

Mainland China's TERFs' Misogyny Under JK Rowling's Anti-trans Incident

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates comments related to JK Rowling's anti-transgender event on Chinese microblogging platforms between June 2020 and February 2022, a period involving further development of JK Rowling's anti-transgender event and discussions on domestic self-publishing, resulting in a large number of relevant comments during this period. The relevant comments are then qualified as sensitive samples through corpus technology and presented through word cloud technology. This paper briefly discusses the definition of radical feminism and the definition of TERF and its development in China and abroad, and then elaborates and psychologically analyzes the JK Rowling anti-transgender incident and the resulting Weibo comments, showing that TERF in China is a hybrid product of essentialism and the attachment of the "I" in ID to the Big Other. TERFs have a misogynistic tendency and fall into a patriarchal trap of women trying to represent all women. We should call for feminist pluralism and create more possibilities.

Keywords: JK Rowling, patriarchy, Chinese feminism, Weibo, TERF

1. INTRODUCTION

JK Rowling's anti-trans incident has brought the existence of TERF (anti-trans radical feminists) to the surface again, and indeed in 2008 TERF sprouted on the internet [1] and further developed in 2014 [2]. In recent years TERF has been active in networking, academic and political activities [3]

The main issue of the article is to explore the historical and realistic reasons why TERFs emerge in China? The author will briefly describe the theory, development and current situation of TERFs at home and abroad as the context, an introduction to the anti-trans sentiment of netizens on Chinese microblogging social media platforms triggered by JK Rowling's anti-transgender comments, and a final analysis.

In the following section the author will first provide an overview of the definition and development of TERF.

2. THEORY

Radical feminism was born in the 1960s, when radical feminists formally introduced the concept of patriarchy, which refers to the basic mechanism of male domination over women [4]. Radical feminism focuses on sexual

exploitation, sexual oppression, gender division of labor, gender temperament and other aspects under patriarchy, and the purpose of radical feminism is to overthrow patriarchy and liberate women [5][6].

TERF is an acronym for Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist, a term used to describe radical feminists who are transphobic, TERF is used as a separate branch of radical feminism to describe the current political struggle for gender self-determination, which is about the demarcation of the boundary between social and biological gender [7]. Its central claim is to deny trans women access to the exclusively feminine spaces claimed and embraced by radical feminists as a way to preserve the sanctity of the essential biological sex [8].

Internationally, the existence of anti-trans feminism is evidenced by Susan Stryker's account of the many feminists who opposed transgenderism in the 1970s [9], and the classic anti-transfeminist work, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* [10] sets out its basic idea that transgender behavior is a submissive imitation of gender roles, and patriarchal countries also dissolve feminism through transgender behavior. These views were also promoted by later anti-transfeminists.

The term TERF was first used by Viv Smythe in a 2008 blog post [11], also known as "tigtog", and its evolution from 2008 to the early and mid-2010s is not

well documented. while in July 2014, Feminist Current published two articles citing the term to justify the TERF perspective [12][13]. TERFs are not only active on the internet, but they are also active in social movements and academia in Europe and the US, even hoping to elevate their anti-trans ideas to national policy and regulation [14].

The contemporary women's movement in China began with women's studies, and women's issues were raised in the late 1970s and 1980s with the reorganization after the Cultural Revolution. The castration of both genders by the Chinese Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution led female scholars to resist through the concept of the "essentialized woman" and to separate women from the class as a way to break free from centralist control. In general, our choice of Western ideas was determined by our political and cultural context and the needs of the struggle. Among the various Western feminist theories, it was the essentialist views of cultural feminism and earlier radical feminism that were most likely to appeal to women's studies scholars in the 1980s, when gender differentiation was in process [15].

So why did anti-trans ideas not emerge in China during the same period? First, TERF and Chinese feminists differ in their use of essentialism, TERF emphasizes in the field of gender identity that gender is "immutable," meaning that biological sex determines one's gender rather than self-determination, while Chinese feminists emphasize in the field of gender differentiation that women exist essentially as human subjects, and they are independent of class or men. Second, the women's movement in China at the time was primarily an academic movement led by female scholars, whose main research targets were urban and rural women, and sexual minorities were not included in feminist research. In addition, during that time, sexual minorities were still socially "invisible" and academic research on sexual minorities was scarce. so sexual minorities may not have been seen as a threat to the "essentialization of women" by radical feminists.

Of course, From the perspective of feminist theory translation, Chinese feminist scholars may not agree with anti-trans-feminist ideas either: feminist works (such as *The Second Sex*) have been introduced into China, while anti-trans feminist works of the same period (such as *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*) have not been introduced so far.

"Essentialism" was later theoretically criticized by Western and Chinese feminist scholars, but it has not been fundamentally subverted which also sets the stage for the emergence of contemporary TERFs.

3. CORPUS TECHNOLOGY

Because of the relatively few studies of TERF's and related events in China, this thesis will use comments on

Weibo, one of the largest social media platforms in China, as a text to demonstrate the existence of TERFs in China and their main issues.

