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Misogyny as Systemic Affect: Reconciling Structural Harm and Emotional Mobilization in the Context of Chinese Anti-feminism

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Abstract

This article proposes a conceptual framework that defines misogyny as a structural system of power that actively deploys and relies on emotion to sustain itself. First, I argue that the definition that overstates explicit hatred against women will risk reducing misogyny to a pathological and individual phenomenon, thereby overlooking its more insidious and structural harm. Second, I propose that the sociological tradition of discursively constructed emotions is useful here to unpack how emotions such as fear, love, and anger constitute the misogynistic discourse to distinguish and punish women. Third, my proposed conceptual framework of reconciling the affective nature of misogyny and the structuralised root of misogyny is examined through reference to empirical research of Chinese scholars who write in English and use the term with anti-feminism interchangeably. I argue that this conflation is not a conceptual error but a reflection of the unique local context. In the absence of a robust and public-mobilising feminist movement, anti-feminist sentiment lacks a clear ideological target, and thus manifests through the cruel and affective form of misogyny. Furthermore, misogynistic discourse operates through a logic of ‘distinguish and punish’ to enforce patriarchal norms and expectations, in which emotions constitute the steps from distinguishing to punishment. This article concludes by proposing a conversation with feminist theories in sociology to offer Chinese scholars a clearer and more contextualized conceptual tool, illustrating the value of context-sensitive feminist vocabulary in global academic exchanges.

Keywords: Affective Structure; Anti-Feminism; Chinese Feminism; Emotion; Misogyny