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Harsh Realities and Strategic Alignment

A Computational Analysis of Chinese Feminist Hashtag Activism on Weibo During COVID-19

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Presented to NCA Feminist and Gender Studies Division

November 24, 2024



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Background: Digital Feminism in China

Opportunities

- Digital platforms like Weibo provide new venues for feminist expression and activism.
- Chinese feminist draw inspiration from global movements like #MeToo and adapt the discourse to Chinese context.
- Hashtags played a vital role in fostering digital feminism in China, while young feminists used hashtags to connect and coordinate actions.

Challenges

- State censorship and surveillance restrict free expression and online activities.
- Cultural resistance and backlash against feminist ideas persist, defending traditional values against “Western” feminism.
- Marketing and commercialization of feminism discourse depoliticize the movement.



Hashtag-Driven Digital Feminist Activism during COVID-19

#SeeingFemaleWorkers



#SisterAntiEpidemicReassuranceAction



The campaign was launched to address the shortage of sanitary products faced by female healthcare workers during COVID-19 in 2020. The two hashtags on Sina Weibo were utilized for gathering volunteers, fundraising for products and coordinating logistics.



Research Questions



- *RQ1. How has the feminist content on Weibo evolved throughout the pandemic?*
- *RQ2. What are the main themes and topics that have emerged in discussions under these feminist hashtags?*
- *RQ3. What types of language have been most frequently used in these Weibo posts?*





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Method

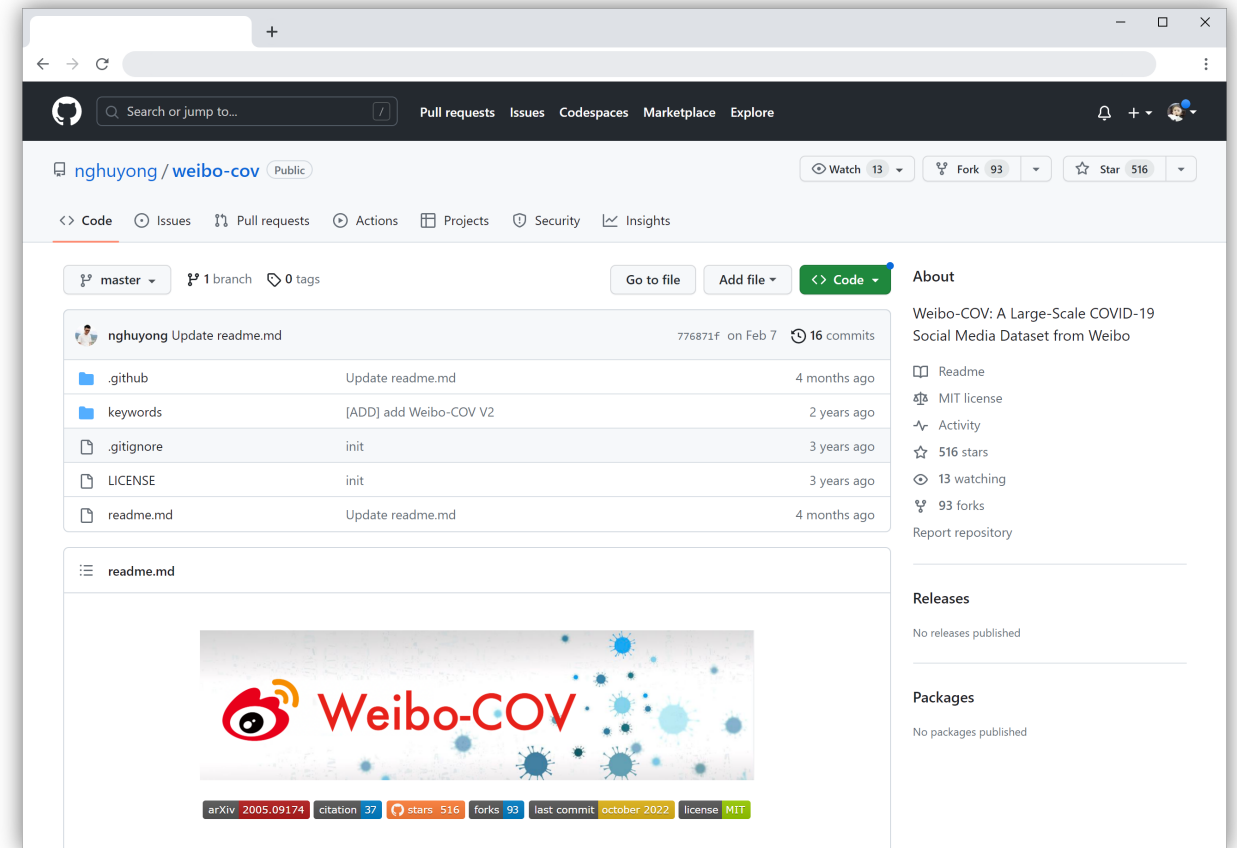
Computational Text Analysis on Sina Weibo-COV Dataset



