Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Ariel Friedman April 15, 2014

Shengnü: The Leftover Woman and Changing Perspectives of Femininity in Urban China

by

Ariel Friedman

Dr. Maria Franca Sibau
Adviser

Department of Chinese Language and Literature

Dr. Maria Franca Sibau

Adviser

Dr. Cai Rong

Committee Member

Dr. Hugo Mialon

Committee Member

2014

Shengnü: The Leftover Woman and Changing Perspectives of Femininity in Urban China

By

Ariel Friedman

Dr. Maria Franca Sibau

Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of Chinese Language and Literature

2014

Abstract

Shengnü: The Leftover Woman and Changing Perspectives of Femininity in Urban China

By Ariel Friedman

A *shengnü* is a woman of marriage age who is not yet married. This project examines the emerging phenomenon of the *shengnü* in modern Chinese society. It discusses the extent to which changing perspectives of femininity have influenced the spread of these "leftover women" throughout China's cities, particularly after the end of the Mao era. It suggests that in the years following the Cultural Revolution and China's reform period, patterns of traditional gender roles began to reemerge. Many women found great difficulty in reconciling these gender roles with the notions of equality spread throughout the Cultural Revolution and the newfound financial independence achieved through the institution of economic reforms. It argues that when women choose a balance between career and traditional femininity that potential romantic partners deem improper, these women are unable to find a husband, and thus become *shengnü.* It investigates the nuances of the term, and different models of women who, for various reasons, have become *shengnü.*

In the second half, it examines the ways in which these women are depicted in popular media. It uses two specific examples, one episode of the reality dating show, *Fei Cheng Wu Rao* and a movie, *Taohua Yun* to discuss the portrayal of single women in urban China. It concludes that *Fei Cheng Wu Rao* makes the term *shengnü* look like a much more negative and passive moniker than the contestants on the show seem to embody. With regard to *Taohua Yun*, it examines the film's ambiguities to uncover its subtle message that a woman's self identity is shaped by her relationships with the men in her life. That these two examples are in seeming opposition with one another leads to the idea that the definitions of and reactions to varying types of femininity are constantly in flux. All in all, this thesis concludes that because notions of womanliness, as well as the ways in which members of society react to these different notions, are constantly changing, the *shengnü* has emerged as a manifestation of women's difficulties in trying to embody all of these types of femininity without deterring potential mates.

Shengnü: The Leftover Woman and Changing Perspectives of Femininity in Urban China

By

Ariel Friedman

Dr. Maria Franca Sibau

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of Chinese Language and Literature

2014

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend a very special thank you to my advisers, Dr. Maria Sibau and Dr. Cai Rong for being incredibly patient and understanding throughout this process. None of this would have been possible without their guidance and encouragement. I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Hugo Mialon for his advice and unique perspective.

A huge thank you also goes out to my parents and my amazing friends for all of their support, and for somehow managing to help me keep my head on my shoulders for the last nine months.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1
Chapter 1: Androgyny, Femininity and the Genealogy of the *Shengnü*..3
Chapter 2: Social Context: Post-Mao Femininity...17
Chapter 3: The Shengnü in Reality Television: *Fei Cheng Wu Rao* 34
Chapter 4: The *Shengnü* in Film: *Taohua Yun* 53
Conclusion 74
Works Cited...78
References 81

Introduction

The term *shengnü*, or "leftover woman" became a popular Chinese colloquialism in the 1990s. It is a moniker used to describe women of marriage age, who are not yet married. The development of the term *shengnü* is difficult to trace, but its evolution is closely intertwined with its prevalence in today's society. As is true in many cultures, language is a phenomenon that develops and changes along with society, reflecting and influencing culture at any given point. Though certainly a sensation that existed before the last decade, the term could not have reached its current levels of popularity and media presence without the Internet. Like many of today's colloquialisms, *shengnü* began as a term used on internet forums, eventually developed into a more commonly used term, and became one of the 171 new words added to the dictionary in 2007.[1] Developing as a product of the Internet age adds another layer of hostility to the term from those who condemn the *shengnü* for breaking with the norm, because these public forums allow a level of anonymity that was never previously accessible. The Internet allowed people to use this term without any of the repercussions associated with the use of other terms deemed politically incorrect, and this sensation enabled *shengnü*'s particularly fast rise to popularity.

This project seeks to investigate precisely what a *shengnü* is, from whence the phenomenon has come, how it is portrayed in popular media, and finally, how society has reacted to the increasing prevalence of this phenomenon. This study is important because the growing population of *shengnü* feel a great amount of pressure to alter their single circumstances. This has direct psychological repercussions for these women, and also marks China's reluctance to let go of tradition and accept alternative family structures. As there is very little extant English literature currently available on this subject, this thesis bridges the gap for

---

[1] Xiuli Wang, "Tan "Shengnü" Yici De Fanyi [Discussing the Meaning of Shengnu]." *Journal of Chifeng University* 71, no. 7 (July 2010): 147.

those who may find interest in the topic but do not have the Chinese comprehension skills to read the original reports. This piece differs from existing scholarship in the fact that it maps out a timeline of events and policies leading up to the emergence of the *shengnü* in addition to synthesizing this information alongside media representations of the phenomenon.

The first chapter examines traditional notions of femininity and marriage, and how they have changed throughout China's history, particularly in the last one hundred years. It examines the path discourses of femininity have taken, specifically throughout the New Culture Movement and the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, it discusses the complexities that have arisen throughout these movements, and how they have contributed to the increasing popularity of the *shengnü.* The second chapter looks at the Post-Socialist era, and examines how notions of femininity have strayed from the models of Iron Women and other portraits of androgynous strong women in the last 35 years. Together, these two chapters draw the conclusion that the *shengnü* has emerged as the result of the difficulties in reconciling different prescriptions of femininity in the modern era. The third and fourth chapters examine this conclusion in the context of the reality show *Fei Cheng Wu Rao* and the movie *Taohua Yun*. They determine the extent to which the women portrayed across these media platforms align with the issues discussed in the first two chapters, and also delineate other nuances these depictions imply about dating in modern, urban China.

Chapter 1
Androgyny, Femininity and the Genealogy of the *Shengnü*

In China's long history, there have been many significant events that have led to the prevalence of the urban *shengnü*. Though the stigma against unmarried women has remained relatively consistent since pre-modern times, this chapter explores precisely how particular events and movements, in addition to preexisting perceptions of unmarried women, have laid the groundwork that has caused this phenomenon to spread. Specifically, this chapter cites changing ideals of femininity during the New Culture Movement (1915-1923), the early Mao period (ca. 1950) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as the vehicles through which the popularity of *shengnü* has risen. It argues that the androgyny that marked the Cultural Revolution was not as much of a universal blurring of the sexes as it was a movement to eradicate femininity, particularly the traditional portrait of the gentle, soft, and subservient woman, and concludes that the *shengnü* has emerged as a manifestation of the rejection of this androgyny coupled with women's desires to maintain the independence and equality achieved during the 1960s and 1970s.

The term *shengnü* was officially incorporated into the Mandarin Chinese vernacular in 2007 to classify women who were of marriage age, but not yet married. The development of this term has roots in pre-modern Chinese culture. There were many controversies surrounding the institution of marriage in the pre-modern period, most notably including stigmas surrounding divorce and widow remarriage.[2] In addition to the issue of the women who would be classified as *shengnü* in contemporary China, there were also a number of widows and divorcees who were left facing the decision of whether to remarry, remain loyal to their deceased husbands, or

[2] W.L. Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 216.

commit suicide. One of the most famous Chinese pre-modern texts is Ban Zhao's*, Admonitions for my Daughters,* a prescriptive text describing the proper ways in which women were meant to act in different areas of their lives. With regard to widow remarriage, this text cites that, "A woman's remarriage offends the gods and ghosts and will be punished by heaven; it is a crime against the rites and against duty, and your [new] husband is bound to despise you."[3] Though there were also many instances of widow remarriages and divorces that were not subject to criticism, the suggestions put in place by this text stigmatize these practices. Even throughout the 1920s, women lived by the slogan, "It is trivial to die of hunger, but it is serious to lose ones chastity" as a way of reminding themselves to remain true to deceased husbands and safeguard their purity above all else.[4] While not referring directly to the type of woman to whom the *shengnü* moniker is most commonly attributed today, this alludes to the cultural stigmas associated with breaks from the married norm. This is a crucial point, because it depicts just how strictly Chinese culture regarded marriage as an institution, and how this way of thinking set up the foundation for a society that ostracizes unmarried women.

Moreover, there are works of literature portraying the rejection of these unmarried women from society. One such example is Ye Xiaoluan's early 1600s lyric, "To the Tune of Yellow Oriole." It is prefaced by the line, "There was a girl who although quite old was still not married, so we all made fun of her and I wrote this song in jest."[5] Beginning the poem this way, the writer alleviates any ambiguity that may have otherwise existed in the lyric. That the author was quite young when she wrote this poem, and not yet married herself, only adds to the implications it has about the extent to which the ideas about marriage permeated through all

---

[3] Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 39.
[4] Chia-lin Pao Tao, "The Nude Parade of 1927: Nudity and Women's Liberation in China." in *Women and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Societies: Beyond Han Patriarchy*, ed. Shanshan Du and Ya-chen Chen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 171.
[5] Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 396.

different layers of society. In this instance, Ye Xiaoluan seems to fully understand that there was a certain age after which being unmarried became unacceptable, and therefore, a topic suitable for jest. This concept was so deeply ingrained in society that despite her age, Ye Xiaoluan was fully aware that the girl's situation strayed from what was considered normal. Furthermore, her inclusion of this line before the poem further exemplifies the extent to which an unmarried woman of marriage age was ostracized. The fact that a young girl in seventeenth century China felt comfortable enough to openly tease one of her neighbors points to the fact that there would be no repercussions for doing so. In a culture and a time period so inclined to heed Ban Zhao's precepts regarding docility and compliance, Ye Xiaoluan's literary temerity should have been received negatively, as a woman failing to act with propriety. Despite the fact that she came from a gentry family and the curriculum composed for her education likely did not align with Ban Zhao's admonitions, that none of her peers or her parents' contemporaries criticized her ill-intentioned words suggests that her actions were not as far removed from the model of womanly characteristics, as was the state of being single past marriage age. This is particularly important because on a small scale, it sets up a hierarchy of femininity that can be applied to the period. A woman who did not follow the prescriptions for how a woman should act would not be penalized if she did so at the expense of someone else who also failed to follow these prescriptions, but to a higher degree. That is to say, the young poet who openly mocked her older, unmarried neighbor was not criticized for this act of misbehavior, simply because the status of being unwed at marriage age was something that was acceptable to mock. Failing to marry after reaching the proper age puts a woman at the very bottom of the social pyramid; in this hierarchy, it is the worst thing a woman can do. This also has much to do with the fact that a woman's identity at this time was realized almost exclusively through her relationships with men. Women were

described as daughters of their fathers and wives of their husbands, rather than by individual names.[6] Moreover, that motherhood was considered to be the only way to validate female sexuality places an even greater emphasis on the importance of marriage, particularly with respect to the way a woman was identified in society. Altogether, this sets up a foundation of how unmarried women were received in traditional China, and begins to explain how the reception of *shengnü* became such a contested topic in modern times.

The ideals of femininity began to see changes in the early 1900s, towards the end of the Qing dynasty, due in part to increased contact between China and western civilizations. With the popularity of western philosophy and exposure to proto-feminist discourses, Chinese scholars began to write treatises condemning traditional marriage roles and the belief in male superiority in a movement that was intertwined with the revolution to overthrow the Qing government.[7] Women took part in the revolution in unprecedented ways; women's army divisions were formed and after the Qing was toppled in 1911, women began to form their own political organizations. Education also played a critical role in the changing perceptions of women's functions in society. The first schools for women were established in the mid 1800s, and coupled with the eradication of foot binding practices, there began to open up a place in society for a new type of intellectual woman to flourish. The types of education offered in these schools, however, differed from those provided to boys of the same age, with the understanding that young boys and girls had different natures and futures. Where boys were given a practical education for their eventual entry into the working world, girls' schools' curriculum was ridden with teachings of domesticity and feminine

---

[6] Elisabeth Croll, *The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 70.
[7] Jie Tao, Bijun Zheng, and Shirley L. Mow, *Holding Up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004), 56.

virtues.[8] This curricular disparity mirrors the education received by gentry children in the pre-modern era as well. Until the beginning of the New Culture Movement in 1915, a woman's educational status was used primarily as a means by which to make her a more appealing prospect for a potential husband.[9] Throughout the movement, though, critics such as Yi Jiayue and Luo Dunwei, the leaders of the Family Research Society, began to reconsider the institution of the family.[10] They suggested that the subordination of wives to their husbands was in direct opposition to China's progress. These critics believed that any advancement China could make must start from its most basic subdivision: the family. In terms of the family structure, the Family Research Society proposed reforms that would discourage the traditional family model in which many generations lived together to adapt to shifting socioeconomic trends.[11] This was also meant to take power away from the patriarch, the customary male head of the house whose domineering role they believed promoted both physical and ideological violence and impeded the potential for individual and societal progress. They argued that this position could be eliminated because new public institutions, such as educational and criminal justice systems removed the necessity of the patriarch to make and enforce the rules.[12] With regard to marriage, these critics sought to completely eliminate the institution of arranged marriages, designate minimum marriage ages and encourage couples to find a balance between emotional harmony and financial independence. On a similar note, they also suggested that traditional restrictions on interactions between the sexes, and even sexual practices should be loosened.[13] Many of the ideas outlined in the Family Research Society's manifesto are reflected in the Marriage Law of

---

[8] Bailey, Paul John. *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 51.
[9] Susan L Glosser, "'The Truths I Have Learned' Nationalism, Family Reform, and Male Identity in China's New Culture Movement, 1915-1923." in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley, University of California Press), 2002.
[10] Glosser, "The Truths I Have Learned", 123.
[11] Ibid.,126.
[12] Ibid.,123.
[13] Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth Century China*, 50.

1950. Finally, they suggested reforms that would enable women to develop their own individual self-identities through educational, political, and social freedoms, and for the first time, in 1920, women were permitted to attend classes at Beijing University.[14] Only when these different reforms were put into place, they argued, could Chinese society begin to experience progress.