3.1 Text

As expected, the corpus of the project generated 1264 valid comments on "JK Rowling (being) cyber-violent" on Weibo during the period from June 2020 to February 2022, which were presented through word cloud technology.



Figure 1 Weibo comment clouds under the keyword "JK Rowling was violated on the Internet".

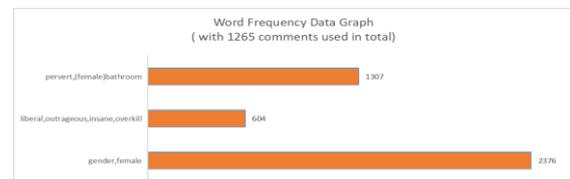


Figure 2 Word Cloud Frequency Data Graph

3.2 Text Analysis

The following events occurred between June 2020 and December 2021: In June 2020 Rowling retweeted an op-ed discussing "menstruating people," apparently with the fact that the story in question did not use the word female. "Menstruating man. Then on June 10 JK Rowling published an article then forwarded it on Twitter in early November 2021, she revealed that she had received a flood of death threats after her family's address was posted online. The author thanked the people and the Scottish police for their tremendous support in this matter. She addressed the whole issue through a series of tweets. Harry Potter author JK Rowling revealed on her Twitter account that three "activist actors" had posted her family's address online. On Dec. 12, Rowling tweeted a link to a New York Times news story with a headline that upset users. The article discussed that Police Scotland insists on registering rape as a crime committed by a woman if the accused insists, even if they have not legally changed their gender. In response to the news article, JK Rowling tweeted, "War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is power. The man who raped your penis is a woman." Her tweet caused a stir on the microblogging site as netizens began to react to her response. While some users supported Rowling's views, many others said her response was "transphobic" [16][17][18].

During this period, the self-published media on Weibo reprinted these events, generating heated debates, and the author will explain the word cloud of phrases

below to illustrate the main attitudes of people on Weibo.

"gender" and "female", the two the emergence of these two phrases is a deliberate attempt by the self-publishing media to tie the issue of TERF to women's survival, and the most popular post about it reads:

Extract: "Some of Rowling's comments on behalf of women's rights are labeled as "TERF. "

Such comments attempt to portray JK Rowling as a feminist who protects women from the transgender community, and this tendency shows the existence of TERFs in China.

The three phrases "liberal," "outrageous," "insane," and "overkill" are mainly indicative of the Internet's. The three phrases are mainly expressions of the Internet's discontent with the strangulation of Rowling by Western political correctness:

Extract: "I can't agree with the exploitation of women's living space to achieve the so-called political correctness."

This shows that Chinese netizens display an anti-political correctness stance when viewing the JK Rowling case, which makes the TERF ideology more convincing (they are more supportive of JK Rowling's views), and it also reflects that when Chinese netizens browse and discuss the topic of democracy and human rights in the West (only the politically correct aspects are discussed here), they hide behind their IDs and unconsciously place themselves in the social power system in an attempt to erase the dilemma of the real self.

To some extent, this is due to the attempted intervention of ID as a form of power in communication as an identity: the self under the image of ID is a purely symbolic creature that wanders in cyberspace and can only be present when seen in cyberspace, yet there is a risk that the consistency and rationality of ID and "I" could be challenge [19].

In order to prevent such a split, it is necessary to completely abandon the "ego" and put the "I" in the position of the imaginary Big Other, to interpret and transcend the failure of the "I" from the perspective of the Big Other, to erase the reality of the subject of ID, and to link the "I" to the ID in hysteria.

JK Rowling's incident in Wei Bo's cyberspace, the so-called "political correctness", as a caring element outside the structure of social oppression, provokes the ID subjects to trans-phobia, not only because the ID subjects are influenced by the heteronormative hegemony in reality, but also because the "political correctness" makes the ID subjects see the "I" of reality, which is the internal impasse that the insane Big Other in the space of collective unconsciousness is unable to deal with.

The "pervert," and "(female) bathroom" reflect TERF's foundational viewpoint: denying MTF access on

the subject of bathrooms:

Extract: "If a male pervert disguises himself as a gender perception is female and goes to the women's bathroom, then the girls in the women's bathroom are not very dangerous?"

The issue of restrooms has pushed TERF's gender essentialism to a high point: public restrooms, as part of modernization, perform as a space for learning and identifying male and female temperament, while women's restrooms are portrayed as a "false safe space [20]". Recently, "protecting women's toilets" has become an internet topic in China, which aims to discuss the malicious intrusion of men into women's toilets and oppose male voyeurism against women, which certainly rebels against the male gaze and objectification of women to a certain extent, but with the discussion of MTF by TERF, it also narrows the definition of "women". They deny the legitimacy of transgender access to public toilets and reinforce the submissiveness to essentialist gender temperament. In such a disconnected discourse from actual experience and context, trans women and non-binary people who were assigned male gender at birth are repositioned as males and potential sexual predators. The complex relationship between genitalia, desire, sexual orientation, biological sex, and gender is also essentialized in TERF discourse, which not only ignores the diverse experiences of transgender subjects, but also confuses the delinquent behavior of a portion of non-trans people with the entire transgender community as a gender identity [21].

