



Flying Solo Salon

Flying Solo Salon is an identity and community building program that helps Chinese single professional women to challenge the stigma of "leftover women."

FLYING SOLO SALON

A Thesis Project by

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“This society only acknowledges one way for women to achieve happiness, which is getting married. No matter how much I excel in my work, once I am not married and don’t have kids, I am a loser in their view.”

Liu Xiao

E-Commerce manager

33 years old, living in Beijing



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Context: “Leftover women” in China



- 1 The social problem
- 2 The importance of the issue
- 3 Contributing factors

INTRODUCTION

Leftover women is a standard translation of the Chinese word Sheng nu (剩女). It is a derogatory term made popular by the All-China Women's Federation and state media that classify women who remain unmarried in their late twenties and beyond.

According to the official definition, generally, "Leftover women" are the single women over 27 years old. They live in big cities, have high education level and financial independence.

In China, the term was intentionally propagandized by state media and the government to pressure educated unmarried women for promoting marriage and birth rate. The term compares these unmarried women to leftovers in the marriage market. It widely used in public, largely shaped the public opinion that perceived those women as "greedy," "picky," "aggressive," "hard to be pleased," and "too strong to fit in family life," which marginalized those women and jeopardized their rights of self- autonomy.

And also because of their parents' intense anxiety of getting their daughter married, these women are usually under huge and long-lasting parental pressure, which makes them anxious about their age and identity.

1 The social problem

INTRODUCTION

CHINA 5 Million+

In China, over 5 million of single women are living under the pressure.

BEIJING 500,000+

In Beijing alone, there are over half million single women are characterized as leftover women.

In China, according to the Demographic Census in 2012, there were over 12 millions unmarried women between 25-34 years old, approximately 5 millions of them were college educated, those young women in China are most likely influenced by the “leftover women” issue.

The unmarried women between 27 to 33 are facing the heaviest pressure of getting married. Most of them are arranged to have blind date or match-making activities with strangers, in order to find a marriage candidate faster. The process is frustrating and sometimes harm their self-esteem.

2 The importance of the issue



INTRODUCTION

From another perspective, the issue of “Leftover women” is a signal of social progress. As leftover women, they are well-educated and financially independent. Hence, they don’t have to rely on men, and see marriage as a necessity anymore. However, Under the significant parental and social pressure, if she fails to resist, she may reluctantly accept a marriage which does not meet her need, then most likely ends up disappointing life which contributes to high divorce rate and other family issues. But if she chooses to stay single, she will confront increasing parental and social pressure and stigma, which makes her feel harder to integrate into the mainstream of the society. Even though some of them choose to resist, they detach from their parents and relatives to live a free and autonomous life, it causes isolation or more conflicts that ruin their family harmony.

To sum up, this issue has been jeopardizing a large number of women’s well-being, and it aggravated the gender inequity in China, undermined the social stability in the long term.

INTRODUCTION

1) The unequal marriage

Men take more interests in marriages in China. Most of the Chinese women have to work and also do housework, take care of children and the elders at home, so women carry more burden after getting married. According to Chinese people love and marriage 2015 Survey Report comparing to men, women felt much less happy and content towards their marriage, especially after having children. There were 29% families in which the wife mainly takes care of children, compared with 2.1% that the husband takes care of children. The unequal status in a marriage makes the independent women wary about losing their rights and interests after marrying. Hence, they more likely insist their criteria and refuse to compromise.

2) The traditional culture

Chinese people value family very much, and in traditional culture, getting married and giving birth to children are duties for young people. Although the notion has changed nowadays, marriage still weighs a lot in the mainstream of the society.

3 Contributing factors

INTRODUCTION

3) The power structure of gender inequality

Chinese society is a very typical patriarchal structure, the values of it is inequality, especially gender inequality. In this structure, men power over women, parents power over children, and the government power over people. The power dynamic is control. Hence, it's common that men take more rights and interests in marriages, parents have authority to intervene children's lives and make decisions for them, and the government enacts unfair regulations to promote marriage and birth rate, all of these play a role in oppressing women.

4) The policy and state media

The one-child policy 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, which will threaten the social stability. Hence, the government need to maintain the social stability, and also need to compensate the gender imbalance, that pushing more women into marriage is a necessary approach. The government enacted unfair regulations restricted the reproductive rights of unmarried women, and the state media promoted the term of "leftover women" to stigmatize unmarried women and aggravate their anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

5) The parental pressure

It's very common that parents intervene their children's marriage and other important decisions in life. Before the new China was founded in 1945, for a long period in history, women could only accept the marriage arranged by their family, and they didn't have right to decide for themselves. Also, the traditional culture of "Xiao" (a traditional Chinese morality proposing that children should be obedient to their parents) justified their authority.

