PHRG
PEACE HUMAN
RIGHTS GOVERNANCE

ONLINE FIRST ARTICLE

Mobilising Digital Feminism in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: South Korean and Chinese Women against Pornographic Deepfakes

Miriam Bartolozzi, Sara Corsaro, Phuc Van Nguyen

DOI: 10.25430/pupj-PHRG-2025-AOF-3

How to cite:
Bartolozzi M., Corsaro S., Van Nguyen P. (2025) 'Mobilising Digital Feminism in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: South Korean and Chinese Women against Pornographic Deepfakes' *Peace Human Rights Governance*, 2025(AOF), 2-40.

Article first published online: April 2025
'Online first articles' are accepted in PHRG and are published online before they appear in an issue of the journal. Each article is complete with a DOI, a date of first online publication and can be fully cited. When 'online first articles' are included in an issue, they are removed from this section.

Research articles published in PHRG undergo a rigorous double-blind review process by independent, anonymous expert reviewers

PADOVA UP

Mobilising Digital Feminism in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: South Korean and Chinese Women against Pornographic Deepfakes

Miriam Bartolozzi, Sara Corsaro**, Phuc Van Nguyen****

Abstract: Pornographic deepfakes are a category of digital sexual offences that have been persistently rising, driven by the rapid progress in AI technology. In 2024, South Korea experienced a widespread crisis involving pornographic deepfakes that predominantly affected women, including minors. The feminist reaction to this case has been lightning-fast: mobilisations have transitioned from online to offline, also receiving support from abroad. This research aims to highlight the gendered dimension of technological innovations as well as the awareness of digital feminists on this matter from a technofeminist perspective. Particularly, it examines the activism of South Korean and Chinese feminists opposing pornographic deepfakes via hashtag campaigns. This study relies on qualitative content analysis of online posts from Instagram and two country-specific digital platforms, Naver in South Korea and Xiaohongshu in the People's Republic of China, to examine the timeline and dynamics of the mobilisations' building process in South Korea and among the Chinese diaspora. The discussion explores the characteristics, practices and claims of these mobilisations. Additionally, it presents an overview of recent legislative developments regarding deepfakes at both the international level and within South Korea and China. The findings aim to 1) enhance understanding of the digital feminist movements in both countries and their alliance, and 2) amplify the arguments and demands of the movement under study.

Keywords: Pornographic Deepfakes, Digital Feminism, South Korea, Chinese Diaspora, Digital Crimes Regulation

* PhD in Global Studies, University of Macerata, email: m.bartolozzi6@unimc.it.
** University of Macerata.
*** University of Macerata.

Introduction

Technological innovations, boosted by the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, risk perpetuating and reinforcing gender discriminations. The recent case of pornographic deepfakes affecting South Korean women epitomises this tendency. At the same time, feminist movements are trying to redefine the digital media landscape—which is dominated by gendered cyberhate and online misogyny—as a space for feminist resistance (Yun 2020, 46). The case presented in this work demonstrates that feminist circles are vigilant about protecting women's rights against new technology-led abuses and that the East Asian transnational feminist movement establishes alliances and gets stronger in the digital space.

In the summer of 2024, the Republic of Korea (hereinafter referred to as South Korea, Korea or the ROK) experienced a significant deepfake crisis when a Telegram channel with around 227,000 users spreading pornographic deepfakes was uncovered (Mackenzie and Choi 2024). The issue of pornographic deepfakes and, more broadly, the perpetration of organised and detailed digital sexual crimes, is relatively recent; fundamental evidence of their use in this country dates back to the period between 2018 and 2020, the time of another digital sexual crime scandal on Telegram referred to as the *Nth Room case* (Jun 2022, 12). Nevertheless, feminist movements and activists have been fighting against repeated sexual crimes and digital sexual crimes for decades. Additionally, the deepfake crisis revealed that minors are particularly vulnerable to such crimes (H. S. Park 2024, 1). The majority of victims were young female students, including a significant percentage of underage girls, while many of the perpetrators were their peers (S. J. Lee 2024) who supplied the images and requested the generation of pornographic deepfakes. To advocate for women's rights in response to this alarming situation, South Korean feminist organisations and individuals promptly coordinated online actions, rallies and other protest activities. They condemned the pervasive misogyny within Korean society and requested both preventive and restorative measures. Interestingly, as discussed later, the case sparked transnational feminist mobilisation as South Korean and Chinese feminists, particularly overseas, organised and participated in a variety of initiatives.

The article aims to highlight the ways in which digital feminist groups have mobilised against this issue, ranging from simple online discussions to more structured campaigns leading, in some cases, to physical protests. Of particular interest is how this movement has leveraged digital platforms with a specific emphasis on the role of hashtag activism. The study, conducted between August and November 2024, presents an online discourse qualitative

analysis of public posts made by interested private individuals and groups through the use of hashtags and/or keywords, focusing on three major online platforms—Instagram, Xiaohongshu and Naver—aiming to understand how feminist activists and, more broadly, netizens have joined together, mobilised to fight the violation of their rights and shown transnational support. This case clearly shows that the digital realm is a double-edged sword: while technology and AI have enabled the creation and spread of harmful content, such as manipulated images and deepfakes, they also provide powerful tools for mobilisation and resistance. This study aims to raise awareness of the new challenges posed by these advancements, particularly regarding gender and digital rights, also showing that enhanced legislations on such topics are necessary. Women, in particular, are disproportionately impacted by the misuse of deepfake technology, yet they are also leveraging digital tools to organise and fight back against these violations, highlighting both the risks and the potential of the online sphere.

First, this article introduces the technofeminist lens as an insightful theoretical perspective to address gender issues posed by technological advancements and, in this framework, hashtag activism as a manifestation of technofeminism. Second, it provides a brief insight into the feminist movements in South Korea and the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as PRC or China), with particular attention to the recent rise of forms of digital feminism in the two contexts. The central section recounts how the deepfake case emerged and was addressed by South Korean and Chinese women online, with a particular focus on how the mobilisations were organised or discussed on Instagram and two nation-specific online platforms (Xiaohongshu in China and Naver in South Korea). Lastly, the study presents an overview of the international legal framework concerning deepfakes and expounds on how the new law introduced in South Korea following this case may contribute to changing the scenario.

1. Addressing Pornographic Deepfakes through a Technofeminist Lens

When discussing the benefits and good attributes of AI, it is essential to equally illuminate its drawbacks. AI may actually be employed to inflict harm and facilitate criminal activities. The most common negative consequences of digital technology are personal information breaches, hacking and copyright infringement, with a recent rise in digital sex crimes. Given their serious implications and consequences, which encompass violations of individual identity and physical integrity as well as lasting humiliation, digital sex

crimes are frequently described as 'character assassination' and 'soul murder' (Jun 2023). A deepfake (from 'deep learning' and 'fake content') is a video, photo or audio in which an individual's face, body or voice has been digitally manipulated. They are produced by machine-learning algorithms integrated with facial-mapping software that can embed this data into digital content without authorisation (Buffett Institute for Global Affairs 2023). This technology is not inherently damaging; however, it is extensively employed with intended harm, serving, in these cases, as a substantial instrument for misinformation, fraud and digital impersonation (Mahmud and Sharmin 2020). This perspective is not solely associated with sexual crimes; for instance, deepfakes are also extensively employed to affect electoral campaigns (Security Hero 2024).

In 2020, researchers at University College London evaluated deepfake technology (defined as 'audio/video impersonation') as the most dangerous AI-driven crime expected to emerge over the following 15 years (Caldwell et al. 2020). The UCL scholars investigated compelling facets of the issue prior to the formal delineation of the deepfake phenomenon. At that time, the authors noted that humans have a marked tendency to believe their sensory perceptions, resulting in audio and video evidence being granted considerable credibility (and even legal authority) despite the long history of photographic manipulation. In this context, they highlighted the significant danger posed by deepfakes, noting the extreme difficulty in defeating them and highlighting their high potential for substantial harm and profit (Caldwell et al. 2020). Nevertheless, the report on the *State of Deepfakes* by Security Hero (2023) revealed alarming facts regarding the issue of pornographic content creation globally. The research showed an increase in the use of deepfake technology, which skyrocketed by 550% from 2019 to 2023. Additionally, 98% of deepfake videos are pornographic, and 99% of these videos feature female subjects.

In analysing the deepfake case and the consequent feminist upsurge of South Korean and Chinese women, this research applies a technofeminist lens. As first expounded by Judy Wajcman (2004), technofeminism aims to shed light on the gendered dimension of the sociotechnical system. Its purpose is to examine and change technology through a feminist lens, against both technophobic and technoenthusiast approaches. While cyberfeminism initially looked at the internet as a space liberating women, holding an optimistic view towards cyberspace as a place where the subversion of gender roles could take place (Wajcman 2004, 63), the technofeminist perspective is less optimistic and more wary. It aims to unveil the gendered dimension of the creation, design, production, marketing and use of both analogue and digital technologies. Technofeminism puts the accent on the co-production of gender and technology, rejecting the idea that technological

innovation is a priori neutral: 'Avoiding both technological determinism and gender essentialism, technofeminist approaches emphasise that the gender-technology relationship is fluid and flexible, and that feminist politics and not technology per se is the key to gender equality' (Wajcman 2007, 287). The technofeminist lens helps address the case under study as it reveals both the impact of digital innovation misuses on women and the digitally organised discourse and reaction of feminist circles against these crimes.

As remarked by Jola Gockel, there is 'a "misogynistic power structure" embedded in certain deepfake technologies' (Gockel 2024, 15), with some of the new applications largely trained on data of sole female bodies (Gockel 2024, 18). Kim Eunsong even maintains that 'deep fakes and photography have been consistently used as a weapon of gendered and racialized violence' (Kim 2022, para. 51), denouncing how deepfakes reproduce a logic of dispossession. The intersection of gender and vulnerability reveals that women often bear the greatest burden of digital sex crimes,[1] particularly public figures who are more susceptible due to the quantity of their images and videos circulating online that AI can exploit.[2] However, Gockel highlights that these vulnerabilities are context-dependent, suggesting that as AI evolves and needs less input to create convincing pornographic deepfakes, private individuals may face increased risks, particularly those with minimal online presence (2024, 21). From this perspective, this analysis underscores a dual correlation between women's social class and their vulnerability. On the one hand, women of high public visibility (like people from the entertainment industry) are more susceptible to victimisation due to the widespread availability of their images online. On the other hand, ordinary women, especially those from lower social classes, often face significant barriers to accessing justice, thereby limiting their capacity to seek legal protection (Gockel 2024, 20-21). The present work draws insights from the South Korean example to support the validity of Gockel's hypothesis. Furthermore, as women clearly appear to be more vulnerable victims of pornographic deepfakes, the lack of legislation and education regarding these new technological applications reveals once again the negligence on women's rights. Gockel points out that

[1] From this perspective, it is important to acknowledge that women frequently find themselves confined to specific societal roles and, when they become targets of deepfake technology, they face a discouraging phenomenon of 'victim blaming,' where moral judgements and accusations are unjustly aimed at them instead of the support and protection they rightfully deserve (Cheng 2024, 82).

