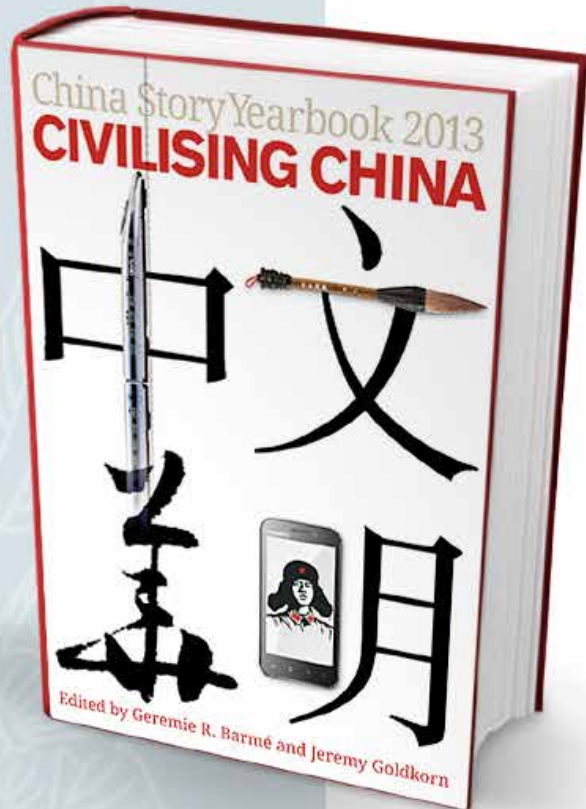


The China Story



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FORUM

TINY TIMES FOR WOMEN

Excerpt from

CHINA STORY YEARBOOK 2013

CIVILISING CHINA

文明中华

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CHINA IN THE WORLD



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The China Story
中国的故事

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As China becomes wealthier and more confident on the global stage, it also expects to be respected and accommodated as a major global force — and as a formidable civilisation. Through a survey and analysis of China’s regional posture, urban change, social activism and law, mores, the Internet, history and thought — in which the concept of ‘civilising’ plays a prominent role — *China Story Yearbook 2013* offers insights into the country today and its dreams for the future.



Chinese football fans, Guiyang, June 2011.
Source: ImagineChina

LEADING SEX AND GENDER STORIES OF 2012

Since 2008, the Sex and Gender Institute at Beijing Forestry University (Beijing Linye daxue xing yu xingbie yanjiusuo 北京林业大学性与性别研究所) has published an annual list of the Ten Biggest Sex and Gender Stories in China (Niandu shi da xing yu xingbie shijian 年度十大性与性别事件). The following is a translation of the 2012 list:

Thirty-eight-year-old Master's Degree Holder Promotes Chastity

In February 2012, Tu Shiyou from Wuhan University started a blog advocating premarital chastity and proclaimed that she herself was still a virgin (and she uploaded a medical report to her blog to prove it). This elicited many critical and satirical responses from online commentators.

Ye Haiyan and Free Sexual Services

At the beginning of the year, Ye Haiyan — a well-known advocate for the rights of sex workers and AIDS victims — posted pictures on her Weibo account



Ye Haiyan.
Source: Baidu Baike

of herself, volunteering to provide free sexual services to migrant workers to focus attention on the lack of legal rights for sex workers. In response, Ye was subjected to physical abuse by locals and her place of work was attacked.

In May 2013, Ye was in the news again for mounting a protest in Hainan against the sexual abuse of schoolgirls there by their principal by uploading photos of herself carrying a sign that said: ‘School principal — leave the schoolgirls alone and come to my room!’ Again, she was the victim of physical attack.

‘Gendered’ Education

In February, Zhengzhou No.18 Middle School in Henan province tested a new education method when it announced the introduction of different academic standards for ‘Masculine Boys’ and ‘Refined and Intelligent Girls’. In March, the Shanghai municipal government approved No.8 Middle School’s ‘Shanghai Senior High School Experimental Class for Boys’ with the stated goal of creating a happy environment for the cultivation of wholesome and studious male learners. Both schools reported good results in their experiments.

Under-aged Girls in Brothels

In 1997, the Criminal Law was revised so that keeping under-aged girls in brothels was specified as a crime separate from the crime of statutory rape. Various scholars have in the period since maintained that this distinction lowers the threat of punishment for criminals who keep under-age girls in brothels. In March 2012, the Vice-Chairperson of the All-China Women’s Federation (*Zhonghua quanguo funü lianhehui* 中华全国妇女联合会), Zhen Yan, stated that the law does not adequately protect minors, and called for the law to be repealed.

Suicide of a Gay Man’s Wife

In June, a woman named Hong Lingcong jumped to her death from a building after her husband admitted to her on Weibo that he was gay. This case ignited heated debate within the gay community regarding marriage: many gay men and lesbian women end up in a loveless heterosexual marriage in order to please their families.

‘I May be Flirtatious, but You Shouldn’t Harass Me’



A female protester holding a placard reading ‘I may be flirtatious, but you shouldn’t harass me’.
Source: Sohu.com

In June, an official working on the Shanghai subway posted an image on Weibo showing the back of a woman wearing a see-through top. Professing his good intentions, the official reminded women not to invite sexual harassment by dressing provocatively. A few days later, two women launched a protest by carrying posters in the subway with the words ‘I may be flirtatious, but you shouldn’t harass me’ (*Wo keyi sao, ni buneng rao* 我可以骚，你不能扰), saying that they had the right to dress in revealing clothes without the threat of being harassed or abused on the subway or, for that matter, anywhere else.

