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Motherhood as Method: Chinese Feminism and Gendered Resistance in the Works of Yu Hong and He Chengyao

Qinlin Wei[1]

[1] University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Correspondence: Qinlin Wei, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom.

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Abstract

This article explores how contemporary Chinese women artists Yu Hong and He Chengyao engage with the concept of motherhood as both a cultural construct and a critical strategy. By situating their practices within the historical trajectories of Confucian ethics, Maoist gender policy, and neoliberal maternalism, the paper argues that their art articulates a form of 'Chinese feminism' shaped by socio-political constraints and localised resistance. Through case studies of Yu's introspective *Witness to Growth* series and He's visceral performance *99 Needles*, the essay demonstrates how maternal imagery is mobilised not to idealise but to question and redefine female subjectivity. While eschewing overt feminist labels, their work subverts dominant narratives of motherhood, challenging state control, patriarchy, and censorship. In doing so, Yu and He carve out a unique feminist voice that merges personal memory, bodily experience, and visual politics within the Chinese context.

Keywords: Chinese feminism, maternal imagery, gendered resistance, performance art, visual censorship

1. Introduction

Standing before the giant figure of Louise Bourgeois' *Maman*, one cannot help but be appalled and disturbed by the paradoxes of motherhood—its strength and vulnerability, its protective and nurturing role.[1] This most impactful maternal totem in contemporary art is like a prism, reflecting artists' multidimensional interpretations of motherhood in different cultural contexts. In China, motherhood is not only characterised by personal experience but also by deeply rooted socio-political ideologies.[2] Here, Chinese women artists like Yu Hong and He Chengyao critically explore the intersection of maternal identity and state power, employing their art to negotiate between traditional historical norms and contemporary feminist agendas.

The conflict between state maternalism and individual motherhood has long shaped gender expectations in China.[3] Confucianism built maternal virtue as the linchpin of family and social order.[4] Meanwhile, Maoist policy reimagined women as icons of socialist maternalism, disempowering their bodily agency under the name

[1] Catherine Margaret Burge, (2005). Disagreeable Objects: The Sculptural Strategies of Louise Bourgeois (PhD diss., University College London), 154.

[2] Joshua A. Hubbard, (2018). The 'Torch of Motherly Love': Women and Maternalist Politics in Late Nationalist China. *Twentieth-Century China, 43*(3), 254.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Sybilla Green Dorros, (1978). The Status of Women in the People's Republic of China. *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspective on Asia, 16*, 1.

of gender equality.[1] Also, the maternal ideal did not disappear with China's economic reforms—it was reimagined by neoliberal consumer culture, producing new maternalism discourses that continue to govern women's roles today.[2] For Angela McRobbie, maternalism is a social control mechanism, idealising motherhood through narratives of self-sacrifice and objectification.[3]

As Zhu and Xiao argue, Chinese feminism is a pluralistic discourse that stems from local ideological and cultural conditions.[4] Unlike Western feminist artists, who can intervene in political criticism, Chinese female artists are denied the right to speak directly on 'grand narratives', such as politics, war, philosophy, and other themes.[5] For example, in China's 85 New Wave art movement, male artists' 'rational paintings' were imbued with enlightenment ideas, while the works of female artists during the same period were often neglected.[6] This gendered media hierarchy further limited the space for Chinese contemporary female artists to express themselves, forcing them to struggle in a more coded visual language. This essay argues that while Yu and He may not explicitly identify as feminists due to socio-political constraints, their works constitute a localized form of 'Chinese feminism' by engaging with gender, motherhood, and state power through subversive artistic strategies. To contextualize this, the essay first examines how maternal identity has been historically constructed in China, followed by an analysis of Yu and He's case studies, ultimately positioning them within the broader discourse of 'Chinese feminism'.

2. Historical Background

Confucianism has historically shaped women's roles within the family, elevating **motherly virtue** to a core social ethic and positioning it as essential for maintaining family lineage and social stability.[7] This moralised maternal role also confines women to a narrative of self-sacrifice, as the *Admonitions for Women* 女诫 state that a woman's righteousness lies in obedience.[8] Mothers' individual needs are suppressed, and their value is dependent on their children's achievements and the family's reputation.[9]