In addition to the New Culture Movement's social reforms, the shifting importance of industry in China began to create an environment that emphasized a focus on societal progress that moved the importance that was previously placed on family units onto new work units. This was particularly true as groundbreaking numbers of women began to join the work force. In the 1920s, cotton factories began to hire women as a solution to the problem of overly aggressive male workers, and in the 1930s and 1940s, there were many women working in factories in many different industrial sectors. However, there were many stigmas surrounding these women due to the sexual violence they often encountered in the workplace.[15] At the same time, the new socioeconomic developments in China's urban centers allowed for a sharp increase in prostitution and the general commercialization of sex, which was perceived to be closely linked to notions of modernity.[16] This continued some of the New Culture Movement's discourses on freedom of sexuality and laid the foundation for the Post-Socialist reclamation of the more subtle commercial sexuality exemplified by the Beijing Transluxury Hotel.[17] Nonetheless, it was not until the mid-1940s that significant numbers of women joined the labor force through the Communist Party. This came about largely through wartime discourses that stated that women would be able to achieve liberation through production. In order to support the war effort, New Culture Movement rhetoric of "free choice marriage" was abandoned in favor of campaigning

---

[14] Ibid.
[15] Gail Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, Calif. [u.a.: Global, Area, and International Archive, University of California Press, 2007), 16.
[16] Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth Century China*, 81.
[17] For further explanation, see Chapter 2.

for health and prosperity.[18] These same patterns emerged throughout the civil war from 1946-1949, where women were often responsible for leading strikes and protests against the *Guomindang*, which ultimately contributed to the rise of the Communist Party, and large scale changes with respect to women's position in Chinese society.[19]

The result of these sharp increases of women workers was a decreased emphasis on families, and thereby decreased pressure on women to marry. While women were by no means completely alleviated of the expectation to marry by a specific age, the Marriage Law of 1950 and other government campaigns encouraged them to marry later.[20] Moreover, the constraints on women's positions outside the home were loosened during the 1960s and 1970s as women were pushed to find places in the public realm and men were told that the desire for a "virtuous wife and good mother" who would be content with a life of domesticity was selfish.[21] It is clear that the ideas of femininity were changing as women were given larger and more important roles in society. This laid the groundwork necessary for achieving the level of equality that marked much of the Mao era.

After liberation in 1949, with the official beginning of the Mao era, the definition of Chinese femininity became even more elusive. Policies enacted in this period allowed much more freedom for women in terms of work, marriage, and equality. The phrase, "Women hold up half the sky" became the slogan that inspired women to denounce traditional notions of femininity and embrace the new model of the strong woman worker. With the Cultural Revolution sprung up an even stronger version of this ideal: the desexualized, masculine woman.

---

[18] Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth Century China*, 98.
[19] Ibid., 99.
[20] Elisabeth Croll, *The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 71.
[21] Harriet Evans, "Changing Images of the Ideal Wife." In *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley, Calif. [u.a.: University of California Press, 2002), 340.

This is most accurately represented by the "iron woman" who was capable, independent, and for whom marriage was a formality used almost exclusively as a means by which to procreate and bring future communists into the world. After Mao's death, there was a widespread reclamation of femininity that took many different forms. While many women were enthusiastic about the elimination of mandatory androgyny, many were also reluctant to renounce their newfound senses of self. Thus, the *shengnü* is the incarnation of the reconciliation of traditional femininity with the desire to maintain the values of strength and independence that had come to define the progressive Chinese woman. She wants to indulge in the feminine aspects of the consumer culture brought about by post-Mao economic reforms[22] but also pay homage to the reemergence of the Confucian ideal of the obedient, gentle and virtuous wife. However, in many ways, this model of the ideal wife stands in opposition with the Mao-era strong woman, which puts these women in a difficult position with regard to which aspects they appropriate from each model. If they balance out these types of femininity in a way society (particularly the men in society) deems suitable, they are lauded for being able to balance family life with public life. However, for those who choose a career-centered lifestyle, with a higher emphasis on consumer-type femininity than Confucian, it is more difficult to find husbands as the unfortunate fact is that even in modern, urban China, many men are still uncomfortable with the idea of powerful, strong willed women. More specifically, Chinese men tend to choose spouses who are not as accomplished as they are.[23] This leaves behind a segment of the population consisting of extremely successful, well-educated women by whom men feel threatened. They thus cannot find spouses, and thereby become *shengnü.*

---

[22] For further discussion, see Chapter 2.

[23] Changhua Li, "Xinci "Shengnu" Yu Shehui Wenhua Xinli Tanshi [The New Word "Shengnu" Gives Insight into Society's Cultural Mentality]" (*Yuyan Xin Guancha*, May 2008), 120.

The first tangible marker of the shift the Mao era instituted on women's position in Chinese society was the Marriage Law of 1950. This law sought to eliminate any remaining feudal marriage practices, such as concubinage, bride price and child betrothal, in addition to allowing women the ability to determine the conditions of their own marriages.[24] Though many of these practices had already been phased out, the encouragement for women to dictate the nature of their marriages was a large step towards equality for women in China. Another part of the law asserted the rights for both men and women to file for divorce. This law was, in part, an attempt to remove some of the patriarchy from the institution of marriage in favor of the more modern approach, in which it represents a union of mutual understanding and equality, though not necessarily love.[25] This was of particular importance in rural areas, where women were eager to take advantage of the new sanctions regarding divorce against their abusive husbands, and also among higher up male party officials, who were able to divorce their spouses in favor of women who were younger and more urbane.[26] This pattern of men leaving their wives for younger women has remained relevant as seen through accounts of *shengnü* that will be further discussed in Chapter 2. Another important aspect of the marriage law was that it successfully increased the age at which women were married. This trend began during the New Culture Movement, and continued well into the 1990s.[27] Though initially instituted as part of the clause regarding the elimination of feudal marriage practices, the repercussions from this aspect of the law are evident in the definition of a *shengnü* and their increasing prevalence. Therefore, it seems that certain trends that were direct consequences of the Marriage Law of 1950 have continued into current times and sharply influenced the development of the *shengnü*.

---

[24] Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China*, 101.
[25] Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*,16.
[26] Ibid., 17.
[27] Ibid., 18.

Another aspect of the new equality between men and women stemmed from Mao's call for women, as well as men to reclaim their agency and redefine their fates. In his rejection of Confucian values, Mao encouraged the Communist Party to reduce the disparity between the sexes in favor of equal rights and sameness. One critical measure taken during the early 1950s was the condemnation of the practice whereby women were referred to as wives of their husbands and daughters of their fathers; for the first time, women were called by their names.[28] Furthermore, when greeting one another, rather than using gendered pleasantries people would use the sexless word, "comrade". This adds to the distinction between a movement towards equality and a movement towards androgyny. The institution of family moved from a private unit to one that was simply a part of the state, where procreation was seen exclusively as a way to benefit the state and spread the revolution. In the same fashion, these children were called, "revolutionary successors" or "sons and daughters of the revolution".[29] The nomenclature people used for one another was just the beginning of the androgyny that became prevalent throughout the Mao era.

In print depictions of model women during the Cultural Revolution, the postures and gestures were extremely different from the meek and repressed images that were previously the norm. Previously, women were covered and portrayed carrying out "feminine pursuits" such as embroidery, calligraphy or music.[30] In their places came strong women who stood up straight, appeared well built and posed with stoic postures. These images, extremely prevalent in propaganda of the period, portrayed images of the new model of the strong workingwoman. That this replaced the traditional images as the female ideal implies that during this period, the

---

[28] Elisabeth Croll, *The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981),70.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Croll, *The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China*, 71.

Chinese government sought to project the notion that women were completely disinterested in traditional portraits of femininity. The Communist Party wanted women to embrace the revolution and its drive to eliminate differences between the sexes. This elimination took the form of universal androgyny because they believed that a complete erasure of gender was a key to successfully perpetuating the revolution.[31] Though reactions to this differed on an individual basis, the vast majority of women obliged, because the satisfaction gained from displaying markers of feminine individuality was not nearly as high as that from supporting the revolution.

Arguably the most well known incarnation of the Mao-era androgyny came in the form of clothing. Though Chinese dress styles did not see the same divergence in men and women's styles that began to appear in Europe in the late sixteenth century, towards the end of the Qing dynasty, there began to emerge a distinction between the long robes worn by men and women. Especially with regard to formal attire, men began to adopt a style more aligned with the western perspectives of masculinity, albeit with a strong Chinese influence, while women's styles became more revealing of physical femininity.[32] However, during the Mao era, the styles began to converge again, this time towards a masculine norm. Skirts and waist-defining belts for women were phased out. This is recognized as part of the movements toward androgyny, though it is also due in part to practicality for manual labor. For the same reasons, women's hair was also cut short.[33] Instead of traditional or western forms of dress, there was a universal adoption of the revolutionary uniform: the boxy grey, blue, or green peasant worker jacket and trousers, devoid of any feminine markers. Also known as the Mao suit, it became the ubiquitous clothing choice, and one of the most distinctive symbols of the period. This marks a particularly poignant implication about the distinction between universal androgyny and universal masculinization.

---

[31] Croll, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, 73.
[32] Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth Century China*, 52.
[33] Valery M. Garrett, *Chinese Dress: From the Qing Dynasty to the Present* (Tokyo: Tuttle Pub., 2007), 222.

Though the trend was accepted as androgyny, the existence of the similar robes for men and women that were changed because they were considered too feminine suggests that masculine dress was not the only path towards removing gender differences. Rather than erasing all feminine styles of dress, there could have been a more multifaceted approach in which the masculine utility of the clothing was garnished with feminine details to promote balance and true androgyny. However, this did not occur. This presents an inherent contradiction in the supposed rejection of patriarchy and gender roles during the Mao era, and adds to the understanding as to why women in the post-Mao era would be so eager to reclaim their femininity through consumerism and other vehicles deemed bourgeois by the communist party during the Cultural Revolution.

The culmination of this adopted androgyny was embodied by the Iron Girls, or brigades of strong women who took on traditionally male roles in agriculture and production, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. The brigades of iron girls began to crop up in 1963, and they were often made up of girls who had been sent down to the countryside to learn from the peasants. These women were celebrated across various media platforms, and much of the art (and propaganda) depicting women during this period portrayed them as muscular, able bodied, dressed in military uniforms or otherwise gender-neutral attire and prepared for manual labor. As these Iron Girls were lauded for their ability and willingness to participate in difficult and sometimes dangerous labor pursuits, factory managers and other employers were eager to employ them[34]. Accounts from some of these Iron Girls as well as Red Guards state that they were so deeply involved in the movement, that they actually forgot that they were female.[35]

---

[34] Emily Honig, "Maoist Mappings of Gender: Reassessing the Red Guards." In *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 255.

[35] Ibid., 257.

However, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, the eradication of femininity took on a new meaning; in an era that sought to empower the proletariat, all forms of femininity were rejected as bourgeois. Girls were condemned for wearing dresses and maintaining their long hair, not because this interfered with the strides toward gender equality, but rather because these forms of femininity were considered to promote bourgeois values and were thus in direct opposition to the revolution. The bourgeois label attached to femininity transcended physicality, and applied to behaviors as well. This further complicates the notion of the universality of the androgyny. During the Cultural Revolution, femininity was eliminated in relation to its class implications, rather than the desire to further the push for equality among the sexes. It ties the concept of femininity directly to that of consumerism, a connection that appears again in the post-Mao reclamation of femininity, particularly among the first group of women born after the Mao-era who constitute the main demographic of *shengnü.*[36]

The result of all of these movements is the foundation for the modern woman in the post-Mao era. She struggles to reconcile the condemned femininity of her mother's generation with the freedoms and level of equality that this same generation was able to achieve. The reclamation of femininity among these women is twofold; it manifests in the consumer culture that was built once consumerism was no longer considered bourgeois, as well as the domestic expectations of these women once they began living as family units once again. The changes in Chinese society during this period created a norm towards the female strong woman, but after the end of the Cultural Revolution and the Mao-era, some traditional gender roles reemerged, particularly within the family structure. Wives and mothers are expected to fill a variety of positions: in addition to being well-educated career women, they must also tirelessly serve their hardworking husbands and care for their children. The emphasis on domesticity that was mostly overlooked

[36] This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

when people were living collectively and not as family units reappeared; where in the socialist era, women were encouraged to focus their energy into contributions toward the state, rather than the family, women are now expected to juggle the responsibilities of family life in addition to jobs and their positions in the public sphere. For the first time, it is frowned upon to sacrifice one of these ideals in favor of the other, and women who cannot, or are unwilling to manage the double responsibility are shunned by the men intimidated by their accomplishments.[37] Thus, the *shengnü* is born. She is a strong urban woman with a high level of education, a successful career and financial independence who is either unwilling or unable to sacrifice her time to find a husband and begin a family. She has surpassed the age society considers to be proper for marriage, which makes it more and more difficult to find a husband, particularly with the precedents established from the Marriage Law of 1950, in which powerful men are constantly looking for younger women to marry. Many women in China have become independent enough that they genuinely no longer need husbands to survive. However, the stigma against the unmarried woman remains, as it is deeply embedded in Chinese culture. Although the definition and associations of femininity in China are constantly in flux, this inability for women to reconcile their reclaimed femininity with their attained independence is what has caused the phenomenon of the *shengnü* to rapidly permeate urban Chinese society.

[37] Evans, *Changing Images of the Ideal Wife*, 340.

Chapter 2
Social Context: Post-Mao Femininity

In Mao-era China, there was a certain level of androgyny imposed upon the Chinese people, manifesting mainly as the masculinization of females, with particular regard to work and dress rather than a more universal blurring of the sexes. Concurrently, there was also a stark lack of consumer culture where superfluous goods were not available to be bought or sold, and luxury items, particularly markers of femininity such as make up, fancy clothes or jewelry became rare, and those who used them were ostracized as bourgeois. After Mao's death, in an attempt to reclaim their lost sense of femininity, the women who grew up in the decades prior began to change the ways they acted, and presented themselves. This created a new definition of femininity that was, to some degree, intertwined with consumerism. This chapter discusses the ways in which women in the post-Mao era began to reclaim their lost femininity and the difficulties these women had in trying to reconcile the desire to maintain the advances in equality and women's rights that had been paved out during the Mao era with the reemergence of a brand of femininity that, in many ways, adhered to traditional Confucian doctrine. It defines the term *shengnü* and explores the ways in which this attempt to balance these two polarized identities has contributed to the emergence of the *shengnü* in modern, urban Chinese environments. Finally, it uses these problems in juxtaposition with specific cases of single, cosmopolitan women to model some of the different types of *shengnü* that have become prevalent.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, femininity began to emerge once again in Chinese society. After Mao Zedong passed away and the policies prohibiting shows of feminine physical attributes were eradicated, women began to redefine their femininity through fashion.[38]

---

[38] Sally E. McWilliams, "”People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy”: Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1&2 (Summer 2013): 165, doi:10.1353/wsq.2013.0051.

It began with reforms in the late 1970s that were meant to raise living standards and improve China's economic growth, in addition to the new "Open Door" policy allowing for foreign investments and joint ventures into capitalist enterprises.[39] The reintroduction of consumer culture into a society from which it was completely devoid allowed for the reclamation of femininity through indulgence in this consumerism, specifically, in the form of fashion. Here, fashion is described as the clothing, make up and accessories women wear for self-expression based on personal preference, rather than utility. This contributed to a new definition of femininity that was closely entangled with consumerism. The reintroduction of women's magazines in the 1980s also brought forth tips on how to embrace femininity through make up application, exercise instruction and fashion advice.[40] These publications were focused toward a generation of young women who were brought up without access to any opulence. The girls of this generation were taught that these luxury items, and any attempts to make oneself look different were bourgeois and should be eliminated. Anyone who took part in these vain activities was labeled a capitalist, or a bad element.[41] However, since these young women were raised without any working knowledge or exposure to these material aspects of femininity, when it became acceptable to embrace them once again, they did not know how. This created a strong divide among these women who were trying to find their own individual senses of self while juggling the reemergence of consumer culture with the proletarian principles that defined the era in which they grew up.

