"Single, Seventies, and Stuck": A Discourse Analysis of the "Leftover Women" or *Sheng Nu* in China in the Blogosphere

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ABSTRACT

The government of China introduced the lexicon of "leftover women," or sheng nu, to publicly signify the "eligible but unmarried women between age 27 to 35" in 2010. Although it was a derogatory lexicon against women, but some researchers have argued that sheng nu is a sign of women's emancipation because these women usually have successful careers. The diverse perceptions in Chinese society about the issue of "leftover women" have become a thought-provoking subject for investigating the debate on positive and negative framing of women and continue to assess the unexplored gender perspective on the discursive construction of women in China through the pervasive growth of digital media. This research examined the blogosphere related to the issue of leftover women in China in order to understand how the blogger negotiate the meaning of sheng nu in the digital community. This study provided insight to explore the discursive construction of women in China by investigating the dynamics of the depiction of unmarried women. The discourse analysis was chosen to answer the main research question on how the bloggers negotiate the meaning of sheng nu, or the leftover women, in China using blogs as a platform of resistance. As a result, the blogger evaluated the sheng nu as the dilemmatic problem of the A-class of women. Also, upon the hegemonic power to suppress women, the bloggers can potentially identify the conflict and negotiate the issue of leftover women under a system of knowledge by shifting the meaning of sheng nu and by using the freedom of creation in the blog.

Keywords: *Leftover women, single women, China, blog, discourse analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education of China introduced the terms of "leftover women," or *sheng nu,* to widely indicate the "eligible but unmarried women between the age 27 to 35" in 2007 (Fincher, 2011). The word "leftover" means that the best girls for brides have been taken, and those, the unmarried girls are the leftover.

However, many scholars, civil society in China, mass media, and the government can perceive the terms for women differently. Some scholars have agreed upon the existence of the "leftover woman" as the progress of the feminist movement (Xinhuanet, 2011). Women who are still single at age 27 or above are women who are aware on welfare, education, and successful life (Xinhuanet, 2010). Hypergamy, or marriage with "higher, richer, and older" men, is still strong. Thus, these women have difficulties finding compatible partners even though they are financially independent.

Ironically, single life and "leftover women" are still perceived by the majority of society as a negative situation for a woman (Xinhuanet, 2011; Gaetano, 2014; Ji, 2015). Therefore, it is intriguing to investigate the discourse that frame the women in the *Sheng Nu* issues (Wu & Chung, 2011) and continue to understand the unexplored gender perspectives on the construction of women in China through digital media (Kelan, 2007).

On the other hand, the optimistic wave of digital media and democracy in China is raising as a way to express the opinion of civil society on national affairs and public opinion. Blog is one of them. The number of Chinese users who write and read blogs is increasing. In July 2008 there were more than 107 million bloggers (CNNIC, 2008). Blogs also can play an important role in disseminating messages worldwide (Porte et al., 2007), facilitating resistance by marginalized groups (Liew, 2010) and offering alternative views outside the traditional media setting or mainstream talk (Johnson et al., 2007; Xiao, 2008). Blogs also allow digital interactions in symmetrical modes among bloggers and expansion of new opinion leaders (Wright & Hinson, 2009), even though blogs tend to have a homogenous and niche audience (Terrilli & Arnorsdottir, 2008).

Accordingly, this research examined the blogosphere related to the issue of leftover women in China in order to understand how the bloggers negotiate the meaning of *sheng nu* in the digital community. With the freedom of expression in the blogosphere, individual or groups are able to publicly humiliate, criticize, and even flame the authoritative objects (individuals or groups) (Liew, 2010). This expression is a part of the resistance toward the hegemonic culture or dominant publics. At this point, blogs may be an effective medium for research to understand alternative public opinion, especially those who actively engage in the discourse and if they have opposite opinion with the government and majority.

This study provided insight to explore the discursive construction of women in China by investigating the dynamics of the depiction of unmarried women. The discourse analysis was chosen to answer the main research question on how the bloggers negotiate the meaning of *sheng nu*, or the leftover women, in China using blogs as a platform of resistance.