[2] Notably, 8 out of the 10 individuals most often targeted by deepfake pornography are South Korean artists. Korean actresses and singers also account for 53% of those portrayed in deepfake pornography worldwide (Security Hero 2023). In this regard, even Korean entertainment companies have started taking action in order to safeguard their artists from these serious crimes (Yoo 2024).

while considerable attention has been dedicated to the creation of deepfakes for political purposes, pornographic deepfakes have received less scrutiny. However, pornographic deepfakes maintain a strong political facet (Gockel 2024, 19) as they contribute to reinforcing the gendered and even misogynist dimension of the sociotechnical system.

The analysed case illustrates that technology is not neutral but strongly permeated by gender and other types of imbalances. At the same time, it shows that women are ready to appropriate technology and occupy online and offline spaces to show feminist solidarity and reverse power structures. The digital space enables the possibility of maintaining ties among the East Asian feminist diasporas, thus creating new ways to support the feminist cause against misogynist societies and even state repression. In this context, this study looks at hashtag feminism as a technofeminist manifestation operating within the regulatory norms of the digital world, offering empowerment in certain instances while concurrently facing limitations in others (e.g., the digital divide). Indeed, this practice fosters global solidarity among women and encourages their active participation, generating potential for change (Chen et al. 2018, 202; 209). Additionally, it is important to consider that digital or online feminist action is not limited to prominent, well-defined hashtag movements but can also be identified within broader, more generic hashtags (Caldeira 2023, 2). One of the key strengths of this kind of activism is its capacity to impact global and cross-cultural dynamics, offering a forum for women who are under-represented or excluded from traditional media (Chen et al. 2018, 211). From this perspective, as elucidated by Masullo Chen et al., with the use of hashtags, women can 'define and redefine feminism in the contemporary world by legitimizing what they see and hear and feel' (Chen et al. 2018, 211).

2. Digital Feminism in South Korea and the People's Republic of China

To explore how the integration of digital platforms has positively impacted contemporary feminist activist practices in South Korea and China, it is essential to first provide a brief historical overview of the role of feminism in these two countries with a particular focus on the digital age.

2.1. Digital Feminism in South Korea

The solid influence of Confucianism, employed during the Joseon dynasty to construct a society founded on patriarchal principles, coupled with the colonial experience that has perpetuated certain patrilineal ideals (e.g.,

through the household head system), has resulted in a protracted history of inequalities and discrimination against women in South Korea (Cho 2012). The origin of the feminist movement in Korea can be traced back to 1898 when the first women's organisation 찬양회 *Chanyanghoe* was founded, led by upper-class widows, to free Korean women from the Confucian gender segregation through education (Park 1992; Yoon 2019).[3] Despite the Japanese government's prohibition of women's associations during Japanese colonisation, numerous women formed resistance organisations, including, for example, the Korean Patriotic Women's Society, which helped gather funds for independence campaigns (Park 1992, 3-4). Even after independence, in a context where the laws were strongly based on Confucian inheritance, it is important to note that the history of women's movements has consistently been intertwined with the history of Confucianism-based family law. For example, legal feminism has been crucial in South Korea for decades, even before the enforcement of the Civil Code in 1958, as it has strived to enhance the social status of women by implementing legal reforms (Yang 2008, 78). Throughout the 1970s, the women's labour movement advocated for fundamental rights. Later, the extended coalition of women's organisations was an essential element of the overall democratisation movement for social transformation in the country (Hwang 2019, 46).

Since the mid-2010s, South Korean feminism has experienced a phenomenon defined as 'Feminist Reboot,' a resurgence of activism (J. Kim 2021a), which was represented by the rise of hashtag activism and the emergence of new feminist movements. Hashtags have a crucial role in connecting women, providing spaces for them to speak for themselves freely, and serving as a means of 're-authoring' for individuals marginalised by patriarchal systems to communicate their gender-related stories and experiences (Kang et al. 2023, 3). The utilisation of hashtags to support online feminist activism has been a significant aspect of South Korean women's online efforts for years (J. Kim 2021a; Ignaczak 2023), including, for example, the launch of the *#saranamatda* ('survived') hashtag, which started to report daily gender-based violence (J. Kim 2021b). Notably, in February 2015, thousands of tweets with the hashtag *#iamafeminist (*#나는페미니스트입니다 *naneun peminiseuteuimnida*) emerged on Twitter (now X), collectively affirming feminist identity amidst widespread anti-feminist sentiment in the country

[3] The organisation issued the first declaration of Women's rights in Korea, which stated: 'Why should our women live on what their husbands earn as if fools, confining themselves to their deep chambers all their lives and subjecting themselves to regulations imposed by their husbands? In enlightened countries, both men and women are equal. Women's skills and principles are equal to those possessed by their husbands. […] We are going to establish a girl's school with the aim of making women equal to men' (Park 1992, 3).

(J. Kim 2017). This hashtag represented a real turning point, showing that identifying as a feminist in Korea was no longer taboo and had begun influencing popular culture, marking a key moment in the nation's women's and feminist movements (J. Kim 2021a, 77). It is important to observe that only a few months after the launch of the *#iamafeminist* hashtag, 메갈리아 *Megalia*, an online community and feminist movement, was established against what was defined by Jeong and Lee as 'air-like misogyny' (Jeong and Lee 2018), a widespread although seemingly imperceptible social issue. It was characterised by the use of a 'mirroring strategy,' reposting and mimicking misogynistic content with reversed gender roles (J. Kim 2021a, 76) through the purposeful use of parody, having fun and making fun of misogynistic practices in order to revive the spark of online activism (Jeong and Lee 2018, 9). Following the movement's dissolution, this strategy has continued to be employed extensively (D. D. Kim 2020).

The revival of activism in 2015 has broadened the scope of feminism, as evidenced by the increasing number of self-identified feminists. In 2019, nearly half of the women (48.9%) in their 20s who participated in a Korean Women's Development Institute survey identified themselves as feminists. However, notwithstanding the growing popularity of feminist activities, a prevailing unfavourable perception of feminists and feminist initiatives[4] continues across the country (Korean Women's Development Institute 2019). Despite significant technological advancements in recent decades, there has not been a corresponding transformation in social conditions, particularly concerning the standing of women in the country (Seong 2016, 2). While this is mainly true, it is essential to recognise that, in particular contexts, the advancement of the internet has at least enabled the emergence of cyberspace centred on social concerns, leading to substantial discussions regarding women's issues, particularly within the familial domain. Therefore, it can be stated that the implementation and improvement of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) have not substantially changed social conditions, but they have influenced the methods of women's mobilisation and assembly (Moon 2022).

Regardless of digital feminism's limitations in Asia, particularly in certain subregions, it is possible to state that social media have fundamentally transformed feminist activism, offering new possibilities for learning,

[4] It is intriguing to note that the Institute's report also demonstrated the extent of support for the recent feminist movements in Korea. The findings indicated that, with the exception of the #MeToo movement, which was supported by 88.8% of women and 56.5% of men, men's approval rating and support for other movements and initiatives (specifically the Corset-Free Movement and the Hyehwa Station Demonstration) were below 20%. Additionally, there was a significant disparity in the recognition of the extent of gender discrimination in society between men and women (KWDI 2019).

assistance and action while helping the rapid dissemination of information and materials like infographics and videos (Yin and Zhang 2024, 39). These platforms have fostered solidarity, granted anonymity[5] and facilitated collaboration within digital communities and across geographical and cultural boundaries, assisting individuals in recognising their shared experiences and supporting one another. Digital platform discontent has often been translated into events and protests in the physical world, linking online activism with on-site action (Yin and Zhang 2024). To clarify this issue empirically within the South Korean context, two notable examples from two distinct decades of the digital era deserve attention: the formation of online platforms for women opposing the patriarchal system at the beginning of the 2000s (Yang 2008) and the development of a digital collective identity culminated in the largest protest for women's rights in the country's history in 2018 (Moon 2022). The first case concerns a pre-existing societal issue unrelated to technology but discussed through online platforms. Differently, the second case involves a problem that directly resulted from technological advancements, which has been addressed through the responsible and constructive use of ICT.

From the early 2000s, the abolition of the family-head system was the primary political agenda of prominent women's movement networks. At that time, various instruments, such as websites, were employed to actively mobilise the citizens' interest (Yang 2008, 86). From this perspective, among the reasons that led to discourse around social changes in the early 2000s, Yang includes using online spaces for a social cause. For example, the Citizens' Alliance for Abolition of Family-head System, a grassroots movement, created an online community for women's experiences and information exchange. This contrasted with the previous movement, which was led mainly by elites, celebrities, and academics who perceived themselves as representing the interests of the general public. Divorced and remarried women were important in advancing the dialogue around the family-head system during this era, using their personal experiences to create a collective identity (Yang 2008, 85-86).

Before 2018, existing women's movements primarily engaged in small-scale, direct-action initiatives (Moon 2022, 961). On May 19, 2018, a significant series of protests started at Hyehwa Station, led by a young generation of

[5] It is important to highlight, however, that concepts like anonymity carry both benefits and drawbacks in the digital space. While anonymity can promote freedom of expression online and facilitate the exchange of experiences among individuals, it can also be among the features that encourage digital hostility and enable intentional harm or cyberbullying, often with a perceived sense of impunity and without accountability (see Mukred et al. 2024; Yin and Zhang 2024).

feminists engaged in digital platforms, and including young women who had never participated in such events (Hankyoreh 2018). Those groups opposed sexism, misogyny and the phenomenon known as 몰카 (*molka*, derived from 몰래카메라 *mollaekamera*, meaning 'hidden camera').[6] The majority of victims in *molka* cases were women, the prosecution rates for perpetrators were low, and the punishments imposed were less harsh than those prescribed by law. On the first day of protests, more than 12,000 women were dressed in red and were protesting against discrimination and the use of spy cameras (Kang et al. 2023). These protests constituted the most significant feminist demonstrations in South Korea, attracting 110,000 participants by December 2018. Additionally, other rallies occurred the following year, prompted by several sexual offences, including the infamous 'Burning Sun' scandal, which also involved many celebrities (see Nam 2024). The organisation of these demonstrations exemplifies a noteworthy instance of digital activism that culminated in a significant offline event advocating for women's rights. The initiative began in a Daum Café, an online community established on a well-known Korean platform, in May 2018, attracting over 25,000 people within ten days. The online group was named 'Courage to be Uncomfortable' (CBU) or 'Uncomfortable Courage' and utilised online platforms (Moon 2022, 964), including an anonymous method for fundraising via a famous Korean messaging application. Ultimately, the government addressed the complaints by enacting legislation to broaden the scope of conduct classified as digital sex crimes and to intensify punishments. A centre was also established to support survivors of digital sex crimes (Barr 2024).

Both situations, initiated on internet platforms, exemplify 'connective action' (Bennett 2014), where individuals, including people not formally associated with any feminist social movement, shared their personal narratives on social media. In other words, the platforms utilised at first to activate online communities on topics related to traditional stereotypes changed their function over time. The evolution of these online spaces has resulted in the creation of female-exclusive forums designed to influence public opinion, thus enabling women to form an independent political entity

[6] *Molka* is a term used to indicate the presence of hidden cameras illegally installed, especially in public bathrooms, with the purpose of capturing voyeuristic images and videos, and it is a problem that has not yet been completely resolved (H. Park 2023; H. Kim 2024). One of the reasons that triggered the protests was the fact that a woman was jailed for posting a nude picture of an illegally filmed male model, making the treatment disparity more evident than before. At that time, some of the most well-known feminist hashtags were used in protests, such as 'My life is not your porn' and 'Are we not human?' (Barr 2024).

that challenges the male-dominated discourse prevalent on the internet through the construction of counterarguments (Kang et al. 2023, 3).

