

Queering Nation/Family: The Movement for LGBTQ Rights in Filial Nationalist China

By

Di Wang

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Sociology)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2022

Date of final oral examination: 11/11/2022

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Myra Marx Ferree, Professor Emerita, Sociology (Chair)

Sida Liu, Associate Professor, Sociology, University of the University of Toronto

Monica Grant, Professor, Sociology

Joseph Conti, Associate Professor, Sociology and Law

Christine Garlough, Professor, Gender & Women's Studies

Gwendolyn Leachman, Senior Staff Counsel at the California Civil Rights Department

Abstract

Why the family is so central to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) movement in China? Guided by this question, this ethnography explores how the LGBTQ movement navigates state-family relation in China. It accounts for the state influence on rights mobilization by treating the “family” as simultaneously a cultural and a legal construct, mingling sets of formal laws, informal norms, and contested practices that define what counts as a family and how a family functions. Empirically, I conducted 15 months of fieldwork in China, from 2016 to 2020, primarily in Guangzhou and Beijing, where many Chinese LGBTQ organizations are headquartered. I limited the sample to Chinese LGBTQ organizations that explicitly engaged in debates around the family. Of these organizations, I selected four national organizations that have established national coalitions or networks of chapters, activists, or professionals.

I conceptualize how the family matters for the institutions, ideas, and individuals in LGBTQ social movements by focusing on two specific research questions: How does the Chinese state actively use family relations to manage and repress challenges from LGBTQ organizations and activists? How do LGBTQ activists strategize about and mobilize through the institutions of family and law to respond to the state’s institutional barriers and active repressions? The dissertation includes the following four chapters:

Chapter One unpacks the Chinese state-family project and contextualizes *filial nationalism* in social movement contexts. From the 1950 Marriage Law to the 2015 Universal Two-Child Policy, the Chinese state has directly politicized the family through explicit mandates on marriage and reproductive control as well as repressive deployment of families as a tool for social stability and national security. I argue that the patriarchal state has constructed and

managed a filial nationalist population in order to secure its authoritarian rule. In addition, this chapter shows how the state-family project has affected people and families that are intersectionally marginalized by gender, sexuality, class and household registration. Lastly, this chapter considers the recent developments of the state-family project which become the conditions of feminist and LGBTQ advocacy for marginalized individuals and families.

Chapter Two focuses on national movement organizations as institutions of social change and proposes the concept *differential modes of mobilization* to understand how the state and family engage in influencing LGBTQ rights. I examine the contingent interconnectedness of the family and other social institutions through Fei Xiaotong's differential mode of association (DMA) theory, which explains social change as a sequence of mutual influence that starts with each person, then their family, their community, the state, and all under the sun (*tianxia*). This chapter shows that Common Language and PFLAG–China (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays in China) anchor their visions of social change for LGBTQ people in differential mobilizing processes. Common Language connects key social sectors to LGBTQ issues, integrating LGBTQ rights into the state-recognized, family-centered “gender equality” framework. Strategizing around filial piety norms, PFLAG–China instead anchors its strategy in sequenced changes from the personal level to the entire society, accompanying LGBTQ people and their families as they work on self-acceptance and becoming agents of social change.

Chapter Three explores how the demand for “single women's” reproductive rights (SWRR) challenges filial nationalism. It examines the coalition-building conditions for reproductive rights under China's authoritarian regime during its transition from an anti- to pro-natalist family planning policy. This chapter shows a *differential coalescing process*, in which Chinese queer feminist activists have driven the coalition to constantly re-center queer women's

lived reality. I argue that these activists' choices among different strategies for challenging China's state-family project and their commitment to rallying others who may differ in their approach have made SWRR a site around which to coalesce in post-2015 Chinese civil society.

Chapter Four looks to the individual activists and asks how it feels to be an LGBTQ activist in China. It examines the sociopolitical costs of becoming an LGBTQ activist in contemporary China in order to highlight the emotion work of these activists in navigating such costs. To capture the emotion work in activism, this chapter proposes a concept of *affective accompaniment* by which organizers following the DMA sequence of change build the relational structure to facilitate an individual's iterative transformation. This chapter found that people join LGBTQ organizations not only for their strategy and vision but also for how it feels like to be part of the organizations' care and support system. Affective accompaniment thus highlights the importance of emotion work in encouraging and strengthening activism.

Overall, this dissertation is distinguished from existing scholarship by: drawing attention to how the state deploys systematic ways of movement repression through family relations; theorizing how social movement organizations choose different modes of mobilization of the state-family relation to advance social change; and considering the emotional parts of being LGBTQ activists to understand how emotion factors iteratively into the relationships among individual activists and the sustainability of overall movement solidarity.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to queer and feminist activists in China: Thank you for your trust, wisdom and accompaniment which makes this piece of work possible. I am grateful for all of you who have shared with me your pain and dreams. I am humbled and honored by witnessing our journeys. Thank you for inviting me to take roots in this struggle. It is by collectively recognizing our pain, we became conscious of our power to fuel our movement forward. You have taught me to not back down and to stand up for what is right. You have held me when I need rest and called me in when I need guidance.

I would love to thank my dissertation committee members, Myra, Sida, Gwyn, Monica, Joe and Chris for their support and guidance. Especially, I would like to thank Gwyn for guiding me to trust my own power, Sida for affirming my passion of storytelling, and Myra for shaping me into the scholar activist that I am today. I also want to shoutout to Jessica Kirsten, my friend, writing coach and editor, who makes my writing journey full of joy.

My gratitude to my queer families in Madison, New York, Guangzhou, Beijing, Chongqing and at FRIDA: It is your friendship and care that helps me survive this process. It is with the love and encouragement from all of you that I have learned to move beyond explaining China to a foreign audience and gradually embraced myself as a storyteller, an activist and a community builder.

My love to my partner, Christine Liu, who has been with me in every step of this work from the proposal, the fieldwork, to now. Your love has made me believe in myself when making hard decisions. I love you baby!

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Data and Method	8
<i>Case Selection</i>	8
<i>Data Collection</i>	9
Sites	9
Individual In-Depth Interviews	10
Ethnographic Observations	10
Chapter One	12
Jia, as in Guojia: Building the Chinese Family into a Filial Nationalist Project	12
<i>Planning the Family, Straight</i>	14
<i>Stabilizing the Family, Securing the Nation</i>	28
<i>From the Margin to the Cutting Edge</i>	39
Chapter Two	45
Differential Modes of Mobilization: Building a National Chinese LGBTQ Movement with the Family	45
<i>The Differential Mode of Association Theory</i>	47
<i>Data and Method</i>	52
<i>Differential Modes of Mobilization in the Chinese LGBTQ Movement</i>	53
PFLAG–China: A Companion Mode of Mobilization	54
Common Language: A Connector Mode of Mobilization	61
Chapter Three	68
Differential Coalescing: (Re-)Building the Coalition for “Single Women’s” Reproductive Rights in China	68
<i>Data and Methods</i>	72
<i>Differential Coalescing in Pro-Natalist China</i>	74
<i>Defining the Reproductive Rights of “Single Women”</i>	80
<i>Coalescing for “Single Women’s” Reproductive Rights</i>	85
<i>Self-Determined Motherhood</i>	86
<i>Living “Single” as a Reality</i>	92
Chapter Four	99
Affective Accompaniment: Caring for the Iterative Transformation of LGBTQ Activists	99
<i>Affective Accompaniment for High-Risk Movement Work</i>	102
<i>Data and Method</i>	104
<i>Navigating the Margins of Liminal Legality</i>	105
<i>Building Affective Accompaniment as Foundational Movement Infrastructures</i>	112
<i>Accompanying Change, Accompanying Difference</i>	114
<i>The Emotional Cost of Affective Accompaniment</i>	120
Conclusion	129
References	136

Introduction

Why is the family so central to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) movement in China? One possible answer to this question is that Chinese society has always valued family. However, this over-simplified answer has not fully accounted for the other important actor in social movement – the state. Treating social movement mobilizations as complex, intersectional, political processes require directly theorizing and situating the family in its specific social relation to the state. This is where my dissertation enters the field of social movement studies.

The institution of the family (*jia*) is critical in governing China. In Chinese, the word “nation-state” (*guo jia* 国家), composed of the characters 国 *guo* (state) and 家 *jia* (family). From the Marriage Law in 1950 to the Universal Two-Child Policy in 2015, the state directly politicized the family both by explicitly regulating marriage and reproductive control and by repressively deploying families as a tool of social stability and national security. To unpack state-family relationality, this dissertation is informed by two key concepts in China’s authoritarian governance. The first is filial nationalism, which Vanessa Fong (2004) defines as a kind of filial devotion to the nation that builds on people’s unconditional loyalty to their parents. The second is relational repression, the term Deng Yanhua and Kevin J. O’Brien (2013) use to refer to the state’s cooptation of the family to demobilize activists. By synthesizing these two concepts, this dissertation argues that the Chinese state cultivates people’s deference to the state by routinely connecting nationalism and filial piety and repressively invoking these concepts to channel the state’s messages through social relations and family members.

The Chinese state relates the “quality” of the population to political loyalty, measured in terms of how subservient people are to the Chinese state and the existing social order. The state’s

family project, then, is a filial nationalist one in which the law, social norms, and demographic structures of the Chinese family all contribute to disciplining the people into a population that reveres the state for providing the material and ideological bases of their own family (S. Wang 2019: 18) and can also be activated to punish family members who fail to fall in line (O'Brien and Deng 2017). Consequently, the state sees any social movement, with any aim of challenge such a family order, as a threat to people's deference to the state. This status quo becomes one of the most important contexts of mobilizing for LGBTQ rights in China.

Family often troubles Chinese LGBTQ people, and consequently, the Chinese state also deploys family relations to control the Chinese LGBTQ movement. A study of the LGBTQ movement requires examining the contingent interconnectedness of the state and the family, as well as the relations of both to other social institutions. Thus, I turn to a classic concept in Chinese sociology—the *differential mode of association* (DMA) theory, Fei Xiaotong's proposal for understanding Chinese society ([1947] 1992). A foundational theory of relationality in Chinese sociology, the DMA sees people as existing in a societal network connected by differentially categorized social relationships. Each person is the center of their own nested, concentric network, where parental and conjugal relationships are the most influential. Following the *Great Learnings* (*daxue*), a Confucian classic on governing, the DMA theory explains social change as a sequence of mutual influences that starts from each person, then changes their family, their community, the state, and all under the sun (*tianxia*) (Fei, ([1947] 1992).

By combining social movement theory of the family with the DMA theory, I propose a new concept: *differential modes of mobilization*. In Chapter Two, I compare two national LGBTQ rights organizations, PFLAG–China (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays in China) and Common Language, to illustrate the two modes of mobilization: *companion* and

connector. Each of these organizations exemplifies an alternative approach to family: the first depends on parental approval for LGBTQ rights claims, while the second criticizes such dependence. When I analyze their strategies in relation to through the lens of DMA theory, however, I argue that these two seemingly oppositional LGBTQ national organizations actually are using compatible modes of mobilization that situate the family in the sequence of change. While PFLAG–China is a companion organization that begins by mobilizing LGBTQ people to gain their families’ support, Common Language is a connector organization that starts by engaging different types of family needs as sectors within the same concentric circle using their common location at the family level to influence the state.

As the differential modes of mobilization approach shows, mobilizing specific spaces within family-state relationality—not the family per se—provides discourses and resources for these organizations to demand that the state respect LGBTQ rights. In Chapter Three, this dissertation dives deeper into another connector organization – Advocates for Diverse Family Network (ADFN) uses a case of its “Single Women’s” Reproductive Rights (SWRR) coalition to illustrate how it goes about coalescing actors across their different causes and movement positions. The term “differential consciousness” has been advanced by Sandoval to explain how each movement’s activists “read the current situation of power and self-consciously” select and implement “the ideological stand best suited to push against its configurations” (2000:60). Adapting and expanding this concept and its implications for social movement scholarship, this dissertation develops a similar process-centered concept focused on understanding coalition building. I call this process *differential coalescing*, and show how coalition feminist and queer activists employ this strategy to create a productive space for different social movement interests to interact dialectically with each other. This differential coalescing has effectively rallied

individuals outside any specific movement organization as well as diverse movement organizations to advance a queer-women-centered agenda for change in China's pro-natalist transition.

In Chapter Four, taking my own emotional turn in writing about social movements, I started to ask, "how does it *feel* to be an LGBTQ activist in China?" Empirically, I came back to PFLAG–China and its companion mode of mobilization. China's LGBTQ movement operates in a context where activists' financial reward is low, but their political risk is high. Care and support are among the few benefits that these social movement spaces can offer. For that reason, the emotions of LGBTQ activists in China are an integral part of understanding how emotional labor is critical for the relational structure among activists and the sustainability of the companion approach to personal transformation as a strategy of mobilization.

Building on the scholarship about mobilization in high-risk contexts, this chapter discusses the emotional aspects of high-risk movement work and examines interlocking affective support within a marginalized group. It addresses the iterative part of activists' journeys, conceptualizing care as an affective and mutual process for both givers and receivers. To describe how emotion affects social change, I propose the concept of *affective accompaniment*, which captures the emotion work that makes the companion mode of mobilization possible. This concept stems from the affective approach to social movements, which argues that emotions have the power to reshape social orders (Gould 2009). Affective accompaniment suggests that people do not only join an organization for its strategy and vision but also because of how it feels to form part of its care and support system. These findings reveal the dynamic and nuanced relationship between emotions and movement solidarity—even when people do not agree on

advocacy strategies, their shared values of care has brought people together despite their differences.

In conclusion, by analyzing *jia*, as in *guojia*, this dissertation conducts a feminist sociological inquiry that puts the Chinese family back into the state and considers the impacts of filial nationalist project on the LGBTQ movement in China. It shows how the connection between *jia* and *guo* is at the core of Chinese state rule, facilitated by the key strategy of building a filial nationalist population. The experience of LGBTQ activists has demonstrated how much the Chinese state has invested in managing and maintaining the family as a relatively stable and heteronormative unit. Equally important, because the connection between *jia* and *guo* is highly politicized in China, LGBTQ activists have turned this connection into a productive site for promoting social change centered on the family, such as anti-domestic violence, reproductive rights, parenting and so on.

Overall, differential modes of mobilization, the central concept of this dissertation, facilitates understanding the relationality among the state, the family, and social movements. This theory can benefit social movement studies in China and abroad in three ways.

First, the practices of differential mode of mobilization have demonstrated two key movement strategies – *differential coalescing* as a connector and *affective accompaniment* as a companion. *Differential coalescing* enables scholars to systematically consider reform and radicalism as complementary rather than oppositional to each other. This theory highlights how strategies that combine reform and radical claims is a powerful asset that can bring a social movement demand into the center of political debate. With the repression and censorship that movements face in China, overt radicalism is not possible so that ADFN activists have to invent a covert way to be radical: differentially coalescing with different causes, while presenting even

radical claims in terms that can be accepted as discussable reforms. In a less repressive contexts, “signaling” radicalism can compete for attention with pragmatically plausible strategies, making “radicals” (people who value the theoretical consistency and/or identity as radicals) fight with “reformers” (people who are willing to compromise to achieve what they acknowledge to be only partial successes) (Ferree 2004). In China, with the high level of repression, radicals and reformers can hardly afford to fight, which encourages radicals to find ways to cloak their concerns in the modest language of reform. This self-conscious strategy is what I call differential coalescing and it facilitates broad coalitions among diverse interests.

The concept of *affective accompaniment* contributes to social movement scholarship by theorizing the radical qualities of activism under repression outside a binary of legal versus illegal actions. It centers significance of emotion work within the companion mode of mobilization and highlights nonlinear and iterative processes of activist transformation within this approach. Thus, affective accompaniment recognizes how activism under a repressive government requires activists to cautiously navigate liminal spaces and constantly (re)negotiate the legality of their actions. When done carefully by organizers, affective accompaniment plays a critical role in maintaining people’s commitment to social movements, despite the lack of civil society space and any explicit policy wins. Through affective accompaniment in a movement care and support system, activists come to empathize with each other’s struggles, frequently celebrate each other’s work, and deepen their commitment to the LGBTQ rights cause, despite their possible strategic differences.

Second, the differential modes of mobilization approach enables scholars to systematically consider the types of relationality and social institutions that have constructed the macro context. As with the Chinese state-family relations, attention to institutional relationality

can help explain the impact of relations between organized religion and the legal system in LGBT religious activism in the United States (Kane 2013). The relational approach to how movements use ideas can illuminate how conservative ideologies and networks gain status and influence through international human rights mechanisms, for example rebranding opposition to LGBTQ rights as “protecting children” (Ho 2008).

Additionally, differential modes of mobilization add to the scholarship on rights mobilizations outside Euro-American experiences. For instance, the relationality in differential modes of mobilization can speak to how First Nations see the interconnections among people and social institutions as a spider’s web (Cohen 2001). Differentially mobilizing state-family relationality can also help conceptualize how militant motherhood has been strategically deployed to secure women’s ongoing presence as political actors in re-democratizing Latin America (Mooney 2007).

Third, this concept of differential mode of mobilization can potentially be used to evaluate China’s global influence on rights mobilization. It is important to consider differential modes of mobilization in considering how international politics may shift transnational mobilizations, not just domestic ones, when non-Western states, such as China, seek to exert global influence. The Chinese state has proactively tried to shape social movements on its own terms both internationally and domestically. For example, recent scholarship on HIV/AIDS movements shows that the Chinese state has responded to transnational interventions by strategically reformulating its local movements to comply with international norms (Long 2018). Thus this dissertation helps unpack China’s position as an emerging global power that can shape discourse and privilege certain types of mobilization over others.

Data and Method

Case Selection

This dissertation starts with question why the family is so central to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) movement in China. In Chapter One, I have conducted a review of the development of Chinese law and policy over family and pointed out the state's effort in controlling family which makes Chinese family central to Chinese politics. In the following three chapters, this dissertation continues such inquiry by presenting how family becomes the dominant focus despite internal contestation over strategies among national organizations. Thus, my sample is limited to LGBTQ organizations in China that have explicitly engaged in family rights claims. This choice excludes some organizations with similar capacities that are well-funded, service-based organizations (for example, those working on HIV/AIDS, which often exclusively centers upon gay men and their healthcare needs) (Bao 2018; UNDP and USAID 2014). Among all these family rights organizations, I center on national organizations that have either established networks of chapters, activists, or professionals, or that have invested in fostering national coalitions. National social-movement organizations under authoritarian regimes, as alternative associations outside the state, are a productive site of inquiry for state-society relations. This is because these national organizations usually have to deal proactively with the state to manage their networks' higher likelihood of being targeted by the state's systematic oversight and crackdowns. Compared with more local and individualized actions, for example, they are more likely to be monitored by police and national security agents, and to face regular check-ins with those state agents (Fu 2017; Wang and Minzner 2015). These interactions are key to investigate state-social movement dynamics.

Many LGBTQ organizations in China were established in the 2000s. Based on my preliminary research in 2016 and ongoing dissertation fieldwork in 2018, only four national organizations have worked substantially on LGBTQ family rights. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays China (PFLAG-China) is a national organization with local chapters that work with heterosexual parents of LGBTQ children. Advocates for Diverse Family Network (ADFN) is a national network which has spearheaded the demand for queer inclusive reproductive rights since 2015. Common Language is a leading LGBTQ organization for combating anti-domestic violence through legal and cultural advocacy, and has built a national network to support local organizations, especially those are led by LBT activists. Rainbow Lawyers is the first national coalition of legal professionals for LGBTQ rights, which helped a gay couple bring the first and only same-sex-marriage lawsuit against the state in 2016.

Data Collection

Sites

This dissertation includes two local sites in China—Beijing and Guangzhou. Both metropolitan areas are home to the four national LGBTQ organizations in China working on family rights: Common Language in Beijing, PFLAG-China and Rainbow Lawyers in Guangzhou, and ADFN in both Beijing and Guangzhou. I completed preliminary research in both sites in 2016, and I completed the dissertation fieldwork at both sites from 2018 to 2020, which I have spent more than six months at each site. During each six-month period, I resided in each city and followed the daily operations of each LGBTQ organization. I visited each organization's office on a regular basis and participated in all organizational activities to which I was allowed access, including litigation, film screenings, staff trainings, and outreach events. To balance the depth and breadth of my data on four organizations, I prioritized in-depth interviews

of activists over on-site observations and organizational archives and focused on the questions that I cannot access somewhere else.

Individual In-Depth Interviews

Given the short history of Chinese LGBTQ activism (beginning in the 2000s) and restricted civic space for activism in China, there are limited numbers of LGBTQ activists, four national groups and approximately 40 local groups working on LGBTQ family rights. This estimate is derived from my informal conversations with contacts in national organizations. To keep the sampling manageable, I reached out to the whole population of activists, either as paid staff or regular volunteers, who are currently working or have worked in at least one of the four national organizations. With these activists as the core, I reached out to other people referred by these activists. As a result, I have interviewed 89 people during my field work.

Ethnographic Observations

The ethnographic component of this dissertation was carried out both online and offline, focusing exclusively on the four national organizations under study. Before entering the field, I have established agreements with each organization to conduct onsite observations. I observed the interactions that take place in organizational offices, as well as workshops, speeches, and social spaces run by these groups and activists. For on-site observations at each national organization and their events, I have documented 1) Where these national organizations were located (e.g. at which district, by which subway lines and in what kind of building); 2) What kinds of people had easy or difficult transportation to them; 3) How these organizations used different sets of tools (e.g. smartphones, social media networks, mobile pay methods, and other software) that were differently available by class; 4) How the office or event space was equipped. In addition, I collected all available national organizational publications when visiting

their offices, including national organizations' reports to funders, materials for constituents, policy recommendations, litigation materials and media/social media posts. When reviewing these all materials and paid attentions to how LGBTQ organizations framed LGBTQ rights and whether and how family was mentioned.

Besides physical offices, digital communication has become a common practice in social-movement organizations. Since online surveillance is intense in China, national organizations rely on digital communication with various levels of security in their daily operations. This study is mostly interested in how these organizations present and construct LGBTQ family relations to mobilize the public and assumes there is an active state surveillance. Thus, I asked only for access to their open-source chatrooms oriented to distributing information to the public, and volunteer chatrooms hosted on state-sponsored software, whose security level was considered the lowest. This dissertation treats these two online spaces as natural focus groups, where people discuss issues related to the organization's cause or daily operations. Connecting my online and offline observation, I seek to identify the mechanisms by which each organization connects family rights, people and the Chinese state to each other in its daily operations.

Chapter One

Jia, as in *Guojia*: Building the Chinese Family into a Filial Nationalist Project

The institution of the family (*jia*) is critical in governing China. In Chinese, the word “nation-state” (*guo jia* 国家), composed of the characters 国 *guo* (state) and 家 *jia* (family). To sustain its authoritarian legitimacy, the Chinese state acts in concert with the patriarchal family; both institutions are grounded in paternalistic cultural norms. As far back as the late Warring States period (475–221 BCE), *Da Xue* 大学 (*Great Learning*), a Confucian classic on governing, emphasized that well-governed families and a well-governed state are mutually dependent and reciprocal. In 2019, seventy years after the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Xi Jinping addressed Lunar New Year Greetings to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee and the PRC State Council, declaring that “[we] should promote the unity of love for the family and love for the nation to make everyone and every family contribute to the big family of the Chinese nation.”¹ The state also guides the “quality” of Chinese families through the law, which often saddles women with more burdens and responsibilities than it does men. From the Marriage Law in 1950 to the Universal Two-Child Policy in 2015, the state directly politicized the family both by explicitly regulating marriage and reproductive control and by repressively deploying families as a tool for social stability and national security.

China is not the only state with an interest in controlling its population and regulating reproduction. Yet Chinese family law and policy are a distinct example of how a strong state uses the law to shape its population of billions of people, reallocate resources among urban and

¹ See the full transcript of Xi Jinping’s 2019 address at Xinhua News, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2019-02/03/c_1124084002.htm [in Chinese].

rural families, and channel state repression through individual families. Indeed, one cannot understand Chinese law and society without understanding the Chinese family as a state project. To unpack this state-family project, this chapter asks how the patriarchal state constructs and manages the filial nationalist population to secure its authoritarian rule. Through the lens of emerging Chinese feminist and queer scholarship on families, this chapter also questions how this state-family project has affected people and families who are intersectionally marginalized by gender, sexuality, class, and the household registration (*hukou* 户口) system.

This chapter is informed by two key concepts in China's authoritarian governance. The first is filial nationalism, which Vanessa Fong (2004) defines as a kind of filial devotion to the nation that builds on people's unconditional loyalty to their parents. The second is relational repression, the term Deng Yanhua and Kevin J. O'Brien (2013) use to refer to the state's cooptation of the family to demobilize activists. By synthesizing these two concepts, this chapter argues that the Chinese state cultivates people's loyalty to the state by routinely connecting nationalism and filial piety and proactively invoking these concepts to channel the state's messages through social relations and family members. Examining the state-family project through these two key concepts, I argue that, for the Chinese state, the "quality" of the population also relates to its political loyalty, measured in terms of how subservient people are to the Chinese state and the existing social order. Family law and policy are two of the key tools that the state employs to control its population. The state's family project, then, is a filial nationalist one in which the law, social norms, and demographic structures of the Chinese family all contribute to disciplining the people into a filial nationalist population that reveres the state for providing the material and ideological bases of the family (S. Wang 2019: 18) and can also be activated to punish family members who fail to fall in line (O'Brien and Deng 2017).

I begin this chapter by reviewing how Chinese family law and policy have enforced a heteronormative ideal to construct a particular demographic structure: small urban families that produce “high-quality” nationalist children who are the only heirs of each family. This review explores the intended and unintended consequences of these laws and policies. Then, I examine how the state uses this demographic structure to advance its political interests in social stability and, in the Xi era, national security. Finally, the article highlights the social movements of marginalized individuals and families and their struggle to challenge the state-family project. As the title suggests, by analyzing *jia*, as in *guojia*, this chapter conducts a feminist inquiry in order to put the Chinese family back into the state and better understand the filial nationalist project in the PRC.²

Planning the Family, Straight

Since the founding of the PRC in 1949, China has rushed toward a public form of gender regime and then undergone an incomplete return to a more private one. Throughout this process, the state-family project has had an underlying tension: the state sees the family, a macro institution, sometimes as a conservative force at odds with the socialist state’s own agenda for change, and at other times as a source of support and a tool of social control. Meanwhile, it is important to recognize that the Chinese state works in multiple layers, implementing law and policy in both coherent and contradictory ways. However, the Chinese state has never been “liberal” in the political sense of understanding the family as private, individual, or a free choice; instead, the state tries to control reproductive and sexual relationships. At best, the Chinese state

² This title was inspired by Sharon R. Wesoky’s (2015) article, “Bringing the *jia* back into *guojia*: Engendering Chinese intellectual politics.”

has assumed that socialism would resolve gender inequality, as it claimed in the early Mao years. As Wang Zheng (2010, 2017) showed in the history of the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), the state and the CCP allowed some space for feminist state agents to insert women's rights in state politics (Greenhalgh 2001; Liu 2006). At worst, China has practiced what Michael Palmer calls "patriarchal socialism," with the CCP sacrificing its socialist goals of gender equality "in exchange for the political support that would be generated by tolerating rather than attacking traditional family values, with their presumptions that partner violence in the home was a natural and private matter, and that women are inferior beings" (2017, 287).

From its earliest mass mobilizations, the CCP has used the promise of abolishing family oppression to recruit women to join the socialist revolution, but it has not always addressed feminist demands. From the May Fourth movement in 1919 to Mao's China, the CCP's founders formulated revolutionary platforms to challenge the dominant culture, including the patriarchal gender hierarchy. At the same time, the party-state has often reproduced and re-inscribed these hierarchies within the CCP and in its members' personal lives (Gilmartin 1993, 1995; see also Honig's 1985 review). In the post-Mao and post-Deng Xiaoping eras, the state loosened marriage regulations, recognizing it as a private issue (Fu 2007; Palmer 2007, 2017) and decoupling sex and procreation (Davis 2014b). Yet this separation did not pursue or yield a rights-based approach to law and policy on reproduction; instead, it led to bureaucratic population management (Fu 2007). It was only in 2015, after three and a half decades of enforcement, that the state finally replaced its one-child policy with the Universal Two-Child Policy (Zeng and Hesketh 2016). Currently, Chinese law still prohibits hospitals and medical

facilities from offering assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) to unmarried heterosexual couples, single women, and, by extension, same-sex couples.³

Through its marriage law and family planning policy, the Chinese state has invested in managing and maintaining the family as a relatively stable and heteronormative unit. The state employs family law to serve its goal of creating generations of high-quality and filial nationalist Chinese people. Chinese feminists have long criticized the state's laws and social practices for attacking women in both the public and private spheres (Wallace 2019). As Lü Pin, a prominent feminist activist and independent journalist, stated in a 2015 interview with Phoenix New Media, "Women have to fight against both the state and the family. On the surface, the state is constraining the family. In reality, there are mix-and-match exchanges (*goudui* 勾兑) between the state patriarchy and the family patriarchy. Hand in hand, they sell [women] out and oppress women."⁴ In the following sections, this review focuses on the development of marriage law and family planning policy. The marriage law section focuses on the gendered impact of the marriage law, while the section on family policy focuses on the re-stratification of the Chinese population through population planning.