6) The force of capital

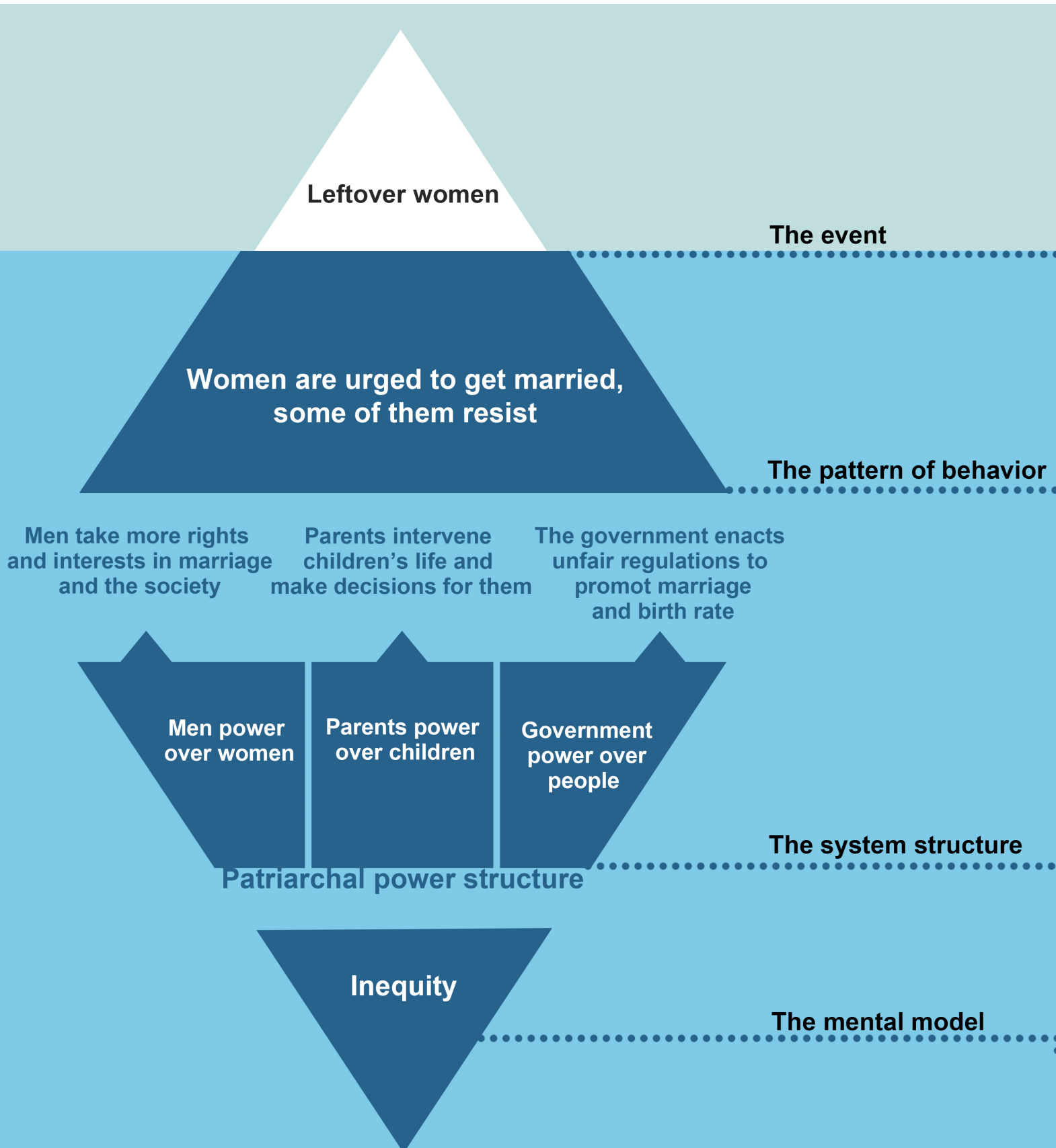
Last but not the least, the marriage and match-making industry in China also play an important role to pressure unmarried women. The massive amount of single people in China implied a significant business opportunity, which promoted many match-making service websites, as well as many cultural and recreational products. Drawing public attention to leftover women and maintaining the popularity of the topic was their need to survive. Only did continuously stigmatize those women, they could make huge profits. Hence, the capital manipulated public media to form the overall atmosphere of the anxiety of getting married. Some big match-making service companies even cooperated with governmental institutions like All-China Women's Federation to conduct national love and marriage survey but interpreted the data in a biased way to lead the public opinion, to attract more single people to buy their service.