Briefly, in this paper, I first review the language function from a gender perspective. Then I address the nuanced meaning of the term *sheng nu*. Secondly, I look at the connection between women's issues and government intervention. Thirdly, from the discourse analysis results, I outline the discourses of *sheng nu* in China within the blogosphere arena as a negotiation of women's identity that intersects with the hegemonic cultural and political background in China. The bloggers also perform as shape-shifters of the meaning of *sheng nu* by reconstructing the lexicon as a form of resistance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Unmarried Women and Oppression in Language
In China, the woman is traditionally expected to fulfill the role of giving birth, lactation, taking care of children, and doing housework, or those can be included in the domestic role and non-occupational role (Cheng & Wan, 2008; Friedan, 2001; Fung & Ma, 2000; Warner, 1997). Women are also considered inferior partners, dependent, submissive, and subordinate to men and traditionally have submissive characters (Chancer & Watkins, 2006; Hung et al., 2007, Johansson, 2001; Ji, 2015). The call of societal duty of woman is to appear as a generic role for woman and they are expected not to find alternative options to these roles (O'Brien, 1973).

Consequently, the unmarried women who remains single becomes the target of societal labels, stereotypes, and exclusion from society because they do not follow social expectations and duties. Unmarried women cannot fulfill the main role of motherhood (Peach, 1998), as a consequence, a label of abnormality appears when women do not have children and are not

even married. Unmarried women can even be considered as a norm violation. Another label that appears is *pitiful* because in the absence of a husband and children, society assumes that these women cannot fulfill the meaning of life: to have family. Unfulfilled and lonely assumptions also appear in the stereotype of the unmarried woman. Obviously, suspicion and curiosity about why this woman is not married also appear in society's perception (O'Brien, 1973).

This stereotype is also related to how language and culture can sustain the construction in society. Mary Frug (1992) contended that language forms and limits our reality, and it can be used to impose power. Language is a product of a cultural mechanism. Language also creates cognitive processes in human perception; thus it can signify and communicate symbols as part of culture (Uco, 1998).

Moreover, language is also a dynamic object that allows for reinterpretation and redefinition, even though it depends on social restriction—to what extent the language can or cannot be reconstructed and deconstructed. Language can also become part of political struggle to either change the incumbent meaning or the dominant meaning from the hegemonic culture or to sustain the *status quo.* Frug also argued that the cultural mechanism "encode[s] women's body with meanings" (1992, p. 1049), and this meaning is very contextual and conditional.

For those reasons above, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1999) argued that representation in language provides practicality to legitimate women to be political subjects and enforces the discourse in the political process. These representations also have normative roles to construct the specific truth about women. As a result, the normative rhetoric, which appears in the language, is used to depict unmarried women across the culture and appears to enforce political process in relation to particular problems in society that relate to women and all "natural" roles of women.

By the same token, Daly and Caputi in *Webster's First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* argued, "Imprisoned by patriarchal usage, words are forced into taking on the usual habits of prisoners. Women, then, are baffled/bamboozled in their victimization by concomitant confinement of words under patriarchal rule" (1987, p. 20). In the discourse of *Wickedary*, the language can be used to politicize women under the "metapatriarchal atmosphere" (Daly & Caputi, 1987, p. 17). Words' power exists in the ontological power to either disempower or empower women.

From Dale's perspective, Griffin (1993) suggested five topic of female communication through language: The words' power and communication may (a) perpetuate the silencing effort of women's voice and development, (b) build systems that oppress alternative voices for empowerment, (c) create the oxymoronic nature of women's liberation, (d) produce the co-creation of culture, and (e) communicate strategies to help women to make their voice heard under difficult circumstances. Thus, words and language may communicatively form an authoritative work to empower, disempower, strengthen, or weaken the hegemony of patriarchy and women.

As an example, the word *sheng nu* does not appear in vacuum. Because the Women's Federation uses the word *sheng* as "leftover" or "spoiled food" and defines the words *sheng nu* as unmarried women above 27, the media started to promote it even more (Fincher, 2013).

When the Women's Federation and the China Marriage and Family Research Group cooperated with Baihe.com to conduct a national survey of 30,000 people in 2010, the identification category of *sheng nu* started to appear (Fincher, 2013).

Leta Hong Fincher, an award-wining, former journalist from China, described this category in her article of "Women's Rights at Risk." Women aged 25 to 27 years old could be considered as the leftover fighters, or *sheng dou shi*, which means "leftover fighters," or these women still have the motivation to search for a partner (Fincher, 2013). However, women 28 to 30 years old can be considered *bi sheng ke*, or "the ones who must triumph," or the women who have no time for searching for partners because they are too busy with their career (Fincher, 2013). The women aged 31 to 35 years old are called *dou zhan sheng fo*, or a similar name to the Chinese legend of the Monkey King (Fincher, 2013). They are called high-level leftover women who have survived in a cruel workplace but are still single. Women above 35 years old are called "great sage equal of heaven," or *qi tian da sheng*; they have everything such as a car, house, and even a company but again are still single (Ji, 2015; Gaetano, 2014).

