

= Sheng nu =

Sheng nu (剩女 ; shèngnǚ ; common translation : " leftover women " or " leftover ladies ") is a derogatory term made popular by the All @-@ China Women 's Federation that classifies women who remain unmarried in their late twenties and beyond . The term is most prominently used in China , including a state sponsored directive and program , but has been used to describe women across Asia , India , and North America . The term has gone on to become widely used in the mainstream media and has been the subject of several television series , magazine and newspaper articles , and book publications focusing on both the good and bad aspects of the term and surrounding culture . Xu Xiaomin of The China Daily described the sheng nus as " a social force to be reckoned with " while others have argued the term should be taken as a positive to mean " successful women " . The slang term , 3S or 3S Women , meaning " single , seventies (1970s) , and stuck " has also been used in place of sheng nu . The equivalent term for men , guang gun (光棍) meaning bare branches , is used to refer to men who do not marry and thus do not add ' branches ' to the family tree . Similarly , shengnan (剩男) or " leftover men " has also been used .

= = Background = =

The one @-@ child policy (Family Planning Program) and sex @-@ selective abortions in China have caused a growing disproportion in the country 's gender balance . Since 1979 , when the one @-@ child policy was introduced , approximately 20 million more men than women have been born , or 120 males to 100 females born , and by 2020 , China is expected to have 24 million more men than women . The global average is 103 males to 107 females .

According to The New York Times , the State Council of the People 's Republic of China (Central People 's Government) issued an " edict " in 2007 regarding the Population and Family Planning Program (one @-@ child @-@ policy) to address the urgent gender imbalance and cited it as a major " threat to social stability " . The council further cited " upgrading population quality (suzhi) " as one of its primary goals and appointed the All @-@ China Women 's Federation , a state agency established in 1949 to " protect women 's rights and interests " , to oversee and resolve the issue .

The exact etymology of the term is not conclusively known , but most reliable sources cite it as having entered the mainstream in 2006 . The China Daily reported in 2011 that Xu Wei , the editor @-@ in @-@ chief of the Cosmopolitan Magazine China , coined the term . The term , sheng nu , literally translates to " leftover ladies " or " leftover women " . In 2007 , the Ministry of Education of the People 's Republic of China released an official statement defining sheng nu as any " unmarried women over the age of 27 " and added it to the national lexicon . The ministry expanded the meaning as a " failure to find a husband " due to " overly high expectations for marriage partners " in a subsequent statement . According to several sources , the government mandated the All @-@ China Women 's Federation to publish series of articles stigmatizing unwed women who were in their late twenties .

In March 2011 , the All @-@ China Women 's Federation posted a controversial article titled ' Leftover Women Do Not Deserve Our Sympathy ' shortly after International Women 's Day . An excerpt states , " Pretty girls do not need a lot of education to marry into a rich and powerful family . But girls with an average or ugly appearance will find it difficult " and " These girls hope to further their education in order to increase their competitiveness . The tragedy is , they don 't realise that as women age , they are worth less and less . So by the time they get their MA or PhD , they are already old ? like yellowed pearls . " Originally at least 15 articles were available on its website relating to the subject of sheng nu , which have now been subsequently removed , that included matchmaking advice and tips .

= = China = =

= = = Culture and statistics = = =

The National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China (NBS) and state census figures reported approximately 1 in 5 women between the age of 25 @-@ 29 remain unmarried . In contrast , the proportion of unwed men in that age range is much higher , sitting at around 1 in 3 . In a 2010 Chinese National Marriage Survey , it was reported that 9 out of 10 men believe that women should be married before they are 27 years old . 7 @. @ 4 % of Chinese women between 30 @-@ 34 were unmarried and the percentage falls to 4 @. @ 6 % between the ages 35 ? 39 . In comparison with other neighbouring countries with similar traditional values , these figures put China as having some of the highest female marriage rates in the world . Despite being categorized as a " relatively rare " demographic , the social culture and traditions of China have put the issue in the social spotlight .

A study of married couples in China noted that men tended to marry down the socio @-@ economic ladder . " There is an opinion that A @-@ quality guys will find B @-@ quality women , B @-@ quality guys will find C @-@ quality women , and C @-@ quality men will find D @-@ quality women , " says Huang Yuanyuan . " The people left are A @-@ quality women and D @-@ quality men . So if you are a leftover woman , you are A @-@ quality . " A University of North Carolina demographer who studies China 's gender imbalance , Yong Cai , further notes that " men at the bottom of society get left out of the marriage market , and that same pattern is coming to emerge for women at the top of society " .

