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Abstract
This study explores the multifaceted feminist discourses embedded in postfeminist humor within the Chinese digital feminist movement. Drawing on textual and thematic analysis of posts from radical feminist communities on Weibo, this study demonstrates how humor disrupts the depoliticized surface of postfeminist discourse. It combines both restrictive and subversive elements, epitomizing feminist radicalism while often provoking anti-feminist backlash, not only from the broader online discursive landscape but also from within feminist communities, particularly among women. These discursive tensions reveal the dialectical challenges within the postfeminist paradox and the layered nature of humor in Chinese feminist discourse. The semantic ambiguity highlights the need for careful interpretation and constructive dialogue between competing feminist discourses and broader publics to move beyond the current polarized landscape in Chinese feminist discourse.

Keywords
Postfeminism, Humor, China, Digital Feminism, Weibo, Anti-feminism

Introduction
Although some recent feminist studies have begun to focus on emerging feminist movements on Chinese social media (e.g., Tian & Ge, 2024; Wang & Chang, 2023; Yin & Yu, 2020), noting notable shifts in the use of feminist humor in comedy (e.g., Meng & Literat, 2023; Tang, 2024; Xu & Zhan, 2024), the exploration of postfeminist humor remains under-examined. This study defines postfeminist humor as a cultural sensibility that conveys paradoxical perspectives of women toward postfeminist discourse. Specifically, it is a mediated discursive strategy that emerges alongside the simultaneous rise of feminist and antifeminist discourses on Chinese social media. Feminists use humorous discourses to expose the paradoxes embedded in postfeminism while negotiating anti-feminist sentiments inside and outside feminist communities.

Postfeminism is not an epistemological perspective, a clear historical or ideological break from feminism (Gill, 2007). Rather, it is a contested and multifaceted discourse — understood as a 'sensibility' or discursive formation that shapes how gender is experienced and understood in contemporary society (e.g., Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007; Loke et al., 2016; Treanor et al., 2020). The 'postfeminist paradox', as Treanor et al. (2020) describe, frequently emphasizes personal effort and agency while downplaying structural inequalities, sexism, and gender discrimination. This creates a paradoxical situation where women acknowledge these dilemmas yet publicly accept the status quo and view inequalities as inevitable or personal choices (Ibid.).

Situated within the discursive formation shaped by postfeminism, this study examines how feminist discourse on Chinese social media mediates humor to expose the postfeminist paradox, simultaneously reactivating feminist radicalism in an interactive yet controversial way. This study demonstrates that postfeminist humor has the potential to challenge the depoliticized surface of postfeminist discourse and reintroduce collective feminist values. However, unlike other inclusive feminist dialogues, its discursive strategies risk oversimplifying structural complexities while often marginalizing individuals with divergent or ambivalent engagements with feminism. Therefore, this study evaluates both the potential and limitations of postfeminist humor. It highlights its creative agency in expressing postfeminist contradictions, alongside the limitations formed by its discursive entrenchment — thereby expanding a deeper understanding of humor as a discursive strategy within the Chinese digital feminist movement.

The landscape of feminist discourses
The current feminist landscape is characterized by tensions and contradictions, with a multiplicity of new and old feminisms coexisting alongside a revitalization of anti-feminism and popular misogyny (Gill, 2016). Traditional or 'old' feminism — often associated with the second-wave feminism of the 20th century — focuses on gender equality, reproductive rights, gender discrimination, and disparities in social structures, representing a more radical and confrontational position (Lindsey, 2014). It centers on shared social experiences and collective oppression (Calas & Smircich, 2006). The notion of collectivity often remains a core value (Benschop & Lewis, 2024). The prevalent liberal feminism assumes that current systems of civil rights, education, government, and law can ensure equal opportunity (Zhang & Rios, 2021) and encourage women's participation in public life, which is typically embraced by middle-class women (Ibid.). Yet criticism, such as Black feminist perspectives, emphasizes the intersectional inequalities of gender, race, and class, particularly for marginalized women (hooks, 1984).

