

Plenary 1. Feminisms through generations
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Convenor of AP NGO forum Dr. Licuanan, Dear leaders of women's movement from Asia Pacific, Dear colleagues from different generations, Good Morning!

It is my honor to be here in this forum to listen to inspiring stories of women's struggles and the achievements have been made throughout generations towards gender equality and social justice. And I feel thrilled to be able to share some of my stories as a young Chinese feminist.

We all know that a feminist identity can not be created in one day. However if I would be asked to pin my finger down on when I became a feminist or what me embrace feminisms, the term has been somehow labelled as "westernised" or "bourgeois" in our context, I would say: it is the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing 15 years ago. Let me tell you why.

In August 1995, I was a young graduate started my journalistic career at China Women's News – the national daily news paper affiliated All China Women's Federation to cover the various women issues. I was so excited to be one of the Chinese NGO representatives, though I was so confused at the same time why some people would like to call themselves "non" something. The concept of non-governmental organisation was a brand new idea for Chinese society in mid 1990's.

Frankly speaking, in the first week of Beijing NGO forum in Huairou, I was more like a tourist other than a participant. (Some young women in this Forum might have the same experience. You are excited about it, but you don't have much ideas about what is going on here.) For me, Beijing NGO Forum was an amazing tour. There are three new things I learnt from that journey, the journey that takes me to this Forum today:

First is feminisms. Second is NGO. Third is women's movement building.

Feminism for me is no longer the "westernised" "bourgeois" kind of thing, it is no more singular, but plural. I met women from all over the world with tremendous diverse background, speaking different languages, dancing, singing, marching, debating and discussing on the issues such as economic and political empowerment, gender mainstreaming, violence against women, sexual rights, sexual orientation, reproductive health, gender stereotypes in media, and etc. I admit that most of time I was lost in their discussion due to the language barriers and lack of knowledge on the issues they talked about, until I linked these discussions with the experience of women in China, who have been struggled for century towards gender equality, from abolishing foot-binding in early 20th century to claiming the rights to land, equal access to education, to eliminate gender discrimination against women. However, there remain many issues in the agenda of the unfinished socialist revolution and there remain much more to be done to make the gender equality from manifesto to de facto,

which is the major challenge we are facing today in China. Moreover, I gained the new lens or perspectives to analyse these issues – from women’s perspective and gender perspective.

The concept of NGO was introduced to China by Women’s Conference started to be widely accepted, particularly the community based women NGOs started to mushroom all over China. Nowadays civil societies are getting stronger and playing more important role in the social and political life. Some of their representatives are here today in this Forum. With their joint and longstanding efforts, “wife-beating” that used to associated only with family affairs are now defined as domestic violence prohibited by law; hundreds of thousands girls that dropped out of school returned to classrooms subsidized by the “Spring Bud Project”, whose beneficiaries are exclusively girls; sexual orientation is no more a taboo issue in society; migrant women workers established their own community and created their own spaces, where they can help each other and share their dreams and frustrations of living in the cities that in need so much of their labors and contribution but exclude them from the equal rights and benefit as a citizen and ignore their needs.

We know in order to make a transformative change in society, that is not enough. That is why we need to build movement and we need the collaboration and we need to struggle through generations, which I witnessed in Beijing NGO forum and I am seeing here now.

As a history major student I have studied women’s history and women’s movement back in university. There is no any pedagogy is more valid and efficient than learning by doing, by involving, by participating in the history and movement and be part of it. When I was five years old naughty girl, I made fun of my great grandmother who walked with her tiny banded feet tried to catch me up. Years later, I felt guilt for what I did and feel lucky that I had more options than my grandmother’s and my mother’s generation. Sometimes, we credit the improvement in women’s lives and diversified choices as the results of the economic development or individual struggles, or think we are smarter or luckier than others and tend to take our advantages and privileges we have for granted.

Let’s do not forget many generations who have strived to maximise our choices that we can enjoy today. Let’s do not forget many at our generations who has less advantages and less access to recourse due to their race, ethnicities, class, origin of birth, disabilities, sex orientation, and other forms of discriminations. After all, no matter how smart you are, you can not change the world by yourself. And if one of us is not free, none of us is free.

We recognise the importance of individual struggles, meanwhile we need to reaffirm and highlight the importance of the collective actions and collective struggles through diversified strategies and communication tools on our shared mission.

These three things – feminisms, notion of NGO, and women’s movement building – which I learnt from Beijing NGO Forum and beyond have encourage me to step out of Beijing to relocate in Manila to work with Isis International, a feminist development communication organisation.

One of prominent changes in the past 15 years is the development of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), which provide the tremendous potentials to advocate the women's human rights, locally, nationally, regionally and globally.

I recalled in Beijing Forum when computer and internet was very new thing, some women refused to use the email as the form of resistance to the emerging dominating power that exclude the participation of women from Global South and other marginalised groups. Today in this Forum, I wonder how many of you didn't bring your laptop and spend hours and hours in front of it to check emails and keep yourselves being informed and link with your family, friends and colleagues at home.

However, the computer and internet that link us up together as a empowering tool can be the device that alienate us from each other. Let's keep in mind that the face to face communication is still most important communication tool for social mobilisation and movement building. That is why we are finally meeting here today.

A while ago Nighat sit next to me told me that it is time to hand over the torch to me. I said: No. Please keep your torch. Rather, let me join you, join our common struggle!

So let's join together, women from different generations to build a stronger women's movement in the region. Unite, we are stronge!

Thank you!