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Data Collection

- **Source:** Weibo-COV 2.0 Public Dataset
- **Time Period:** 12/01/2019 – 04/30/2020
- **Hashtags:** #SeeingFemaleWorkers & #SisterAntiEpidemicReassuranceAction
- **Cleaning:** Remove duplicate values and automated posts
- **Sample Size:** 135,498 tweets filtered from 65M original tweets
 - 852 original posts
 - 134,646 reposts



Hu, Y., Huang, H., Chen, A., & Mao, X.-L. (2020). *Weibo-COV: A Large-Scale COVID-19 Social Media Dataset from Weibo* (arXiv:2005.09174). arXiv. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2005.09174>



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user_id	gender	provin...	city	birthd...	fans_n...	vip_le...	crawl_...	_id	crawl_...	create...	like_n...	repost...	comm...	content	origin...
7683825...	女	贵州	安顺	NaN	70	未开通	1579457...	lquwZqr43	1587628...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	#看见女...	lquuRDM...
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9de8b42...	女	江苏	苏州	0001-00-...	180	未开通	1575955...	lqCTLoH...	1587877...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	#看见女...	lquuRDM...
687d7ed...	女	北京	海淀区	01-01	119	未开通	1576241...	lqF4EAtO	1587818...	2020-01-...	4	2	1	#看见女...	lquuRDM...
5be5025...	女	湖北	NaN	0001-00-...	165	未开通	1576176...	lqFi1kNJo	1590452...	2020-01-...	2	0	1	#看见女...	lquuRDM...
d5b1769...	女	吉林	长春	1981-03-...	366	未开通	1579367...	lqFWs0xi9	1590698...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	#看见女...	lquuRDM...
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bd944da...	女	其他	NaN	0001-00-...	119	未开通	1576210...	lqSy3tpm	1590341...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	【若有战...	lqRtniOJ3
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6eec191a...	女	海外	美国	1998-06-...	139	1级	1576052...	lqURM4R...	1587843...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	【若有战...	lqRtniOJ3
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39aba16...	女	湖南	衡阳	01-01	499	1级	1575981...	lqViz1mK5	1590758...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	【若有战...	lqRtniOJ3
8f06abbf...	女	其他	NaN	1998-10-...	383	2级	1580864...	lqVqp5xv1	1587997...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	【若有战...	lqRtniOJ3
1d339e1...	男	其他	NaN	1996-10-...	204	1级	1576150...	lqW2C20...	1590138...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	【若有战...	lqRtniOJ3
e7e0c40...	男	上海	徐汇区	1993-02-...	302	4级	1576169...	lqXhXgm...	1590649...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	#看见女...	lquuRDM...
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378292e...	女	海外	澳大利亚	处女座	1694	6级	1575983...	lqY9Na1yp	1590878...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	危难之际...	lqY0h5CuF
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45ef9668...	女	其他	NaN	射手座	188	未开通	1576136...	lqZ2YntQQ	1587887...	2020-01-...	0	0	0	【若有战...	lqRtniOJ3