2.2. Digital Feminism in the People's Republic of China

The origin of Chinese feminism dates back to late imperial China, when pioneer feminists such as the revolutionary and intellectual Qiu Jin (1875-1907) and the radical anarchist He-Yin Zhen (1884-1920) brought women's issues into the revolutionary intellectual debate of the period, starting a lively discussion regarding women's emancipation from the patriarchal Confucian tradition. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and later on during the Maoist period, the official discourse of 'equality between men and women' (男女平等 *nannü pingdeng*) endorsed equal rights for women. The introduction of the New Marriage Law (1950) foresaw some progressive advancements in terms of marriage equality and prohibition of child brides and polygamy. Besides, in socialist China, women's economic power increased as they joined the socialist workforce. Nevertheless, women continued to provide care work at home on their own (see Guo 2007). At the same time, during the Maoist years, positions of power were rarely occupied by women, while feminism was erased from the official discourse (see Hong Fincher 2018, chap. 5). Since 1978, with the market reforms period, Chinese society has been witnessing a resurgence of patriarchal culture and women's rights have encountered a backlash. This led to the reconstitution of the traditional role of women, also due to an instrumental revival of Confucianism in the country (Wu and Dong 2019, 8), and of a gendered dimension of work, with a gradual increase of the gender pay gap. In the developmental context of post-socialist China, women shifted from being producers to being consumers (Xu and Feiner 2007, 310). This phenomenon also saw the coming back of the sexualisation of the image of women, which was, in some facets, also liberatory after the imposed asexual appearance during the Maoist period (Rofel 2007). However, this context reinforced heteronormative discourses and gender inequalities under the patriarchal Party-State authorities, which have been accentuating since Xi Jinping came to power in 2013 (Hong Fincher 2018, chap. 7; Hird 2017). In recent years, middle-class women have been pressured to marry (Hong Fincher 2014) and, more recently, to have children in order to reverse the demographic downfall affecting the country (Hong Fincher 2018, chap. 7).

In this scenario, the PRC has witnessed since the 2010s a revival of the feminist discourse, also boosted by the relative enlargement of the public space with the introduction and diffusion of the internet in the country. Three different episodes epitomise the rise of a feminist movement in China

thriving in the digital space: the first originated in 2015 with the arrest and arbitrary detention of the 'Feminists Five': five NGO workers and university students involved in the organisation of a street-based campaign against sexual harassment on public transport. This case attracted national and international attention, while the activists received online support and solidarity (see Hong Fincher 2018). The second coincided with the spreading of the Chinese #MeToo movement in 2018. The initial diffusion of the protest was stirred by Chinese overseas students (Zeng 2020, 15) and was later propagated among Chinese universities. The third involved the online feminist solidarity circulating during the lockdowns imposed in the course of the 'Zero Covid' policy (2020-2022), expounding the gendered impact of Covid-19 preventive measures (Zhang 2023; Bao 2020; Wang 2022; Yang and Zhang 2021). These episodes denote the upsurge of a digital feminist movement in the PRC spreading via social media (Wang and Driscoll 2019) and, significantly for what is analysed later, also supported by the Chinese diasporic population and overseas students.[7]

As remarked by Wang (2018), the post-2000 Chinese feminist movement is young and located outside formal institutions, organisations and structures. She identifies three main practices enacted by Chinese grassroots feminists: performance art, philanthropy and cyber feminism (Wang 2018, 6). This post-2000 Chinese feminist movement proves, in fact, to be technological 'savvy,' as '[o]ver the past decade, feminist activists have embraced new media technologies to aid emotional display and sharing' (Zhang 2023, 4). In the authoritarian context of the PRC, in which Party-State authorities look at feminism as a threat to political stability (Huang 2022), new communication technologies might represent the sole possible way to organise actions and campaigns and resist systematic repression, also given that the autonomy of social organisations has been consistently restricted in the country (Yuen 2015). However, the Chinese internet is a peculiar cyberspace where social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and X (Twitter), along with other Western digital platforms and media, are banned. The internet in the PRC is strictly governed through 'regulation, censorship and surveillance' (Peng

[7] With 'Chinese diaspora(s)' scholarship refers to the various emigration flows from Mainland China that started at least two centuries ago, which often also comprehend emigration from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao (Poston and Wong 2016). In some cases, the term is used to refer to people born outside of China but identifying as Chinese (华裔 *huayi*) (Poston and Wong 2016) or simply speaking Chinese (华语 *huayu*), originating forms of 'cultural citizenship' (Suzuki 2018). More recently, Chinese diaspora studies have also focused on Chinese overseas students, as the PRC has the largest number of tertiary education student migrants (17% of the totality of international students in 2017 are from Mainland China, Liu 2022). It must be also remarked that those people leaving the PRC following Party-State repression become part of the Chinese diaspora too (Zhang H. 2024).

2020, 24). The 'Great Firewall' works as a membrane isolating the Chinese internet through 'a series of information-filtering projects to systematically block certain information from being generated and circulated by people living in China' (Peng 2020, 25) (even though it can be trespassed using a VPN). The establishment of a partially isolated and controlled cyberspace does not mean that online discussions do not take place. Chinese netizens have developed creative ways, using emojis, homophones, puns, dialects, screenshots and memes to communicate online and elude censorship. These methods are also employed by the feminist digital movement (Zeng 2020, 21-22): for example, during the Chinese #MeToo, the two characters 米兔 (*mitu*, rice-bunny), which sound like 'me too', were used to diffuse the movement avoiding repression (Zeng 2019).

Beyond the systematic censorship, as authorities often shut down feminist online media and accounts (Han 2018), feminists in the PRC have to deal with a male-dominated (digital) public sphere (Peng 2020). In fact, even though the gender gap of internet users in China has been balanced, women are still less active online (Peng 2020, 4). At the same time, Chinese netizens often use derogatory epithets to refer to feminists (Wu and Dong 2019, 2), as feminism in the PRC still maintains a negative connotation (Wu and Dong 2019, 6; Han 2018, 6). Huang has identified four anti-feminist online strategies to discredit feminists that function through depicting them as 'deviant women,' 'betrayers of the nation,' 'connected to Islamists' and even 'fake-feminists' (2022, 8-13). The Chinese digital feminist movement is, thus, located within a cyberspace dominated by a 'cultural specific' and even 'state-sanctioned misogyny' (Han 2018, 2, 10). To respond to patriarchal authorities and to deal with a misogynist digital sphere, the feminist movement in China needs to be flexible, adaptive and fragmented/personalised, in order to avoid being silenced as a whole (Zeng 2020, 10). The fragmentation of the movement, which in other contexts could be looked at as a weakness, in the Chinese one becomes a strength for its sustainability and resilience against repression (Zeng 2020, 26). Moreover, the movement is extremely diversified, spanning from more radical forms of activism to more popular and commercial forms of feminist narratives. In this context, hashtags may work as communication tools that facilitate the sharing of individual and collective experiences. Zhang Jinman has observed that, during the Covid-19 pandemic, women used hashtags as 'carriers of affect' to amplify personal experiences and solidarity in the Chinese digital sphere (Zhang 2023, 9-10). Additionally, Zeng Jing has analysed how the use of hashtags contributed to organising 'connective actions' during the Chinese #MeToo (Zeng 2020, 8-9).

Being present online allows Chinese digital feminists to dialogue among themselves and with feminists in other countries, originating transnational

movements such as the #MeToo (Wang and Driscoll 2019, 21). As we try to show later, the Chinese diasporic population and overseas students are becoming more involved in activism while abroad (Zhang H. 2024; Kaufman 2024), which might enlarge the ties among the East Asian feminist transnational movement.

3. Online Mobilisations against Pornographic Deepfakes

Before focusing on the online analysis aimed at describing the digital feminist responses to the pornographic deepfake violations, it is necessary to provide background and context regarding the issue of deepfakes in South Korea, along with previous violations and reactions. As mentioned before, approximately 99% of deepfake pornography worldwide involves female subjects, with 53% of these cases targeting famous women from South Korea. In 2023, the country was already the most affected by deepfake pornography globally (Security Hero 2023). It is also reported that, in the first eight months of 2024, over 36% of the victims were underage girls, and the number of Korean girls seeking support for these issues increased by 4.5 times in just two years (S. Lee 2024). Between January and September 2024, 434 reports (involving 617 individuals) of sexual abuse materials were received from schools, with 350 cases submitted by the Ministry of Education for investigation (H. S. Park 2024, 1).

A significant controversy involving digital sex crimes already occurred in Korea a few years before the most recent happenings. The *Nth Room case*[8] was a digital sex crime and sexual exploitation case in the country. Between 2018 and 2020, victims had been contacted online and lured into using apps like Telegram (De Souza 2020; J. H. Kim 2021). Women were threatened, and videos of many of them, including minors, were distributed. The first two people who investigated the cybersex trafficking of the *Nth Room case* were female university students under the name of Team Flame. Recently, in an interview, one of the Team Flame members shared how this 2019-2020 case already involved the use of deepfakes. She described the 'acquaintance humiliation' that was carried out in those spaces as a form of deepfake sextortion, in which the faces of the women known by these men were superimposed onto the naked bodies of other women (Won 2024).

[8] The case was known as *Nth Room* because the mastermind behind this crime created eight rooms and simply named them with ordinal numbers. It is important to note that such crimes frequently pose a risk of instigating similar offences; for example, this case was imitated in a copycat crime referred to as *The Doctor's Room*, where an individual, with the pretext of offering part-time employment through Twitter, collected information and pressured women into appearing in pictures and videos.

The more recent deepfake crisis surfaced as a national concern in the summer of 2024 following the discovery of a Telegram channel. It was revealed that within those channels, individuals shared ordinary pictures of women obtained (without consent) from their SNS (Social Networking Service) pages and manipulated them using artificial intelligence to produce pornographic deepfakes (Ko 2024). When the channel was uncovered, there were around 227,000 subscribers, and it was very easy to find through keywords on SNS like X. The online channel was operated by a bot capable of generating deepfakes using AI technology. Upon joining the channel, the bot requested uploading a woman's picture, and the deepfake was produced in five seconds. After creating two free photos, the channel required a cryptocurrency payment to generate additional images (Pieranni 2024). The pictures were shared on other digital platforms, ending up in the perpetration of a mass sexual crime, since the damage coming from the distribution of those contents was enormous. Among photos of other women, the channel included middle school, high school and university students' AI-generated pictures (McCurry 2024), well-organised by 'topic' through channel subsections arranged by school, age and region (Won 2024). Furthermore, users could not interact and send messages to each other, making it harder to monitor the use of deepfakes (G. Park 2024).