PROCESS

PROCESS

The Ecosystem Map



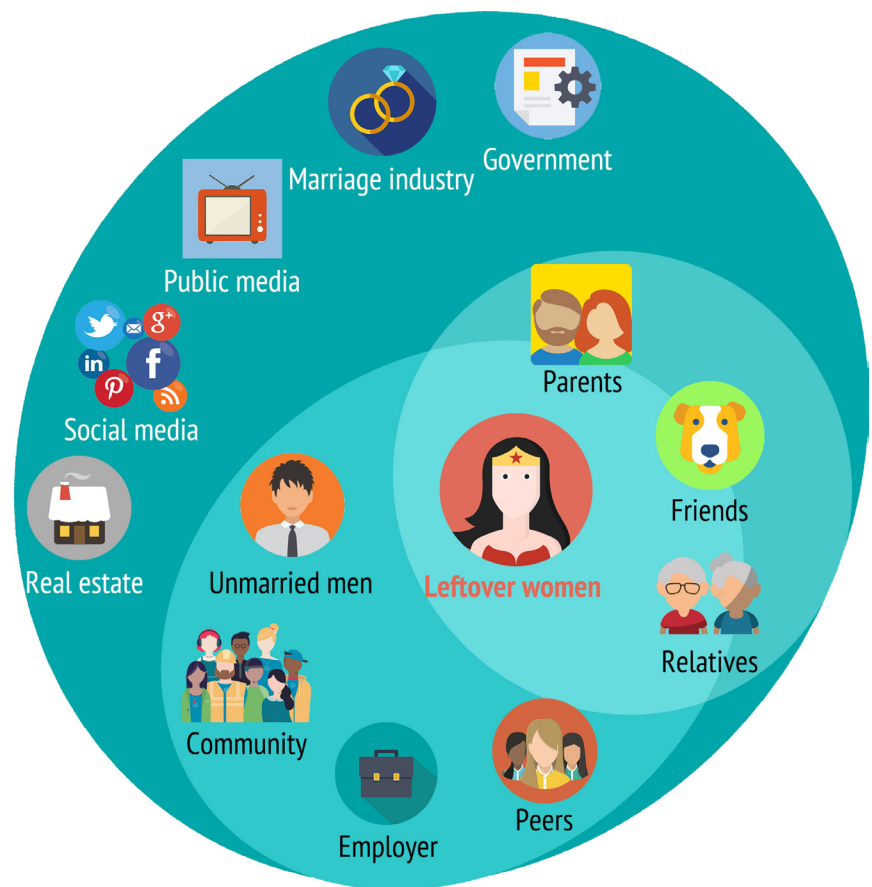
PROCESS

Chinese society is a typical patriarchal society. If we observe this system from bottom to top, we can see the most rooted mental model, which means the traditional value is Inequity. The system structure that stems from it is patriarchal power structure.

Male elders are the most privileged in this structure, while young women are the underprivileged. The Confucian culture and feudal hierarchy regulated the unequal relations between monarch and officials, father and son, husband and wife, which passed down to modern times. Hence, we still have that the government power over people, parents power over children, and men power over women. it's very common that the government enact unfair regulations to promote marriage and birth rate, parents have authority to intervene children's lives and make decisions for them, men take more interests in a marriage. Therefore, behaviors of different parties interact, finally leads to the issue of "leftover women."

Only when we see the whole ecosystem and power structure, can we understand that the issue is not about a group of women who are too "picky" to find a satisfying husband, but they are facing a structural inequality.

PROCESS



The Stakeholders Map

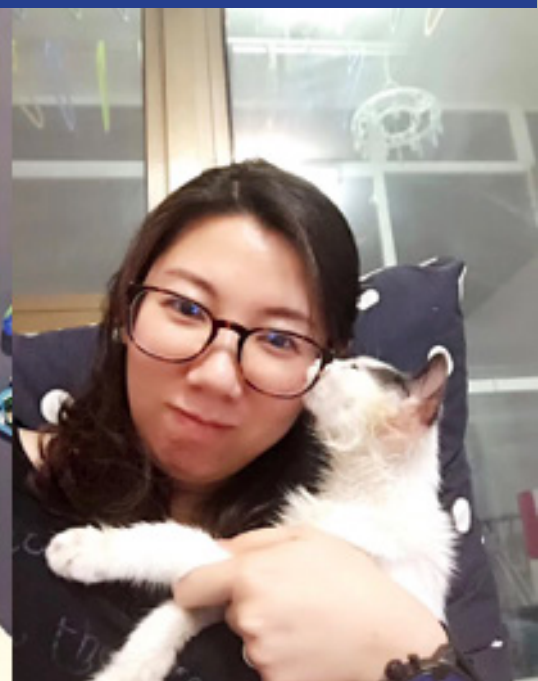
The stakeholder map shows where the pressure for “leftover women” comes from. There are three circles for their relations. Parents, relatives, and friends are in the intimate interpersonal cycle, they directly and frequently contact with “leftover women”. Hence, “leftover women” feel the most pressure from them.

Unmarried men, community, employer, and peers are peripheral, so the pressure which they impose to “leftover women” is not as strong as relatives’. The environment of the whole society influences the atmosphere of these two interpersonal cycles. And the government, state media, social media, marriage and matchmaking industry, and real estate industry contribute to the environment.

PROCESS



I interviewed 25 so-called "leftover women" from 6 cities in China, including three experts working in women's rights, they are in age from 27 to 40, they are lawyer, architect, teacher, manager, editor, researcher, doctoral student, from all walks of life.