The Development of Marriage Law

Law and policy are contested terrain where different actors continuously attempt to insert their political agendas. Although the CCP is by no means a feminist party, it does allow some space for raising issues about women's rights, especially when the proponents align these rights with

³ See the 2019 report by Advocates Network of Diverse Families on the reproductive rights of single and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women in China:

<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/myzBeCvjg4Bmg2NKRX1puw>[in Chinese].

⁴ See the full Phoenix New Media interview with Lü Pin, October 30th, 2015:

http://news.ifeng.com/a/20151030/46058531_0.shtml [in Chinese].

the party's interests. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the party's commitment to equality between men and women (*nannü pingdeng* 男女平等) was compelling. Chinese women from all walks of life joined the socialist revolution because it offered the promise of breaking away from their families of origin and/or forced marriages; later, after the founding of the PRC, many of these women worked for the ACWF (Min 2011; Z. Wang 1997, Wang 2017; Zhong, Wang, and Bai 2001). These promises to break away from the past and establish a new China provided leverage for these women to force the CCP and the new republic to put women's issues on the political agenda. At a time when China was deprivatizing and celebrating public ownership of the means of production and communal living, women were seen by the party-state as new socialist citizens who should be liberated from backward cultural practices (Zhong et al. 2001). As Wang Zheng (2017) shows, during the early Mao years, many feminist demands for change were included under the umbrella term of "antifeudalism" (*fan fengjian* 反封建). The call for "antifeudalism" was discursively powerful, because during the New Culture movement in the 1910s, the CCP had called for the overthrow of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism, which the party referred to as "three big mountains" (*san zuo dashan* 三座大山). By framing the patriarchal oppression of women as part of Old China's feudal practices, these state feminists deployed antifeudalist claims to push the PRC and the CCP to use their power to address women's rights (Gibbs 2018; Z. Wang 2017).

The 1950 Marriage Law represented one of these state feminists' achievements. In the excitement of founding the PRC in 1949, state feminists took a leading role in drafting the law. Continuing the 1940s' principle of "self-determination" from the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border

Region⁵ (Cong 2013), the 1950 Marriage Law was written to fulfill the revolutionary goal of liberating Chinese women from feudalist family practices. Thus, the legislation terminated the practice of arranged marriage and allowed both spouses to initiate a divorce. In addition, the law favored women's property rights in divorce. For example, Article 23 established that the wife was entitled to her premarital property, which would not be split with her husband in the event of a divorce (Davis 2014b: 565). However, the rationale for granting women these rights was also about enabling women to “take on the new status of socialist citizens” (Woo 2003, 107).

Although this reasoning gave women some rights in a divorce, it also kept the Marriage Law in line with the state's overall political agenda of replacing the family in making marriage decisions and reformulated the purpose of marriage in distinctly socialist terms. As Article 8 of the 1950 Marriage Law stated, “the purpose of the law [is] to be that spouses would form a family in the service of the ‘new society’” (Woo 2003, 107). Consequently, the law's emphasis on serving socialist goals affected people's access to divorce. Because disputed divorces required (frequently exhaustive) mediation by work-units (*danwei* 单位), local ACWF officers, or neighborhood residential committees, people were instructed by the authorities to prioritize the broader political implications of their decisions on marriage and the family over their personal reasons. The law also benefited urban and rural women unequally. Rural women lacked economic security and land rights, access to legal aid, and social support in a divorce; these obstacles to obtaining a divorce persist to this day (Diamant 2000; Hershatter 2004; Li 2015; Ma, Turunen, and Rizzi 2018; Woo 2003; Li 2020). In short, although the 1950 Marriage Law had

⁵ The Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region [shan-gan-ning bianque, 陕甘宁边区] (1937–1950) was created by CCP in agreement with Kuomintang. Its capital was at Yan'an, and the region was named after the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia. It has also been referred to as the Liberated Zone (jiefang qu, 解放区).

feminist intentions, because of its use of socialist terms and the state's overwhelming influence on the law in practice, it ultimately served more as a socialist blueprint for socially engineering marriage than for considering women as rights-bearing individuals who were entitled to freedom of marriage.

In the 1950s, the de-privatization of the family and legal recognition of the right to divorce helped some women, but, at the same time, the patriarchal socialist state depoliticized women's issues. Because of the land reform, many male CCP leaders believed that after the socialist revolution changed private ownership to socialist ownership, men and women would become equal, and so gender-based mass organizations such as the ACWF would become unnecessary (Z.Wang 2017, 65). Consequently, the central political powers in the newly established republic pushed the ACWF aside; eventually, the organization had to reclaim the vestiges of its authority by drawing on heteronormative family discourses.

The 1957 national women's congress work report exemplified the organization's appeal to heteronormative family discourses (Z.Wang 2017, 54–77). With Deng Xiaoping's support, ACWF leaders titled the report “Diligently, Frugally Build the Nation, and Diligently, Frugally Manage the Family, in Order to Strive for the Construction of Socialism!,” which linked the Maoist theory of assiduously building the New China to women's role in homemaking.⁶ In so doing, the ACWF strategically reclaimed women's rights to participate in the state's governing work and preserve its existence, as it also contributed to equating women's political capacity for state governance with heterosexual family management. Ultimately, the law regarded women as

⁶ *Qinjian jianguo, qinjian chijia, wei jianshe shehuizhuyi er fendou!* 勤俭建国，勤俭持家，为建设社会主义而奋斗！ See the full final draft of the 1957 ACWF report: http://www.women.org.cn/art/1957/9/9/art_46_13020.html [in Chinese]. “Diligently, frugally build the nation and manage the family” was also called “the two diligences” (liangqin 两勤).

family managers who served the state's socialist goals but gave them limited rights and state support in carrying out that role. Arguably, this overall strategy contributed to the tendency to hold women responsible for maintaining marriage and reproduction without giving them the right to exercise power in practice, whether in the state system or at home.

As part of a re-privatization process that began in the late 1970s, the feminist-led origins of the Marriage Law have been replaced by patriarchal traditions and the Chinese state has become more aggressive in its practice of "patriarchal socialism" (Palmer 1995, 2017). The 1980 Marriage Law and the Revised Marriage Law of 2001 departed from the state's socialist blueprint of 1950 and recognized the institution as a private (and heterosexual) relationship between two adults (Davis 2014a, 2014b; Palmer 1995). The reintroduction of privatization in China gradually separated people's employment from their communal living arrangements, in which work-units had provided employees' social benefits. At the same time, the state offered only limited support for child care, elder care, and health care for individual family members to replace such work-unit-based care, creating obstacles to women's labor participation (Attané 2016; Wallace 2019). Nor did the state work to eliminate gender stereotypes, even during the Maoist period, when state policy had encouraged women's work outside the domestic sphere (Sargeson 2012).

Since re-privatization, Chinese society continues to ascribe lower social value to women both in the home and at work (Zuo and Bian 2001). Competing with men in the job market in Chinese cities, women confront higher unemployment rates, discrimination in hiring, wrongful dismissal due to pregnancy, forced early retirement, and other forms of discrimination (Attané 2012). According to the ACWF, the percentage of urban women with paid employment dropped

from 76 percent in 1990 to 61 percent in 2010 as a result of gender-based employment discrimination (Attané 2016, 533).

When it comes to divorce, the Revised Marriage Law of 2001 and Provision 22 of the 2003 Supreme People's Court interpretation of this marriage law have departed from the 1950 Marriage Law's support for a woman's right to an equal share of marital property. Instead, the state has strengthened individual property rights within marriage as well as enhancing protection for parental investment in married couples (Davis 2014b; Li 2015; Woo 2003). Because of China's patrilocal cultural practices, this law disadvantages women's access to property in divorce. Parental investment in their children's marriages are driven by the norm that women should marry into families that are wealthier than their families of origin. To respect these arrangements, the groom's parents are expected to pay for the couple's residence as well as to invest earlier in the process to enhance their sons' marriageability in a heteronormative marriage market where there are more men than women of marriageable age (Eklund 2018; Wei and Zhang 2011). Usually, the bride's family is expected to provide less tangible and necessary assistance in return, such as with interior renovation and decoration of the home for the couple. As a result, the failure to address on-going sources of gender inequality within the family means that the legislation will further contribute to women from receiving less than their fair share of household wealth.

Because the law inherently privileges the property rights of the husband and his parents, it also limits women's ability to claim abuse or escape physical, sexual, or psychological violence by their husbands (McLaren 2016). Although the 1980 Marriage Law mentioned preventing the abuse of women and family members, the Chinese state only implemented an Anti-Domestic Violence Law implementing this goal twenty-five years later, on March 1, 2016

(McLaren 2016; D. Wang 2019; Zhang 2009). In other words, women's rights have been attacked by the market, the family, and the Chinese state, both when the state was rushing to establish a public system of production and reproduction and when the state dramatically reverted to a private system after the public one failed (Wallace 2019). The Chinese marriage law also denies marriage rights to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. It does not recognize same-sex marriage, and its limited protection for premarital cohabitation applies only to heterosexual couples. When same-sex couples manage to establish a life together, the Chinese legal system does not treat them like cohabitating unmarried couples but, rather as strangers, which disadvantages them in property disputes and many other respects (Luo 2019).

The Development of Family Planning Policy

Through its revision of the marriage laws, the post-Mao Chinese state gradually moved away from its role in decisions about individual marriages. The state started to recognize marriage as a private relationship between two people and de-linked sex and procreation by promoting family planning. However, the Chinese state has consistently failed to see population control through the lens of reproductive rights, viewing it instead as a demographic problem to be dealt with through bureaucratic regulations (Davis 2014b) and control of individual families as subjects of the state (Wang, Cai, and Gu 2012; Wang, Gu, and Cai 2016). In 1979, when the Chinese state introduced the one-child policy, it noted that having smaller families and “high-quality” offspring was no longer a state recommendation but, rather, a strictly enforced official policy. As Greenhalgh (2008) found, the policy stemmed from a crisis-oriented view that each family needed to “work” to prevent overpopulation from ruining China's political and economic

future. In Deng's China, the state believed it was necessary to enforce population control by downsizing the family and lowering fertility rates in order to accelerate modernization and lift China out of severe poverty caused by decades of economic mismanagement (Davis 2014a; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005; Zeng and Hesketh 2016). After the one-child policy became the authoritarian state's official policy, challenging it became taboo, even when critiques came from within the state or the CCP. Nevertheless, many demographers repeatedly warned that, far from providing a solution, the one-child policy was creating a future demographic crisis in China. These demographers argued that the policy was unnecessary for slowing population growth or speeding up urbanization and cautioned that the approach contributed to skewing the population as well as accelerating its aging, which would hurt the Chinese economy in the long term (Cai, Wang, and Shen 2018; Greenhalgh 2008; Wang et al. 2012, 2016).

Slowing the rate of population growth was only one of the state's goals: the state also wanted to control the "quality" of the population. By permitting only one or two births per couple, families could focus their material and symbolic resources on fewer children. Through these families, the Chinese state could "create a high-quality, competitive workforce and a modern citizenry befitting a global power" and shape "human potential . . . to meet the nation's needs" (Greenhalgh 2010, x, 58).

To be sure, the one-child policy has benefited girls who were the only children in urban families and urban women's labor participation (Fong 2002). Some women, especially urban intellectuals, have taken advantage of this policy to negotiate a small family, which enabled their professional development (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). In return, these women's contributions to household income and to support for their own parents in old age gave them leverage and made them role models for their own daughters with ambitions to gain power

within and beyond the family (Fong 2002). Based on a 1998–1999 survey of 1,040 eighth graders in Wuhan, Ming Tsui and Lynne Rich (2002) found no gender differences in education between boys and girls as only children; they shared similarly high educational aspirations and mathematical performance. Reaching similar conclusions about the education of only children, Ming-Hsuan Lee (2012) also found that urban girls with male siblings attended about 0.62 years less school than girls with female siblings. The share of Chinese women enrolled in higher education rose from 23 percent in 1980 to 41 percent in 2000.⁷ In 2018, Chinese women accounted for 48 percent of undergraduates and 48 percent of postgraduates among the entire population over six years old.⁸

However, a focus on the gendered benefit for urban women is shortsighted and comes at the expense of other women, especially girls with no brothers and mothers with no sons in rural areas (Cao 2015; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005; Shi and Kennedy 2016). Through the policy's enforcement, some women were forced to undergo abortions or sterilizations, and others were divorced by their husbands, who wanted to remarry in the hope of having a son to carry on the family lineage (*chuanzong jiedai* 传宗接代) (Anagnost 1988; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). The Chinese state also politicized such abortions as acts of heroic motherhood to persuade, or even force, women to sacrifice themselves to meet the state's demographic goals (Cao 2015). As the preference for male offspring persisted in China, many girls went “missing” because of sex-selective abortion and female infanticide (Johnson 2016; King 2014).

⁷ National Bureau of Statistics of China, *2001 China Statistical Yearbook*, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2001c/t2020c.htm> [in Chinese].

⁸ National Bureau of Statistics of China, *2019 China Statistical Yearbook*, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2019/indexch.htm> [in Chinese].

According to China's fourth census, in 1990, the sex ratio at birth (SRB) was 108.3 males per 100 females (Coale and Banister 1994, 461). According to the sixth census, in 2010, the Chinese SRB was 118 per 100 females compared with the global average of 105 (Shi and Kennedy 2016, 1018). The fifth census, in 2000, reported that the Chinese infant mortality rate (IMR) was 9 per 1,000 for males and 11 for females in urban areas, but 28 per 1,000 for males and 41 for females in rural areas (Shi and Kennedy 2016, 1023). Additionally, using data from the 1990, 2000, and 2010 censuses, Yaojiang Shi and John James Kennedy (2016) estimated that, since 1982, 10 million to 15 million women in China were registered late or never registered with the state by their parents, which resulted in their lack of a household registration for a significant period. Without a *hukou*, these women could be denied the social benefits associated with it, including access to education, inheritance, marriage registration, and even public transportation.⁹

Even when someone has obtained a *hukou*, having a rural *hukou* has disadvantages. The Chinese urban social welfare system excludes migrants and their children from urban schools, health care, housing benefits, retirement pensions and other benefits from the public social insurance (Gao and Fennell 2018; Zavoretti 2017; Whyte 2010).¹⁰ As a result, in 2010, more than 60 million children from birth to age seventeen were “left behind” (*liushou* 留守) in rural areas when at least one of their parents migrated to the city for better job opportunities, and for 47 percent of the “left behind” children, both parents migrated to the city (Zhou, Murphy, and Tao

⁹ See the Human Rights in China report on household registration: <https://www.hrichina.org/chs/zhong-guo-ren-quan-shuang-zhou-kan/cong-fei-zhi-hu-kou-zhi-du-kai-shi/> [in Chinese].

¹⁰ See the *Deutsche Welle* report on migrant workers and their children's equal right to education: <https://p.dw.com/p/1Cef8/> [in Chinese]; see also the Radio Free Asia report on the 2012 Chinese lawyer-led equal education campaign: <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/aw-07162012171257.html> [in Chinese].

2014, 273). Boys are not more or less likely than girls to be left behind by their parents, but “left behind” boys have suffered more in terms of their educational performance (Zhou, Murphy, and Tao 2014, 273). Media reports consistently show that “left behind” girls run a higher risk of being sexually abused.¹¹ As Michael Palmer put it, “the problem of low-quality births in rural areas is, in the eyes of the Chinese authorities, exacerbated by the relative success of the single child policy in urban areas” (1995, 128).¹² Indeed, as Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005, 256) have pointed out, the family planning policy has stratified Chinese society, adding a reproductive dimension to existing inequality at the intersection of gender and the urban-rural divide.

Between 2013 and 2015, China’s family policy underwent rapid reform. In 2013, the Chinese state loosened the one-child policy to allow married couples to have two children if one partner was an only child. Consequently, this more relaxed family planning is more likely to apply to couples with at least one spouse born with an urban *hukou* during the one-child policy era. On December 31, 2015, the CCP Central Committee and State Council jointly issued the Universal Two-Child Policy, which allows all married couples to have two children. However, throughout the process of reforming family planning policy, the state failed to treat reproduction as a right, viewing it, instead, as a mechanism for strengthening state control over the “quality” of the Chinese population to reverse low fertility rates and optimize the population structure for the sake of the economy (Attané 2016).

The two-child policy perpetuates, and, in some cases, worsens, the problems of the one-child policy. Under the state’s patriarchal-socialist family planning, women continue to receive

¹¹ See the 2015 news report in *Xinjing bao* 新京报 [*Beijing News*], <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/inside/2015/07/13/370435.html> [in Chinese].

¹² For more discussion on how the state discourses on “quality” impact rural women’s labor participation in the market economy, see Judd (2002) and Yan (2008).

limited state support regarding employment discrimination (Liu 2013; Wallace 2019; Yu and Xie 2018) and gender-based violence (McLaren 2016; D. Wang 2019; X. Wang 2017; Zhang 2009). As a result, the new policy gives each family, not individual women, more power to determine women's reproductive responsibilities. Thus, the reform has made women more vulnerable to the heteronormative expectations of marrying early, having children, and focusing less on their careers. A two-child policy that fails to prioritize Chinese women's rights will not raise the fertility rate, regardless of whether state discourse encourages couples to have more children (Attané 2016; Basten and Jiang 2015; Wang et al. 2016; Yu and Xie 2018). Urban professional women and others have begun to voice concern about the consequences of this policy on their careers when their (potential) employers assume they will have two children.¹³ For example, in December 2013, thirty female lawyers in ten different locations in China started an online petition titled “The Petition on Respecting Women, Eliminating the Harm to Vaginas in the Birth Planning Policy and Its Implementation.” The petition was signed by a thousand women and then sent to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the National Health Commission, and the ACWF.¹⁴ As Lü Pin said about family planning policy in 2013:

¹³ See Zhao Sile's op-ed “To Look at Family Planning from a Gender Perspective: A Feminist Discussion on the Family Planning Policy” [fu jisheng yi xingbie: jihua shengyu zhengce de nüquan taolun, 赋计生以性别：计划生育政策的女权讨论] on @FeministVoices, China's largest independent feminist media before it was censored on both Weibo and WeChat in 2018: <https://www.douban.com/note/345026134/> [in Chinese]; see also the report by the Media Monitor for Women Network [Funü chuanmei jiance wangluo] for additional discussion of the 2015 two-child policy, published on Helan Online: <http://helanonline.cn/archive/article/13361/> [in Chinese].

¹⁴ See a news report “China's 12 Feminist Moments in 2013 — An Annual Review on Activist Actions “[2013 zhongguo de 12 ge nüquan shike —— niandu gongkai xingdong huigu; 2013 中国的 12 个女权时刻——年度公开行动回顾] by Sina: <https://cul.qq.com/a/20140123/016754.htm> [in Chinese].

Cleaning up patriarchal culture is necessary for realizing reproductive rights. Otherwise, ending the birth planning policy would mean that, in practice, control over reproduction is passed down from the state to patriarchal families. And this is exactly what these young women are worried about.¹⁵

Stabilizing the Family, Securing the Nation

The Chinese state has invested in building a state-family project, weaving the Chinese family into the social fabric to suppress political movements and preserve the social order. In the context of China's shrinking civil society, one could argue that this state-family project serves to "stabilize the family in order to secure the nation" for two reasons.

First, China has expanded its efforts to maintain social stability. "Stability maintenance" (*weiwen* 维稳) operations have been the state's top priority since at least 1989 (Biddulph 2015; Fu 2016; He 2014; Lorentzen 2017). Analyzing China's new laws on civil society, Diana Fu and Greg Distelhorst (2018) found an escalation in the state's framing of "threats" from civil society as well as domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Increasingly, unauthorized activity by civil society is a matter of national security as well as of social stability. The Xi administration requires foreign NGOs, foundations, think tanks, and trade associations to register with the Ministry of Public Security. Further, compared with the previous administration, Xi's government has significantly increased the number of people convicted of the crime of "endangering state security" (*weihai guojia anquan zui* 危害国家安全罪), which is

¹⁵ See Lü Pin's op-ed "Lü Pin: Reproductive Right Neither Belongs to the Nation nor the Patriarchal Family" [Lü Pin: shengyu zizhuquan, ji bushuyu guojia, ye bushuyu fuquan jiating, 吕频: 生育自主权, 既不属于国家, 也不属于父权家庭], on @FeministVoices: <https://www.douban.com/note/318303806/> [in Chinese].

vaguely defined in the law and often used to criminalize local activists (Fu and Distelhorst 2018). Citing the example of local housing management bureaus' growing responsibility for settling land seizure disputes, Wang Yuhua and Carl F. Minzner (2015) argue that the Chinese state, through the expansion of its security apparatus, has blurred the distinction between security and nonsecurity work. Thus, one could reasonably expect to see more social structures, including the family, explicitly made part of the national security apparatus.

Second, the state is compelled to hide its repressive tactics. Because international society regularly condemns the Chinese state for its human rights abuses, the Chinese state strategically shifts social conflicts away from the public eye (e.g., deploying the police) and into more private channels (Qi 2017) to reconstruct its front-stage performance as a legitimate authoritarian power (Wang and Liu 2020). The Chinese family fulfills this function perfectly. Drawing on the patriarchal norms of filial piety, family law and policy have heightened dependence within families. As those who grew up under the one-child policy continue to rely on their parents for financial and social support, they must wrestle with their parents' expectations and the state messages channeled through them. The state routinely takes advantage of this dependence to discipline young people using filial nationalist ideas (Fong 2004). During outbreaks of social unrest, the Chinese state strategically uses that dependence by mobilizing family members to pacify activists (Deng and O'Brien 2013; Qi 2017). Thus, by structurally incorporating the family into its security apparatus, the Chinese state benefits from people's uneasy and dependent family relationships and can incite or repress their demands, as needed.

Filial Piety and Uneasy Dependence

As discussed above, the Chinese state has moved away from pursuing revolutionary socialist goals to engineer a stabilizing heterosexual Chinese family. In the process, the state has granted each family more authority over its members' life decisions, including marriage, and created the need for families to provide its members with greater social and economic support. Between 1979 and 2015, enforcement of the one-child policy shaped urban Chinese families into a 4:2:1 structure, meaning that the typical urban family consists of a married couple (made up of two adult only children), the couple's four aging parents, and one child (Wang and Fong 2009; Zavoretti 2006; Zeng and Hesketh 2016). As the state failed to actively support families in their state-assigned reproductive and educational roles, each individual family became indispensable for meeting people's socioeconomic needs, including education, housing, health care, and retirement; in the late 1970s economic reform, all of these social services became increasingly marketized (Attané 2016; Kuan 2015; Wallace 2019). In addition, filial piety is deeply ingrained in Chinese society and culture; it functions as a moral code for family relations and creates material reciprocity as well as younger generations' respect for, and obedience to, older generations (Eklund 2018).

The social welfare system became more limited, the labor market became more competitive, and filial piety norms remained strong, presenting the one-child policy generation with significant obstacles in gaining independence from their families. For example, according to data collected from 1993 to 2006, working mothers had their wages cut 12 percent for each additional child they had, but those who lived with their parents—an unusual arrangement in a patrilocal culture—avoided a significant wage penalty (Yu and Xie 2018). The implementation of the two-child policy might introduce an expectation that after women have two children, they will be more likely to rely on their parents for childcare. In addition, the surge in the housing

market after its privatization also reinforced children's dependence on their parents, as they are increasingly unable to afford to live in expensive cities without parental financial support, regardless of whether they are in the urban middle class (Liu 2017; Zhong and He 2014) or are working class (D. Wang 2010). Owning a home in the city can increase one's marriageability in the heteronormative marriage market; this is especially true for men, as the groom's family is expected to provide a residence for the marrying couple (Wei and Zhang 2011). Thus, even though men face less discrimination at work than women, expectations of homeownership before marriage mean that it is not necessarily easier for men to achieve independence from their parents.

The one-child policy generation's increased dependence on parental assistance to meet their socioeconomic needs gives parents more control over their children. This dependence, referred as *ken lao* 啃老 (literally "chewing the elderly"), has negative connotations. In their study on family relationships and filial piety among the parents of only children in Guangzhou (2014), Zhong Xiaohui and He Shining find that these "chewed" parents are willing to invest in their adult children's lives, but they also expect their children to display greater filial piety. These expectations include weighing in on whom their children marry and how to raise their grandchildren, gratitude from their children expressed in terms of financial support in their old age, and sufficient geographic proximity to be able to share "one pot of soup."¹⁶ Thus, young people who think differently and choose alternative life paths become more vulnerable to pressure from their families. Because, as only children, they carry the "only hope" of their individual families and the Chinese state, both men and women in the one-child policy

¹⁶ On the distance to share "one pot of soup," see the *People's Daily* report on Guangzhou and elder care: <http://zj.people.com.cn/n2/2019/1029/c186327-33484268.html> [in Chinese].

generation reportedly suffer from high rates of depression and anxiety caused by the daily pressure to succeed in both career and marriage (Greenhalgh 2010; He 2009; Wang and Fong 2009; Zavoretti 2014). Only children feel much more responsible for their parents' happiness and welfare than those who have siblings (Deutsch 2006).

Public discourse in China often ties filial responsibility for parental well-being to the timing of marriage and choice of spouse. The media constantly label unmarried women as "left overs" (*shengnü* 剩女), and families pressure these women, calling them too picky and encouraging them to lower their standards to avoid failing the entire family as they navigate the marriage market (Liu 2018; Zavoretti 2014; Zheng 2017). This stigma especially attaches to highly educated women (Tian 2013), with single men stigmatized less; when men delay marriage, they are viewed as falling victim to the male squeeze in the heteronormative marriage market (Fincher 2014; Greenhalgh 2012).

In addition, the Chinese state fails to recognize same-sex marriage. LGBTQ people are especially negatively affected by how the 4:2:1 demographic structure intensifies marriage/reproductive pressure because society offers limited support for nonheteronormative relationships and nonbinary identities (Hu and Wang 2013; Jun 2010; Miles-Johnson and Wang 2017; Wei 2019). Lesbian women and gay men face marriage pressure akin to their heterosexual counterparts, which can be deeply troubling for them because they are more likely to find heterosexual marriage undesirable. Because of the gendered expectations of heterosexual marriage, lesbian women might experience more acute marriage pressure, as it is generally more acceptable for men to delay marriage, while gay men might endure more pressure than women to have children so that they can continue the patrilineal line. Reflecting how extreme this pressure is, the 2017 Human Rights Watch report entitled "Have You Considered Your Parents'

Happiness?” noted that many LGBTQ people in China in the one-child policy generation had undergone conversion therapy (including electric shock therapy) to make themselves “straight” for their families; in some cases, their families had forced them to do so (see also Bao 2018).

The state-family project has taken advantage of people’s dependence on their parents. Because filial piety requires people to take into account their parents’ happiness and the honor of their families, the state can use this narrative to force people to consider the Chinese nation their larger family and pressure them to act in the state’s interest. In addition, the authoritarian Chinese state and the CCP have a deep reach into society. For example, the CCP hosts constant training for CCP members to generate ideological coherence (Mertha 2017) and teams up with local elites and leaders of democratic parties to form a united front with the explicit purpose of strengthening the party’s total social control (Liao and Tsai 2019). The state can deploy these asymmetrical connections to control people who depend on the state for their livelihood and that of their family. Building on the moral code of filial piety, political repression, and economic uncertainty, the state-family project fuels China’s expansion of *weiwen* and transfers the responsibility for defending the social order to the broader society. It is increasingly clear that the Chinese family forms part of the domestic security apparatus.

Next, this chapter presents two Chinese governing strategies that use the family to stabilize society and secure the nation—filial nationalism and relational repression. This is by no means a comprehensive account of state practices. Instead, the two strategies discussed here are meant to invite additional research on the state-family relationship and its impact on social movements in China.