In addition to the direct consequences and traumas endured by victims of digital sexual crimes, including humiliation, blackmail, reputational damage and difficulty in job retention (Obadia 2024), it is important to underscore that numerous other concerning instances illustrate how various dimensions of society and individuals' lives are profoundly impacted by the widespread proliferation of pornographic deepfakes, necessitating organisational restructuring and influencing public sentiment. For example, data released in mid-October 2024 by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in Korea highlighted a notable staff reduction at the Advocacy Center for Online Sexual Abuse Victims over the past three years, particularly within the department responsible for removing and blocking illegal deepfake content, from 30 to 15 staff members (H. R. Lee 2024b). Despite a growing number of deletion requests, no significant increase in personnel has been planned, resulting in a corresponding rise in the workload for each staff member (H. R. Lee 2024b). Additionally, the Korean Federation of Teachers' Associations (KFTA) surveyed over 3,500 teachers from September 30 to October 9, 2024, and found that 93.1% were concerned about deepfake crimes, photo manipulation and portrait rights violations using graduation album photos. Young people are also becoming more cautious, with 45.5% of educators reporting an increase in students requesting the exclusion of their images from graduation albums (The Korea Times 2024).

In order to fight against this issue that profoundly affects women, in September 2024, university student and feminist groups organised a large-scale protest at Marronnier Park near Hyehwa Station, in Seoul, to demand stronger legal measures against deepfake crimes targeting women (C. Kim 2024). The rally's location is significant due to its historical connection to women's rights activism, particularly the 2018 Hyehwa rallies. The protest drew around 6,000 people and was widely promoted on social media. It was organised by the Joint Action to Condemn Misogynistic Violence, a women's rights movement led mainly by university students. The organisers criticised the government for failing to address the evolving nature of sexual offences, especially with technological advancements, and called for a new legal framework to combat deepfake-related crimes (H. R. Lee 2024a; S. W. Kim 2024).

Following the approval of the law reform at the National Assembly later in 2024 (H. S. Park 2024), feminists organised more events and gatherings, such as speech contests and rallies (spread via SNS, mainly Instagram), which will be discussed more extensively in the findings section. While acknowledging the efforts of women supporters of the cause, activists deemed the new legislation insufficiently strengthened. They contended that there remained a substantial need for further regulations concerning digital sex crimes against adults, as well as provisions enabling direct deletion requests and access blocking measures bypassing the intermediary role of the Korea Communications Standards Commission.

3.1. Methodology and Post Collection

As the article aims at analysing how digital mobilisations were organised in the South Korean context and relaunched by the Chinese diaspora, Instagram, a global mainstream platform where radical feminist initiatives and popular and commercial forms of feminism coexist (Semenzin 2022; Lu 2023), has been chosen for the intended analysis. Attention has also been dedicated to analysing two other 'local' platforms, Xiaohongshu in the PRC and Naver in the ROK. This approach allowed for a more nuanced exploration of localised experiences by examining context-specific platforms. Xiaohongshu has been selected because it shares some infrastructural similarities with Instagram and, as more thoroughly explained later, is a very popular platform among young women in the PRC, while Naver, despite differing significantly in structure, functions as a key context-based space that, much like Xiaohongshu and Instagram, heavily depends on content created by users and is community-oriented. These features make it a convincing virtual place of comparison with its Chinese counterpart. More generally, the three platforms have been

elected as compelling spaces for exploring digital feminist discourses. The following section clarifies the data collection methodology and is followed by the main findings and discussions.

Instagram has been selected as the main space for analysing online mobilisations and transnational feminist solidarity regarding the deepfake case. It is a User Generated Content (UGC) social network created in 2010 and has been part of the Meta Group since 2012. As of April 2024, it had around 2 billion monthly active users (Statista Search Department 2024a). Its primary original function was creating posts by uploading photos. Now, posts can also contain videos and reels (short videos) and can be spread through the function of 'stories,' which, if not saved, disappear after 24 hours. As the discussion aims to show, South Korean feminist mobilisations spread on Instagram and were relaunched by the Chinese feminist diaspora[9] (Instagram is banned in the PRC and cannot be accessed in the country unless using a VPN). Three main hashtags were analysed: 1) #StandForMyFace, #내_얼굴과_일상을_지켜주세요, #知晓我面孔; 2) #DeepfakeMurders, #딥페이크는_살인이다, #深伪在谋杀; 3) #MyLifeIsNotYourPorn, #내_삶은_너의_포르노가_아니다, #我的生活不是你的色情片 (the last one had been widely used in the 2018 demonstrations in South Korea). 36 public posts, dating from August 27 to November 6, 2024, were manually collected on Instagram, 23 in Korean and 13 in Chinese. The selection process focused on the relevance of the posts to the topic being studied. This included examining the use of hashtags and the types of accounts that shared the posts (primarily openly feminist ones). The investigation conducted on Instagram aimed to reconstruct the organisation and dynamics of the mobilisations spread via specific hashtags and to observe recurring themes and claims through qualitative content analysis. During the mobilisation period, Instagram stories were also observed on accounts connected to the Chinese diaspora. Additionally, some accounts disseminated QR code flyers via Instagram to spread information about actions and rallies.[10]

9 of the collected posts have been gathered utilising the above-mentioned hashtags in Korean. The examination of posts featuring these hashtags has been particularly insightful in assessing the involvement of Koreans and

[9] For a definition of 'Chinese diaspora', see footnote 7.

[10] Information acquired from public posts of both private individuals and collective groups, as well as from online observation in general are kept anonymous, and we intentionally refrain from disclosing sources or specific details. Any data provided for purposes of understanding the context will be anonymised and referenced solely in broader conclusions regarding the issue, devoid of names, links and pictures in order to protect the anonymity of the people involved in the mobilisations and in the discussions. This remains valid for the data collected on Xiaohongshu and Naver.

the use of the Korean language in protests conducted overseas, especially those coordinated by Chinese diaspora activists. Nevertheless, the Korean experience necessitated analysis within the country's borders as well, considering national activities and protests conducted there. Additional posts, 14 in total, including the posters of various protests and initiatives, have been collected using hashtags such as #우리가_느끼는_것은_수치심이_아니라_분노다 *uriganeukkineungoseunsuchisimianirabunnoda* ('We feel anger not shame'), #딥페이크_엄벌하라 *dippeikeueombeolhara* ('Impose a severe punishment on deepfakes') and #알면서_봐주는_놈도_한패다 *almyeonsobwajuneunnomdohanpaeda* ('Those who know and look the other way are also accomplices').

As anticipated, data has also been collected on two nation-specific social networks. While the research was conducted on Instagram via hashtag analysis, posts were collected using keywords on Xiaohongshu and Naver, as the designated hashtags did not provide any results on these two platforms. Xiaohongshu (RedNote or RED) is a popular social network and e-commerce platform in the PRC based on User Generated Content (UGC). It was established in 2013 and now has more than 200 million users per month (Gu et al. 2023, 2), most of whom are between 18 and 34 years old (Shi et al. 2021). Xiaohongshu has been selected because it shares some infrastructural similarities with Instagram. Moreover, around 80% of its active users are women (Statista Search Department 2024b), making it a 'female-oriented space' (Gu et al. 2023, 2) and a 'female-dominated' app (Shi et al. 2021, 1043). Xiaohongshu is thus an interesting social network for analysing young feminist discourses in the PRC. To investigate how this case was discussed on Xiaohongshu, a content analysis of 18 collected posts, published from August 22 to the first half of October 2024, was conducted. The posts have been manually gathered by searching two keywords, '韩国' (*hanguo*, South Korea), and '深伪' (*shenwei*, deepfake), because the researched hashtag/slogans on Instagram did not provide any relevant content on this platform, and they have been selected based on their pertinence regarding the researched issue. The second context-based platform analysed is Naver (NAVER), a Korean-language web portal with a search engine that presents search results in organised categories, including news, photos, videos, shopping and advertising sites. Interestingly, in 2018, the year of the major feminist protests, the most searched word on the dictionary tool of this platform was 'feminist' (Song 2019), indicating how searches frequently reflect the significant events occurring in a country during a specific year. In this analysis, particular attention was directed to Naver Café, a community-oriented social networking service launched by Naver that facilitates information exchange on particular topics. More than

30 Naver posts were monitored from September 2024 to early November 2024 and translated with the sole purpose of gathering general information. The Naver analysis was carried out using keywords and trending topics such as '딥페이크 시위' ('deepfake protests') and '딥페이크' ('deepfake') and the most searched related keywords like: '딥페이크 처벌' ('deepfake punishment'), '딥페이크 시청 처벌' ('punishment for watching deepfake'), '딥페이크 법' ('deepfake law').

3.2. Research Findings and Discussion

The following paragraphs provide an elaboration of the main contents of the collected posts and a summary of the principal connections and dissimilarities that emerged among the different online platforms. Analysis of Korean posts and hashtags on Instagram revealed that, in addition to the main demonstrations, several actions and initiatives were organised by feminists to raise awareness on the issue, assist victims and emphasise the human rights violations and the criminal nature of pornographic deepfakes. More in detail, the 2024 feminist activism initiatives in South Korea were characterised by the organisation of various hashtag campaigns on specific dates, including #딥페이크_엄벌하라 ('Impose a severe punishment on deepfakes') and other hashtags in both Korean and English, to raise awareness about the deepfake issue, expose the perpetrators and ask for more severe punishments. A key activity identified through the analysed hashtags is the organisation of speech rallies, where groups convene to deliver speeches on issues related to a particular cause, at Exit 10 of Gangnam Station, a symbolic location for feminists. A noteworthy initiative related to the analysed hashtags was the 'sticker campaign', which encouraged individuals to place stickers around the city and capture photographs to post online with the relevant hashtags. This campaign draws parallels with the 'sticky notes campaign' that emerged in 2016 in response to the Seocho-dong public toilet murder (see Korea JoongAng Daily 2016), commonly referred to as 'Gangnam Station femicide'. During this earlier initiative, handwritten sticky notes were placed in public spaces, and photographs of these messages were subsequently disseminated through online platforms, helping the formation of 'affective counterpublics' (J. Kim 2021b). Furthermore, an interesting project comprised a compilation of handwritten experiences, starkly contrasting with the digital nature of the offences, as well as supportive messages for victims of digital sexual crimes. It is crucial to note, however, that many posts relevant to the feminist movements against deepfakes were shared on the Instagram accounts of prominent non-profit organisations and associations in Korea dedicated to combating digital sex crimes without the

use of hashtags. These posts included reading materials on the topic, victim support and online efforts to address the safety of female workers. Except for the hashtag campaign, which was an online-only initiative, all the other examined activities shared the presence of both online and offline features in their efforts to facilitate 'connective actions' (Bennett 2014). However, each of these activities combined these characteristics in distinct ways. The speech rallies followed an online-to-offline model, the handwritten letters initiative operated on an offline-to-online model, and the sticker campaign moved between online, offline and back to online. This dynamic shows how digital and physical actions can complement each other and be creatively combined in different ways, enabling activist efforts to be carried out in the most effective and impactful manner possible.

