increasing from the perspectives of middle-aged or elderly females, and intergenerational factor should be considered as part of gender relationships in urban households (Y. Shen, 2011).

MX told me that she faced two other main issues at the *P City Daily*: her increasing age and her opportunities for promotion. She wrote on WeChat: "I am currently dealing with the 'middle-age trouble': elders, children, and husband live in another city". She told me that she was planning to resign the following year and move to the provincial capital with her husband, who had moved there for work the previous year.

> My husband and I have been living in two different cities for one year, and I am in my late 30s, we think it's time to have a second child because I am not young anymore. If I move to the capital, our children will have better educational opportunities.

When faced with conflicts in her family plan, MX eventually chose to give up her own career for her husband and child. At the beginning of 2020, MX and her son finally reunited with her husband and she found a new job at a newspaper in the Henan provincial capital Zhengzhou (which is a 'New first-tier cities',

according to the classification system mentioned in the Chapter 2). This decision to move to a higher level city was not easy for MX. She wrote on WeChat:

> When I started to think about leave P City, I had many struggles. I did not want to give up my six years of fights in the local news media, my relations with news sources which I built from zero, every achievement I earned from nothing, and also my relatives and friends. But the main reason for me to make this decision is my son. Last year, one friend of mine said to me: "no matter how great is your career in P City, have you ever thought about your child is a boy, without a close relationship with his father for years, whether this will affect his personality and character? If you send him to be with his father in Z City, what is the meaning for you to fight alone in P City?" I was touched by her words. How many real years in a woman's career life? How difficult for a woman in her late 30s to give up the six-year hardworking to restart from zero? This is one end of the scale, but another end is child, family and future. So, I made the decision.

After MX moved to Zhengzhou, she started work at the city's daily newspaper, reporting on local government news. When I chatted with her through WeChat about her life there, she said:

> The only thing I worried before we move to Zhengzhou is my son. But I am so glad that he seems to have adapted well in this new city, with new friends and new school. But sometimes I really missed the old life in the hometown [P City].

Without her parents' help with child care, MX now had to spare more time for her son and sometimes send him to a private childcare centre when she has late reporting tasks. Her translocation of practice from a bottom-tier city to a provincial capital was not an easy decision to make. An individual's mobility is

not only about geographic relocation, it also requires cultural and psychological adjustments (Wanning Sun, 2006). For women, this seems more complicated because it involves their identities as mothers and wives.

Some people view local media work as a 'perfect' and 'stable' job for women. But women still face problems due to family structures and expectations, as well as social attitudes, when they want both successful careers and family life, especially women who don't have the support from parents or cannot afford to hire full-time domestic help (Joseph, 2004). Social and cultural expectations for women prioritise marriage and children in their life plans. In a study of Chinese women in provincial cities, To (2015) argued that some Chinese professional women still viewed marriage as an indispensable life event and that their husbands should be the main breadwinners, while they themselves could slow down in their work and take on traditional household roles.

In my observations in P City, I found that women tend to compromise when their boyfriends or husbands makes changes in their careers. In the case of MX, although she is an excellent journalist, she was willing to give up her achievements for her family. MX's story fits into Wanning Sun's (2006) collateral translocalism taxonomy category, which describes lives that are "changed or transformed by the movement of people around them" (p. 257). As DeLaat (2007) notes, "Women's mobility in their life-long career tends to be horizontal while men's mobility is upward" (p. 21). Marriage is one main reason for personnel movement. Women are more likely to be followers who give up their careers for family reasons.

MX's case points to the difficulty faced by some female professionals: juggling between family roles and professional roles. She was torn by her desire to fulfil her role as a mother and wife, and willing to follow her husband despite

her own competence, but at the same time she had done reasonably well at a job where she had to try hard to fit in a masculine media culture. Interestingly, even though she had proven her competence, she still preferred to work under a male leader, believing it would deliver more security. This seems to indicate how entrenched the patriarchal values are, even for strong women such as MX. It shows how much she has internalised these values – after all, if she can trust her own competence, why shouldn't she trust a woman's competence? Again, her choice reflects her individual agency and gender awareness along with her difficulties in negotiating institutional and organisational structures. Some questions therefore arise: If MX were to have a second child, would that pose obstacles to her rising up the ranks and cracking the glass ceiling in her new employment? And, will moving up the city scale – from P City to Zhengzhou – help her juggle these competing goals?

5.4 WLL: The only female deputy director in the history of the local television station

When I conducted interviews at PTV, some journalists mentioned a previous female director they used to work with. WLL is now the CEO of an arts business company, but she was the only female ever to have been a deputy director of PTV (the management board is composed of one television president (*taizhang*) and three deputy directors (*fu taizhang*)). Before she came to PTV, WLL had worked in the propaganda department of the local government for almost 10 years and reached the position of the deputy director there. One interviewee told me her appointment to PTV was made by the government, even though she had no educational background or experience in journalism or television program production. This is the "add-women-and-stir" formula that is often expected to correct gender imbalances among media personnel and other government institutions (Joseph, 2004, p. 133). Although she had not 'climbed'

to this position at PTV, I was interested in her story and wanted to know more about her work experiences at the exclusive management level there.

WLL's former colleagues at PTV made various comments about her working style, and they disagreed on whether or not she was good at her job. One junior female journalist told me:

> I really enjoyed and miss working under her mentorship. Of course, she gave strict requirements and can be severe when you didn't meet her standards. But she always cared about us, and provided us study opportunities in other cities. I felt comfortable to work with a women director.

Another senior female program director also shared her observation about WLL's work at PTV. She had been hoping a woman deputy director might bring some changes in promotion and opportunities for women in the workplace, but she was disappointed:

> When WLL worked in the station, she did not bring any improvement or change in the station for us (women employees). She is a straight talking person. Although she may have good ideas about the development of television, she has a problem to work with the other three male directors and talk about her ideas. And inside of the management team, these three male directors always disagree against her. What she can do is very limited.

This comment also reveals why WLL only worked three years at PTV before resigning. During that time, she was initially in charge of the contents of the education and entertainment programs, and then she organised the department of new media. These two areas are not the most important departments when compared with local news programs or advertising, but she tried to improve the quality of their television programs and utilise social media. When I searched

for her working reports, I found she had published several articles about innovating entertainment television programs and had participated in several workshops on traditional and social media convergence. A woman journalist in the news department, who had worked with WLL for two years, told me that other journalists did not know much about WLL's personal life because she did not like to share it with them. But they would talk about her personal life among themselves. I was told WLL is not married but has a child, although nothing was known about the father of her child. Although WLL tried to separate her personal and professional life in the workplace, as a rare female senior director, her employees were still interested in her private life.

During my second fieldwork trip to P City, I contacted WLL through an introduction from one of my interviewees at PTV. During our meeting in her office, also present at her invitation was a male senior editor of the *P City Daily*. When I ask them whether the gender of a journalist would have an impact on their news reporting, WLL and the male senior editor gave different opinions. The male editor said:

> It is the physical differences, female editors and journalist have a problem when we work late in the evening. They cannot concentrate and easily make mistakes after 22 o'clock. The *P City Daily* had several publishing faults under the responsibility of women editors, such as wrong writing of the name and news title.

WLL argued with him: "Are you sure? Do you have the specific reports? I think the percentages of men and women editors make mistakes are even". She did not continue to argue with the male editor, but after he had left she said to me:

> What he said is wrong. If he looks at the whole reports of all the mistakes, male journalists may account a large portion of it. Just because he is a male leader, the mistakes made by women leave him a deep impression.

When I asked about her work experiences at PTV and her opinions about women in the workplace generally, she said: "At this level, it has nothing to do with gender. No one will see you as a woman, you have to work like a man". She told me it is more about one's own hard work and personality: "In the daily work with male managers, they do not see you as a woman, they see you as a working man just like them". When asked to give suggestions for how women might achieve the management levels, she again said it has nothing to do with gender and that a woman has to work like a man. This is an example of setting the male practice as the default norm, with women having no option but to conform if they are to succeed in a media institution. I find it ironic that she did not think this related to gender.

Sexism and the disadvantaged position of women journalists can also be seen in the awards and prize appraisals of the national journalism industry and local media organisations. Men – as judges and winners – dominate the Fan Changjiang News Prize and Taofen News Prize, the top two prizes for Chinese journalists and editors (Shunming Huang, 2011). In government institutions, professional awards affect personal titles and incomes. For Chinese journalists working in the media outlets in a bottom-tier city, some of the most important professional awards are presented on November 8th – Chinese Journalist's Day. Each local media institution will select and nominate employees for municipal and provincial journalism awards. According to MX, a senior journalist, this selection is neither fair nor transparent, and it treats female employees unequally. Both she and the previous deputy director WLL talked about the extra hard work women needed to put into their daily work to achieve higher positions.

The lack of women in decision-making positions may be related to the work–family tensions that require them to combine their careers with family and parental responsibilities. Yet home responsibilities decrease women's

chances of performing jobs which require round-the-clock availability (Santos et al., 2018). In my fieldwork in P City, I found that many female journalists experience major tensions between being a woman and being a journalist. As mentioned in Chapter 4, unmarried young women experience anxiety from parental pressures and social attitudes about being labelled as 'leftover women'. Some married female interviewees did not reach senior positions until their 40s, when their children were in college. In the case of WLL, she is not married and had her child after she had reached a senior position. And some outstanding female journalists, like MX, are thankful for their parents (grandmother is the main caregiver) taking care of their children and giving them time to work.

WLL's comments reflect research findings that female journalists are likely to downplay their gender identity when they establish their professional identity (F.L.F. Lee, 2007; Van Zoonen, 1998a). As Chambers et al. (2004) stated, "Women reporters have professional reasons for distancing themselves from the notion that they 'do' journalism differently from men" (p. 123). Many successful women in media professions, as well as in other professions, tend to adopt or adapt to the prevailing values and norms of the profession, "otherwise, women's choices regarding gender performance are far less draconian" (Steiner, 2017, p. 13). But such conformity does appear to be an effective strategy for women journalists to achieve career advancement because the real problem for women is the (predominantly male) gendered professional norms, such as objectivity and detachment (Joseph, 2004).

Gender biases also exist in the dominant conceptions of journalistic professionalism, particularly in China. The gender discourse in Chinese popular culture often blatantly devalues women or values femininity that conforms to male standards (B. Wang & Driscoll, 2019). Women journalists such as WLL, who wants to be professional, need to downplay or minimise the impacts of

gender bias and their feminine sensibilities in the workplace. Hence it is usually harder for a woman to become a respected senior professional in this field.

In the case of WLL, who got a senior job as a token woman, her three years' working at PTV raises the question of whether working for a small media organisation had restricted her capacity to bring about real change for women. There were some structural reasons in the workplace that constrained her capacity to fulfil her role in this position. When I talked with WLL about the promotion mechanisms at PTV, she said: "There are no working promotion channels for women employees. The so called 'fair competition' is a just posturing (*zuo yangzi*)". In other words, promotions within the P City television station largely depend on management-level decisions. Even when WLL was in a top position there and tried to make a contribution to women employees, the structural powers were much stronger than her capacity. The lack of equal promotion opportunities at PTV affected not only women at the lower levels, but also those in the senior positions. For years, the P City local government has talked about the importance of including women in top management of the city's media institution, but the entrenched masculine political culture in the top level has changed very little.