Comparatively, the media often portrays 'new' feminism as a more inclusive movement, characterized by greater political and social engagement, particularly emphasizing individual choice with efforts to distinguish itself from traditional feminism (McRobbie, 2009). Popular media configure feminist signifiers to promote postfeminist self-discipline by framing discourses of female empowerment and freedom of choice as progressive representations of feminine subjectivities (Ibid.). Consumer-led capitalism

amplifies this tendency by commodifying feminism and promoting values of self-interest, consumption, and free markets (Baer, 2016). Within a neoliberal framework, women express feminism through personal choices and lived experiences, shifting the focus from collective struggle to individual empowerment (Ferguson, 2010). Although academia has nuanced discussions of postfeminism, recognizing both its restrictive and empowering dimensions (e.g., Banet-Weiser, 2018; Negra, 2008), feminist critics question whether postfeminist politics inevitably reduces feminism to a personal project centered on individualism and the 'self' (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Particularly, detracting from collective goals may undermine the importance of engagement and influence public attitudes toward feminist agendas (Loke et al., 2016). Correspondingly, postfeminist sensibility is a multifaceted concept that reflects the nuances of feminist discourses, characterized by both advances in feminist values and the complexities with entrenched gender norms (Gill, 2007).

In China, although postfeminism is often framed as a Western phenomenon, it emerges from a complex interplay of historical legacies, authoritative state relationships, class dynamics, and consumerist discourses, forming a distinct postfeminist subjectivity (Yang, 2020). Aligning with Western postfeminism's focus on individualism, self-empowerment, and personal choice, it reinforces neoliberal ideals of autonomy while perpetuating traditional gender norms (Sun & Ding, 2024). These dynamics are shaped by the rise of the middle class and the cooperation between the women's studies movement and the market economy, developing a culturally specific yet constrained landscape (Yang, 2020). According to Yin and Yu (2020), the framework of intersectional digital feminism highlights a nuanced, context-sensitive tool to analyze how digital media shape feminist discourses in China. This model embraces digital accessibility, discursive visibility, and activist outcomes and risks (Ibid.).

Compared to other feminisms, radical feminism advocates for challenging and completely restructuring the current male-dominated social hierarchy (Zhang & Rios, 2021), including views of men collectively as the primary agents of women's oppression (Ibid.). This uncompromising criticism of patriarchy and traditional institutions such as marriage and motherhood, and the insistence on the gender binary as essential to feminist politics, makes it widely perceived as a threat in both society and academia (Donovan, 2013). In China, radical feminism faces the limitation of narrow social reach, with activism largely concentrated among educated urban women (Yin, 2021). Although digital technologies have exemplified their visibility, activists still confront government suppression and censorship (Wu & Dong, 2019). Meanwhile, the state's neoliberal transition, the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts, and resurgent patriarchal anxiety have frequently framed a backlash (Bao, 2024). On Chinese social media like Weibo, anti-radical feminist discourses often portray it as an irrational, foreign-influenced, and a threat to social stability (Ibid.). These metaphors not only delegitimize their structural critiques of gender inequality but also function as tools of cultural and technological control to suppress feminist voices (Ibid.).

Navigating anti-feminist sentiments and humor in China
Across digital platforms where popular feminism circulates within an 'economy of visibility', anti-feminist sentiment and online misogyny remain considerable (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Modern anti-feminism implies a sort of feminism gone wild, where feminism is rendered obsolete, anachronistic, unnecessarily aggressive, or manufactured by hatred of men (Anderson, 2015). Networked misogyny appears not only in widely negative comments, hostility, and violence but also in the significantly polarized sentiments between private and public perceptions of feminism (Gill, 2017). A feature is 'righteous outrage', which conveys a sense of moral superiority in claims of male victimhood or appeals to 'common sense' and 'biological truths' (Evans & Riley, 2020). It frames feminism as cultural dominance and undermines these purported truths of natural social orders (Ibid.).