Additionally, the Chinese Ministry of Education (2007) also implied a statement that unmarried women sometimes have too-high expectations of finding a partner. This statement indicates the patriarchal culture in Chinese society has a lack of positive concept to describe women's independence, and it seems unfit for traditional domestic roles. In other words, men are superior, and marriage is a must for women (To, 2013). The traditional point of view of *mendang hudui*, or criteria to find similar background to guarantee future marriage livelihood, enforces hypergamy marriage in a patriarchal culture.

As a result, the common practice of matchmaking, or *meiren*, as an adopted system from the imperialist era to hire someone to find a spouse for daughters also appears in various events in Chinese mass media, reality shows, and even advertisements (Yang, 2011). The phenomenon of leftover women in China is related closely to the oppression of women in China through various social and political systems and through language.

This research looks at the language usage in the discourse of leftover women in China in the blogosphere. Still very limited research has been conducted to understand the phenomenon of leftover women in China. Grounded research conducted by To (2013) to comprehend the phenomenon of late marriage among Chinese professional women found that the patriarchy in China is the foremost reason of women being "leftover" to get marriage. The conflicts between the traditional views of the women's parents and the modern views to support women's economic achievement have led to the perpetuation of the number of *sheng nu*, especially in urban area (To, 2013).

Women's Issues and Governmentality
The major discussion among scholars about the reasons for unmarried women has been developing mostly in terms of a socioeconomic scenario. Unmarried women obviously come up as a contradiction from social expectancy. Statistically, in China, marriage registration fell to 17% this year compared to last year (Larson, 2012). In a recent survey from Shanghai Daily, of the leftover ladies, 30% are college students, 36% have a bachelor's degree, and 48% have a master's degree (Shanghai Daily, 2011). The income of adult unmarried women mostly reaches US$5,000–$15,000. The statistic also shows how over the time, unmarried women are

increasing; for example, in 1982 there were only 5% of urban Chinese women aged 25 to 29 who were unmarried (Shanghai Daily, 2011).

In fact, in 1995 the percentage increased to almost 10%, and in 2008 it almost tripled. Meanwhile, women aged 30 increased from 2% in 1995 to 6% in 2008. This population's problems and social change have led the government as an authoritative body to intervene in the situation, either by formal regulations or by constructing social standards to make society follow the government's objective.

From here on, the state as an authoritative body in a nation has the power to control the population and problems in society. Foucault (1991) introduced the idea about the governmentality as a way to control a group of citizens without unswerving and intimidating power by emboldening the self-governing to act and think according to the objectives of the government. The strategy to create governmentality is by promoting a strong image and/or positive connotation and by supplanting negative connotations and the stereotypical image to govern themselves to follow the image and self-govern their group through government facilities and policies (Foucault, 1991).

Therefore, Foucault (1991) argued that populations are governed through institutional and formal intervention, social standards and norms, and self-discipline. The governmentality concept also implements power through public spaces, workplaces, family, media, and organizations as the non-state aligns to reproduce the power from government (Dean, 1999). Thus, some scholars have argued that governmentality also implements the polycentric authority and contribution of non-state players to strengthen the regulations, norms, and objectives of government through civil society (Swyngedouw 2005, 1992; Dean, 2002). This governmentality process will construct the choices of individuals to make decisions and modify themselves to achieve the standard of happiness and perfection according to the construction of the government and its alignment (Dean, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

Next, I present an analysis of several texts from some blogs that I have chosen in the pre-research. I chose the keywords "leftover women China" in the Google blog search engine and Baidu. I chose the Top 20 pages of blogs listed in both search engines with the time frame from January 2011 to March 2013. This was based on a consideration of the frequency of blog views detected by the search engine system (Pandey et al., 2005) and the behavior of bloggers to affirmatively use the search engines before choosing blogs (Terrilli & Arnorsdottir, 2008). Both search engines are mostly utilized in China (Qiang, 2009). A blog that did not discuss the leftover women was specifically eliminated from the research. In this stage, I found 52 blogs.