The attempts to reconcile the strides towards equality between men and women achieved during the Mao era with this new consumer-driven picture of femininity manifested in a wide

---

[39] Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth Century China,* 128.
[40] Wu Hui, *Once Iron Girls: Essays on Gender by Post-Mao Chinese Literary Women* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 101.
[41] McWilliams, *People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy,* 165.

variety of ways in the generation born just after the socialist era. Some of these women reverted, in part, to the traditional roles held by their mothers and grandmothers in the days before communism. Most notably, this included a revival of femininity as prescribed by the Confucian doctrines, and the pressure to be "pretty, soft-spoken, submissive and exquisite".[42] Though these doctrines were by no means regarded as strictly as they were during feudal times, there was a noticeable resurgence of the model of the obedient wife, as well as an attack on the female strong woman for not being feminine enough.[43] Rather, the idea that if a woman wants to have a successful career, she must balance it with a family became prevalent. However, the inability or refusal to do so was not uncommon, and the result is what has come to be known as the *shengnü*. There was another camp of communist era women who chose to reclaim their femininity by embracing the sexualized consumer culture to which they were beginning to be exposed through China's new relationships with western civilizations and cultures. Though these seem to be the two extremes, a whole spectrum exists in between, with women struggling to adjust to the new norms and roles in society that the end of the Mao era brought forth. Even in today's generation of young women, the divide between these schools of thought is still apparent.

The role fashion, made available through China's economic reforms and open door policy, has come to play in society becomes evident through examining the roles of the *qipao* and the wedding dress in contemporary Chinese culture. The white wedding dress, as an institution, is an example of how the idea of urban femininity has become interconnected with international consumer culture. The western-style wedding dress came to China through the channels of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan in the 1980s[44] and was very popular by the early 1990s. For many Chinese women of this era, the wedding dress represented the notion of

---

[42] Hui, *Once Iron Girls,* 102.
[43] Hui, *Once Iron Girls,* 101.
[44] McWilliams, *People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy,* 172.

marriage as an institution of love, rather than one of necessity and propriety, reflecting society's changing views on marriage. This change is marked by a refusal of many women to accept an arranged marriage, or allow their families to pressure them into entering a union they do not deem suitable. In addition, many also reject the traditional Chinese wedding attire and instead indulge in a western-influenced dress likely to have been purchased from an international marketplace. More observable, however, is the stark contrast between contemporary wedding images and those of the Cultural Revolution. While the postures practiced, photographed and depicted in propaganda posters during the Cultural Revolution were strong and masculine, those of modern brides depict feminine and even vulnerable poses. This is evident on the cover of a October 2013 edition of CosmoBride, a Chinese bridal magazine.[45] Gone are the strong gestures, Mao suits and little red books of the 1970s. In their place, as depicted on this magazine cover, are elegant, but closed off postures. The bride covers herself with her arms and bends at the waist and knees, all of which suggest modesty and meekness. Her wide-open eyes and slightly parted lips convey a sense of innocence. It contrasts quite sharply with the inherent nature of the photo shoot and modeling industry, which are marked by modernity, consumerism and not uncommonly, pride. These brides attack the outdated 1970s wedding customs with vigor, and strive to restore femininity to this institution from which it was obliterated during the Mao era. In so doing, they demonstrate a paradox in the attempt to balance femininity and modernity; no matter how elegant and graceful a bride may look in her modern white wedding dress, the femininity of the image is detracted from by the aggressive consumer culture necessary for the image to exist.

[45] "Charming Ni Ni Graces COSMO Bride Magazine." (Xinhua News. October 20, 2013): Cover, Accessed March 25, 2014. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/celebrity/2013-10/20/content_17046230_2.htm.

The *qipao* represents the way a traditional Chinese dress was updated and used to represent a new type of femininity in a modern, consumer-centric China. The *qipao* is a Manchu-inspired garment that came into popularity in its modern form in the mid 1920s. It was symbol of the "modern woman"[46] that was later sexualized in art and advertising, as it was the first garment of its kind to show off the female figure. The result is that the *qipao*-clad figure has become the typified symbol of the Chinese woman, especially as interpreted by westerners. In the 1980s, when women were once again permitted to embrace fashion trends, the *qipao* did not return to its place as the quintessential marker of style and femininity among Chinese women, but rather was relegated, for the most part to the hospitality industry.[47] While it may be worn by other women on formal occasions, or make a temporary return through a re-imagined form designed by a popular name in fashion, this industry is the only place where the *qipao* remains a constant wardrobe staple. This creates a strong tie between femininity and subservience through the vehicle of the *qipao*, as this symbol of the Chinese woman is quite literally used by primarily by those whose job it is to cater to (mostly male) customers' needs.

As such, the *qipao* has become a symbol of the imagined China, a China in which women are submissive and accommodate men's needs in accordance with the stereotypical picture of Chinese femininity created both by the expectations of these men and the duties inherent in providing service in the hospitality industry. One isolated case in which this is shown to be particularly true is the Beijing Transluxury Hotel, a glamorous establishment catering mainly to a wealthy western clientele. The screening process in selecting female workers suitable for employment at the hotel is rigorous and superficial. Women who do not meet the hotel's appearance requirements for height, age or positive promotion of sexual availability are

[46] McWilliams, *People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy*, 169.
[47] Ibid.

immediately dismissed.[48] Once past the selection process, these women are trained to serve the customers with an air of refinement and an acute awareness of detail. This includes memorizing where the guests prefer to keep their toothbrushes, which fruit they choose from the baskets provided, and which brand of bottled water they select, in order to tailor the visitors' stay to their preferences without having them realize this was being done.[49] Furthermore, these workers are forced to let go of all senses of individual aesthetic taste, instead focusing solely on the clients' predilections and are criticized harshly for defending themselves if they make mistakes. This strict behavior model for workers in the hospitality industry reinforces the idea that women in modern China are forced to conform to the pinnacle image of femininity as determined by the men they serve. It transcends the notion that "the customer is always right" and confirms the guests' preconceived expectations that Chinese women are both docile and servile. The confirmation of these stereotypes through the hospitality industry is problematic, and in many ways negates the progress China has made towards equality, particularly in a global context. Using the traditional, albeit stereotypical image of the Chinese woman, in conjunction with the requirement that they must behave with subservience and obedience, sends the message to the foreign guests that the modern Chinese woman is no different from their preconceived notions of the traditional Chinese woman. This is another example of how consumerism, femininity and modernity are forced to coexist in a way that does not let all three aspects shine through equally, particularly when Chinese women are expected to conform to the male and western perspectives of womanliness in appearance and conduct.

Changing perspectives of femininity were not limited exclusively to physicality, and in contrast to the aforementioned docility, the late 1970s and early 1980s brought about

---

[48] Eileen M. Otis, *Markets and Bodies: Women, Service Work, and the Making of Inequality in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 79.
[49] Ibid., 80.

unprecedented opportunities for women in terms of education and career availability. The foundations of women's education changed fundamentally, beginning with accessibility of schools and educational materials. Female literacy increased immensely across China, from a national rate of 10% in 1940 to 77.4% in 2000.[50] As government agencies cited a strongly positive correlation between women's education and income, in order to expand women's access to higher education, they altered the system to include various non-traditional types of adult education programs. This includes the addition of night and seasonal schools, as well as distance learning methods for women whose education would otherwise be limited by family obligations, providing opportunities for uneducated mothers to benefit from social mobility.[51] In 2000, the enrollment in one such type of school was 50.24% female, and the overall average of female students in adult higher education institutions increased from 17.8% in 1947 to 41% in 2000.[52] While there is evidently still a lack of gender equality in these institutions, the situation has certainly improved a great deal. Furthermore, where in the past, incomes did not vary a great deal based on occupation, with the post-Mao economic reforms came the opportunity for real personal wealth in the form of high-salary careers. This placed an even stronger emphasis on education, because for the first time, one's level of academic success was directly correlated to monetary prosperity. The majority of the areas in which participation in these schools is most prevalent are urban and economically developed, implying that when the correlation between economic prosperity and education is so strong, women are unwilling to forgo the opportunity to achieve success. While this seems like an obvious conclusion, it is only upon reference back to the models of Confucian femininity in China that the striking nature of this movement becomes

[50] Jane Liu, and Marilyn Carpenter. "Trends and Issues of Women's Education in China," *The Clearing House* 78, no. 6 (July/August 2005): 279.
[51] Croll, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women,* 135.
[52] Tao, Zheng and Mow, *Holding Up Half the Sky,* 113.

apparent. Despite the fact that an education may make a woman less feminine, and thereby less appealing by Confucian standards, these women would rather be able to compete in the developed job markets than submit to the whims of their potential future husbands. Though this is undoubtedly not true for all of China, it marks a shift in thought among urban women in their approach to marriage and independence.

Women began to find independence in the rural market economies in the mid 1980s, when they were trained in animal and plant sciences, and thus given the opportunity to make a self-supporting living and gain a sense of personal agency.[53] For many urban women, the job market was turbulent in the 1990s; unprofitable state-run institutions laid off numerous workers, but later improved again with the increasing popularity of non-state enterprises and companies. The prospects for college-educated women were even greater; many were able to reach managerial level positions in internationally owned or joint venture companies.[54]

As a direct result of the rapid growth after the socialist era, in the early 1990s, a middle class had emerged for the first time in China. It described a relatively large part of the population, as many women who had never held jobs previously were working and making independent salaries. As a result, the demand for service in the form of childcare workers and other modes of domestic assistance increased tremendously. With this trend, these workers' salaries improved as well. Many of these female household workers, as well as factory workers and other laborers were migrants from rural areas to urban cities. This exemplifies how the post-Mao era opened opportunities for women of various social strata to seek employment and social mobility not previously available to them. Many of the professions these migrant women take are considered to reside within the feminine realm; these positions are reasonably traditional in

[53] Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth Century China,* 140.
[54] Ibid., 142.

nature and do not typically venture into the world of men's work. This creates a complex reality regarding the divide between urban and rural modernity. While the reforms and open door policy brought about unprecedented job opportunities for urban women in previously male dominated sectors, rural women then filled the voids the urban women left in their homes. Where many urban women were filling positions into which women had never ventured prior, rural women remained in the realm of domesticity. These are all examples of opportunities that women did not have before the end of the Mao-era, but the tension they brought about between urban and rural working women with regard to the types of femininity inherent in the different industries in which they worked is telling of the difficulty of reconciling femininity, professionalism and domesticity.

China's booming economy has increased opportunities for women across the board, including, but not exclusive to improved educational and career prospects. Implicitly, however, this creates an inner dilemma among the women who have chosen to embrace femininity, as financial independence and high levels of education are not seen as traditionally feminine according to Confucian doctrine. As successful as these women are on their own accord, because their independence is regarded as non-feminine, they are sometimes seen as undesirable by the men in whom they would potentially be interested romantically. This can be viewed through the correlation between the increasing divorce rate and women's improving position in society.[55] This is problematic because it creates tension between the definitions of femininity coined by women and the revived Confucian expectations of femininity held by men after the end of the Mao era. Even with regard to physical beauty, the modern Chinese woman generally seems concerned with how she appears to others primarily, and to herself as a secondary afterthought. All of this drawn together implies that in order for a woman to find a suitable life partner, she

[55] Evans, "Changing Images of the Ideal Wife." 352.

must conform to some of the reestablished norms of traditional femininity. From 1980s and 1990s popular discourses of obedient wives and gentle women, it is implied that a woman can either choose to withdraw from the professional sphere entirely, or find a balance where she weights domestic and professional responsibilities on equal footing.[56] Those who choose to stay solely on a professional track are often looked down upon by many of these traditionally minded men who feel threatened by their success, and as a result are forced to remain unmarried. Thus, the term *shengnü* was born.

When attempts were made to translate it into English, many problems arose. This section seeks to explore the multifaceted nature, and many nuances of *shengnü*. Literally, *shengnü* translates to "leftover woman" in English, but this is an ambiguous translation that does not begin to cover the subtle complexities included in its Chinese associations. A synonym that has evolved coincidently is "3-S woman", which stands for "single, seventies and stuck".[57] Here, seventies signifies that these women were born after the socialist era, and therefore, the 1970s. These two terms, used interchangeably, describe a Chinese woman who has passed marriage age, and has yet to marry. Upon first glance, it seems to carry negative connotations in both languages. Accordingly, many people view *shengnü* as old, single women, and for this reason, it is often translated as "spinster." This term almost surpasses the harshness associated with *shengnü*. "Spinster" suggests not only that these women are single, but also that they are wholly unable to form significant, lasting bonds with other people. However, in contemporary Chinese society, there are actually some flattering associations with the word *shengnü*, as the women it is used to describe are often well educated and professionally successful, and these aspects have become ingrained in *shengnü*'s connotation as well. This is not to say that it is not still used

[56] Evans, "Changing Images of the Ideal Wife." 340.
[57] Li, "Xinci 'Shengnü' Yu Shehui Wenhua Xinli Tanshi [The New Word "Shengnu" Gives Insight into Society's Cultural Mentality], 120.

widely to be disparaging; indeed, society's negative mentality regarding these women is a large part of the definition of this word, and it carries hostile, old-fashioned subtleties.[58] In pre-modern China, when the custom of arranged marriage was in place, if a woman was unmarried, it meant that there was something so significantly wrong with her that her parents could not have her married off, even as a concubine. The negative reactions toward *shengnü* are ridden with associations left over from those days. This is further evidenced by the fact that this term has yet to be "reclaimed" by the group it describes. In China, as well as many other places in the world, it is not uncommon for terms deemed derogatory to be taken back by the people they marginalize in an effort to empower themselves. That it has not yet happened with *shengnü* implies two possibilities: the term is either too recently added to the vernacular to have gone through the cycles typical for words of this nature, or the women it describes are too sensitive and self-conscious about their condition to be able to embrace its positive aspects and use it to empower themselves as strong, independent women. Nonetheless, due to the close associations of the *shengnü* with success and stability, it would be an oversimplification to dismiss this term as entirely derogatory.

Besides its fame as a product of the Internet era, the fact of the matter is that urban Chinese women are getting married later in life. It would seem that this trend would have emerged because these women are somehow less desirable than their predecessors, but the fact is that many of these cosmopolitan career women are choosing to adopt these lifestyles over a more traditional family setting. Many of the women born in the 1970s, towards the end of the Mao Zedong era have had unprecedented access to educational resources, which has allowed them to build their own solid, financial foundations, and construct independent lives. This is particularly true in urban environments. It is also a stark contrast to the collectivism associated with the years

[58] Wang, "Tan 'Shengnü' Yici De Fanyi [Discussing the Meaning of Shengnu]", 147.

before these women were born, and to some degree, their independence can be seen as a rebellion against the communist values imposed upon the previous generation. Because their parents were pulled out of school and sent to the countryside to perform manual labor alongside the rural peasants, these same parents wanted to give their children access to the highest, most distinguished educational opportunities available. These children, specifically the daughters, are able to reap the benefits created by China's Reform and Opening Up, and the general strengthening of China's international position.[59] The result is a generation of often attractive women with advanced degrees, successful careers, the ability to think for themselves, but no spouses. There is a strong divide within this population, as well, between willing and reluctant *shengnü*, though there are no distinctions made in the rhetoric to distinguish between these two categories. This creates a highly stigmatized term that almost exclusively implies the unwillingness of the *shengnü* to accept her single condition, though this is not always the case.