4. ANALYSIS

Extract: "Transgender is a perverse product of a patriarchal society, MTF is a panderer to gender stereotypes from a patriarchal perspective and FTM is a betrayer of misogynistic biological traits".

First, Butler also shows that masculinity and femininity are guided by hegemonic notions of heteronormativity, constructed as the essence of nature, and that the behavioral expression of gender is strictly regulated and subverted through self-exclusion as a form of behavior for re-regulation, and through this repeated repetition and exclusion, human beings are shown to be constructed within the hegemony of the heteronormative binary, ultimately in the intersection of Gender, sex and sexuality are interwoven to complete the heteronormative hegemony of homophobia and transphobia [22]. So the heteronormative hegemony does not take measures to encourage people who do not conform to the social gender to change their gender queue and conform to social norms, but rather, society suppresses and punishes body and gender changes through structural forces such as policies and regulations, stereotypical gender culture, etc. Also, transgender as a gender identity cannot be defined simply by challenging patriarchy or obeying

stereotypes. Transgender communities are not confronted with an arbitrary gender spectrum that allows them to claim a gender identity at will, but rather with specific, complex life experiences and very limited experiences. The trans community is not confronted with an arbitrary choice of gender spectrum to claim a gender identity, but with a specific and complex life experience and a very restricted economic, policy, social and cultural space [23].

Second, from a scientific perspective, the absolute biological nature of female identity is absurd, as feminist biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling has shown that physical sex is much more complex than fixed gender expression [24], and it is also evident through the intersex body that our gender is more of a sociocultural construct than a biological reality.

At the same time, TERF's rhetoric against the trans community is inherently problematic: by invoking the "immutable" biological sex to attack transgender, it defends gender error and reinforces the binary essentialization of gender, contradicting the feminist emphasis against essentialism [25], and then revealing TERF's true nature -reinforces the dichotomous discourse and power relations between men and women, while establishing an "inviolable community of sacred biological women" to compensate for the structural deficiencies of the masculocentric narrative, and ultimately sacred men and women work together to maintain the traditional gender order. The two form a mutually generative whole [26].

Extract: "Feminism cannot be defined uniformly, but at least there is a consensus that women's groups are empowered, but the most basic consensus should be that the bundle of transgenderism and feminism is a corruption of feminism. All gender-related data is no longer credible (births deaths, employment, crime, etc.) and eventually the concept of femininity will be dissolved, essentially strangling women."

This conspiracy theory is absurd in itself, as it unites women's groups to develop feminist movements through the creation of cross-gender "imaginary enemies. At the same time, I question the concept of femininity in TERF. I question whether these "empowered women" are alienated by the patriarchy after they have been given the same power as men. Will they still speak out against other vulnerable groups? Will the patriarchy be overthrown as a result?

At the same time, it also reveals that the definition of "women" in TERFs is narrow, and that the "women" in Chinese TERFs are only middle-class, educated, cisgender heterosexual women. And this exposes the misogyny of the Chinese TERF community: And this exposes the misogyny of the TERF community in China: when a feminist accepts the logic of patriarchy, she is misogynistic. For example, the above-mentioned insistence on the tyranny of essentialism and dualistic

thought under patriarchy is a manifestation of accepting the logic of patriarchy, and another manifestation is "falling into the feminist trap", trying to represent all women through one category of women (TERFs represent cisgender women), occupying the high ground of feminist discourse and erasing the life experiences of other women, ignoring their interactivity.

In this regard, we need to have a clear understanding that the goal of feminism is not only to realize the equal rights of men and women, but also to create a discourse, knowledge, value, social system different from phallogocentrism [27]. Feminism is futuristic, historical and possible, and the exploration of the experiences of sexual minorities such as transgender groups is an opportunity for us to open up an open and pluralistic de-centered non-binary gender system.

5. CONCLUSION

The author first gives an overview of the development of TERF both at home and abroad, and analyses the reasons why TERF did not appear in China in the 1980s. Secondly, the paper presents the existence of TERF in China in the JK Rowling incident through corpus technology, and analyses it from a feminist perspective, psychoanalysis, and symbolic theory to criticise the essentialist and misogynistic limitations of TERF's existence. It concludes with an argument against essentialism advocating the exploration of pluralism as a way to open up the path of feminism.

The textual analysis has many shortcomings: first, no textual data analysis was conducted on the topic of Chinese women defending women's restrooms. Second, due to procedural data flaws and poor representation of relevant data, the textual data did not record the situation in 2019 when Rowling first made her anti-transgender statements. Third, ideological claims about TERFs in China are based on the most supported posts on the Douban feminist forum, unfortunately, due to network censorship, links to these posts are no longer available, and descriptions can only be made based on saved screenshots. Fourth, the author believes that Chinese online public opinion is oriented overall against Western political correctness, and that its analysis cannot be based on psychoanalysis alone. Due to the limited capacity of the author, the author hopes that this can be further studied in the future.

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