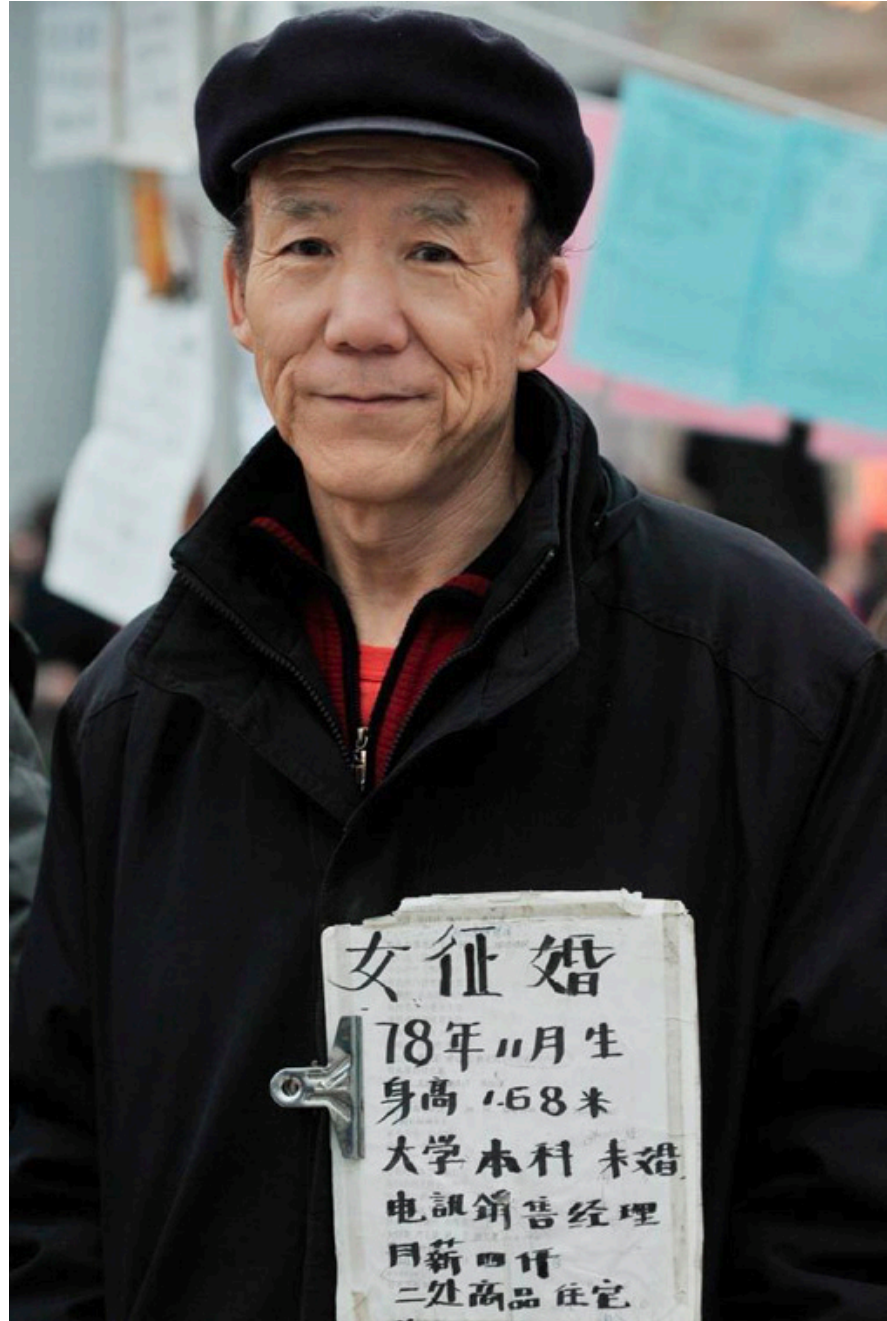
PROCESS

Initially, I tried to focus on their parents, because all of my 25 interviewees ranked "Parents" in the top 3 of important pressure resources, 22 of them ranked "Parents" the most (or the only) significant pressure resource for them.

I Also found most of them had the communication problem with their parents. Because Chinese parents consider their daughter's marriage part of their parental duties, they feel like they have the authority to intervene. They are used to control their daughter's life and make important decisions for her. They don't trust their daughter's free will. They are afraid of that without their protection, their daughter will live a hard life.

And daughters often fail to claim their marital autonomy due to difficulties in communication: they cope with parental pressure by either detaching themselves from or arguing with the parents, either of the two ways ultimately undermines the relationship. In the alternative, they may bend to the pressure and get married in haste, which ends up causing other problems in their life.

Hence, I wanted to help "leftover women" to achieve marital autonomy in their family, so they can be free of parental pressure and make their own decision on marriage.



PROCESS

“My parents always urge me, said if I don’t get married before 30, I will be discounted. And people around me always say I am too picky. But why shouldn’t be picky? I am looking for a partner I will stay for the rest of my life!”

Xiao Yu

Associate editor in new media

28 years old, living in Beijing

PROCESS



I planned to design a communication tool helping my users to assert their authority of marriage confidently and comfortably in the family, which could clarify their boundary but emotionally unify family members together.

But when I proposed this problem statement to advisors, it was challenged a lot by them. I thought it's because of cultural difference. American can hardly feel the pain in the intergenerational relations of Chinese. In the western culture, the boundary between family members is clear, children develop their independent consciousness early, and the parent-child relationship is equal. Although they could understand the issue in Chinese families, either they tended to think this is massive culture issue and is hard to change, or they tended to think this is a private issue, and it's hard for an outsider to intervene.

One of the advisors made a comment which convinced me. She said: "You can hardly see how these women are communicating with their parents so that the whole design will be on the assumption. Although you can interview their parents, but it's not first-hand information."

PROCESS

“I am afraid of being excluded by mainstream society, because I don’t want to lose connections with others. I don’t think single women are connected, we are isolated individuals.”

Hua Yi

University teacher

32 years old, living in Chengdu

Then, I saw a powerful quote by a single woman on social media, which led me to change the direction of the thesis, she said: “At the beginning, you thought you were resisting your parents, at last, You realized that you were resisting the country.”

Hence, I opened my mind and tried to find another intervention point. My attention shifted from the parental pressure of “leftover women” to the situation of single professional women in China.