Regarding the 13 posts collected on Instagram after searching the three main hashtags in Simplified Chinese (and, partly, in English, giving resonance to the contents in the Chinese language), it has been observed that news and information about the deepfake case were spread by both individual and collective accounts, with a predominance of the second. According to the brief description provided on the accounts' profiles, the collective accounts are managed by feminist and LGBTIQ+ groups, communities and associations of the Chinese diaspora based in different countries (mainly European countries, but also North American, South-East and East Asian countries). These collective accounts advocating for feminist issues denote that the Chinese diaspora and overseas students are becoming more involved in activism while abroad (Kaufman 2024; Zhang H. 2024). The accounts spread news and information about collective actions in English, Chinese (primarily Simplified Chinese but in some cases also Traditional Chinese), Korean and other languages depending on the country where the groups are based. In some cases, the posts were created and co-shared by groups of collective accounts. The three researched hashtags, constituting the slogans of the protest, were written on digital posters, pictures and banners in different languages, including Korean. Based on the observed posts and other information shared by the accounts, five rallies were organised, in some cases in front of South Korean embassies, in different cities (London, Los Angeles, Toronto, Taipei and Tokyo) in September 2024. Online mobilisations, such as calls for action, were also launched. The participants were invited to write the slogans on banners, photograph them and post them online using the suggested hashtags.

The main intentions of the posts collected using the hashtags in Simplified Chinese were to spread the voice about the Korean deepfake case and to raise awareness about pornographic deepfakes and sexual crimes. At the same time, the posts were aimed at showing solidarity to the victims and support

to the Korean feminist reaction. Some posts underlined the importance of transnational feminist solidarity, which was also expressed via hashtags such as #女性无国界# *nüxing wuguojie*, 'women without borders' and statements such as 'women have no borders; regardless of where we are, we face similar threats, and our fates are closely linked'. As remarked above, Instagram was also used to promote and report offline mobilisations. When giving information about the organisation of the rallies, large attention was dedicated to protecting the anonymity of activists, which was likely to avoid local and, perhaps, even 'transnational repression' (this latter refers to forms of repression enacted by Chinese Party-State authorities outside the PRC, see Kaufman 2024 and, also, Thunø and Wang 2024). The analysis of collected posts and materials in Chinese showed that the diffusion of news about the deepfake case in South Korea led to both online and offline mobilisations of the Chinese diaspora and, more broadly, of the Chinese-speaking overseas communities, organised and also diffused via Instagram.

With respect to the domestic Chinese context, the discussion within the PRC's online sphere regarding the deepfake case emerged following the call of South Korean women to Chinese netizens on Weibo (a Twitter-like Chinese social network) and Xiaohongshu to spread the case outside of South Korea (Huang 2024). At the end of August, the deepfake case became a hot topic of discussion within the Chinese digital sphere (Li 2024). The main theme that emerged following the qualitative content analysis of the 18 posts on Xiaohongshu was the importance of spreading the news about the Korean case while diffusing insights on deepfakes and their unlawful applications, particularly for sexual crime purposes. Warnings and practical suggestions were provided to increase awareness and prevent these kinds of digital sex crimes. Protecting oneself and others emerged as a recurrent claim; indeed, 'women's safety' (#女性安全# *nüxing anquan*) was a recurrent slogan. Additionally, the discursive tool of 'feminism beyond borders' unfolded when screenshots of South Korean women appreciating the emotional involvement of Chinese netizens were shared. One of the recurrent slogans was, in fact, 'women without borders' (#女性无国界# *nüxing wu guojie*). Finally, positive remarks were observed on Xiaohongshu following the introduction of the new legislation about deepfakes in South Korea (26 September 2024). While some Xiaohongshu accounts posted photos or news regarding the Korean mobilisations, there was no reference to the actions carried out by the Chinese diaspora activists via Instagram. This is likely due to the fact that Mainland Chinese netizens cannot access Instagram (while Korean initiatives were reported by Chinese media, see Huang 2024 and Li 2024). Moreover, the discussions regarding the Korean deepfake case on Xiaohongshu did not lead to any kind of direct mobilisation, whether online or offline. This comes

as no surprise as the Chinese internet is strictly regulated and surveilled, as remarked before, and citizens' practices are mostly non-confrontational in the authoritarian context of the PRC (Jakimów 2022). Nevertheless, the discussion on Xiaohongshu corroborated the assumption that feminist discourses are popular among young female Chinese netizens (Geng et al. 2024), who showed concerns for the South Korean deepfake scandal and expressed transnational feminist solidarity.

As for the Korean social media platform, several posts on Naver Café featured contentious opinions regarding the motivations for the protests, particularly those conducted abroad by the diaspora, as well as controversial opinions about the scope of the new deepfake regulations. From the findings, Naver was not used for social mobilisation, but it was employed to share information afterwards and post detailed news about the demonstrations. Half of the analysed posts using the keywords '딥페이크 시위' ('deepfake protests') were either summaries of the protest activities or personal reflections from participants. The posts detailing experiences of participation in rallies against deepfakes garnered many replies from others sharing their own experiences, photographs or expressions of solidarity. Searching for the word '딥페이크' ('deepfake') on Naver at the beginning of November, some of the most relevant related search keywords were: '딥페이크 처벌' ('deepfake punishment'), '딥페이크 시청 처벌' ('punishment for watching deepfake'), '딥페이크 법' ('deepfake law'), showing a great interest in the legal consequences of deepfake-related digital sex crimes. In fact, in October and November, searches for the term 'deepfake' returned several results from law firms elucidating the legal implications of deepfakes and the methods to seek legal assistance about this type of offence.

From the overall analysis, three main conclusions were drawn. First, on Instagram, the gendered and committed nature of the engagement emerged as most of the content and support were shared by collective accounts of feminist groups (in the case of the Chinese diaspora also LGBTQIA+ groups). At the same time, a substantial part of the online discourse, particularly on Instagram and Xiaohongshu, expressed solidarity via slogans stated in the first-person singular ('my life is not your porn') or first-person plural ('we feel anger not shame'), suggesting the predominance of the involvement of female netizens. Second, on Instagram, hashtags worked as 'connective organisers' (Zeng 2020, 8-9), originating forms of 'connective action' (Bennett 2014) both in the South Korean digital space and within the actions organised by the Chinese overseas communities. As previously remarked in this article, hashtag activism is a widespread form of mobilisation characterising digital feminism, and South Korean and Chinese digital feminists are not strangers to its use (see J. Kim 2017; Yun 2020; Mendes and Jeong 2024, 548 for the

ROK and Zeng 2020; Zhang 2023; Gu et al. 2023 for the PRC). The online mobilisations carried out against pornographic deepfakes represented a manifestation of this digital practice. The last noteworthy finding is that, despite similar levels of engagement on Instagram and country-specific platforms, Instagram is more widely used for the practical organisation of both online and offline initiatives, also thanks to the combination of quick-sharing features and, as highlighted by Lu Chuting, visual impact that leads to emotional resonance and the creation of a safe space for transnational feminists, through, for example, the use of pseudonyms (Lu 2023, 125). These features help give women an online space that goes beyond national borders. Local platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Naver Café are less impactful on such topics: the former is because of the peculiarities of the domestic Chinese cyberspace and the repressive environment for activists in the country, while the latter is due to its structural design, which limits its effectiveness for organising initiatives or mobilising collective action.

Some limitations of the current research may be identified. First, data has been circumscribed to a restricted number of manually gathered posts. Second, even though Instagram, Xiaohongshu and Naver were selected as interesting spaces for analysing emerging discourses of South Korean and Chinese digital feminism, they cannot depict an all-encompassing image of the online discussions and mobilisations regarding the researched case in the two countries. Other social networks (e.g., X for the case of the ROK and Weibo for the PRC) could be analysed to see how the issue was received within other digital contexts. Third, quantitative research was not conducted to assess the engagement or impact of online discourse (e.g., the number of likes and comments were not taken into consideration when collecting the analysed posts, which were instead selected based on their relevance for analysing feminist claims). Fourth, this research does not provide a thorough description of the offline mobilisations in South Korea and abroad, as it mainly focused on online discourses while offline actions were only addressed when referred to online. Last, the study focused on the alliances between South Korean and Chinese feminists regarding this specific case; however, it is doubtless that activists from other countries also contributed to the mobilisations. These remarks may constitute a starting point for further research, in particular to explore the transnational alliances of the East Asian feminist movements. That said, the article has brought to attention a particular concern of the interested individuals and groups: the necessity of a legal framework to regulate deepfakes. For this reason, the last section of the study will be dedicated to concisely presenting South Korean legal developments in this regard, with a quick glance at the international arena and the PRC's context.

4. Legal Frameworks on Deepfakes

In the last few years, an ever-growing number of countries around the world have been paying more and more attention to the issue of deepfakes from a legislative perspective. However, divergent approaches have been proposed and/or adopted across different national jurisdictions. In general, there are two common paths to regulating deepfakes by modifying relevant existing regulations, for example, on data protection and security on virtual platforms, and/or by enacting laws specifically targeting the topic under exam, yet to varying degrees. Legal intervention, or at least the consistent call for it, has also been featured in some international human rights protection mechanisms, which, however, may not have kept pace with the rapidly evolving technology. Following the demonstrations discussed in the previous section, South Korea has implemented stronger regulations addressing issues directly or indirectly related to deepfake crimes. However, despite these legislative advancements, the reform has been considered insufficient, with feminist groups continuing to advocate for broader protection to include other vulnerable victims who remain largely excluded. Therefore, critically analysing the strengths and limitations of current international and stale-level regulations is crucial to identify areas for further improvement.

4.1. International Level

At the moment, there are no specific international laws that particularly mention the term 'deepfakes' and address the issue (Equality Now 2023, 5). However, in addition to the possibility that established international norms, such as the right to protection of one's personal image and personal life, can be interpreted to include the risk of deepfakes, some United Nations Treaty Bodies have produced output that can deal with this problem, although still in an indirect manner. For instance, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) aims at protecting women against all acts of discrimination by persons, organisations or enterprises, whether in real life or virtually (Equality Now 2023, 5). Moreover, the CEDAW Committee, tasked with monitoring the implementation of the mentioned-above Convention, issued a General Recommendation no. 35, explicitly defining online and technologically assisted violence as a new form of gender-based violence against women and falling within its scope (Equality Now 2023, 5). However, it should be noted that although the Committee's General Recommendations, as well as most of its output or that of the other United Nations Treaty Bodies, can be considered authoritative in

explaining and clarifying the content of the legal responsibilities of the State Parties, they are not legally binding.

Moreover, on 21 March 2024, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted its 'first global resolution on AI' (United Nations General Assembly 2024). It presents recommendations covering several challenges and opportunities, including, for example, the malicious use of AI, the creation of possibly deceptive content and the exigency to guard personal data over the life cycle of AI systems. Additionally, although the resolution does not include the word 'deepfake,' it does recognise the risks of AI-generated content and promotes the development of tools, standards and practices for 'reliable content authentication,' such as 'watermarking or labelling.' However, the document is non-binding. In June 2024, the United Nations published a landmark document entitled *United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity: Recommendations for Multi-Stakeholder Actions* (Global Partners Digital 2024). The principles call for transparency, accountability and fairness among all internet stakeholders, including technology and AI companies, advertisers, the private sector, news media, civil society organisations and member states. However, it has been criticised for the lack of specific measures addressing the issue of deepfakes, even though there is mention of the topic in the policy brief to this document, published in June 2023, entitled *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8: Information Integrity on Digital Platforms* (16, 19). The topic of deepfakes has also been studied and discussed by various United Nations agencies, who often share the need for more research and more effective legal intervention.[11]

4.2. State Level

Across different states, one may not find a uniform approach to handling the problem of deepfakes, even though the tendency to criminalise has seen a rapid expansion. Among a growing number of states that have followed this trend, China and South Korea appear to position themselves as those that have built a relatively extensive legislative corpus and paid particular attention to the topic at hand.