Then, after examining all the articles about *sheng nu* in these blog resources, I chose articles with high popularity that were written by Chinese women in English and had relevant content about the leftover women issue. The consideration of this choice of material was from the research steps of Fairclough's model (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). The accessible knowledge, language, and relevant material within the social domain and interest of the researcher should be considered in choosing the material for discourse analysis (Jogersen & Phillips, 2002). As a non-Chinese researcher, I chose English articles in the blogs that could open access to understanding this issue, not to mention that English blogs are also open to a more

international audience.

After reading all these articles and considering the representation of text description, interpretation, and the social practice in the content of the text (Fairclough, 2003), I limited my analysis to four articles. I choose four articles published in five blogs such as lovelovechina.com, *Shanghai Shiok*, *The Atlantic*, *Offbeat China*, and *MsMagazine*. These article were written by Chinese women and represent the utterances on the issue of leftover women. My intention was to explore similarities and immediate subjects and ultimately understand a shared representation of the world in a similarity of discourse (Fairclough, 2003).

The aim of using critical discourse analysis for these four texts was to understand how people gain communicative purposes through the use of language, perform communicative acts, participate in communicative events about the leftover women issue, and present themselves to others (Paltridge, 2012). Critical discourse analysis will help the researcher to understand the construction of reality on the leftover women issue from the bloggers' perspectives. Bloggers, as the bridge between China and the outside world, communicate their interpretation of leftover women within a particular community or audience and culture through the use of language, their negotiation of their own identity, and the social context (Paltridge, 2012). CDA will also reveal the social and political issues constructed in the discourse, power relations within the gender issue, and how the discourse reproduces social relations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

Each of these texts was viewed as the contextualization of material phenomena and social practice of the leftover women discourse. I used Fairclough's 3D framework to organize my analysis of the texts, aiming to uncover how the bloggers negotiate the issue of leftover women in China as representations of social life. Fairclough's model will uncover the dimension of the discursive event in the articles titled "How Do Educated Chinese Girls Become "leftovers?" "My Chinese Teacher Draws Venn Diagrams to Explain Why She Is Still Single," "For China's Educated Single Ladies, Finding Love Is Often a Struggle," "China's 'Leftover' Women," "Leftover Women in China Speak Their Heart Out," and "No House, No Car, No Bride."

The Fairclough model (2003) defined three dimensions to understand some discursive texts: (a) spoken or written texts; (b) discursive practices for example the construction and analysis of a text; and (c) examples of social practice. For each dimension, different type of analysis should be employed: (1) text analysis or description, (2) processing analysis or interpretation, and (3) social analysis or explanation. All dimensions are interdependent; therefore any researchers can begin with any way and priority.

RESULT

The discourse analysis can be a tool to understand the social identity, social relations, and construction of meaning and information (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Therefore, the analysis will uncover the discourses of leftover women as follows:

1. The bloggers evaluated the sheng nu as the dilemmatic problem of the A-class of women.
2. The bloggers can potentially identify the conflict and negotiate the meaning of leftover women.

In what follows, I discuss each strategy in turn with reference to extracts from these four blog articles.

1) The Paradoxical Profiles of "Leftover women"
The depictions refer to the leftover women, who are women with high education and a good career and who are financially independent and wealthy. However, this success for women by modern standards cannot prevent them from the social standards in the eyes of men, family, media, and society. Looking at the data, I found the following exemplary utterances:

> Another slang used to describe them is "3S women", meaning "single", "seventies" (born in seventies) and "stuck." It's not pleasant to be tagged as "leftovers" even if you are a nice-looking, educated and independent woman (which is often the case with these girls) (C Tao, blogger).

> Wei Pan, a 33-year-old biomedical engineer can't seem to find Mr. Right. A fresh-faced woman with an M.D. and Ph.D. under her belt, Wei should have her pick of men. As she read through them, Wei realized that many of Shanghai's single ladies are just like her: highly educated, career-driven, and not getting any younger (S Subramanian and D Jian Lee, blogger).

> Shanghai's so-called "leftover women"—the *sheng nu*—are constantly on my mind, now that I have one in my life. She's my Teacher Wang, and I've previously blogged about her lessons on love, dating and being a *sheng nu*. This harsh term refers to the growing battalion of Chinese women in their late 20s and 30s who are well-educated, well-paid, career-minded, and — gasp! — still single, unlikely to get hitched anytime soon (Christine, blogger).