China , and many other Asian countries , share a long history of conservative and patriarchal view of marriage and the family structure including marrying at a young age and hypergamy . The pressure from society and family has been the source criticism , shame , social embarrassment and social anxiety for many women who are unmarried . Chen , another women interviewed by the BBC , said the sheng nu are " afraid their friends and neighbours will regard me as abnormal . And my parents would also feel they were totally losing face , when their friends all have grandkids already " . Similar sentiment has been shared amongst other women in China , particularly amongst recent university graduates . A report by CNN cited a survey of 900 female university graduates across 17 Chinese universities where approximately 70 percent of those surveyed said " their greatest fear is becoming a 3S lady " .

The increasing popularity of unwed women in China has been largely accredited to the growing educated middle class . Women are more free and able to live independently in comparison to previous generations . Forbes reported that in 2013 , " 11 of the 20 richest self @-@ made women in the world are Chinese " . In addition , it cites that Chinese female CEOs make up 19 percent of women in management jobs making it the second highest worldwide after Thailand . Another noted outcome has been the reluctance amongst male partners to date women who are professionally more successful than they or unwilling to give up work or both . A rapidly growing trend in premarital sex has been commonly surveyed and noted amongst women in China . In 1989 , 15 % of Chinese women engaged in premarital sex against 2013 where between 60 @-@ 70 % had done so . Chinese Academy of Social Sciences professor Li states that this shows an increase in the types of relationships amongst new generations in China .

A movement in China to have the word banned from most government websites , including the All @-@ China Women 's Federation website , was marginally successful . The wording was changed to " old unmarried women " , but sheng nu remains a widespread and mainstream idea . The term has also been embraced by some feminists with the opening of ' sheng nu ' social clubs . In an interview with fashion editor Sandra Bao by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting , Bao stated that " many modern , single women in China enjoy their independence and feel comfortable holding out for the right man , even as they grow older . " She further explained , " We don 't want to make compromises because of age or social pressure " .

Between 2008 and 2012 , sociologist Sandy To , while at the University of Cambridge , conducted a ' grounded theory method ' study in China regarding the topic . To 's research focused on " marriage partner choice " by Chinese professional women in the form of a typology of four different " partner choice strategies " . The main finding of the study found that contrary to the popular belief that highly educated and single women remain unmarried , or do not want to take on traditional roles in

marriage , because of personal preference , that in contrast , they commonly have an appetite for marriage and that their main obstacle is traditional patriarchal attitudes . The study also pointed out that in other Asian countries such as Japan , Singapore , South Korea , and Taiwan , where women have been receiving a higher education , that correspondingly , the average age of marriage amongst them is much higher . The Chinese People 's Daily cited a 2012 United Nations survey that found 74 percent of women in the United Kingdom and 70 percent of women in Japan were single between the ages of 25 and 29 . The China Daily published an article that cited figures from the 2012 United Nations ' World Marriage Data which reported 38 % of women in the United States , and more than 50 % of women in Britain remained unmarried in their 30s .

= = = Media = = =

The Chinese media has capitalized on the subject matter with television shows , viral videos , newspapers and magazine articles , and pundits that have sharply criticized women for " waiting it out for a man with a bigger house or fancier car " . The television series comedy Will You Marry Me and My Family , which premièred on CCTV @-@ 8 , that revolves around the principal concept of sheng nu as a family frantically searches for a prospective spouse of the main character who is in her 30s . The series Old Women Should Get Married and You Are the One (MediaCorp Channel 8) have been accredited with minting terms like " the shengnu economy " and further bringing the subject into public fascination and obsession . If You Are the One (Jiangsu Satellite Television) is a popular Chinese game show , loosely based on Taken Out , whose rise has been credited with the " national obsession " surrounding sheng nu . The show between 2010 @-@ 2013 was China 's most viewed game show .

In response to a popular music video called " No Car , No House " about blue @-@ collar Chinese bachelors , another music video called " No House , No Car " was made by a group of women and uploaded on International Women 's Day . The video was viewed over 1 @.@ 5 million times over the first two days on the Chinese video site Youku . Other commercial interests have taken advantage of the situation such as the increased popularity of " boyfriends for hire " . The concept has also been turned into a popular television drama series called Renting a Girlfriend for Home Reunion .

= = = Longevity and consequences = = =

Experts have further theorized about the term 's longevity as the National Population and Family Planning Commission has been moving towards phasing out the one @-@ child policy in favour of an " appropriate and scientific family planning policy (one @-@ child policy) " where the child limit may be increased . He Feng in The China Daily points out , " the sheng nu phenomenon is nothing like the feminist movement in the West , in which women consciously demanded equal rights in jobs and strived for independence . " Rather , the change has been " subtle " and that " perhaps decades later , will be viewed as symbolic of China 's social progress and a turning point for the role of women in its society . "

In an article by the South China Morning Post , it concludes , " with mounting pressure and dwindling hopes of fulfilling both career and personal ambitions at home , for women such as Xu the urge to pack up and leave only grows stronger with time . Without women such as her , though , the mainland will be left with not only a weaker economy , but an even greater pool of frustrated leftover men . "

Divorce rates in Shanghai and Beijing , China 's two most populated economic centres , have been steadily rising since 2005 with it reaching 30 % in 2012 . This among other contributing factors such as online dating and the upward mobility of people have been attributed to pushing the average age of marriage in China to 27 . Up from 20 in 1950 making it closer to global marriage trends .