While gender policies during the Mao era promoted formal equality under the slogan 'Women can hold up half the sky,' they incorporated women into the power structures of both the state and the family through dual discipline.[10] On the one hand, the state pushed women into the public sphere under the banner of collective labour, yet through the de-gendered image of 'iron girls,' the female body was erased into an abstract symbol of national construction.[11] On the other hand, motherhood in the private sphere was strategically re-empowered as a national duty under the 'glorious mother' policy, which included fertility as a population growth target, transforming women's reproductive capacity into a state resource.[12] As feminist scholar Tina Mai Chen argues, women under socialist feminism became state-defined symbols of liberation rather than autonomous individuals.[13]

After the Reform and Opening-up period, the transition to a market-driven economy and globalisation generated

[1] Jinhua, Dai, (2002). "A Dilemma or Breakout?" in *Women, Nation, and Feminism*, ed. Shuxin Chen and Dai Jinhua (Beijing: Zhongyang Bianyi Chubanshe), 29.

[2] Angela McRobbie, (November 12, 2013). Feminism, the Family and the New 'Mediated' Maternalism. *New Formations*, *80*(80), 136.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Shuqin Cui, (2023). Female and Feminism: A Historical Overview of Women and Art in China. *MODOS: Revista de História da Arte*, *7*(2), 302.

[5] Wenyan Ma, (October 19, 2024). Chineseness and Gender Studies of Collectives in 85 New Movement. *And Others: The Gendered Politics and Practices of Art Collective*, https://artcollectives.org/chineseness-and-gender-studies-of-collectives-in-85-new-movement/.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Dorros, (1978). The Status of Women in the People's Republic of China, 1.

[8] Sherin Wing, (November 1, 2003). Technology, Commentary and the Admonitions for Women. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *5*(1), 60.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Cui, (2023). *Female and Feminism*, 310.

[11] Cui, (2023). *Female and Feminism*, 314.

[12] Weiwei Cao, (2015). Exploring 'Glorious Motherhood' in Chinese Abortion Law and Policy. *Feminist Legal Studies*, *23*(3), 295.

[13] Tina Mai Chen, (August 2003). Female Icons, Feminist Iconography? Socialist Rhetoric and Women's Agency in 1950s China. *Gender & History*, *15*(2), 291.

new contradictions in gender roles, particularly in the arts, media, and consumer culture.[1] Motherhood, which was once framed as a collective socialist duty, has been commodified under neoliberalism—manifesting in the expansion of the mother-baby market with the further commercialisation of female reproductive identity.[2] This shift reflects a broader dilemma for contemporary women artists: while they have gained greater visibility in the art world, their bodies, identities, and narratives continue to be shaped by both capitalist market forces and residual patriarchal structures.[3]

Beyond the commodification of motherhood, women artists today face institutional barriers, market exclusion, and political censorship.[4] Unlike Western female artists, who can directly engage in political activism, Chinese female artists must abide by the state's strict regulations.[5] These regulations further limit explicit critiques of gender inequality. For example, artworks that touch on sexuality or domestic violence are often censored or banned from public display.[6] The repression of women even extends beyond art—in 2018, the media *Feminist Voices*, which advocated for gender equality, was shut down.[7] This reflects the state's broader repression of feminist discourse. As a result, artists such as Yu and He must adopt more subtle forms of resistance that challenge gender norms to cope with political censorship without facing direct repression.

Under historical and political pressures, contemporary female artists seek new spaces for expression. Yu's paintings deeply explore the complexity of the maternal identity. At the same time, He's body performance directly faces the social stigmatisation of the image of a 'crazy mother', questioning the social construction of motherhood with the extreme experience of the individual body. Their works break the sacred imagination of motherhood and reveal the power game and the multiplicity of personal experience. In this context, 'Chinese feminist' art is not simply a copy of the Western model but has formed a unique and critical force profoundly shaped by local history and social reality. In particular, the discussion about motherhood has become an essential perspective for female artists to challenge gender norms and resist cultural oppression. Through the artistic expression of motherhood, they redefine female subjectivity in a 'Chinese feminist' way.

3. Case Studies

Yu Hong is a leading contemporary Chinese female artist recognised for her exploration of everyday female experiences and memories.[8] Though she does not openly identify as a feminist, her engagement with feminist discourse is unmistakable.[9] She is among the 32 women artists featured in Luise Guest's book *Half the Sky: Conversations with Women Artists in China* (2016), a project dedicated to increasing visibility for Chinese female artists.[10] Yu also paid tribute to a fellow female artist through her painting *She—Artist, Xiao Lu* (2005) (Figure 1), which depicts the performance artist Xiao Lu, known for her infamous 1989 gallery shooting incident swiftly censored by the state.[11] Yu explores female autonomy through this dialogue while carefully avoiding the state's political 'red lines'—achieved through her maternal perspective.