The similarities of the utterances that appear within the blog articles on leftover women in China are paradoxical. The sentences demonstrate the attempt to compare the binary situation of leftover women in China. One side the bloggers framed the women positively as smart with high-income salaries and as excellent career women, but at the same time they performed a negative tone on unmarried and single women. For example, the use of the words "even if you are nice" "should have her pick of men," and "gasp! — still single," indicate the performativity of the paradoxical language usage to describe the leftover women. Clashing the fulfilling standard of modern women in terms of financial, career, and education with their unmarried condition also indicates the recognition of traditional and constructional perspectives of marriage as the social duty of women. This result consistently indicates previous research conducted by Ji (2015) who argue that a double standard narrative appeared in the qualitative interviews to unmarried women in China.

In general, the utterances consistently showed the recognition of the Chinese women's role to take part in the traditional role of marriage and be subordinate to men (Cheng & Wan, 2008; Friedan, 2001; Fung & Ma, 2000). The traditional expectation requires the hyper gamy

married expectation. Or the women need to find men who can be higher than them, and men will find women who are lower than them in terms of socioeconomic status, education, or career. The statements below highlight the recognition of traditional expectations and recognition of the modern world that are abundantly and consistently expressed in the blogosphere.

> They find themselves in painful conflict between older traditional values of their parents' generation and the realities of modern world.... It seems that the ambitious Chinese girls set a kind of trap for themselves (CT, blogger).

> Men marry women who are beautiful, or rich, or talented. They avoid the overlaps, and these are the *sheng nu*. Beautiful and rich women are untrustworthy; talented and rich women are too old to bear children; as for women who are both beautiful and talented—well, the combination of looks and brains can be a bit too intimidating, and also, these women are poor. At least, I am! And women who are all three? Unattainable (C, blogger).

> The country's long-held tradition of marriage hypergamy, a practice in which women marry up in terms of income, education, and age, means that the most highly educated women often end up without partners (SS&DJL, blogger).

The bloggers recognize the dilemmatic presupposition between the modern-life demand to compete in progressive industrial urban China and the social and/or cultural boundaries in the issue of leftover women. The bloggers suggested the problematic and complex nature of the words *sheng nu*, or leftover women, not only as a derogative vocabulary but also as the construction of reality in the gender discourse in China. The bloggers interpretations of the social construction of the women indicate their judgments of the leftover women. The words "painful conflict," "trap," "intimidating," "unattainable," and "end up without partners" describe the identification of problems with the leftover women. The usage of the words indicates the victimization or marginalization of the leftover women. The bloggers recognize that the *sheng nu* has problems because of external issues, and they are victims of the powerful body. The bloggers also perform similar utterances upon the bigger frame of the leftover women's issue, especially in terms of the way they construct the social and political discourse to negotiate power relations between women and government of China.

2) Identification the Complexity of Discourses
A second category in the utterance patterns from the data deals with the significance of social problems from regulations and the intervention of the government in the issue of leftover women. There were some systemic problems, such as the impact of the one-child policy and demographic imbalance between men and women, expressed through their statements:

It adds that because of China's sex-ratio imbalance, as many as 24 million men could be perpetual bachelors by 2020: "The marriage competition is fierce and statistically, women hold the cards." China's preference for boys, combined with its one-child policy, has resulted in the abortion of tens of millions of female fetuses. But does the resulting sex-ratio imbalance mean that women really have the upper hand in the marriage market? (LHF, blogger).

Should it come as [a] surprise that in spite of worrying [about] gender imbalance (there are about 30 million more males of marriageable age in China than females) as much as 500,000 women in Beijing alone are "leftover" ladies? (CT, blogger).

These political and regulatory problems have been identified by the bloggers as completing the complication of the issue of leftover women. The problem in this issue is not only about social construction but also systemic construction, involving various element of society including politics, economics, and social problems.

The bloggers also stated the involvement of government, particularly in constructing the language used for unmarried women, using the term *sheng nu* and publicizing the survey to support the construction. Here are some utterances:

In China, the sexist term "leftover woman," *sheng nu*, is widely used to describe an urban, professional female over the age of 27 who is still single. This derogatory term has been aggressively disseminated by the Chinese government, warning women that they will become spinsters if they do not marry by the time they turn 30. (LHF, blogger).

Another "unfair" difference is rooted in preferences for marriage age. A survey found that [the] ideal age to marry for Chinese men is above 30, and for Chinese girls is below 25! (CT, blogger).