Regarding the PRC, it is one of the first countries around the world to have put in place legislative mechanisms for the management of deepfakes. After publishing articles discussing the need for AI regulation,[12] the

[11] For instance, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research organised the 2021 Innovations Dialogue: Deepfakes, Trust and International Security. Deepfakes were again a topic of discussion at the 2024 'AI for Good Summit,' which takes place annually (United Nations 2024).

[12] One of the driving factors that has led to the legislative focus on deepfakes in China may be the controversy involving an app called ZAO, which became popular in 2019 for its face-

Cyberspace Administration of China eventually issued the *Regulations on the Administration of Online Audio and Video Information Service* (Geng 2023, 168). The regulation, targeting providers of audio and video information services and their users, criminalised the publication of deepfakes without being clearly marked as such and banned the use of deep learning and virtual reality to generate fake news. On 25 November 2022, the Cyberspace Administration of China, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued the *Provisions on the Administration of Deep Synthesis of Internet-based Information Services*, often referred to as the *Deep Synthesis Provisions*, the final official version of which was published and entered into force on 10 January 2023 (Geng 2023, 169). Even though the regulation focuses on service providers, it also has important implications for their users. Indeed, the provisions require providers to obtain consent, verify identities, register records with the government, report illegal deepfakes, establish recourse mechanisms, provide watermark disclaimers and so on (Interesse 2022). Behind these regulations, China's criminal law and civil codes also have provisions that can be relevant to deepfakes (Shrish and Komal 2024, 542). Other existing legislation and regulations dealing with AI in its entirety can be used in such cases, for example, the 2022 Algorithm Recommendation for Internet Information Services and the 2023 Interim Administrative Measures for Generative Artificial Intelligence Services (Shrish and Komal 2024, 540).

Similar to China and probably even more so, South Korea has become one of the most extensive legal frameworks on deepfakes, particularly pornographic ones. Even though the Korean government has paid particular attention to AI for more than a decade, the many deepfake-related sexual scandals in the last few years and the consistent call for more legal protection from the interested civil society, as was analysed in the previous sections, has played a significant role in the official introduction of further legal measures in this regard. The above-mentioned Nth Room scandal brought about the so-called *Nth room Prevention Law*, which came into effect on 10 December 2021 (E. Lee 2022). The law required large online platforms to engage in removing sexually exploitative content from their servers (Matsuo 2024). However, criticisms emerged since Telegram, where the illicit acts leading to the scandal took place, was left out of its scope because its chat rooms are considered private, and its operational centre is not based in South Korea (The Korea Herald 2021). The Nth Room scandal also resulted in the revision of the *Act on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment of Sexual Crimes*, also known as the *Sexual Violence Punishment Act*, in May 2020 that, for the first

swapping function (Geng 2023, 167).

time, punished those who produce and/or distribute illicit deepfake materials with an imprisonment of no more than five years or a fine of no more than 50 million won (Article 14.2). The Act also criminalised acts of blackmail using illicit deepfake materials with a limited term of imprisonment of at least one year (Article 14.3).

On 23 September 2024, the *Deepfake Sexual Crime Prevention Act*, revising the *2020 Sexual Violence Punishment Act*, was passed by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, increasing punishments for digital sexual crimes using deepfake technology (H. L. Lee 2024). At the same time, amendments to the *Act on the Protection of Sexuality for Children and Adolescents*, known as the *Youth Sexual Protection Act*, and the *Act on the Prevention of Sexual Violence and the Protection of Victims* were both voted by the National Assembly's Women and Family Committee in plenary session (Y. Choi and W. Jeong 2024). On 26 September 2024, the National Assembly, in plenary session, voted with 249 members present and approved the *Deepfake Sexual Crime Prevention Act* with 241 votes in favour (Shin 2024). As reported by Choi and Jeong (2024), the Act, which went into effect on 16 October 2024, establishes new provisions and strengthens penalties for already-defined crimes relating to deepfakes. Specifically, not only are producers of deepfakes punished, but other individuals who possess, store, purchase or view sexually exploitative materials produced through deepfakes are also subjected to heavy punishments, that is imprisonment for up to 3 years or a fine of up to 30 million won. Under this rule, the sole act of saving deepfake pornography is a crime. Moreover, penalties for producers are significantly strengthened as they are now subjected to a period of imprisonment of up to 7 years—an increase from 5 years as was laid out in the *2020 Sexual Violence Punishment Act*—or a fine of up to 50 million won. More noticeably, the punishment goes beyond cases where editing of deepfake pornography is carried out for the purpose of distribution to include also the ones where there is no purpose of distribution.

Alongside the *Deepfake Sexual Crime Prevention Act*, the revised *Youth Sexual Protection Act*, which went into effect the same day, stipulates that, if a crime such as intimidation and coercion is committed against a child or adolescent using sexually exploitative materials, there will be a punishment of at least 3 years in prison for intimidation and at least 5 years for coercion (Choi and Jeong 2024). In addition, in cases where an emergency investigation into digital sex crimes targeting children and adolescents is needed, the police can investigate without prior approval. Furthermore, it is also laid out as a rule that judicial police officers can request the Korea Communications Standards Commission to delete or block access to sexually exploitative materials involving underage individuals once the case has been assessed

and confirmed. As for the amended *Act on Prevention of Sexual Violence and Protection of Victims*, approved alongside the *Deepfake Sexual Crime Prevention Act* and the revised *Youth Sexual Protection Act*, it requires that the state and local governments have the responsibility to delete illegally filmed content and support victims' recovery. It also establishes ground rules to operate Digital Sexual Crime Victims Support Centres in the central and local areas to support the deletion of victims' personal information and prevent damage. More noticeably, the South Korean National Assembly has approved with overwhelming bipartisan support its first major AI legislation—*The Basic Act on the Development of Artificial Intelligence and Creation of a Trust Base*—on 26 December 2024, which was signed into law on 21 January 2025 and will enter into force on 24 January 2026 (Baig and Gardezi 2024). The Act, *inter alia*, aims to balance AI advancements with the protection of fundamental human rights, stipulating more obligations for AI operators, including those having their headquarters abroad, and requiring the government to establish AI policy and research centres. While pornographic deepfakes are not mentioned, the legislation, if implemented correctly, will definitely have far-reaching impacts on the regulation of such sexual offences.

Concerning the application of the laws analysed above, there have not been a sufficient number of court sentences that may give an elaborate description of how they have been interpreted. In analysing all the Korean Supreme Court's decisions since the enactment of the *2020 Sexual Violence Punishment Act*, which mostly involves the production and distribution of deepfake pornography, J. H. Kim (2024) observes that suspended sentences accounted for 40%. However, the low severity level of punishments handed out by courts is also noticed (J. H. Kim 2024). On 30 October 2024, a sentence was handed out by the 31st Criminal Division of the Seoul Central District Court, which punished the main culprit in the Seoul National University deepfake scandal from July 2020 to April 2024, with 10 years in prison (J. E. Kim 2024).[13] On the basis of Article 14.2(1-2) of the *2020 Sexual Violence Punishment Act* and the *Youth Protection Act*, he was charged for having edited and distributed deepfake pornography and sexually exploitative materials (Y. Lee 2024). The severity of the sentence signifies the increasing awareness of the seriousness of sexual deepfake crimes on the part of the judiciary. However, given the recent existence of laws concerning sexual

[13] The accomplice to the main culprit was sentenced to 4 years in prison. In addition, the two offenders were also required to complete an 80-hour sexual violence treatment program, to disclose and report their personal information for five years and to be banned from working at institutions relating to children, adolescents and disabled people (Y. Lee 2024).

deepfake crimes, more attention needs to be paid to how they will be applied in the upcoming court interventions. In the meantime, despite the growing legislative corpus, the protesters, as analysed in the previous sections, still call for further attention to adult victims and the enactment of provisions that allow direct deletion requests of pornographic deepfakes without passing through the Korea Communications Standards Commission. Moreover, voices are further raised to ask for, among many others, even harsher punishments, mandatory educational programs on digital sexual crimes at schools and more regulations on social media (H. J. Kim 2024).

Conclusion

The South Korean deepfake case epitomises the gendered dimension of technological innovations. AI technologies, encompassing design, production, ownership, marketing and use, arise from a sociotechnical system that consistently reveals a deeply patriarchal and misogynistic foundation (Agrawal 2024). This case calls for the establishment of international and national legal frameworks to protect people, especially women and the underage, from digital sex crimes, which are being fuelled by the new advancements of deepfake technologies. Moreover, although an active and dedicated group of women advocates for their rights, broader support in official political and legislative forums should be granted. An increase in women's representation in formal political and legislative spaces, which remain predominantly male-dominated (Shin 2024), may enhance awareness and understanding of women's demands. At the same time, preventive measures must be deployed in terms of sexual and emotional education. Equally important, forms of digital education shall be considered as well.

South Korean and Chinese feminists prove to be wary regarding technological issues discriminating against women. In both countries, previous cases had already emerged regarding the misuse of hidden cameras to disseminate illicit content (Teshome 2019; R. Zhang 2024). At the same time, South Korean and Chinese feminists are reclaiming and occupying the digital space to disseminate their claims, as also remarked by one of the slogans of the protest: 'Cyberfeminism Crushes Cybersexual Violence'. The mobilisation regarding this case has revealed transnational feminist alliances, which denote the rise of an East Asian feminism also spreading among the Chinese and South Korean diasporas and thriving in digital spaces.

References

Acts on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment of Sexual Crimes (2020), Act No. 17264, May 19, 2020, Republic of Korea, retrieved from: https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=55416&type=part&key=9 (accessed: 14/01/2025).

Agrawal, H. (2024) 'Gender Inequality in Artificial Intelligence: Feminist Political Economic Approach', *International Journal Of All Research Writings*, 7(3), 1-8.

Baig, A. and Gardezi, S. E. (2025) 'An Overview of South Korea's Basic Act on the Development of Artificial Intelligence and Creation of a Trust Base (Basic AI Act)', retrieved from: https://securiti.ai/south-korea-basic-act-on-development-of-ai/ (accessed: 04/05/2025).

Bao, H. (2020) 'Diary Writing as Feminist Activism: Guo Jing's Wuhan Lockdown Diary (2020)', *MCLC Resource Center Publication*, retrieved from: https://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/hongwei-bao/ (accessed: 05/11/2024).

Barr, H. (2024) 'South Korea's Digital Sex Crime Deepfake Crisis', Human Rights Watch, August 29, retrieved from: https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/29/south-koreas-digital-sex-crime-deepfake-crisis (accessed: 03/11/2024).

Bennett, W. L. (2014) *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media And The Personalization Of Contentious Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Buffett Institute for Global Affairs (2023) 'The Rise of Artificial Intelligence and Deepfakes', Northwestern University, retrieved from: https://buffett.northwestern.edu/documents/buffett-brief_the-rise-of-ai-and-deepfake-technology.pdf (accessed: 10/01/2025).

Caldeira, S. P. (2023) 'The Pluralization of Feminist Hashtag Landscapes: An Exploratory Mapping of Feminist Hashtags on Portuguese Instagram', *Social Media + Society*, 9(2), 1-11.