Aligning with the global rise of the digital feminist movement, Chinese feminist activists recognize the potential of online platforms to amplify marginalized voices and create

counter-publics (Yin & Yu, 2020). Nevertheless, a rising anti-feminist backlash highlights how state discourse and platform architecture coupled with patriarchal structures (Wang & Chang, 2023). This backlash portrays and condemns feminism as deviating from social norms, justifying their marginalization (Huang, 2022). This interplay effectively diverts public attention from systemic, structural issues and limits critical discussion of women's struggles (Ibid.). It also generates complex affective dimensions among women navigating feminist identities (Wang & Chang, 2023).

Despite the rise of social media significantly enhancing the visibility of feminist discourse, feminism is still largely subsumed by postfeminist values, especially when collectively feminist values conflict with the self-promotion practices (Pruchniewska, 2017). There is a significant discourse around who has the authority to define feminism, with a tendency for media to present a narrow view of what constitutes feminist identity rather than as a social movement or ideology (Loke et al., 2016). This framing leads to a portrayal of simplistic and monolithic views that reinforce stereotypes rather than acknowledging the complexity of feminist thoughts (Ibid.). As a way to challenge the status quo, feminist research emphasizes the need for deeper social transformation, particularly moving away from the postfeminist individualist orientation towards a more radicalized positioning (Benschop & Lewis, 2024).

In feminist discourses, humor holds transformative potential in challenging faux feminism, exposing stereotypes, and disrupting conventional gender roles and power dynamics (e.g., Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018; Riquelme et al., 2020). It operates through several key dynamics, including reinforcing, subverting, or resisting existing gender norms (Kanai, 2016). For instance, hilarious responses can express complicated socio-political themes, allowing women to question deep preconceptions and surpassing ideological boundaries (Shifman & Lemish, 2010). Charged and satirical humor can evoke aggression, judgment, and laughter, while also revealing social inequality and advocating strategies and solutions (Krefting, 2014). Offensive humor can jolt audiences out of their comfort zones and lead to new perspectives about acceptable or offensive, promoting deeper engagement with social issues (Graefer & Das, 2017). Shaped by postfeminist ideologies, women are expected to regulate emotions in ways that align with social norms, further converting their struggles into humorous and relatable content (Kanai, 2017). This emotional labor responds to the pressures of maintaining a pleasing and approachable postfeminist femininity, particularly in digital spaces (Ibid.). While online platforms allow for the remixing and recontextualization of humor, they often reflect a middle-class perspective by reinforcing certain identities while marginalizing others (Kanai, 2016). It requires digital literacy, an ideal audience that navigates to its nuances, and often an intersectional lens (Ibid.).

In China, feminism occupies a precarious existence shaped by structural oppression, cultural stigmatization, state censorship, and limited government support (Yin & Yu, 2020). This produces a hybrid and often contradictory form of feminist expression through mediated discursive strategies (Zou et al., 2025). In this repressive and social climate, humor becomes a way to express existential anxiety, vulnerabilities, loneliness, or social exclusion, while also permitting the establishment of identity (Yin & Yu, 2020). It enables women to lightheartedly convey personal stories and emotions to spark discussions about gender inequality and female dilemmas, serving as both entertainment and a subtle tool of critique and resistance (Tang, 2024). Especially, its flexibility and indirectness make it powerful in a constrained expressive environment, enabling connections and resilience among women (Xu & Zhan, 2024).

Methodology
This study uses netnography as its primary research method, enabling access to authentic, spontaneous user-generated content (Kozinets, 2015). It involves systematic observation and participation in online communities (Ibid.). The dataset comprises publicly available posts and user interactions on Weibo. Given that Chinese social media's censorship mechanism

may restrict the expression of feminist discourses, purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) is mainly conducted. This study centers on radical feminist communities because of their confrontational discursive strategies, platform visibility, and influences. Particularly, they often provoke backlash due to their controversial discourse, which makes them valuable for analyzing postfeminist humor compared to other feminist communities. Firstly, based on the visibility, engagement levels, or centrality, I identified several seed accounts that served as opinion leaders (n ≥ 20) in radical feminist communities. After that, I utilized a snowball sampling strategy to track reposts/shares by these seed accounts over six months (from June to November 2023) to expand the pool. The collected posts are archived to input and annotate with each text, URL, timestamp, top review (n=3), and contextual detail.