5.5 LS's dilemma between staying in Beijing and back to her hometown

LS is a 30-year-old female PTV news journalist. She was born and raised in P City and went to The China Women's University in Beijing. Affiliated with All-China Women's Federation, this is the first and the only state-owned women's university. After her graduation, she worked in a movie company in Beijing for two years but came back to her hometown at the request of her parents. LS is expected to fulfil her role as her parents' only daughter – an

expectation that would not necessarily be placed upon a son. As several interviewees mentioned, a media job in one's hometown is thought suitable for a young woman, whereas sons are encouraged to earn a living in the big cities. In other words, it may be assumed that parenthood has a different gender-related influence on daughter/son's career development, work-life balance expectation and life satisfaction.

Many female interviewees said family responsibilities were the main reason they work in the local media. Their parents and family do not want them go to the big cities to find a career, but instead want them to stay in their hometown, find a stable job, then marry and have children. There are also generational differences between attitudes to job decisions and life plans. Parents may want their daughters to follow these 'common' life progressions, but the daughters are likely to see more possibilities in developed societies. For unmarried young women, a main reason for choosing to work in municipal TV stations or newspapers is that they and their parents believe these jobs will enhance their 'good reputation' for the small-city courtship market or for finding a good husband in the city.

The traditional gender roles that perceive men as breadwinners and women as homemakers still dominate most local journalists' families. The man carries the responsibility of earning money for the whole family, and women are expected to be the main caregivers who spend much of their time with the family (Tsui & Lee, 2012). Some female reporters do not see their jobs in municipal media as their main income sources. A senior female worker in the advertisement department of the PTV station said to me: "Where you can get a job like this one gives you flexible time to take care of children and family, and give you two thousand yuan every month?". In her opinion, some fellow employees did not have much work to do; they would come to the station at 8 am to punch their card and go home early in the afternoon, yet still receive their

basic wage every month. For some women, this would be a 'perfect' job that allowed them to fulfil their duties to their families and children.

Although LS had not formally studied feminism or taken gender-related courses, she spoke to me a few times about the lectures and posters at her university that dealt with LGBT matters. Although she does not consider herself a feminist, due to her study and working experiences in Beijing, she already had a relatively strong sense of gender inequality in the workplace; in fact, she was the only interviewee who explicitly talked about this. For instance, she noticed the station's management is all male.

During the period of our early interviews in July 2018, the Chinese #MeToo movement began appearing online. LS was one of a few people I spoke to who knew about the #MeToo movement or '*mi tu*' (Chinese translation). She said:

> I saw the posts of my friends' WeChat. The sexual harassment is really common occurrence in the media workplace, especially between the interns with their mentors. These 'cultural rascal' are just disgusting.

When I asked whether as a PTV journalist she could promote women's issues and gender equality through her work, she said:

> I think we can do nothing in our job in this television. See the contents of my daily task, they are all boring reports like this change of bus schedule. There is no gender related news, such as sexual harassment issue. Even I got the news by myself, I know the station would not let me publish it.

In LS's opinion, gender and women's issues were absent in the local media's daily coverage, and news about sexual harassment would definitely be considered too politically sensitive to be on the television, hence she would not even bother to try reporting on them. She seemed to be engaging in self-censorship out of a sense of defeatism.

LS told me that compared with her previous job in Beijing, her work at PTV was much easier and more straightforward, despite the lower income. Unlike her busy life in Beijing, she only had to finish one daily report task or find other sources of news if she wanted an extra bonus. When I was with LS at her workplace, we encountered an older woman in the front door of the television station seeking help; her son had disappeared a few years before and she wanted the television station to post some information that might help her find him. LS immediately invited her into their office and did an interview for the news program. Afterwards, a male colleague teased LS using a Chinese proverb: "You are earning the money of cabbage, but are concerned over the price of the pork". LS laughed and said to him, "She just looked pitiful to me. It would be wonderful if we could give her some help". After the male colleague left, LS gave me a meaningful glance showing her disapproval of the male colleague. LS was not thinking about any financial reward from this work and was acting out of a sense of professionalism and compassion. But instead of direct confrontation, LS thought it was more important to maintain good co-worker relations.

After LS returned to her hometown, the pressures to get married intensified when she turned 30.

> My parents said I'm at the age to get married, and they are worried about it. Many people introduced men to me, but I have no feelings for them, we don't even have the same '*san guan*' (world outlook/view of life and values). These men in P City don't even understand and accept homosexuality.

LS still wanted to go back to Beijing, but as the only child in her family, she felt powerless against the mounting pressure from her parents. But it was the views of other people that bothered her more. She told me:

> There is once a colleague who said to me: "You are too strong, and man did not want to have a wife who is stronger than himself". I am upset to hear that. Does a woman have to fulfil their value through marriage? If a woman doesn't get married then she is worthless? A pig can also give birth to babies, why don't they just marry pigs?

When a woman reaches a certain age and is not married, she is expected to explain this to others. LS chose to post comments on Weibo (China's Twitter-like microblogging site) rather than WeChat because she did not want her co-workers and family members to see them. In her Weibo account, she would post her thoughts and retweet articles about the pressures on 'leftover women', for example, in her opinion, marriage should not be a point for self-evaluation for a woman:

> I really hate people asking me about when I will get married. I am single because I want to. There is so much bias in society, the 30s should be the best time for woman. Don't live in the eyes of others.

In our second interview, LS shared with me some public WeChat accounts about sex and gender relations that she followed. One member wrote:

> Now I think openly about my marriage, and I never will settle for it. If I'm not married in the end, I think I will buy a sex toy for myself.

Many young women also revealed on WeChat that they had been scolded by their parents or colleagues for not getting married by a certain age, which made them indignant and defiant. Even though the women themselves think it is acceptable to be unmarried, people in their social network pity them. Family, relatives, friends, and colleagues care greatly about their unmarried status and urge them to date and find a husband. Some of them had internalized these social expectations and become anxious about not finding a husband. But there are also women like LS who possessed a visceral antipathy to conventional

gender relations (J. Chang et al., 2018). But the deep-seated patriarchal and traditional values in Chinese society make it difficult for individuals to challenge conservative attitudes, especially in the small and less-developed cities.

Early in 2020, LS opened a WeChat public account called 'LS tells stories'. She said after working as a journalist for years, she wanted to record and share on this online forum her thoughts about her life, relationships and family. The first story she wrote was about her previous relationship:

> If I'm not married, then I am worthless? Young people are experiencing this kind of 'single shame', the logic behind this shame is that the value is not up to whether you are married, is you are obeying the rule.

When I communicated with LS through WeChat, she said her account only had 300 followers for now, but she would put in the effort and perhaps become an online influencer in the future. If her social media account does become successful, it will bring her both popularity and income. Through this online approach, LS could potentially skip the 'scale' of this small place and connect with larger audiences and places in ways she could not achieve in her current job and life in P City.

Family considerations played a big part in LS's decision to return to P City, even though she had been educated in the big city and acquired a high level of gender awareness and knowledge of how gender politics works. But this gender awareness had not empowered her decision-making process. As a so called 'leftover' woman living in a bottom-tier city, she was angry about the pressure to get married, but she seemed powerless to change her situation by changing her job or remaining single. This raises some questions: Would a son be likely to be pressured to return home after studying and working in Beijing to make his parents happy? Are women equal to men in negotiating inter-generational

tensions? Would an unmarried man in his 30s be able enjoy the freedom to stay single without having to deal with 'single shame' and being labelled as 'leftover'?.

These individual cases of woman journalists offer a glimpse of how women of different ages, marital status and family situations negotiate their gender and professional identities in the media institutions in a bottom-tier city. Joseph (2004) sees hope in increasing young women professionals' awareness and concern about gender-related issues. In China's case, a recent study by Jiang (2020) found that the general educational level of Chinese women has risen due to the 'one-child' policy; it delayed their entry into marriage and parenthood but increased their participation in the workforce.

B. Wang and Driscoll (2019) tell of an interviewee in their study who had joined a student-run feminist society at a Chinese university, but after graduation she found it difficult to locate or develop activist organisations in her inland city. She moved to Beijing and started working at Feminist Voice—a Chinese feminist group. By contrast, for young women such as LS and WY who are living in small places like P City, their spatial imaginations about living in the top-tier cities are constrained by urban myths, folklore, and other people's stories circulating in the mass media and in the community (Wanning Sun, 2006).

5.6 Conclusion

I started my ethnographic interaction with women media practitioners in P City in order to find out how they negotiate the tension between their desire to exercise individual agency and the structures that constrain them. In particular, I wanted to understand how female journalists make decisions about their careers against the backdrop of a general climate of gender discrimination in

their workplaces. It was also my intention to ascertain if the four women media professionals I interviewed in P City have levels of gender consciousness similar to those of their top-tier city counterparts.

These accounts illustrate that while each woman demonstrated a certain level of gender awareness, negotiating familial and kinship relationships constrained them from expressing their gender consciousness at work. To varying extents, these women's stories conjure up a sense of being 'stuck', not just because of having to live and work physically in a bottom-tier city, but also because of the institutional, organisational and personal circumstances that hold them there. It is interesting that some of them expressed the desire to move to higher scale places, yet at the same time they express gender-determined hesitation or caution about actually pursuing physical or social mobility.

In comparison with their counterparts in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, these women professionals in P City have far fewer resources and less support – social, cultural and economic – for successfully negotiating their private and public identities. This is not to suggest that women professionals in top-tier cities do not also experience obstacles; H. Wang's (2019) research clearly points to some of these. Moreover, what this discussion attempts to show is that institutional, organisational and personal factors tend to interact in ways that leave less room for local media operators, and the women professionals working for them, to either resist the various types of pressure or ignore the consequences.

It is hard for women media professionals to reconcile their competing desires to be perceived to be a good woman, good wife, good mother, good daughter at home, and to be admired and acknowledged for their talent and achievement at work. However, as this discussion shows, social media can play a crucial role in women's daily efforts to negotiate the tension between

structural constraints and individual agency. The four P City women journalists featured in these case studies have few opportunities to express and exercise gender-related agency in their professional capacity as public servants. At the same time, they do freely express their views as private citizens on WeChat. In other words, what these accounts reveal is how both gender- and place-based inequalities interact to produce further disempowerment. This relative inability to bring their gender awareness and personal gender politics into work places and, thereby influence the production of media content, seems stark.

This discussion also shows that when investigating gender awareness and media, it is important to go beyond the traditional media women work in and to examine the statements they make in digital and social media about being a woman, about being a professional, and about gender relations. This disjuncture between the lack of power in effecting gender equality at the workplace and the freedom to express themselves online as private media consumers may be a common experience for journalists throughout the world. However, by considering the high levels of tension and contradiction that these four female media professionals in a Tier-4 city have to live with, it is possible to see the complicity between gender and geographic inequalities. Similarly, it is also important to juxtapose their workplace performances and their lived experiences of juggling competing demands as private citizens at home and in the society. By acknowledging the levels of discrepancy between their relatively low professional capacity to speak at work and their relatively high capacity to speak as private citizens it may be possible to recognise how the connection between spatial inequality and gender inequality gets played out. ■

Chapter 6

#MeToo in China: the politics of representing gender relations in local and metropolitan media

Chapters 4 and 5 have attempted to show that investigations into the relationship between gender, place and media must start by asking structural questions about how political power and economic forces shape media institutions and media organisations. The relationship between individual women media practitioners, their level of gender awareness, and the actual work they do is complex. Both the institutional analysis in Chapter 4 and ethnographic insights in Chapter 5 suggest that, to a considerable extent, the participating female journalists' perspectives and their capacities to transcend obstacles of gender empowerment are shaped, even determined, by the fact that P City is a small-scale place in a less economically developed region that is culturally more resistant to social change than cities in the coastal regions.

