

## CITY

## SOCIETY

## UNLUCKY IN LOVE ... OR JUST LEFT OUT OF THE MARKET?

Unmarried women on the mainland are more likely 'too successful' than 'too picky' – but that's not the case here, a study shows

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The number of never-married women has increased in both Shanghai and Hong Kong over the last decade. But while these so-called leftover women are largely derided on the mainland, attitudes are different here, according to a recent study.

The Chinese government defines *sheng nu* – leftover women – as unmarried females over the age of 27. The Ministry of Education says the unmarried status of these women is down to their "overly high expectations for marriage partners". By contrast, in Hong Kong such women are commonly described by the much more neutral term, *xing nu*, meaning blooming women.

But sociologist Sandy To Sin-chi revealed in a University of Hong Kong study, *Understanding Sheng Nu*, released last week, that Shanghai professional women have trouble finding marriage partners not because they are "too picky", but because men have rejected them for being "too successful". "Many of them want to get married, but because of gender constraints where women are expected to be less successful than their husbands, they get left out of the marriage market," said To. "It's common to see these women trying to marry Westerners, because they think men from countries such as Canada and Australia are less traditional than local Chinese men."



Sociologist Sandy To says high-flying women in Hong Kong are more open to marrying someone with lower economic status. Photo: Nora Tam

To's study draws on her interviews with 50 women in Shanghai from 2008 to 2011, including eight women from Hong Kong who were living in Shanghai.

The study also found even very successful women on the mainland tend to want to marry men with higher economic status than theirs. "In Hong Kong, while traditional ideas about gender roles are still common, there are more women who are open to marrying someone with a lower economic status.

"This might be because there is less pressure on them to get married from family members and because traditional values are not as strong here," said To.

Vivian Cho, 32, a corporate lawyer in Hong Kong, told the *South China Morning Post* that she is engaged to a local man who earns a much lower wage than

she does. "I find successful men to be too egotistical. For me, it makes a good balance to be with someone more laid back than I am ... My fiancé would be fine with staying at home to take care of the kids while I work."

Tanna Wong, chief executive of a media company, who recently married an American, said: "I have never encountered men

who are intimidated by me and I have never concealed my accomplishments."

Valerie Chin, 34, an unmarried chief executive of a fashion firm, agreed there is less pressure on women to get married in Hong Kong, but thinks the city is worse than the mainland when it comes to men rejecting older women. "Some women here are

just trying to make themselves feel better by saying they can't get married because they're too successful. Men in Hong Kong are superficial. They think, 'Why should I marry a 30-something when I can have a 25-year-old?'"

"More and more of my single friends and colleagues are getting plastic surgery because they think that if they don't look young, they'll have no chance."

But critics say there are flaws in recent studies.

Lucetta Kam Yip-lo, a Chinese gender and sexuality researcher at Baptist University, said: "In addition to deliberately ignoring [lesbian and bisexual] women's existence, the Hong Kong government and some researchers also neglect the experiences of straight women who live outside the life path of marriage and reproduction."

## 'LEFTOVER WOMEN'

**Shanghai:** Proportion of unmarried women almost doubled from 2000 to 2010. Those aged 30 to 34 accounted for 1.8 per cent of women in 2000; 4.5 per cent in 2010. Those aged 35 to 39 accounted for 0.8 per cent in 2000; 1.5 per cent in 2010.

**Hong Kong:** There were 98,700 unmarried women aged 30 to 34 in 2011; and 115,900 in 2010. There were 65,400 unmarried women aged 35 to 39 in 2001; and 71,500 in 2010.

SOURCES: SHANGHAI MUNICIPAL STATISTICS BUREAU, 2010; HONG KONG POPULATION CENSUS, 2011.

CITY BEAT  
VIVIENNE CHOW

## A war of words fuelled by critics, critiques

The Arts Development Council has questions to answer over its handling of the Critic's Prize

A new war of words sparked by Hong Kong-mainland tensions was waged last week over a piece of writing. The first Arts Development Council Critic's Prize went to Jia Xuanning, a 24-year-old working for the pro-Beijing newspaper *Wen Wei Po*. She fought off competition from about 60 other entries, picking up the HK\$50,000 prize for her piece on the film *Vulgaria*.

She won the hearts of the six-member judging panel with her criticism of Hong Kong director Pang Ho-cheung's blockbuster film *Vulgaria* from a "social perspective".

Outraged critics and netizens bombarded the ADC after the decision. Many demanded a "refund" of the HK\$50,000, and others lamented that Jia's writing was political ideology, not a film critique.

Jia offers little discussion of the film itself.

Instead she slams the vulgarity in *Vulgaria*, criticising the film for appealing only to a local audience and describing it as an "irresponsible cultural product".

Hong Kong-mainland tensions derived from her interpretation of the film form the backbone of her piece: "The mainland can be the saviour for Hong Kong, but it can't win the hearts of Hongkongers.

Hongkongers kowtow to the economic power of the mainland, but in their heads they wouldn't let go of their superiority [to mainlanders]...on the surface they oblige, but deep down they feel as if they were 'being raped'."

The tensions described by Jia

are nothing new and everyone is entitled to express their view in a free city like Hong Kong. The gist of the issue here, however, is the ADC. Its endorsement of a piece of writing that has little to do with arts criticism, out of taxpayers' wallets, not only raised many eyebrows but called into question its professionalism.

The Chinese language media smelled a potential conflict of interest. Jia knew judging panel members Perry Lam, chair of the council's arts criticism group and a government-appointed council member, and Yau Loppoon, chief editor of *Yazhou Zhouban* – both Jia and Lam are contributors to Yau's publication. Lam and Yau denied the allegation last week.

The expertise of the panel, where many are from a publishing background, is also in dispute. Critics asked why the ADC did not utilise the expertise of the professional critics' associations, specialists in film, theatre and visual arts, funded by the council.

Adjudicator and acclaimed writer Leung Ping-kwan sadly died of lung cancer at the beginning of this year.

The ADC must explain how the judging process could continue when one of the city's most respected writers was seriously ill.

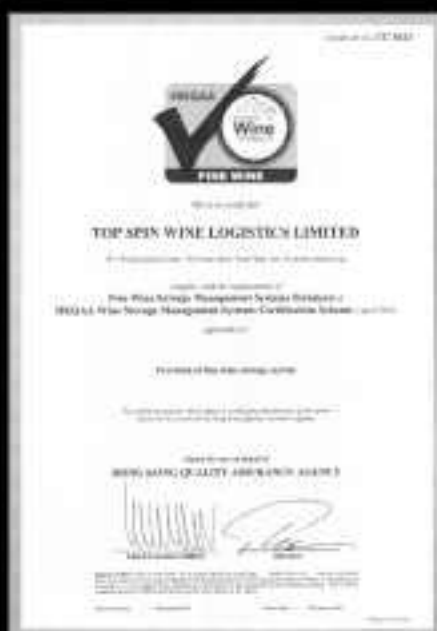
Organisers also compare criticisms of different art forms arbitrarily. How is it possible to rate critiques of art forms when they convey messages in different "languages"? The awards also exclude English entries, an important language in the art world.

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