The bloggers recognized the involvement of the government more in constructing the language for the terms *sheng nu*, or leftover women. Here, the language is used to impose power and to produce cultural mechanisms, perceptions, and symbols and to sustain the status quo (Frug, 1992; Uco, 1998). Thus, the word "leftover" serves as a construction to categorize women and is enforced to create a political and cultural process. The language also provides a particular identity to women (Frug, 1992), including the unmarried woman. In this case, the bloggers perceived the government of China as related closely to the concept from Foucault (1991) of governmentality through the power of language as a way to control a group of citizens by emboldening the self-governing to act and think according to the objectives of the government.

3) Redefining the Meaning of Sheng Nu
One of the most interesting types of content on the blogs is the video "No Car No House," posted on March 27, 2011. The lyrics are a rebellion toward the "leftover" label and instead call the "no car no house" man the one who is actually dumped.

> Having a house and a car is what women long for. Marrying the right person is the biggest wish.... My mother will also ask you how much savings you have.... I also have a car. I also have a house, as well as money in the bank. If you guys aren't even as capable as me, don't depend on me. I'm not your mother.... You, poor person who drives an old BMW, don't pretend you're a rich guy who can afford me.

The women in China, who do not see marriage as the ultimate destination of a woman and manage to escape Bridezilla syndrome during the ages of 20–30 years old (Valenti, 2007) find an alternative way to fight to mummify the language. The words *sheng nu* still exists, but the construction on why they want to be *sheng nu* is "Be-spelled" (Daly, 1987). The effort of fighting the *sheng nu* impact is obvious. The video for "No Car and No House" on some blogs exists as a way to articulate, deform, and reform the words in a new fashion.

However, the weapons to fight back still fall under materialist and capitalist perceptions, such as money and property. Daly also argued similarly, "Made fashionable, women are fashioned and re-fashioned by the fascist phallocrats" (1987, p. 28). The beginning of the shape-shifting effort toward the perception of why women want to be "leftover" also can be seen through blog testimonials or through numerous attractive Chinese women singing in the video. This data can be seen as the realization of ecstatic emotional disorder, where people start to call them *sheng nu* and pressure from many places begins to formulate. Daly and Caputi argued, "Finding her Rage and Hope, a woman observes the melting away of plastic passions that had possessed her, blocking the flow of Elemental Communication Powers. The old guilt, anxiety, depression, bitterness, resentment frustration, boredom, resignation, and worst of all, feminine fulfillment begin to disappear" (1987, p. 19). The pseudo passions frantically joined the peer actions of the fight for the *sheng nu* words' power back: "She finds it especially efficacious to begin Spelling/Be Spelling Out Loud" (Daly, 1987, p. 19). This creates dynamics of the "leftover women" discourse and shows the efficacy and agency of women toward the politics of language and the latent power of being in patriarchal atmospheres. This finding is similar with previous research conducted by Gaetano (2014). He argues that the women who are labelled as *Sheng Nu* attempt to negotiate and redefine the meaning of womanhood and the reasons behind delaying married (Gaetano, 2014).

Accordingly, the effort to redefine *Sheng Nu* in the bloggers community may continue through online or offline media to reproduce meaning and vocabulary to empower women and strategically make their voices heard in the dominant Chinese patriarchal framework (Griffin, 1993). Unlike mainstream media such as magazine (Kim, 2007), film, and other globalized media, which only facilitate the main tenant of dominant discourses, imposes images of female roles (Kaul, 2012) and monitoring biased ideology of gender (Kim, 2007), the blogosphere offers bigger opportunities for dissenting opinion. Through blogs, the women find ways to connect,

express their dissenting opinion, interact with those who have an interest in the issue of the leftover women, and, if necessary, criticize these issues. Hence, the blogosphere serves as a rich source of data when assessing text productions on the controversial issues and lexicon of the leftover women.

DISCUSSION

The issue of leftover women in China involves a double standard for women. First, women are expected to fulfill modern and industrial expectations in order to survive and be financially ready to live in an urban setting. These women became independent, educated, and financially wealthy. Second, family and society still have a strong expectation for women to fulfill their motherhood and traditional role or character, to find a man, and to get married. However, due to the hypergamy expectation that men should be better than women in terms of finances, education, and career, difficulties happened for these women in finding a match, and sometimes they also want to have low expectations for men. This complexity of problems involves the intersection of values, cultures, and competitive expectations in a modern world.