There is a layer of traditional patriarchy deeply ingrained in Chinese society that is responsible for the projection of unwillingness among *shengnü*. China has a long tradition of "*da nanzi zhuyi,"* or male chauvinism, preventing the most professionally successful and financially independent of these women from finding husbands. Chinese sociologists and marriage experts suggest that one of the reasons *shengnü* may have emerged was as a subconscious homage men paid to women's traditional low position.[60] As a nod to this tradition sewn so deeply into Chinese ideology, once men became able to choose their own wives (in contrast with the prior custom of arranged marriages) they tended to choose women they could subordinate to themselves, who would be dutiful and filial. To these men, the fact that these women were lower in status and would indulge their husbands made them inherently more feminine than their better-educated,

---

[59] Li, "Xinci "Shengnü" Yu Shehui Wenhua Xinli Tanshi" [The New Word "Shengnü" Gives Insight into Society's Cultural Mentality], 120.
[60] Ibid.

independent counterparts. This creates a problem for this newly emerging class of highly educated and independent women; though they seek men of equal footing, many of the men with similar high qualifications prefer traditionally feminine women who will be submissive to their power and respect them in the way they think they deserve. As a result, these intelligent, professional women are ostracized from the dating circuit, and left to become *shengnü*.

Alongside *shengnü* developed its male counterpart: the *shengnan*. While the *shengnan* is also defined as an individual above marriage age who has yet to marry, that is where the similarities between the terms end. The age after which a single man qualifies as a *shengnan* is higher than that for one to be called a *shengnü*, which implies that Chinese society is more willing to accept a man as unmarried, and thereby grants him a longer period of time to look for a wife before being forced to succumb to this unappealing label. A *shengnan* is an unmarried man between the ages of thirty and forty-five and many of the nuances surrounding the term are completely different from that of a *shengnü*. They are typically physically attractive, pay close attention to hygiene, and they have stable enough finances to live comfortably.[61] Beyond that, there are no particular demographic markers to distinguish one as a *shengnan*. With regard to the males, they are allowed the element of choice that is removed as a possibility from *shengnü*; whereas it is widely accepted that *shengnü* are as such because they are unable to find suitable partners, it can be said that men are generally *shengnan* by choice. By definition, they do not want to settle down with one woman, so they accept lifestyles that do not include wives. This creates the opposite problem of the *shengnü*; as *shengnan* does not account for the "spinster" males, it implies that all older single men are willingly alone. Furthermore, there is another term, *zuanshi wang lao wu*, or "diamond bachelor" which is a step above *shengnan* in terms of status,

[61] Li, "Xinci "Shengnü" Yu Shehui Wenhua Xinli Tanshi [The New Word "Shengnü" Gives Insight into Society's Cultural Mentality], 120.

but for which there is no female equivalent. The result is a contemporary culture in which a single man appears to have a far more active role in his own fate than a single woman, further marginalizing these women in a society traditionally structured upon a foundation of patriarchy.

Rare, but certainly not insignificant in number is the antithesis to the above: the elusive willing *shengnü*. There are many reasons why a woman in modern China would choose to live this type of lifestyle, but through Wu Shuping's interviews with single women in urban environments across the country, certain patterns repeat. There are trends of married men deceiving innocent girls, as well as women who date many men before becoming frustrated and giving up. Typically, the former of these types of women will exemplify characteristics deemed feminine, by traditional Chinese standards. This includes obedient, soft, and meek personalities in addition to extremely modest sexual attitudes. The latter are better suited to a more western take on femininity, including extroversion, strong willed natures and openness to exploring sexuality.

More often than one would expect, a woman will begin to date a man and they will build a comfortable routine together before she realizes that he is already married. Given China's traditional history of concubinage and multiple marriages for men of high status, it should not be particularly surprising to see that modern men in high power situations might be inclined to take mistresses. Satisfied with the life the men can provide, these women choose to continue on as their mistresses, spending the men's money and bearing their children without the benefits of being a legal spouse. Other *shengnü* find themselves taken advantage of when they are young, and become bitter about marriage as a result. These women are often in their early twenties, with clerical jobs and powerful, intriguing employers, to whom they are drawn romantically. One such woman, Liu Yue, a 28 year old administrative office head from Beijing with a bachelor's

degree, fell in love with her boss, moved in with him after dating only a short period, became pregnant and then discovered that he was married. He told her that, "After a few years of married life, your wife becomes more like a relative: only your live-in girlfriend is your love".[62] Unwilling to accept this at face value and be viewed as naïve by her peers, she left her boyfriend and aborted their child. Not dissimilar is the story of Chen Qing, a twenty-five year old administrative clerk who also holds a bachelor's degree, and also began a relationship with her boss, only to find out that he was married as well. He divorced his wife, but his mother strongly opposed a marriage to Chen Qing, and though they had fought so vehemently to be together, they were eventually forced to separate. She realized she was pregnant and ultimately decided to keep the child and accept her fate as a single mother. After this, she was simply too exhausted and disinterested to try to begin another relationship, as she knew no man would ever be able to accept her child as his own. This type of *shengnü* is not uncommon in urban China. She can be a well-educated dating veteran who has endured multiple failed relationships, or a young girl who trusted the wrong man. These women fear marriage and choose to remain single for its safety and simplicity; they can care for themselves and they do not want to be hurt again.

Others are less willing to be single. They are often in their late twenties or early thirties, but seem naïve and childish in both appearance and behavior. They have an overarching fear of sex, if not intimacy altogether. They also have many similarities in the way their relationships pan out. They meet and date slightly older men, often divorcees, with more relationship and sexual experience than these women have. They break up because of the women's reluctance to commit physically to these men, or alternatively because these men are reluctant to rob these women of their innocence. The unique pattern that seems to mark many of these relationships is the disinclination of the women to speak their minds and express their objections to the

[62] Shuping Wu, *Single in the City: A Survey of China's Single Women* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2012), 13.

termination of these relationships. Xu Zijuan, a twenty-nine year old woman from Shenzhen with a bachelor's degree and a history of computer training, blames her traditional upbringing and perfectionist nature for her failure to defend herself when discarded by the man she was seeing. She believed it was, "Not too sensible [for him] to be too sensible about the emotions,"[63] but the modesty she was taught her whole life to embody prevented her from expressing these sentiments. These *shengnü* are unmarried because they are too reserved and traditional to make themselves emotionally available, and were raised to be better suited to an environment in which they could act more passively in the search for a spouse. Some men may end their relationships because these women are too sexually conservative for the changing values and expanding sexual freedom that is beginning to be exhibited in urban environments. While this repression might be interpreted as an embodiment of the partial reversion to traditional Confucian attributes on part of these women, ironically, the result is the same as the women who channel all of their energy into their careers, but for converse reasons.

Some cases do not seem to be particularly extreme in nature. Ma Xiaofei is a thirty-six year old college graduate who runs her own company in Shenzhen, and has had several serious but unsuccessful relationships. She was not jaded or bitter when these relationships ended, but because of her age and society's emphasis on marriage, her words are tinged with these emotions. While she admits that she is not single by choice, she states that many who claim to be willingly single are secretly lonely, and wish to find someone as well. Here, she brings into question the validity of the stance many of these women have taken: that they are satisfied remaining single. Whether or not these sentiments of contentment are true differs based on individuals' circumstances, but it also raises a point with which many of these single women admit they agree. One of the critical aspects inherent in the definition of a *shengnü* that puts so

---

[63] Wu, *Single in the City,* 73.

much pressure on these women is age, but it is critical to remember that many *shengnü* are only twenty-seven, which is still quite young. Though at the time they were interviewed many of these women claim that they are no longer interested in marriage, many acknowledge that they recognize that they are still young and their opinions are likely to change over time. Their environments have deemed them "leftover" by some arbitrary measure of propriety with respect to one's lifespan, so it is significant that they recognize the potential for change within themselves, regardless of society's prescriptions. The result is a less strict model of the *shengnü* that allows the states of reluctance and willingness to be fluid, not only on an individual basis, but also among these individuals at different moments in time.

The transition from the Cultural Revolution into the Reform Era was a turbulent time that brought about many societal changes. While it is clear that women's positions have improved in the last four decades, there are apparent difficulties in trying to reconcile women's status with the re-adoption of many traditional Confucian models of femininity. The consumer culture that emerged during this time has allowed women to redefine femininity in a way that is tailored to their desires, but this does not always match up with the opinions of their male counterparts. The result is a generation of well-educated independent *shengnü*, and until the men in their dating pool are willing to accept these women for their accomplishments and contributions to society, these *shengnü* will remain a staple of urban contemporary China.

Chapter 3
The Shengnü in Reality Television: *Fei Cheng Wu Rao*

As the phenomenon of *shengnü* becomes more widely understood in China, it has received a correspondingly widespread amount of media attention. One such manifestation is exemplified through the popular reality dating show, *Fei Cheng Wu Rao.* This chapter will analyze a 2011 episode of the show. It explores interactions between the twenty-four female contestants and four male contestants in this episode to examine the mindsets of the sample set of *shengnü* that makes up this panel, and elaborate upon the differences between *shengnü* and *shengnan.* Finally, it begins to uncover the extent to which the moniker "*shengnü*" is a problematic term to describe these women, as it does not afford them an accurate representation of their agency in the dating sphere, but rather groups them together as one passive, desperate entity.

Fei Cheng Wu Rao, or "If You Are the One" is a Chinese dating reality show that premiered on January 15, 2010 and is based out of Nanjing. Its first few months were marked by unprecedented success, with over fifty million viewers in the show's inaugural season, as it pushed the boundaries of what was typically represented on Chinese television. The original goals of the show were twofold: producers wanted to exhibit the social interactions of the increasingly common *shengnan* and *shengnü*, as well as provide insight into the lives of the "second rich generation,"[64] the children of those who had benefited from China's introduction to the global market in the 1980s. The show is also targeted as a way to combat the loneliness and isolation of China's middle class, who emerged relatively recently through China's rapid

---

[64] Edward Wong, "China TV Grows Racy, and Gets a Chaperon," *The New York Times*, January 1, 2012. Accessed March 1, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/world/asia/censors-pull-reins-as-china-tv-chasing-profit-gets-racy.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0A1

development.[65] This program is unique as it focuses not only on the "leftover woman" but also provides insight into the mind of her male counterpart.

Within the context of the show, the definition of *shengnü* is expanded beyond that established in the previous chapter. Rather than being limited to the educated, successful women born after the 1970s, *shengnü* in the context of *Fei Cheng Wu Rao* is used to label all of the female contestants as single women, regardless of age, income or educational status. As it is well known that the object of the show is to find matches for *shengnan* and *shengnü,* even though some of the contestants do not meet the generally accepted conditions of the *shengnü*, their appearances on the show act as statements that they are self-proclaimed *shengnü*. Their willing acceptance of the *shengnü* title suggests several different characteristics of the women who appear on the show. First, they may feel that they have been unlucky in the dating arena previously. Though they are still within the age range where being a single woman is considered acceptable, they are afraid that if they do not begin a relationship imminently, they may become *shengnü*. In this case, their appearances on the show can be seen as a preventative measure against their future potential *shengnü* status. Additionally, in a more subtle way, their appearances as younger women also suggest that they might be taking advantage of the positive connotations associated with the *shengnü* status to make themselves more appealing to their male suitors. These younger women may not have as much education or success as the older contestants simply due to the limitations imposed by their ages, but appearing on a show that is so deeply associated with the mainstream definition of *shengnü* inherently associates them with these attributes. The male contestants do not necessarily know the female contestants' specific educational or financial details, so a younger contestant may reap the benefit of having the men

[65] Jing Wu, "Post-Socialist Articulation of Gender Positions: Contested Public Sphere of Reality Dating Shows." ed. Youna Kim. In *Women and the Media in Asia: The Precarious Self*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 233.

assume that she is particularly educated and successful in addition to being young and beautiful. The contestants each go through a stringent application and interview process before they are selected for the show, so that the producers can be sure to handpick a group of intelligent, successful, attractive and diverse women who can provide stimulating conversation and high ratings. Therefore, in their dating lives outside of the context of *Fei Cheng Wu Rao*, these women can also use their appearance on the show as a marker of these positive qualities.

The structure of the show is fairly simple. There are twenty-four female contestants per episode, many of whom are carried over from previous episodes until they make a match. A male contestant comes out on stage, and the women immediately turn their lights on if they are initially interested in him, and leave them off if they are not. He chooses a woman as his favorite, and even if she turns off her light at some point during the segment, if he makes it to the final round, he can still include her on the panel of his top three most desired suitors. The women are allowed to ask the man questions, though these sessions are mediated by the show's main host, Meng Fei, and they are also shown prerecorded videos in which he describes his hobbies, dating history and criteria for what he considers to be a "perfect match". According to his answers, the women can then choose to leave their lights on, or turn them off. In the end, if the male contestant has not been rejected by all of the women, he can choose three (two of whom must still have their lights on, in addition to the contestant he originally chose) and ask them questions from a predetermined list to learn more about them. He then narrows his selection down to one, and she can decide whether the match is reciprocal.

There is a notable imbalance regarding the information the male contestants have about the women and vice versa. The women know nothing about the male contestants before they walk out on stage at the beginning of the episode, and judge the men solely from what they see

and hear during the round. On the other hand, many of the women have spent multiple episodes on the panel, engaging and bantering with other male contestants. The men know what these women look like, as well as how they feel about certain issues before they ever meet, face to face. In addition, every time one of these women chooses to speak, a box pops up with her name, age, and profession. However, if there are women who have not been particularly vocal in previous episodes, the male contestants will not know much about them, though this might also make them stand out as demonstrating traditional feminine ideals in their less vicious approach to appearing on the show.[66] As the male contestants play three videos, the women are given the opportunity to learn a good deal of information about the male contestants at once, while the men only receive as much information as they can glean from the women's responses and questions. This creates a dynamic in which the female contestants control the floor and speak assertively towards the men, competing for those they deem worthy, and sometimes banding together against those they do not.

The exchanges between the contestants are meant to be candid and uninhibited; the show's producers encourage them to speak in this manner to accurately portray current issues and showcase differing opinions from different demographics. However, censors have limited the extent to which they are actually free to speak frankly, after some incidents that occurred in the show's first season. Early episodes of the show proved to be more scandalous than the television syndicate was prepared for; many of the female contestants unabashedly portrayed their desire for wealth, while the eager male contestants came prepared with bank statements and evidence of prestigious family backgrounds.[67] As a result, the censors gave the producers an ultimatum: reform the show, or it would be cancelled. Unwilling to let go of "If You Are the

---

[66] Wu, "Post Socialist Articulation of Gender Positions," 233.
[67] Jing Li, "Playing by the Rules in the Game of Love," *China Daily* (Beijing), July 02, 2011, Accessed March 1, 2014. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-07/02/content_10049150.htm.1.

One," the producers quickly made some changes, including the addition of older contestants and imposition of restrictions on what the contestants are permitted to say. This ensured that there would be no more statements, such as "I'd rather cry in a BMW than laugh on the backseat of a bicycle,"[68] the most commonly referenced remark when referring to the show's initial infamy. These rules also seek to weed out any contestants that are looking to project controversial opinions in television in hopes of receiving media attention, rather than appearing on the show because they are genuinely looking for love.[69] These changes, implemented beginning with the June 26, 2010 episode, allowed the show to stay on television, and though ratings dropped, the show remained quite popular.[70] Despite the changes, the show remains under scrutiny as the state continually revises its rules regarding censorship.