[1] Daria Berg and Giorgio Strafella, (2024). Author, Artist, Actress: China's New Women Cultural Entrepreneurs. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, *53*(2), 179.

[2] Hubbard, (2018). *The 'Torch of Motherly Love'*, 254.

[3] Griselda Pollock, (2014). Painting, Feminism, History, in *Looking Back to the Future*. London: Routledge, 141.

[4] Ziyao Wang, (2025). Censorship and Female Identity in Contemporary China. PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 15.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 23.

[8] Zhen Gong, (2023). Interpreting Yu Hong's Mother-Child Themed Paintings from a Maternal Perspective. Master diss., Jiangsu University, 27.

[9] Tate, (November 7, 2013). Yu Hong 喻红. *Tate*, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/tate-research-centre-asia/women-artists-contemporary-china/yu-hong.

[10] Luise Guest, (July 20, 2020). How Women Artists Are Navigating China's Complex Feminist Landscape. NüVoices, https://nuvoices.com/2020/07/20/how-women-artists-are-navigating-chinas-complex-feminist-landscape/.

[11] Guest, (2020). How Women Artists Are Navigating China's Complex Feminist Landscape.

Figure 1. Yu Hong, *She – Artist, Xiao Lu*, c.2005, private collection.

Given this context, how do contemporary female artists present 'Chinese feminism' through a maternal perspective? Yu's *Witness to Growth* series offers a compelling response, positioning maternalism as a personal narrative reflecting broader social change.[1] This lifelong autobiographical project, which began in the 1990s, centres the experience of mother and daughter in a visual narrative. It challenges the singular, stereotypical image of the mother and further redefines the subjectivity of women.[2]

Yu combines photography and painting, echoing Roland Barthes' idea that photography repeats the irreproducible.[3] However, unlike Barthes, who emphasises photography's realism, Yu reconstructs reality with emotional and symbolic depth, challenging the passive nature of photographic representation.[4] For example, in *1994, Yu Hong Twenty-Eight Years Old*; *Liu Wa Was Born* (Figure 2), she reinforces the gaze of mother and daughter towards the outside world. This deliberate composition subverts the conventional photographic mode of 'being viewed,' instead foregrounding female subjectivity and positioning motherhood as an agentic rather than an objectified experience. Yu's use of hazy, layered brushwork in the background, softens the documentary realism of photography, transforming it into a subjective, dreamlike reflection on motherhood. This painterly effect challenges the authority of photographic truth, positioning maternal identity as fluid and evolving.

Figure 2. Yu Hong, *Witness to Growth Series: 1994, Yu Hong Twenty-Eight Years Old; Liu Wa Was Born*, c. 2001, Beijing, East Modern Art Center.

[1] Gong, (2023). *Interpreting Yu Hong's Mother-Child-Themed Paintings*, 27.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Sasha Su-Ling Welland, (September, 2003). Special Issue: Women Artists' Cruel/Loving Bodies. *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, *2*(5), 34.

[4] Ibid.

The combination with a *People's Daily* page on the left indicates that in the 1990s, as China's market economy deepened, women transitioned from their Mao-era role as 'labour pioneers' back to domestic spheres, encountering new forms of gender discipline shaped by consumerism and globalisation.[1] In this context, Yu's choice, which visually narrates her childbearing experience, is a political act—one that redefines women's subjectivity during times of social transformation.

In this series of works, Yu also includes images of her own childhood with those of her daughter at the same age, further illustrating the evolution of motherhood in changing times. In *Yu Hong, Two Years Old* (Figure 3), she wears a doll-like dress with two commemorative medals of Chairman Mao on her chest, symbolizing the Cultural Revolution's ideological presence in everyday life.[2] The painting, rendered in black and white, emphasises the starkness of the era. Yu holds her mother's hand with an innocent smile, seemingly oblivious to the turbulent political climate. In contrast, her mother's facial expression conveys a solemn, almost apprehensive demeanour, embodying the weight of societal expectations and political uncertainties of the time. This contrast between the child's carefree innocence and the mother's subdued gravity implicitly underscores the cultural revolution's broader political and emotional tensions, a period marked by ideological fervour and personal sacrifices.[3] Decades later, in *Liu Wa at Two Years Old* (Figure 4), as a mother, Yu revisits this maternal relationship, now as a mother herself. She is depicted sitting quietly on a sofa, gazing into the distance—a posture suggesting contemplation and a sense of detachment from the ideological burdens that once defined her childhood. Her daughter, Liu Wa, is at ease, leaning on a plush crimson cushion while wearing a bright red skirt. The striking use of red—a colour that once symbolised revolutionary zeal and collective struggle—now serves a different function.[4] Instead of embodying ideological intensity, it transforms into a warm, comforting presence, symbolising a new generation's relative freedom from political turmoil. Through these two works, Yu reveals the changing roles and perceptions of motherhood across generations and prompts reflection on the intersection of personal memory and political change. The shift from black and white to colour, from solemnity to relaxation, and from political insignia to personal comfort encapsulates the transformation of Chinese society—where the echoes of the past remain present but no longer dictate the lives of the younger generation.