But one overarching question remains: In what ways do such institutional factors and the experiences of individual professionals who work with them shape the output of media production? In other words, how do local Chinese media institutions make decisions about whether or not to report on certain gender-related issues? Which aspects of gender-related stories do they focus on or obscure? Whose perspectives and points of view do they validate/prioritise when telling stories of gender conflict? And most importantly, do media – national, provincial and local – approach issues of gender relations and stories

of gender conflicts in similar ways? And if the answer to this last question is negative, what factors account for the different approaches? As Xiaoying Wu (2010) argued, the state, market and traditional culture powers are "sometimes in confrontation and sometimes allied" (p. 154), playing different roles in constructing social gender in the news coverages of sexual harassment at different times. This chapter examines the interaction between these factors – the state, market and traditional culture – to see how it gets played out in editorial decision making vis-à-vis the news reports of the #MeToo movement.

6.1 Background of the #MeToo in China

And at this period in history, the #MeToo movement is an apt prism through which to investigate these questions. On October 5th, 2017, after the publication of an article in *The New York Times* titled 'Harvey Weinstein paid off sexual harassment accusers for decades', which was about the sexual harassment and abuse of women in the Hollywood film industry, millions of social media posts under the #MeToo hashtag triggered a viral campaign to show solidarity against abuse (Cobb & Horeck, 2018). It has since broadened to include other male-dominated sectors, including the music, literary, media, sports, fashion, and food industries (Cobb & Horeck, 2018; Hearn, 2018). The movement soon mobilised in beyond the US to the UK, South Korea, Japan, France, Italy, Spain, Israel, India, and Australia, and also to China (Cobb & Horeck, 2018; Hasunuma & Shin, 2019; Zeng, 2020).

When the #MeToo movement first took hold in Chinese universities it faced strict political obstacles (Zeng, 2019). In January 2018, the first reported case was about a former doctoral student Xixi Luo, who lives in the US, writing an open letter on Chinese social media Weibo under the hashtag #MeToo accusing Xiaowu Chen, her professor at Beihang University, of sexually assaulting her

and other female students (Cahill & Liu, 2018). This post led to Chen's sacking and encouraged more Chinese women to came forward (Zeng, 2020). About two months later, the Chinese campaign was galvanised when a 20-year-old story resurfaced. Yan Gao was a female undergraduate student at Peking University (one of China's most prestigious universities) in 1998 who committed suicide after repeated sexual advances and an alleged raped by her professor, Yang Shen (Zeng, 2019). Inspired by the #MeToo movement, a group of her friends and students posted remembrances online on the 20th anniversary of her death and calling for the university to reopen the investigation (Zeng, 2019). This story became one of the hottest topics online during the Tomb Sweeping Festival in China.

Since then, many Chinese women have started to put their sexual harassment stories online and speak out against prominent men from other industries, including charities (Tianpeng Yuan, Chuang Lei, Fei Deng), media (Wen Zhang, Jimin Zhang, Jieke Pan, Jun Zhu), sports (Jianjun Liu, Wei Zhang), education (Luncan Xie, Xiang Cai), and religion (Longquan Temple resident Xuecheng). Such stories reverberated across Chinese social media such as Weibo and WeChat. The Chinese #MeToo started on university campuses at the beginning of 2018, but unlike its western counterparts, the online discussions were heavily censored. In November 2018, one individual established a website (https://metoochina.org) to collect stories of sexual harassment in China.

Unlike Twitter, which has provided the Western #MeToo movement with a voice platform, Chinese social media such as Weibo and WeChat the #MeToo campaign have had to contend with censorship by the regime. Some posts and pictures on Weibo and Wechat were deleted by these platforms without the consent of the users. Sensitive characters were automatically blocked on Chinese social media, such as 'metoo', 'sexual harassment', and some peoples' names. According to a study at the University of Hong Kong, the #MeToo and sexual

harassment allegations against a Peking University professor were in the top-10 controversial censored topics on WeChat in 2018 (Tai & Fu, 2020). A search through the Weibo for the #METOO# hashtag shows: "According to relevant laws and regulations, the page of this topic doesn't exist". In order to circumvent online censorship, Chinese #MeToo activists have managed to use a range of innovations, such as distorting images, using emojis, manipulating Chinese characters, using public blockchains and accessing codes from Github (Zeng, 2019, 2020).

It has been difficult to develop the online #MeToo campaign into a nationwide movement in China driven by social media because of the government's heavy internet censorship. With maintaining political stability a priority of the central party, Chinese censors block online content related to collective action, activism, and political movements, all of which have the potential to intensify social tensions and conflicts (G. Yang, 2009). The Party state promotes the Propaganda Department's directive of proactive and retroactive control — "the size of the mouth" — in media reporting of major events (Y. Zhao, 2004a, p. 179). The media in China observe strict guidelines in their coverage of major domestic and international events, from WTO and NATO, in addition to bombings, SARS, and protests. Political censorship aside, Y. Zhao (2003) has also pointed to the issues of journalistic self-censorship and market constraints that result from the complicated power relations between the Chinese media, the Chinese state and the market.

As with the online #MeToo movement, the internet and other technologies influence the media content for woman's empowerment (and in some cases they may fail). The internet is considered as an empowering space for women's voices in terms of reach and information (Youngs, 2004), but we know little about how the media workers in small places access and using these platforms. When I asked media workers in P City about the #MeToo movement, most were

not broadly aware of it. One reason was that the mainstream media and social media did not mention the words '#MeToo movement' in their news reports. And the Chinese translation vision slogan and hashtag of 'MI TU' was only spread to a small circle and later censored. Even so, several alleged sexual harassment cases that involved high profile people were widely discussed both online and offline; examples include Jun Zhu, a well-known TV host of China's Central Television; Xuecheng, the former chairman of the Buddhist Association of China; and Qiangdong Liu, an e-commerce tycoon (Zeng, 2020). These stories were probably not prompted by the words 'metoo', but rather by the mainstream media's coverage of sexual harassment cases involving famous people.

For Chinese feminist activists, Weibo and WeChat have become important gathering places over the past few years for creating communities and networks (Lam, 2019; B. Wang & Driscoll, 2019). According to Chinese activist Leilei Zhang:

> While social media in China in recent years has become increasingly tightly controlled, it has still provided a dynamic large-scale platform to debate feminist issues and organise groups—the most powerful example being the #MeToo movement which was initiated, spread, and expanded on social media in 2018. In the early days of the movement, the mainstream media was afraid to speak up, but after the topic of sexual harassment exploded on social media they started, one by one, to cover the issue. The #MeToo movement in China has always been subject to official investigations and related posts on social media are frequently deleted, but at its height this interference was not sufficient to prevent the movement from taking off. (cited in Lam, 2019, p. 65)

Starting in 2018, Chinese feminists in Beijing, Chengdu, Guangzhou and Shanghai have organised several exhibitions of the #MeToo movement called 'the voiceless rise up'. Although some of these exhibitions were terminated by the state, they show that grassroots feminist groups are active in the developed regions in China.

Thanks to the Internet and social media, people living in small cities have the same access to channels of information and communication as those in the larger cities. These include WeChat, Weibo, short video platforms, and live streaming platforms. Women journalists working in traditional media tend to be vigilant about fake news online, so they use their social media to share information about their lives and children, or to promote their second businesses. For example, MX said she enjoys watching her friends share their daily lives on WeChat and she follows the Weibo accounts of some 'celebrity women journalists' journalists who work in Beijing and Shanghai. Some women journalists I spoke to also recommended several public WeChat accounts that deal with gender relations. These sorts of social media accounts not only allow women living in inland China to learn about life in the major cities, they also serve as 'handbooks' for them to seek power and support for their own situations.

The internet can also help local journalists access globally circulated opinions and to view China through a transnational gaze. One female editor showed me how she uses a VPN software to breach a firewall to read news; she also knows how to use Google to read the news from the Phoenix Hongkong. However, because she cannot read or speak English, she could only read Chinese contents. Many journalists and editors in the local media outlets have a relatively low levels of second-language competence, yet they know the importance of learning English either for themselves or their children.

The global #MeToo campaign could not have happened without social media. In China, most sexual assault victims choose social media to post their #MeToo stories instead of traditional media because of its spreading efficiency and to avoid potential censors. Everybody can talk about anything on social media, but the traditional media, which is owned and controlled by the government, need to decide how to respond to news on social media, what stories and content to reproduce from online media, and what levels of coverage these should have. Traditional media are still important in the media landscape in China, but we do not know how traditional media interact with social media, or if local places such as P City allow similar levels of interfacing between them as do, for instance, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. My interest in analysing the #MeToo movement is not so much about how Chinese social media discuss or fail to discuss incidents of sexual harassment; rather it is about the level of interface and synergy between traditional media and social media, and whether the traditional media outlets in P City face more constraints in their responses to online exposés of incidents and allegations of sexual harassment than metropolitan newspapers. In other words, this chapter examines how Chinese traditional media responds to the sexual harassment news on social media, the aspects and content they reproduce from online media, and how various factors work together to produce decision making and news production.

I begin with a critique of the Chinese censorship and blocking of the online #MeToo campaign, and then I analyse news articles from sampled newspapers to identify the similarities and differences in the ways stories are framed. At the centre of this analysis lie tensions between the growth of online stories and the attitudes of the traditional media; between the imperatives of political control from the state and the commercial needs of an increasingly competitive market; and between cultural values and media professionals' perspectives among different scale of places in a special inequality context. By conducting

comparisons of news reports from small local newspapers and their counterparts in Chinese first-tier cities, I test a hypothesis that Chinese local media are more conservative than metropolitan media in their coverage of sensitive gender issues.

I chose the #MeToo movement for this analysis because it embodies the most powerful aspect of gender dynamic relations in recent times. Due to the difficulties of obtaining substantial evidence, many of the disputes highlighted by the #MeToo movement remain arguments between two parties that are framed within a classic binary narrative structure of 'his words against hers'. Most online petitions become open-ended issues. For this reason, it is a good case to analysis gender politics. Moreover, the media's narrative structure in the movement provides a good example to look at the role of the media in covering gender issue. From the point of view of the Chinese media, these controversies between two parties are more ambiguous when compared with other gender-related issues, such as domestic violence. In the media coverage of sexual harassment news, whose side are the journalists on – the woman's or the man's? With whom do they identify and accord credibility to the statements made? How are claims and accusations of sexual harassment framed in these stories, and what do these framings tell us about the differences between media practices in top-tier cities and bottom-tier cities such as P City?