Filial Nationalism

The first strategy that the Chinese state employs to legitimate its rule is *filial nationalism*, which Vanessa Fong (2004) defines as a kind of filial devotion to the state that builds on people's unconditional loyalty to their parents. As previously discussed, the state has cultivated the one-child policy generation to change China's economic fate (Greenhalgh 2010; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). These young people see themselves as competitive in the global economy, but they also see China as inferior to other, wealthier countries (Fong 2004). In addition, they have increased access to uncensored information about China, which makes them more likely to question the CCP's accounts of historical events, from World War II to the student-led democratic movement in the 1980s (Li and Li 2017; Zhao 2001). This awareness of critiques of China has made it more difficult for the state to imbue this generation with nationalism. For instance, research has shown that education in Chinese schools about the official history of the anti-Japanese war (1937-1945) has failed to develop nationalism in young students (Qian, Xu, and Chen 2017). In addition, since 2012 young feminist activists in the one-child policy generation have used social media to raise questions about the state's unfulfilled promise of equality between men and women (Tan 2017; Wang and Liu 2020).

As it becomes more difficult to unite the new generation around glorified versions of the CCP's history, the state strengthens people's connections to, and dependence on, their families, combining the moral code of filial piety with state nationalist propaganda. As Eklund notes, in China, it is common to see propaganda billboards with slogans such as "Filial piety runs through the veins of the Chinese people" (2018, 296). As Fong (2004) finds, members of the one-child policy generation can maintain a strong sense of filial devotion to China by resolving their conflicting views of Chinese political and economic problems through the idiom of filial

devotion. Instead of portraying China as admirable, these young people develop a strong sense of protecting the nation, especially against criticism from abroad, and responsibility for building the nation as a global power. Indeed, while young people are encouraged to love the nation as they love their parents, their increasing dependence on their families makes it much harder for them to break away from their parents' control and the nationalist state-family project. As Fong puts it, the powerful foundation of these young people's nationalism is "the belief that they could no more cease to be 'people of China' than they could cease to be their parents' children" (2004, 645).

Although direct evidence of how the state uses filial piety is limited, activist observations of civil society provide meaningful insights into how filial piety and family relationships trouble people's consciousness of their rights and sense of independence. Chinese feminist activists have articulated how families contribute to maintaining social stability. For example, in 2015 Zhao Sile, a feminist activist and writer, wrote an op-ed in the *Oriental Daily News*, a Hong Kong-based newspaper, observing that there are two tasks that Chinese families carry out to preserve social stability.¹⁷ The first task is to nudge their offspring to get married and have children so that they are structurally tied to the family. The second is to push them to work in stable careers. As Zhao pointed out, they do not have the option to be "an NGO worker, a journalist, a writer, an artist, and soon enough, being a lawyer will not be an option, either," a reference to the July 9 crackdown on lawyers that year when more than 200 Chinese lawyers and human rights activists were instigated by the state authorities (Fu 2018). The issues raised by the Chinese feminist

¹⁷ See Zhao Sile's 2015 op-ed "At the Core of Marriage Pressure, it is Family-based Stability Maintenance" [bihun de shizhi shi jiating weiwen 逼婚的实质是家庭维稳] in *The Oriental Daily News*: https://hk.on.cc/cn/bkn/cnt/commentary/20150214/bkncn-20150214000317284-0214_05411_001_cn.html [in Chinese].

movement show that instead of only focusing on cis-normative people in heterosexual relationships and with an urban *hukou*, more research should be done on how filial nationalism affects the marriage and career decisions of marginalized people, such as LGBTQ people, working-class people, and people with a rural *hukou*, as well as how Chinese activists of all genders view filial piety vis-à-vis both their families and the state. In addition, many questions have yet to be explored about how the two-child policy has influenced parental investment in the new generation that is now more likely to grow up with siblings, and how this change will affect intergenerational relations.

Relational Repression

The second strategy the state uses to legitimate its rule is relational repression, which refers to the state's mobilization of people's strong and weak social relations to influence behavior and maintain social stability (Deng 2017; Deng and O'Brien 2013). In their studies of environmental protest (Deng and O'Brien 2013) and urban demolition (O'Brien and Deng 2015), Deng Yanhua and Kevin O'Brien found that some people withdrew from collective action because they were concerned that their participation in protests would cause family members to lose their livelihood or subject their loved ones to other kinds of punishment. Local state agents play on this fear by recruiting family members, close friends, and even superiors at work or school into thought-work teams (*sixiang gongzuo xiaozu* 思想工作小组), which are designed to deter individual protesters from resistance. In practice, these teams are more likely to gain cooperation from family members who are directly subject to state influence, such as local officers, public school teachers, and business owners with government partnerships. Similar

incidents have been documented among people who petition the state (Biddulph 2015, 105) and religious protesters (Luo and Andreas 2016).

Local state agents also mobilize neighbors and the surrounding community against dissidents, thereby using people's fear of social ostracism to target entire families with "thought work." As Deng Yanhua (2017) found in her work on "demolition and relocation" (*chaiqian* 拆迁), local state agents encourage all neighborhood residents to establish small committees and employ shame, guilt trips, and other marginalizing, sometimes violent, strategies to harass recalcitrant homeowners, remove homeowners from their property, and force them to obey state-approved *chaiqian* plans. In the name of respecting people's self-determination about neighborhood development, the state forcibly implements its urbanization policy by relying on the neighborhood's majority of people to police the minority and make their families vulnerable to neighbors' shaming and attacks. This is a sophisticated social-control strategy that uses the weak social ties on which people's well-being depends not only to hide the state from view in repressing popular protests but also to hijack democratic ideas such as community self-determination.

With the advent of a national LGBTQ movement and the increased visibility of LGBTQ people, the state's practice of relational repression has started to incorporate homophobic tactics. Since 2015, local state agents have made it a frequent practice to "out" LGBTQ activists to their parents, on the assumption that doing so would neutralize their activist children.¹⁸

Unsurprisingly, such strategies "successfully" serve the state's interests. In China, LGBTQ

¹⁸ See the BBC report on these cases in 2016 "Petition Demands Apology For Chinese Lesbian Student Denied Diploma": <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36921331/>.

people cite their families as a top concern.¹⁹ It is not unusual for prominent Chinese LGBTQ activists to choose not to come out to their families, to use pseudonyms, and to rely on China's censorship of LGBTQ rights issues to hide their activism from their families. Thus, after Chinese state agents learned that they could disrupt individuals' family ties by "outing" them, they began to deploy this tactic to preserve "social stability." For instance, on August 18, 2015, the first day of a new school year, Qiu Bai's parents found out that their daughter was a lesbian in a phone call they received from her university's political ideology counselor.²⁰ A college student activist, Qiu Bai had sued the Chinese Ministry of Education, challenging its inaction on homophobic school textbooks. According to Qiu, the university threatened to "out" her to her parents if she did not drop the case, and it made good on its threat when she refused to relent. Other incidents like this one suggest the need for systemic research on LGBTQ people's unique vulnerability to the state-family project and the range of state tactics that target LGBTQ activists. Additionally, not all Chinese parents are homophobic, transphobic, or opposed to social movements. In the following chapters, this dissertation will examine how parents and other family members refuse to pass down state messages as well as how parent-led alliance movements leverage their parental authority over their children's reproductive decisions and social responsibility to resist state repression.

¹⁹ See United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Being LGBTI in China," 2016: <http://www.cn.undp.org/content/china/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/05/17/-being-lgbti-in-china-survey-report-launched-.html>.

²⁰ See Rainbow Media Award's reposting of Qiu Bai's story in 2015 "Outed but Supported by the Whole World" [bei chugui zhihou, quanshijie douhuacheng yonggande xingdongzhe, 被出柜之后, 全世界都会撑勇敢的行动者]: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_944d4f3b0102vun3.html [in Chinese]; Political ideology counselor [zhengzhi fudaoyuan 政治辅导员] is a position widely built into China's higher education system since the early 1950s. Political ideology counselors play an active role to monitor students' daily activities and guide students' political ideology.

From the Margin to the Cutting Edge

China is a patriarchal socialist state that is building a filial nationalist population to secure its authoritarian rule. The Chinese state uses the law to affirm and construct patriarchal families and co-opts families to legitimate the state's authoritarian power. Under this state-family project, the Chinese family is molded into an institution that is lawfully reproductive, economically self-sufficient, and politically submissive. The above synthesis of the scholarship on China's family law and policy reveals that the country's legal system is slowly evolving and incorporating some new social issues, such as domestic violence and relaxing the family planning policy, while remaining largely silent and repressive about issues that affect marginalized populations, such as same-sex marriage. At the same time, the rapid development of the national security apparatus makes the family a crucial site for reproducing filial nationalism (Fong 2004) and perpetuating relational repression (Deng and O'Brien 2013).

In this way, the Chinese family has become the foundation of the Chinese state's legitimacy and the social fabric for absorbing inequality and suppressing grievances. To some extent, the one-child policy generation has benefited from the policy; this is especially true for girls in urban areas who have no brothers. In addition, members of this generation are more likely to rely on their parents for essential resources to survive in a competitive labor market with limited state welfare programs. This demographic structure prevents people with a marginalized identity from accessing benefits from both the state and the family.

Nevertheless, where there is oppression, there is resistance. To be sure, resistance always exists in the contested relationship between the family and the state. This chapter focuses on how people are *currently* resisting as individuals and as a collective force. I do not aim to present a comprehensive list of instances of resistance here; rather, the accounts of scholars and activists in

this chapter underscore the need for additional debate about how to understand and engage with the active struggles of individuals, families, and movements in response to the state's heteronormative and patriarchal agenda.

Chinese people on the margins have adopted various strategies for survival in their everyday lives. In response to pressure to enter a heteronormative marriage, women and queer people renegotiate their relation to family using multiple moral and legal codes. In her interviews with single women in the one-child policy generation in Putian, Fujian Province, in 2016, the feminist sociolegal scholar Liu Qian (2018) found that these women decline to marry prospective husbands who do not accept taking care of the woman's parents. This sometimes includes living with the parents. Refusal to marry also implies forgoing childbearing, because the Chinese medical system does not permit the use of ARTs for single women or unmarried couples.

When family law and policy work against these women's interests, they rely primarily on the aspect of filial piety called *qing* 情, defined as an "attitude or behavior [that] is morally acceptable to the public" (Liu 2018, 9), to navigate competing sociolegal norms involved in regulating reproduction. This might mean evading such laws, bending the laws to align with *qing*, or even breaking the law to confirm what they believe to be *qing*. Even relying on *qing* is not necessarily helpful for women, because it frequently represents the interests of the Chinese patriarchal family. Nevertheless, these women's practices still demonstrate their agency in wrestling with the state-family project by appropriating both state laws and family norms to maximize their leverage vis-à-vis the state and their families.

Gay men and lesbian women in China face marriage pressure but do not have the right to marry their same-sex partners. Some of them choose to enter into heterosexual marriages, often without coming out to their spouse; this was especially true before the advent of the national

LGBTQ movement (Bao 2018; He 2009; Hsiung et al. 2013) and the rise of LGBTQ social media (Cao and Lu 2014; Hung 2011) in the mid-2000s. Many scholars and LGBTQ activists have criticized gay men for marrying unwitting women, calling this practice a social tragedy.²¹

However, Zhu Jingshu (2018), a queer legal scholar, cautions against making such ethical judgments and urges scholars and activists to see these gay men's experience in a global sociolegal context: an overarching modern neoliberal project to build the family that makes marriage–love–sex the ideal and makes it difficult to live outside heterosexual marriage. Indeed, the question of whether it is becoming harder or easier for anyone to live outside heterosexual marriage is highly gender and class specific. For example, more research is needed about middle-class gay men's marriage decisions. Under China's current marriage law and social norms, the gendered parental investment in an only child's heterosexual marriage usually benefits men more than women. Thus, these gay men might decide to enter a heterosexual marriage to gain economic power. It is also possible that men who are more financially independent from their parents, irrespective of their marriage status, face more moral pressure from the state-family project and their parents to make their sons marry women to preserve the lineage.

Among gay men and lesbian women, another strategy for subverting the state-family project is the arrangement of cooperative marriages²². Spouses in such cooperative marriages perform heterosexual-appearing familial units in order to avoid pressure from their families and hide their sexual orientation in the workplace. Drawing on two years of ethnographic research in five cities in China, Stephanie Wang argues that lower- and middle-class gay men and lesbian

²¹ See Di Yufei's *Shining a Light on Gay-Straight Marriages in China*, *New York Times*, May 14, 2015: <https://cn.nytimes.com/lifestyle/20150514/t14marriages/dual/>

²² Similar practices of queer people can be found in other contexts, such as lavender marriage which can be dated back to 1890s.

women found that cooperative marriage was one of the few creative, painful, but often inevitable, “means to be incorporated into the marriage and family system, while queering the heteronormative scripts with alternative practices” (2019: 16). Parties to cooperative marriages often struggle to contest heteronormative expectations, but these arrangements also offer space for negotiating the different interests of the parties involved in a nonconfrontational way (Huang 2016). In a study of middle-class LGBTQ people, John Wei (2019) found that the kinship connection between LGBTQ people and their families of origin is increasingly stretched by their ability to relocate geographically to urban areas or another country and by the loosening of their emotional attachment as a result of their families’ lack of acceptance. Alternating between leaving and returning to their family of origin, between sharing and hiding their gender identity and relationship status, LGBTQ people in China live in constant filial panic (Wei 2019).

Similarly, Elisabeth Engebretsen (2015) and Lucetta Kam (2013) both found that urban *lalas* (拉拉, referring to lesbian, bisexual women, and transgender people who like women) face pressure to marry and show that their lives are normal and respectable, either through heterosexual marriage, committed and long-term same-sex partnership, or, frequently, both. As Kam (2013) argued, there is a profound belief in “the politics of public correctness,” which obliges these women to fulfill family expectations (being married at the appropriate age) and to aspire to achieve or maintain a certain economic status (financial independence) before establishing a committed life with their same-sex partners. Because of the one-child policy generation’s uneasy dependence on their families to meet their most basic socioeconomic needs, families exert control over their members. Therefore, it is possible that getting married with a man at the right age and achieving financial independence are strategies *lalas* find sensible for breaking or loosening their dependence on the state-family project and their family of origin.

Movements for women's and LGBTQ rights have been at the forefront of resisting the state-family project. Beginning in the late 1990s, these pioneering movements created new discourses, changed laws, and provided social support for people to navigate the state-family project (Bao 2018; Chia 2019; Liu 2015; Miller 2013; Parkin 2018; Wang and Liu 2020; Wu, Feng, and Lansdowne 2019). From working in coalitions with feminist movements to combat domestic violence,²³ to coming out as supportive parents of their LGBTQ children,²⁴ feminist and LGBTQ activists in China are changing the definition of what counts as a family. Queer and feminist lawyers also battle the legal system, the backbone of the mutually reinforcing state-family patriarchy, either by appropriating the current legal system to construct queer-friendly appointed guardianships or by taking legal actions to advocate for women's and LGBTQ rights.²⁵ Instead of romanticizing these collective actions as more effective than individual-based actions, it is critical to recognize that these are making use of the spaces where social movements can

²³ See Common Language's 2019 report on supporting LGBTQ people who experience domestic violence: Exploring How the Rainbow Anti-GBV Initiative Works [caihongbaoli zhongjiesuo gongzuomoshi tanta, 彩虹暴力终结所工作模式探讨]:

<http://www.tongyulala.org/uploadfile/2019/1119/20191119031830212.pdf> [in Chinese].

²⁴ For a news report on the parents in PFLAG–China who advertised for their single LGBTQ children in a matchmaking market at Shanghai People's Park, see: Bibek Bhandari, At Wedding Market, Mothers of Gays and Lesbians Face Resistance on *Sixth Tone*, May 20th, 2017: <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1000233/at-wedding-market%2C-mothers-of-gays-and-lesbians-face-resistance/>.

²⁵ See the Rainbow Lawyers report,: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/uNS1hs-lpYGuzgTBfNbzLw/> [in Chinese]; see also The Economist's report on appointed guardianship in China: Gay Chinese take a modest first step towards civil unions, September 5th 2019: <https://www.economist.com/china/2019/09/05/gay-chinese-take-a-modest-first-step-towards-civil-unions>; see also recent litigation on employment discrimination by LGBT Rights Advocacy China, The Plaintiff of the First Gay Teacher's Employment Discrimination Case said: The Most Important Thing to be a Teacher is to be Honest ["tongzhijiaoshi laodongquan diyian" dangshiren: zuolaoshi, zuizhongyaode jiushi zhenshi, "同志教师劳动权第一案"当事人: 做老师, 最重要的就是真实]: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/XkLKYQcJc7dDXxsAcu7B_g [in Chinese].

exist in conversation with the state-family project in the context of an ever shrinking Chinese civil society.

As recently as November 2019, the China Marriage Equality Advocacy Network (CMEAN; *Ai cheng jia* 爱成家), a newly established national coalition of Chinese LGBTQ and feminist NGOs, rallied 188,383 people to make suggestions for legalizing same-sex marriage in the Civil Code under public review.²⁶ Many of the activists behind the coalition, including Sun Wenlin, the plaintiff in China's first same-sex marriage case, are only children and are in the one-child policy generation. Indeed, feminist and LGBTQ activists in the one-child policy generation are on the cutting edge in challenging the filial nationalist state project, which deserve more scholarly attention. Thus, this dissertation is dedicated to their bravery and innovation which contribute to feminist struggles against the state-family patriarchy both at home and around the globe. In the following chapters, this dissertation will further analyze how the feminist and LGBTQ activists build a national movement of LGBTQ rights in China with the family.

²⁶ See CMEAN's open letter to fellow grassroots organizers on their Weibo account: CMEAN's Open Letter to Grassroots Activists [爱成家致草根行动者的公开信 *aichengjia zhi caogen xingdongzhe de gongkaixin*]: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6xayKMwmx3OkwLUPuXIomA> [in Chinese].

Chapter Two

Differential Modes of Mobilization: Building a National Chinese LGBTQ Movement with the Family

Chinese society's social hierarchy starts precisely from the family order. [...] Since obedience and control start with the family, rebellion and destruction must also happen there. However, the desire to be part of the mainstream is so overwhelming that it is enough to co-opt all the rebellious forces one by one. Facing disastrously appealing concepts like family and "a mother's love," we, the queer children, must ask ourselves how we should live with ourselves and coexist with these tensions.²⁷

– Guo Yujie, a Chinese Lala Alliance board member²⁸

Family often troubles lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people in China. Consequently, movement strategies around the family are central to public debates. For example, the quote above appeared in a review of *Mama Rainbow*, a 2012 documentary featuring six Chinese mothers and their LGBTQ children. PFLAG–China (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays in China) and three other LGBTQ organizations co-produced the film to celebrate the pioneering generation of Chinese parents who advocate for their LGBTQ children, with a goal of redefining what family means in China. Yet other leading voices criticize the film's premise: if demanding rights depends on parents' "loving" approval of their LGBTQ children, queer politics

²⁷ See Guo's op-ed: <https://site.douban.com/211878/widget/notes/13514090/note/307760461/> (accessed 01/04/2021).

²⁸ Chinese Lala Alliance is a regional network of LGBTQ grassroots organizations and activists in China and the Chinese diaspora. *Lala* is a non-derogatory Chinese slang term for a same-sex-desiring woman.

reinforces parental authority and ultimately contributes to the Chinese patriarchal state. Tension over family strategies repeatedly surfaced in reference to this film, first in 2014 when it was censored and then in 2015 when the film's director sued the National Radio and Television Administration.²⁹

This lingering tension is unsurprising. Feminist scholarship has contended that the family institution is a saturated site where systems of practices, representations, and patterns visibly intersect and repeatedly produce and reproduce power dynamics and inequalities across all countries (Collins 2019:261–63; Ferree 2010). Additionally, given the heterogenous histories of class, gender, and race across these contexts, parental and conjugal rights relate to each other differently in Singapore (Chua 2014), France (Geva 2013), the United States (Levitsky 2014), and China (Kong 2010), creating different mobilizing conditions for family-based social movements. Treating social movement mobilizations as complex, intersectional processes requires directly theorizing and situating the saturated site (the family) in its broader social context (China). Instead of assuming that activists' views of *Mama Rainbow* represent opposing views on challenging the family, I start with an under-theorized question: *How does family become the dominant focus of to the LGBTQ movement in China?*

To do so, I examine the contingent interconnectedness of the family and other social institutions through the *differential mode of association* (DMA) theory, Fei Xiaotong's proposal for understanding Chinese society ([1947] 1992). A foundational theory of relationality in Chinese sociology, the DMA sees people in a network society as connected by differentially categorized social relationships. Each person is the center of their own nested, concentric

²⁹ See *The Guardian*'s report: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/sep/24/mama-rainbow-film-maker-sues-chinese-censors-over-ban-on-gay-themed-movie> (accessed 01/04/2021).

network, where parental and conjugal relationships are the most influential. Following the *Great Learnings (daxue)*, a Confucian classic on governing, the DMA theory explains social change as a sequence of mutual influence that starts with each person, then their family, their community, the state, and all under the sun (*tianxia*) (Fei, ([1947] 1992).

By combining social movement theory of the family with the DMA theory, I propose a new concept: *differential modes of mobilization*. This concept helps explain how social movement organizations differentially promote social change around a saturated site where the relationality of intersectional processes becomes salient and mobilization possibilities appear abundant. Empirically, I compare two national LGBTQ rights organizations, PFLAG–China and Common Language, each of which exemplifies an alternative approach to family: the first depends on parental approval for LGBTQ rights claims, while the second criticizes such dependence. My research shows that these two seemingly oppositional LGBTQ national organizations use compatible modes of mobilization that situate the family in the same sequence of change. While PFLAG–China is a companion organization that begins by mobilizing LGBTQ people to gain their families’ support, Common Language is a connector organization that starts by engaging different sectors within the same concentric circle to influence the state. Mobilizing the spaces found within family-state relationality—not the family per se—provides discourses and resources for these organizations to demand that the state respect LGBTQ rights.

The Differential Mode of Association Theory

LGBTQ movement scholarship contests what the family, as the reservoir of moral values, means for mobilizing collective actions (Bernstein and Taylor 2013; Chávez, Conrad, and Nair 2009). In Western and democratic contexts, some scholars recognize legalizing same-sex

marriage as a practical goal to broaden definitions of “family values,” welfare reform, and tax benefits (Bernstein 2018), while others argue that this agenda reinforces the inclusion of white, cisgender, and middle-class citizens who happen to be gay (Spade, 2015). These queer critiques have approached the family as a site of biopolitical governmentality through which the state regulates its population and establishes a gendered, racialized, and classed public order (Brandzel, 2016, pp. 74; 88). Similarly, Chinese queer scholars have debated the social and economic costs for LGBTQ people who challenge their exclusion from the marriage institution by forming alternative family ties, including the cooperative marriages between gay men and lesbian women, which serve to perform heterosexual-appearing familial units, avoid pressure from their families, and hide their sexual orientation at work (S. Y. Wang 2019; Zhu 2018). However, most research examines resistance against the family as interpersonal interactions in non-voluntary associations (such as families of origin), or it treats collectively mobilized queer people as interacting with the state primarily through other voluntary association memberships in civil society.

To deepen LGBTQ movement studies’ theorization of the family, we must examine how the state and LGBTQ movement actors confront and shape each other when the family is the primary institutional space for such interactions. Certainly, China is not the only state interested in disciplining its people through the family. Yet Chapter One has shown that the Chinese state cultivates people’s loyalty by routinely connecting nationalism and filial piety, proactively invoking these concepts and channeling the state’s messages through social relations and family members (O’Brien and Deng 2017; Wang 2020). At the same time, the Chinese state has allowed limited space for social movement organizing and civil society, which has impacted LGBTQ movements (Chia 2019). Thus, a case study of organizational mobilization in response to the

Chinese state-family dynamic sheds light on what the family means for mobilizing collective actions.

Heeding the call for a contextualized understanding of the family in social movements and applying it to China, this dissertation introduces a native metaphor for social relations and social change, the “differential mode of association” (*chaxu geju*). Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong ([1947] 1992) coined this term, defining it as a society of overlapping yet hierarchical networks of people linked through differentially categorized social relationships. These networks are nested and concentric across the micro, meso, and macro levels, with each person at the center of their network. Such networks are strongest at the center, with a gradient of mutual influence between each person and their families, communities, the state, and the world (Hamilton and Wang 1992). Instead of defining people as individuals with natural rights, Chinese society determines people’s claims to rights based on their control of various desires in order to fulfil their obligations to such nested collectivities, from the family to the nation-state (Yan 2010, 2017). Chinese society values parental and conjugal relations most highly and rewards filial piety with social status and discursive power (Zhou 2018).

While the DMA theory is used mostly to explain how to capitalize on interpersonal social relations (*guanxi*), the theory’s explanatory power vis-à-vis China’s social structure has received less attention (Barbalet 2020; Yan 2006; Zhou 2018). Scholars have connected the DMA theory with theories of strong and weak social ties to understand how state authorities exert social control by manipulating a person’s familial and social relations (Deng 2016, 2017; O’Brien and Deng 2017). However, few studies apply this concept to contextualize social movement tactics or strategies. Specifically, the DMA theory provides insight into state-family relationality; it

regards the state as just one institution in the sequence of change, on equal footing with the family (Fei, [1947] 1992: 70).

Employing the DMA theory to deepen the relational analysis of social movements, I define *differential modes of mobilization* as a movement strategy for reconstructing how social institutions (the state and the family) and people interact by integrating new discourses into these institutions' sequence of change. In the DMA sequence, each step focuses on interacting with one social institution—a person's self, family, community, or state. In these interactions, social institutions and individuals assess a person's rights (i.e., entitlement to social recognition and respect) by locating each other in differentially categorized and institutionalized relationships. Making each step of the sequence more conducive to change requires uniting differential social relations and networks to alter the relationality that connects each social institution into the overall sequence.

Thus, a DMA-informed movement strategy requires cultivating and strengthening wide-ranging networks over the long term. To activate the sequence of DMA influence, social movements can encourage people to cultivate their personhood, which changes their relations with their families, social groups, and the state. Additionally, change on the DMA sequence can be initiated by building coalitions across networks to pressure social institutions. In China, national social movement organizational functions fall into two major categories: *companions* and *connectors*. Through these two differential modes of mobilization, I analyze why the family institution often represents a primary site of LGBTQ struggles and why social movements rely on networked social structures to incorporate LGBTQ people into the state's family discourses and effect change.

Starting from the DMA sequence's inner part, a *companion* mode of mobilization cultivates individuals' personhood and close concentric circles' support. Companions are usually social actors who support individuals and families and provide the resources for cultivating stronger devotion to the cause, frequently in the name of their own families or those in similar situations. The companion strategy aims to intervene in the whole DMA change sequence and steer as many people towards the organization's cause as possible. By adding people in this sequence, a companion organization can build a strong base for influencing the state. When the state actively employs the family for social control, the family becomes a more saturated site where discrimination against a marginalized group's identities (e.g., LGBTQ people) becomes more visible. Consequently, if the organization addresses family-related concerns, the marginalized group will be more likely to see a companion strategy as necessary.

A *connector* mode of mobilization marshals a wider range of social institutions for a given cause. Connectors are key social actors that build coalitions in the outer part of the DMA sequence of influence. To redefine state-family relations, social movements can connect people across social groups and professions that work on family issues, collectively change how they work with families, and pressure the state to do the same. Along with robust networks around the state and the family, effecting such change requires a coalitional front of conventional and resonant claims that people with different causes can support. Thus, a connector organization often breaks its agenda down, disguises it with uncontroversial claims (such as anti-violence and anti-discrimination), and inserts them into different co-formative processes through professional connections. Once a claim is integrated into the DMA change sequence, it becomes a placeholder to ensure further inclusion. For instance, when a law that connects the state and the family does

not specifically protect LGBTQ people, a connector ensures that legislation at least provides room for social movements to promote change in the future.

Data and Method

From 2016 to 2020, I conducted 15 months of fieldwork in China, primarily in Guangzhou and Beijing, where many Chinese LGBTQ organizations are headquartered; I also conducted interviews in other cities. I limited the sample to Chinese LGBTQ organizations that explicitly engaged in debates around the family, excluding some well-funded service-based organizations with similar capacities (for example, those working on HIV/AIDS, which often focus on gay men's healthcare needs) (Bao 2018). Of these organizations, I selected national organizations that have established national coalitions or networks of chapters, activists, or professionals.

Here, I compare China's two largest national LGBTQ organizations: PFLAG–China and Common Language. My empirical analysis primarily draws on interviews with 18 LGBTQ-identified PFLAG–China activists, 5 PFLAG–China parents, 14 Common Language activists, and 7 gender and legal experts who work with Common Language. I recruited the activists by directly contacting them, using my previous connections with them through our activism. These activists introduced me to the parents and experts I interviewed. I tried to interview all current staff members of both organizations; one staffer declined to be interviewed. To fully protect my interviewees' identities, I identify them only by job title.