An episode from December 4, 2011 provides a standard example of what a post-reform episode of *Fei Cheng Wu Rao* entails. This time period is far enough removed from the beginning of the series that it has had time to adapt to the changes that have been made to its structure, and it has found a balance between witty banter and appropriateness that has been approved by the state. This episode is divided in to several sections, one for each male contestant. As the phenomenon of *shengnü* and *shengnan* had become common at the time this episode was filmed, the interactions among the contestants in this episode reveal much about society's perception of this phenomenon.

The first is a man named Song Zhifeng, a 36 year old originally from Kunming who currently works in Shanghai. When he first walks on to the stage, all twenty-four women turn their lights on, to indicate that they are interested in him, from first glance. He is of average

---

[68] Justin Bergman, "China's TV Dating Shows: For Love or Money?" *Time*, June 30, 2010. Accessed March 24, 2014. http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2000558,00.html.1.
[69] Wu, "Post-Socialist Articulations of Gender Positions," 227.
[70] Wong, "China TV Grows Racy, and Gets a Chaperon," A1.

height, and average build, and he carries a large black bag, the contents of which he initially leaves a mystery. He banters briefly with the host, who asks him about the bag, which he reveals to contain some gifts and a pocketknife. Song then goes on to introduce himself, citing his work history and his many qualifications that he has received through the years. He cites his desire to "be a pioneer" as his reason for holding so many certificates and switching jobs so frequently, but the women seem skeptical. Contestant Eleven asks, "With all of your qualifications, where does your marriage certificate fall?". She poses this question jokingly, but it immediately provides insight into the nature of the women who appear on this program. They are witty and quick thinking, but they are also eager to find marriage, so they do not hesitate trying to find out about these men's true intentions. He responds with a fairly neutral answer, stating that he believes that a marriage certificate is a mark of a good relationship between partners, as well as an important legal statement. This seemingly innocuous response is practical and straightforward, but lacks any strong emotion that would be expected of someone participating in a game show of this nature. Part of this could be attributed to his attempt to appear more masculine by painting a collected, impassionate portrait of himself, but it seems to have had a negative effect on two of the women, who promptly turned off their lights after hearing his remarks. This, too, is an important indicator of the types of people who choose to appear on this show. With all of the stigmas and pressure surrounding *shengnü*, it would not be surprising if they chose to settle for a less desirable man. The fact that these two women rejected him on the basis of an answer that was relatively neutral, but with which they did not necessarily agree projects that they still hold with their criteria for an ideal man, regardless of what society expects them to do.

To learn more about Song's character, while keeping in line with the show's frank tone, contestant nineteen points to the fact that he carries a pocket knife with him, remarks that it makes him look as though he lacks a sense of security, and asks how he will make a woman feel secure if he is not so, himself. This question points to a more traditional Chinese perception of femininity, in which a woman is vulnerable and needs a man to keep her safe. Intentionally or not, this particular contestant's remarks have set her up as more traditionally-oriented in character, which may make her more appealing to the male contestant. Whether her question was deliberate, it presents a juxtaposition between her position as a *shengnü* and her innate desire to conform to the Chinese ideals of a woman. Though *shengnü* are often labeled as such due to their forward-thinking and independent nature, this question reflects the patriarchal values that are ingrained so deeply into these women; they are still looking for men to protect and care for them. However, her question here is actually meant to be interpreted on two levels, as she is also referring to the fact that he has changed jobs numerous times and she is expressing concern about his degree of job security. This further exemplifies the tension between the desire to be both career oriented and traditionally feminine. Her concern regarding his work life displays her attentiveness toward career matters and portrays her as business savvy and professional, but the nature of the question implies that she is trying to determine the extent to which he will be able to provide for her, thereby reverting, in part, to the model of the vulnerable woman who must be supported. This offers another layer to the mindset of the typical *shengnü*: she may or may not be cognizant of it, but she is fighting an internal battle between independence and tradition, or modern and traditional femininity, and her ambivalence between these two extremes contributes to her difficulty in finding a suitable partner.

After this exchange, the host plays a video in which Song describes his hobbies and finally reveals the contents of his large black bag. He discloses that he carries a large toolkit, containing various gadgets and emergency supplies with him at all times. The nature of some of these items hints at the reason Song is a *shengnan*. In his emergency supply kit, he carries food and a water filtration system, but only enough for one person. While as a single man he should not be expected to carry supplies for two people, it becomes clear that he only carries items that might become useful to himself. The host asks one of the female contestants to come down and act out a scenario in which her blouse tears. Song feels confident when he is able to produce a sewing kit from inside the bag, but the kit proves useless when they point out that it does not contain any pink thread. While this is a seemingly minor detail, it prompts him to reveal that he, "only considers men's needs" when determining what items should go into his tool kit. At this point in his life, Song is still focused completely on himself; he prides himself in being prepared for any situation with the items in his toolkit, but until his appearance on "If You Are the One" he does not realize that he is actually only prepared for situations he might personally encounter. That he is only prepared to help himself, combined with the pride he feels in having these toolkits with him at all times implies a certain level of immaturity that suggests that Song is not yet ready to commit. It appears that more of the female contestants see this as well, and after this exchange, three more women turn out their lights.

In the next segment of the Song's time on the show, he presents another video in which he discusses his previous relationships, as well as the ideal criteria that his perfect woman should meet. In the video, he mentions that he broke up with his second serious girlfriend because of "mental illness resulting from her single-parent family". While the exact nature of the circumstances is left ambiguous, it seems that this may be a glimpse into a more traditional side

of his character. This conservative view of family life alludes to the possibility that he is ill-prepared for dating in a modern environment, and again can be seen as a factor in his status as a *shengnan*. When he begins to describe his ideal woman, the remaining female contestants turn their lights off in quick succession. His first standard is that he only wants to marry a woman from northern China, and upon hearing this, seven women remove themselves from the round, either because they are not from northern China, or because they do not want to be with a man who believes in the stereotype that "northern women are more open and considerate". The rest of his criteria were strictly superficial: she must be plump, under thirty years old, and have an oval shaped face. Upon hearing this, all but two women turn off their lights. Nowhere in his descriptions does he account for personality traits or intellectual capabilities. The women may have turned off their lights simply because these qualities described disqualified them as potential matches for Song, but more likely it was because these smart, independent women recognize that they should not settle for a man who chooses a mate based on superficial characteristics alone. Shortly thereafter, the remaining two women turn off their lights, and a large red "Fail" flashes across the screen. It appears that the same qualities that have caused Song to be a *shengnan* in the first place have caused him to remain one, despite his appearance on the show. This first round of this episode reflects negatively upon *shengnan* as immature and superficial, but contrastingly portrays *shengnü* as unwilling to settle, despite their internal conflicts between modern and traditional family values.

The segment of the show with the second male contestant is significantly shorter than the first, as the women quickly lose interest in him. His name is Jiang Wenbing and he hails from Fushun in the Liaoning Province. He introduces himself and immediately mentions that he is interested in earthquake relief efforts when bantering with the host. As two of the women turn

off their lights, contestant nine mentions that he seems to be very relaxed on stage. As the only information he has thus far provided about himself refers to his philanthropic interests, and none of the women immediately turned off the lights in judgment of his appearance, it seems that they agree with Contestant Nine's assessment. The two women who turned off their lights likely did so because they interpreted his collected demeanor to mean that he is not taking his appearance on the show, and therefore his search for love, seriously. Alternatively, however, a display of nervousness would have subtracted from his perceived masculinity, which also would have made him less appealing to the panel. In fact, Contestant Seventeen, in whom he initially expresses interest, states that she has eliminated him because she, "Does not find him man enough". This further illustrates that despite the desperation implied in the term "leftover woman," these women are not willing to abandon their own requirements for a partner and settle for someone they do not deem suitable to their tastes.

They go on to present another video in which Jiang describes his interests and hobbies. None of the women react negatively to the fact that he is an art student and that he hopes to become a professional artist when he graduates from the academy. However, when he tells a story that was meant to exemplify his luck and munificence, he receives some negative feedback from one of the female contestants. He speaks of an incident in which his friend needed a place to live but could not afford it, so Jiang offered the money himself, and purchased the house on the spot. Jiang says that at first, his family criticized his spontaneity, but then lauded him once the property became valuable. However, one of the female contestants is not convinced. She sees through his generosity, and recognizes that handling money so capriciously is irresponsible; she does not want a partner who is so financially reckless, so she turns out her light. In a later video, Jiang's friend describes an incident in which he donated almost all of his money to an earthquake

disaster relief fund, and then had to rely on his friends' financial help for a while after. This reiterates his naïve generosity; he wants to help others, but fails to approach these situations pragmatically, which Contestant Three describes as, "alarming" as she, too, turns out her light. These women understand that although generosity may be an important quality in a partner, Jiang is far too negligent to be a good match for them.

As he talks about his previous relationships and requirements for a suitable woman, it becomes clear that his immaturity extends beyond his treatment of money, and at the end of the video, he only has nine women remaining. As he describes his prior relationships, one woman turns off her light after his superficial comment that one of his favorite qualities of his fourth girlfriend was her pretty eyes. The female contestants' overall reaction to him changes once he starts discussing what he calls his requirements, not just his criteria, for his perfect woman. At first, he states that she must be kindhearted, and not just pretty, which indicates that he is less superficial than he initially lets on. Unfortunately, he continues on to say that he expects a lifestyle similar to that of the characters in one of Qiong Yao's[71] romance novels, and contradicts his initial statement, elaborating that she must, in fact, be good looking. Upon hearing this, more of the women turn out their lights, as they notice his hypocrisy and recognize that he is not as genuine as he tried to portray. They recognize that the life he is looking for is an unrealistic fantasy, and they do not want to be matched with a man who does not have a practical idea of what it means to be in love. As *shengnü* these women are disillusioned with the idea of a fairy tale type of love story, and they want to be with men who are equally pragmatic. This, combined with his lack of financial responsibility, causes Jiang to "fail" as well; he is not regarded as reliable, sensible or manly enough by any of the contestants.

---

[71] Qiong Yao is a well-known female Taiwanese romance novelist.

The segment with the next male contestant, a man from Beijing named Sue Zheng follows a slightly different trajectory. When asked for initial impressions, Contestant Thirteen offers her opinion that he "looks reliable," which the host takes to mean that she finds him unattractive, though she insists she just meant that his body is well built and it makes him look responsible. Sue Zheng laughs and responds that he knows that he is not handsome, but that everything is normal, and this lighthearted answer allows the women to see that he has a sense of humor and can be self-deprecating without taking offense. They play the first video, in which he reveals that he is a lawyer. He jokes that anyone who would choose to become a lawyer, "must have serious problems," thereby reinforcing the idea that he is clever and capable of laughing at himself. He then goes on to explain his strategy for his appearance on the show. He has noticed that the men are often nervous and that the women are sometimes "too mighty" and he mentions that he does not like the way the judges often answer the women's questions for the men in order to deflect if they believe the men will be unable to answer them. This alludes to his preference for women who conform to more traditional models of femininity. Rather, he insists that since he has a lawyer's experience, he will be able to handle the women himself. In so doing, he asserts his masculinity, and is therefore successful; none of the women turn their lights off during or immediately following his first video. Thus far, Sue Zheng has demonstrated his humor and masculinity, qualities of which the female contestants approve, without betraying any of the characteristics that made the previous male contestants appear unappealing. For the first time in this episode, it seems as though the female contestants are faced with a man who might make a suitable match.

The difference between Sue Zheng and the prior contestants is also apparent in the way he interacts with Meng Fei. Though Meng gently teases all of the male contestants, the rapport

he quickly builds with Sue Zheng reflects a higher level of respect for the contestant than he had for those prior. Because of what he said in the video, the hosts allow Sue Zheng to direct the questioning himself, at which point he admits that he underestimated himself, and that he is, in fact, quite nervous. Initially, this does not seem to bother the female contestants, but the actions he takes, likely as a result of his realized anxiety, eventually deter all twenty-four of the women. This nervousness betrays weakness in Sue Zheng, and the women are put off by this feminine quality. As he is in control of the floor, he calls on the women to ask him questions, and answers each question succinctly and without much emotion. Contestant Six asks how his job as a divorce lawyer influences the ways he contemplates marriage, to which he responds that it has made him more careful in the dating arena, and when considering marriage in the context of his own life. At this point, a female contestant turns out her light, as she reads this caution as a reluctance to actively pursue a relationship. Though she may be slightly premature in this assessment, the third video clip and the rest of the women's reactions to it prove that she is correct.

Though the first two-thirds of his segment have gone rather smoothly, the questioning session after the second video clip is where the tone begins to change. Whether due to his state of nervousness or inquisitive personality, Sue Zheng requests to continue having the women ask him questions, rather than showing the third clip right away. This further evidences his passive approach to dating; rather than displaying his personal interests and opinions, he would rather have the women lead the conversation. When he says this, multiple women immediately turn out their lights, because they understand that if he is putting them on the spot in the context the show, it reflects the way he will treat them in a relationship. He makes them feel awkward in his approach to dating, and they are cognizant that this will translate to an uncomfortable and

possibly one-sided relationship. Eventually, he obliges to playing the third video clip, which reveals why he may have felt hesitant to have it shown in the first place; in the clip, he admits to having written a five-thousand word marriage-seeking advertisement. This is all he had to say; the remaining women immediately turn out their lights. The marriage-seeking ad is the ultimate incarnation of passivity towards dating. Rather than attempting to arrange social interactions in which he might meet a potential future wife, Sue Zheng chooses to have the women come to him. The women find this unappealing, particularly because it causes him to look even less masculine than his admission that he was nervous. Furthermore, when asked why she chose to turn her light off, Contestant Seven responded that she felt that Sue Zheng was boring, and that if they were dating they would not have much to talk about. Therefore, the red "fail" flashes across the screen again, and Sue Zheng is left alone, as well.

Though subtle, the conclusion of this segment implies two crucial points about the *shengnü* on the panel. As previously established, they are not interested in pursuing a relationship with a man they do not consider masculine enough for their tastes. This segment adds the fact that they also do not believe a man with whom they do not share similar interests will be a good match. These two points are crucial because they move the model of the *shengnü* even further from the notion of desperation; for these women, finding a husband is very different from finding husband who is a good match. These women are looking for companionship, not simply a man to marry to father their children and coexist in the same space. If they were as distressed as the name "leftover women" and the stigmas surrounding the term would suggest, they would eagerly seize the opportunity to date any man who came on the show. Of course, making a match with a contestant on the show would not necessarily lead to marriage; it would simply be a chance to date. However, a larger number of dates also means a larger number of

opportunities for a successful relationship to bloom. That these women are remaining true to their standards of what they consider an ideal man, and refuse even to date someone who does not align with their personal preferences, negates the idea that they are "leftover" and hopeless. Rather, they believe that they are entitled to a fulfilling life with the partners they hope to eventually find, despite the disparaging moniker with which they are labeled.

The most significant insight into the minds of these *shengnü*, however, comes in the fourth segment of the show, with Zhang Zhu, or Michael, a 26 year old American born Chinese man, currently residing in Beijing. He is younger than the other male contestants have been, and possesses a youthful air about him that fluctuates between charming and immature as the segment progresses. He is also better looking than his three predecessors, and his first video reveals that he is a successful entrepreneur. At the end of the first video, he states that he believes that he is more handsome and intelligent than most other contestants he has seen on *Fei Cheng Wu Rao*. Here, he exudes confidence and masculinity that seems to draw in the women, rather than deter them, and despite the rather arrogant framing of this display, none of the women turn out their lights. Again, this places an emphasis on masculinity, and further exemplifies that it is one of the most crucial qualities that these women hold in their criteria for an ideal partner.