The ways the media approach these controversies might reveal a lot about the Chinese media's positions on the #MeToo movement and how they approach gender-related issues. While this is certainly one of my objectives, my main concern here is to compare the coverages of the #MeToo-related stories in the Chinese media of different geographic scales in order to get a sense of which Chinese places are more likely to engage with and reproduce globally circulated information and news content about issues related to sexual harassment.

6.2 Analytical Approach

In order to describe the ways in which the dominant news narratives in China construct the #MeToo movement, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of three sexual harassment cases that happened in 2018 and were reported in Chinese mainstream newspapers. I then compared the news contents of the #MeToo movement in Chinese traditional local media and their counterparts in first-tier cities Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, the three largest metropolises in China.

Because the #MeToo movement started at the beginning of 2018, I chose three news events that happened in 2018 for a longitudinal examination of mediated texts and their social contexts. I intentionally chose a different sexual harassment news item from the international news, national news and local news. The first news story was from the global #MeToo movement: American Hollywood movie star Morgan Freeman accused of sexual harassment; the second was from China's #MeToo movement: a professor of Sun Yat-Sen University accused of sexual harassment by five women; and the third was from local news of a senior journalist of the *Dahe Daily* accused of sexually harassing a female intern.

In order to compare these news reports with those of the *P City Evening* paper, two metropolitan newspapers were chosen from each first-tier city: Beijing – *Beijing Morning Post* and *Beijing Evening Paper*; Shanghai – *Whenhui paper*, and *Shanghai Morning Post*; and Guangzhou – *Guangzhou Daily*, and *Yangcheng Evening Newspaper*. These newspapers were chosen for the following reasons: (a) Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou represent the economic, political and cultural centres of the nation; their newspapers exemplify how news contents are produced through China's leading political and cultural

ecosystems; (b) these metropolitan newspapers include commercial newspapers and typical party papers that could show the differences in their degrees of autonomy and their spaces for sexual harassment news; and (c) these newspapers were selected based on the rank of their overall influential capacities (paper's circulation and digital platforms' performance) to impact their cities' media market[3]. These first-tier city newspapers offer points of comparison and contrast to my case study of the local newspaper in P City.

My analysis of newspapers in these first-tier cities is mostly based on their contents; whereas my analysis of local media in P City's newspaper is based not only on its contents, but also on my interviews with journalists and editors of P City's two newspapers about what they think about this content, and on my fieldwork notes from my two-month participant observation in their workplaces. It should be noted that in my efforts to examine the gender politics through content, I regard the absence of the content as important as the presence of content. In other words, I am interested in both what gets published and what is not allowed to be published, taking into account the Party's tight control and journalists' self-censorship.

As outlined earlier, there are two main news organizations in the P City: P City Broadcast and Television station (PTV), and the *P City Daily* newspaper. In a bottom-tier city like P City, the main media include three local television channels, two printed newspapers (Daily and evening papers), four broadcast channels, and several social media outlets. However, I observed that sexual harassment news never appears on most of these media. My analysis does not include broadcast content because the P City broadcaster does not provide an

[3] see the 2018 Chinese newspapers' communication capacities rank: http://media.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0327/c120837-30996998.html

online web for historical radio programs records, and it would have been difficult to obtain the data.

Since the beginning of 2018, as the #MeToo movement became a hot topic, I noticed there were no related reports on the three channels of PTV. In order to follow the trends of digital media, P City's television and newspaper institutions set up several WeChat and Weibo accounts to post their programs or news on a daily basis. Each television program has its own official WeChat account, and they have special staff to post their program content and some local people related news, such as the city bus service. However, in none of the official accounts that I followed did they post any reports on sexual harassment-related news. I therefore shifted my focus to the content of P City's newspapers because they have related news reports on in their previous issues. But I was still going to talk to people from PTV about their opinions on sexual harassment news and the #MeToo movement.

I reviewed most of the sampled newspapers on their official websites. The *Guangzhou Daily* and *Shanghai Daily Post* did not provide online versions of their previous newspapers beyond one month, so I brought their older issues as hard copies from a Chinese website which sells old Chinese newspapers. In order to fully record their coverage for each news event, I looked at four days' worth of issues of each newspaper: one issue before the news happened; the issue when it happened; and two issues after the news happened. After collecting all the news contents of these newspapers, I compared and analysed the coverages. For the news articles, I paid attention to their text, headlines, word length, news themes, framing from the news source text, and the direct quoted sources. Besides the news content, I also paid attention to the page design, the location of the page section, and the use of photos that accompanied the article.

6.3 Compare news cases

6.3.1 International news: 2018.5.26. Morgan Freeman accused of sexual harassment

On 26 May 2018, the US-television network CNN reported that Hollywood actor Morgan Freeman had been accused of sexual and verbal harassment by eight women who alleged that he had subjected them to inappropriate remarks about their bodies and harassed them on film sets and at his production company[4]. It is interesting to note that the *P City Evening* newspaper did not report on Harvey Weinstein in regard to the #MeToo movement. Morgan Freeman is more famous than Weinstein in China because Chinese people are more familiar his several movies.

This news was covered in most Chinese newspapers because it came from the official China's national news agency, Xinhua News Agency. On the same day, four of the sampled newspapers covered the Freeman news story: *Wenhui Paper*, *Shanghai Morning Post*, *Beijing Morning Post*, and the *P City Evening* paper. All of their coverages were also provided by the Xinhua News Agency. The *Wenhui Paper* and *Beijing Morning Post* have 'special article from Xinhua news agency for this paper' from the same journalist, Yijun Wang, as their news source. The Chinese Party's municipal newspapers were compelled to publish Xinhua's exclusive reports on politically sensitive issues and cross-regional and international news; "In this sense, the Party newspapers were politically dependent on Xinhua" (Xin, 2006, p. 49). For lower level media institutions, it is not just the mandate that has them use only official news sources, it is also a matter of saving costs and resources; they don't have the resources to send their own journalists to other places. Some Chinese media in major cities such as

[4] see CNN news: https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/24/entertainment/morgan-freeman-accusations/index.html

Shanghai and Guangzhou have successful operations running their own foreign news reporting and earning profits from them (H. Wang et al., 2013).

I first compared the same Xinhua agency articles about Morgan Freeman that appeared in *Wenhui Paper*, *Shanghai Morning Post* and *Beijing Morning Post*. They all presented this article in their international section but not in the priority position. Under the tile of 'Morgan Freeman apologises for alleged sexual harassment', the *Beijing Morning Post* did not change the content of the Xinhua news source and it was the shortest version of article among the three newspapers. *Shanghai Morning Post* and *Beijing Morning Post* both published similar news contents but without adding any additional information. The article title in the *Shanghai Morning Post* focussed on the 'octogenarian film star' but without mentioning his name, unlike the other papers. It also used two semi-titles to divide the content into two sections: 1) "it is not my intention" (*bing fei benyi*), which described Freeman's response and the main point in his apology; and 2) "cannot be replaced?" (*buke tidai*), which detailed the victims' complaints and experiences about the different power and status relations between famous actor and his assistants. The article also explained why the victims had chosen not to report Freeman's actions:

> One production assistant, who worked with Freeman on *The Dark Knight*, told CNN that although she was never personally targeted by Freeman, she witnessed some inappropriate comments Freeman made to female members of the crew.
>
> Morgan did things in a way that an older more established person can get away with because they have that power.

> Production assistants can be replaced, grips can be replaced, electricians can be replaced, but the actors cannot … if you report somebody like Morgan Freeman that the movie would lose a lot of money by replacing them or getting them in trouble, then you're the trouble maker and you'll get fired because you're just a production assistant.

Despite some rearrangements of the text, neither the *Shanghai Morning Post* nor *Beijing Morning Post* reinterpreted the Xinhua material. Instead of taking the sides of either Freeman or the women, they adopted the same stance as the Xinhua source. In the international news section of *Wenhui Paper*, the title and the first part of the article described Freeman's response to the accusation and his apology, and how the screen actors' guild might withdraw his lifetime achievement award. Differently from the other newspapers, *Wenhui Paper* added a short paragraph about Freeman's acting career and more details of the accusations from his female colleagues; he tried to lift a woman's skirt and judged her appearance; and when another actor witnessed this and "asked him to stop", he got "freaked out" and "did not know what to say". More importantly, this article gives a brief introduction of the #MeToo movement in America in the last paragraph:

> Since the expose of sexual harassment and misconduct scandals of Hollywood star producer Harvey Weinstein, a movement against sexual harassment in workplace called 'wo ye shi' (Chinese translation of 'me too') swept through entertainment industry to political circle, even parliament. According to the American press, Weinstein will turn himself into the New York policy on 25th.

Despite the fact that discussion of #MeToo was blocked on the Internet in China, the *Wenhui Paper* still included this short paragraph on the global #MeToo movement. The paper was also more explicit about gender politics. While the

other two papers, *Shanghai Morning Post* and *Beijing Morning Post*, did not mention the #MeToo movement in their articles, their contents were exclusively based on the same story from the Xinhua news source.

The scale of place might affect local journalists' understanding of news sensitivity and the value of potential social issues. While three metropolitan newspapers in Shanghai and Beijing all presented this news report in their international news pages, the *P City Evening* newspaper chose to present theirs on its entertainment page as a foreign celebrity scandal. Under the headline 'Veteran Hollywood actor Morgan Freemen caught up in sexual harassment scandal' on page B8 of the *P City Evening* paper on 26 May 2018, the newspaper reported the story with a large photo of Freeman. During my interview with the Wang (29-year-old, eight years working), who was the editor of that page, I asked her why she decided to put this news report in the entertainment news. She said, "Because he is a Hollywood celebrity". Freeman's celebrity determined the value of this news in this editor's eyes; she did not pay much attention to the sexual harassment issue but saw this news as a selling point.

As a commercial supplement to the *P City Daily* newspaper, the main purpose of the evening newspaper is to increase the circulation and attract more advertising, which is the main source of revenue. In order to increase readership with soft and entertainment contents, the journalists and editors of the *P City Evening* paper unconsciously seem to have played down the seriousness of the sexual harassment, thereby showing a lower-level sensitivity of gender awareness and conservative news values. In fact, as H. Wang et al (2013) have noted, Chinese local media are relatively less burdened by the 'political tasks' of foreign news reporting. "They may find more room to produce more 'market-oriented' foreign news because they are under looser control by the state compared to the national media" (p. 888). Xiaoling Zhang (2007) also suggested that, unlike the national-level media, whose main focus is on news and

information provision, local media outlets below the provincial level face difficulties in obtaining 'hard news' due to their policies, resources, and technological and financial situations, but they can "turn their attention to 'soft' news with lower technology requirements and lower expenditure but good market returns" (p. 66). However, it is important to realise that by positioning the Freeman story on their entertainment page, the *P City Evening* reduced the importance of the social issue to a controversy about a Hollywood celebrity.

Furthermore, although all the newspapers were using the same news source, the editor in the *P City Evening* paper used a different framing strategy in its article. Unlike the three metropolitan newspapers, which wrote that Freeman was alleged to have both physically and verbally harassed a woman, the *P City Evening* paper put quotation marks around the phrases "unwilling contact" and "inappropriate language". The editor did not use direct quotes from the victims, as three metropolitan newspapers had done, but used more implicit and conservative words to describe the victim's complaint, such as "*dongshou dongjiao*" (touch) instead of "he lifted her skirt" and "*zhizhi diandian*" (finger pointing) instead of "overcritical about her appearance". These two Chinese phrases are easy for most people to understand. The editor said she was trying to summarise and present the accusation in a way that was more suitable for the local audience and the newspaper: "I think these words would be enough [to show the meaning], otherwise these details would be too much [for their readers in the city]". This avoidance of specifically sexual words reveals how the local media practitioners were negotiating their audiences' cultural sensibilities in this lower level city.