Caldwell, M. et al. (2020) 'AI-enabled Future Crime', *Crime Science*, 9(1), 14.

Chen, G. M. et al. (2018) '"Hashtag Feminism": Activism or Slacktivism?', in Harp, D., Loke, J. and Bachmann, I. (eds.), *Feminist Approaches to Media Theory and Research*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 197-218.

Cheng, X. (2024) 'The Gendered Impact of Deepfake Technology: Analyzing Digital Violence Against Women in South Korea', *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Global Politics and Socio-Humanities*, 75(1), 80-85.

Cho, J. W. (2024) 'SNU graduate sentenced to 10 years in prison over deepfakes of more than 60 women', *Korea JoongAng Daily*, October 30, retrieved from: https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2024-10-30/national/socialAffairs/SNU-graduate-sentenced-to-10-years-in-prison-over-deepfakes-of-more-than-60-women/2167079 (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Cho, U. (2012) 'Gender Inequality and Patrilineal Order Recontextualized', in Cho, H. Y., Surendra, L. and Cho H. J. (eds.), *Contemporary South Korean Society: A Critical Perspective*, London: Routledge, 18-27.

Choi, Y. and Jeong, W. (2024) 'What's the problem with "deepfake"? - Summary of punishments and legal issues related to deepfake', retrieved from: https://www.lawtimes.co.kr/LawFirm-NewsLetter/202317 (accessed: 13/01/2025).

De Souza, N. (2020) 'The Nth Room case and modern slavery in the digital space', *The Interpreter*, April 20, retrieved from: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/nth-room-case-modern-slavery-digital-space (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Equality Now (2023) 'Briefing Paper: Deepfake Image-based Sexual Abuse, Tech-facilitated Sexual Exploitation and the Law', retrieved from: https://equalitynow.org/resource/briefing-paper-deepfake-image-based-sexual-abuse-tech-facilitated-sexual-exploitation-and-the-law/ (accessed: 10/01/2025).

Geng, C. et al. (2024) 'Feminist Impact via Chinese Social Media: A Post Content Analysis of Xiaohongshu', *Jurnal Partisipatoris*, 6(2), 27-40.

Geng, Y. (2023) 'Comparing "Deepfakes" regulatory Regimes in the United States, the European Union, and China', *Georgetown Technology Review*, 7, 157-178.

Global Partners Digital (2024) 'The UN Global Principles for Information Integrity: our thoughts', retrieved from: https://www.gp-digital.org/the-un-global-principles-for-information-integrity-our-thoughts/; https://securitybrief.in/story/un-releases-global-principles-to-tackle-misinformation-online (accessed: 10/01/2025).

Gockel, J. (2024) 'The Current State of Pornographic Deepfakes: A Science and Technology Studies Perspective', *The Maastricht Journal of Liberal Arts*, 15, 15-25.

Gu, Y. et al. (2023) '#StopMenstrualShaming: Xiaohongshu Users' Online Advocacy for Women's Issues in China', Paper presented at AoIR2023: The 24th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Philadelphia, PA, USA: AoIR, retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org.

Guo, Y. (2007) '"Nous étions comme un feu ardent": la collectivisation des esprits dans les récits des femmes du village de Jicun (nord du Shaanxi)', *Civilisations. Revue internationale d'anthropologie et de sciences humaines*, (56), 43-62.

Han, X. (2018) 'Searching for an online space for feminism? The Chinese feminist group Gender Watch Women's Voice and its changing approaches to online misogyny', *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), 734-749.

Hankyoreh (2018) '[Editorial] South Korean women are mobilizing in unprecedented ways', June 11, retrieved from: https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/english_editorials/848603.html (accessed 13/01/2025).

Hird, D. (2017) 'Xi Jinping's Family Values'. *China Policy Institute: Analysis*, September 22, retrieved from: https://cpianalysis.org/2017/09/22/xi-jinpings-family-values/ (accessed 03/04/2025).

Hong Fincher, L. (2014) *Leftover women: the resurgence of gender inequality in China*, London: Zed Books (Asian arguments).

Hong Fincher, L. (2018) *Betraying Big Brother: the feminist awakening in China*, London, New York: Verso.

Huang, Q. (2022) 'Anti-Feminism: four strategies for the demonisation and depoliticisation of feminism on Chinese social media', *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(7), 1-16.

Huang, Y. (2024) '"深伪"催发新版"N号房"事件，在中国社交平台求助的韩国女性：将坚持发声', *The Paper*, August 31, retrieved from: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_28591301 (accessed: 11/01/2025).

Hwang, J. M. (2019) 'Gendering Democracy after Democratization in Korea Public Feminism and Politics of Identity', *Journal of the Korean Welfare State and Social Policy*, 3(1), 43-65.

Ignaczak, A. (2023) *Numerous faces of feminism and their meaning in contemporary South Korea through the lens of the country's young adults* [Master's Thesis, University of Turku].

Interesse, G. (2022) 'China to Regulate Deep Synthesis (Deepfake) Technology Starting 2023', retrieved from: https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-to-regulate-deep-synthesis-deep-fake-technology-starting-january-2023/ (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Jakimów, M. (2022) 'Activist Citizenship in Non-Western and Non-Democratic Contexts: How to Define "Acts of Citizenship"', *Citizenship Studies*, 26(4-5), 505-511.

Jeong, E. and Lee, J. (2018) 'We take the red pill, we confront the DickTrix: online feminist activism and the augmentation of gendered realities in South Korea', *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), 705-717.

Jun, W. C. (2022) 'A Study on Characteristics Analysis and Countermeasures of Digital Sex Crimes in Korea', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,* 19(1), 12.

Jun, W. C. (2023) 'A Study on the Analysis of and Educational Solution for Digital Sex Crimes in Korea', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(3), 2450.

Kang, H. et al. (2023) 'Recalling the Past Within a Social Network's Collective Memory Work: How Did Korean Twitter Users Shape #Equal_ Punishment_for_Equal_Crime From Their Experiences?', *Social Media + Society*, 9(1), 1-10.

Kaufman, A. (2024) 'Chinese Diaspora Voices Fight Harassment and Find Room for Expression', *China Digital Times (CDT)*, July 17, retrieved from: https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2024/07/chinese-diaspora-voices-fight-harassment-and-find-room-for-expression/ (accessed: 09/11/2024).

Kim, C. (2024) ''Punish those who make, sell and watch it': Korean women rally against deepfake abuse', *Hankyoreh*, September 23, retrieved from: https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1159340.html (accessed: 01/04/2025).

Kim, D. D. (2020) 'Mirroring the Misogynistic Wor(l)d: Civic Imagination and Speech Mirroring Strategy in Korea's Online Feminist Activism', in Jenkins, H., Peters-Lazaro, G. and Shresthova, S. (eds.), *Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination: Case Studies of Creative Social Change*, New York: New York University Press, 152-161.

Kim, E. (2022) 'On the Depth of Fakeness', in Filimowicz, M. (ed.), *Deep Fakes*, London: Routledge, 50-70.

Kim, H. (2024) 'South Korea's spy camera epidemic persists despite stricter law'', *Korea Pro*, April 30, retrieved from: https://koreapro.org/2024/04/south-koreas-spy-camera-epidemic-persists-despite-stricter-laws/ (accessed: 07/11/2024).

Kim, H. J. (2024) 'South Korea fights deepfake porn with tougher punishment and regulation', retrieved from: https://apnews.com/article/south-

korea-deepfake-porn-women-409516f159827770913ddf8d39f84cfd# (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Kim, J. (2017) '#iamafeminist as the "mother tag": feminist identification and activism against misogyny on Twitter in South Korea', *Feminist Media Studies*, 17(5), 804-820.

Kim, J. (2021a) 'The Resurgence and Popularization of Feminism in South Korea: Key Issues and Challenges for Contemporary Feminist Activism', *Korea Journal*, 61(4), 75-101.

Kim, J. (2021b) 'Sticky Activism: The Gangnam Station Murder Case and New Feminist Practices against Misogyny and Femicide', *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, 60(4), 37-60.

Kim, J. E. (2024) 'Seoul National University Deepfake Mastermind Sentenced to 10 Years in Prison… Court "Hatred on Women Who Are Awesome"', retrieved from: https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/1165047.html (accessed: 14/01/2025).

Kim J. H. (2021) 'Nth Room Incident in the Age of Popular Feminism: A Big Data Analysis', (J. Chang, Trans.), *Azalea: Journal of Korean Literature & Culture*, 14, 261-287.

Kim, J. H. (2024) 'Analysis of all sentences since the enforcement of the 2020 Deepfake Sexual Exploitation Punishment Enhancement Act… Suspended Sentences Nearing 40%', retrieved from: https://www.khan.co.kr/article/202409041031011 (accessed: 14/01/2025).

Kim, S. W. (2024) 'Behind the 6,000 Women Who Stand Up to "Deepfake Sexual Exploitation" There Was a "Joint Action to Condemn Misogynistic Violence"', *Women News*, September 26, retrieved from: https://www.womennews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=252463 (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Ko, N. (2024) '[단독] '○○○ 능욕방' 딥페이크, 겹지인 노렸다…지역별·대학별·미성년까지', *Hankyoreh*, August 22, retrieved from: https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/1154763.html (accessed 20/01/2025).

Korea JoongAng Daily (2016) 'Murder becomes symbol of Korean misogyny', May 19, retrieved from: https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2016/05/19/socialAffairs/Murder-becomes-symbol-of-Korean-misogyny/3018936.html (accessed 03/04/2025).

Korean Women's Development Institute (2019) 'A Survey on the 20s' Perception on Korean Society's Feminism', retrieved from: https://eng.

kwdi.re.kr/publications/cardDetail.do?p=3&idx=102201 (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Lee, E. (2022) 'The Nth Rooms and the Ungovernable Digital Bodies', retrieved from: https://botpopuli.net/the-nth-rooms-and-the-ungovernable-digital-bodies/ (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Lee, H. L. (2024) 'The whole country is in a mess because of deepfake… The National Assembly's Leisure and Cultural Services Commission passed the "Deepfake Sexual Crime Prevention Act"', retrieved from: https://www.mk.co.kr/en/society/11122876 (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Lee, H. R. (2024a) 'Thousands rally in Seoul for stronger action against deepfake crimes', *The Korea Times*, September 22, retrieved from: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/12/113_382845.html (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Lee, H. R. (2024b) 'Korea faces staff shortage in battle against deepfake sexual exploitation crisis', *The Korea Times*, October 20, retrieved from: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/10/113_384596.html (accessed 23/11/2024).

Lee, S. (2024) 'Deepfake Aiming at Teenagers…3 out of 10 victims are minors', *Yonhap News*, August 28, retrieved from: https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20240827158700530 (accessed 14/03/2025).

Lee, S. J. (2024) 'Adolescents 80% of 474 suspects arrested for deepfake porn this year', *Korea JoongAng Daily*, October 16, retrieved from: https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2024-10-16/national/socialAffairs/Adolescents-80-of-474-suspects-arrested-for-deepfake-porn-this-year-/2156145 (accessed: 01/04/2025).

Lee, Y. (2024) 'Seoul National University Deepfake Mastermind Sentenced to 10 Years in Prison… "Extremely Disgusting and Vile" (Comprehensive 2nd Report)', retrieved from: https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20241030103152004 (accessed: 14/01/2025).