Interviews averaged 90 minutes and were conducted in Chinese, then translated into English. Each interview began by asking how interviewees became involved in Chinese LGBTQ movements, except for the two organizations' directors, who have written extensively about

joining the movement. In those cases, I posed clarifying questions about their activism and their families' roles in it. I asked staff members about their main work responsibilities, challenges, and achievements and their views of LGBTQ community needs and difficulties. Each interview ended by examining interviewees' views of the current political environment and visions for the LGBTQ movement's future. Through this approach, I could have interviewees assess the Chinese state's influence on the LGBTQ movement without forcing them to discuss the state directly.

Differential Modes of Mobilization in the Chinese LGBTQ Movement

In China, the family is a critical institution for LGBTQ people's economic survival and the political legitimacy of LGBTQ rights. Enhanced by the DMA social structure and filial piety, the Chinese state's promotion of the patriarchal family has tied people to their families of origin and established familial relationships as the foundation of all social relationships (Wang 2020). Yet this structure has an inherent logic of social change, where changes to the family and the state occur in an interconnected but reversible sequence (Fei [1947] 1992). This section analyzes how two national organizations integrate LGBTQ rights into state-sponsored familial discourses, either as parental or state authority over the family, to incorporate LGBTQ issues into the fundamental state-permitted sequence of change. As the analysis will reveal, the family institution's visibility in the Chinese LGBTQ movement stems from how the DMA sequence's dominates ideas about social change in China, which fosters both the state's prioritization of the family in governance and social movements' use of familial relations for social change.

PFLAG–China: A Companion Mode of Mobilization

In summer 2008, friends who met regularly at Guangzhou’s East Lake Park formed a formal group that became PFLAG–China. Guangzhou is an important destination for domestic migration. Because the city represents upward mobility and social tolerance, it has attracted many queer people (G1805; G1825)³⁰. Before its 2013 expansion, PFLAG–China consisted of a small group of volunteers that hosted intimate meetings for LGBTQ people and their parents; members gathered in the park or over dinner to share stories and concerns about coming out to their parents and their parents’ journeys to accepting their LGBTQ children (G1807; G1813). Since 2013, PFLAG–China has expanded nationally; in 2015, it began fundraising directly from the community. By 2019, PFLAG–China had more than 76 local chapters, 12 paid staff members, and over six thousand active volunteers across China working with LGBTQ people’s parents.³¹ Between 2009 and 2019, PFLAG–China organized 12 national conferences.

PFLAG–China is a *companion* organization that aims to achieve a nationwide base of political support for LGBTQ rights. The organization has implemented a three-step strategy that includes acceptance of the self, the family, and society. This approach starts by accompanying people as they accept their LGBTQ identities and come out to their families. Then, PFLAG–China activists work closely with LGBTQ people’s families to overcome their homophobia and transphobia by pairing new members with experienced activist parents and organizing social gatherings and story-sharing events. Ultimately, the organization supports families as they advocate for their LGBTQ relatives and raise LGBTQ awareness and acceptance in the broader

³⁰ All interviews are coded by location, year, and number of interviews that year. For example, G1805 means the fifth interview conducted in Guangzhou in 2018.

³¹ See PFLAG-China’s 2019 annual summary:

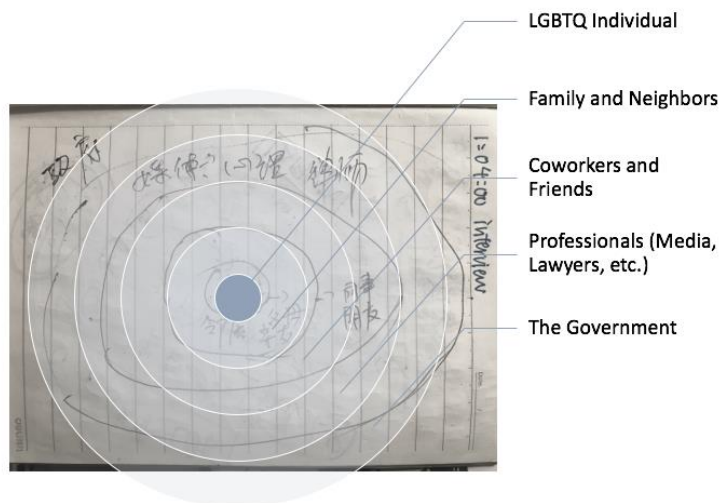
<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/kj8O1RtLnKPmnxP1Zv0LQQ> (accessed 03/01/2021).

society. A senior staff member overseeing the organization's volunteer training explained the logics of change by drawing the following concentric circles (see Graphic-1):

PFLAG–China Staff: If we want to influence this whole society and as we draw a few more circles here, from the easiest to the hardest, who would be the easiest one for you to influence?

Interviewer: Myself?

PFLAG–China Staff: Yes, this one [indicating the center of the graphic labeled “self”]... and then the next is parents and friends, right? Here, it probably should include some of your neighbors. Then, when you go outside, there would be some other ecologies. Maybe it's your colleagues and friends. What we're talking about is that we hope they can accept us, sexual minorities. Not only letting them know but letting them accept it. Moving further out, it's some media. Some media, some psychologists, and some lawyers. Relatively speaking, these would be in the society as a whole, these are some more open-minded sectors. If [we] continue to move out further, it would be the government (G1904).



- *Graphic-1* -

The senior staffer also emphasized that a more accepting society would help more people come out, thereby reinforcing overall acceptance. As the quote suggests, PFLAG–China’s movement strategy follows the DMA change sequence: each individual (the center) most influences the concentric circles closest to themselves, especially relatives. PFLAG–China *accompanies* LGBTQ individuals and their families to gain support for LGBTQ rights in their concentric circles, so that the LGBTQ movement can gradually expand its influence and eventually change society as a whole.

If the DMA’s sequence of social change is the strategy’s bone, filial piety provides the flesh that connects each part of the change. Social structures, as DMA theory defines them, establish maintaining the social order as a shared responsibility. Each person supervises everyone else’s actions and obeys the rules of interacting with others; such rules are predicated on a person’s roles and responsibilities, which depend on the relationship (Hamilton and Wang, 1992, p. 25). Filial piety norms within such structures link meeting obligations to one’s parents to full societal recognition as a person. Chinese norms often define such logic as self-

disciplining; people cultivate their personhood by suppressing the self and following mutually agreed-upon rituals in their social networks (克己复礼 *ke ji fu li*) to earn others' respect (Fei, 1992).

By anchoring its three-step strategy in filial piety norms, PFLAG–China further incorporates LGBTQ rights into Chinese understandings of the family and happiness (幸福 *xingfu*). The organization's core values express this discursive integration: “Love, Courage, Responsibility (爱 *ai*, 勇敢 *yonggan*, 责任 *zeren*).” When accompanying people as they come out to their parents and persuading their parents to join the LGBTQ rights cause, PFLAG–China activists frequently explain the conflicts around a relative's coming out as a family matter and hiding one's sexual or gender identity as a barrier that separates families (G1807; G1811; and G1812). They often emphasize *love* as unconditional family support; *responsibility* as fully accepting the consequence of one's actions, including both raising an LGBTQ child and coming out to one's parents; and *courage* as necessary for loving and taking responsibility for one's family and happiness. Stressing that family members should never despise each other, a senior PFLAG–China staff member overseeing community engagement connected the three values, noting their importance for family happiness: “Societal pressure is invisible. It is soft. But oppression from the family ... this word is too heavy. It feels so real if one's family does not understand and accept them. This is heart-breaking. When a child is not accepted by their own parents, their own family, they might get depressed and lose faith in life, because their last resort is gone” (G1810).

PFLAG–China presents LGBTQ rights as part of the collective responsibility for wellbeing that family members share. While LGBTQ rights are “foreign” to parents, filial piety and parental love are not. Instead of tying these rights to human rights or equality, PFLAG–

China activists introduce Chinese notions of change into the “foreign” issue of LGBTQ rights. Indeed, when recapping their journeys to accepting their LGBTQ children, many PFLAG–China parents shared stories like this one: “It breaks my heart to think of all the suffering my son has gone through to hide his identity from me for all these years” (G1811). They express their sense of obligation to accept their children and mitigate such pain in their family. Thus, PFLAG–China integrates what it means to be an LGBTQ person into Chinese family norms and employs family discourses to create a more just society for LGBTQ people. As a founding member averred, “it is hard to conclude what role the family plays and whether it is progressive or conservative. China really values family. [...] After they accepted [their children's sexuality], parents would strongly support their children because they value family, value family ties, and want to support their children more” (G1807).

PFLAG–China’s vision of social change does not stop at influencing Chinese families. As the three-step strategy asserts, “if [we] continue to move further out [in the DMA sequence], it would be the government” (G1904). PFLAG–China activists are always mindful of the state’s current attitude toward the LGBTQ population and aspire to change it in the future. PFLAG–China’s Executive Director assessed the situation:

When I first started [in the gay rights movement], discrimination did not come from the state. It came from the prejudice of society and people in everyday life. [...] Now, when society comes to understand homosexuality more, when LGBTQ people were about to step into the media’s spotlight, when they were so close to being seen, roughly after 2016 or 2017, suddenly everything about homosexuality was taken down, from online videos to LGBTQ organizations (G1910).

This account reveals that the state has stalled the change sequence for LGBTQ families. As a companion organization, PFLAG–China is open to joining some coalitions around LGBTQ legal issues, but it focuses less on connecting different social sectors and holding the state accountable than the other organizations do. More frequently, it projects the state’s inevitable future acceptance of LGBTQ people. Per DMA theory, the state is not the institution that suppresses the family; it is only one part of the change sequence. Indeed, anchoring their hopes in the DMA sequence of social change, many PFLAG–China activists believe that a time will come when the government cannot deny a population that wants it to accept LGBTQ people. In most of my interviews and casual conversations with PFLAG–China staff and volunteers, I often heard some variation of this statement: “There are seventy-million LGBTQ people, and the number should be multiplied at least three times to include our parents. How could the [Chinese state] not address our needs?” (G1817).

Working directly with parents on family issues also legitimizes PFLAG–China politically. As the Chinese state promotes families and parental authority for its own ends, parenthood becomes a relational and political position. If the state establishes norms of parental control and responsibility over their children, social movements can use such state-assigned roles to mobilize the masses. When confronted about their activism, PFLAG–China parents often respond by saying: “It is natural that I speak for my children!” or “I fight for the rights of my children. Why don’t you let me speak?” (G1811; G1812; G1813; and G1814). By subverting state-sanctioned parental authority, parents transform the relationship between their children and the state.

For example, when Xi Jinping became president in 2013, PFLAG–China parents wrote an open letter to Xi’s wife, Peng Liyuan, before World AIDS Day. They asked her to support

their LGBTQ children and to understand why, as mothers of LGBTQ children, they wrote the letter.³² They introduced themselves as concerned mothers of gay men and referred to Peng as Big Sister Liyuan (丽媛大姐 *Liyuan dajie*). Commenting on Peng's HIV/AIDS public awareness campaign, the mothers wrote:

Big Sister Liyuan, we watched the HIV/AIDS prevention film you participated in. As the goodwill ambassador for HIV/AIDS, you and the children run in the sun, so free and happy. The children are so content and satisfied. We feel so proud of your actions!

Yet our homosexual children are often not accepted in the family. They are bullied on campus and face discrimination in society. They also desire to grow up happily. They hope to unveil their pretense and be their true selves. As mothers, we also hope to be just like you, to accompany our children as they run in the sun, and let every young person have a chance to pursue their Chinese Dream.

Here, PFLAG–China parent-activists called on Peng, as a sister and fellow mother, to feel the pain of seeing their children suffer. They emphasized that they looked up to Peng as a role model, likening their support for their children to Peng's rapport with the children in the film. They intentionally mentioned those children to invoke Peng's public image as the mother of the nation. These mothers drew on the Chinese Dream to incorporate their children's suffering in the family, educational settings, and social life into state-led family discourses about future

³² See Helan Online's report: <https://helanonline.cn/archive/article/6891> (accessed October 2, 2020).

generations. The Chinese Dream was one of the first campaigns that Xi's new administration promoted to restore collective hope and re-establish China's lost national greatness. These mothers claimed their state-assigned parental responsibility to support their LGBTQ children's "Chinese Dream" and asked Peng—as mother of the nation—to support their children and themselves with access to equal opportunities. Thus, PFLAG–China parents and activists leveraged their position as parents and used state narratives to defend LGBTQ rights.

Ultimately, PFLAG–China activists see their social change strategy as aligned with state-sponsored discourses; each family's happiness, including LGBTQ ones, matters for embodying China's core socialist values (社会主义核心价值观 *shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhi*). As the senior PFLAG–China staff member overseeing community engagement said, "on the one hand, we can make the family more harmonious, and on the other hand, we can make social values warmer and promote a deeper, broader understanding of love. I think the construction of socialist civilization and cultural values should achieve true equality, democracy, and freedom, starting with the family" (G1810).

Common Language: A Connector Mode of Mobilization

Founded in 2005, Common Language was one of Beijing's first queer women-led advocacy organizations. It is now a national organization that supports people who experience violence and discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression (SOGIE).³³ Supported by existing feminist and queer networks in Beijing, the organization's founders formed Common Language to strengthen queer women-led activism; later, they also

³³ See Common Language's website: <http://www.tongyulala.org/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=lists&catid=39#abc> (accessed 10/02/2020).

helped establish new Beijing-based queer organizations and civil society spaces like the Beijing LGBT Center (B1952; B1936; B1923; and G1901). Gradually, Common Language built a national network to support local organizations, especially those led by LGBTQ activists, notably the Chinese Lala Alliance. Since its founding, the organization has participated in feminist anti-violence efforts and played a key role in passing the Anti-Domestic Violence (ADV) Law (B1930; B1936; B1952; and B1953). Additionally, Common Language has extended its organization; in 2016 it established the Rainbow Anti-Gender Based Violence Center, China's first to provide social work and legal aid for LGBTQ people facing domestic violence or SOGIE-based violence and discrimination.

Common Language is a *connector* organization that forms and strengthens concentric networks of experts for broader SOGIE equality in China. No less than PFLAG–China, Common Language recognizes the family's importance in supporting LGBTQ people's survival and understands how relatives contribute to their suffering. As Common Language's legal program officer put it, "Even if the new generation is more individualized, Chinese people nowadays still cannot just abandon their family" (B1934). Noting that "the law functions to guide [the public view]" and should be ahead of public opinion on anti-discrimination and anti-violence issues, she explains that Common Language works specifically to extricate queer people from their "indispensable" Chinese families by emphasizing financial independence and protection from domestic violence as urgent, fundamental rights (B1934). Consequently, the organization prioritizes laws against violence and discrimination over legalizing same-sex marriage. Unlike PFLAG–China, Common Language promotes changes from the edges of the DMA structure toward the center. It deploys state law to "correct" social norms and society's attitudes towards

LGBTQ issues rather than asking LGBTQ people to change themselves first (B1939, B1942, and B1952).

Geopolitics also factor into the connector mode of mobilization. Beijing's geopolitical advantages have provided Common Language access to professionals at universities, state agencies, and international organizations, including United Nations agencies, which have interpersonal connections and policy influence in China and abroad (B1945 and B1931). For example, the Anti-Domestic Violence Network (ADV N) was an important network for Common Language. Since the early 1990s, Chinese feminist movements have focused on combating domestic violence (Liu 2006; D. Wang 2019). The ADV N, itself a Beijing-based connector organization, organized many conferences, bringing together scholars, state agents working on women's rights issues, lawyers, social workers, and other experts and professionals to discuss domestic violence-related issues. Founded in 2000, ADV N was China's first nationwide feminist legal advocacy network;³⁴ Moreover, CL was affiliated with the China Law Society, which focuses on state institutions and policymaking channels (Zhang 2009). In 2007, Common Language received funds from the ADV N to research lesbian and bisexual women's experiences of family violence (B1952). In 2009, Common Language published the first report to center lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LBT) people's experiences of domestic violence in China.

Through the ADV N network, Common Language activists accessed policy channels by hosting scholar-advocate consultation conferences, submitting expert opinions to legislators and jurists, and conducting studies on LGBTQ communities to ensure that the Anti-Domestic Violence Law included LGBTQ demands. After ADV N closed in 2014 due to internal and

³⁴ See China Development Brief's report on ADV N: <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/problems-cohabitation-rise-fall-anti-domestic-violence-network/> (accessed 09/11/2019).

external pressure, Common Language organized annual conferences and leveraged their partnership with the UN Women Beijing Office to sustain connections with state agencies like ACWF (All China Women's Federation) (B1930) and with feminist legal scholars, whom the state often consults on gender issues (B1941; B1943; and B1950). These conferences have allowed experts to get to know LGBTQ community members and activists personally, thereby strengthening DMA-sequenced change through interpersonal relations to benefit LGBTQ rights.

With target issues and robust networks in hand, a connector still needs a strategic front to mobilize broader coalitions. This is not an easy task. To make a case for LGBTQ issues within the Chinese legal system, Common Language must leverage its networks to join feminist efforts to transform China's governing principle of "equality between men and women" into "gender equality." In China, hiding LGBTQ rights to protection from violence and discrimination within the "gender equality" claim is more palatable than explicitly framing them as SOGIE equality. However, as the state's recent crackdown on feminist activism indicates (Wang 2015; Wang and Liu 2020), the Chinese state has a profound interest in controlling feminist resistance to patriarchy, and neither "equality between men and women" nor "gender equality" can guarantee protection from state repression. Thus, Common Language and its feminist allies must walk a fine line of not over-politicizing LGBTQ rights by connecting them explicitly with feminist activism or international human rights. The connector mode of mobilization allows them to strategize around the limited space the state allows LGBTQ people and feminists/women to challenge the current system and build a less violent, more harmonious family.

Ultimately, the 2015 Anti-Domestic Violence Law included Article 37, which uses gender-neutral language to describe the law's protection for people in premarital/cohabitation relationships. While the law's text does not explicitly protect LGBTQ families, Article 37

provides space for that interpretation (B1951 and B1952). Common Language celebrated the victory, which exemplified their views of legal advocacy, but without declaring their goals achieved. Common Language sees its next step as ensuring that the law's implementation includes LGBTQ families. Even after the ADV law's passage in 2015, China still lacked established protocol for dealing with domestic violence in any type of relationship (B1930; B1952; and B1953). Common Language activists seized this opportunity to provide service for LGBTQ communities under the ADV Law. These efforts led to the founding of the Rainbow Anti-Gender-Based Violence Center in 2016. Through this Center, Common Language connected different social sectors related to LGBTQ rights and gender equality, making it a hub of expertise in law, social work, gender and sexuality studies, and local and international LGBTQ rights work. By foregrounding strategic issues like domestic violence, Common Language makes visible the state-family relations that connect regulating the family (齐家 *qijiao*) and governing the state (治国 *zhiguo*).

Citing DMA theory, a social worker at the Center explained that their work differs from therapist- or lawyer-centered services, because it not only supports each client in processing their relations with the whole system but also provides these services with the goal of intervening in the system (B1933). In practice, the Center prioritizes social work over legal aid, especially litigation, because in China most people still will not sue anyone, let alone their parents (B1953). Indeed, Fei ([1947] 1992) refers to China as a society without litigation (无诉 *wusu*). Beyond providing direct service, the Rainbow Center has provided data on its work with clients to Common Language; since 2017, Common Language has used this information to publish annual reports on the ADV law and highlight the community's needs. For example, the 2019 report states that “[i]t is still not uncommon that the public sectors, relevant ADV agencies, and

individuals working in these institutions (e.g., the police, ACWF officers, and so on) disagree that the Anti-Domestic Violence Law should be applied to gender and sexual minorities.”³⁵

These public reports became important data and empirical evidence for all kinds of professionals to push for LGBTQ inclusion in their own processes of change. By calling out sectors of the state as unresponsive in implementing the Anti-Domestic Violence Law, Common Language connects different social institutions that also demand a more inclusive definition of gender and family from both the state and society.

Conclusion

In China, the family is a critical institution for LGBTQ people’s economic survival and the political legitimacy of LGBTQ rights. Enhanced by the DMA social structure and filial piety, the Chinese state’s promotion of the patriarchal family has tied people to their families of origin and established familial relationships as the foundation of all social relationships (Wang 2020). Yet this structure has an inherent logic of social change, where changes to the family and the state occur in an interconnected but reversible sequence (Fei [1947] 1992). Chapter Two analyzes how two national organizations integrate LGBTQ rights into state-sponsored familial discourses, either as parental or state authority over the family, to incorporate LGBTQ issues into the fundamental state-permitted sequence of change. As the analysis reveals, the family institution’s visibility in the Chinese LGBTQ movement stems from the DMA sequence’s

³⁵ See Common Language’s 2019 report: <http://www.tongyulala.org/uploadfile/2019/1119/20191119031830212.pdf> (accessed 12/23/2020).

domination of change in China, which fosters both the state's prioritization of the family in governance and social movements' use of familial relations for social change.

Chapter Three

Differential Coalescing: (Re-)Building the Coalition for “Single Women’s” Reproductive Rights in China

“Allowing married husbands and wives, as well as single women who meet specific technical requirements, to perform artificially assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) will give women an equal opportunity to choose their fertility.” -- Lawyer Peng Jing, a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference who proposed legalizing single women’s access to ART.³⁶

“The issue of egg freezing requires further public education. I hope this proposal I introduced [to ban medical facilities to freeze single women’s eggs] will remind the public to get married and have children at an appropriate age.” -- Professor Sun Wei, a medical doctor and representative of the People’s Congress who opposed Peng’s proposal.³⁷

In May 2020, “Single Women’s” Reproductive Rights (SWRR) became a key topic in the Chinese government’s Two Sessions, China’s highest legislative body.³⁸ On May 25, Phoenix

³⁶ See ‘Should “Egg Freezing” Be Banned or Approved? The Right to Reproductive Equality Runs Into A Technical Imperfection’ (Sohu, May 26 2020)

<https://www.sohu.com/a/397870476_617717> accessed February 1, 2022.

³⁷ See ‘Evening Reading Of The Two Sessions: A Representative of The People’s Congress Responds And Proposes To Ban Egg Freezing For Single Women’ (BJ News, May 26 2020) <<http://www.bjnews.com.cn/feature/2020/05/26/731765.html>> accessed February 1, 2022.

³⁸ The Two Sessions—or, in Chinese *Lianghui*—refers to the annual plenary sessions of the national or local People’s Congress and the national or local committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, which are the highest legislative body in China.

Media, a partially state-owned television network, interviewed Teresa Xu, a plaintiff in SWRR impact litigations, to get her response to Peng's proposal and Sun's statements in the national debate. A queer woman in her early 30s, Xu had sued a Beijing hospital in 2019 for the right to freeze her eggs as a single woman. Advocates for Diverse Family Network (ADFN, or the Network) and lawyers from a LGBTQ friendly legal aid network, coordinated by Impact Law Firm, supported Xu's case by filing a lawsuit against the hospital. In the interview, Xu commented that some representatives have supported the ban on egg freezing because they considered the current technology detrimental to women's health, but she compared their perspective to "giving up eating for fear of choking. A woman's right to choose has been erased too easily."³⁹

How has SWRR become able to impact the national debate? One explanation is that Chinese state policy has shifted from the anti-natalism of the One-Child Policy era towards pro-natalism to counter the aging of its population, and SWRR "happened" to coincide with the mainstream's move towards prenatal policies. However, this explanation does not account for the national debate's current feminist framing: at its core, the public debate revolves around whether women who are unmarried or in partnerships that the state has not recognized are entitled to state support for parenthood. Chinese society has shifted away from portraying unmarried women past their late 20s as "leftover" and "too picky" (cf. Fincher 2014; Gui 2020; Liu 2018). It has also moved away from considering the children of unmarried women who give birth in violation of China's family planning policy--which only permits birth within heterosexual wedlock--to be a social problem, which sometimes are referred to as "out of plan birth." Through impact litigation

³⁹ See Phoenix Media's interview 'Representatives Suggest Banning Single Women from Freezing Their Eggs' (Phoenix Media, May 25 2020) <<https://weibo.com/1806128454/J3zMjhsh9>> accessed February 1, 2022.

and public education, a coalition of SWRR activists has steered the debate towards questioning what role the Chinese state plays in the lived reality of women who are not married under the legal definition and must therefore pursue parenthood outside the state's family planning policy. Thus, to understand SWRR's mainstreaming moment, it is important to investigate how the social movement's reframing of "family" factors into China's pro-natalist policy shift.

More importantly, SWRR's mainstreaming came after a half decade of state retaliation against civil society, in which the Chinese government has been swiftly erasing queer feminist movement discourses and public spaces. Since 2015, the Chinese state has detained many feminist activists and activist lawyers nationwide (Fu 2018; Liu and Halliday 2016; Wang 2015), and it has systematically attacked independent journalists,⁴⁰ independent feminist media,⁴¹ and even LGBTQ-related hashtags on Weibo.⁴² Yet, despite these attacks, the SWRR debate has reached the 2020 Two Sessions, where two national representatives presented the two sides of SWRR as a legitimate policy debate. The emergence of this debate leads to the article's central question: How does demanding SWRR produce a coalitional ground among feminists, LGBTQ activists, and activist lawyers, especially in light of recent state repression targeting feminist and legal movements?

⁴⁰ See Linda Lew 'China's Missing #Metoo And Labour Activist Pair Held By Police, Family Told' *South China Morning Post* (October 5 2021) <<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3151288/chinas-missing-metoo-and-labour-activist-pair-held-police>> accessed December 12, 2021.

⁴¹ See Catherine Lai, 'Prominent Chinese Feminist Social Media Account Censored on International Women's Day' *Hong Kong Free Press* (Hong Kong, March 9 2018) <<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2018/03/09/prominent-chinese-feminist-social-media-account-censored-international-womens-day/>> accessed December 12, 2021

⁴² See Darius Longarino, 'Precarious Progress: Advocacy for the Human Rights of LGBT People in China' *OutRight International* (December 15, 2020) <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/PrecariousProgress_2020_1215.pdf> accessed December 12, 2021.

To address this puzzle, I investigate the conditions for building a reproductive rights coalition under authoritarian regime and its family planning policies. In China's transition from the notorious one-child policy to the current pro-natalist goal of three children, the Chinese state has continued its filial nationalist state-family project. It uses law and policy in diverse ways to control the Chinese population's political "quality" through families (Wang 2020). Yet state policy and the lived reality of families do not always align with or affirm each other creating gaps in which different movements see space for themselves to maneuver. The question becomes how to coalesce across the different causes and movement positions that have emerged in these spaces.

The term "differential consciousness" has been advanced by Sandoval to explain how each movement's activists "read the current situation of power and self-consciously" select and implement "the ideological stand best suited to push against its configurations" (2000:60). Adapting and expanding this concept and its implications for social movement scholarship, this chapter develops a similar process-centered concept focused on understanding coalition building. I call this process *differential coalescing*. I deploy it in this chapter to explore how activists have created new spaces in the Chinese state's state-family project, built coalitions even among actors who endorse different social change strategies, and eventually garnered additional resources to advocate for inclusive family policy with a queer agenda.

Empirically, my analysis centers on Advocates for Diverse Family Network (ADFN), the organization that has spearheaded the SWRR demand since 2015, and their interactions with other activists on the frontlines of this coalition. I found that ADFN frames SWRR to combine court and media discourses and steer the discussion towards benefiting queer women's reality of living "single" in China. At the same time, the Network strategically focuses on self-determined

motherhood, regardless of marital status or sexual expression, to avoid divisive debates over surrogacy and same-sex marriage. As accounts from LGBTQ community members, feminist activists, and activist lawyers show, ADFN collaborators have joined to form this coalition and contributed to the SWRR framing with different understandings of which parts of the system have gone wrong. Although their constituencies, strategies and frames differ, they share the common goal of challenging the status quo of the Chinese state-family project. Overall, they differentially coalesce to move between and around these anchors of state-family discourses. I find that differential coalescing is a strategy that feminist and queer activists have used to create a productive space for different social movement strategies to interact dialectically with each other. This differential coalescing has effectively rallied more people outside any specific movement to advance a queer-women-centered agenda for change in China's pro-natalist transition.

Data and Methods

From 2016 to 2020, I conducted 15 months of fieldwork in China, primarily in Guangzhou and Beijing, where many Chinese LGBTQ organizations are headquartered; I also conducted interviews in other cities. For this chapter, I draw on 89 interviews that I conducted between 2018 and 2019, when SWRR was becoming a significant national issue, as well as my participatory observation of Advocates for Diverse Family Network. I was consulted when a particular activist in ADFN first initiated the SWRR project, a few months after her release from 37 days of detention in 2015. Since then, I have closely observed SWRR demands. Later, I started to aid the Network's work by copyediting their reports, supporting their online and offline events, and participating in different national and international spaces where the Network has a

presence. I recruited the activists I interviewed by contacting them directly, using my previous connections with them through joint activism. These activists introduced me to the other activists and community members whom I interviewed. I conducted interviews with all three staff members who worked at Advocates for Diverse Family Network between 2018 and 2019. The team included a bisexual single mother and artist, a queer feminist lawyer, and a nonbinary queer community organizer, all of whom are in their late 20s or early 30s. To fully protect my interviewees' identities, I identify them only by job title.