PROCESS

“For me, Marriage is not merely a relationship, it’s access to resources. Getting married is the mainstream, everybody accepts this lifestyle. This society was built around the institution of marriage, when you choose not to do so, you are excluded from the system. This feeling of exclusion will worsen as time goes by, then peak in your old age.”

Mandy

Divorce lawyer

41 years old, living in Guangzhou

Marriage is just one of the issues for women in China. Most importantly, I observed how women try so hard to blend in this patriarchal society, even at the cost of compromising their own values and rights to pander the values of patriarchy for the sake of being accepted by the mainstream, because otherwise, they don’t have a better way to acquire resources.

PROCESS

Key Insights

Though society devalue them, they value themselves.

In fact, most of them are single professional women who have clear self-awareness and positive self-identification. They know who they are, what they are doing and what they want. Most of them have a promising career and many hobbies. That's why they can resist the pressure, and stand firm being single.

They feel isolated and unaccepted. They need a community.

There is no safe space for them. The government try to push them into marriage for the sake of social stability and promoting fertility rate; the state media spread the stigma and bias their image in public; their friends are getting married one after another and then disconnect with them; even their parents and relatives urge them to marry at cost of disputing and devaluing them.

They want to marry, but are not willing to compromise.

They want to have their value acknowledged by the society. However, with the stigma, they have nothing to say with the deal of marriage, they don't have the bargaining power to get their value acknowledged by the mainstream who only see them as marriage candidates of doing housework, serving husband and bring up children.

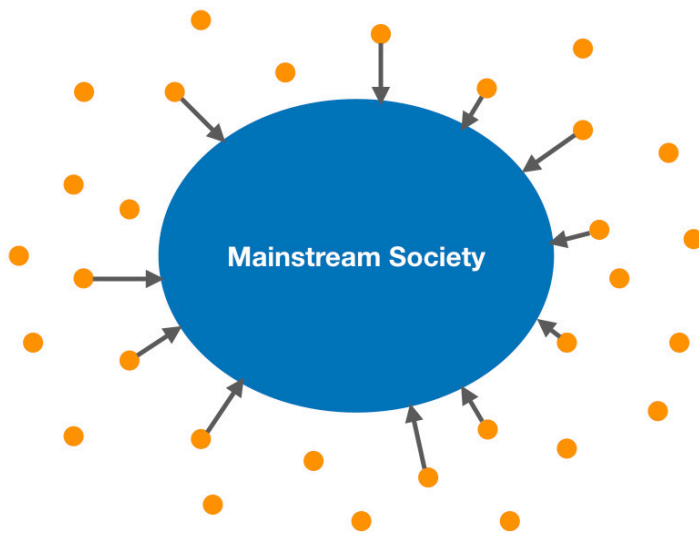
With the stigma, they are afraid of being siloed as losers.

However, the stigma of "leftover women" is big barrier that prevents them from forming a community. With the stigma, they are afraid of being siloed as losers. They don't want to stay with "losers" for warmth. Hence, they can only try to get out from "leftover women" class and blend into mainstream society.

PROCESS

How might I take the initiative to bring those women together and form their voice in public to challenge the stigma, and help them to stay connected so the community can grow ?

PROCESS



The Current Status

"Leftover women" haven't had a community yet. They are scattered and isolated from each other. Although some of them strive to negotiate their rights with the mainstream and try to challenge the stereotype, it doesn't work, because each's power is too weak compared to the mainstream.