To ensure the thematic continuity aligns with the framework of postfeminist humor, this study employs a set of criteria to identify humor-mediated discursive strategies. For example, a post was coded as postfeminist humor only if it met one or both of the following criteria:

(1) The humor linguistic clues, including wordplay, irony, puns, metaphors, and other literary devices, especially characterized by hilarious, satirical, or offensive strategies (Martin et al., 2003). Example 1: 'Why say 殖女 [an offensive wordplay] can't be a feminist?' (User You, Weibo, 2023). Example 2: 'Like men? Then pay the "man tax" [a hilarious metaphor]' (User Ka, Weibo, 2023). Example 3: 'Hopefully, their "high fertility genes" problem [an ironic metaphor] will be solved after their son gives birth' (User Zheng, Weibo, 2023).

(2) Posts reflect postfeminist contradictions, sensibilities, rhetoric, or contexts. Example 1: 'They cloak the vast, unequal edifice of patriarchy under the banners of "free choice" and "agency"' (User San, Weibo, 2023). Example 2: 'No strand of feminism can offer her the solidarity she seeks — that of "showing allegiance to men"' (User Nü, Weibo, 2023). Example 3: 'When she's trapped in patriarchy, she cries "I had no choice"; but when she does have a choice, she turns around and says "choosing patriarchy is my freedom"' (User Qian, Weibo, 2023).

While some posts may not be overtly humorous, if they responded to anti-feminist sentiments, online misogyny, or reflected feminists' complex feelings, they were included in the dataset. Example 1: 'I got cyberbullied for days just because I said, "I hired a female plumber"' (User Fei, Weibo, 2023). Example 2: 'You might notice that many anti-radfem voices keep repeating "radfems never did anything for them anyway"' (User Huan, Weibo, 2023). Example 3: 'While you're out here dragging men but still nervously prefixing it with "straight cis" — just to make sure no one thinks you hate all men — gay men are busy doing this: [image]' (User San, Weibo, 2023).

Data are interpreted thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to uncover the latent meanings behind the texts' presentation. The initially coded nodes are identified within a total of 241 Weibo posts: marriage and motherhood (n=45), anti-feminist sentiments among women (n=35), dissatisfaction with the gender gap (n=37), beauty labor (n=24), self-objectification (n=20), female narratives and heteronormativity (n=30), online violence and misogyny (n=19), online misandry (n=18), and tensions with LGBTQ+ communities (n=13). Ultimately, five overarching themes are derived inductively and encapsulated from the dataset: (1) postfeminist affective dissonance, (2) the revival of traditional roles, (3) heteronormative reproduction, (4) self-presentation within 'choice', and (5) gendered biases in the reception of 'new men.'

Findings
Postfeminist affective dissonance
Postfeminist culture encompasses a set of assumptions about the 'pastness' of feminism (Tasker & Negra, 2007). In this sense, anti-feminism works by construing feminism into individualistic discourses, downplaying the precious political goal of collective action, wherein social disadvantage or discrimination are considered exceptional or isolated

phenomena (Anderson, 2015). Correspondingly, data reflect feminists' complicated receptions of these narratives, a dynamic that exemplifies postfeminist affective dissonance. It demonstrates a form of emotional labor that feminists and activists engage in digital movements, e.g., feelings of dissonance, exhaustion, or psychological issues (Frazier, 2020). In other words, the affective incongruity between promise and delivery within postfeminist discourse provides an entry point for this affective dissonance (Benschop & Lewis, 2024).

Many posts use ironic discourses to expose postfeminist depoliticized narratives with persistent structural inequalities. Discussed issues include the lower female birth rate and survival disadvantage faced by girls and women in many regions (Pennington et al., 2023), the widespread discrimination in employment-related areas (Zhang et al., 2021), or the reinforcement of conservative gender stereotypes in mainstream media (Li, 2021), for example. In 2022, the Xuzhou horrifying trafficking of women (Zhang, 2023) presented an extreme example of patriarchal control over women, not merely an issue of individual rights.