Figure 3. Yu Hong, *Witness to Growth Series: Yu Hong Two Years Old*, c. 1999–2002, Beijing, East Modern Art Center.

[1] S. Bernard Thomas, (2020). *Labor and the Chinese Revolution: Class Strategies and Contradictions of Chinese Communism*, 1928–1948. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 258.

[2] Welland, *Special Issue*, 34.

[3] Welland, *Special Issue*, 34.

[4] Ibid.

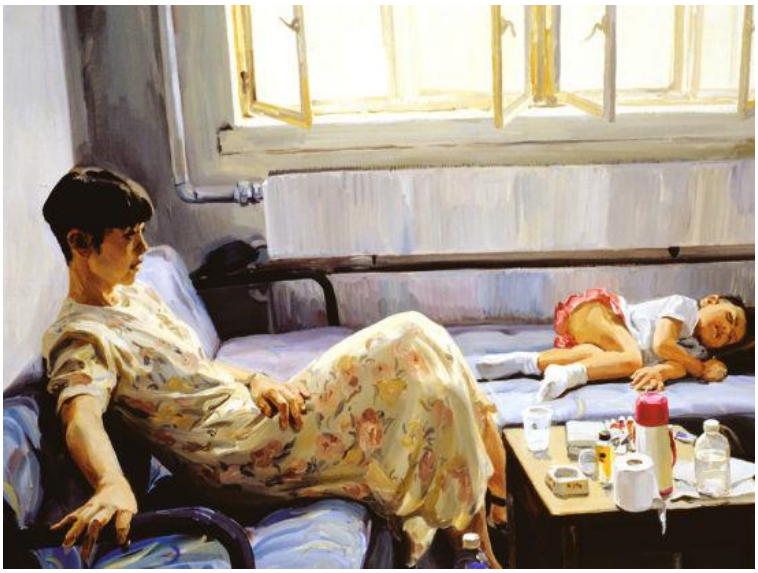

Figure 4. Yu Hong, *Witness to Growth Series: Thirty Years Old in 1996* (*Liu Wa, Two Years Old*) (detail), c. 1996, Beijing, East Modern Art Center.

Rather than aligning with Western feminist frameworks—such as Julia Kristeva's critique of the 'patriarchal construction of maternal discourse'—Yu avoids both idealising and negating motherhood.[1] Instead, she reveals its complexity at the intersection of personal experience and socio-historical transition. Her maternal figure functions as a 'witness' or 'companion', marking a 'maternal spectator perspective' that stands in contrast to the grand, detached, and rationalised narratives frequently found in male-authored representations.[2] This maternal gaze, rooted in emotional depth and introspection, provides an alternative epistemological mode through which personal memory and social history are interwoven.

Through *Witness to Growth*, Yu documents maternal experience as a site of both personal introspection and ideological reflection. Maternalism becomes a strategic visual language—one that enables her to explore gender politics with subtlety while navigating the constraints of censorship. In doing so, she articulates a form of 'Chinese feminism' that both resists and adapts to structural boundaries.

Unlike Yu, who reclaims female subjectivity through gentle intergenerational parent-child documentation, He Chengyao takes a more radical approach through nudity. After her performance *Opening the Great Wall* (Figure 5) was censored by the state due to her public nudity, He strategically integrated nudity with maternal imagery.[3] By aligning her work with the culturally accepted association between motherhood and the female body, she found a way to address themes of bodily autonomy and social stigma. Her works *Mother and I* (2001) and *99 Needles* (2005) are two representative examples exploring the complexity of motherhood — one seeks to repair, and the other seeks to deconstruct.

[1] Judith Butler, (1988). The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva. *Hypatia*, *3*(3), 105.