The fact that local media in less developed areas are more likely to rely on higher level news media as their sources also indicates the possible limitation of their scope when covering major events, "which might mean that reading more local news can actually constrain an individual's understanding of international

issues" (H. Li & Tang, 2009, p. 223). While local media in major cities send journalists to cover major international news to project soft power (H. Wang et al., 2013), small local media in less developed areas posit themselves as being left behind in foreign news reporting. Chinese Party media organisations in less developed areas such as P City, have more limitations on their news resources than their counterparts in big cities. It should be noted that a significant difference between P City and the big cities is the former has no independent commercial media, only the commercial arm of the Party media, the *P City Evening* paper. Even though the Party's bottom-level media "play an important role in constructing local knowledge, their limited scope of coverage and perspectives constrain their role in reporting international news" (H. Li & Tang, 2009, p. 219). This also applies to the global #MeToo movement.

Political and cultural factors also interact to shape media content in different papers. All the sampled newspapers use the official Xinhua news source and stick to the official line when covering stories from outside China. In reporting on Morgan Freeman, they did not draw on or engage with any online discussions about the #MeToo movement or sexual harassment. However, the *Wenhui Paper*'s story offered more context and alternative perspectives when it expanded on the official news material. This suggests the *Wenhui Paper* was more geared towards bringing this gender-related knowledge to readers, while the editor of the *P City Evening* paper preferred to de-politicise it after considering that the its local readers had accepted sexual harassment as an issue for public discussion. While coverages on gender issues in all media in China are governed by the triple forces: market, the state and culture, these three elements interact in different ways depending on the scale of the place. In other words, the Freeman coverage is an example of how the *P City Evening* paper exploited an important issue of sexual harassment and turned it into a 'selling point' and in doing so passed up a good opportunity to educate its readers

about gender politics and raise their gender awareness. Its strategy was to adopt an approach that would be both politically safe and profitable, but would reinforce, rather than challenge, the traditional ideas of talking about gender relations.

6.3.2 National news: 2018.7.11. Professor of Sun Yat-Sen University accused of sexual harassment of his students

On 9 July 2018, an online article (in Chinese) published on the WeChat blog *The Livings* reported that Peng Zhang, an ecology professor at Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU) in Guangzhou, had been accused of sexual assault by multiple women. The article detailed an encounter between student Jing Chen and Zhang during a field trip in 2016. According to Chen, the teacher made inappropriate comments on her appearance, forced her to hug him, and put his head on her breasts while the two were taking a walk away from the group. The article revealed that Chen was not the only victim of Zhang's predatory behaviour. In 2011, one of his female colleagues reported to the school's disciplinary committee that he had stalked her and touched her inappropriately on multiple occasions, but the board did not punish him, even as he continued to harass the female teacher via texting. It was not until April 2018, when a freshman student was allegedly raped by Chen, that the committee took some disciplinary measures against him as 'punishment within the party', but this did not constitute any substantial harm to Chen's career.

After this news spread online, on 10 July SYSU announced on the school's website that Zhang had been stripped of his teaching duties and the university had terminated his research contract and removed his title of 'Changjiang Scholar'. The announcement said: "We have zero tolerance for faculty members who violate the teachers' code of conduct … We will firmly protect our

students' legal rights".[5] However, this statement was published by the university under the pressure of online opinion, and there has been no further movement or update from the university on this investigation. SYSU is a top-tier university located in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, so the news of its professor received nation-wide attention. The reporting of such 'negative' news by the city-level Party daily newspaper the *Guangzhou Daily* was low-key, cautious in tone and carefully worded.

On 11 July 2018, the day after the official statement by the university, an article on page A15 of the *Guangzhou Daily* under the headline 'Suspend Zhang's teaching duties and mentoring doctoral student' quoted extensively from the official announcement, but it omitted the professor's given name throughout the article. While the official statement and other media had released his full name and information, the *Guangzhou Daily* referred to him as a certain Mr Zhang (*zhang mou*). Without interviewing anyone involved, its report used the official statement as their only source of information. It also avoided the keywords 'sexual harassment' and 'sexual misconduct', instead referring to 'teacher's ethics problems' and 'improper conduct'. The report highlighted the professor's punishment, the university's intention to treat 'the violation of teacher's ethics' seriously, the university's 'thanks for the attentions from the society and welcomes its scrutiny of teacher's ethics'. This sidestepping of the issue of sexual harassment was intended to deflate the public's attention and the likely negative impact on the university. This is an example of how the *Guangzhou Daily* toes the line of the Chinese Communist Party; the sexual harassment issue in the online article was only a teacher's improper behavior that violated the moral and ethical relation between students and teachers, and while it was dealt

[5] Announcement from Sun Yat-sen University website: http://www.sysu.edu.cn/2012/cn/sysunotice/32717.htm

with as a serious mater, it was not associated with the #MeToo movement, nor was it framed as a politically serious issue.

On the other hand, the commercial papers, which enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in operation and distribution, created some space for this news. On the same day, on page A6 of the *Yangcheng Evening Newspaper* under the headline 'One Sun Yat-Sen university professor be suspended teaching and terminated contract due to accused of sexual harassment', about 1,200 characters were devoted to this news, including details about the online article. In addition to the official response of the SYSU, it published an introduction to the online article and questioned the response of the University:

> July 9th, one article 'she thought she could avoid the professor's hand' became a hit on the Internet. In this article, five women report professor Peng Zhang of the SYSU continued sexual harassed female students and female teachers from 2011 to 2017… In the same day, the SYSU published a **short** statement said that they had done an investigation and punishment to Peng Zhang in April… This response of the SYSU **indirectly acknowledged** the most facts of the online article, but they also expressed that there are some aspects that are inconsistent with their investigation. [The bold parts were marked by the author Shan Huang]

According to the online article, Zhang had played with female student's hair, put his hand on a woman's shoulder, hugged female student, and put his head on woman's chest. He had stayed alone with a woman in his workplace and turned off the lights, and publicly harassed a female teacher in a shuttle bus. However, the SYSU did not not specify which of these complains it had investigated.

It is worth noting that *Yangcheng Evening Newspaper* referred to this online article and openly questioned the inadequate response of the University in

regard to sexual harassment on campus. Even though its journalist had not interviewed the women in the article, her complaints were summarised in some detail from the online article that had been censored. Compared with the *Guangzhou Daily*, the *Yangcheng Evening Newspaper* stood with the female victims against sexual harassment in universities.

In addition to this critical report, on page A10 in the comment section of the *Yangcheng Evening Newspaper,* Yun Zhou, a professor from South China University of Technology, gave a social commentary about sexual assault in Chinese universities. Under the headline 'University should be serious and frankly to face sexual harassment in campus', in 1200 characters the author argued that sexual harassment causes harm to both men and women, especially when between teachers and students because there is imbalance of power:

> In recent two years, such cases have been growing, if education administration and universities continue to do nothing about this situation, then the number of victims will continue to increase and it could further dent the image of university. How to prevent and take disciplinary action against sexual harassment has become a desperate task for every university. Universities have to be serious and frankly to face sexual harassment and take actions, and cannot be hide and avoid this issue like they used to be.

This author also suggested several actions universities might take, including publicity and education about sexual harassment on campuses; and regulations on relations between teachers and students. The author said the response from SYSU was rather late but its punishment of Zhang was acceptable and other universities should adopt more serious discipline. By inviting comment from this scholar, the paper made a genuine attempt to function as a space for public debate, and in doing so took a small step towards raising gender consciousness

among the public, as well as highlighting the seriousness of sexual harassment as a social issue.

Far away from Guangzhou and the SYSU, the same event was covered in the *P City Evening* newspaper in a report of less than 500 characters just one day after the online news story appeared on the Internet. It appeared on the national news page A10 (10 July), with a short follow-up report on 11 July when SYSU published its official response. Its information was sourced from the *Nanfang Metropolis Daily*, the biggest metropolitan daily newspaper in southern China. The *P City Evening* newspaper did not add any journalist's comments or interviews. The metropolitan newspapers and national media are cited most often by the local media, which not only confirms their elite status and influence in the Chinese news industry, but also that "national media news coverage often trickle down to local media" (H. Li & Tang, 2009, p. 223).

But it would be wrong to assume that this is always the case, and that local media have no space to manoeuvre. Interestingly, the *P City Evening* paper turned out to be ahead of the game by publishing the story on 10 July – a day earlier than Guangzhou's media. Given the massive blocking of the online article that day, the *P City Evening* paper's publication would have been the quickest official newspaper report on this issue when compared to other mainstream media. Interestingly, while the media in Guangzhou opted to wait for the university's statement and the newspapers in Beijing and Shanghai also 'played by the book', the media in P City seemed to have less hesitation in publishing negative news stories about happenings in another provinces, especially their big cities. Possibly motivated by this news story's top click rate on that day's news in the *Nanfang Metropolis Daily* website, the editors at the *P City Evening* newspaper selected it as the story of the day for their national news page. By reproducing news sources from other major media outlets, small local media institutions have a 'pool' from which to select national news stories

for their pages after the major media have 'filtered' the news. However, these major media outlets, being in the 'frontline' of news reporting, have to be more cautious about publishing sensitive material.

Contrary to what the local journalists told me, because they usually only deliver 'local news' and 'positive energy news', the sexual harassment-related news from Guangzhou became a selling point in their attempt to boost circulation. The management of the *P City Evening* newspaper took the risk to publish this sensitive matter because the potential gain of attracting readers clearly outweighed the possibility of getting into trouble from their government superiors. In other words, the management has to make a judgement call each time a case is presented requiring careful consideration about how to negotiate delicate balance between the Party line and the bottom line (Y. Zhao, 1998). In this case, it was less about which of the media tended to play safe; rather, the sensitivity of the story was determined not by the size of the city but by the physical distance between the media offices and the topics/issues covered. This is partly due to the fact that Party-controlled media are subject to the regulation often described as 'remote reporting' (*yidi baodao*) or 'remote supervision' (*yidi jiandu*). Negative news that happens in a region will not be reported or commented on by local media but can be reported in the media in other provinces (Su, 2005; Z. Zhao, 2004). It is common to see this in the division between the northern and southern areas (J. Luo, 2015): southern media will be the first to report negative news happening in the northern provinces, and vice versa. The 'remote reporting' on negative news could help the media supervision to breaking through the 'local protectionism' with less restriction on market and human relations (J. Luo, 2015; Su, 2005).

That said, it is clear that unlike the *Yangcheng Evening Newspaper*, the intention of the *P City Evening* paper in publishing the Zhang story was not to raise public awareness of about gender-related exploitation and violence.

Juxtaposing the commercial papers from Guangzhou and P City, it is possible to see that market-based journalism can be a two-edged sword: it may decide to cover matters related to sexual harassment for the purposes of profit, but it may also use its relative autonomy to champion the rights of women and give a voice to victims of sexual harassment. And it is often the better resourced media outlets that cater to more educated readerships in the big cities that 'push the envelope' in reporting social issues such as sexual harassment.