Despite persistent gender inequalities, some women engage with feminism superficially and selectively. They invoke feminist discourse only when faced with concrete instances of gender oppression while maintaining a certain degree of detachment in their daily lives. Feminists and activists, in turn, perceive themselves as being instrumentalized and generate feelings such as discontentment or disillusionment. As a resistance mode, many posts focus on derisive or ironic tones to provoke laughter inside feminist communities. Negative yet catchy and interactive buzzwords[1] are used to mock individuals who resist or overlook feminism while grappling with feminist concerns. For instance, *尊重祝福* (respect and blessings), as a highly frequent buzzword, is characterized by postfeminist languages of supportive rhetoric that humorously appropriates and ironizes its depoliticization of feminist issues.

Moreover, the overwhelming focus on Western white middle-class women in postfeminist cultural representations reflects broader gaps by failing to adequately represent the experiences of non-white women (Butler, 2013). Some posts satirize a sense of complacency by certain ideologies that assume Western feminism has transcended non-Western feminism in terms of 'progressive' and 'liberal' narratives, to the extent of dismissing their discourses as 'backward' to silence their experiences and feelings.

This shift from the old affectionate united front is not merely a series of individual actions or attitudes but is laden with a broader sense of affective dissonance in the postfeminist era. These divisions are difficult to eliminate since postfeminist principles often celebrate personal accountability and achievement regardless of the challenges posed by 'sameness oppression.' In a broader sense, these discourses have emerged since postfeminists withheld feminist criticism (Benschop & Lewis, 2024).

The revival of traditional roles

Family is often viewed as a site of ideological conflict due to the overlooked domestic oppression embedded in patriarchal family structures. In China, Confucianism continues to influence women's choices in a familial context where the state often highlights the idea of harmonious families (Zou et al., 2025). Despite feminist criticism of the institution of family, especially marriage, which limits women's mobility within domestic responsibilities, studies of class, social mobility, and intimacy consider marriage in upward mobility and support bonds for women (Fercovic, 2023). Moreover, the idealized motherhood norms with excellent careerism in postfeminist and neoliberal culture have women self-policing, reconciling traditional roles with feminist identity (Whiley et al., 2021).

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[1] Also including *她超爱* (she loves it), or *放下助人情节, 尊重他人命运* (let's drop the savior complex and respect their choice). Similar to 'respect and blessings', they appropriate postfeminist discourses such as 'free of choice', while simultaneously mocking the negative outcomes that result from overlooking, avoiding, or denying feminist concerns. These discourses have replaced traditional slogans like Sisterhood or Girls Help Girls.

Nevertheless, offensive humor in posts frequently carries provocative or scornful rhetoric that targets women's complicity in these conventional roles. Radical feminists perceive this perpetuation as a subversion of feminist principles and frame these women as betrayers or perpetrators while frequently provoking intra-female conflicts. Many wordplays utilize the characteristics of Chinese typography to satirize marriage, wherein women's agential participation reinforces patriarchal reproduction. For instance, utilizing the pictographic feature, 婚姻 (marriage) is deconstructed as 'women [女] lose mind [昏], women [女] being imprisoned [因].' Single font 婚 is deliberately written into a homophone, 殙 (describing someone as completely blinded). 虏 (referring to the prisoner of war), according to its pictographic structure, is used as an ironic metaphor of individuals' compliance, a sense of 'defeatist feminism.'

Besides these typography changes, offensive buzzwords relate to individuals who perform exaggerated femininity and marital devotion, such as 娇妻 (referring to submissive and pampered wife), as a response to beliefs that romanticize heteronormativity and frame traditional roles as a form of 'privilege.' Furthermore, a series of humiliating mockeries[2] is produced and distributed, epitomizing the intergenerational manifestations of systemic issues. For example, 男宝妈 (baby boys' mothers) or 太子妈 (princes' mothers) are widely spread to mock maternal privileges due to a gendered space debated occurrence on Weibo, where a mother brought her six-year-old son into a female restroom, expressed dissatisfaction at the presence of a young girl inside (see Tian & Ge, 2024).

