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Spaces of Our Own: Reimagining Women-Only Spaces in China as Sites of Safety, Belonging, and Exclusion

Xinyue Yu

Shanghai Guanghua Cambridge International School, China

Abstract

Women-only spaces, emerged as a part of female economy and from women's collective safety concerns in China, have now gathering more and more attention from feminist scholars and activist. This research aims to explore the gendered spatial politics in a Chinese setting through embodied, phenomenological, and political lens. The study examines feminist theories and literatures on the history and theory foundation of women-only spaces, such as lesbianism, queer phenomenology, and bio-politics; rethinks the concept and meaning of "safety" in the spaces; explores the complicated relationships between body, autonomy, and spatial negotiations; and critically discusses the inclusion-exclusion dynamics in women-only spaces. The paper uses a mixed approach of both semi-structured interviews to five creators of different types of women-only spaces in Shanghai and surveys targeted on twenty users of these spaces to explore how women are directed, oriented, and being confirmed with binary gender norms in these spaces. By engaging with key feminist texts and real-world experiences, this research offers a unique insight into Chinese feminism spatial politics and demonstrates the feminist potential and possibility of women-only spaces.

Keywords: feminism; spatial politics; chinese feminism movement; body autonomy; women-only