6.3.3 Local news: 2018.7.26. a woman accused been sexual harassed by a male journalist of Dahe Daily

Although there were no news reports of sexual harassment happening in P City, this does not mean there are no incidents of it. What's not published in the newspaper is also important to examine. During the growth of stories of sexual harassment in China in July 2018, an anonymous woman took to social media and accused Changzhen Zhu, a senior male journalist of *Dahe Daily* (a metropolitan daily newspaper in Henan province, the same province as the P City) of attempting to sexually harass her in his house when she was an intern at *Dahe Daily*. On 26 July 2018, she posted an article on Weibo titled 'I was subjected to sexual harassment by the journalist of *Dahe Daily* Changzhen Zhu'. She accused Zhu of bringing her to his house in the summer of 2012 with the excuse of discussing a charity event, but with an intention to sexually harass her. In the article she said: "He suddenly stood up, and ran at me…I clearly remembered that I bite his tongue hardly, so he let go of me for a moment, but he still kept pressing himself on me (it is super sick)". She also mentioned that she tried to speak up on the Internet in 2013, but no one believed her except her family and a few friends. As for the evidence, she said there was no record of the conversation on that night, and she had only met Zhu twice and they were

not very familiar, but she "still can draw the floor plan of his house".[6] Ironically, information about this case came from Zhu's own online social media. Zhu was a native of P City and had been a senior journalist at the *P City Daily* for 10 years before working as an investigative journalist at *Dahe Daily*. Zhu retweeted the news report of *Souhu News*'s Weibo account:

> [I] have been busy on the publishing of my new book <XX>…. When the book published, I will promote them both, including this gossip news so-called sexual harassment and intend to murder six years ago.' (he attached a picture of his new book cover)

[6] The online story post in Sina Webo: https://www.weibo.com/5890672121/GrKFetQux?type=comment#_rnd1547442626514

Figure 6.1 Zhu's Weibo account retweet of the online article accused sexual harassment

This post of him has been deleted after, and the follow screenshots is capture by the author on 27 July 2018

Most Chinese mainstream media remain silent about the many accusations of this sexual misconduct. The *Souhu New*'s official Weibo account retains the only trace of this online article. The news about both the *Dahe Daily* journalist the SYSU professor came out in July when the Chinese version of the #MeToo started to unfold. Although they were both local incidents, the Guangzhou newspapers and P City's newspapers responded differently. In Guangzhou, as a first-tier major city, media could not pretend the allegations of harassment by the professor had not happened. By contrast, the P City's newspapers could pretend the story involving the *Dahe Daily* journalist did not happen or they that they did not see it online. This is because it was negative news that happened elsewhere.

When dealing with disputes between 'his words' and 'her words', Chinese media tend to be careful in choosing sides. They would rather be an 'information transfer' than clearly state their opinion. In the case of the *Dahe Daily* journalist, none of the Chinese newspapers I selected had reported this news in their daily issues or their online media platforms. Since Zhu was a famous former employee of the *P City Daily* and was well known in Henan province, none of the province's media chose to repeat this story or conduct an investigation. From a profit-making perspective, this news scoop would have made quite an impact on the sales of P City's papers, but in this case they had apparently made an editorial decision on the principle that when profit and politics clash, the 'Party line' trumps the bottom line.

During an interview with one of the chief editors of the *P City Daily*, I asked why their newspapers did not report the *Dahe Daily* journalist's news. What he said reveals a lot about how senior management makes decisions about what is locally appropriate content to publish:

> This news is out of our reporting scale, I think no media in the province will report it. Because it happened in the provincial media. This kind of negative news may be interested by media in other provinces as 'Remote reporting'. But this online news did not reach to enough heat and attention.

However, when the major media outlets received directives about banning the coverage of #MeToo stories, this online case remained of interest to social media only.

When discussing sexual harassment news in general, the chief editor of the *P City Daily* said:

> This kind of news (the gender related news and sexual harassment reports) will never be published in our daily paper, but they could be written on evening papers, because the daily paper is 'Party's paper' (*dang bao*) and has to be 'positive energy' (*zheng nengliang*).

I did not find news reports in the *P City Daily* on the three events I've chosen to analyse. The daily newspapers are bound by the party's ideological rules of editorial etiquette, and their main role is to pass on the official discourse. They believe one of a party newspaper's responsibilities is to maintain social stability. The propaganda duties of the Chinese press need to support official activities and government policies by, for example, presenting positive images of elite groups, and emphasising progress and national success (H. Wang et al., 2018). Their decision to not print the #MeToo news reflected how the Party papers see #MeToo as a potentially political sensitive and controversial topic.

As Schudson (1995, p. 54) noted, "The real power of the news media lies not only in their ability to declare things to be true, but also in their power to provide the forms in which the declarations appear". In the case of the #MeToo movement, judging by the discursive strategies and narrative structures adopted by the sampled mainstream Chinese newspapers, it is clear that sexual harassment issues have been given a low priority. In terms of policymaking, the #MeToo movement aims to promote anti-sexual harassment laws in workplaces and campuses, yet the public discourse on this issue in China is still mostly muted. Under their strict state control, Chinese media remained limited and constrained on the reporting on sensitive gender issues. J. Chang and Ren (2017), in their critical discourse analysis of gay- and lesbian-related news reports in five mainstream Beijing newspapers, found that homosexuality is almost 'invisible' in Chinese news media: "The resulting scarcity of samples compelled us to resort to exhaustive sampling as we scanned all published reports of the five papers in the period 2010–2015 for the Chinese word of homosexuality (*tongxinglian*)" (p. 323). They also found that representations of homosexual people in Chinese mainstream news media are tainted with ideas of sin and perversion.

Local reporters, editors and producers live and work in the communities they report on and this may affect their reporting. The media workers of P City's television station and newspapers told me they have their own understanding of 'local' and what the local people in P City think and need. They tried to define 'local' in their own words and used it to justify not covering sexual harassment news in their newspaper. This was their way of saying that if these issues happen all over the country and the world, some other media can cover them; as local media, they are not obliged to do so. And while they preferred to report local news, not all local news is equal. Controversial local news is not suitable, and only uncontroversial local news that meets their criteria of news-

making is worth reporting. In other words, local newspaper reporting is not a simple reflection of the social issues and facts, but a manifestation of the scale-determined cultural sensibility on moral issues that influences the public's attentions towards certain issues.

As for the local media operating on the ground, Chinese journalists' daily practices are negotiated between the powers of the state, the market, and culture. A 'good story' is one that is at least partly defined by local journalists' political and social concerns, and its contents should fit the needs of people living in the city and adjacent countryside. Journalists have a 'parameter' in their mind by which to measure news value and, more importantly, a sense of the political, national and international issues that may be too sensitive for local media to cover. Minor corruption cases, local human-made disasters, mass entertainment, consumer advice, stock analysis, and financial reports are politically safe and economically more rewarding. Most interviewees described the censorship on political sensitive contents as a 'parameter' in their work routines, but none overtly questioned or criticised it in their professional work as journalist.

As scholarly studies show, regional media fulfils functions beyond the simple provision of information; it works as a focal point for community connection, cohesion and education (Hanusch, 2015). Like the metropolitan media outlets, small local newsrooms focus on producing local news, being close to the audience, and supporting advocacy and community togetherness. PTV has three channels: news channel, public service channel, city's lives channel. Looking through their news contents, very few international news and the national news reports are selected from livelihood (*minsheng wenti*) perspectives to serve the needs of the local audience. As a government-led media outlet, the promotion of the local government is their main focus.

However, there were no news reports of the three gender-related news events in any PTV program. Local journalists and editors explained the absence by saying that these kinds of news are not what the local audiences care about or want to see. Han, a female television program producer of PTV said:

> We choose news topics that matter to local people, such as health insurance. These gender issues, are just like the topic about anti-corruption, it is just too difficult to handle for us, there will have bad influence (if we report them not careful).

The news topics preferred by local media are those directly relevant to the lives and lifestyles of regional audiences. In other words, political consideration trumps all.

Along with state power and censorship, traditional culture influences journalists' considerations of gender-related issues. In my talk with MX, a senior journalist in the *P City Daily* who had working experience in a provincial city newspaper (as discussed in Chapter 5), she said that, compared to the big cities, the patriarchal culture and conservative values are more deeply embedded in lower tier places with relatively small populations and networks such as P City. She said that in small cities people and local media do not feel comfortable discussing negative news and potentially sensitive topics that may have a bad influence on social harmony or stability, such as an official's corruption or sex-related matters: "These issues will involve many people and institutions, which will bring bad influence for us. As journalists in a small city newspaper, we have to consider the 'local protectionism'".

I find MX's response interesting. Even though she displayed gender consciousness, she did not see the need to advocate for women's perspectives. Her consideration of 'local sensitivity' trumps her gender politics and she seems to have internalised the views of her male colleagues. In the previously

mentioned international and national sexual harassment cases, the *P City Evening* newspaper was prepared to report on happenings in other provinces and countries but not to either send a journalist to cover news that happened just 100 kilometres away or give their famous ex-employee Zhu a phone call. A reason for this lack of media coverage may be the cultural way of dealing with sex-related scandals. In contrast to the 'group structure' of modern Western societies, the basis of Chinese society has been described as a "network constituted by personal connections" (J. Chang & Ren, 2017, p. 335). The relatively small circle of people in their city is an important consideration for local journalists. The Zhu case could have brought profit in short term, but cultural influences together with state control overruled such market considerations

The ascetic tendency of traditional Chinese moral culture to regard sexual topics as indecent and frivolous may have led to the general silence on sexual harassment issues (Tang, 2001). During my fieldwork at P City's television station and newspaper, I noticed that media workers were sensitive about sexual harassment and gender issues. Many interviewees looked uneasy when they heard or spoke of the word 'sex' (*xing*) and would use other words instead of 'sexual harassment' (*xing saorao*), such as 'this kind of thing' (*zhezhong shiqing*). Some would lower their voices to appear more serious when we talked about this topic, even when only two of us were in the room.

The factors determining the choice of topics for local journalists are complicated, but according to Wanning Sun (2013), it is the "spatial scale determines that certain sensibilities governing one's conduct and socialisation are preferable to or more acceptable than others" (p. 70). The cultural differences between big cities and small cities result in the different attitudes of their residents and media workers towards the news of sexual harassment. A male editor of the *P City Evening* newspaper said:

> As a city-level news organization, our audiences are live in this small city. We have to meet our audiences' demands for the types of news ... But it is not easy, because there are elder people, children etc. ... Some topics they just cannot accept.

In media workplaces, women journalists seem to have internalised the patriarchal culture's gender consciousness; it is not just gender policies that empower women, but also their own levels of gender awareness. I found that the female media practitioners in P City had a lower level gender awareness than those in the major cities in developed regions. For some, as long as there is no pornography in advertisements, then there are no signs of gender discrimination. Pornographic material remains largely hidden under the strict control of government, however, gender stereotyping is increasingly being brought into the open.