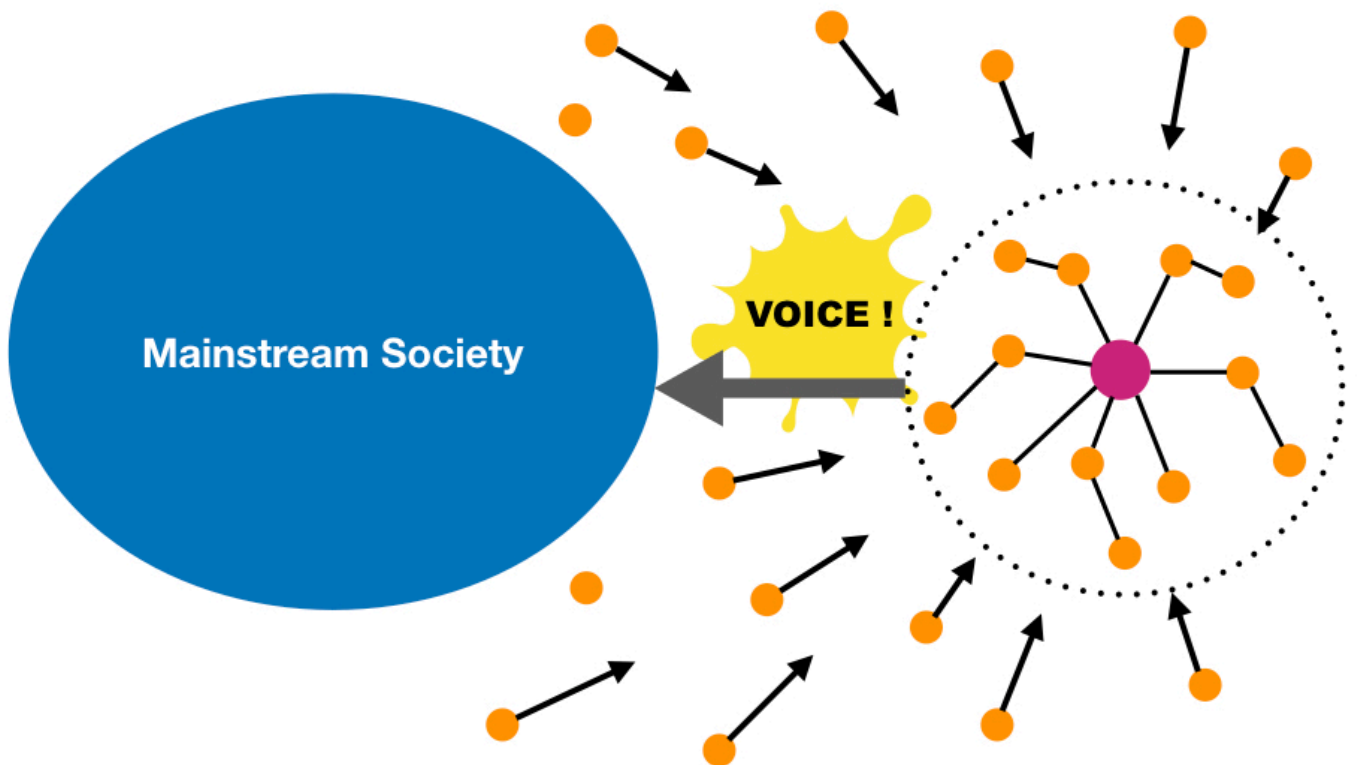


The Vision

This is the ideal relation between mainstream society and the community. When the stigma is eliminated, the community will be included in the mainstream society. All the community members will be safe because they will no longer be discriminated by others, they will be treated equally and have equal access to social resources.

PROCESS

Hypothesis



In my hypothesis, as a founder of the community, I could be a start point, I would try to connect the single women around me. We already had built up relationships through the research so that it wouldn't be hard. Then we would form a small but high-quality group, as the foundation of the community, at the same time we would raise a positive voice to the public, which would attract more women to this group so that the community can grow.

PROCESS

Target Audience

In terms of how to connect people in the first place, I need to understand my target audiences deeply. I need to know what they value and care, so I can motivate them to participate the following practice. Based on the interviews, I defined my target audiences as single professional women who are in the 27 to 40 years old, live in cities in China, have a college education and financial independence.

I found that these single professional women have some common features.



First, they are more willing to participate social activities than married women, because they are lack of family supports, so they need to develop a social network to survive and thrive.

Second, Single professional women dedicate most of their time to work. Each of them is an expert in her area; they have excellent professional skills and plenty of resources.

Third, single professional women invest themselves generously, they care about their economic ability and self-development, so they are willing to learn new things, especially which benefit them.

PROCESS

Thesis Statement

I am building an identity and community for single professional women in China through activities of connecting, sharing and raising a voice in public.

By women, for women, open to the public

PROCESS

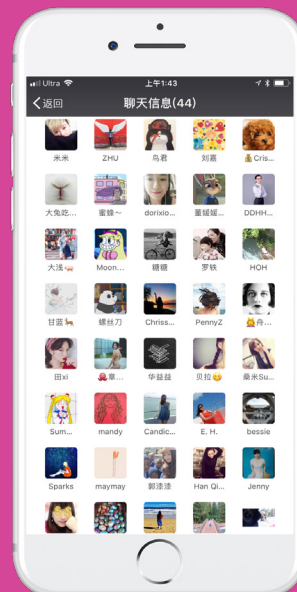
Initial Prototype



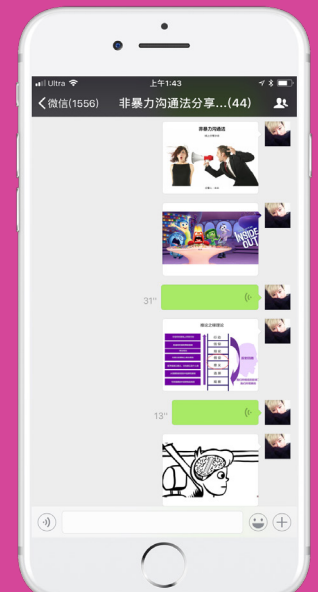
Channel



Publicity



Group



Live streaming

I organized a Non-violent communication online sharing with my target audiences. From previous interviews, I knew that most of my audiences have the communication problem with their parents and relatives, this is a big pain point for them. So, I want to bring this issue up and have a conversation with them, as well as share my knowledge of non-violent communication with them.

I gathered 44 participants together on Wechat, and we organized a group, I did the live streaming using pictures and voice messages, then we had group discussion after the sharing.

I got very positive feedback from my audiences, They thought the topic is beneficial and worthy of spreading, they learned a lot, and they want more, but there were some problems of organizing.



INTERVENTION

INTERVENTION



单飞沙龙 *Flying Solo Salon*

单身职业女性共益聚会



12.30 成都
组织人：米米 微信号：mimiyana

To gather those women together and become a community, I planned to host a whole day event consists of skill, experience and resource sharing and a workshop for single professional women in Chengdu, China. I collected topics from my audiences to make sure that they would be interested in the content of the event.

Agenda

Presentation:

Who are "leftover women"?