These discursive controversies illustrate a central paradoxical site where postfeminist discourse renders women compliant subjects of conventional expectations while sidestepping the systemic roots, such as unequal gendered distributions or intergenerational gender tensions. A crucial concern is that assuming 'sameness oppression' may cover up the social status differences (hooks, 1984). It affects how women perceive the necessity of feminist critiques, which may be irrelevant to their personal choices or lived experiences. Discourses in data embody the patriarchy of divide and conquer, which may lead to women's persistent inter-struggle within postfeminist paradox — to dismantle structural oppression without essentialist blame towards individuals. However, such rhetorical tactics need to be carefully reevaluated. The presence of anti-feminist sentiments of non-feminists demonstrates potential danger since these discourses frequently elicit discriminatory language and stereotypes rather than attracting self-awareness or promoting online solidarity.

Heteronormative reproduction

In recent years, the realm of mediated intimacy on social media has increasingly fostered feminist consciousness, yet it has adopted neoliberal-style individualist solutions to gender inequality (Tan & Liu, 2024). Many posts satirize the neoliberal co-opting of heteronormativity wherein postfeminist rhetoric masks the reproduction of heterosexual norms and marginalizes radical politics. With a sense of irony and humiliation, many posts mock individuals who prioritize romantic or intimate relationships through a polarizing perspective. Controversial buzzwords[3], including 恋爱脑 (love-addled mindset), exemplify

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[2] Such as 扶弟魔 (referring to brother-prioritizing sister, adapted from the homophonic pronunciation of 'Voldemort' in Chinese translation), which ironically describes the patrilineal family status of older sisters. They are expected to take on economic and caregiving responsibilities to support their younger brothers' success and well-being, including contributing to their education, family finances, and childcare (Ding et al., 2020). Satires on motherhood in this context stem from their roles as perpetrators in oppressing daughters, 伥鬼 (referring to corpse slaves, it comes from a Chinese idiom 为虎作伥, literally means help evil), an emotionally humiliating term, which often conveys moral outrage of younger women towards older women.

[3] It is sometimes used alternately with 性缘脑 (sexual-romance mindset). Compared to the 'love-addled mindset', it emphasizes a cognitive tendency to compulsively interpret all cross-gender interactions

a postfeminist characteristic inherent in reflecting a shift toward female autonomy, personal fulfillment, traditional gender roles, and romantic ideals (see Zou et al., 2025). Some posts also deal with the potential impact of female-oriented media consumption, especially chick lit or Danmei (Boys' Love), which remain highly contested for perpetuating male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered narrative paradigms. These conventions govern traditional narratives and provide a pleasurable way to confront patriarchy (Dutton & White, 2012). They frequently lie in a highly constrained postfeminist rhetoric of 'choice' with a weakened representation of women (Yang, 2020), yet often affect women's perceptions and abilities to express themselves independently and autonomously (Pickens & Braun, 2018).

Self-presentation within 'choice'
Postfeminism relates commercialization to individual liberty, framing women's autonomy and display of femininity and sexuality as political acts of choice (e.g., Budgeon, 2015; Ferguson, 2010). However, this freedom often governs its access and application to strict and systematized norms (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2019). The makeover paradigm, for instance, encourages women to see their bodies as changeable commodification projects — subjects to improvement through digital self-discipline and neoliberal self-monitoring (Elias & Gill, 2017). Feminist debates often grapple with reconciling these ideals of self-presentation with the demands of cultural consumption in a neoliberal media landscape.