In my interviewees with local media workers, I found most had little understanding of gender related words and their definitions, such as 'sexual harassment', 'gender stereotype' and 'feminism', and only a few knew of the #MeToo movement and the alleged sexual harassment news appearing on Chinese social media. As Lü (2017) says, the issues of sexual harassment are still be denied by the people in power and wider society in China and some still hold to the idea of blaming women's 'improper' behaviour for men's actions. As discussed in Chapter 4, the local media institutions lack regulations to cope with sexual harassment in the workplace. The policies and procedures in the government institutions such as municipal television stations are insufficient to both investigate the issue of sexual harassment and take appropriate actions.

Under heavy censorship online and offline from the party state in China, many alleged sexual harassment cases during the China's growing #MeToo campaign in 2018 did not got much attention from the public and the press.

Dozens of victims shared their stories but the names of some famous alleged abusers were not discussed on the internet, and due to the lack of legal support in China's law system of sexual harassment, most cases did not end up with judicial process. The *Dahe Daily* journalist's case allows us to understand why silence still tends to prevail on issues related to sexual harassment and to discrimination against women in general. My aim in discussing this case is not just to make the point that some cases of sexual harassment don't get reported; rather, I want to draw attention to some of the factors that conspire to the general silence on this matter, namely, political sensitivities, cultural sensibilities, and fear of exposing something or somebody that is close by. I also want to shed light on the thinking (on the part of editors, both male and female) behind decisions to leave it untouched.

It needs to be said that because not every one of the six sampled metropolitan newspapers covered all three news stories about sexual harassment, this does not mean other media did not cover them in the major cities. For instance, Guangzhou city had more than 10 published newspapers in 2018, and although the *Guangzhou Daily* and the *Yangcheng Evening Newspaper* did not cover the news about Morgan Freeman, people in the city still could access the print story from the *Southern Metropolis Daily*, which used a large section to report this news on their second page in its 26 May 2018 issue.[7]

The sampled newspapers represent only a small part of each city's media market. Several national magazines had special issues about the #MeToo topic or sexual harassment issues, for instance *Life Week* magazine (issue 2018-4), *Vista* magazine (issue 2018-5), and *Moview* magazine (issue 2019-10). Given their relatively high prices, the readerships of these magazines are targeted to the middle class that aspires to high culture (Louie, 2012). The first-tier cities are the

[7] available at: http://epaper.oeeee.com/epaper/A/html/2018-05/26/node_9428.htm

main circulation market than the small, bottom-tier cities in China (Tian & Cui, 2011). Most people in bottom-tier cities such as P City are disadvantaged since they are less likely to access the modern lifestyle national magazines that target middle-class readers in urban China. If the people living in the small cities or rural areas want to know about the #MeToo movement or sexual harassment news happening in China, they have had to go beyond the local media to access media content that is not easily available or bypass the heavy censorship online.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter provides cross-level comparisons between how the media in Tier-1 or Tier-2 cities and Tier-3 or Tier-4 cities operate by juxtaposing the textual and institutional strategies of Chinese traditional media with news reports on sexual harassment from municipal newspapers in the first-tier cities Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou against those of the bottom-tier P City. It also explores how political, economic, and cultural forces interacted to shape the practices of Chinese newspapers covering alleged sexual harassment news during the #MeToo campaign.

The various framings in the newspaper articles reveal how different forces shape the ways traditional media and journalists select, mould and present news. Their portrayals of social issues help shape the public's perception and judgement by predisposing them to interpret the social issue of sexual assault through the prism of the journalists' built-in values and perspectives (J. Chang & Ren, 2017). This analysis of news reports of three #MeToo news cases from eight Chinese newspapers shows that local media in bottom-tier cities may be more cautious on sensitive issues such as sexual harassment than newspapers in major cities.

But my discussion also cautions against generalization. For instance, in some cases, local media may have more freedom to cover news stories of the #MeToo movement than metropolitan media. Under the strong political control, while most Chinese media waited and published their reports after the official statement from SYSU, yet the political censorship loose at a time in the local media organization created a space. The report appeared in the *P City Evening* paper when this news is only a widespread online article and highly censored online. The sexual harassment news of the different media levels reflect not only their differences and similarities when covering such topics, but also the complexity of the tripartite powers.

Political and market forces often work in tandem in the social construction of gender-related news, but when they clash, politics takes priority. Mainstream media used the same official news source on the international #MeToo movement and reported the SYSU news with caution when it broke online. It also seems fair to say that traditional cultural values seem to have more sway in shaping the content of the local media of Tier-4 cities. Unlike in other metropolitan papers' international pages, the editor of the *P City Evening* newspaper played down the control of political issues and let the market forces frame the Morgan case as a Hollywood scandal in its entertainment pages. However, it is clear that we should also pay attention to the news that did not appear in the media. During the Chinese #MeToo movement, many alleged sexual harassment cases were not reported in the Chinese mainstream media because they had received heavy censorship, both online and offline. In other words, the silence surrounding this issue speaks resoundingly of the oppressive discursive environment in which the narratives of female empowerment and gender equality struggle to emerge.

This chapter has also shown how the scale of place can affect the ways media workers think about sensitive news such as sexual harassment. Journalists in small cities may not yet have sufficiently strong gender awareness; and it may be their media organisations' institutional need to comply with the interplay of the market, the state and the culture that determines their conservative content. Within the heavy censorship environment of the #MeToo on the Chinese Internet, local media did not forget their main role as a Party-led media is to maintain social stability. At the same time, compared to metropolises in China, these places have conservative cultures and a relatively small people's network. All of these factors contribute to how Chinese local media workers report sexual harassment news. ■

Chapter 7

Conclusion

As I draft the conclusion, another case of alleged sexual harassment has appeared in Chinese social media. On 9 October 2020, a woman student at South China University of Technology (in Guangzhou) claims to have been raped by a professor. An audio recording and some photos are spreading through the internet and attracting attention. In the audio, the woman is seen crying, "Please call the police, he raped a lot of people. He raped me, please help me take a photo and post it on Weibo". The online photos show the woman surrounded by a group of guards within a campus building. Later that evening, the university made a statement announcing this professor sacked for having 'violated professional integrity'. But the professor denied all the accusations.

When I searched for articles about this case in the traditional media outlets of both Guangdong and Henan provinces, I found only a few reports on it, mostly on their online news website or social media accounts. The newspapers and television station in P City were not covering this news on any of their platforms. This case serves as a timely and sobering reminder that the issues of gender inequality, sexism and sexual harassment that I have discussed in this thesis are not likely to go away soon. They remain serious but largely overlooked social issues.

7.1 Empirical Findings

The major finding of this thesis is that media institutions of the bottom-tier cities in China tend to be more conservative in terms of gender relations. Responding to the research questions has been an important intellectual exercise, because it has required me to go beyond the realm of the 'common sense' and accepted wisdom and instead engage in careful, systematic and comprehensive critical inquiry. It is almost a truism to say that small-city people – in China and beyond – tend to have more parochial values and be less open-minded than residents of large cities. But demonstrating how the connection between small places and conservative views has manifested at this specific historical point in time and in a specific national/cultural context was a challenge. And testing this hypothesis through the prism of gender was even more challenging, as it entailed going out of the comfort zone of disciplinary silos to forge conceptual connections with other areas of research. And depending on one's disciplines, researchers may adopt different analytic framework to get at the question of how and why.

Drawing on cultural geography, cultural anthropology and critical feminist media studies, this study has considered the specific ways in which the triple forces – the state, the market and cultural norms – interact at local-level media institutions in China in each of three domains: media institutions, individual media professionals, and media content. By employing multiple research methods in a case study of a bottom-tier city's media institutions, I looked at how spatial scale impacts on gender relations. As mentioned above, a key finding is that media institutions in bottom-tier cities tend to have more conservative gender politics, gender practices, and gender representations. While this empirical finding itself may not constitute a significant research breakthrough, my analytic argument about how state, market and cultural norms interact with scale of place is nevertheless worth highlighting. In other words, my study has demonstrated beyond doubt that media in bottom tier cities such as the P City have more conservative gender politics and gender

practices. This not necessarily because the people in these institutions are inherently backward or have parochial views. More likely, it is because the relatively small geographic scale of bottom-tier cities such as P City makes it unlikely that the state, the market and cultural norms can interact in productive and positive ways to promote progressive views and gender practices. By comparison, media institutions in top-tier cities, while also subject to the same triple forces, may nevertheless be more able to exploit the complicity and tension among these forces to achieve more positive gender outcomes.

During my fieldwork in P City, I examined the three domains in which the triple forces interact to produce gendered cultures, practices and content in its media. With the first domain, the media institutions, I looked particularly the impact of commercialisation on their institutional cultures and their attitudes towards women. The reform of the market economy and media in the 1980s contributed to a decline in the readership and revenues of the traditional media outlets in small cities. The dual imperative of producing media content that is simultaneously politically safe and economically viable has led to the feminisation of the media profession and media content. While this feminisation process has been a general phenomenon and certainly not unique to bottom-tier cities, my research suggests that media institutions in the bottom-tier cities are more much less capable of resisting this process. Feminisation in the media organisations of P City has taken a number of forms, including an increase in 'soft' contents, changes in the employment system to the disadvantage of women professionals, and the expansion of non-journalism work within institutions in ways that not only prevent women from getting ahead in their careers, but also lead to the de-professionalisation of women media practitioners. In the absence of concrete and enforceable gender equity policies, and given the government's reluctance to make gender equity issues a priority on the political agenda, media institutions need to take care of both the 'Party

line' and the 'bottom line' (Y. Zhao, 1998), while reinforcing rather than challenging cultural norms. What I have uncovered is a synergy of the triple forces, with gender equity being relegated to the lowest priority.

The second domain is the lives of individual women practitioners. Women in bottom-tier cities, despite displaying reasonable levels of gender consciousness, face more structural and cultural obstacles in their attempts to negotiate their identities as both women and professional journalists. Many female media practitioners operate within the confines of cultural norms that assume the inferiority of women because of their traditional roles as mothers, wives and daughters. They work in institutional contexts that are also premised on the assumption that women are, on one hand, secondary to men in terms of professional performance, and on the other, extremely indispensable for turning media products into market commodities. It is therefore not surprising that some women journalists, especially those who have acquired reasonable level of gender awareness either through their social media consumption or through their previous experience of studying or working in big cities, share a common desire to 'move up' the geographic scale by leaving the small cities and going to big cities. Ironically, this awareness that things could be different elsewhere while being unable to leave due to their perceived need to fulfil their expected gender roles leads a widespread feeling of being 'stuck'.

The third domain in which I interrogated the interaction of the triple forces is gender-related news content. Through comparisons between P City's local newspaper with their counterparts in the first-tier cities, I have illustrated the complex ways political, economic and cultural forces influence the construction of news coverage of sexual harassment issues in the media in different geographical scales. Where once the political and market forces used to work in tandem in Chinese media's coverages, now the political are prioritised. While bottom-tier city media outlets are relatively loosely controlled by the political

forces compared with the metropolitan media in the major cities, their traditional cultural values may exert more influence on local media than in top-tier cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou. Hence, the context of spatial scale can also explain why media institutions and journalists present the news differently in these locations.