Li, Y. (2024) 'Deepfake crime in S.Korea triggers discussions in China', *Global Times*, September 1, retrieved from: https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202409/1319047.shtml (accessed: 07/11/2024).

Liu, J. M. (2022) 'From "Sea Turtles" to "Grassroots Ambassadors": The Chinese Politics of Outbound Student Migration', *International Migration Review*, 56(3), 702-726.

Lu, C. (2023) 'The Impact of Instagram on Feminist Activism', *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 30(1), 124-30.

Mackenzie, J. and Choi, L. (2024) 'Inside the deepfake porn crisis engulfing Korean schools', *BBC*, September 3, retrieved from: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cpdlpj9zn9go (accessed: 11/01/2025).

Mahmud, B. U. and Sharmin, A. (2020) 'Deep Insights of Deepfake Technology: A Review', *DUJASE,* 5(1-2), 13-23.

Matsuo, T. (2024) 'Deepfakes and Korean Society: Navigating Risks and Dilemmas', retrieved from: https://keia.org/the-peninsula/deepfakes-and-korean-society-navigating-risks-and-dilemmas/ (accessed: 13/01/2025).

McCurry, J. (2024) 'South Korea battles surge of deepfake pornography after thousands found to be spreading images', *The Guardian*, August 28, retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/28/south-korea-deepfake-porn-law-crackdown (accessed: 10/01/2025).

Mendes, K. and Jeong, E. (2024) 'Digital Feminist Activism Against Gender Violence in South Korea', in Boyle, K. and Berridge, S. (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gender, Media and Violence*, New York: Routledge, 543-552.

Moon, M. (2022) 'Digitally Mediated Mobilization in South Korea: Women's March and Collective Identity Building Online', *Sociological Perspectives*, 65(5), 960-980.

Mukred, M. et al. (2024) 'The roots of digital aggression: Exploring cyber-violence through a systematic literature review', *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 4(2), 1-18.

Nam, J. E. (2024) 'BBC documentary's new revelations about Burning Sun scandal reignite rage, grief in Korea', *Hankyoreh*, May 22, retrieved from: https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_entertainment/1141624.html (accessed: 10/01/2025).

Obadia, S. (2024) 'Survivor Safety: Deepfakes and the Negative Impacts of AI Technology', *Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault*, retrieved from: https://mcasa.org/newsletters/article/survivor-safety-deepfakes-and-negative-impacts-of-ai-technology (accessed: 29/03/2025).

Park, G. (2024) 'With a click, 220,000+ member Telegram room generates illegal deepfake porn', *Hankyoreh*, August 22, retrieved from: https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1154909.html (accessed: 03/04/2025).

Park, H. (2023) 'With Every Click: An Analysis of South Korea's Hidden Camera Epidemic and Laws Against Digital Sex Crimes', *Harvard*

Undergraduate Law Review, retrieved from: https://hulr.org/spring-2023/taztieymxrvayt5rwn38g67f18mryz (accessed: 07/11/2024).

Park, H. S. (2024) 'South Korea's Rising Deepfake Sex Crimes and Recent Legal Responses', ADRN Issue Briefing, 1-8.

Park, K. A. (1992) 'Women and Social Change in South and North Korea: Marxist and Liberal Perspectives', Women in International Development, Michigan State University, Working Paper #231, 37.

Peng, A. Y. (2020) *A feminist reading of China's digital public sphere*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pieranni, S. (2024) 'La piazza e il salotto di casa (Ep. 54)', *Fuori da Qui* (Podcast), Chora Media, retrieved from: https://open.spotify.com/episode/6OsljRcYqvpFytBWriwMHZ (accessed: 28/10/2024).

Poston, D. L. and Wong, J. H. (2016) 'The Chinese diaspora: The current distribution of the overseas Chinese population', *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2(3), 348-373.

Rofel, L. (2007) *Desiring China: experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Security Hero (2023) '2023 State of Deepfakes', retrieved from: https://www.securityhero.io/state-of-deepfakes/#appendix (accessed: 10/01/2025).

Security Hero (2024) 'AI Deepfakes in 2024 Elections', retrieved from: https://www.securityhero.io/ai-deepfakes-in-2024-election/ (accessed: 03/11/2024).

Semenzin, S. (2022) '"Swipe up to smash the patriarchy": Instagram feminist activism and the necessity of branding the self', *AG About Gender - International Journal of Gender Studies*, 11(21), 113-141.

Seong, J. (2016) 'Megalia: South Korea, feminism, and the Internet walk into a bar… An STS analysis of nascent Korean feminism', Final Paper, 2-11.

Shi, J. et al. (2021) 'The Role of Social Media in Female Gender Construction Under Feminism', in. *2021 4th International Conference on Humanities Education and Social Sciences (ICHESS 2021)*, Atlantis Press, 1040-1045.

Shin, J. H. (2024) 'Reality check: How diverse is Korea really? Women in politics (1)', *The Korea Herald*, January 21, retrieved from: https://www.koreaherald.com/article/3304861 (accessed: 19/01/2025).

Shin, M. (2024) 'Korea passes bill making viewing non-consensual sexual deepfakes illegal', retrieved from: https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1160090.html (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Song, A. (2019) '"Feminist" Most Searched Word in Naver Dictionary Last Year', *Korea Bizwire*, January 17, retrieved from: http://koreabizwire.

com/feminist-most-searched-word-in-naver-dictionary-last-year/130644 (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Statista Search Department (2024a) 'Biggest social media platforms by users 2024', *Statista*, retrieved from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/ (accessed: 16/01/2025).

Statista search Department (2024b) 'Xiaohongshu: active user gender distribution 2024', *Statista*, retrieved from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1053571/china-xiaohongshu-user-gender-distribution/ (accessed: 17/01/2025).

Suzuki, T. (2018) 'Embodying Belonging: Diaspora's Racialization and Cultural Citizenship', Cohen, R. and Fischer, C. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies*, New York: Routledge, 63-70.

Teshome, B. D. (2019) 'Spy Camera Epidemic in Korea: A Situational Analysis', *Asian Journal of Sociological Research*, 2(1), 1-13.

The Korea Herald (2021) '[Newsmaker] Nth room prevention law draws fire for censorship, invasion of privacy', retrieved from: https://www.koreaherald.com/article/2739361 (accessed: 13/01/2025).

The Korea Times (2024) 'Nine in 10 teachers fear deepfake abuse from graduation album photos', October 17, retrieved from: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/10/113_384402.html (accessed: 15/12/2024).

Thunø, M. and Wang, Y. (2024) 'China's Smart Diaspora Governance: Extraterritorial Social Control Through Digital Platforms', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 1-25.

United Nations (2024) 'Global AI summit tackles misinformation and deepfakes with a little "bot" of help', retrieved from: https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/05/1150526 (accessed: 13/01/2024).

United Nations Civil Society Unit (2023) 'Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8: Information Integrity on Digital Platforms', retrieved from: https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/information-integrity-digital-platforms (accessed: 13/01/2025).

United Nations General Assembly (2024) 'General Assembly Adopts Landmark Resolution on Steering Artificial Intelligence towards Global Food, Faster Globalization of Sustainable Development', retrieved from: https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12588.doc.htm (accessed: 10/01/2025).

United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (2021), 'The 2021 Innovations Dialogue: Deepfakes, Trust and International Security',

retrieved from: https://unidir.org/event/the-2021-innovations-dialogue-deepfakes-trust-and-international-security/ (accessed: 13/01/2021)

Wajcman, J. (2004) *Technofeminism*, Cambridge: Polity.

Wajcman, J. (2007) 'From Women and Technology to Gendered Technoscience', *Information, Communication & Society*, 10(3), 287-298.

Wang, B. and Driscoll, C. (2019) 'Chinese feminists on social media: articulating different voices, building strategic alliances', *Continuum*, 33(1), 1-15.

Wang, J. (2022) 'Lockdown Sound Diaries Podcasting and Affective Listening in the Shanghai Lockdown', *Made in China Journal*, April 27, retrieved from: https://madeinchinajournal.com/2022/04/27/lockdown-sound-diaries/ (accessed: 11/01/2025).

Wang, Q. (2018) 'From "Non-governmental Organizing" to "Outer-system" – Feminism and Feminist Resistance in Post-2000 China', *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 26(4), 260-277.

Won, E. J. (2024) 'I saw deepfakes when exposing the Nth Room case 5 years ago – the government's lax response is to blame for their proliferation today', *Hankyoreh*, September 6, retrieved from: https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1157369.html (accessed: 10/01/2025).

Wu, A. X. and Dong, Y. (2019) 'What is made-in-China feminism(s)? Gender discontent and class friction in post-socialist China', *Critical Asian Studies*, 51(4), 471-492.

Xu, G. and Feiner, S. (2007) 'Meinü Jingji/China's beauty economy: Buying looks, shifting value, and changing place', *Feminist Economics*, 13(3-4), 307-323.

Yang, H. (2008) 'A Journey of Family Law Reform in Korea: Tradition, Equality, and Social Change', *Journal of Korean Law*, 8, 77-94.

Yang, S. X. and Zhang, B. (2021) 'Gendering Jiang Shanjiao: Chinese feminist resistance on Weibo during the COVID-19 lockdown', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 23(4), 650-655.

Yin, H. and Zhang, Q. (2024) 'Digital Feminism: The Role of Social Media in Shaping Feminist Movements in Asian Cultural Contexts', *Advances in Humanities Research*, 10(1), 38-42.

Yoo, H. (2024) 'Rising tide of deepfake pornography targets K-pop stars', *The Korea Herald*, September 11, retrieved from: https://www.koreaherald.com/article/3473202 (accessed: 13/01/2025).

Yoon, J. R. (2019) 'Origins of the Korean Women's Movement: An Examination of the Organization Chanyanghoe and the Establishment of Sunseong Women's School', *Women & History*, 30, 33-78.

Yuen, S. (2015) 'Friend or Foe? The Diminishing Space of China's Civil Society', *China Perspectives*, 3, 51-56.

Yun, J. Y. (2020) 'Feminist Net-Activism as a New Type of Actor-Network that Creates Feminist Citizenship', *Asian Women*, 36(4), 45-65.

Zeng, J. (2019) 'You Say #MeToo, I Say #MiTu: China's Online Campaigns against Sexual Abuse', in Fileborn, B. and Loney-Howes, R. (eds.), *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 71-83.

Zeng, J. (2020) '#MeToo as Connective Action: A Study of the Anti-Sexual Violence and Anti-Sexual Harassment Campaign on Chinese Social Media in 2018', *Journalism Practice*, 14(2), 171-190.

Zhang, H. (2024) 'How Members of the Chinese Diaspora Found Their Voices', *The New Yorker*, June 11, retrieved from: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/essay/how-members-of-the-chinese-diaspora-found-their-voices (accessed: 09/11/2024).

Zhang, J. (2023) 'Feminist responses to COVID-19 in China through the lens of affect', *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(4), 1327-1343.

Zhang, R. (2024) 'Hidden Hotel Cameras in Shijiazhuang: Controversy and Growing Distrust', *What's on Weibo*, October 5, retrieved from: https://www.whatsonweibo.com/hidden-hotel-cameras-in-shijiazhuang-controversy-public-outcry-and-growing-distrust/ (accessed: 15/01/2025).