Experience Sharing and Conversation:

Single woman entrepreneur

Single woman globe traveler

Skill Sharing:

Non-violent Communication

Workshop:

Creative thinking

Local Event

INTERVENTION



Hua Yi

Architect
University teacher
Founder of "Baiha", a civil academic exchange platform

I partnered with my previous colleague Hua Yi. She is a founder of "Baiha", a civil academic exchange platform in Chengdu. Hence, she has experience and resources to organize public activities, also because she works in a university, so she helped me to recruit some students as volunteers. When I got back to China, we already had a team.

INTERVENTION



Luo Si

CEO of Yuan Yinqiao trading company
post-90's entrepreneur



Guo Jiaqi

Single woman global traveler
traveled 90 countries for 8 years

I invited two guest speakers, both of them were my interviewees.

One was Luo Si, a post 90's single women entrepreneur; she is a young CEO of a local trading company, which develops original local brands and produce daily necessities.

The other one was Guo jiaqi, a single woman global traveler, she traveled 90 countries for five years by herself and did many volunteer works to help local communities.

They were excellent representatives of the community, and they send powerful messages to the public.

INTERVENTION



After I went back to China in the winter break, I published the announcement of the event on social media and also sent invitation letters to my audiences. I hosted the event in a beautiful café store, 37 people came, they have different age and occupation.

In the event, everyone introduced themselves in turn. They talked about their profession, hobbies, struggles, and what supports they need, what resources they can provide for others. Everyone got to know everyone there. It's very glad that I saw many spontaneous interactions and connections happened.



INTERVENTION



"It's very nice I got to know many excellent single women here and found we have a common language. Some of them work in the professional fields which I wanted to get involved for a long time."

Huang Lihan

Designer

33 years old, living in Chengdu

INTERVENTION



I presented my project to the participants, and we had a group discussion about how to build the community together. During the early research, I collected much valuable information, which is very useful to my audiences. Some of them joined my project as interviewees, I also wanted to give them feedback, so they knew that their contribution was appreciated.

“I appreciate you bring me here and give us a safe space to talk about the issue. I was bothered too much but never thought how it could be changed. Now I feel I can be part of it. ”

Han Qinqin

Trainer

30 years old, living in Chengdu



INTERVENTION

In my guest speaker's sharing, Luo Si and Guo Jiaqi told terrific stories about their startup company and global traveling, the interaction was very active.

Many people exchanged contact information with them and kept talking for a long time after the event.



INTERVENTION



“It’s inspiring to see they did such amazing things in life. What made them so courageous to travel alone for several years? And to found a startup company in their early 20’s? I had a similar dream before, I should try as well!”

Xiong Yafang

Accounting

33 years old, living in Chengdu

INTERVENTION

Broadcast

After the event I was invited by one of my participants' friend, who is a famous broadcaster, to do a live stream in her program [Chengdu New Youth], in Sichuan People's Broadcasting Station, which covers over 700 thousand audiences

We had a conversation about the issue of "leftover women" and the event I organized. I made advocacy on behalf of my audiences.



INTERVENTION

Social Media Campaign



To push the impact further, as well as build solidarity of the community, it's essential to form a cohesive narrative for internal and external communication.

Hence, I organized all the pieces together to write an article about the issue of leftover women, for the public to understand and get the message from us. Otherwise, it's too hard for them to see the whole story.

I spent one week to write 20 thousand words article, this article is not only about my project, but also talked about Chinese society, culture, politics, economy which related to the issue.

I published the article on different popular media platform on the eve of Chinese New year, which is the peak time of the pressure of getting married. In the period of Chinese New year, Chinese families get reunion and share their experience during the whole year, elders pay much attention to juniors 'private life, and unmarried women are frequently urged to get married. Hence, this is the right time to bring this issue up in public.

All of my audiences joined and helped me to launch a campaign on Social media, to promote a social movement which aims to destigmatize leftover women and to attract more potential community members.

INTERVENTION



《是时候把”剩女“污名埋进历史的坟墓了 | 我们都是掘墓人》

It's time to bury the stigma of "leftover women" into the grave of history



INTERVENTION

The post on Weibo achieved
1030,000+ views

The article achieved
450,000+ readings



#NoForcedMarriagesNewYear

A Social media campaign on Weibo

The most successful campaign happened on the Weibo (the Chinese version of twitter).

At the beginning of the campaign, I sent many private messages to celebrities to ask them to share my post, most of them ignored me, but some of them did, they reposted the article, and it went virus very soon.

Thousands of users engaged, they shared and discussed the issue lively. Within several days, the number of views rocketed to hundreds of thousands. Before my account got censored by the authority, the post achieved over 1 million views, and the article also reached over 4500,000 readings. That was a highlight moment in my life. As a writer, I never reached that coverage before.