7.2 Contribution to the field

The research design of my study is informed by the research questions, which are concerned with how place interacts with gender to inform local media practice, media production, and media culture. To address the overarching question, I examined the interplay of place and gender by situating it in the tripartite framework of state, market and cultural norms. There are, of course, other ways the same question could be approached in further research. For instance, researchers might conduct an audience analysis to learn how gender and place get played out in the consumption of media content. In a comparative analysis of readers' surveys between two cities – the national capital Beijing and a remote provincial capital in Southwest China, Kunming – H. Lee's (2010) study revealed the different newspaper readerships' reception of sensitive political news events in the two cities. Further studies could develop audience research to testify whether the scale of place has relation with the audience's reception of gender issues.

As an English-language systematic analysis that draws together gender, media, and place scale, this study is a small but concrete step towards a more complete understanding of the complex Chinese media landscape. In so doing, it provides an important perspective for Chinese media scholarship, which is mostly dominated by a political sciences approach to structural issues, political control and censorship, and does not pay sufficient attention to how these

impact cultural production. By examining media production, institutional factors and individual perspectives, I have demonstrated how the 'spatial scale' intersects with state, market and traditional culture forces to construct the gender discourses of today's China.

This study also contributes to both media studies and gender studies. I point to the importance of understanding the politics of language and cross-cultural translation. For example, English expressions such as sexual harassment, misogyny, and sexism may not find precise equivalences in the Chinese context. During my fieldwork interviews in the less-developed P City, I soon noticed language issues when asking gender-related questions of people who may not have had a relatively high level of gender awareness or may not culturally accept a direct question about issues they do not know about. For instance, interviewees used different Chinese words to refer to 'women'; instead of using the direct and formal translation of 'woman' as *'nüren'* or 'nüxing' in their daily conversations, the younger generation tended to use '*nühai*' (girls), while the older generation (mostly leaders at the management level) used the word '*nü tongzhi*' (female comrade) when referring to the same group of female employees in their workplaces.

Apart from such language issues, my research also demonstrates the importance of rethinking what constitutes fieldwork data. I argue that what is empirically significant includes not only what is said and not said, but also the manner and circumstances in which certain things are said. Facial and other physical expressions during the conversation can also be informative and should be noticed by researchers. As for some topics that may be sensitive for interviewees to talk about, such as sexual harassment and homosexuality, their reactions can show their reactions to gender-related topics. For example, in my study, some interviewees lowered their voices when talking about sexual harassment issues or even sex-related gossip.

Through a close examination of female media workers in the local media workplace, I have not only gathered material from what they said, I have also been able to discern the possible social and cultural reasons behind their silence about the 'unspeakable' topics published in the news articles of the #MeToo movement. These methodological experiences could be useful for researchers with different language and cultural backgrounds planning to conduct fieldwork in small-scale contexts in China.

Finally, I hope my approach to the study of traditional media and their interface with digital news can provide a productive perspective for future studies of the media sector against the general backdrop of the digital revolution. Although the material I analysed mostly came from traditional media, in order to understand how local media organisations operate, what media professionals think, and why certain content is produced, this study has made use of material from social media in three ways: 1) by looking at what women are saying on social media as private individuals but cannot write about and report on for their media outlets; 2) by looking at how and why certain online content is used and reproduced in traditional media; and 3) by looking from the perspective of the differences between metropolitan and smaller places. I suggest these are innovative approaches for researching the roles and practices of traditional media in the digital era.

This study is interdisciplinary – it draws on geography for concept, turns to anthropology for method and approach, and engages with media studies for its framework. It adds a spatial inequality perspective to media studies by showing how media production, media cultures and media professionals operate differently at the local level in China, and to feminist analysis by showing how the triple forces of the state, the market and cultural norms operate in cultural production. By exploring the interface between media studies and cultural studies, this study not only enriches feminist media studies, it also provides

empirical material that may of interest to geographers working on the relationship between scale and cultural imaginary.

7.3 Final Remarks

While elsewhere in the world people were uniting against sexual harassment through the #MeToo and other movements, my interviewees in P City knew little about them. Some were even quite adamant that the Chinese women they know receive equal treatment with Chinese men. For example, a male journalist said to me: "You know that Chinese women don't have to take their husband's surname after they married, isn't this proved that we are living in a better place than the Western counties?" Despite this perception, statistics tell a different story. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Reports indicate that China's ranking has increased from 63 in 2006 to 106 in 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2018, 2019). These rankings, along with the higher male to female sex ratio at birth, reveal the slow improvement of China's approach to gender inequality and the status of women compared with other countries (B. Chen & He, 2020). Recently, on 1 October 2020, Chinese President Xi Jinping at a high-level meeting on the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women at the 75th UN General Assembly, noted that protection of women's rights and interests must become a national level commitment. This seems give us hope for continuing improvement.

I embarked on this research journey in the hope of making sense of this discrepancy between what goes in P City and the wider world 'out there'. I was motivated to find out what people in P City might say about the #MeToo movement and sexual harassment issues generally. It was only after I began pursing this question that I became aware of the possible relationship between geographic scales and levels of gender awareness. As I have said in the Chapter

1 Introduction, by taking on this project, I wanted to learn how to engage with a globally resonant critical language in order to understand and account for the media practices in the city that I thought I knew very well. As I come to the end of this doctoral project, I realise that my intellectual journey may have only just begun. Meanwhile, I am content with the thought that although the women in P City may not be immediately empowered this thesis, it may contribute to a better understanding of how gender inequality intersects with the political economy of place in China and elsewhere. ■

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Appendix A: Ethics approval email

Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au

Wed 9/26/2018, 4:43 PM

Dear Applicant

Thank you for your response to the Committee's comments for your project titled, "Gender equality and Chinese grassroots media". The Committee agreed that this application now meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) and has been approved on that basis. You are therefore authorised to commence activities as outlined in your application, subject to any conditions detailed in this document.

You are reminded that this letter constitutes ethics approval only. This research project must also be undertaken in accordance with all UTS policies and guidelines including the Research Management Policy (http://www.gsu.uts.edu.au/policies/research-management-policy.html).

Your approval number is UTS HREC REF NO. ETH18-2467.

Approval will be for a period of five (5) years from the date of this correspondence subject to the submission of annual progress reports.

The following special conditions apply to your approval:

- Approval is subject to receiving the signed org consent letter from the TV station and the newspaper. Data collection must not start until the HREC has a copy of this approval letter.

The following standard conditions apply to your approval:

- Your approval number must be included in all participant material and advertisements. Any advertisements on Staff Connect without

an approval number will be removed.

- The Principal Investigator will immediately report anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project to the Ethics Secretariat (Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au).
- The Principal Investigator will notify the UTS HREC of any event that requires a modification to the protocol or other project documents, and submit any required amendments prior to implementation. Instructions can be found at https://staff.uts.edu.au/topichub/Pages/Researching/Research%20Ethics%20and%20Integrity/Human%20research%20ethics/Post-approval/post-approval.aspx#tab2.
- The Principal Investigator will promptly report adverse events to the Ethics Secretariat (Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au). An adverse event is any event (anticipated or otherwise) that has a negative impact on participants, researchers or the reputation of the University. Adverse events can also include privacy breaches, loss of data and damage to property.
- The Principal Investigator will report to the UTS HREC annually and notify the HREC when the project is completed at all sites. The Principal Investigator will notify the UTS HREC of any plan to extend the duration of the project past the approval period listed above through the progress report.
- The Principal Investigator will obtain any additional approvals or authorisations as required (e.g. from other ethics committees, collaborating institutions, supporting organisations).
- The Principal Investigator will notify the UTS HREC of his or her inability to continue as Principal Investigator including the name of and contact information for a replacement.

I also refer you to the AVCC guidelines relating to the storage of data, which require that data be kept for a minimum of 5 years after publication of research. However, in NSW, longer retention requirements are required for research on

human subjects with potential long-term effects, research with long-term environmental effects, or research considered of national or international significance, importance, or controversy. If the data from this research project falls into one of these categories, contact University Records for advice on long-term retention.

You should consider this your official letter of approval. If you require a hardcopy please contact Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au.

If you have any queries about your ethics approval, or require any amendments to your research in the future, please do not hesitate to contact Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tim Luckett
(Acting) Chairperson
UTS Human Research Ethics Committee
C/- Research & Innovation Office
University of Technology, Sydney
E: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au

REF: E38

Appendix B: Interview questions

A) Filing data ☐ Television ☐ Newspaper

1. Date:

2. Number:

3. Job category:

☐ junior journalist ☐ junior editor ☐ middle-level manger ☐ host

☐ senior journalist ☐ senior editor ☐ decision-making manger ☐ others (_____)

4. Gender:

5. Age:

B) Role and experience at PTV/P newspaper

6. What is your job content and position in PTV/P newspaper?

7. How long have you been at PTV/P newspaper?

8. Why did you decide to work for PTV/P newspaper?

9. What is your educational background?

C) Recruitment

10. What was your experience of the recruitment process? More generally, how do you think gender plays a role in the recruitment process, in relation to your colleagues or yourself?

11. Do you think the HR and the management departments prefer male

applications than female? If so, could you give more details? If no, could you talk about the reason and your opinion?

D) Contract/salary system

12. What is your contract type with the station?

13. How is your salary and real income?

14. How do you think gender played a role in payment by your employer, in relation to your colleagues and yourself? If so, could you give more details? If no, move to next question.

E) Content arrangement

15. What was your experience of job arrangements? More generally, how do you think gender played a role in the job arrangement, in relation to your colleagues or yourself?

16. Do you think female journalists themselves prefer to choose work on 'soft content'? If so, can you give more details?

F) Advantage/disadvantage

17. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a female journalist?

18. How do you think the age and physical appearance played a role in the career, in relation to your colleagues and yourself? If yes, could you give me more details? If no, move to next question.

G) Family/children responsibility

19. What is your marital status?

20. Do you have children?

21. Do you experience the challenges of balancing home and work lives? If so, can you give me more details?

22. Do you experience pressure under the 'two-child' policy? If yes, can you give me more details about the pressures? If no, move to next question.

23. What is the maternity leave policy in the station?

24. Would maternity affect income and your career advancement?

H) Career advancement/senior position

25. How are your career advancement options?

26. Do you think male and female have same opportunity for senior positions in your station? Why do you think so? Could you give more detail about it?

27. What is the gender ratio between females and males in senior and decision-making positions in your station/news office?

28. Have you heard of the term 'glass celling'?

29. Can you describe your understanding of the term 'glass celling'? Do you think there has 'glass celling' in your station? If yes, can you give more details?

30. Do you think having a male or female boss will have different leadership effect for you? If yes, could you provide more details/ If no, could you give the reasons?

I) Unions in the station

31. What are the roles of the Women's Federation and Trade Union in the stations/office?

32. If you experienced unequal treatment or sexual harassment at work, would you tend to them for help?

J) Gender awareness

33. How do you describe your work environment?

34. Can you describe the ways you are treated by male co-workers and male news sources (who providing news information)?

35. Do you think your colleagues have high or low gender sensitivity?

36. How is your view of the state of women in journalism generally?

K) News content and censorship

37. When a major gender-related story breaks, such as 'MeToo' campaign, would you report such news?

38. Why/Why not?

39. (If not) what would happen if you cover that?

40. Do you think working in a higher-level television or media organization in a big city will enjoy more freedom of gender issues?

41. Compare with newspapers in big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, do you think P newspaper has more or less room and freedom on reporting news? Why this is the case?