Interviews averaged 90 minutes and were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, then translated into English. Each interview began by asking how interviewees became involved in Chinese LGBTQ movements. In all my interviews, I asked questions about how people think about reproductive rights, regardless of whether their advocacy work is directly related to reproductive rights. In this way, I could survey the whole ecosystem of LGBTQ movements and allies on their differentially situated views of reproductive rights. I asked the staff members of LGBTQ organizations about their main work responsibilities, challenges, and achievements as well as their views of LGBTQ community needs and difficulties. I asked community members about their views of LGBTQ organizations and their personal and community needs and difficulties. Each interview ended by examining the interviewees' views of the current political environment and their visions for the LGBTQ movement's future, especially where they see issues like same-sex marriage and reproductive rights going in China. Through this approach, I could have open spaces for interviewees to assess the Chinese state's influence on the LGBTQ movement without forcing them to discuss the state directly.

Differential Coalescing in Pro-Natalist China

Feminist movements and scholarship have developed rich analyses of coalition building for the right to have children, to not have children, and/or to parent (Luna and Luker 2013; Reuterswärd 2020; Staggenborg 1988; Zavella 2017). In the US, coalitions of women of color have led the reproductive justice (RJ) movement to challenge the mainstream framing of reproductive rights (RR) as a matter of supporting women's choice. With intersectionality at the core, RJ activists who are women of color have maintained racially or ethnically specific organizations while also building grassroots coalitions across the different intersections of gender, race, class, and immigration status to shift culture and make policy based on visions of strength, resiliency, and dignity for all (Zavella 2020).

Focusing on SisterSong, an intersectional RJ coalition, Luna investigated how RJ activists purposefully invoke human rights "back home" with the US population where, by and large, the concept of human rights has not resonated (2020, 43:60). Nevertheless, RJ activists have made progress in establishing reproductive human rights as a priority for the US feminist movement by using this framework to strengthen concrete connections among different groups, while not necessarily seeking total consensus among all movement actors (Luna 2020). In South Korea, reproductive justice framing has helped a coalition led by women with disabilities frame abortion as a social justice issue that goes beyond the pro-choice versus pro-life binary (Kim, Young, and Lee 2019). In Hong Kong, RJ activists and pro-democracy activists have formed coalitions for community medical care and cross-generational solidarity. And these Hong Kong activists have built a coalition through advancing a RJ view of the police's misuse of crowd-control chemical weapons (especially tear gas), in order to fight for a safer physical and political environment for protests. (Yam 2021).

Together, these studies have outlined why and how certain configurations of reproductive rights or justice frames and tactics can help grassroots organizers build power across different constituencies and causes in their own contexts. In Ferree's comparative case of the legal abortion movements in the US and Germany, she proposed contextualizing movement claims in their discursive opportunity structures, which are "institutionally anchored ways of thinking that provide a gradient of relative political acceptability to specific packages of ideas" (2003:309). Importantly, as Ferree reminds us, a claim or tactic is "never fully freely chosen, but also not institutionally dictated" (ibid). Instead, activists have constantly destabilized the binary logic of revolution and reform as they shift within and across social positions and co-create a fluid sensibility toward institutionally anchored differences to negotiate the messiness of coalition building (García 2020:442). While providing a multiplicity of tactical choices for social change, a multi-institutional approach to discursive opportunities also raises the question of how movements create a more inclusive productive space and coalesce to embrace additional movement claims that affirm or challenge mainstream views.

Similarly, in cultural studies, Sandoval (2000:54–63) has analyzed the US variety of third-world feminism and articulated a fluid and hybrid form of resistance she refers to as differential consciousness. Her argument is that differential consciousness is what allows activists to interconnect different oppositional ideologies strategically without being tied to any particular one. They can "read the current situation of power and self-consciously choos[e] and adopt[...] the ideological stand best suited to push against its configurations" (ibid, 60). During the 1968–90 period, while ideological resistance discourses like "equal-rights," "revolutionary," "supremacist," and "separatist" increasingly appeared to be "mutually exclusive" and eventually divided the social movement from within, US third world feminists specifically fostered this

broader form of oppositional consciousness. As intersectionally marginalized women of color, they could ill afford fighting for single issues and lacked the privilege of fighting for an uncompromising revolutionary position as compared to their white, middle-class counterparts. Instead, these feminists were a particular, eccentric cohort of women of color who were active across diverse social movements. Thus, their oppositional coalition practices had to mobilize and transmit power through tactical agency with “the capacity to de- and re-center, given the forms of power to be moved” (Sandoval 2000:59). Through their coalitional practices, these women of color demanded an alternative to any singular hegemonic oppositional theory or practice.

Coming from this tradition of differential consciousness theory, Chavez has explored manifestos of queer migrant coalition building, and added the concept of differential vision, defining it as an “impure orientation, committed to a politics of relation with others that may differ in their approach” in order to create and sustain “coalitional subjectivities and coalitions of resistance with both those who share the vision and those who may share only particular goals” (2013:47). In this chapter, I adopt and expand on Chavez’s differential vision by combining the concept’s power in analyzing written texts and with a development of a process-oriented analysis of ongoing interactions among activists. I define these interactive processes as *differential coalescing*, in which activists design and implement their differential visions to create and sustain a coalition. I argue that it is critical to look at how activists read discursive opportunities and deploy flexible, often messy, strategies to interact with institutional discourses and other actors who may not share the same vision. The goal of differential coalescing is to create inclusion through radicalization rather than moderation, so differential coalescing means constructing a demand that can manage multiplicity and contradictions to demand changes that are differentially envisioned by the partners in the coalition.

The SWRR coalition in China provides a critical case for understanding how movements coalesce across difference under an authoritarian regime with a weak civil society and strong censorship. Since the early 2010s, the Chinese state has been moving away from anti-natalist population control towards pro-natalism (Basten and Jiang 2015; Wang, Cai, and Gu 2012; Zeng and Hesketh 2016). Departing from the infamous 1980 One-Child Policy, the Chinese state first implemented a universal Two-Child Policy in 2015 and a universal Three-Child Policy in 2021. This opening in family planning policy has added to the ongoing tension between the legal regulation of the family on the books in specific statutes forbidding or demanding particular relations and the diversity of family formation citizens want or see in practice.

In its current natalist transition, the Chinese state encourages women to give birth but only allows legally married couples access to assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) and to social benefits like maternity insurance and protection against domestic violence (Liu 2018). Concomitantly, the state encourages young people to enter into timely heterosexual marriages but does not recognize same-sex marriages (Kam 2013; Miller 2013). As a result, only people with sufficient time and resources can seek transnational ART service and access the black/grey ART market, regardless of whether they are single or in a same-sex relationship (Wei 2021). Single parents and same-sex couples with children are also more likely to face discrimination at work and in society compared with parents in heterosexual marriages (Wang 2020).

For Chinese social movement studies, it has been key to inquire how to form and sustain a coalition under the state repression against collective action. Building on empirical observations of China during the 1990s and the 2000s, scholars have spotlighted how activists leveraged the fragmented nature of the Chinese authoritarian regime for movement causes. Nationally, for example, after the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women

(FWCW), while the All China Women's Federation could not directly criticize the state's gender-restrictive policies, the Federation successfully justified their demands for women's rights by drawing on China's commitment to hosting the FWCW summit as well as endorsement for the Platform for Action (PFA) (Dong 2006). Similarly, grassroots NGOs created mutually beneficial spaces of "contingent symbiosis" (Spires 2011) by making sure their rights claims relieve some state agencies of social welfare obligations. In the late 2000s and the early 2010s, journalists, lawyers, NGO-based activists, and other movement actors have co-created a contentious public sphere by taking advantage of the development of three interconnected yet different institutional processes – "the development of a legal system, the marketization of media, and the adoption of information technologies." (Lei 2018, 4) It is through such close collaborations that seemingly individualistic practices can shield collective action (Fu 2017) and can create conspicuous spectacles in the public eye for the purposes of exposing social issues and invoking public discussion (Wang and Liu 2020).

As evidenced by the state crackdowns on both feminist activists and activist lawyers since 2015, the action model built on media spectacle and public debate in China has been successfully raising the profile of movement causes. At the same time, the state has figured out how to surveil and repress this action model systematically (Fu and Distelhorst 2018). Since 2015, the political cost has become higher for organizers to put any individual, either as a plaintiff or as a concerned citizen, at the forefront for media coverage. Many established movement causes, such as anti-sexual harassment, have now been deemed by the state as politically sensitive topics and face strong censorship. Consequently, activists have started looking for new contentious spaces to move their own causes forward. Yet, the question remains:

how social movements in China strategically create and sustain viable coalitions after the 2015 crackdowns.

The SWRR coalition in China provides a critical case for understanding how movements coalesce across difference under an authoritarian regime with a weak civil society and strong censorship. Since the early 2010s, the Chinese state has been moving away from anti-natalist population control towards pro-natalism (Wang, Cai, and Gu 2012; Wang, Gu, and Cai 2016). Departing from the infamous 1980 One-Child Policy, the Chinese state first implemented a universal Two-Child Policy in 2015 and a universal Three-Child Policy in 2021. This opening in family planning policy has added to the ongoing tension between the legal regulation of the family on the books in specific statutes forbidding or demanding particular relations and the diversity of family formation citizens want or see in practice.

In its current natalist transition, the Chinese state encourages women to give birth but only allows legally married couples access to assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) and to social benefits like maternity insurance and protection against domestic violence (Liu 2018). Concomitantly, the state encourages young people to enter into timely heterosexual marriages but does not recognize same-sex marriages (Kam 2013; Miller 2013). As a result, only people with sufficient time and resources can seek transnational ART service and access the black/grey ART market, regardless of whether they are single or in a same-sex relationship (Wei 2020). Single parents and same-sex couples with children are also more likely to face discrimination at work and in society compared with parents in heterosexual marriages (Wang 2020).

In Chinese society, differentially coalescing around reproductive rights means constantly battling not only the state but also the family. The Chinese state's population policy and marital law have woven filial piety norms into each Chinese person's devotion to the state and turned the

family as an institution into an extension of the state's security apparatus (Fong 2004; Wang 2020). Even with the loosening of China's family planning policy, both family norms and state laws remain critical anchors for the Chinese state to stabilize society by controlling each individual's family relations (O'Brien and Deng 2017). Thus, the Chinese state has a strong interest in tightening its population control over two central aspects: who can reproduce the Chinese population and who can form a Chinese family. This makes reproductive rights in China a politically sensitive issue for activists and requires activists to take precautions against state censorship and retaliation. However, the concept of differential coalescing reveals that a multiplicity of movements and activists advocate SWRR and offer differential visions of managing the multiplicity of needs that SWRR captures, but manage to work together constructively on this issue. Differential coalescing offers a way to see how a radical balance is constructed despite ongoing state repression.

Defining the Reproductive Rights of "Single Women"

Founded after the state's 2015 retaliation against feminist movements, Advocates for Diverse Family Network has used advocacy-oriented research, impact litigation, and community education to promote reproductive rights for single women. Through this approach, ADFN has woven the SWRR demand into mainstream discourse, making it a nationally recognized issue (G1901). ADFN became the core organization of the SWRR coalition in the midst of China's pro-natalist transition. After her 37-day detention, one of the Feminist Five activists founded Rainbow Lawyers, a Guangzhou-based national legal aid hotline for LGBTQ people. In 2016, Rainbow Lawyers coordinated the legal support for China's first same-sex marriage litigation case. At the end of 2015, during Rainbow Lawyers' first all-staff retreat, the team chose three

major foci for LGBTQ rights advocacy: employment discrimination, reproductive rights, and partnership rights (G1915). The reproductive program was called the Single Women's Reproductive Rights Working Group. Later, in 2018, the reproductive rights program separated from Rainbow Lawyers entirely because of security concerns and divisions over strategy; the core members of the reproductive rights program officially became Advocates for Diverse Family Network (G1915, G1917 and B1937).

In a 2016 joint report it published with two other feminist organizations, ADFN (then still the SWRR working group under Rainbow Lawyers) defined single women's reproductive rights this way: Women who are not married under the law's definition should have rights to 1) Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), which include but are not limited to full legal access to sperm banks; 2) exemption from Social Maintenance Fees (also known as the out-of-plan birth fine); and 3) access to all reproductive rights regardless of marital status.⁴³ Because out-of-plan birth fine policies went unenforced in the late 2010s and were officially eliminated in 2021, the SWRR demands have become "single women's" rights to 1) ARTs; 2) maternity insurance; and 3) protection from social and employment discrimination.⁴⁴ To be sure, at first glance the SWRR demands do not directly address the root concerns of feminist, legal, or LGBTQ activism. Yet it is important to contextualize the SWRR demands and the ADFN's position within post-2015 Chinese civil society. Specifically, in constructing the SWRR

⁴³ See a 2016 news report on "*Single Women's*" Reproductive Rights – A Research Report on Policy and Lived Experience <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5b09f6cd0102x0s6.html> accessed December 27, 2021, and see a 2017 second edition of the report here <<https://cnlgbtdata.com/doc/139/>> accessed December 27, 2021.

⁴⁴ See a 2020 panel the Network hosted on "The reproductive dilemma of single women in China" (ADFN, June 10 2020) <<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/IAjAmmcrHu9pH6LKOuWXtw>> accessed December 27, 2021.

framework, ADFN strategically combined a legal argument and a media argument to differentially coalesce sets of actors from these two major institutions.

First, the coalition between lawyers and journalists predated the founding of ADFN. Chinese feminist activists and activist lawyers, empowered by the rise of social media, have established a history of using the courts and media as their primary channels to “publicly respond to social, political, or legal issues in order to spread a message, to provoke a debate, to expose a power abuse, or to create an alternative representation” (Wang and Liu 2020:2). The founding members of Rainbow Lawyers and later the Diverse Family Network all came from this feminist activist tradition. Thus, these members are either social media savvy activists who have strong ties with journalists and lawyers or they are activist lawyers themselves.

After the 2015 crackdown, ADFN continued to recruit and collaborate with lawyers, journalists, and scholars to rebuild their previous coalition. Consequently, the Network decided to pick issues that could be litigated in China’s current socio-legal landscape. For example, the current ADFN coordinator is a queer woman who has worked closely with feminist movements since 2011, and only decided to become a lawyer after the 2015 state repression that threw five feminists into detention. When explaining to me why the Network gradually moved to focus on reproductive rights and partnership rights, the ADFN coordinator stated, “After working on employment [issues] for a long time, we found that it was not very productive, and then it was hard to find cases, so we gave up” (G1915).

Second, ADFN was deliberate about making their choices of litigation and demands reportable for the state-run media. The Chinese state’s censorship system constantly monitors content related to feminist, LGBTQ, and lawyer activism and has often acted quickly to withdraw news reports, delete social media posts or hashtags, or even shut down entire accounts

suspected of mobilizing collective action. As the ADFN coordinator explained why their work on SWRR avoids some of this repression, she noted

At that time [of publishing our first report on SWRR in 2016], there were signs from our interaction with the media. They were very direct and said NGOs can't be reported, and gay people can't be reported, but reporting on mothers is not a problem. So, you can see where some of the difficulties are. Later, we had a discussion, in fact, even if [legal change] was achieved from heterosexual people's perspective, gay people can also benefit. If so, we thought, it is okay. A little compromise, right? There is nothing you can do if [the media] cannot report [on the cases]. (G1915)

Because China is not a case law system, the influence of impact litigation like Xu's case for freezing eggs has depended largely on media coverage and public debate. Media coverage has also helped ADFN activists to gain legitimacy in finding potential plaintiffs for litigation (G1901 and B1937). Therefore, the Network is willing to tone down its mention of feminism and queer women to safely publicize its demands in the media. To make these demands legible to other activists, the Network has also participated in important movement gatherings in different sectors to run workshops on how to support SWRR and report single women's reproductive stories, including radical feminist training camps, pride events, lawyer or journalist workshops, mainstream organizations for reproductive issues, and so on.

Thus, ADFN's mainstream-media-friendly message has insulated its messages from state censorship, increasing the likelihood that they will reach a broader audience on social media when the Network publishes its research, shares community members' reproductive stories,

distributes hands-on guides for navigating sociolegal barriers to having children as single women, and runs community outreach events. However, whenever it can, the Network finds creative spaces to hint to the queer community that the Network is run by queer people and attentive to queer women's needs. For example, instead of mentioning lesbian women, the Network usually puts "single women" in the titles of their online and offline publications, and in more friendly spaces or its own publications, it uses "single women" and "lala" alongside each other. It has been a common pedagogical practice to make up a protagonist to walk people through information in public education materials. While *lala* refers to queer women within LGBTQ community, the term can be also used as a hypothetical person's nickname. Thus, when the censors can read "lala" in the latter sense, the Network can reach a broader audience while also signaling its support for the queer community.

To understand how the Network differentially coalesces with various allies, we must move away from dichotomizing activism as reformist or revolutionary. As the SWRR coalition has shown through its differential inclusion of various positions and views, reformist and revolutionary visions are not mutually exclusive; when strategically configured, various goals can be realized in concert by a single coalition. In the coordinator's explanation of why the coalition speaks of "single women's rights" instead of "queer women's rights," it became obvious that the SWRR demand is intentionally specific about concrete claims while also allowing additional potential allies—with "among and between" ideological positions on supporting queer women—to join the cause. While the definition and demands of SWRR are not explicitly radical, the framing ADFN offers is innovative in that it joins legal and media discourses, enables greater community engagement, and legitimizes the Network even as it subverts the mainstream perspective on women's reproductive rights in media and court

discourses. In this way, ADFN has emphasized strategic incorporation of the differential visions of a variety of movement actors to encourage the shared use of SWRR framing. This differential consciousness strategy has created spaces for social movement actors to come together and take action in pursuit of a queer reproductive rights agenda. This interactional space in which coalitions form is what I am calling differential coalescing.

Coalescing for “Single Women’s” Reproductive Rights

The Advocates for Diverse Family Network’s SWRR demand deliberately features adaptable and principled tactics that appropriate legal and media discourses to challenge the Chinese state-family project. This effort has demonstrated that, as the representation of a coalition with differential visions, the SWRR demand provides a productive space that combines different social change visions and tactics. However, to coalesce in practice with more activists around actionable points, the coalition must also navigate between and among differential movement positions while staying grounded in its deeper, most essential cause—queer women’s rights. Through this differential coalescing process, a coalition can sustain active participation from diverse movement groups and configure a shared practical goal to push the cause forward.

Thus, ADFN centers “women’s self-determination” as the answer to the Chinese state’s central question of who can reproduce the Chinese population and who counts as a Chinese family. In pursuit of state support for self-determined motherhood, regardless of marital status, the SWRR coalition has litigated cases to promote its three concrete SWRR demands and built a coalition in practice among queer feminist activists and activist lawyers from various movements and causes. By centering single women’s lived reality, ADFN has strategically highlighted women’s agency in social reproduction, using this differential visioning to negotiate

disagreements within feminist and queer movements over the ethics of surrogacy and gay men's reproductive rights. Additionally, ADFN has woven together feminist and queer critiques of marriage institutions by calling for the separation of marriage from reproductive rights. I thus look now at how differential coalescing takes the diversity of the coalition and makes it a practical strength by envisioning women's self-determined motherhood as a cause that unites rather than divides constituencies.

Self-Determined Motherhood

Feminist and LGBTQ movements heatedly debate whether becoming a parent constitutes self-determination or compulsory reproduction. This is because having children has been important for Chinese people, including LGBTQ people (G1807 and G1810). Similar to their heterosexual counterparts, lesbians and gay men in China face pressure to marry and carry on their family lineage. This responsibility can be deeply troubling for them because same-sex marriage is not legal in China. Many queer people choose to enter into heterosexual marriages, either by not revealing their queer identities to their partners or by collaborating with another queer person to perform a heterosexual marriage in order to hide their identities and access basic reproductive support like ARTs and maternal insurance (Wang 2019; Zhu 2018). Queer people of means seek ART service transnationally (Wei 2020). This pressure does not lessen once they come out to their parents. One gay male activist who works with a surrogacy agency explained that when he came out to his family, his mother asked his sister to carry a baby for him. While he found it ridiculous and refused to turn his sister into the family's "birth machine," he also understood the pressure his mother faced from their extended family, because he was the only son who could pass down the family name (G1817). Another queer female lawyer has aptly

summarized the family pressure that LGBTQ people experience: “Chinese parents worry about two things. One is that their child is different from others. The other is that their child does not have children” (B1934).

Many social movement actors recognize that becoming a parent is a basic human right, and they understand the community’s need for access to ARTs, especially for those who cannot bear a child. However, despite its pro-natalist transition, the Chinese state still imposes its own ideal of parenthood on the Chinese population. Thus, the state limits access to ARTs to married heterosexual couples and only provides economic incentives (like maternal insurance) to “in-plan” births. As a result, many gay men who want to become parents have to go through complicated illegal channels to access ARTs, which has created divisions within the gay community and yielded a process in which only the most privileged men are likely to succeed. As a lawyer I met through ADFN put it, “because it is illegal, if something happens, it makes it very complicated for gay men, right? Also, the cost [of surrogacy] is very high, it is also a very big risk, and there is no legal protection” (B1928). He stressed that the state does not take gay male communities’ special reproductive needs into consideration and emphasized that legal access to ARTs “is really a basic human right, a very important one” (B1928). Most cis-male gay lawyers and community organizers I interviewed shared this sentiment. They often mentioned their own struggles to find ARTs (B1925) or shared stories about the difficulties that their clients or community members experienced (B1947). They repeatedly argued that the right to parenthood, irrespective of gender and marital status, is a compelling demand for mobilizing community members who would not otherwise care about LGBTQ movement.

For their part, many feminist activists’ views differ markedly from gay men’s perspectives on reproductive rights. The former raise concerns about the ethics of surrogacy as

well as emphasizing the fundamental gendered appropriation of women's reproductive labor and the oppression that results. For these feminists, both the state and the family impose childbearing on all women, including queer women, and thus should be resisted. A faction of the feminist movement has taken this view in a homophobic direction and strongly opposes surrogacy, by actively attacking any mention of legalizing surrogacy and extending this attack to include efforts to legalize same-sex marriage. For example, when asked about reproductive rights, a trans community organizer stated that he did not follow this issue closely, but he had witnessed many heated debates in social movement spaces around surrogacy. Recalling a 2019 campaign for legalizing same-sex marriage, he said anti-surrogacy feminists sabotaged same-sex marriage campaigns saying, "all you gays actually want is to legalize surrogacy, and then to use women as a reproductive tool" (B1929).

Consequently, established LGBTQ organizations tiptoed around the question of surrogacy and were careful about officially taking a side in the surrogacy debate (G1804 and B1952). While acknowledging that ARTs can be a neutral technology and men's reproductive rights should be also respected, the leader of a queer-women-led national organization stated that

I think the reproductive rights of men ... the reproductive rights of men using assisted reproductive technology should also be respected. But we haven't studied in depth whether the use of surrogate women is justified, especially in the area of women's [rights]. But as I said earlier, I think that every person's reproductive rights should be respected regardless of gender and sexual orientation. The specific technical issues involved also need to be respected and deserve consideration. (B1952)

In our conversation about reproductive rights, the same leader constantly validated both sides and ended by emphasizing that the organization needed to conduct more research and conversations in their community before giving me a clear on-the-record position on surrogacy. This back-and-forth shows that LGBTQ movements are cautious in navigating ongoing disagreements over whether surrogacy exploits women and whether cis men (gay or straight) should have institutionalized access to ARTs. Given the high cost of opposition from anti-surrogacy feminists, established national organizations are, unsurprisingly, less likely to support the SWRR coalition if ADFN's reproductive rights narratives are not crafted to circumvent the gendered tensions around the rights of cis gay men to biological parenthood.

Thus, ADFN has distanced itself from debates over surrogacy in order to represent a coalition that encompasses feminist demands against compulsory motherhood and gay men's demand for access to biological parenthood. For this reason, the coalition frames the demand as women's self-determination, turning the question back to the state to insist it take action and provide support to make women's self-determination financially feasible. The emphasis on women's self-determination was evident in Xu's case. She often told reporters that she wanted to freeze her eggs during the prime of her career to preserve her choice and agency in deciding when to become a mother.

Storytelling, as in relating Xu's experience, has been a key ADFN strategy to amplify the impact of its litigation. On social media, the Network publishes the stories of women (and sometimes men, too) who become parents out of heterosexual wedlock and their struggles. Importantly, they usually tell these stories in upbeat tones. Through its storytelling, ADFN presents a picture of a new generation of Chinese women who stand up for themselves and desire motherhood. These narratives of motherhood appeal to state-run media and dovetail with the

state's pro-natalist policy direction. At the same time, these stories—along with ADFN reports on SWRR litigation cases—demonstrate how these women must navigate their lack of state protection, as they bravely demand that local state agents and hospitals respect their desire and choice to become parents.

In China's first maternity insurance litigation, ADFN supported Zhang Meng, a single mother, who went to court in 2017 to challenge Shanghai's policy of only offering maternity benefits to married women. After losing her lawsuit and two appeals, Zhang and an ADFN lawyer petitioned and spoke to the Shanghai People's Procuratorate in October 2020.

Afterwards, Zhang shared on a ADFN social media blog post that “I think the prosecutor may have felt unable to convince me and later he said that he might want to extend the response period for this petition; the prosecutor also asked me about my financial ability, claiming that this matter did not affect me much and telling me not to look too deeply into it. Which I definitely disagree with, [my case] is just important! Not only is it important to me, but it's important to China's many single mothers. Maternity insurance is a money issue, but more importantly, it's our right.”⁴⁵ Inspired by Zhang, on November 3, 2021, Li, another single mother in Shanghai sued the Shanghai Healthcare and Social Security Administration with the help of a ADFN lawyer. On an ADFN social media blog post titled “Un-Married birth cases lose 99% of the time, but I still choose to stand up for myself,” Li stated that “it is my right, my most basic reproductive right as a woman, and that right should be in my hands.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See the Network's WeChat blog post on Zhang by DF Editorial Team, ‘The Money for Maternity Insurance is an Issue, But More Importantly, [It is] My Rights!’ (ADFN, October 15 2020) <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/t_3YOW9wT9U-Zr9tGycf4A> accessed January 21, 2022.

⁴⁶ See the Network's WeChat blog post on Li by DF Editorial Team, ‘Un-Married birth cases lose 99% of the time, but I still choose to stand up for myself’ (ADFN, December 8 2021) <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/_0KMujw-jV2ms140M4DEjA> accessed January 21, 2022.

When I asked the staff member who oversees the Network's storytelling and social media about those stories, she offered the following explanation:

We present stories on our social media account that are lightly edited but faithful to the words of those who tell them. Because [after collecting the stories], you can pick and choose [the content] later, right? Editing the content is not tampering with it, but we want to convey a proactive and diverse message. No, it's not that we deliberately obscure the difficulties, or that they regret the choices they made, or that this choice was not their own, but they were in fact very passive. However, nothing in this world is absolute. It might have been, for example, an accident or something. They did not realize that they were not actively making that decision, but later they had a very proactive attitude. We advocate this kind of taking the initiative in making your decisions and this is the life you choose, the way you choose to live.

This statement makes it clear that the Network deliberately seeks to promote women's self-determination as the first step to empowering individuals in intimate relationships. This strategic move also helps protect against anti-surrogacy trolling. While the idea of self-determination is not "Chinese" per se, it does align with the Maoist idea that women hold up half of the sky and are active participants in building socialist China. At the same time, featuring stories like those of Xu, Zhang and Li has helped to empower more women to reject the path of compulsory motherhood that the state-family project establishes; it encourages them to exercise their own agency and refuse to allow marriage to limit how they imagine the family. The Network's storytelling also encourages more people to stand up against injustice and creates a channel for ADFN to find additional plaintiffs for its impact litigation cases (G1901 and G1915).

While this demand is a step towards directly challenging the patriarchal, heteronormative institution of marriage, it does not obstruct advocacy opportunities from perspectives that are different from those of ADFN. This differential coalescing strategy reflects the Network's commitment to building power with people who may not have the same view of oppression but still share this particular SWRR goal. One gay lawyer—who has been active in the LGBTQ movement since 2016—shared why he thinks SWRR is an attainable and critical step towards reproductive rights for all LGBTQ communities: “After single women gain the right to artificially assisted reproduction, I think the next step is for single men to advocate for their own right to access artificially assisted reproduction on the basis of equal rights. It is advocating for equality between men and women [China's governing principle]” (B1927). While not all DF activists in the SWRR coalition share this lawyer's view, the emphasis on self-determined motherhood has enabled more people like him to support the current SWRR demands, and they see their own long-term agendas reflected in this joint action.