Computational Text Analysis

Step 1. Word Frequency Statistics

- Reveal the most frequently used words and general trends.
- **Word segmentation:** Thulac & Jieba Python library

Step 2. LDA Topic Modeling

- Identify underlying themes and topics within the posts.
- **Topic modeling:** Tomotopy Python library

Step 3. Sentiment Analysis

- Examine the linguistic styles and emotional tones.
- **Dictionary-based approach:** C-LIWC dictionary (Zeng et al., 2018); cntext Python library





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Findings

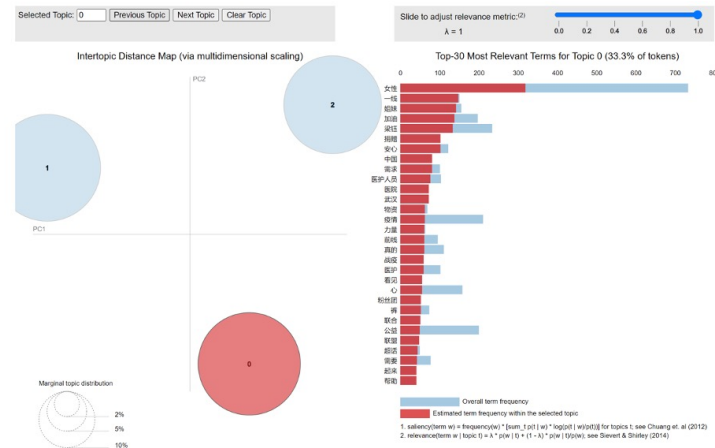


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Findings



Word Cloud



Topic Modeling

Word Labels	Word Categories	Example Words	Female Posts	Male Posts	χ^2	p	DOF
<u>cognitive</u>	Cognitive process words	understand, choose, question	35.7167	32.1781	444.8708	0.0000	159
relative	Relative words	before, compared to, reach	18.7658	16.9724	446.4845	0.0000	92
social	Social process words	family, accept, greet	18.6546	16.9692	574.0111	0.0000	88
<u>funct</u>	Function words	perhaps, many, those	14.9466	13.5591	311.9229	0.0000	73
incl	Inclusive words	include, near, add	11.1534	9.8358	227.1156	0.0000	63
space	Spatial words	inside, street, on stage	9.9559	8.7933	405.8016	0.0000	46
affect	Affective process words	angry, grateful, disappointed	9.7143	8.7443	371.2376	0.0000	60
bio	Biological process words	dizzy, sweating, hug	9.0564	7.7067	425.7486	0.0000	49
insight	Insight words	understand, epiphany, realize	8.2856	7.466	336.127	0.0000	41
assent	Assent words	understand, really, good	8.0605	7.4887	442.5703	0.0000	49
humans	Human words	people, member, masses	7.3618	6.6417	312.8965	0.0000	36
<u>TenseM</u>	Tense marker words	already, before, in the future	7.1176	6.5257	406.8986	0.0000	38