INTERVENTION

“I hope this movement will expand from the Internet to our real life. It’s so important that women can connect and support each other, and refuse to be a accomplice of the patriarchy system which oppresses us. ”



灰噗噗pupu: 希望这种运动可以从互联网发展到现实生活中//@不愤怒的小花:女性互相连接、互相帮助, 拒绝主动或被动地成为父权体制中对同性不平等待遇的帮凶, 真的非常重要。//

2月11日 12:30

转发 |  赞

INTERVENTION

“You helped me to understand ‘leftover women’s issue at a higher level of power structure and system. It’s amazing that you did practice too, which makes me feel I can be part of it. I forwarded your article to my friends and I want to influence more people. I will participate more gender equality activities in the future! ”



晓

失眠的夜里细细读完。先献上我的膝盖及不多的打赏支持表达下对米米的敬意！好一篇有理有据又有实际行动的文章！你的文章帮我在权力、制度这个最高层面上认识了所谓“剩女”的问题，并且还在行动上探讨了实际可行的路线！这个实践简直不要太赞了！在国内看到的文章，大多数调查只是调查，几乎没啥实践探索。米米不仅做了实际，并且让我这个读者都觉得可以参与！所以，务必转发到朋友圈...（个是可以的吧🤔）以影响更多同胞们！之后也会考虑参与更多可以促进平权的活动！当然，在我朝需要委婉点🙄

2018-02-21 15:13:30

★ 不回

INTERVENTION

#104 members
in Wechat group

#1706 followers
in Weibo

During the process of actions, I gradually built up the foundation of the community. I collected engaged audiences from the interviewees, from the Salon's participants, and from my article's readers and gathered them together to form a WeChat group which has 104 core members. And in Weibo, we also had 1706 followers.

These people became the foundation of the community.

INTERVENTION



联结 分享 发声

Connect Share Voice

One of the community members designed a logo for us, the community was formally founded.

Flying solo salon is our community's brand, it re-frames the identity of "leftover women". The message of "flying solo" is positive, progressive and independent, which is aligned with single professional women's identity. It shifts their image from negative to positive, from passive to proactive, from lagging to progressive.

Our purpose is to provide single professional women a supportive platform to connect, share and voice.

INTERVENTION



On March 8th, the international women's day, we planned to publish a manifesto to promote the movement further. But Unfortunately, in that day, the most significant feminism media account "feminist voice" was shut down by the government, so as a single women's community which also promotes gender equality, we made advocacy to urge the authority to recover the account. The advocacy attracted lots of attention, and it finally got censored. We lost almost two thousand followers and all the contents. We lost an important platform to voice. Although we registered another account and recover some important contents, we couldn't achieve previous coverage and the number of followers.



LEARNINGS & LOOKING FORWARD

LEARNINGS

1. Storytelling is a critical tool to promote social change

The power of narrative can reframe people's mind and make them think and see differently.

In the social media campaign, many readers said the article blew their mind, it connected pieces and enabled them to see the big picture. Hence, they understood the deep causes of the issue and might figure out how to contribute to change.

2 .Only when you draw back, can failure become a failure. Success is to use failures as a resource to move forward.

I learned to get along with failure and fear peacefully. During the process, several times, I felt lost, I went in a wrong direction and failed to make progress. But I found that if I could summarize and learn something from failures, especially took advantage of them to tell a good story, that is a success. Every step counts if you don't stop and it will contribute to progress.

LEARNINGS

3. To make a social change, you cannot ignore the elephant in the room.

Here, the elephant means the political system in China. To advocate gender equality and women's rights in public, we have to raise a voice on popular social media platforms. However, the censorship oppressed our voice and activities in public, which limited the expansion of the community and its impact, and prevent the change from happening. It's almost impossible to challenge the status quo while avoiding the censorship and the authority which tries hard to shut people up.

4. Understanding how to navigate in the local context is essential.

E.g. keeping away from politics is necessary for projects to survive in China.

In China, any topic associated with politics is highly sensitive and is easily shut down by the authority, especially assembling and making advocacy in public for civil rights. Hence. A social innovation project should concern how to frame their story and what approaches they can take to better navigate in the local context.

LOOKING FORWARD

After the authority censored the account of our community, we found it's more and more difficult to voice on popular social media like Weibo, since it was supervised strictly. So I decided to focus on community development. We found a new platform for live streaming online, which is convenient for online sharing activities. Hence, we registered an account and organized two sharing sessions. One topic was Non-violent communication developed from the early prototype. The other one was about How social media change our society, in which I shared my experience of the social media campaign of Flying Solo Salon.

We earned some money through the two sharing sessions and the audiences' feedback was very good. So now I am looking for a business model for the community, which can be a practical way for a organization to develop in the context of China. The community was initially formed, but I more concern about how to sustain it. It requires continuous investments of time and energy from other members and me. But if it doesn't generate revenue or at least, some forms of rewards, the community can hardly sustain. Hence, I think a practical business model can bring us to a new stage. It's promising to develop the online platform and invite community members to contribute contents regularly, and through organizing various topics of sharing, we may engage more public audiences in the future.

If it's harder and harder to make advocacy in public nowadays in China, we hope to have our value acknowledged by the public through contributing our value to society, and also sent our positive message of gender equality along with it.

I believe in the future, no single woman will be marginalized because of her accomplishments, no more stigmatization because of her aspiration.

Women will have unlimited possibilities to fulfill their potentials, rather than being urged to fit in the stereotype in marriage, and they will have all the acknowledgments they deserve for their dedications and contributions to society and human progress.



ACKNOWLEDGE- MENTS

Thank you

To all the people who made this journey possible.

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单飞沙龙
Flying Solo Salon

单身职业女性共益社群聚会



12.30星期六 上午9:30-12:30 下午1:30-4:30

Café Pissenlit咖啡馆-武侯区临江西路9号附6

主办人：米米、华益

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A Thesis Project by
Lang Qin

Design for Social Innovation 2018