Radical feminists use buzzwords like 绕圈 (endlessly going in circles) or 半觉醒 (half-woke) to satirize such paradoxical rhetoric within postfeminist discourses. These discussions frequently arise from 'free-choice' or 'self-liberation' as central components that align with the broader rhetoric of individual empowerment, yet often frame women's empowerment within the persistent gender norms and aesthetic standards. For example, the beauty aesthetic of 'pale, young, and slim' (see Liu & Li, 2023) is often combined with 服美役 (beauty labor) or 落体人 (falling girl) to satirize the inherent traditional norms and standards women comply with.

In feminist discussions about the contradictions of postfeminist discourse, the tendency to deny or overlook feminist critiques is likened by radical feminists to 恐弱 (weakness phobia), as postfeminist discourses allow women to actively make choices while rejecting being depicted as succumbing to the male gaze or patriarchal control (Ueno & Suzuki, 2022). It results in the logic and setting that women no longer accept 'pastness' narratives of bonding them as shared 'oppression' or 'victimization' and shield all the upsetting and discomforting realities to avoid self-conflict. When assessing these contradictions with feminist critiques, many discussions reflect difficulties arising from postfeminist personalized vocabularies, accompanied by accusations of radical feminism for creating unnecessary anxiety and panic.

Gendered biases in the reception of 'new men'
Since the shift from women's studies to gender studies, including masculinity, queer, and non-binary studies, a more fluid political grammar has emerged (Hemmings, 2013). This mobility can divest feminist potentially radical associations as it often invests in postfeminist narratives that are not as consistent as earlier feminist policies (Ibid.). 'New men studies' are styled as alternatives around a particular constituency of modernizing, changing hegemonic masculinity (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 2017). These tendencies do little to address women's issues and often challenge feminism — the rhetoric of 'men', 'male power', or 'male privilege' as an unmarked universal political oppositional category now raises questions about essentialist interpretations of gender dichotomy (Ibid.).

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through a framework of potential sexual/romantic outcomes. Under these cognitive tendencies, 雌竞 (female rivalry) is an ironic term for women who engage in rivalry to secure male attention, social mobility, or capital validation. Feminist critiques emphasize how it internalizes misogynistic mindsets by diverting hostility towards other women and reinforces gender hierarchies.

Many posts satirize the disproportionate focus on 'new men' and use 爱男 (describing systematic privileges men have over women) to highlight the embodied sense of gender hierarchy. A significant feeling of an imbalanced mindset among radical feminists is observed because they think men's distress is often perceived as more exceptional and visible than women's 'normalized' vulnerabilities. The frequently mentioned disputes include the overshadowed status of gay wives in China (Wang et al., 2020). With the increasing controversies related to commercial surrogacy, legal concerns also provoke greater hostility towards gay men (Cao & Zhang, 2022). Similar to Western online conflicts regarding transgender identities (Pearce et al., 2020), TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist) adherents have increased recently. Feminists supporting arguments for separatist space are often depicted as androphobic or heterophobic. Dissenting voices argue that over-asserting the recognition of transgender identities might threaten the physical safety of cisgender women (Morgenroth et al., 2022). These discourses typically refuse to recognize psychological gender identity as a meaningful construct, emphasizing the pervasiveness of misogyny and broader gender disparities present in China.

In particular, it is observed from the data that many forms of gender violence and online misogynistic behavior are perceived to be predominantly perpetrated by men. This has fueled growing misandrist sentiment online. Humor in this context is often used as a confrontational thinking and discursive strategy to counterbalance gender violence and misogyny. However, it also frequently provokes hostilities and reinforces prejudices against men in general.

This asymmetry highlights the contradictions in postfeminist landscapes that unintentionally make women unperceived and passive within the persistent gender gap. Nevertheless, some posts demonstrate that these hostilities to men often cause backlash, misguiding, and hostility to radical feminists as they convey exclusivity and essentialism that are incongruous with affirmative initiatives. It reflects the historical tensions and conflicts between feminism regarding motives, forms of oppression, priorities, and political interests (Butler, 1990). As a backlash, radical feminists are accused by other communities of being excessively, extremely controlling while ignoring intersecting contextual relations and power. These barriers or divisions make women and other groups hesitant to endorse feminism publicly and collectively.