Linguistic Analysis



Findings - Word Cloud

2020-01



Hospital, Mask, Combat

2020-02



Hospital, Mask, Combat, Sanitary Napkin Protect, Frontier Work, Team, Volunteer

2020-03



Protect, Frontier Work, Team, Volunteer

Immediate Health Crisis



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Findings - Word Cloud

2020-04 Data



2020-05



Female Workers

2020-06



Healthcare Workers

Economic And Social Impacts On Women



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Findings - Word Cloud

State
Council

2020-07

Support



Labor Rights

2020-10

Data



2020-08



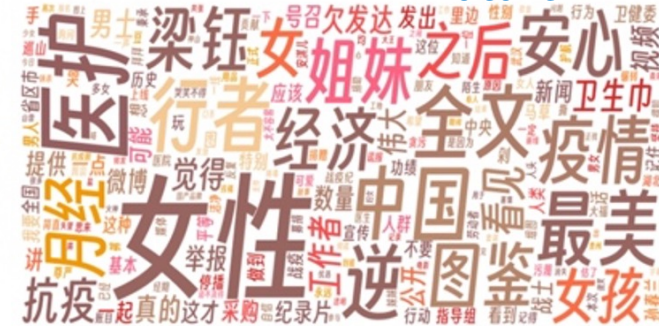
2020-11

Female



2020-09

Future



2020-12

Health Worker



Advocating For Structural Change

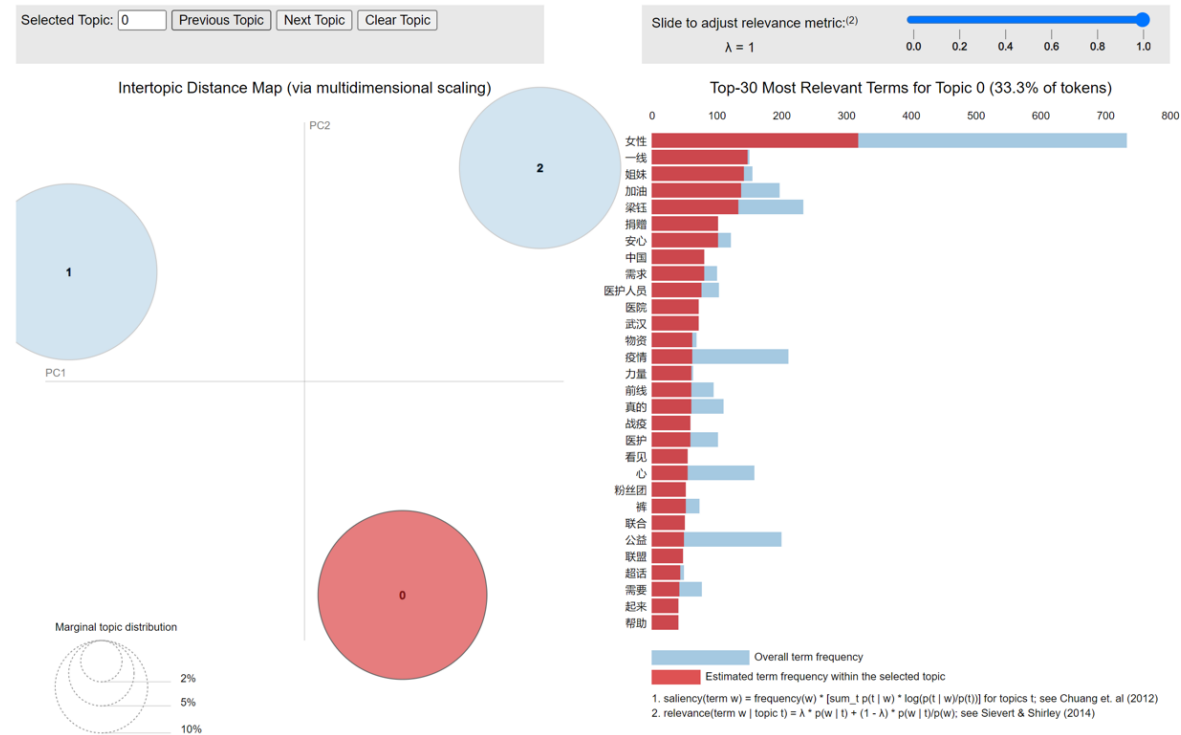


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Findings – Topic1:

Unsung Heroes:

The Harsh Realities and Unmet Needs of Female Frontline Workers



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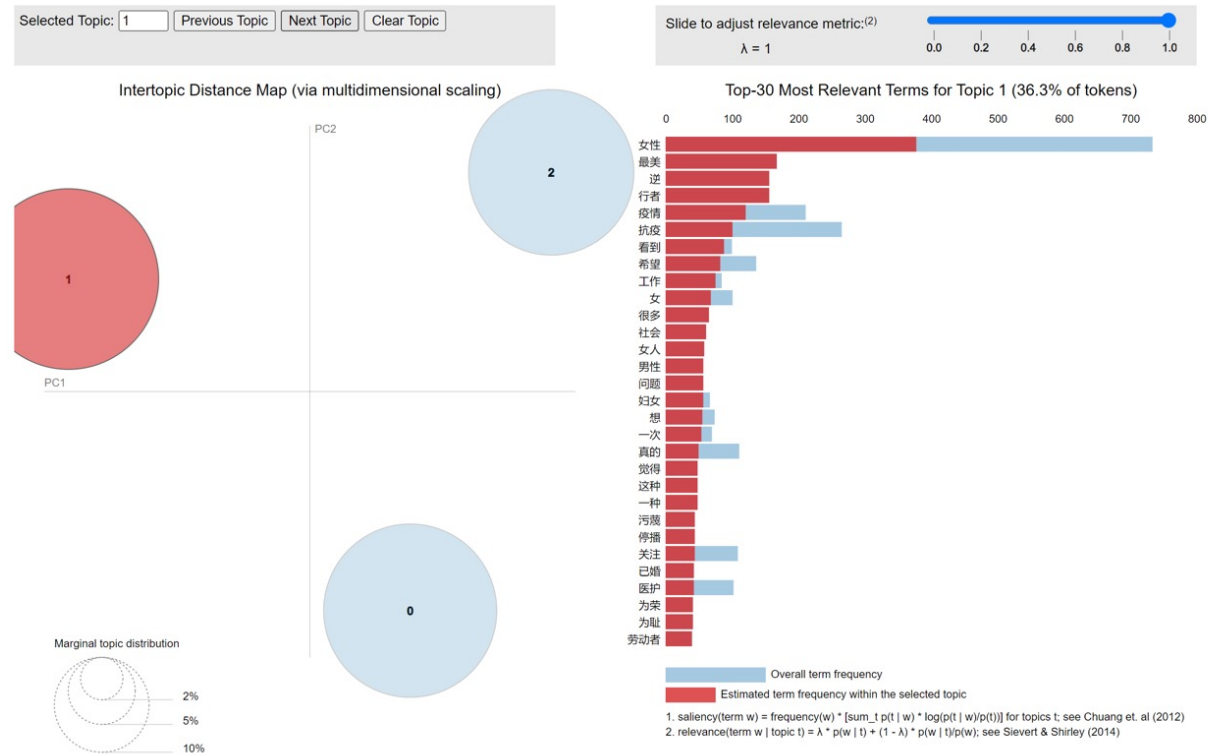
"Faced with such great difficulties, it seems that 'it's not that urgent yet,' and there are no voices. I fully understand the current difficulties, but it is precisely because of these difficulties that any material policy must have priorities, and those that are not so urgent will naturally be ignored. In a state of 'war', if the menstrual issues of female 'soldiers' are not a priority, they will naturally be overlooked. However, this should not be ignored, and it is very appropriate that period panties and sanitary napkins should be included as essential supplies in a state of 'war'. Don't even mention completing the exam paper on time; it's already good enough to fill it out. I hope everyone can stop and think that the situation there really cannot be measured by ideal conditions. If you have the heart to delve deeper, it's truly eye-opening, witnessing history, the magical 2020 [smile] [bye]. #SeeingFemaleWorkers# #SisterAntiEpidemicReassuranceAction#"



Findings – Topic2:

More Than Brides:

Challenging Media Stereotypes of Female Medical Workers



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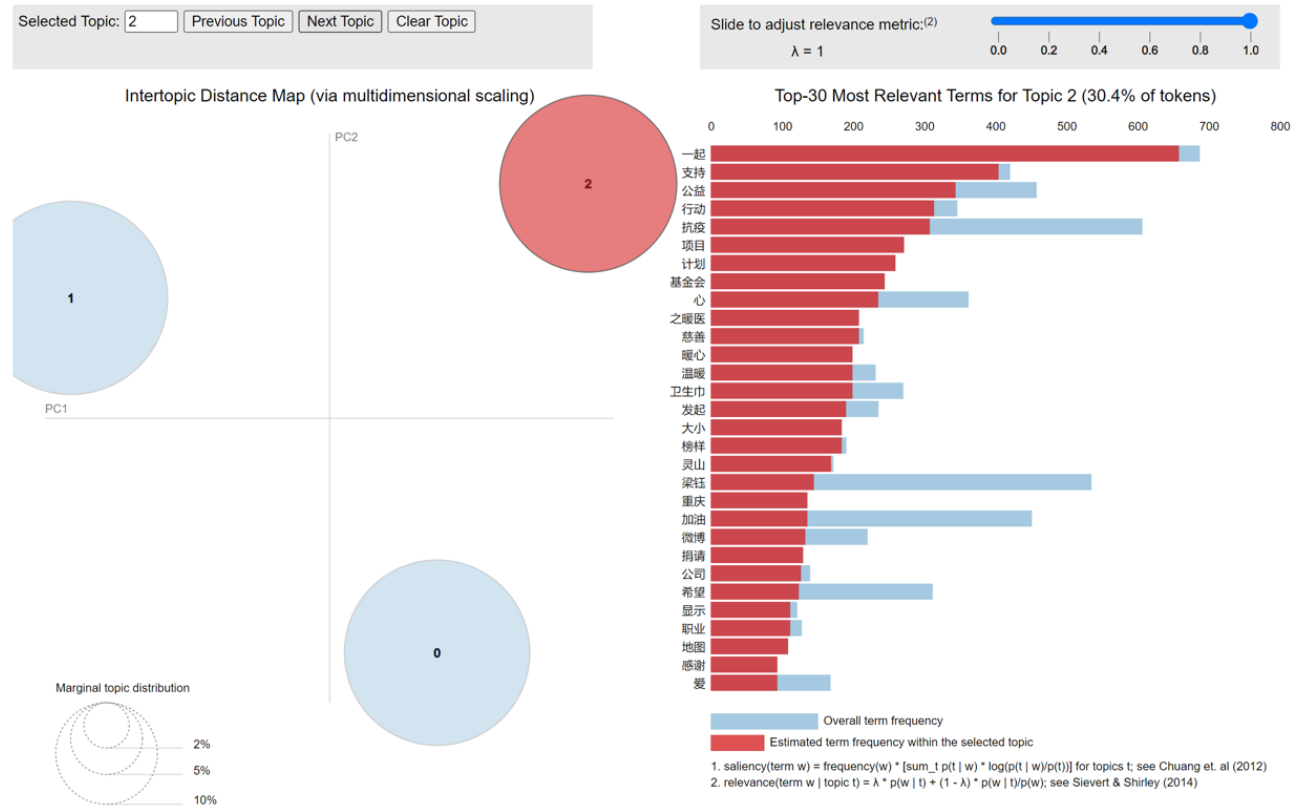
"#SeeingFemaleWorkers# Recently, the publicity on Weibo about female medical staff has focused on organizing blind dates, marriage, engagement, and family. In such a large-scale epidemic, these female medical staff on the front line are currently the greatest exemplary force. As a result, do those people only want other women to learn to get married? I want to see what books these female medical staff like to read, what personalities they have, and what difficulties they have encountered at work. I don't want to see marriage, marriage, marriage!"