[2] Gong, (2023). *Interpreting Yu Hong's Mother-Child-Themed Paintings*, 20.

[3] Tate, (November 20, 2013). He Chengyao 何成瑶. *Tate*, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/tate-research-centre-asia/women-artists-contemporary-china/he-chengyao.

Figure 5. He Chengyao, *Opening the Great Wall*, c. 2001, performance, Great Wall of China, Beijing.

He's mother had faced ostracisation for giving birth out of wedlock and later struggled with mental illness, leading to a lifetime of social exclusion.[1] As a child, He wrestled with feelings of shame and denial about this past.[2] However, *Mother and I* become a turning point—rather than distancing herself, she reclaims this relationship through art. *Mother and I* (2001) (Figure 6) is a striking photographic piece capturing an intimate yet unsettling moment between He and her mother. In the image, He removes her shirt, stands behind her half-naked mother, and embraces her—marking the first time they were photographed together.[3] This simple yet powerful act dissolves both physical and emotional barriers, directly confronting the social stigmas surrounding female mental illness and the marginalization of women who fall outside traditional family structures in Chinese society.[4] Her nudity in the photograph is not meant to shock the audience but to challenge inherited trauma and redefine maternal bonds on her terms.[5] The piece ultimately symbolises her transformation from a daughter burdened by familial shame to a woman embracing her understanding of motherhood.[6]

Figure 6. He Chengyao, *Mother and Me*, c. 2001, performance, Rongchang County, Chongqing.

[1] Eva Kit-Wah Man, (2019). *Bodies in China: Philosophy, Aesthetics, Gender, and Politics*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 90.

[2] Ibid., 91.

[3] Brooklyn Museum, (2024). *Feminist Art*, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/zh-CN/areas/22.

[4] Man, *Bodies in China*, 91.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

If *Mother and I* is a restoration of motherhood, *99 Needles* should be considered a deconstruction of motherhood. In this extreme performance art, He had 99 acupuncture needles inserted into her body, including her face (Figure 7). This painful act is not only a reproduction of individual trauma but also a critique of the myth of maternalism in Chinese society. He herself says this work is 'dedicated to my mother who has suffered so much'.[1] As a child, she witnessed soldiers of the People's Liberation Army tying her mother to a doorway and stabbing her body with silver needles under the guise of 'curing' her.[2] Her mother's agonised howls, filled with horror and helplessness, left an indelible mark on her memory.[3] This traumatic experience became He's 'physical nightmare' and later inspired *99 Needles*.[4] Through the visceral depiction of pain in her own body, the artist exposes the suffering of motherhood under state control. Acupuncture, originally a healing practice in traditional Chinese medicine, is transformed in her work into an instrument of trauma. The precise placement of acupuncture needles across He's body creates an unsettling symmetry, visually reinforcing the tension between healing and suffering, state control and bodily agency. Her choice of '99' further deepens the work's metaphorical complexity. By drawing on traditional Chinese culture, where nine is the most significant single-digit number and shares the pronunciation of *jiǔ* (久), meaning 'long-lasting,' this connection underscores the profound and enduring damage inflicted on motherhood by institutional violence.[5] This paradoxical numerical symbolism strengthens the work's dual role: an intensely personal narrative and a broader critique of systemic gender oppression.

Figure 7. He Chengyao, *99 Needles*, c. 2002, performance.

[1] Welland, *Special Issue*, 23.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] K. Wilkinson, ed., (2008). *Signs and Symbols*. New York: Dorling Kindersley, 295.

Motherhood in China is idealised yet disciplines women to fit societal roles.[1] *99 Needles* confronts this myth by revealing women's suffering in motherhood and transforming the private experience into a public issue through the act of self-harm. This is very different from how *Mother and I* attempt to rebuild the mother-daughter relationship — the former is repairing, the latter is tearing, and together they form He's two narratives of motherhood: intimacy and alienation, healing and resistance.

Critics have debated the nature of He's performance art, questioning whether her extreme performances serve as structured feminist critiques or function more as a personal catharsis.[2] Yet, her works should be understood within the Chinese socio-political context, where direct feminist activism remains constrained.[3] By using her own body as a site of resistance, He reclaims agency within a system that has historically silenced women's narratives.[4] The revolutionary slogan 'Women can hold up half the sky' emphasised women's emancipation in the realm of productivity but neglected to mention that the state apparatus still controls women's reproductive rights.[5] *99 Needles* alludes to this violent structure of institutional control through the persistence of performance art: her body is subjected to hours of needling, echoing the long-lasting violence over female bodies. If Yu's works still attempt to construct female subjectivity within the myth of motherhood, 9*9 Needles* destroys this myth and brings motherhood back to the actual political arena.