Living “Single” as a Reality

While focusing on women's self-determination has helped the coalition avoid heated, divisive debates around surrogacy, emphasizing “singlehood” has safeguarded the coalition's ties to feminist movements and allowed it to maintain critical distance from the institution of marriage. On the one hand, many feminists understand marriage as an institution that particularly oppresses women and gender-marginalized people. The choice to be single is one way to resist the state-family project. On the other hand, because state law makes marriage a condition for many social rights, taking an anti-marriage stance is unnecessary to make a claim to support single women's needs. Indeed, their pressing needs stem from the social stigmas and economic

hardships that result from discrimination against unmarried mothers, such as being denied insurance and promotions. Thus, by working for single women's rights first, the SWRR coalition cuts to the chase and demands that the state address the needs of Chinese families that fall outside its narrow definition.

Before the law, many gender and sexual diverse people are first seen as "single women." As the ADFN coordinator explained, "from the policy point of view, there is no gay identity, it is an identity of unmarried women, single women. Therefore, speaking from the perspective of the [ADFN community] survey, a single woman's perspective is also more logical [than a queer women's]" (G1915). While highlighting single women's identity provided a compromise with legal and media arguments for ADFN, this legal status has become an important coalitional ground for uniting different feminist and LGBTQ activists. Thus, ADFN has actively articulated who is covered under the legal definition of "single women" and who will therefore benefit from the three SWRR demands. For instance, all of ADFN's social media handles include the following four phrases: "Single Mothers; Queer Women Couples; Freedom for Marriage and Parenthood; and Diverse Families" around their name and logo. Similarly, the Network's legal aid announcement indicates that it addresses the following issues: "reproductive issues for diverse families/unmarried women," "single/*lala* reproduction-related legal issues," "pregnancy and employment discrimination," and other terms related to queer partnership rights.⁴⁷

On the one hand, the legal aid issues the Network takes on, along with its stated vision and mission, clearly demonstrate that SWRR is a concrete demand that addresses state law. On the other hand, the Network also makes clear that SWRR demands go beyond reproductive rights

⁴⁷ See the Network's 2021 post on the legal aid it offers on January 16, 2021, ADFN, <<https://weibo.com/6503675176/JDtXYvYwJ?pagetype=profilefeed>> accessed Feb 1, 2022.

to encompass other movement causes. ADFN discourse prominently presents two movement visions for itself: First, “The institution of marriage is not the only ideal type of family formation and intimacy, and we strive to break down the patriarchal institution of marriage and family;” Second, “The significance of the diverse family is its direct challenge to the patriarchal and heteronormative institution of marriage, empowering individuals in intimate relationships to consider how we can develop a person’s agency and not allow marriage to limit one’s imagination of the family.”⁴⁸

This vision shows the radical principles that undergird the Network’s contestation of the state-family project and its commitment to patriarchal heterosexual marriage. But ADFN also presents SWRR in terms of the three specific demands that have emerged through the differential coalescing process. By asking the state to provide more concrete support, these mothers—whom the law defines as single, many of whom are queer—can gain greater independence from their patriarchal families of origin. Overall, SWRR is a demand that provides tactical capacity to decenter the marriage institution. ADFN’s differential consciousness is both principled and flexible, with the strongest goal being to create coalitions that can reorganize the social relations that drive the Chinese state-family project. Thus, the SWRR coalition can center feminist causes and prioritize both straight and queer women’s reproductive needs over those of cisgender men as a radical challenge to the family and the heteronormative-patriarchal marriage institution, despite its focus on specific pragmatic reforms. Ultimately, the coalition aims to create additional spaces for women to exercise their agency under China’s state-family project.

⁴⁸ The Network’s vision and mission are stated in its pamphlet’s “who we are” page; the pamphlet was distributed at all the Network’s public events I observed during my fieldwork.

The separation between marriage and reproductive rights resonates with other actors ADFN has tried to bring into the coalition. For example, a Beijing-based feminist lawyer, who specializes in medical rights and the hospital system, shared her support for SWRR, emphasizing that “our health system is particularly old school. It restricts ARTs to [legally] married husbands and wives. [...] Marriage and reproductive rights should not be tied together, right? They must be separate. I have the right to enjoy marriage, even if I do not want children. I can also choose not to marry, and still have the right to have children. These are not contradictions. No, we cannot tie them together. So, that’s one of the things we have to do.” Like this feminist lawyer, other feminist activists and lawyers told me that they supported SWRR because of the separation between marriage and reproductive rights; they see it as a theoretically better way of addressing marital-status-based discrimination in reproductive rights than same-sex marriage would be, and they believe that China’s status quo makes the latter approach impractical as well (G1816, B1922, and B1950). At the same time, some feminist activists involved in different causes see potential in support for SWRR, but remain wary of the impact that legalizing same-sex marriage could have on surrogacy.

Nevertheless, many queer women see SWRR demands as a step towards legalizing same-sex marriage. The Network has worked closely with LGBTQ community organizers to host SWRR discussions in specific contexts where the potential gains can be articulated. One of them is a Beijing-based group that works with older LBT women. According to this group’s coordinator, many queer women worry about their retirement and want to try to have children in their 40s when they can afford the cost of ARTs. She stated that, “If you are 40 or older, the risk of childbirth greatly increases. For them, it is basically gambling with lives [to try to have a child]. So, if she has children, she may be a little less anxious because she may transfer some of

the stress of her retirement to her children. But if she doesn't have children, then all the pressure of her retirement falls on her partner" (B1948). The Chinese state has continually privatized social benefits in accordance with filial piety norms, so that preparing for retirement amounts to raising a child and letting the child support their elderly parents. A butch lesbian in her late 40s once joked that childbearing is like "women's political assignments" (G1824), because they either have to finish doing it before coming out or, if they are lucky, their lesbian-accepting parents will still ask about grandchildren.

In addition, the inability to enter into legal same-sex marriages makes many feel insecure in their partnerships, and they believe that having a child will at least ensure that they have a companion (G1827). A trans community leader told me that this common sentiment among older queer women is also a familiar concern in many trans men communities; for that reason, trans men also demand the right to freeze their eggs (B1940). As he explained, to use ARTs is more complicated for trans men because in China they must undergo full gender-affirming surgery to legally change their gender marker, during time in which they are not allowed to be a legal marriage. A law professor who works with the trans-rights community echoed this dilemma, stating that "if you're a female to male transgender, you're having a child with a female, and say you want to put your name on the birth certificate, you're required to change your ID card, right? But if you want to change your ID card, [the state] will require you to undergo these procedures [full transitioning through surgery]" (B1951). The Network's emphasis on reproductive rights regardless of marital status has allowed lesbian women and other gender-marginalized people to see themselves represented in the SWRR demands; as a result, they have become important community partners for ADFN, and some have even become long-term individual donors to the SWRR cause (B1940 and B1948).

Conclusion

The Advocates for Diverse Family Network's approach to the reproductive rights of "single women" demonstrated its ability to differentially coalesce a multiplicity of queer, feminist and legal activists and activist groups around a unifying cause. Following the state's crackdown on civil society and amid China's transition to pro-natalist population policy, ADFN has intentionally sidestepped the surrogacy debate to recenter the needs of women and trans men who are (or are becoming) parents. It advocates concrete reforms to support their rights by legally allowing them to access ARTs and to afford them equal maternity insurance and protection from employment discrimination. The pragmatic coalescing of diverse activist groups and their differential visions into a single SWRR coalition provides an effective means to advocate for broadening the legal protection of "single women." By supporting the concrete rights of all people who fall into this legal category, ADFN also maintains a radical critique of the state and its position on families. The queer feminist activists who work to advance SWRR demands see it as a battle against state-led patriarchy; others see this issue as a path towards achieving their own goals as gay men seeking same-sex marriage rights, heterosexual women and trans men seeking access to ART, and lesbian women looking for economic protection from discrimination against the unmarried. However, this approach to coalition building is not without cost. Divisions over explicitly mentioning queer women became a divide within Rainbow Lawyers that contributed to ADFN's split from Rainbow Lawyers in 2018; the latter prefers to focus explicitly on LGBTQ communities. ADFN's priority on differential coalescing as a

strategy demanded instead some more organizational separation (G1915 and G1917). Even so, taking SWRR demands as a practical first step is still a goal that both organizations share (G1914), and Rainbow Lawyers has continued to appear on ADFN's partner organization list.

ADFN's story has demonstrated the resiliency of coalition building in contemporary China with a weak civil society and strong censorship. However, social movements around the world under different levels of state repression face similar challenges on how to coalesce groups with these different agendas. Echoing the feminist theory and practice of differential consciousness, differential coalescing is concerned less with theoretical purity or consistency but more with the ways to move forward practically and politically in the given context. The differential coalescing concept have thus added to Sandoval's differential consciousness theory by advancing the analytical tools to understand how a coalition can strategically create an interactional space by the incorporation of differential visions of various movement actors in pursuit of a shared agenda.

Chapter Four

Affective Accompaniment: Caring for the Iterative Transformation of LGBTQ Activists

Auntie Rainbow was in her 50s. She is a parent activist in Beijing, and the mother of a gay son. I first met her at a Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays China (PFLAG-China)⁴⁹ event for the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, on May 20, 2019. She was a panelist, and she told the audience that she had recently burst into tears at the wedding of a close friend's child. She cried because she felt jealous of her friends with straight children. She realized that none of them would need to make the same extra effort to invite people to their children's weddings that Rainbow will have to do for her son's wedding. At the end of the wedding, Rainbow asked all of her close girlfriends to promise that they would come to her son's wedding in the future. [...]

Today was the 22nd, two days after we first met. When Rainbow and I met again in a park near the Dongzhimen Subway Station, she double-checked about whether it was okay with me to meet in public space because some people might know her activism and therefore would know I am *that* kind of kid too. She told me that she has worked in the public sector all her life and her only child's sexuality made her realize for the first time that everything in society goes against her family. [...]

⁴⁹ In 2008, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays–China (*zhongguo tongxinglian qinyouhui*, PFLAG–China) was founded in Guangzhou, a metropolis in southern China, far from Beijing and closer to Hong Kong. As of 2019, PFLAG–China had more than 76 local chapters across China that work with the heterosexual parents of LGBTQ children; by then, the organization had 12 paid staff members and over six thousand active volunteers. Between 2009 and 2019, PFLAG–China organized 12 national conferences. In 2017 and 2019, the organization hosted two cruises with over 800 and 1,200 attendees, respectively.

Like many parent activists I met through PFLAG-China, Rainbow told me that, as a mother, it is her right to speak up for her child. At one point, moving her eyes away from me and gazing into the distance, she said determinedly, “If same-sex marriage is not legalized in China, I will die with my eyes open.” We sat crying in silence for a few minutes before we said goodbye and headed in different directions to catch the subway for our evening events. (fieldnote, May 22, 2019)

When presenting about the Chinese LGBTQ movement, I’ve often been asked some variation of the following questions: “What is it like to be an activist in China, and what makes these activists stay?” Since 2019, I’ve started sharing Auntie Rainbow’s story to open my presentations and address these questions up front. When I need some more courage, I always go back to that early summer afternoon in Beijing. I still remember standing in the subway and typing up notes, thinking about Auntie Rainbow’s profound statement on same sex marriage, and feeling deeply moved, cared for, and more committed to the cause. Taking my own emotional turn in writing about social movements, I started to ask, “how does it *feel* to be an LGBTQ activist in China?”

Social movement scholars have long inquired about mobilizing people in high-risk environments (Loveman 1998; McAdam 1986). More recently, they have begun to examine how emotion impacts high-risk social movements (Jasper 2011; Liao 2021; Nah 2021). Empirical works have found that social ties and resource networks contribute to recruiting new activists, but they also exclude those who feel less emotionally attached to the core groups of activists in the social movement (Chua 2018). In addition, academics have increasingly focused their

attention on the emotional (and often messy) elements of the movement-building work organizations and activists do to sustain coalitions (García 2020).

Building on the scholarship about mobilization in high-risk contexts, this chapter contributes to the discussion about the emotional aspects of high-risk movement work and examines interlocking affective support within a marginalized group. China's LGBTQ movement operates in a context where activists' financial reward is low but their political risk is high. Care and support are among the few benefits that these social movement spaces offer. For that reason, the emotions of LGBTQ activists in China are an integral part of understanding how emotion factors into the relationship between the relational structure among activists and the sustainability of movement solidarity.

To comprehend how emotion affects social change, I propose the concept of *affective accompaniment*, which captures the emotion work that makes the companionship for a person's activist transformation possible. This concept stems from the affective approach to social movements in which emotions have the power to reshape social orders (Gould 2009). On the one hand, with the shrinking of civil society, positive and upbeat emotional stories often serve as a way to counter anti-queer social norms and practices and to reclaim spaces where state law hinders activism and collective action. On the other hand, affective accompaniment looks beyond stories of resiliency to ask what makes people continue doing high-risk movement work. Overall, affective accompaniment adds to the social movement scholarship by addressing the iterative part of activists' journeys and by conceptualizing care as an affective and mutual process for both givers and receivers.

Empirically, I focus on PFLAG-China, a national LGBTQ rights organization whose mission already highlighted a companion mode of mobilization. Centering the stories of parent

activists, I look at their paths to accepting their LGBTQ children, overcoming sociopolitical barriers, and providing companionship for each other. More importantly, I contextualize their stories in the 15 months of ethnography in four national LGBTQ rights organizations. Their experiences of providing and receiving emotion work in movement spaces provides a focal point for interrogating how affective accompaniment works and through whose labor and effort in sustaining companionship. My findings suggest that people do not join an organization only for its strategy and vision but also because of how it feels to form part of its care and support system. These findings reveal the dynamic and nuanced relationship between emotions and movement solidarity—even when people do not agree on advocacy strategies, their shared values of care has brought people together despite their differences.

Affective Accompaniment for High-Risk Movement Work

In recent social movement studies exploring affect, scholars have found that emotions play an important role in recruiting new members and sustaining solidarity for movement causes (Chua 2018; Gould 2009; Liao 2021; Yang 2005). Often acting as a counter-hegemonic force, social movements have created discursive spaces to articulate feelings and enable new ways of surviving and resisting the threats they face (Jasper 2011; Mackenzie 2022; Yang 2022). Yet most research on emotions and movement participation has focused on the micro-level initial turning points where one's transformation from a bystander to a participant in collective action occurs in binary fashion (Ward 2016). As a consequence, these studies have paid less attention to the continual and iterative work of activists to sustain relational movement structures.

Importantly, this chapter recognizes that the experience of activism under repression is necessarily precarious and liminal. Social movements confront both hard repression, through

direct state violence, and “softer” repression, including ridicule, stigma and silencing (Ferree 2004), which often results in social and political isolation (Deng 2017; Thayer 2010). Thus, activism amidst repression requires that activists carefully navigate liminal space and constantly (re)negotiate the legality of their actions before the law and in their communities. Inspired by research about how uncertain legal status impacts the lives of immigrants in the U.S. (Menjívar 2006), this chapter conceptualizes the legality of activism under repression beyond the black-and-white binary of legal and illegal. Instead, it looks at the work, especially the emotion work, that activists must perform to manage the fear of repression and the costs of marginalization. In that context, this chapter looks at activists’ participation in high-risk movement work as a nonlinear and iterative process of transformation.

The affective approach to social movements has recognized the companionship within social movements that shepherds activist transformations. Building on this approach I propose a concept of *affective accompaniment* to capture the emotion work that makes such companionship possible. This concept sees that “power is exercised through and reproduced in our feelings,” that is, power both shapes and is shaped by what we feel (Gould 2009:39). For that reason, emotions have the subversive potential to enable us to “perceive the world differently from its portrayal in conventional descriptions” and “lead us to make subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the *status quo*” (Jaggar 1989:167 emphasis in original). To situate the relationship between power and emotions in an authoritarian context, I investigate how social movements compete with the state to orchestrate the public’s emotions and widen their political horizons. On the one hand, the Chinese state tries to limit what information people can access and direct how the public should feel and process such information (Yang 2022; Yang and Tang 2018). On the other hand, people also express emotions in non-verbal ways (Gould 2009). In the

context of strong state censorship, this means that non-verbal expressions of affection are harder for human language to capture and by extension more difficult for the state to censor. Thus, to challenge the state's control over emotions and restructure the social order, activists and social movement organizations can intentionally create compassionate and supportive spaces for people to feel differently about state-imposed social order.

Additionally, affective accompaniment seeks to address the iterative part of the activist's journey by conceptualizing care as an affective and mutual process for both givers and receivers. In this process, activists provide space for each other's growth and healing and share the sociopolitical risks. In particular, while activists may not share the same strategies for social change, their common values of caring for new recruits and for each other can deepen their commitment to the cause. At the same time, the effort to maintain such levels of accompaniment requires consistent emotional labor, which often is made possible at the expense of activists' emotional and physical health and can cause emotional burnout. Overall, the concept of affective accompaniment calls for more scholarly attention to the sociopolitical costs and the emotion work behind each protagonist's transformation from a moment of crisis, like when Auntie Rainbow burst into tears, to a more hopeful ending.

Data and Method

From 2016 to 2020, I conducted 15 months of fieldwork in China and interviewed 89 people. My two main research sites were Guangzhou and Beijing, where many Chinese LGBTQ organizations are headquartered, but I also traveled to other cities for interviews. I recruited the activists by directly contacting them based on my previous connections with them as fellow activists. My sample is limited to LGBTQ activists and community members who are connected

to LGBTQ organizations in China that have explicitly engaged in debates around the family. While this chapter draws extensively on quotes from four PFLAG--China activists, it is the day-to-day ethnography on the four national organizations that has largely informed the analysis.

The community generally refers to PFLAG-China parents by their first names with a family-like title—such as mama, papa, big sister, or auntie—attached. When referring to the four mothers quoted in this chapter, I refer to them by their preferred name or use a pseudonym that reflects the typical PFLAG-China parents' naming system. I coded all the interviews by location, year, and number of interviews that year. For example, B1901 means the first interview I conducted in Beijing in 2019, and G1907 refers to the seventh interview I conducted in Guangzhou in 2019.

These interviews lasted between an hour and three hours, averaging 1.5 hours. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese and then translated into English. I started each interview by asking people how they got involved in LGBTQ movements in China. I asked parent activists about their experiences of being a parent of LGBTQ child as well as an LGBTQ rights parent activist. I also inquired about their views of LGBTQ communities' needs and difficulties. I ended each interview by exploring the interviewee's views of the current political environment and visions for the LGBTQ movement in the next year and decade. Through these three questions, I had them assess the Chinese state's influence on the LGBTQ movement without putting people on the spot by asking them to discuss the state directly.

Navigating the Margins of Liminal Legality

When my son came out to me, he told me, “mama I am *tongzhi*.” I told him, “I am *tongzhi* too.” (G1812)

Born in 1963 in northeastern China, Sister Mei is the PFLAG–China coordinator in Shanghai. When she attends large LGBTQ gatherings, such as the 2019 PFLAG–China Cruise and the 2019 Shanghai Pride Week events, Mei is always easy to spot because of her bright hair and stylish outfits. When Mei enters these spaces, she carries an air of sunshine and laughter. Other community members have jokingly referred her as representative of northeastern women, because she lives up to the stereotype of them: loud, outspoken, and strong-minded. Her cheerful and assertive personality and charm make Mei a natural leader. She is fun to be around and always knows what is happening in Shanghai. Mei is the person to ask what plays to see at the theater and which new restaurants to try.

When I first met Mei in 2018, her son had already been out to her for 13 years; the *tongzhi* exchange between them occurred in 2005. As she recalled, back then she did not know anything about homosexuality. When her son came out to her, she had no idea that the term *tongzhi*, which Chinese Communist Party members use to refer to fellow party members (*comrade*), has become a code word for *gay* or *queer* in the LGBTQ community. To be sure, *tongzhi* is a creative and resilient way for Chinese LGBTQ activists to (re)claim space in contemporary Chinese political language. Mei's interaction with her son also reflects how LGBTQ people live at the margins of Chinese society. In China, state law, social norms, and family tradition actively contest queer lived experiences and disrupt organized pro-LGBTQ rights actions. In addition, because of the cognitive barriers that state censorship imposes, the issue of rights, and any concepts that the state has deemed unfit for the general public to know about, have been systematically filtered out of everyday people's cognitive understanding (Wang and Liu 2020). As a consequence, LGBTQ activists and community members are not only are

forced to find creative ways to conceal their double lives by using uncensored words but must also unpack and explain the meanings behind them.

While celebrating the LGBTQ community's creativity and resilience is important, we must also recognize that the marginalization of LGBTQ rights and efforts to break the silence around them negatively impact the people who perform these strategies of resilience. Mei told me that during the *tongzhi* conversation with her son, she felt like her head was spinning and was at a complete loss. As her son explained to her, "that means that I will not be with a woman in this life. I will not love a woman. The person I will live with in the future will be a man. The person I want to grow old with in this life will be a man." Upon hearing her son say those words, Mei could not hold herself together anymore and broke down completely (G1812). When she repeated those words to me 13 years later, she trembled; her old feelings suddenly resurfaced as she remembered being lost and falling apart.

Parent activists must then make a big leap from knowing what *tongzhi* means to saying the uncoded word *tongxinglian* (homosexual) in everyday life. Living at the liminal margin between being out and closeted has made word choice in daily conversation a constant dance of testing the waters. In Mei's journey to joining PFLAG-China, she found out that most parents—even those who were already activists—did not want to say the word "homosexual" aloud. Mei recalled her early involvement in PFLAG-China national events. In 2011, Mei participated in PFLAG-China's fourth national gathering in Shanghai—there were only eleven parents in attendance along with a psychology professor who was there as a facilitator. Mei recalled that when the professor asked people to introduce themselves, they became quiet and shy. Then, she stood up and said, "Hello everyone! I am Sister Mei, from Shanghai. My son came out as a homosexual to me in 2005, and it took me 24 hours to accept him." However, after Mei, the

second parent didn't use the word homosexual or *tongzhi*. Instead, she said, "I am so and so's mother and my child told me they were 'that' in such and such year." Similarly, the parent activists who followed only said their children were "*that*" without saying what "that" meant. Mei realized then that even PFLAG parent volunteers who actively participated in public sharing could not effortlessly say the words homosexual or *tongzhi*.

A decade later, I observed a similar pattern when I was doing my fieldwork. For example, when Rainbow and I chatted for the first time in park, she referred to me as "that" instead of saying that I am *lala*⁵⁰. That interaction did not mean that Rainbow refuses to say the word "homosexual." Once we got to know each other better, I learned that Rainbow is highly fluent in LGBTQ terminology as used in the community as well as the mainstream and medical vocabulary. Instead, Rainbow's word choice during our first one-on-one conversation shows that the LGBTQ community's standard practice is to still to avoid explicitly mentioning one's sexuality.

Mei's concerns about the silence around homosexuality have extended to her observations of current state law and policy. Amidst an authoritarian regime, strong state censorship, and weak civil society, the LGBTQ movement in China often has to slip LGBTQ rights into state law and policy by identifying strategic openings to make covert claims. Yet these openings are not enough for Mei. In her opinion, they are at best a liminal space where the law does not mention homosexuality or queerness out of neglect or ignorance. As she commented on current state law, "Now, it's true that the state has taken a stand. For example, [homosexuality] is no longer considered a mental illness. Legally, it is no longer a crime, but it's all at the margins, it's all at the margins. It is not very clear what [their rights] are. [What the state did is] just

⁵⁰ *Lala* is a non-derogatory Chinese slang term for a same-sex-desiring woman

removing [homosexuality...from the law on the books]. However, it does not say what [the state] advocates instead or which rights this [population] should have” (G1812). Mei’s comments illustrated a common frustration that I often heard from LGBTQ people and their families about the right to marry and employment protections. Liminal legality and marginalized social status are the new reality most parent activists face after their children come out. As Rainbow mentioned, she suddenly realized that everything in Chinese society went against her and her family.

As Mei concluded that the failure to legalize same-sex marriage, for example, is a state act of discrimination: “You [the law] say people, heterosexual people can get married, but homosexual people cannot get married, then this is discrimination. Why can’t we get married? Is it that only one man and one woman can be in love? Is that right?! Two men or two women is not love, right?” (G1812). Mei also used an example of fatphobic comments she received as a metaphor to illustrate invisible and subtle discrimination: “Some people will casually say, ‘Have you gained weight again’ This is discrimination, right?! Did I eat meat or drink water from your house?! It’s none of your business. Well, they are just nosy like that and say, ‘you couldn’t be fatter.’ That statement is hidden discrimination. This is what it is like to experience discrimination as LGBTQ people. This shows the importance of official [and affirming] state recognition [of LGBTQ rights].” The state's unwillingness to legally and explicitly include LGBTQ people means that their fundamental rights are at the mercy of whichever institutions or social are involved in accessing such rights. The failure to explicitly include LGBTQ people and their families forces them to bear the burden of articulating why LGBTQ people should not be excluded from basic benefits and protections. That uncertainty makes every day an uphill battle for LGBTQ people.

Activists who work on connecting different social sectors to pursue legal change also feel the marginalization of LGBTQ rights. For example, many organizations must provide free administrative labor for local and national conferences in order to introduce their own agendas into the broader programs of such conferences. Otherwise, official conference hosts could easily dismiss LGBTQ rights as too Western, too specific to a small minority, or too scandalous a political issue (B1938). Sometimes this means that a five-person team of LGBTQ activists must put together a national conference on very short notice so that LGBTQ activists also get the chance to participate in this conference (B1932; B1936). A queer female organizer once joked that her organization's movement strategy was "sneaking into big conferences as administrative experts," which has made her excel at conference administrative work, so she could easily go into this field after her LGBTQ advocacy career is over (B1932). Another organizer who works mostly with transmasculine people shared that they ended up in the Emergency Room during an anti-domestic violence national conference. As a result of back-to-back trips and overpacked schedules, they collapsed one morning after drinking a cup of black coffee. Even so, they emphasized that their experience was nothing compared to their roommate who was a full-time employee at that host organization and experienced even more stress and a heavier workload (B1936).

In addition, the fear of state repression has discouraged activists from speaking up about their labor conditions because they worry about bringing unwanted police attention to their organizations (G1901; B1930). Many people were forced out of their normal social circles, not because of their LGBTQ identities but because of their careers as activists. As one lawyer said about the social isolation of activists and the frequency of depression among activists, "Many people are more willing to do a job that can be mentioned in public, under the sun. No one wants

to have a sneaky job” (G1917). However, while the unequal exchange of labor between LGBTQ activists and mainstream stakeholders is taxing and widely known within the LGBTQ movement space, it is not an unusual practice because most activists consider that exchange to be necessary for getting a seat at the table.

Even a seasoned cis-male organizer acknowledged that burden. One of the national organization’s directors told me that when he attended more general philanthropic conferences, he often felt that people in mainstream fields have a much easier time:

Other [national organizations] often say “our business side can donate millions to us,” or they say that “our government recently gave us a site to use, so I can work there now for free.” Fuck me. I said I never got that. Our organization have been pulled down by the state [from having an equal chance to access resources and fundraise]. Why can't NGOs for LGBTQ rights be registered? Isn't that in itself differential treatment? It's the same differential treatment for LGBTQ people, isn't it? It's the same kind of discrimination that we face today because of our civil society jobs and sexual orientations. The real discrimination, the real core of this discrimination comes from the state (G1910).

These activists’ observations and experiences of political silencing and social isolation show that being an activist in China means occupying a precarious and liminal social position. More often than not, these activists experience social media shut down and police harassment. These day-to-day marginalized experiences discourage people from joining the cause. Rather than drawing firm distinctions about who is or is not an activist, people like Mei, Rainbow, and the people with whom they organize must constantly navigate the political silencing and social

isolation they experience. They have to reposition themselves in relation to the state to construct the legality of their actions and their eligibility for social resources.

Building Affective Accompaniment as Foundational Movement Infrastructures

Given the pervasive uncertainty and anxiety within movement spaces, affective accompaniment often means holding space for people with compassion. Sustaining that affective accompaniment calls for social movement leadership to build relational infrastructures to support people as they go through deeply personal and often iterative transformations. With that support, more people can gradually experience change and envision a better future. In day-to-day conversations, this carefully cultivated accompaniment requires activists to read the space and meet people where they are to gradually normalize queer discourses.