When Meng Fei then opens the floor to questions from the female contestants, an unexpected thing happens. Contestant Seventeen raises her hand and says that on a past episode, she believed she was interested in one of the men, but it was not reciprocal. She now feels that she is interested in Michael; she likes the way he gesticulates when he speaks, and though the hosts tease her lightly about her mercurial heart, she maintains, "I am telling you I like you, here, in front of a national audience". In so doing, she simultaneously emphasizes the strength of her personality, and draws attention to a critical flaw inherent in the structure of the show. The

contestants are all aware that they are being broadcast nationally, and this is troublesome with regard to crafting an accurate analysis of their actions and words. Though the producers try to make sure these contestants are all genuine in their pursuit of love, when they get on stage, they can fabricate any sort of persona they decide they want to portray to the country. Coupled with the rigorous editing process mandated by the television censors, there is much room for the contestants' words and actions to be represented misleadingly. Nonetheless, these same editing laws also enforce the validity of the final cut of the show. The crackdown on entertainment television procedures forced the producers to be more stringent on the people they allow on the show, and the content that makes it into the episodes that will be broadcast. Due to the rigorous screening process the contestants must pass through before appearing on the show in addition to the producers' extensive experiences weeding out candidates whom they have determined are auditioning for the wrong reasons, it is relatively safe to assume that the contestants' intentions are genuine. Any material removed was then done so strictly to conform to the censors' propriety guidelines for reality dating shows, which state that any woman appearing on the show should be sincere in her goal of looking for a date, rather than fame.

There is controversy regarding the extent to which this editing is effective and it is suggested that many of the women who appear on the show are indeed looking for their time in the spotlight.[72] Though this may be true, the fact remains that even if they appear on the show to stir up controversy, the opinions they express are likely their own, albeit exaggerated versions of them. After all, they still have lives independent of the show, and when they navigate the real world, particularly if they do achieve some degree of fame, they will have to face responses to the views they express on the show. It would make their lives quite difficult if they presented opinions they could not support if confronted outside the context of *Fei Cheng Wu Rao*. As such,

[72] Wu, "Post-Socialist Articulation of Gender Position," 227.

taking Contestant Seventeen's words and actions at face value, viewers are presented with a portrait of a strong-willed, outspoken woman, who does not appear feminine according to traditional Chinese prescriptions regarding etiquette of speech and manners.[73] Later on in the segment, however, she raises her hand and expresses that her prior actions misrepresented her actual personality. Fearing that she has caused herself to look too masculine, she attempts to reconcile her behavior to conform more to the "gentle and soft"[74] expectation that the media dictates the modern Chinese wife is meant to embody. She continues that despite her tough demeanor on stage, she is actually "feminine and tender". She promises that she will make a virtuous wife, and that she will take care of laundry and cooking, thereby aligning herself even more closely with the model of, "the supportive, caring and servicing wife"[75] that was delineated in popular Chinese magazines, such as *Funü zhiyou* [Women's Friend] and *Zhongguo Funü* [Chinese Women] as well as entries in 1980s academic journals. The presence of these statements in both popular media as well as academic journals enabled the ideas to permeate different areas of urban, literate society, and allowed the subservient wife to become the norm in modern, urban environments.

Here, Contestant Seventeen has done quite a remarkable thing. She has found a balance between the femininity that is expected of a modern Chinese wife, while still appealing to her strong and independent character. Though she tries to refute the aggressive image she has created for herself by asserting that she does not typically behave in this manner, she paradoxically makes this assertion aggressively. The result is a calculated depiction of herself that should appeal even more to Michael, as the combination of his American upbringing and Chinese

---

[73] Janet M. Theiss, "Femininity in Flux: Gendered Virtue and Social Conflict in the Mid-Qing Courtroom," in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 48.
[74] Evans "Changing Images of the Ideal Wife," 340.
[75] Ibid.

heritage would make him more inclined to relate to a woman of this nature. In fact, this must have charmed to him to some degree, because when he makes it to the final round of the show, he chooses Contestant Seventeen among his three finalists. In the end, however, he chooses Contestant Twelve, who rejects him for his immaturity. The hosts then attempt to analyze what has happened. They draw the conclusion that Michael has foregone the guarantee of a relationship with Contestant Seventeen in favor of the challenge to convince Contestant Twelve to agree to date him. In the end, he is unsuccessful, and in his exit interview, he states that he was so enchanted by Contestant Twelve's beauty that he felt as though he had to take the risk for the opportunity to be matched with her.

This depicts a rather bleak reality for the *shengnü* on the show, as a representative set of the *shengnü* of urban China. In a society that has embraced capitalism and provided an unprecedented number of opportunities for women to flourish in educational and professional spheres, the expectations of the virtuous wife do not match the bounds these women have made. These modern, urban atmospheres have molded socially and financially independent women who, despite their troubles in the dating arena, truly believe that they are entitled to find husbands who will accept their idiosyncrasies, and with whom they can connect deeply to form relationships beyond the scope of procreation. However, the aforementioned example reveals that despite the understanding that women possess exceptional capabilities, Post-Mao marriage prescriptions illustrate a reversion to more traditional wifely ideals. These women are perceived as too eager if they express themselves sincerely and are therefore expected to take the same passive approach to dating that they found so unappealing in Sue Zheng. That some of them still choose to articulate their passion and sincerity, however, hints that the moniker "leftover

women" implies a desperation that does not quite encompass these nuances, and makes the women appear more powerless and hopeless than contestants on the show prove they can be.

Chapter 4
The *Shengnü* in Film: *Taohua Yun*

The movie *Taohua Yun*, came out one year after the word *shengnü* was officially added to the vernacular. *Taohua Yun*, or "Desires of the Heart" was directed by a woman named Ma Liwen in 2008. The film follows five single women, framed as *shengnü,* as they try to find love and change their respective situations. These women all come from different backgrounds and they all begin the movie as single women for a variety of reasons. Throughout the film, each woman falls in love, and based on her specific circumstances, the relationships either work out or fail. More specifically, three of these women are able to maintain successful relationships, while the other two are not. This chapter will examine each woman as the representative of a different model of single woman found in modern urban environments. It will also discuss the nature of the rather ambiguous feminist approach this movie takes, and elaborate upon the suggestion the movie makes, that women often find or alter their senses of self-identity through their relationships with men.

The feminist position taken by much of this movie comes from several important places. First, the movie comes entirely from the women's perspective. This is crucial, because where the viewers are given an omniscient perspective on the women's behalf, there is no point at which they are ever given insight into what the male characters are thinking. The result is a layered viewing of the movie, in which the audience is watching the women as they pursue and scrutinize the men. The viewers watch the events unfold as the female characters, allowing for greater empathy, and a better understanding of the characters' frustrations. This aligns closely with the trends set by many female directors in the 1980s, in which they explore themes of

female identity and the female experience.[76] This feminist perspective also manifests in the idea that many of the women become savior figures for the men. This is particularly true with Sis Gao, and Li Cong, who provide immense financial assistance to the men in their lives, as will be discussed later in the chapter. Finally, the women in this movie all represent the progressive model of the well-educated, financially independent modern woman. They are all capable of supporting themselves, and do not need to rely on husbands for monetary purposes. This is also conveyed in order to align all of these women with the commonly understood definition of *shengnü*, even though their ages and in some cases, divorced statuses are not as typical.

At the same time, there is a great stigma among Chinese female directors associated with being labeled as feminist,[77] which could add to the reasons that Ma Liwen added such a high level of ambiguity to the film. This ambiguity comes into play when the women's vulnerability is revealed to suggest that many of these women develop their self-identities through their interactions with men. To some extent, each of the women besides Li Cong alters her sense of self based on different events that occur in her relationship. This is a major theme throughout the movie, and it betrays the movie's initial feminist approach, implying that the modern urban dating scene in China is tinged with traditional perspectives. Furthermore, this movie portrays the idea that for many women, the state of being a *shengnü* is simply a transitional phase from which they wish to escape. Though they may insist otherwise, according to the film, the women all want to find men to take them out of this stage; if they cannot, it is due to particular circumstances and not actually a result of choice.

The first woman to whom viewers are introduced is named Zhang Yin. She is twenty-eight years old, and comes from a traditional family. Though the movie takes place in Beijing,

---

[76] Shuqin Cui, *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 180.
[77] Ibid., 183.

she speaks in the Nanjing dialect, which is an immediate clue the movie provides to hint at the fact that she is ill suited to the fast paced, modern way of life that is associated with living in Beijing. Where Beijing, here, is a symbol of cosmopolitan sophistication, Zhang Yin's use of dialect labels her as less urbane. This is further emphasized by her old-fashioned style of dress. Throughout the scenes in which she is depicted, it becomes clearer that this is the case; her traditional upbringing and seeming inability to fully adapt to the modern way of life in Beijing are a source of constant conflict in her life. This clash also calls attention to her transition from girlhood, as represented through references to her upbringing, into womanhood, as seen through Beijing's urban setting and the sacrifices she makes to revive her relationship.

The opening scene of the movie begins with Zhang Yin as the narrator of her story so that the viewers are able to see her perspective on her circumstances before analyzing her interactions with other characters and drawing their own conclusions. She is at a family event, and she explains that for the first time in her life, she is being encouraged to make friends, which seems to leave her feeling unsettled. A relative then asks if she would like a boyfriend, and her expression changes completely. She is taken aback by this suggestion as it goes against the morals instilled upon her throughout her whole life, but even more deeply because it comes from precisely one of those people responsible for teaching her these same values. A camera shot inside her room reveals that it is set up in a rather childish manner. There are many stuffed animals on her bed, which is covered with a pink frilly comforter. Coupled with her strict adherence to her family's conventions, viewers are meant to understand that despite her age, Zhang Yin is not quite an adult, at least by modern urban standards. This is also, in part, a commentary on the pressure to marry, exerted on her by her parents. This stark change in her parents' views represents that they finally see her as an adult, but she reacts as a teenager would

to a parent's seemingly mercurial temperament. Though this change is not of a mercurial nature, she sees it as such because she is ambivalent about her single status, herself. She wants to adhere to the chaste values her parents have instilled in her, but now, in pressuring her to find a husband, they are inherently encouraging her to break with these principles. This creates a paradox, in which we see how her family's emphasis on conventional behavior has stunted her emotional and social growth. On one hand, she wants to follow her parents' direction and find a man to marry, but at the same time she is ill equipped to handle Beijing's dating culture, partially due to her traditional upbringing. This unpreparedness is further exemplified throughout the later scenes in the movie.

In the Zhang Yin's next scene, she is eating lunch with her friends, and they are discussing love and marriage. When she laments that she feels as though there is something missing in her life, a friend jokingly responds that perhaps she only needs someone to sleep with to quell these feelings. This is introduced ironically, because as we see later on in the film, sex turns out to be Zhang Yin's biggest obstacle in maintaining a successful relationship. In this scene, we also begin to see a divide between Zhang Yin and her friends in the way they approach the topics of love and marriage. While the other women are far more casual and candid when discussing sex, Zhang Yin is reserved, and expresses her concerns about why one should have to give in to the pressures of getting married at a certain age at all. At the end of this scene, she resigns herself to the idea that, "A woman without a man is nothing". This old-fashioned view on a woman's position reiterates Zhang Yin's traditional nature. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of her views against those of her peers, in addition to the questions she asks and the way she approaches these topics of conversation signal a gap in maturity between Zhang Yin and her friends. Here, Zhang Yin seems far younger than the other women, despite the fact that she is

twenty-eight years old. Paired with the repetition of her traditional values, the movie takes this opportunity to imply an inverse correlation between maturity and tradition. It makes the statement that in a progressive city such as Beijing, there is no room to hold on to old conventions, and that by doing so, one cannot grow and mature at an appropriate pace. This begins to foreshadow that Zhang Yin's traditional views on sex and relationships are mutually exclusive with successful navigation of Beijing's dating scene.

Though the movie outwardly appears to be filmed from a modern feminist viewpoint, this is the first place where it is subtly revealed to be built upon a more traditional foundation. Zhang Yin brings forth some of this ambiguity through her statement that, "A woman without a man is nothing." She does not regurgitate this statement as though it is something she has been taught her whole life; rather, it is the conclusion she draws through analysis of her own and her peers' experiences. This betrays one of the movie's main themes, which is saturated in conventional thought: a woman's self identity is very much grounded in her relationship with men. It also suggests that this is a key characteristic of the *shengnü*, or more specifically, the reluctant *shengnü*. According to *Tao Hua Yun*, even the *shengnü* who think they are comfortable being single actually want to be with a man when given the choice. Furthermore, it says that once a woman finds a man, she will be willing to alter her self-identity around their relationship; if she is unwilling to do so, the relationship will not work and she will revert back to her *shengnü* status.

Now that she has received permission from her family and advice from her friends, Zhang Yin attends a singles networking event. The theme of the event is "masquerade ball" and all of the attendees dress up and wear masks. She expresses her surprise that she has reached a point in her life where she has to attend such an event, which, again, can be seen as her

traditional upbringing reasserting itself, as in a traditional setting, she would certainly already be married at twenty-eight, and likely would not have to go through the trouble of finding a match for herself. She is approached by a former schoolmate, and they dance together. As they converse, he says, "I can tell you are a girl with traditional Chinese values," so it is clear that he immediately recognizes that this is one of her most prominent characteristics. It also aligns him with views held by many post-Mao urban men, as described in Chapter 2: when looking for a mate, he wants someone who will take the role of the "virtuous wife and good mother"[78] and embody traditional models of femininity. However, the crux of this scene lays in the symbolism of the masquerade; they are both masked, and in some ways, they each put up a façade. He expresses satisfaction upon learning that she holds traditional values, though he later makes it clear that these same values are the reason that they must break up. Her façade is more nuanced, but her approach to the modern urban dating scene, and the fact that attending this type of function is so far removed from her comfort zone suggests that this relationship is set up to fail from the beginning. This scene depicts the director's message that modern dating is difficult because people put up façades, and if women are not careful, they will fall for the mask rather than the man it conceals. This turns out to be true with regard to this scene, and it is also reflected in what happens when Sis Gao and Ye Shengyin are deceived by the men they love.[79] In this case, when the man says that he appreciates the traditional values with which Zhang Yin has been raised, he means only that he thinks she gentle and soft, as a traditionally feminine woman should be. He does not respect her actual morals, and condemns her chastity.