In the globalised context of contemporary art, *99 Needles* becomes a representative Chinese performance art response to international radical feminist art.[6] Artists such as Marina Abramović have challenged the boundaries of femininity through endurance-based body experiments, while Tracey Emin has used personal trauma to expose the political dimensions of the female experience.[7] However, He's work remains distinctly rooted in its historical and cultural context, navigating the tensions between China's socialist legacy, Confucian ethics, and political censorship. This makes *99 Needles* an exploration of motherhood and a multifaceted confrontation with the female body, state power, and cultural politics. Using her own body, she radically dismantles traditional maternal narratives, transforming motherhood from a passive vessel of societal expectations into an active site of resistance. The silver needles in her skin form a striking visual statement—a warning monument proclaiming the female body is no longer a blank canvas for state control but a force of revolution that demands recognition.

Yu and He adopt **contrasting yet complementary strategies** in their art. Yu's approach is **subtle and introspective**, navigating censorship within personal and historical narratives. In contrast, He engages in **radical bodily performance**, directly confronting the political violence. Whether they can be classified as 'feminists' needs to be viewed dialectically in context. On the one hand, there is no doubt that their creations are distinctly feminist: They pay attention to women's experiences, question patriarchal structures, and seek to express women's subjectivity, all of which are in line with the core spirit of feminist art.[8] He was selected for the 'Global Feminism' exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in New York and is regarded by the international art world as one of the representatives of 'Chinese feminist' artists.[9] Although Yu's approach to gender issues is modest, her paintings speak for women and expand the scope of 'Chinese feminist' art. On the other hand, the label 'Chinese feminist' is not easily recognised or claimed in the local context. As He herself said, 'Feminism is a remote topic in the country where I live. China is always a male-dominated world .....'[10] Many female artists in China avoid publicly identifying themselves as 'feminists' due to social sensitivities or a desire not to be labelled.[11] However, this does not mean their work lacks feminist intent. Yu and He have chosen to advance the feminist agenda in a way that is consistent with the local cultural context: in the name of maternalism, but act as a feminist. It can be said that they embody 'Chinese feminism': without radical claims, they profoundly challenge and change the inherent ideas about women and motherhood in their works.[12] Their creations belong to

[1] Wing, (2003). *Technology, Commentary and the Admonitions for Women*, 60.

[2] Sasha Su-Ling Welland, (2018). *Experimental Beijing.* Duke University Press, 210.

[3] Welland, *Experimental Beijing*, 210.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Xueping Zhong, (2010). Women Can Hold Up Half the Sky, in *Words and Their Stories.* Leiden: Brill, 227.

[6] Welland, *Experimental Beijing*, 230.

[7] Kwan Kiu Leung, (2018). Uncompromising Female Aesthetic Subjectivity. PhD diss., Royal College of Art, 45.

[8] Leung, Uncompromising Female Aesthetic Subjectivity, 17.

[9] Man, Bodies in China, 98.

[10] Man, Bodies in China, 98.

[11] Jia Tan, (2023). *Digital Masquerade: Feminist Rights and Queer Media in China*, vol. 30. New York: NYU Press, 38.

[12] Tani Barlow, (2004). *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 361.

the universal dialogue of feminism but also come from the unique response of the Chinese context. This dual identity enriches the face of global feminism and gives the title 'Chinese feminists' a different vitality.

In conclusion, Yu and He can be considered 'Chinese feminists' because of their deep engagement in feminist critiques of **gender, motherhood, and state control**. Their art challenges patriarchal structures much like Western feminist artists but through **coded and contextually specific strategies shaped by censorship and cultural constraints**. As such, they function as feminist artists **within the Chinese socio-political landscape**, demonstrating that feminist art does not require explicit declarations to be impactful.

Yu and He's artistic practice uses **motherhood as a method rather than an essence**—**neither romanticising it as 'divine' nor denying its cultural significance.** Instead, they transform it into a critical lens to reveal **how power disciplines women through family, childbirth, and bodily autonomy**. In doing so, their art carves out a **third path** that **challenges gender norms within the cracks of the system**. Rather than seeking grand political statements, their work demonstrates that '**Chinese feminism' evolves through adaptation and resilience**.

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