After her first national meeting with PFLAG parents, Mei raised her concerns to PFLAG-China's leadership about parent activists not being able to say the word "homosexual" and the liminal legal status of LGBTQ rights. Mei feels that everyone should practice saying homosexual, especially in daily conversations where there is less concern about censorship and political calculation. In addition, Mei suggested that PFLAG-China not only work on the self-acceptance of LGBTQ children but also parents' self-acceptance as the parents of LGBTQ children. Mei became an advocate for parents' self-acceptance as the parents of LGBTQ children. Self-acceptance of being the parent of an LGBTQ child means saying to oneself as well as publicly "my child is a homosexual, and I am the proud parent of my homosexual child. My child can live a healthy life and enjoy this world. My son and I can face this world with sunshine and enjoy the sunshine of this world. I will use this word everywhere, on Weibo and WeChat, and when chatting with other [PFLAG] parents" (G1812).

As a community organizer, Mei has always tried to create a safe space for new parent members. That includes strategically and carefully bringing up topics related to the word “homosexuality” as well as the word itself. For example, at the gatherings she organizes, she always considers different parents’ preferences and their readiness to participate and contribute. She also makes sure people have fun together. For example, Mei shared a story about a father in Shanghai who had prohibited his wife and son from talking about LGBTQ issues at home and yet went on to become a PFLAG-Shanghai activist.

Out of love for his son and his wife, that father always volunteered to drive them as well as other participants for PFLAG-Shanghai gatherings but he never participated in them. Then, one day Mei happened to be in the car with him and his wife, and she successfully persuaded him to stay for the meeting. Mei said that “because he knows that I am a leader [of PFLAG] in Shanghai, and to him, I am also a northeasterner who’s good at smooth talking, he would for sure think that once I am in the car, I would keep talking about [LGBTQ] topics to brainwash him.” But Mei surprised him. Instead, she spoke about everything else, from makeup, skincare, and wellness, to TV shows. She did so to show him that parent activists are just like everyone else.

Of course, Mei did so strategically and intentionally based on her own experience. She knows that parent activists often feel socially isolation; they long for a community but shy away from connecting with people because of their LGBTQ children. For that reason, she always carries a speaker to PFLAG social gatherings. When the time is right, she asks people she knows are good dancers or singers to dance and sing for the group. That day, Mei asked who knew how to ballroom dance. To everyone’s surprise, the father said, “I can dance with you.” All night, an increasingly bright smile spread across his face, and the gathering ended with everyone dancing and singing.

Later, Mei heard from the man's wife that he had said "this is how parents should be. Don't keep saying homosexual or not homosexual every day. The more you say it the harder your heart feels. It is okay to have a homosexual child, but us parents have to show healthy and positive attitudes. Don't get caught up the word homosexual. It is okay to be homosexual. If you catch yourself up every day in the word homosexual, other people will really think you are not normal" (G1812). But to the delight of both his wife and Mei, he finally started saying the word "homosexual." Since that event, the father always goes to PFLAG-Shanghai events whenever he can and he has become an active member of the community.

With Mei's carefully thought-out support for parents like that father, more parents are open to thinking and speaking about their LGBTQ children. More importantly, they make new friends and move away from the self-imposed isolation that began when their children first came out. Thanks to her work, Mei gradually saw that everyone in her own Shanghai social circle uses the word "homosexual" as a mundane word, one that is like any other word; it does not feel as if the word is "very tongue-in-cheek or very harsh or difficult to say." Through activists like Mei, who pour their hearts and souls into creating spaces of companionship like PFLAG-Shanghai, more LGBTQ people and their families can feel hopeful about the future together. When describing PFLAG-Shanghai, Mei said "We are super tight. Now, we are all like sisters and brothers" (G1812).

Accompanying Change, Accompanying Difference

While Mei works to normalize queer discourses in everyday language, other parent activists have taken more public and direct action to resist the marginalization of LGBTQ rights. On May 20, 2017, also known as Lovers' Day, PFLAG-China organized a group of eleven

heterosexual parents (ten mothers and one father) who traveled from all over China to advertise their single LGBTQ children at a matchmaking market. They held the event in the Shanghai People's Park, where Chinese parents gather each week to arrange dates for their single straight adult children.⁵¹ Within an hour, security guards forced the PFLAG parents to disperse. As one mother told the *Sixth Tone* reporter, "If the parents of straight people can be here, the parents of gay people can also be here ... We have every right to be here — I'm here to find a boyfriend for my son."

Mama June was one of the eleven parents at the Lovers' Day event. Born in 1969 and raised in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei Province, June is the mother of a gay son, and she is a regional leader of PFLAG-Wuhan. Mama June is one of the most active and athletic parents I met. On her WeChat moments, one can see that she is always swimming, hiking, or traveling. She is part of a Changjiang River all-women swimming group; every once in a while, she posts pictures of herself and her friends wearing swimsuits in the same bright pink color. In Pussy Riot fashion, their swimsuits cover their faces and arms; that's less of a political statement and more a means of sun protection, when they were heading into the river, or being interviewed for local TV. When I asked June why they chose the Shanghai People's Park for their queer matchmaking action, Mama June answered,

We need ordinary people to understand more about this, right? So, we chose the Shanghai People's Park. Every week, there is a corner dedicated to matchmaking. This famous weekly event has been here for a while, and it has always been for heterosexual people.

⁵¹ See the news report on this PFLAG–China action: <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1000233/at-wedding-market%2C-mothers-of-gays-and-lesbians-face-resistance>

So, a bunch of us parents were like, “those of us who have gay kids also need a public space to have a face-to-face [meet-up for match-making].” But it’s not really about our children having to go to the matchmaking event. Our goal is to help people learn about the gay community. (G1811)

By directly occupying a physical space in the heart of heterosexual marriage market, June and her fellow parent activists made a public statement about LGBTQ people’s rights to marry and have family. The Chinese state cultivates people’s deference to it by routinely connecting nationalism and filial piety (Wang 2020). Thus, the state makes all parents responsible for passing down family values and socializing their children (regardless of gender and sexuality) to participate in the state’s family project. That responsibility ensures parents’ authority over their children’s marriage decisions, and the state assumes that all parents agree with state-promoted heterosexual family norms. However, by subverting that responsibility, PFLAG’s parent activists use their authority over family issues to claim a public space by shining a bright light on the state’s denial of LGBTQ people’s basic rights to marry and have a family.

The Shanghai People’s Park event was not the first time Mama June had participated in a direct action taken by the parents of LGBTQ people. About a month before the Shanghai action, in April 2017, a homophobic banner appeared at the basketball court at Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan while no one claimed responsibility.⁵² The banner said, “Defend core socialist values. Resist corrosive and decadent Western thoughts. Keep homosexuality away from campus.”

⁵² See the *New York Times* report on the incident and PFLAG parents’ action: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/world/asia/china-anti-gay-banner-university.html> (accessed October 31, 2019).

The banner's content reflects the pervasive effect of the Chinese state actively referring to homosexuality, along with many progressive gender and sexuality ideas and practices, as "the influence of Western vices." Proactively responding to the banner, June organized a team of parents to make their own banner that stated, "Don't let homophobes hurt our children!" They stood holding their banner in protest on the same basketball court and in many other spots college students frequent on campus. Just like the parents at the Shanghai People's Park event, the parents in Wuhan leveraged their parental authority over their children's education to demand a school-parent meeting and forced the university leadership to put the university commitment to making the campus inclusive for LGBTQ students down in writing (G1811).

While they are aware of state-assigned parental responsibilities and the political power that comes with them, not all PFLAG-China parents agree with June's strategy. This includes the outspoken veteran activist Sister Mei. Mei told me that she could not participate in the Shanghai People's Park action because of a business trip; she also expressed some concern about how confrontational parents should be. Mei prefers to visit the park once a while to speak with people about not forcing their children to get married and encouraging them to be aware of what their children might not tell them about their sexualities (G1812). However, despite their different approaches to action strategies, Mei spoke highly of June. She emphasized the bravery of those parents and implied that June, who is six years younger than Mei, represented a new generation of parent activists:

Most of the parents participating that day were "new parents" [who had just joined PFLAG]. Some "new parents" were freaked out at first [when the security guard showed up.] At a time when the community was under attack, these "new parents" were the

bravest and fought back directly. So, they were awesome! The power of solidarity and visibility is much needed. If you don't speak up, how can you make the public aware that [the LGBTQ] community exists? Right? If even you, as a parent, won't speak up, how can you ensure that your child enjoys the same rights as other people? (G1812)

Beyond their sense of responsibility to protect their children, parent activists also mention the pressure to marry they face even after accepting their children's queer identities. Born in 1965, Mama Li is a national coordinator for PFLAG-China's hotline based in Anhui. Li is gentle and assertive. When talking to her, Mama Li has the magical ability to make you feel like you have all her attention. Besides running the hotline, Mama Li also actively participates in PFLAG-China's qipao league where a group of parents wear traditional Chinese clothes and perform fashion shows at PFLAG events. Commenting on the Shanghai People's Park event, Li stressed that she understands the parents who went to the People's Park, because all parents, regardless of whether their children are straight or gay, feel pressure to make sure their children have life partners. In the matchmaking corner, parent activists verbalized the pressure they feel about their children's marital and family status. As Li noted, "Their action also lets the public know about us. I think it's very brave of them to let the public know that our kids are gay, and we are anxious too. You see, that's why it makes a lot of sense for the matchmaking corner to have both heterosexual and homosexual [people's parents]. That reflects the diversity of our society" (G1814).

Mama Li generally distinguishes herself from Mama June and hesitates to use the word "social movement" in describing her work. Li emphasizes that she is a mother first. She understands that the People's Park action is part of the public education work that PFLAG

parents do, and she knows that they use different strategies to carry it out. Li does so through her daily work at the PFLAG–China hotline. Her hotline work aims to provide companionship for LGBTQ people and their families so they can live proud and public lives, free of the public’s judgment. “This is a long process of psychological building. So, I will start from there [not worrying about people’s judgment] and accompany them to see that we do not have to live for other people’s approval” (G1814). While Mama Li’s work coordinating the hotline is less visible in the media than the two aforementioned public actions, Li’s work at there has been critical for helping to change the narrative about what it means to have LGBTQ relatives and for accompanying LGBTQ families as they embark on their own transformations.

Hotline work is not an easy task. When Mama Li first started at PFLAG-China, the hotline was a phone line. She could only speak to a few people each night, mostly LGBTQ people who were worried about even telling their parents that they were not getting married. She had to try to keep each person’s call under an hour so that she could speak to more people in need. Now, the PFLAG hotline has moved to WeChat, so she can speak with more people nationwide, add them to different regional chatrooms, and connect them with other parents. However, scaling up the hotline also created more work for her. For example, in 2018, on the fourth day of Lunar New Year, 131 new people contacted her via the WeChat hotline; she spoke to 18 people that evening. Because people tend to face more family pressure and choose to come out to their families in person during the new year, Li was overwhelmed by hotline work and could not do much else (G1814).

It is also worth noting that while Mei and June have participated in different types of organizing work in their respective cities, they also work at the hotline with Li because each of them found the accompaniment essential to PFLAG’s movement work. Their devotion to the

cause of LGBTQ rights and involvement in PFLAG–China are not just because of PFLAG–China’s specific actions or political strategies. Rather, these parent activists found each other by working in the movement’s affective accompaniment spaces. Together, they have built regional and national support systems to provide care and companionship for each other and to support other LGBTQ people and their parents. This affective support work has allowed them to gradually accept their families, start thinking about Chinese politics differently, and recruit more people to join their activities.

The Emotional Cost of Affective Accompaniment

Mama June switched to her back camera to show me the Changjiang River and pointed at the view outside the balcony’s sliding glass doors. That was where she pulled her son towards the balcony when she found out he was gay and told him, “Even if mama accepted you, this society would not accept you. Your fate is to die alone. No one will accept you.” “If I left you in this world,” I said ... I said ... ‘it would be to hurt you and make you suffer. Why don’t the two of us, you and me, jump off the building together to end it all.’” Scared, her son ran away from home that night. Since he was only in college and still depended on his parents financially, June decided to cut off his money and tried everything to force him to change. That tension lasted for over a week, until June’s birthday. Her son borrowed some money, bought her a birthday cake, and came back home at midnight.

June switched back to the front camera and started describing the night of her birthday to me: “I was already in bed, in the dark. He sang the birthday song, lit up the candles, and came next to my bed ... I am sorry ...”

Upon mentioning the cake, Mama June suddenly started sobbing. I watched the tears stream down her face. She put down the camera and a few seconds later, when she picked it back up, I was in tears, too, lost in thoughts about my own parents and our family’s journey when I came out. Feeling the pressure to say something, I blurted out something like, “he is such a sweet son, such a good kid.”

About three minutes went by; it felt like the whole story was playing in my mind repeatedly like an old film as my own story was struggling to find its way out. Mama June’s words brought me back to our conversation again as she said, “lighting... [he was] lighting the candles and told me, he said, he said “Mama, today is your birthday. You don’t have to worry about anything else.” At that moment, I knew, at that moment, I knew, my son was just a homosexual, he was not a monster. I knew I wanted to accept my son.”

Our tears continued to flow as June’s voice traveled from the Changjiang River to the Pearl River, June’s words blurred into my mom’s words. June told me that the night her son came back home with the cake ended with her son, her husband and her hugging each other tightly, crying aloud and telling June’s son “no matter what you are, baba and mama will love you forever.”

At this moment, June's son came home. June turned to the door. Panic showed on her face as she said to me, "my son is coming back. He is coming back. He is right here. I have to dry my tears. I don't want him to see my tears. Really, I've never cried in front of him. No matter how much pain I feel, I always dry my tears, gather my strength and fake a smile to show him that I am happy." (G1811)

Mama June is the same activist who confronted a security guard at the Shanghai People's Park and demanded a meeting with a university's leadership in Wuhan. She is the same June who has constantly comforted other parents who are on their own journeys toward accepting their LGBTQ children. Yet sharing her story and revisiting her feelings still triggers strong emotions. In her desire to protect her son, she has carried the additional burden of hiding her tears from him. In that gendered mother-son dynamic, June's accompaniment of her own family is at once affectively present and invisible out of love for her family. When I talked to Rainbow about 6 months later, her tears reminded me of June's. They are both determined to bravely face any challenge in order to protect their sons, and they extend their love for their sons to the broader LGBTQ community through public speeches and actions. Through love that is bigger than their nuclear families, they dare to be open, honest, and vulnerable with another young child like me. For example, June does not see being interviewed for my dissertation project as just another opportunity for advocacy; it is also helping me finish my homework. Activists like Rainbow and June repeatedly reminded me of the fear and frustration, as well as care and love, behind stories of resilience and determination.

The moment when June's emotion shifted during our WeChat call illustrates that the process of becoming an activist is not binary or linear. Instead, the feelings associated with embracing LGBTQ rights seem to travel across time and space. Just as emotions of pride and joy resurface, so do feelings of loss, pain, and frustration. In a society that is still largely anti-queer, the discrimination in day-to-day interactions triggers LGBTQ people and their parents. Sister Mei, Mama Li and Auntie Rainbow all mentioned accompanying many parents who experience their journeys to accepting their children as iterative and emotional processes. As Rainbow shared on the panel when I first met her, weddings and other family-centered holidays and ceremonies are common triggers that remind people of the social spaces and resources from which they are excluded.

It is even more difficult to face anti-queer comments when parent activists participate in day-to-day support work for other parents and LGBTQ children. Sometimes they even experience harassment from parents who call the help hotline and accuse them of manipulating young people to become queer. Parent activists often experience breakdowns then. When they are unfairly accused by people on the hotline, parent activists feel betrayed by the very people they seek to support. As Mei puts it, "So, there are parents who are active and accepting, but become less sure after hearing too many negative things [when working at the hotline]. It's like, why am I so unlucky?! There are so many things I need to do to take care of my child every day, but I have to sit here and listen to you complain from all day" (G1812). Yet parent activists feel a sense of responsibility to help bring about change, and they feel overwhelmed by the weight of society's existing anti-queer practices. As Mama Li said, "Through answering hotline calls, I came to realize that I could not just accept my child; I also had to turn small love into big love and let the whole society know about the pressure of being homosexual. [...] If [my work helps]

more people understand LGBTQ issues and accept them as normal, my child will have the chance to live his life without any discrimination.” (G1814) Mei echoed those sentiments when she explained to me why the hotline work is so demanding but also crucial: “there is a sense of responsibility to change these people. That puts very heavy pressure on us, so much so that we can hardly breathe” (G1812).

Most LGBTQ activists I interviewed or met during my fieldwork recognized that breaking down the cognitive barriers that silence LGBTQ issues has an affective impact on people; they constantly try to remedy such effects. Because China generally lacks public space for LGBTQ issues, movement-run hotlines and individual organizers are some of the few public resources that LGBTQ people and their families can turn to for support. That means that LGBTQ activists carry the burden of absorbing social unrest in addition to their organizing work and often without proper public recognition or economic compensation. LGBTQ organizers elsewhere also told me about similar experiences of emotion work. They say that for many people, social movement organizers are the only safe option they can turn to for emotional support. As a local organizer at a Guangzhou queer women’s community group shared, she constantly feels overwhelmed by the task of taking care of community members’ feelings. She thinks that is the most challenging part of her job:

Sometimes I feel that I have to overextend myself a lot. Maybe there is something wrong with the way I work, but I get really burned out when I have to listen to all their stories. In this process, I discovered that I need self-care and accompaniment, too. This has been a co-learning process [for me and our group members]. (G1819)

Consequently, many activists, LGBTQ people, and their parents are all triggered by other people's anti-queer comments and the internalization of homophobic attitudes. At the same time, they cannot easily refuse to provide this emotion work; as organizers, they rationally understand that it is a step toward gradually accepting their own LGBTQ identities or those of their relatives.

Luckily, national organizations like PFLAG–China have a greater capacity and more resources to support their volunteers. For example, to practice collective care among themselves, Mama Li started a rotation system for the PFLAG hotline: “We parents have a rotation system. After all, [answering the hotline calls and chats] is very tiring, especially doing it all year long. So, we figured out that we should take turns to be able to rest. After years of building the system, we now have 29 parents and 12 LGBTQ people on rotation. On Sundays, we have a therapist hotline with 10 volunteer therapists on rotation” (G1814). This rotation system not only relieves parents from overwork but also provides opportunities for more people to join PFLAG. The participation of professionals like therapists (and sometimes lawyers) has benefited the veteran hotline activists when they need to ask for support. For example, Mei mentioned that she has also asked the therapists for help sometimes, because she really appreciated their perspectives (G1812).

Through mutual support, these parent activists have found their own ways to recognize the new knowledge, organizing skills, and emotional intelligence that each person has gained. When I praised Sister Mei's important role in Shanghai's movement, Mei emphasized that being part of the movement has helped her to grow as a person: “When you've just started [being a PFLAG parent], you may do it out of a sense of responsibility [for your child and other LGBTQ children]. You feel that not all children are as lucky as my son is to have parents who accept them without making a big fuss. More often than not, parents react more strongly. So, by

helping these families, you come to understand that not all of the children are like my son, and not all parents are like me. So, when you help them, it is actually a process of self-awareness, and then you will grow a lot.” (G1812) As Mama Li put it, she is grateful for her son and the movement because, even in her 50s, she still has the opportunity to learn something new and make new friends (G1814).

Since 2008, PFLAG–China parent activists have built a support system of friendship. I distinctly remember the joy of their sisterhood when I joined two other gay men to help the PFLAG–China qipao league put on makeup for the 2019 PFLAG Cruise. In a room of a dozen parents, they constantly praised each other’s looks and directed us to put darker eyeshadow on some people and lighter shades on others. Later, they replaced the lighter shades with darker eyeshadow when they agreed that the darker color worked better for their age. Occasionally, one of their children stopped by to visit, and the mothers brought the child around the room to meet all of the aunties, telling their kids how to address each person in an age-appropriate way. It dawned on me that they must all know each other’s ages. The afternoon went by fast as I found myself surrounded by laughter and gratitude. Later in the evening, I felt proud as I watched them all on stage. The closing event ended with everyone on the cruise singing Fish Leong’s “Courage”—a pop love song that’s become a Mandarin queer anthem—twice. I looked around and saw tears in everyone’s eyes as the lyric repeated:

Finally made the decision, I won't listen to what other people say

As long as you are also just as certain

I'm willing to follow you to the ends of the earth

I know it won't all be easy

My heart always rehearses iteratively convincing itself

I'm most afraid that you'll suddenly say you want to give up

Love really needs courage to face gossip and rumors

As long as your eyes express certainty, my love has meaning

We all need courage to believe we'll be together

In a crowded stream of people, I can feel you

I'm holding your sincerity in my hands

(fieldnote June 21, 2019)

Conclusion

On July 6th, 2022, a WeChat message from Auntie Rainbow popped up as I was finishing the first draft of this chapter. Auntie Rainbow told me about her recent retirement and her mom's 90th birthday celebration, and she said that her son and her partner are both doing great. She had just thought of me and wanted to check how I was doing. Once again, Rainbow's effortless ways of expressing care and love moved me. The warmth I felt in my heart at Dongzhimen resurfaced and gave me the strength to continue the journey of writing about LGBTQ movements in China. (personal conversation, July 6, 2022)

I have often shed tears during my fieldwork. These tears are intangible evidence of how liminal legality and political marginalization impact Chinese LGBTQ people and their families. Despite their fears of state retaliation and social isolation, these activists have affectively accompanied each other and built national and interpersonal support systems to champion the

movement during hard times. The parent activists I met have different positions on the state, as their differential strategies for promoting LGBTQ visibility and acceptance show. However, these differences do not stop them from recognizing their shared concerns about LGBTQ people's marginalization and their support for each other. Through affective accompaniment, people like Mei, June, Li, and Rainbow have helped each other to break the silence wherever they can to mobilize more people and help them understand LGBTQ issues. Only by holding space for subversive emotions can people, including activists themselves, gradually overcome censorship-imposed cognitive barriers and challenge the political silencing and social isolation of the LGBTQ community.

Conclusion

My dissertation is about the movement for LGBTQ family rights in China in the early 21st century. It is important to contextualize its contributions with the ups and downs of movements for Sexual Reproductive and Health Rights (SRHR) and Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Rights globally. It is also critical to mention that, as I am writing this conclusion chapter in 2022, it has been more than 12 years since I participated in the LGBTQ movement as a student organizer in China. This piece of writing is not just about documenting the LGBTQ family rights in China but more importantly, it is written in homage to all the activists and scholars whose care and wisdom have helped me become who I am today.

Reflecting back on the past 12 years, it became more and more obvious that the conservative and anti-rights movements have invested thoroughly in refining their frameworks. In particular, there is a pattern that calls for more scholarly attention in which the conservative movements have re-framed their anti-rights claims under the banner of a global “anti-gender” movement which claims gender is an “ideology.”⁵³ With a comparative analysis of three country case studies (Bulgaria, Ghana, and Peru), the 2021 joint report by the Elevate Children Funders Group and Global Philanthropic Project found that in the effort of manufacturing moral panic, conservative movements often mix pseudoscientific and rights-affirming language to create manipulative “common sense” framework to cover their anti-rights values.⁵⁴ These movements mobilize under the banners of “concerned parents” and “parental choice” to rally people around

⁵³ Global Philanthropy Project (2020) *Understanding the Resourcing of the Global ‘Anti-Gender Ideology’ Movement*. Page 2. <https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/MTM-Summary-.pdf> (accessed 10/14/2022)

⁵⁴ Elevate Children Funders Group and Global Philanthropic Project (2021) *Manufacturing Moral Panic Weaponizing Children to Undermine Gender Justice and Human Rights*: <https://elevatechildren.org/publications-manufacturing-moral-panic> (accessed 10/14/2022)

gender normality. For example, in Peru, the Don't Mess with My Kids movement hijacks progressive discourse around anti-state violence and frames their messages as a warning for concerned parents that the “police state” that could dictate how families should raise their children. By misusing parents’ “human rights” over how to raise their children, since 2013, this movement has been successfully pushing back against Comprehensive Sexuality Education and beyond. In the United States, such tactic has also appeared and become one of the core structures of some extreme conspiracy theories. For instance, in 2020, the “Save the Children” slogan became a fundamental part of QAnon, which claims to fight against a cabal of “child-eating Satanic pedophiles.”⁵⁵

China is no exception to the global conservative and anti-rights trends. My peer Chinese LGBTQ activists and scholars of the one-child policy generation have strongly felt the chilling effects of the conservative trends within China and abroad. It is the time for my generation of social movement activists and scholars around the world to carry on the responsibilities to work together, despite the increasing political polarization. Thus, even though this dissertation focuses on the Chinese LGBTQ movement for family rights, I approach this subject with the global progressive causes for SRHR and SOGIE rights in mind. The Chinese state’s law and policy as well as governing practices over family provide a paradigmatic example of how a strong actor uses family norms to legitimize its ruling. My investigation of this paradigmatic example is deeply motivated by a desire to share Chinese movement experience with other progressive movements and to build multilayered transnational coalitions against rising conservative forces and authoritarian trends. This dissertation adds to the important conversations on how to

⁵⁵ See New York Times report: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/28/technology/save-the-children-qanon.html> (accessed 10/14/2022)

advocate for SRHR and SOGIE rights when democratic institutions are under constant attacks; how to subvert and reframe social and cultural “common sense” for progressive purposes; and equally importantly, how radicals and reformers can work together.

Since my pre-dissertation field work (in 2016), many Chinese LGBTQ activists have been constantly talking about their relations with their families in the context of security and risk assessment. For example, LGBTQ activists often talked about back-up plans in case media or the police intentionally or accidentally out them to their parents. In addition, there were often requests for their non-activist partners to participate in security trainings to protect themselves and their families from police harassment. It was precisely these overwhelming worries and concerns about families that brought me to think about family politically. Literatures on Chinese family law and policy have backed-up these worries: the Chinese family has become a part of the state’s extended security apparatus, which I detailed in Chapter One.

However, it is my dissertation field work (from 2018 to 2020) that has brought me answers and hope to the pressing questions of how to resist such a powerful state-family project. Through ethnography and interviews, I observed how activists interact with the state and the family with creativity and resilience. Instead of thinking about the family as a monster representing “tradition” as portrayed by anti-queer conservative movement, these activists have shown me the family as an institution can be a source of discursive and material power for affirming LGBTQ rights.

My dissertation argues that on the DMA sequence of social change, the relationality and interconnectedness among individuals, the family and the state have offered insights into how progressive movement organizations can resist conservative cooptation of the family and subvert the family discourses for social change. It conceptualizes *differential modes of mobilization* as

movement strategies for reconstructing how social institutions (the state and the family) and people interact by integrating new discourses into these institutions' sequence of change. There are three points that I want to further clarify in this conclusion.

First, it is the importance of emotional labor in building and sustaining both modes of mobilization. While Chapter Four showcases many PFLAG-China activists, *Affective Accompaniment* is present in all four national organizations of this research. I found that emotional labor provided by activists have been a critical resource to sustain movement organizations in China. I chose to center on PFLAG-China and its companion mode of mobilization because it is a paradigmatic case which exhausts all forms of companionship I saw in the field. If given more time for fieldwork, I would love to join the hotline volunteer to observe its operation directly, and include interview questions on all activists' experience of providing and receiving care from other activists. This came from my realization that activists' emotional labor is the building blocks of social movement, especially ones in high-risk contexts like China. This dissertation calls for more scholar attentions to emotional labor in movement-building and encourages us to rethink about societal and individual transformation as emotional and iterative journeys.

Second, coalitions across different causes play a critical role in subverting the state-family project. My findings suggest that while connector organizations are more likely to lead coalitions as such Common Language for the Anti-Domestic Violence Law and Advocates for Diverse Family Network (ADFN) for "Single Women's" Reproductive Rights (SWRR), both the connector mode and the companion mode of mobilization have enabled diverse social movement organizations to join coalitions. For example, while PFLAG-China has not been fully present in ADFN's daily operations, LGBT Rights Advocacy China (RAC), a legal advocacy group

founded in 2014 with the support of PFLAG-China, has been active in ADFN. In 2017, Common Language also published a report on SWRR.⁵⁶

In addition, all three organizations, ADFN, RAC and PFLAG-China, are active members of the China Marriage Equality Advocacy Network (CMEAN), a national coalition of Chinese LGBTQ and feminist NGOs. In 2019, CMEAN rallied 188,383 people to make suggestions for legalizing same-sex marriage in the Civil Code under public review.⁵⁷ It is worth to note that the presence of ADFN and the absence of Common Language at CMEAN further illustrate these two connector organizations' differences on supporting same-sex marriage.

Nonetheless, *Differential Coalescing* has shown the notable influence of frameworks like SWRR to rally people who would not have worked together otherwise. To foster coalition-builders like SWRR, funders and other movement resource contributors should invest in cross-sectoral and cross-issue collaboration and support frontline organizations in creating productive frameworks for different social movement strategies to interact dialectically with each other.