When they have been dating for six months, he takes her to see his apartment for the first time and remarks that soon, she will be taking care of the house. She takes this to mean that they

---

[78] Evans, "Changing Images of the Ideal Wife", 337.
[79] This will be further elaborated later in the chapter.

will soon get married, but she is then caught off guard when he suggests that they should live together for some time before getting married. He frames it as his parents' idea, however, to appeal to her traditional beliefs; he knows that she will be uncomfortable with the suggestion, so he presents it in a way that will open her up to the proposal. She looks crestfallen, and runs to the bathroom to call her friends for advice, nervously asking, "What if he wants to make love?" Here, it is clear that the way he asked her to move in has not put her at ease, and it further evidences the fact that he does not respect her traditional values. When she returns, she tells him she wants to leave, but he is persistent, and she eventually opens up to him. She tells him that she knows that sex will be difficult to avoid once they are living together, but she is simply unready. He asks, "At your age, you've never done it before?" and when he realizes that this is true, she responds that she is an old fashioned girl. They exchange words; he tries to convince her that this would be a good opportunity, but she maintains that she wants to get married first, in accordance with the way she was raised. Here, it becomes clear that their relationship will not work out if they both hold fast to their views. His initial attraction to her, as he describes as grounded in her traditional values, actually has nothing to do with her values at all. He is attracted to her traditional femininity, and the inclusion of obedience as inherent in the definition of this type of femininity implies that he believes that he will be able to coerce her into having sex and cohabitating with him before they are married. That she stands her ground in this scene creates a powerful contradiction with his expectation of her submissiveness that he cannot handle. Their expectations for the relationship are simply too different; though they seek counseling and advice from multiple sources, it becomes more and more evident that they are incompatible, and they break up.

Suddenly, at the end of the movie, she is shown in a white wedding dress, and the camera pans to a photo of the two of them hanging on the wall. As discussed in Chapter 2, the white wedding dress is a sign of a break with tradition and changing perspectives of femininity. Where it would be expected that a girl as traditional as Zhang Yin would wear more customary Chinese attire for her wedding, the fact that she is in a white, western-styled wedding dress implies that she has distanced herself from tradition. With this, it can be inferred that she decided to go against her values in order to win back her boyfriend. More specifically, in this scene, it is implied that she was so afraid to become a *shengnü* that she renounced her chastity in order to successfully adapt to the modern, urban dating scene. Again, her relationship with this man has completely altered her self-identity and forced her to relinquish her traditional morals in favor of a flourishing relationship.

Zhang Yin's character is representative of a specific type of *shengnü*, who will henceforth be referred to as "the naïve traditionalist". She is not originally from an urban environment, or she is raised by parents who are not, and her values are far more traditional than those of her peers. She is similar to the type of *shengnü* delineated by Xu Zijuan in Chapter 2. As a result, she seems less mature than others the same age, and she is ill suited to engage in the urban dating scene. She may attempt to conform to certain standards in order to meet men, such as attending singles' events or dating casually, but her core values ultimately prevent her relationships from flourishing. This could be in reference to sex, common-law marriage, or any other practices not condoned by her parents. Even if the men she meets claim to share these traditional morals, the fact that they were raised in the city, or by less strict parents renders them incompatible, as the men have expectations for the relationship that she is simply unwilling to fulfill. Furthermore, her naïveté as a result of the way she was raised prevents her from seeing

through the façade many men put forth. Her old-fashioned upbringing results in character traits that are not advantageous in an urban dating environment, and thus, she is left with an ultimatum: she can remain single or she can break from tradition and give into the pressures of dating in the modern, urban world.

The other two women who are unable to maintain successful relationships at the end of the movie both begin as divorcees, and though divorcees are not necessarily included within the most common definition of *shengnü*, due to their inclusion in the movie they can be regarded as such for the purpose of this analysis. The first of these two characters is named Ye Shengyin, and she is depicted from the beginning as having great difficulty thinking and speaking for herself. She is even further characterized as such when, in her first scene, her son is the first to speak; whereas the other women all introduce themselves, her circumstances explained by her son. He informs her, and therefore the viewers that his father is getting married soon. Only then does she provide a short monologue, in which she explains that she did not want a divorce, but rather was "dumped" by her husband. Again, this reemphasizes the passive role she takes in her own existence, as she seems to have had no control over the deterioration of her marriage. It also connects back to the movie's revelation that despite how financially independent and educated these women may be, their self-identity is dependent upon the men in their lives. Here, Ye Shengyin's role in the context of the movie, and therefore as a *shengnü* is quite literally defined by her son and her ex-husband; the result is the statement that she is incapable of identifying herself as an entity independent from the men in her life.

Interestingly, what she lacks in independence and confidence, she makes up for in appearance. When her son tells her that his father is getting remarried, he qualifies the statement by saying that his new wife is younger than, but not as pretty as the mother. In her next scene,

she is crying to a friend about how miserable she feels in her circumstances, and the friend responds that she looks so young that she will not have trouble finding a new husband. This introduces another important theme surrounding this character: the correlation between age, beauty and the search for love. This particular part of her story line reflects a truth outlined in the premise of *Fei Cheng Wu Rao*, that even the most beautiful women can be left behind. This becomes more evident when considering how she meets the man she dates throughout the movie. She signs up for a dating service, and then he sees her photograph and comes to meet her. As he tries to avoid the matchmaker's fee, he seeks her out on his own, and lies to her boss about who he is and the nature of their association. Despite these strange circumstances, she agrees to date him. This sets the tone for their connection throughout the movie, as the foundation of their relationship is built upon physical appearances and manipulation. Like Zhang Yin's case, the man Ye Shengyin thinks she is dating is not the man he truly proves to be; he gives the impression that he is caring and loyal, and because she is heartbroken and vulnerable and needs a man in her life to complete her self-identity after her divorce, she lets herself become swept up by his false appearances without considering that he is, perhaps, too good to be true.

The woman's most defining characteristic, however, can been seen through the lens of her relationship with her ex-husband. From the beginning of the movie, it is clear that he dictated their relationship when they were together and from their interactions on the phone, it seems that they still have hostile feelings toward one another. When he comes into her home to see their sick son and notices that her new boyfriend is comforting him, the ex-husband yells that it is inappropriate for Ye Shengyin to be dating when their son is sick. For the first time, she stands up to him. Again, the extent to which she defines her own identity based on men's actions is apparent in this scene. She can only speak out against her ex-husband when her new boyfriend is

present; without him, she does not have the courage to assert herself. There is one other critical instance in the movie in which she interacts with her ex-husband; it involves the ex-husband calling and asking his ex-wife for help when his new fiancée is pregnant and ill. This scene occurs after she has found out the truth about her new boyfriend, and though it is not shown how she responds, from her actions throughout the movie, it can be inferred that she yields to his request. Ye Shengyin allows her ex-husband to exploit her kindness because she needs the validation that only a man can provide. Her self-worth is so deeply intertwined in her relationships with men that she consistently puts aside her best interests to seek their affection and approval.

A few scenes after the confrontation with her ex-husband, Ye Shengyin's boyfriend goes out of town, and she realizes that she is pregnant. When she cannot reach him, she begins to feel concerned, but it is not until she is approached at home by a group of women that she fully understands the nature of the situation. These women have all been scammed by the same man; he promises each that he will marry her, takes her money as an investment in a new home, and then disappears. They tell their stories and then ask her to join them in fighting back and punishing him for what he has done, but she declines. Even after she has been scorned, she cannot bring herself to actively fight back against this man she thought she knew. The subtle message this scene sends is that banding together with a group of women is not a powerful enough base from which Ye Shengyin can draw strength. Where her new boyfriend gave her the courage to stand up to her ex-husband, the support of these three women is not enough to bring her to stand up against her boyfriend. Her self-identity is so deeply founded in her relationships with men that without a man by her side, she cannot act in defiance of those who have mistreated

her. This is the most disturbing story line in the movie, as Ye Shengyin is left single because she is drawn to strong, dominating men who prey on her meek, kindhearted nature.

The character in this section can be modeled as “the passive doormat”. She is a sweet natured woman who repeatedly finds herself in relationships with men who may initially woo her, but ultimately treat her poorly. She cannot fully stand up and defend herself against her ex-husband’s attacks without another man to support her. When she finds a man who makes her feel safe and secure, she lets him take the lead in their relationship, and again, allows herself to be vulnerable to his whims. Her self-identity revolves around her relationships with men, and without them, she cannot, or will not defend herself. She is overly trusting, and easily manipulated. As a result, she has her heart crushed repeatedly, her money stolen and she is left pregnant and alone.

The next notable character in the film is Sis Gao. She is fifty years old, and fiercely independent, as is evidenced in the first scene in which she appears. In her first scene, rather than describing her unhappy marriage, we are given a firsthand glimpse into her relationship with her husband. They bicker, and she pushes him onto the floor; she is quite obviously the stronger person in the relationship, both physically and mentally. The scene then cuts to her narration, where she explains that she is not like other women; whereas they typically “get dumped” she actually asked her husband for a divorce. This distinction between Sis Gao and other women becomes a crucial theme in her scenes, and it is demonstrated most prominently through her financial independence and somewhat masculine qualities. However, as we see her fall in love with Zhang Su, her appearance and behavior become more reflective of traditional notions of femininity. Her self-determination at the beginning of the film makes it particularly surprising when she gives up everything she has to help the man with whom she has fallen in love. Between

her sacrifices and her path towards a more conventional picture of femininity throughout the movie, she further evidences the idea that a woman's identity is often shaped by her relationships with men.

After her divorce, she initially seems completely opposed to seeking out a new relationship; she thinks she is too old, and that single life is wonderful. She mentions that she has stopped doing housework since her divorce, and as the camera pans around her home, it resembles a typical, chaotic "bachelor pad," once again hinting at Sis Gao's masculine qualities. The first time she begins to question whether being alone is actually better than being married is when she falls ill; though she has seen the positive impact single life has had on her business and productivity, she also recognizes that it is less-than-ideal having no one to care for her when she is sick. Furthermore, the weakness she exhibits through her illness seems to hint at a twisted take on traditional femininity. Traditional perspectives of femininity laud weakness as a trait women should possess, so for the first time, Sis Gao is portrayed as feminine. As the employees at the boutique she owns encourage her to try and "turn over a new leaf" she does not object to the man who comes into her office after reading her blog and developing an interest in her. When Zhang Su comes into the store, it is being renovated and he immediately recognizes that the workers are doing something incorrectly. When he reprimands them, it is effectually a sign that Sis Gao's masculinity and independence are beginning to deteriorate; she says, "There should be a man to handle these affairs," thereby suggesting limits inherent in a woman's position, and hinting at her increasing tendency towards femininity. Where she was clearly the dominant personality in her prior marriage, we see that her relationship with this new man eventually undermines the strong sense of self on which she previously prided herself, thereby altering her self-identity.

A few scenes later, Sis Gao finds out that Zhang Su is having some financial trouble, and she insists upon helping him, forcing him to take a large stack of cash. She continues to pay his debts, and it begins to affect her business. This seems to be the turning point in their story, where he begins to exploit her love and kindness. Here, it is clear that Sis Gao sacrifices economic prospects to help Zhang Su, creating a mutual exclusivity between productivity in business and love. Where a *shengnü* is conventionally characterized as being financially independent, here, Sis Gao surrenders her economic stability for love. Initially characterized as smart and business-savvy, Sis Gao has built her identity upon her strength and self-sufficiency, which she forfeits to leave the *shengnü* stage in her life behind. She becomes so swept up in her new relationship that her priorities change drastically, and as she conforms more to traditional feminine ideals, her strong self-identity dissipates.

Soon after, Sis Gao learns that she is very sick, and needs to undergo surgery. Again, this weakness reflects her path towards femininity. She is extremely nervous, but Zhang Su comes to the hospital every day to take care of her and reassure her. He helps Sis Gao use the bathroom, and he holds a tissue for her when she needs to clear her throat, both of which embarrass her greatly, and further emphasize her weakness. After one such interaction, she breaks down and begins to cry, and here we see that she has lost much of the confidence and control she had at the beginning of the movie. She tries to validate helping him financially by citing his actions while she was hospitalized, but her friends and families recognize that he is a criminal, and that he is cheating her out of her money. Finally, she sells the boutique to pay off more of his debts. This is the most poignant marker of her change in identity as a result of her relationship; she has become a shell of her former self and no longer has any of the money or independence upon which she

previously prided herself. At the very end of the movie, her friends have Zhang Su arrested, but Sis Gao maintains that she will wait for him until he is out of jail.

Sis Gao's model is rather complicated. She can be seen as a "downward spiral towards femininity" though her initial independence and hardheaded nature makes it seem as though no man would ever be able to compromise her position. As viewers, we want to believe that she is too smart to fall for a man's schemes, but this movie implies that even women who claim to be happy when single feel much more content in relationships, so they will do all they can to maintain them. For Sis Gao, she realized her vulnerability when she was sick, and determined that a relationship would assuage these feelings of weakness. This relationship made her feel confident and whole once again after her first illness, and throughout the film, she continually alters different aspects of herself to cater to Zhang Su and his needs. Sis Gao's story is a tragic one, because it sends the message that even the most strong-willed woman can be fooled by a man who makes her feel complete. It also suggests that it is impossible to balance a successful business life with a successful love life, which, as discussed in earlier chapters, is a key factor towards the prevalence of the *shengnü*.

The second character to which we are introduced in the film further exemplifies the fact that if one wants to find love and maintain a successful relationship, one must change. In this case, Xiao Mei's self-identity stems from her repetition of standards for qualities in a romantic partner, and the concessions she makes in the end suggest a change in character. In her first scene, she provides a first hand account of her personal circumstances, as well as her requirements for a potential suitor. We learn immediately that all she wants is to find a wealthy man who will shower her with gifts and money. This introduction by no means endears Xiao Mei to the viewer; she is extremely self absorbed and superficial in her quest to find a husband. This

was a deliberate characterization on part of the director in order to enhance the gravity of the decision she ultimately makes, as well as the extent to which an urban woman must change in order to find and maintain a successful relationship.

Xiao Mei is beautiful as well as successful, and she has no shortage of men interested in dating her. She makes it clear, however, that she is not interested in them unless they are in possession of substantial wealth. She says in order to be considered, men must have money, a car, a house and no wife. Though it seems insignificant and obvious, the inclusion of "no wife" as a necessary quality in a potential date is the first suggestion that she might find success in love, and separates her from the *shengnü* like Liu Yue and Chen Qing mentioned in Chapter 2. In this moment, we catch a glimpse into her inner psyche; it is not true that she is only interested in money. While other girls will settle for a rich, married man who will buy them expensive things, she distinguishes herself by expressing her desire to find a single man, implying that it is important to her to be treated properly.

When she hears that there is an opening at a company run by a very wealthy man and his son, she applies and interviews for the position, despite the fact that she is overqualified for the job. When she is hired, she lies and tells her current employer that she would like to take several months off to further her education, in order to keep her higher-paying job secure for when she is finished wooing her new boss. She makes it clear that she will go to great lengths to impress her boss, Mr. Zhang, and some of her endeavors are more successful than others. She buys heels to wear to work, but her plan to capture his attention goes awry when she loses her balance and falls in front of him. This demonstrates that small steps she makes to change in order to impress Mr. Zhang are not enough and that she must do something drastic if she wants to see results. When he mentions that the company is working on a large business deal, she goes so far as to

break into her former workplace and steal documents to give her new company an advantage over the competition. This exemplifies the measures she is willing to take to ensure that she will impress Mr. Zhang; she is prepared to turn against and potentially ruin her other employer, and even break the law to capture his attention.