Eighty-four-year-old Transgender Woman Steps Out of the Closet

In June, an eighty four-year-old transgender woman in Guangdong province named Qian Jinfan stepped into the limelight by accepting an invitation to be interviewed by a journalist. Qian intended to challenge the prejudices held in society against the transgendered. She has not had a sex change operation but dresses and self-identifies as a woman.

The Fight Against Sexual Violence

During a ‘Global Campaign Against Sexual Violence Towards Women’ in November and December 2012, the UN Population Fund’s representative office in China ran a concurrent online campaign urging men to pledge to oppose sexual violence against women. During the sixteen-day campaign, 351 men signed up to the pledge.

Online ‘Pornographic Anti-corruption’ Cases

During 2012, pornographic images and videos of officials were regularly exposed online, and punishment meted out to the people involved. Such cases have seen an official at a university expelled from the Party in August, another

er official at a university fired from his position in November and, that same month, an official in Chongqing was relieved of his position.

Activities of Feminists

2012 was a year of increased feminist protests in China. These included:

- In February, a number of women launched ‘Occupy Male Restrooms’
- In April, female students at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou sent a letter to 500 companies protesting against gender discrimination in recruitment
- In August, women shaved their heads to express their dissatisfaction with the Ministry of Education over gender discrimination in college entrance exams
- In November, women posted bare-breasted pictures of themselves online to show their support for the enactment of laws governing domestic violence
- In December, women in Guangzhou put on red wedding dresses to protest against domestic violence.



Women shave their heads to protest gender biased examination policy.
Source: Chinese Internet Forum



Women protesters outside a men's restroom.
Source: Mop.com



MARRIAGE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Rachel Wang

The following is adapted with permission from an article that originally appeared on TeaLeafNation.com.

IN LATE February 2013, the Sina Weibo news portal published an article that included the following assertion:

According to relevant regulations, the first marriage of males aged twenty-five or older and females aged twenty-three or older are considered 'late marriages'. A bit of simple math shows that 2013 is the first year that some post-Eighties [those born in 1980 or later] are turning thirty-three, and the first year that some post-Nineties [those born in 1990 or later] are of 'late marriage' age.

Over 400,000 web users discussed the topic on Sina Weibo, and with print media covering it as well, the subject of 'late marriage' generated a discussion on a variety of issues related to marriage, age and gender roles in China: how can a Chinese woman born in 1990 already be too old for marriage?

Though the age for late marriage was not set in the law, twenty-three years of age for women and twenty-five years for men has been the assumed standard at local levels, and has been used in such documents as the Population and Family Planning Policy of Beijing (Chapter 3, Article 16), published in 2003. Several decades ago, the state ac-

tually encouraged late marriage. Chapter 2, Article 6 of the 1980 Marriage Law states: 'Late marriage and late child-birth should be encouraged.'

Although the original aim of the Population and Family Planning Policy was to curb population growth, policy-makers today have different concerns. A number of prominent Chinese academics recently signed a letter pointing out that even if China's one-child policy were to be scrapped immediately, the Chinese population will begin to shrink in ten years. Faced with an aging population, China has an interest in hurrying its post-Nineties citizens into marriage.

Yet some young Chinese women still hesitate. Some of their reasons are similar to those of other women around the world who are less keen than those of previous generations to jump into marriage early (or in some cases, at all). Ifeng.com surveyed over 35,500 single women in China in early 2013. The most popular response to the question 'What kind of men are you willing to marry?' was 'a divorced man who owns a house and car' followed by 'a successful forty-something man who has gone on a lot of blind dates but is still single'. The least popular kind of man, com-

ing behind even 'an unassuming computer programmer' and 'a handsome freelancer', was the so-called 'phoenix man' (*fenghuang nan* 凤凰男), a successful and ambitious businessman or corporate executive from a humble background. 'Phoenix men' are assumed to have exhausted the resources of their families in the process of educating themselves and raising themselves out of poverty, and are expected to have many family members burden them financially and emotionally. Instead of being regarded as heroes who changed their own destinies, 'phoenix men' are perceived to be prone to insecurity, fear of failure, penny pinching, inferiority complexes, and prioritisation of their extended family over their own wife and children.

One female Weibo user commented on the popularity of the 'divorced man with a house and a car':

I personally think that you may lose face by marrying an old man, but at least you might have some security in life. He might also be less flirtatious. A more stable life would bring you a sense of safety.



Street scene in Zhuzhou, Hunan province.
Photo: Ernie Emop

A majority of the women surveyed said that while single, they devote themselves to their work. Almost half reported they had no sex life. A sizable 13.28 percent said they did not want to marry, while 23.87 percent said they were 'uncertain, tired, and might never love again'. Paradoxically, as pressure from

the state and society to marry early increases, women might opt out altogether from a system that seems designed to entrap them in a loveless economic relationship or a love match that makes no economic sense.