Findings – Topic3:

Valuing Women's Work:

Recognizing and Rewarding Female Contributions in the Fight



Findings – Topic3:

Valuing Women's Work:

Recognizing and Rewarding Female Contributions in the Fight

"Through this donation of period panties and sanitary napkins, with so many teams and such a large quantity needed, it's impossible to ignore that in the battle against the new coronavirus, the number of female medical personnel is quite huge, and they have contributed an enormous amount, risking their lives (accounting for more than two-thirds). Please record them in history, and may news media platforms give them more coverage, and may artists feature them more as protagonists. Most importantly, when they return safely, please give them the promotions, raises, and research funding they deserve. Please see them, face them, the women who protect our homes and defend our country. #SisterAntiEpidemicReassuranceAction# #SeeingFemaleWorkers#"



Findings – Linguistic Analysis

Word Labels	Word Categories	Example Words	Female Posts	Male Posts	χ^2	p	DOF
<u>cogmech</u>	Cognitive process words	understand, choose, question	35.7167	32.1781	444.8708	0.0000	159
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<u>TenseM</u>	Tense marker words	already, before, in the future	7.1176	6.5257	406.8986	0.0000	38
time	Time words	period, past, autumn	6.3726	6.0632	450.483	0.0000	38
<u>posemo</u>	Positive emotion words	confidence, satisfaction, blessing	4.9263	4.6179	351.8656	0.0000	40
work	Work words	factory, interview, salary	4.5881	4.2666	345.5571	0.0000	31

percept	Perceptual process words	warm, experience, gaze	2.6407	2.5145	182.7116	0.0000	24
<u>negemo</u>	Negative emotion words	worry, suspect, revenge	2.5956	2.2726	160.4744	0.0000	24
sexual	Sexual words	have sex, lust, naked	2.5477	2.0801	197.7689	0.0000	19
body	Body words	neck, skin, stomach	2.1945	1.8539	166.5094	0.0000	19
health	Health words	insomnia, doctor, exercise	1.8629	1.5971	178.1524	0.0000	21
money	Money words	wealthy, annual salary, discount	1.8455	1.6092	258.0219	0.0000	21
<u>inhib</u>	Inhibition words	abolish, forbid, rules	1.2773	1.0648	337.6759	0.0000	11
see	Seeing words	appearance, shiny, green	1.0195	0.9237	118.9768	0.0000	12
leisure	Leisure words	sing, relaxed, vacation	0.946	0.9807	46.411	0.0000	10
anger	Anger words	annoying, complain, destroy	0.8561	0.7668	156.3927	0.0000	12
hear	Hearing words	shout, hear, talk	0.8015	0.7792	41.2737	0.0009	17
<u>FutureM</u>	Future tense marker words	after, will, in the future	0.6954	0.6603	58.6819	0.0000	8
family	Family words	in-laws, siblings, granddaughter	0.6376	0.5597	121.8717	0.0000	20
sad	Sad words	heartache, depressed, powerless	0.581	0.5067	86.2326	0.0000	10



Discussion:

Strategic Alignment in Chinese Feminist Discourse

- **Integration with State Goals**
 - Careful language and topic framing.
 - Feminist issues linked to broader topics, e.g., labor rights.
- **Rational, Negotiative Approach**
 - Use of cognitive process words like “understand,” “choose,” “question.”
 - Balances critique with alignment to state policies.
- **Adaptability in China’s Sociopolitical Context**
 - Emphasis on constructive criticism over direct opposition.
 - Progress achieved without political backlash.



Discussion:

Focus on Marginalized Women in Feminist Discourse

- **Emphasis on Vulnerable Groups**
 - Female medical workers, migrant workers, and other disadvantaged populations.
- **Intersectional Advocacy**
 - Highlights unique challenges and structural barriers.
 - Moves beyond general gender equality to amplify specific voices.
- **Deliberate and Inclusive Approach**
 - Commitment to addressing diverse experiences within the feminist movement.