= = In other cultures = =

== United States ==

Comparisons have been made to a 1986 Newsweek cover and featured article that said " women who weren 't married by 40 had a better chance of being killed by a terrorist than of finding a husband " . Newsweek eventually apologized for the story and in 2010 launched a study that discovered 2 in 3 women who were 40 and single in 1986 had married since . The story caused a " wave of anxiety " and some " skepticism " amongst professional and highly educated women in the United States . The article was cited several times in the 1993 Hollywood film Sleepless in Seattle starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan . The Chinese People 's Daily noted a United Nations study , mentioned earlier , that in the United States in 2012 , nearly half of all women between 25 and 29 were single .

The term bachelorette is used to describe any unmarried women who is still single . The popular American reality television series The Bachelorette capitalizes on matchmaking often successful businesswomen in their mid to late twenties with other eligible bachelors .

Former Los Angeles deputy mayor Joy Chen , a Chinese @-@ American , wrote a book titled Do Not Marry Before Age 30 (2012) . Chen 's book , a pop culture bestseller , was commissioned and published by the Chinese government as a self @-@ help book for unmarried women . In an earlier interview with The China Daily , she was quoted with saying , " We should not just try to find a ' Mr Right Now ' , but a ' Mr Right Forever ' " . The same year , Chen was named " Woman of the Year " by the All @-@ China Women 's Federation .

== Other countries ==

Singapore is noted to have gone through a similar period . In 1983 , then Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew sparked the ' Great Marriage Debate ' when he encouraged Singapore men to choose highly educated women as wives . He was concerned that a large number of graduate women were unmarried . Some sections of the population , including graduate women , were upset by his views . Nevertheless , a match @-@ making agency Social Development Unit (SDU) was set up to promote socialising among men and women graduates . In the Graduate Mothers Scheme , Lee also introduced incentives such as tax rebates , schooling , and housing priorities for graduate mothers who had three or four children , in a reversal of the over @-@ successful ' Stop @-@ at @-@ Two ' family planning campaign in the 1960s and 1970s . By the late 1990s , the birth rate had fallen so low that Lee 's successor Goh Chok Tong extended these incentives to all married women , and gave even more incentives , such as the ' baby bonus ' scheme . Lee reaffirmed his controversial position in his personal memoir , From Third World to First , " many well @-@ educated Singaporean women did not marry and have children . "

The 2012 UN study cited by the Chinese People 's Daily reported that in Britain 74 percent and in Japan 70 percent of all women between 25 and 29 were single . A similar feature in the People 's Daily focused on the reception of the concept of sheng nu from netizens outside of China , particularly in Asia , specifically Korea , Japan , and India . One Japanese netizen noted that during the 1980s , the term " Christmas cakes " was commonly used to refer to women who were unmarried and beyond the national age average of married women . The actual reference to Christmas cakes is the saying , " who wants Christmas cakes after December 25 " . Another contributor wrote , similarly " a class of highly educated , independent age 27 + women who choose to live a more liberated life and put their talent / skill to good use in society " is happening in India . " People must make their own choices and must simply refuse others ' labels and be blissfully happy , " she further explained . Alternatively , for men in Japan , the term Herbivore men is used to describe men who have no interest in getting married or finding a girlfriend .

The China Daily posted the question , " Are ' leftover women ' a unique Chinese phenomenon ? " on their opinions column . Readers cited their own experiences universally stating they too felt societal and family pressures in their 30s and 40s for marriage . Yong Cai who studies China 's gender imbalance at the University of North Carolina stated , " The ' sheng nu ' phenomenon is

similar to trends we 've already seen around the world , in countries ranging from the United States to Japan as higher education and increased employment give women more autonomy " . Cai cites studies that show that women are now breaking the tradition of " mandatory marriage " to have fewer children or marry later on in life .

Other similar terms that are still used in the modern lexicon of other countries and cultures show the concept has existed in some cases as far back as the 16th century . The term spinster was used to describe unmarried or single women of a marriageable age . It wasn 't until 2004 when the Civil Partnership Act replaced the word spinster with " single " in the relationship history section of marriage certificates in the UK . Subsequently , at the height of the Industrial Revolution , the term surplus women was used to describe the excess of unmarried women in Britain .

Catherinette was a traditional French label for women 25 years old or older who were still unmarried by the Feast of Saint Catherine of Alexandria on 25 November . The French idiom , " to do St. Catherine 's hair , " meaning " to remain an old maid " is also associated with this tradition .