Consequently, the population problem and violation of social expectancy have created derogatory language for unmarried women who are accused of being unable to fulfill the natural role of a woman. This is problematic because if language can be used to enforce power caused by societal problems, then the language has fallen its power to a marginalized group of women based on their choices. The examination of women depicted in mass media provides critiques of the language problem in disseminating hegemonic culture that victimizes women, while the overall societal problem is still happening. The unmarried women become the scapegoat for the problem and relate this problem to the "natural" role of women. Thus, the research answers two major inquiries: First the bloggers framed women in the issue of "leftover women" as a complex situation to identify the connection between women and cultural expectation. Thus, it created a double standard for women between their traditional role and industrialized world standards. Second, the bloggers noticed the government's role in the issue of "leftover women," mostly through language and publication interventions that are strengthened by the participation of the non-state aligned to support the government objectives.

The construction of marriage exists in the intersection between social construction and economic benefit (Goede, 1982; Becker, 1981). However, when women do not feel that marriage can be beneficial, such as because their husband will own their property once they get married or because they have to change their independent personality and lifestyle to be more dependent and submissive, getting married may be a difficult option. This result is consistent with previous research about marriage being delayed due to the independence of women in terms of their financial condition or education. The relationship to the hypergamy issue, and the fear of men to marry women who have a higher status is that women will get less benefit if they marry is also consistent with the argument from Becker (1981), especially about independence hypothesis. Unfortunately, the problem depicts the women who decide to marry later or not marry as "leftovers." This stereotype is used to urge women to get married (Peach, 1998). The stereotype of women, especially through the use of the words *sheng nu*, or

"leftover," has pushed parents, friends, society, and the media to put pressure in these women to control them and avoid the "deviant" option.

As a consequence, the language of *sheng nu* creates cognitive processes in human perception to communicate the symbol of women who are not fulfilling the standard of culture (Frug, 1992). The lexicon of leftover women, or *sheng nu*, has become a political statement to sustain the incumbent hegemonic culture of the traditional construction of women's bodies in China (Frug, 1992; Daly, 1987). The use of language is also part of governmentality to control the growing phenomenon of women's emancipation and independency in a patriarchal culture. Language through negative connotation and stereotypical images supports the non-state aligned to implement the government's objective and to reproduce power in order to push women's roles in society (Dean, 1999; Griffin, 1993).

Additionally, the pressure from parents, media, friends, and society in general supports the polycentric authority and participation of non-state actors in implementing the governmentality of leftover women (Swyngedouw 2005, 1992). The language of "leftover women" manages the freedom of women in contemporary Chinese urban and industrial development to organize women in traditional roles and to construct the limitation of being an adult woman in China (Foucault, 2007).

Finally, the research indicates the roles of blogs as a media, which facilitate discourses and gather individuals who have similar thoughts. In this study, the blogosphere become a resistance arena and gather the identity of the bloggers who can access an international and/or Western point of view. Through blogs, the women can express their rejection on the "leftover" lexicons and identify the complexity of the issues. Similar to To's (2013) research, the individuality of bloggers creates agency to remake the meaning of *sheng nu*, spread the idea of not being the "traditional breadwinner" (To, 2013, p. 17), and liberate information on the victimization of women in the transition to the industrialized era in China. This critical discourse analysis open further discussion about the roles of blogosphere in creating counter publics from the hegemony discourses of female roles and profile in China. The bloggers enact and circulate their oppositional identity by opening discussion of *Sheng Nu,* and invite wider publics to the join their enclaves. Blogs then, become the space of struggles and contestations on the oppositional point of views from the discourse of *Sheng Nu.*

CONCLUSION

The research suggests that the issue related to women, especially through the use of language, can have complex problems beyond just the lexicon. *Sheng nu* is a unique segment of the Chinese transition from the traditional cultural scene to a developing consumer market. It also raises the dynamics of women's empowerment to communicate under difficult circumstances through mass media that can facilitate their resistance. This research tried to understand the complexity of the problems in women's issue that involve a derogatory term for women: the word *sheng nu*, or "leftover women." This lexicon appears to be a reflection of social, political, and gender phenomena in China.

Because the research used English blogs in their conversations and opinions, the research cannot cover the utterances about the issue in the dominant language. The researcher realized that English content in a blog might represent a Western perspective even though

Chinese women, due to their understanding of communication and access English or Western literature, write it. The research may have been different if it had been conducted on blogs that have Chinese content.

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