Discussion and conclusion

The postfeminist sensibility marked by affective dissonance offers insight into how the fragmentation of feminism informs today's postfeminist cultural dynamics (Gill, 2017). By accepting 'feminist fraudulence' in neoliberal and postfeminist discourse (Sharp & Weaver, 2015), feminists draw on this sensibility to subvert conventional feminist techniques while inspiring reflection to examine self and other (Dobson & Kanai, 2018), therefore fostering a shared consciousness to transform the current feminist quo. Postfeminist humor in this context contributes to raising feminist awareness by allowing critiques or disagreements instead of seeking 'safe' communication. Although the fragmentation of contemporary feminist values frequently dissolves its radical potential, tension or conflict stemming from these competing discourses may lead to revolutionary change and transformation, whether individually or collectively.

Nevertheless, as feminists actively spread the women-hating legacy among listeners, this has also led to further misguided perceptions, intra-female conflicts, and growing anti-feminist sentiments. As findings show, radical feminists verbally tear apart, humiliate, and mistakenly demonize individuals who are not 'feminist enough.' These sarcasms, indignations, or self-awareness to address postfeminist paradoxes may oversimplify the complex structural entailments. As noted in the findings, non-feminists frequently vent negative sentiments rather than develop shared beliefs and collective goals. Feminists in this context unknowingly become agents of hegemony by reinforcing discrimination and prejudices with ineffective and unconstructive communication. It is crucial to acknowledge

that individuals' experiences of the intersecting relation between gender and power are socially constructed and historically located, which may affect how people experience privilege or oppression (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 2017).

Accordingly, misinterpretations of humor can lead to unforeseen consequences, including negative self-perceptions or other-directed hostilities (Martin et al., 2003). As data demonstrate, inappropriate humor can lead to misguided interpretations and prevent a unified awareness of gender issues among those outside feminist communities. Using and comprehending humor requires the consideration of cognitive processing and the audience's capacity to analyze and build on jokes (Saucier et al., 2018). Feminists should learn how to engage in dialogue and collaborate across ideological disagreement (hooks, 1984). This involves developing strategies to overcome arguments, resentments, and hostility to move beyond ongoing confrontations (Ibid.).

This study also notes the semantic ambiguity in postfeminist discourse, not only through the conflation of individualistic discourse but also through conflicting understandings of gender disparity. Because postfeminism mixes feminist rhetoric and neoliberalism, especially absorbing and commodifying feminist vocabulary, it manifests as a desirable alternative cultural choice that purportedly serves women's interests (Gill, 2017). This cultural logic makes women oscillate between individualistic strategies and collective values, reflecting the inherent contradiction of postfeminist discourse. Moreover, with the rise of queer theory, critique of biology and gender has become a central to modern theory and evaluations of radical feminism (Rosewarne, 2020), wherein 'old' concepts like male dominance or sex-class are less effective at addressing gender oppression (Ibid.). The traditional approach rests on the binary opposition between the given and the constructed, which is now replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction and stressing the self-organizing force of living matter (Braidotti, 2013). As findings reflect, these changes witnessed the tensions arising from the postfeminist shift, such as treating 'men' as an analytic term to consider gender and power, or viewing gender as important, binary, and culturally driven (Hyde et al., 2019). These circumstances rarely enable existing feminist analytic terms to threaten public or private patriarchal domination, but rather limit feminist discourse.

Nevertheless, as the sample in this study is primarily sourced from a single social media network community, its representativeness and applicability may be subject to certain limitations. Considering feminist theory itself has been detailed and criticized as focusing on 'women' alone and indicating an anachronistic attachment to false unity or essentialism (Butler, 1990), future research needs to consider the intersection and reception with different communities to identify diverse views and analyze how postfeminist humor forms online solidarity or confrontation. This approach can enhance the understanding of how individuals across various classes, sexual orientations, or other marginalized identities engage with postfeminist humor, providing an introspective perspective that can be contrasted with the insights derived from this study.

Conflict of interest statement
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work.

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