Her risk here brings reward, when the deal is closed and Mr. Zhang gives Xiao Mei a large congratulatory sum of cash. She feigns humble, and says that she cannot accept the money, at which point Mr. Zhang asks her on a date. When they go out to dinner together, she is less than subtle about her interest in his wealth; she immediately draws the conversation to his high level of education and his high standard of living. Her desire for wealth permeates the conversation, and briefly, it appears that this is the only matter upon which they will form a bond. However, when she finds that he does not like to drink, they laugh and we see them connect on a deeper level. This is a crucial turning point in the movie, because for the first time, Xiao Mei looks at Mr. Zhang and sees something other than a wallet. She says that it is her birthday, and he takes her shopping, telling her that she can pick out anything that she would like. She has a daydream in which she buys piles of clothing, shoes and jewelry, but when Mr. Zhang drops her off at her home, we see that she has only actually bought a small crystal ornament. However, when she goes inside, she sees that he has slipped the bonus money into her purse as well. Here, it seems momentarily that Xiao Mei will succeed in finding all she expects out of love; she has a man who meets all of her standards, and they even connect on an emotional level. Nonetheless, she soon learns that to maintain this successful relationship, she will need to make some sacrifices.

Some times passes in the movie, and we learn that Xiao Mei has gone half a month without seeing Mr. Zhang. When he finally returns to the office, he announces that the company

is in a financial crisis, and that they must lay off all of the employees. He also mentions that if any of them would like to stay, they will be paid just enough to cover their life expenses. At the same time, however, Xiao Mei receives a phone call from her old company that her time to study has elapsed, and it is time for her to return to work. She is faced with a choice: she must decide between her old, well paying job, and her newly poor boyfriend. When she returns to Mr. Zhang's office the next day, it is clear that she has chosen him, despite the fact that her job now pays very little, and he is no longer wealthy and prestigious. Though until now she has defined herself entirely by her desire to marry a wealthy man, her concession at the end of the film marks a change in self-identity based on her relationship with Mr. Zhang. For the first time, she has drawn apart happiness from wealth, and the result is a healthy relationship.

Xiao Mei's character can be classified as the model of "the reformed gold digger". Though she initially believes that wealth is the most important quality in a potential husband, she eventually meets someone who she comes to understand is more important to her than money. Though this is framed in a romantic way in the context of the movie, the reality it suggests for *shengnü* is actually rather discouraging. Though viewers are meant to be happy for Xiao Mei for ultimately losing her shallow perspectives and falling in love with a man on a deeper level, the reality of the situation is that she is forced to settle to find love. Though her character is initially defined by her strict guidelines for a suitable husband, she abandons them when she finds someone she loves for other reasons. In a scenario this heartwarming, it is difficult to criticize Xiao Mei for changing her mind, but on a broader scale, it implies that for a woman to find love in the modern urban dating scene, she must loosen her standards and settle for something different that she initially thought she wanted.

Interestingly, the last woman who finds love in the movie is Xiao Mei's friend, Li Cong. At the beginning of the movie, it is revealed that Li Cong has inherited a large sum of money from her father, and her role in the film sends the message that only when one is wealthy can one afford to maintain one's self-identity while simultaneously developing a successful relationship. Where Xiao Mei declares her interest in finding a rich man to marry, Li Cong says she is just looking for a man who is smart and honest, at least partially because she has enough wealth of her own that she does not need an affluent husband. She has a smaller role in the movie than the other women, and her story suggests that finding love without making concessions is possible, but one must be both lucky and wealthy for it to happen.

Li Cong is even-tempered and rational, albeit fatalistic. At the beginning of the movie, she says that she wants her relationship with her husband to be like that of an old friend, and that she is hoping for a miracle. Coupled with a series of dates she has on the seaside where the setting is so romantic and clichéd that it borders on fantasy, the viewers are meant to understand that because of her wealth, Li Cong can afford the luxury of these "dream dates" and is entitled to the miracle relationship for which she hopes. This miracle comes in the form of a meal; while at a restaurant, she tastes a dish reminiscent of one her father used to make, and insists upon finding the chef. When they meet, it is love at first sight. She seeks him out again, and throughout the movie, they develop a beautiful, loving relationship.

Unfortunately, her friends do not approve of the relationship; Guan Xiang comes from a poor family in a rural area and there is a large gap in their education levels, so her friends fear that he and Li Cong will have nothing in common and that he will be unable to provide for her. However, Li Cong maintains that she understands what she is doing, and that she is at a place in her life where she knows what is really important to her. What the viewers are to understand

here, is that because she has money, Li Cong is entitled to be free spirited, and to make her own decisions, even if her friends disagree with them. Eventually, Li Cong and Guan Xiang get engaged, and he buys them a new house. As it turns out, his investment was made at the expense of keeping his job; he could not afford to buy new furniture for the house, so he took a significant amount of time off from work to make it himself, and thus was fired. As Li Cong has high connections, however, she is able to find him a new, more prestigious job, taking on the role of his savior in a charming, lighthearted scene. They get married, and presumably live happily ever after.

Li Cong's character sets up the model of "the conditional happy ending". It seems that she is able to find love so easily because her standards are not shallow, and she accepts that she will find love at the whim of the universe. However, the fact is that she can only find her dream suitor because her inheritance enables her to find love without making concessions. Even though her friends initially disapprove of her significant other, she does not allow this to impact their relationship. Because she has the luxury of being able to focus only on her happiness and raw emotion as criteria for determining the success of the relationship, she is able to look past Guan Xiang's poor upbringing and lack of education without feeling like she is making any sacrifices. In a somewhat cynical twist on a seemingly lighthearted storyline, the director sends a message that there is a direct correlation between money and romantic success, and that only when a women is wealthy can she find love while simultaneously maintaining her self-identity.

The format of this movie is cut in a very deliberate manner. The movie is choppy, quickly moving between the various characters and their story lines in order to mirror their fast-paced lives in Beijing and the impact this pace has on their search for love. The movie ostensibly shows the women's perspectives, and explores their desire to escape the world of *shengnü*. It also

examines the ways in which they try to find their true identities through their relationships with these men. Through the movie's use of different types of women in various situations, it provides well-rounded insight into how women see the search for love in modern, urban China. Through its different story lines, *Tao Hua Yun* ultimately sends the message that navigating the dating scene in such a fast-paced environment is incredibly difficult, and without changing one's self-identity or falling into extremely lucky circumstances, it is nearly impossible.

Conclusion

It appears that the *shengnü* has arisen from women's difficulties in reconciling the post-Mao reclamations of femininity with the values of equality, progress and the model of the female strong woman that became prevalent during Mao era. The emergence of consumer culture and exposure to western perspectives of femininity that arose with the economic reforms and open door policy after Mao's death in 1976 stood in stark juxtaposition with the traditional, Confucian ideals of feminine softness and subservience, which had started to become the norm again in the reform era. Many of the women who had grown up believing that any capitalist influence was bourgeois and bad now found themselves drawn to the educational and professional opportunities brought forth by the newly emerging industries. When many decided to seek higher education and financial independence, they did so with the tradeoff of getting married and having a family. Some were willing to make this trade; often, they were proud of being the first women to have this type of independent stability, so they embraced the fact that they were perfectly capable of surviving on their own without a husband and decided to forgo the traditional route of marriage and children. Alternatively, others found themselves unable to find husbands willing to marry such independent, free willed women in a society so traditionally saturated with patriarchy. There are just a few of many nuances and influences that have contributed to the definition and phenomenon of the *shengnü.*

Media portrayal of the *shengnü*, however, seems to be focused around the latter type, the reluctant *shengnü.* From the women depicted in *Fei Cheng Wu Rao*, it would seem that young, unmarried women in China are desperate to find someone to marry, though also unwilling to sacrifice their standards for the type of man they believe would be an ideal husband. This tension between wanting to get married, or more specifically not wanting to become a *shengnü*, and the

unwillingness to settle for an imperfect partner is what makes the plight of the *shengnü* so unique of a phenomenon. Likewise, the *shengnü* portrayed in *Taohua Yun* each come from different backgrounds, and express differing degrees of ambivalence regarding marriage and remarriage. Despite all of the ambiguities and complexities present in the movie, its overarching message seems to imply that women have a deep seated, even innate desire towards companionship, and that they will make any changes necessary to their self-idenities in order to find love. However, some of the accounts from the interviewees in *Single in the City* would intimate otherwise. Despite the possibility that some of these women have cited their vocal willingness to remain unmarried as measures taken to save face, it does seem that there is a legitimate representation of women who are genuinely content with breaking from tradition and remaining single. The implication here is that according to movies and television, the phenomenon of the *shengnü* is a problem that must be solved, rather than an acceptable way of life. Modern, urban Chinese society places pressure on these women to embrace Confucian models of femininity while also giving them the tools and opportunities for real, individual success. They are forced to choose femininity, or a balance between femininity and professional life; embracing a career at the expense of a family is not something society accepts as a viable option. Thus, the *shengnü*, willing or not, is ostracized by her environment in part for failing to meet outdated feminine prescriptions.

There were many limitations included in the undertaking of this project, the most notable being a relative lack of English scholarship on the *shengnü* phenomenon. With the exception of one source, an article on the show *Fei Cheng Wu Rao,* all of the sources that directly mention *shengnü*, including its definitions and implications were in Chinese. Although the phenomenon has existed for a longer time that the word itself, there was also very little statistical data

available for further analysis of unmarried women in modern, urban China. Though it is possible that the *shengnü* phenomenon is too newly recognized to have a substantial base of data available, it is also possible that the Chinese government organizations may have information that has not yet been made public. At the same time, this lack of scholarship is also what makes this project significant; it is among the first English studies to mention the *shengnü* phenomenon, let alone explore it in depth. It is a topic that is cross-culturally relevant, and it is a real issue to which women and even men of many different demographics can relate.

In terms of further exploration that can be done on the subject, there would be much room for expansion in research on the *shengnü* phenomenon. It would not be at all unlikely for there to exist a strong correlation between the rates of single men and women and China's one-child policy. With fewer children born to each family, particularly with China's notoriety for female infanticide and a male/female ratio skewed such that there are significantly more men than women of marriage age in China, it is surprising that the issue of singleness is focused around women. Further expansion upon this topic could apply the one child policy's implications to the development of the *shengnü* phenomenon and examine the connections. Similarly, future research in the same subject area could touch upon other portrayals of *shengnü* in the media particularly with regard to televisions dramas, and perhaps delve more deeply into nuances of the *shengnan,* as well. It is likely that, as this topic continues to gain prominence in the media in China, statistics will be gathered and released. Additionally, there is a new book, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*, the subject that has only recently been written, and has not yet been released. It covers some of the nuances in the negative influences of the Mao era on women's position in society, and would be a useful resource for future research.

Finally, any further data collected or released to the public would do much to substantiate the findings of this project.

The *shengnü* is an important, albeit misunderstood aspect of modern, urban China. She is to some extent ostracized by a society that traditionally frowns upon unmarried people of marriage age. Therefore, the marginalization of the *shengnü* is tied deeply to other rejections of unconventional lifestyles, including homosexuality, and these are all large obstacles in the way of China's progress. Until further research is done and this phenomenon is destigmatized, there will continue to be an unnecessary subjugation of what is becoming a crucial section of China's population.

Works Cited

Bailey, Paul John. *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Bergman, Justin. "China's TV Dating Shows: For Love or Money?" *Time*, June 30, 2010. Accessed March 24, 2014. http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2000558,00.html.

"Charming Ni Ni Graces COSMO Bride Magazine." Xinhua News. October 20, 2013. Accessed March 25, 2014. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/celebrity/2013-10/20/content_17046230_2.htm.

Croll, Elisabeth. *Changing Identities of Chinese Women: Rhetoric, Experience, and Self-Perception in Twentieth-century China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995.

Croll, Elisabeth. *The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Cui, Shuqin. *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003.

Evans, Harriet. "Changing Images of the Ideal Wife." In *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, edited by Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, 335-60. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002.

Evans, Harriet. *The Subject of Gender: Daughters and Mothers in Urban China*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

Garrett, Valery M. *Chinese Dress: From the Qing Dynasty to the Present*. Tokyo: Tuttle Pub., 2007.

Glosser, Susan L. "'The Truths I Have Learned:' Nationalism, Family Reform, and Male Identity in China's New Culture Movement, 1915-1923." In *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, edited by Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, 120-44. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Hershatter, Gail. *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Honig, Emily. "Maoist Mappings of Gender: Reassessing the Red Guards." Edited by Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom. In *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, 255-68. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Hui, Wu. *Once Iron Girls: Essays on Gender by Post-Mao Chinese Literary Women*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010.

Idema, W. L., and Beata Grant. *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004.

Jin, Yihong. "Rethinking the "Iron Girls": Gender and Labor During the Chinese Cultural Revolution." In *Translating Feminisms in China*, by Dorothy Ko and Zheng Wang. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007.

Jing, Guiying, and Hongqiang Xi. "Cong "Sheng Nu" Xian Xiang Kan Zhong Guo Nu Xing Zi Wo Yi Shi De Fa Zhan [From the "Shengnü" Phenomenon, Comes the Development of Chinese Women's Self Identity]." *Wenhua Jianshi Zongheng* 200 (December 2012).

Li, Changhua李长华. "Xinci 'shengnü yu shehui wenhua xinli tanshi 新词"剩女"与社会文化心理探视 [The New Word "Shengnü" Gives Insight into Society's Cultural Mentality]." *Yuyan Xin Guancha*, May 2008, 120-21.

Li, Jing. "Playing by the Rules in the Game of Love." *China Daily* (Beijing), July 02, 2011. Accessed March 1, 2014. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-07/02/content_10049150.htm.

Liu, Jane, and Marilyn Carpenter. "Trends and Issues of Women's Education in China." *The Clearing House* 78, no. 6 (July/August 2005): 277-81.

McWilliams, Sally E. ""People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy": Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1&2 (Summer 2013): 162-81. doi:10.1353/wsq.2013.0051.

Otis, Eileen M. *Markets and Bodies: Women, Service Work, and the Making of Inequality in China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012.

Pao Tao, Chia-lin. "The Nude Parade of 1927: Nudity and Women's Liberation in China." In *Women and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Societies: Beyond Han Patriarchy*, edited by Shanshan Du and Ya-chen Chen, 171-84. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011.

Tao, Jie, Bijun Zheng, and Shirley L. Mow. *Holding Up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004.

Theiss, Janet M. "Femininity in Flux: Gendered Virtue and Social Conflict in the Mid-Qing Courtroom." Edited by Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom. In *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, 47-66. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Wang, Xiuli 王秀丽. "Tan "Shengnü" Yici De Fanyi 谈"剩女"一词的翻译[Discussing the Meaning of Shengnü]." *Journal of Chifeng University* 71, no. 7 (July 2010).

Woman Being. Directed by Wenjie Qin. Watertown, Mass.: Documentary Educational Resources, 1997. DVD.

Wong, Edward. "China TV Grows Racy, and Gets a Chaperon." *The New York Times*, January 1, 2012. Accessed March 1, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/world/asia/censors-pull-reins-as-china-tv-chasing-profit-gets-racy.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

Wu, Jing. "Post-Socialist Articulation of Gender Positions: Contested Public Sphere of Reality Dating Shows." Edited by Youna Kim. In *Women and the Media in Asia: The Precarious Self*, 220-36. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Wu, Shuping. *Single in the City: A Survey of China's Single Women*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2012.

References

Fei Cheng Wu Rao 非诚勿扰 *(If You Are the One)*. Jiangsu Satellite Television. December 04, 2011. http://video.sina.com.cn/v/b/68283464-2019845715.html.

TaoHua Yun 桃花运. Directed by Liwen Ma. Performed by Ge You, Fang Bingbing, Vivian Wu, Guo Tao. Beijing: Media Asia Film, 2008.