Third, it is important to recognize the diversity of companionship on the DMA sequence of change. Similar to PFLAG-China who provides social support, Rainbow Lawyers is a companion organization that provides legal support for LGBTQ people and their families, advocate for these queer families in the face of all social sectors. During my field work, Rainbow Lawyers has shifted from running a free community legal hotline towards establishing a law firm

⁵⁶ See Common Language's 2017 report: *A survey report on the reproductive status of non-marital women in China*: <http://www.tongyulala.org/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=23&id=152> [in Chinese].

⁵⁷ See CMEAN's open letter to fellow grassroots organizers on their Weibo account: *CMEAN's Open Letter to Grassroots Activists* [爱成家致草根行动者的公开信 *aichengjia zhi caogen xingdongzhe de gongkaixin*]: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6xayKMwmx30kwLUPuXIomA> [in Chinese].

that provides legal service package. They do so to scale up their support for LGBTQ people to access legal protection via the current law and policy. At the same time, by charging clients with resources a reasonable fee, they can provide free or cheap service for clients with fewer resources (G1917). Their strategies are informed by their insights of law-making in China: one of the ways to change law on the book is to provide the legislators with significant numbers of cases in order to demonstrate how current law cannot solve the problems that LGBTQ people and their families face (G1914; G1917).

If I had known what I have learned now about the importance of professional-centered companion groups from my dissertation analysis, I would love to spend more time interviewing and observing other groups specialized in working with professionals like Rainbow Lawyers. In particular, I would like to include the Beijing LGBT Center in this research who works with a national network of LGBTQ-friendly therapists and physicians, and in 2019 has expended their work to include affirming support for trans youth.

Overall, my dissertation demonstrates how companions and connectors in China have relied on individual transformation and coalition-building as well as emotion work to advance LGBTQ family rights on the DMA sequence of change. In the high repression context where radicals and reformers can hardly afford to fight against each other, LGBTQ activists have found radical ways to cloak their concerns in the modest language of reforms. They reframe socialist ideas (e.g. women's self-determination) and family values (e.g. parents' rights to speak up for their children) into demands for LGBTQ family rights. Their activist journeys and movement strategies can serve as guiding constellations for movements navigating similar situations. This dissertation is closing at an uneasy time. Yet, I still believe that our collective creativity,

resilience and persistence will eventually make possible a feminist multiverse, where our work can heal us and our dreams can flourish.

References

- Anagnost, Ann Stasia. 1988. Family violence and magical violence: The woman as victim in China's one-child family policy. *Women & Language* 11(2):16–22.
- Attané, Isabelle. 2016. Second child decisions in China. *Population and Development Review* 42(3): 519-536
- Bao, Hongwei. 2018. *Queer Comrades: Gay Identity and Tongzhi Activism in Postsocialist China*. Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS Press.
- Barbalet, Jack. 2020. "The Analysis of Chinese Rural Society: Fei Xiaotong Revisited." *Modern China*. doi: 10.1177/0097700419894921.
- Basten, Stuart and Quanbao Jiang. 2015. "Fertility in China: An Uncertain Future." *Population Studies* 69(April 2015): S97–105.
- Bernstein, Mary, and Verta Taylor, eds. 2013. *The Marrying Kind? Debating Same-Sex Marriage within the Lesbian and Gay Movement*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bernstein, Mary. 2018. "Same-Sex Marriage and the Assimilationist Dilemma: A Research Agenda on Marriage Equality and the Future of LGBTQ Activism, Politics, Communities, and Identities." *Journal of Homosexuality* 65(14):1941–56.
- Biddulph, Sarah. 2015. *The Stability Imperative: Human Rights and Law in China*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Brandzel, Amy L. 2016. *Against Citizenship: The Violence of the Normative*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Cai, Yong, Feng Wang, and Ke Shen. 2018. Fiscal implications of population aging and social sector expenditure in China. *Population and Development Review* 44(4):811–31.

- Cao, Jin, and Xinlei Lu. 2014. A preliminary exploration of the gay movement in mainland China: Legacy, transition, opportunity, and the new media. *Signs* 39(4):840–48.
- Cao, Weiwei. 2015. Exploring "glorious motherhood" in Chinese abortion. *Feminist Legal Studies* 23(3):295–318.
- Chávez, Karma R. 2013. *Queer Migration Politics Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*. University of Illinois Press.
- Chávez, Karma R., Ryan Conrad, and Yasmin Nair. 2009. "Against Equality, Against Inclusion." *Decolonizing Sexualities* 215–30.
- Chia, Joy L. 2019. "LGBTQ Rights in China: Movement-Building in Uncertain Times." Pp. 657–680 in *Handbook on Human Rights in China*, edited by S. Biddulph and J. Rosenzweig. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Chia, Joy L. 2019. LGBTQ rights in China: Movement-building in uncertain times. In *Handbook on Human Rights in China*, edited by S. Biddulph and J. Rosenzweig, 657–80. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing
- Chua, Lynette J. 2014. *Mobilizing Gay Singapore: Rights and Resistance in an Authoritarian State*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Chua, Lynette J. 2018. *The Politics of Love in Myanmar: LGBT Mobilization and Human Rights as a Way of Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Coale, Ansley J., and Judith Banister. 1994. Five decades of missing females in China. *Demography* 31(3):459–79.
- Cohen, Bill. 2001. "The Spider's Web: Creativity and Survival in Dynamic Balance." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 140–48.

- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2019. *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cong, Xiaoping. 2013. From "freedom of marriage" to "self-determined marriage": Recasting marriage in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region of the 1940s. *Twentieth-Century China* 38(3):184–209.
- Davis, Deborah S. 2014a. On the limits of personal autonomy: PRC law and the institution of marriage. In *Wives, Husbands, and Lovers : Marriage and Sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Urban China*, edited by D. S. Davis and S. L. Friedman, 41–62. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Davis, Deborah S. 2014b. Privatization of marriage in post-socialist China. *Modern China* 40(6):551–77.
- Deng, Yanhua, and Kevin J. O'Brien. 2013. Relational repression in China: Using social ties to demobilize protesters. *China Quarterly* 215:533–52.
- Deng, Yanhua. 2016. "Relationship Control Practices of Grassroots Government in China 中国基层政府的关系控制实践." *Academia Bimestrie 学海* 5:31–29.
- Deng, Yanhua. 2017. "'Autonomous Redevelopment': Moving the Masses to Remove Nail Households." *Modern China* 43(5):494–522. doi: 10.1177/0097700416683901.
- Deng, Yanhua. 2017. "Autonomous redevelopment": Moving the masses to remove nail households. *Modern China* 43(5):494–522.
- Deutsch, Francine M. 2006. Filial piety, patrilineality, and China's one-child policy. *Journal of Family Issues* 27(3):366–89.
- Diamant, Neil J. 2000. *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China 1949-1968*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Eklund, Lisa. 2018. Filial daughter? Filial son? How China's young urban elite negotiate intergenerational obligations. *NORA—Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 26(4):295–312.
- Engebreetsen, Elisabeth. 2015. *Queer Women in Urban China: An Ethnography*. New York: Routledge.
- Fei, Xiaotong. [1947] 1992. *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Ferree, Myra Marx. 2003. "Resonance and Radicalism: Feminist Framing in the Abortion Debates of the United States and Germany." *American Journal of Sociology* 109(2):304–44.
- Ferree, Myra Marx. 2004. "Soft Repression: Ridicule, Stigma, and Silencing in Gender-Based Movements." Pp. 85–101 in *Authority in Contention (Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change, Volume 25)*, edited by D. J. Myers and D. M. Cress. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Ferree, Myra Marx. 2010. "Filling the Glass: Gender Perspectives on Families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72(3):420–39. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00711.x.
- Fincher, Leta Hong. 2014. *Left Over Women: The Resurgence Of Gender Inequality In China*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Fong, Vanessa L. 2002. China's one-child policy and the empowerment of urban daughters. *American Anthropologist* 104(4):1098–109.
- Fong, Vanessa. 2004. "Filial Nationalism Among Chinese Teenagers with Global Identities." *American Ethnologist* 31(4):631–48.

- Fu, Diana, and Greg Distelhorst. 2018. Grassroots participation and repression under Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. *China Journal* 79(79):100–122.
- Fu, Diana. (2017) “Fragmented Control: Governing Contentious Labor Organizations in China.” *Governance* 30: 445.
- Fu, Diana. 2016. Disguised collective action in China. *Comparative Political Studies* 50(4): 1–29.
- Fu, Hualing. 2007. Commentary on "transforming family law in Post-Deng China." *China Quarterly* no. 191:696–98.
- Fu, Hualing. 2018. “The July 9th (709) Crackdown on Human Rights Lawyers: Legal Advocacy in an Authoritarian State.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 27:554–68.
- Gao, Yan, and Shailaja Fennell. 2018. *China’s Rural-Urban Inequality in the Countryside*. Shanghai: Springer and Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press.
- García, Rocío R. 2020. “Latinx Feminist Policymaking: On the Necessity of Messiness in Collective Action.” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 25(4):441–60.
- Geva, Dorit. 2013. *Conscription, Family and the Modern State: A Comparative Study of France and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, Levi S. 2018. Forming partnerships: Extramarital songs and the promotion of China’s 1950 Marriage Law. *China Quarterly* 233:211–29.
- Gilmartin, Christina. 1993. Gender in the formation of a communist body politic. *Modern China* 19(3):299–329.
- Gilmartin, Christina. 1995. *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Gould, Deborah B. 2009. *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Greenhalgh, Susan, and Edwin A. Winckler, ed. 2005. *Governing China's Population From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Greenhalgh, Susan. 2001. Fresh winds in Beijing: Chinese feminists speak out on the one-child policy and women's lives. *Signs* 26(3):847–86.
- Greenhalgh, Susan. 2008. *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Greenhalgh, Susan. 2010. *Cultivating Global Citizens: Population in the Rise of China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Greenhalgh, Susan. 2012. Patriarchal demographics? China's sex ratio reconsidered. *Population and Development Review* 38:130–49.
- Gui, Tianhan. 2020. "Leftover Women' or Single by Choice: Gender Role Negotiation of Single Professional Women in Contemporary China." *Journal of Family Issues* 41(11):1956–78.
- Hamilton, Gary G., and Zheng Wang. 1992. "Introduction: Fei Xiaotong and the Beginnings of a Chinese Sociology." Pp. 1–36 in *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society by Fei Xiaotong*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- He, Xiaopei. 2009. My fake wedding: Stirring up the Tongzhi movement in China. *Development* 52(1):101–4.
- He, Xin. 2014. Maintaining stability by law: Protest-supported housing demolition litigation and social change in China. *Law and Social Inquiry* 39(4): 849–873.
- Hershatter, Gail. 2004. State of the field: Women in China's long twentieth century. *Journal of Asian Studies* 63(4):991–1065.

- Ho, Josephine. 2008. "Is Global Governance Bad for East Asian Queers?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14(4):457–79. doi: 10.1215/10642684-2008-001.
- Honig, Emily. 1985. Socialist revolution and women's liberation in China. *Journal of Asian Studies* 44(2):329–336.
- Hsiung, Ping-Chun, Maria Jaschok, Cecilia Milwertz, and Red Chan, ed. 2013. *Chinese Women Organizing: Cadres, Feminists, Muslims, Queers*. Oxford: Berg.
- Hu, Xiaowen, and Ying Wang. 2013. LGB identity among young Chinese: The influence of traditional culture. *Journal of Homosexuality* 60(5):667–84.
- Huang, Shuzhen. 2016. Post-oppositional queer politics and the non-confrontational negotiation of queer desires in contemporary China. Doctoral Dissertation. Arizona State University.
- Human Rights Watch. 2017. "Have You Considered Your Parents' Happiness?" *Conversion Therapy Against LGBT People in China*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Hung, Chin-fu. 2011. The politics of electronic social capital and public sphere in Chinese lala community: Implications for civil society. *International Journal of China Studies* 2(2):369–88.
- Jaggar, Alison M. 1989. "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology." *Inquiry (United Kingdom)* 32(2):151–76. doi: 10.1080/00201748908602185.
- Jasper, James M. 2011. "Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37:285–303.
- Johnson, Kay Ann. 2016. *China's Hidden Children: Abandonment, Adoption, and the Human Costs of the One-Child Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Judd, Ellen R. 2002. *The Chinese Women's Movement Between State and Market*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

- Jun, Pi. 2010. Transgender in China. *Journal of LGBT Youth* 7(4):346–58.
- Kam, Lucetta Y. L. 2013. *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Kane, Melinda D. 2013. “LGBT Religious Activism: Predicting State Variations in the Number of Metropolitan Community Churches, 1974-2000.” *Sociological Forum* 28(1):135–58. doi: 10.1111/socf.12006.
- Kim, Sunhye, Na Young, and Yurim Lee. 2019. “The Role of Reproductive Justice Movements in Challenging South Korea’s Abortion Ban.” *Health and Human Rights* 21(2):97–107.
- King, Michelle T. 2014. *Between Birth and Death Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century China*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Kong, Travis S. K. 2010. *Chinese Male Homosexualities Memba, Tongzhi and Golden Boy*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Kuan, Teresa. 2015. *Love’s Uncertainty: The Politics and Ethics of Child Rearing in Contemporary China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lee, Ming Hsuan. 2012. The one-child policy and gender equality in education in China: Evidence from household data. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 33(1):41–52.
- Lei, Ya-Wen. (2018) *The Contentious Public Sphere: Law, Media and Authoritarian Rule in China*. Princeton University Press
- Levitsky, Sandra R. 2014. *Caring for Our Own: Why There Is No Political Demand for New American Social Welfare Rights*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Li, Jun, and Xiaoqin Li. 2017. Media as a core political resource: The young feminist movements in China. *Chinese Journal of Communication* 10(1):54–71.

- Li, Ke. 2015. "What he did was lawful": Divorce litigation and gender inequality in China. *Law and Policy* 37(3):153–79.
- Liao, Sara. 2021. "Feeling the 2019 Hong Kong Anti-ELAB Movement: Emotion and Affect on the Lennon Walls." *Chinese Journal of Communication*.
- Liao, Xingmiu, and Wen Hsuan Tsai. 2019. Clientelistic state corporatism: The united front model of "pairing up" in the Xi Jinping era. *China Review* 19(1):31–56.
- Liu, Dongxiao. 2006. "When Do National Movements Adopt or Reject International Agendas? A Comparative Analysis of the Chinese and Indian Women's Movements." *American Sociological Review* 71(6):921–42.
- Liu, Petrus. 2015. *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Liu, Qian. 2018. "Legal Consciousness of the Leftover Woman: Law and Qing in Chinese Family Relations." *Asian Journal of Law and Society* 5:7–27.
- Liu, Sida and Terence C. Halliday. 2016. *Criminal Defense in China: The Politics of Lawyers at Work*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Liu, Wenrong. 2017. Intergenerational emotion and solidarity in transitional China: Comparisons of two kinds of "ken lao" families in Shanghai." *Journal of Chinese Sociology*. 4,10.
- Liu, Xiaonan. 2013. Chinese women in legal education. *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 20(2):1311–57.
- Long, Yan. 2018. "The Contradictory Impact of Transnational AIDS Institutions on State Repression in China, 1989–2013." *American Journal of Sociology* 124(2):309–66. doi: 10.1086/698466.
- Lorentzen, Peter. 2017. Designing contentious politics in post-1989 China. *Modern China* 43(5):459–93.

- Loveman, Mara. 1998. "High-Risk Collective Action: Defending Human Rights in Chile, Uruguay, Argentina." *American Journal of Sociology* (104):477–525.
- Luna, Zakiya and Kristin Luker. 2013. "Reproductive Justice." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 9(1):327–52.
- Luna, Zakiya. 2020. *Reproductive Rights as Human Rights: Women of Color and the Fight for Reproductive Justice*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Luo, Qiangqiang, and Joel Andreas. 2016. Using religion to resist rural dispossession: A case study of a Hui Muslim community in North-West China. *China Quarterly* 226:477–98.
- Luo, Yan. 2019. Jiating zhong de mosheng ren: pipan faxue shiye xia de tongxing tongju 家庭中的陌生人：批判法学视野下的同性同居 [Strangers in the family: Same-sex cohabitation from the critical legal perspective]. *China Law Review* (6):171.
- Ma, Li, Jani Turunen, and Ester Rizzi. 2018. Divorce Chinese style. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 80(5):1287–97.
- Mackenzie, Sonja. 2022. "Social Movement Organizing and the Politics of Emotion from HIV to Covid-19." *Sociology Compass* 16(5):1–12. doi: 10.1111/soc4.12979.
- McAdam, Doug. 1986. "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer." *American Journal of Sociology* 92(1):64–90.
- McLaren, Helen. 2016. Domestic violence in Chinese families: Cold violence by men towards women. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 17(4):1–15.
- Menjívar, Cecilia. 2006. "Liminal Legality: Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants' Lives in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 111(4):999–1037. doi: 10.1086/499509.

- Mertha, Andrew. 2017. Stressing out: Cadre calibration and affective proximity to the CCP in reform-era China. *China Quarterly* 229:64–85.
- Miles-Johnson, Toby, and Yurong Wang. 2017. “Hidden identities”: Perceptions of sexual identity in Beijing. *British Journal of Sociology* 69(2): 323-351.
- Miller, Casey J. 2013. Inside the circle: Sexuality, HIV/AIDS, and civil society in post-socialist Northwest China. PhD dissertation, Brandeis University.
- Miller, Casey J. 2013. *Inside the Circle: Sexuality, HIV/AIDS, and Civil Society in Post-Socialist Northwest China*.
- Min, Dongchao. 2011. From men-women equality to gender equality: The zigzag road of women’s political participation in China. *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 17(3):7–24.
- Mooney, Jadwiga E. Pieper. 2007. “Militant Motherhood Re-Visited: Women’s Participation and Political Power in Argentina and Chile.” *History Compass* 5(3):975–94. doi: 10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00435.x.
- Nah, Alice M. 2021. “Navigating Mental and Emotional Wellbeing in Risky Forms of Human Rights Activism.” *Social Movement Studies* 20(1):20–35. doi: 10.1080/14742837.2019.1709432.
- O’Brien, Kevin J. and Yanhua Deng. 2017. “Preventing Protest One Person at a Time: Psychological Coercion and Relational Repression in China.” *China Review* 17(2):179–201.
- O’Brien, Kevin J., and Yanhua Deng. 2015. The reach of the state: Work units, family ties and "harmonious demolition. *China Journal* no. 74:1–17.
- Palmer, Michael. 1995. The re-emergence of family law in post-Mao China: Marriage, divorce and reproduction. *China Quarterly* 141:110–34.

- Palmer, Michael. 2007. Transforming family law in post-Deng China: Marriage, divorce and reproduction. *China Quarterly* 191:675–95.
- Palmer, Michael. 2017. Domestic violence and mediation in contemporary China. In *Mediation in Contemporary China: Continuity and Change*, edited by H. Fu and M. Palmer. 286–318 London: Wildy, Simmonds and Hill.
- Parkin, Siodhbhra. 2018. LGBT rights-focused legal advocacy in China: The promise, and limits, of litigation. *Fordham International Law Journal* 41(5):1243–62.
- Qi, Xiaoying. 2017. Social movements in China: Augmenting mainstream theory with *guanxi*. *Sociology* 51(1):111–26.
- Qian, Licheng, Bin Xu, and Dingding Chen. 2017. Does history education promote nationalism in China? A "limited effect" explanation. *Journal of Contemporary China* 26(104):199–212.
- Reuterswärd, Camilla. 2020. "The Inter- and Intra-Party Politics of Moral Policy: Free Voting and Abortion Reform in Uruguay." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 0(0):1–25.
- Sandoval, Chela. 2000. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sargeson, Sally. 2012. Why women own less, and why it matters more in rural China's urban transformation. *China Perspectives* 2012(4):35–42.
- Shi, Yaojiang, and John James Kennedy. 2016. Delayed registration and identifying the missing girls in China. *China Quarterly* 228:1018–38.

- Spires, Anthony J. 2011. "Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China's Grassroots NGOs." *American Journal of Sociology* 117 (1):1
- Staggenborg, Suzanne. 1988. "The Consequences of Professionalization and Formalization in the Pro-Choice Movement." *American Sociological Review* 53(4):585.
- Tan, Jia. 2017. Digital masquerading: Feminist media activism in China. *Crime, Media, Culture* 13(2):171–86.
- Thayer, Millie. 2010. *Making Transnational Feminism : Rural Women, NGO Activists, and Northern Donors in Brazil*. New York: Routledge.
- Tian, Felicia Feng. 2013. Transition to first marriage in reform-era urban China: The persistent effect of education in a period of rapid social change. *Population Research and Policy Review* 32(4):529–52.
- Tsui, Ming, and Lynne Rich. 2002. The only child and educational opportunity for girls in urban China. *Gender and Society* 16(1):74–92.
- UNDP and USAID. 2014. "Being LGBT in Asia: China Country Report."
- Wallace, Claire. 2019. Between state, market and family: Changing childcare policies in urban China and the implications for working mothers. *International Sociology* 35(3): 336-352.
- Wang, Danning. 2010. Intergenerational transmission of family property and family management in Urban China. *China Quarterly* 204:960–79.
- Wang, Di, and Sida Liu. 2020. "Performing Artivism: Feminists, Lawyers, and Online Legal Mobilization in China." *Law and Social Inquiry* 45(3):678–705.
- Wang, Di. 2019. "Radical Feminist Disruption in China: A Case of Topless for the 2012 Anti-Domestic Violence Law Petition." Pp. 144–65 in *Gender Dynamics, Feminist Activism*

- and Social Transformation in China*, edited by G. Wu, Y. Feng, and H. Lansdowne. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wang, Di. 2020. “*Jia*, as in *Guojia*: Building the Chinese Family into a Filial Nationalist Project.” *China Law and Society Review* 5:1–32.
- Wang, Feng, Baochang Gu, and Yong Cai. 2016. The end of China’s one-child policy. *Studies in Family Planning* 46(1):83–86.
- Wang, Feng, Yong Cai, and Baochang Gu. 2012. “Population, Policy, and Politics : How Will History Judge China ‘ s One-Child Policy?’” *Population and Development Review* 8:115–29.
- Wang, Stephanie Yingyi. 2019. “When Tongzhi Marry: Experiments of Cooperative Marriage between Lolas and Gay Men in Urban China.” *Feminist Studies* 45(1):13–35.
- Wang, Xiying. 2017. *Gender, Dating and Violence in Urban China*. London: Routledge.
- Wang, Ying, and Vanessa L. Fong. 2009. Little emperors and the 4:2:1 generation: China’s singletons. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 48(12):1137–39.
- Wang, Yuhua, and Carl F. Minzner. 2015. The rise of the Chinese security state. *China Quarterly* 222:339–59.
- Wang, Zheng. 1997. Maoism, feminism, and the UN Conference on Women: Women’s studies research in contemporary China. *Journal of Women’s History* 8(4):126–52.
- Wang, Zheng. 2010. Creating a socialist feminist cultural front: Women of China (1949–1966). *China Quarterly* 204:827–49.
- Wang, Zheng. 2015. “Detention of the Feminist Five in China.” *Feminist Studies* 41(2):476–82.

- Wang, Zheng. 2017. *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ward, Matthew. 2016. "Rethinking Social Movement Micromobilization: Multi-Stage Theory and the Role of Social Ties." *Current Sociology* 64(6):853–74.
- Wei, John. 2019. *Queer Chinese Cultures and Mobilities: Kinship, Migration, and Middle Classes*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Wei, Shang-Jin, and Xiaobo Zhang. 2011. The competitive saving motive: Evidence from rising sex ratios and savings rates in China. *Journal of Political Economy* 119(3):511–64.
- Wei, Shang-Jin, and Xiaobo Zhang. 2011. The competitive saving motive: Evidence from rising sex ratios and savings rates in China. *Journal of Political Economy* 119(3):511–64.
- Wei, Wei. 2020. "The Normalization Project: The Progress and Limitations of Promoting LGBTQ Research and Teaching in Mainland China." *Journal of Homosexuality* 67(3):335–45.
- Wei, Wei. 2021. "Queering the Rise of China: Gay Parenthood, Transnational ARTs, and Dislocated Reproductive Rights." *Feminist Studies* 47(2):312–40.
- Wesoky, Sharon R. 2015. Bringing the *jia* back into *guojia*: Engendering Chinese intellectual politics. *Signs* 40(3):647–66.
- Whyte, Martin King, ed. 2010. *One Country, Two Societies Rural-Urban Inequality in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Woo, Margaret Y. K. 2003. Shaping citizenship: Chinese family law and women. *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism* 15(1): 99-134.
- Wu, Guoguang, Yuan Feng, and Helen Lansdowne, eds. 2019. *Gender Dynamics, Feminist Activism and Social Transformation in China*. New York: Roudedge.

- Yam, Shui-yin Sharon. 2021. "The City of Tears: Reproductive Justice and Community Resistance in Hong Kong's Anti-ELAB Movement." *Feminist Formations* 33(2):1–24.
- Yan, Hairong. 2008. *New Masters, New Servants: Migration, Development, and Women Workers in China*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Yan, Yunxiang. 2006. "Differential Mode of Association and the Chinese Cultural View of Hierarchy 差序格局与中国文化的等级观." *Sociological Studies 社会学研究* 4:201–13.
- Yan, Yunxiang. 2010. "The Chinese Path to Individualization." *British Journal of Sociology* 61(3):489–512. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01323.x.
- Yan, Yunxiang. 2017. "Doing Personhood in Chinese Culture." *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 35(2):1–17. doi: 10.3167/cja.2017.350202.
- Yang, Guobin. 2005. "Emotional Events and the Transformation of Collective Action: The Chinese Student Movement." *Emotions and Social Movements* 79–98.
- Yang, Peidong, and Lijun Tang. 2018. "'Positive Energy': Hegemonic Intervention and Online Media Discourse in China's Xi Jinping Era." *China: An International Journal* 16(1):1–22.
- Yang, Yue. 2022. "When Positive Energy Meets Satirical Feminist Backfire: Hashtag Activism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in China." *Global Media and China* 7(1):99–119.
- Yu, Jia, and Yu Xie. 2018. Motherhood penalties and living arrangements in China. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 80(5):1067–86.
- Zavella, Patricia. 2017. "Intersectional Praxis in the Movement for Reproductive Justice: The Respect ABQ Women Campaign." *Signs* 42(2):509–33.
- Zavella, Patricia. 2020. *The Movement for Reproductive Justice: Empowering Women of Color through Social Activism*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

- Zavoretti, Roberta. 2006. Family-based care for China's ageing population: A social research perspective. *Asia Europe Journal* 4(2):211–28.
- Zavoretti, Roberta. 2014. "My generation had it all easy": Accounts of anxiety and social order in post-Mao Nanjing. *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 32(2):49–64.
- Zavoretti, Roberta. 2017. *Rural Origins, City Lives: Class and Place in Contemporary China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Zeng, Yi and Therese Hesketh. 2016. "The Effects of China's Universal Two-Child Policy." *The Lancet* 388(10054):1930–38.
- Zeng, Yi, and Therese Hesketh. 2016. The effects of China's universal two-child policy. *Lancet* 388(10054):1930–38.
- Zhang, Lu. 2009. "Domestic Violence Network in China: Translating the Transnational Concept of Violence against Women into Local Action." *Women's Studies International Forum* 32(3):227–39.
- Zhao, Dingxin. 2001. *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zheng, Jing. 2017. Mate selection and gender reflexivity: The emphasis of *gan jue* and the emergence of a new generational pattern of intimacy in contemporary China. *Asian Women* 33(1):49–71.
- Zhong, Xiaohui, and Shining He. 2014. Negotiative intimacy: Expectations of family relationship and filial piety among only-child parents. *Open Times* n(1): 155–75.
- Zhong, Xueping, Zheng Wang, and Di Bai, eds. 2001. *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

- Zhou, Feizhou. 2018. "Ethics of Mobilization and 'Relational Society' - A Path to the Chineseization of Sociology 行动伦理与‘关系社会’—社会学中国化的路径。” *Sociological Studies 社会学研究* 33(1):41–61.
- Zhou, Minhui, Rachel Murphy, and Ran Tao. 2014. Effects of parents' migration on the education of children left behind in rural China. *Population and Development Review* 40(2):273–92.
- Zhu, Jingshu. 2018. "Unqueer" kinship? Critical reflections on "marriage fraud" in mainland China. *Sexualities* 21(7):1075–91.
- Zhu, Jingshu. 2018. "‘Unqueer’ Kinship? Critical Reflections on ‘Marriage Fraud’ in Mainland China.” *Sexualities* 21(7):1075–91.
- Zuo, Jiping, and Yanjie Bian. 2001. Gendered resources, division of housework, and perceived fairness: A case in urban China. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63(4):1122–33.