

《剩男不哭，站起来……》

未来30年中国将有3000万"剩男"，男女比例严重失衡，这些“剩男”要跟谁结婚呢？



When Liu returned to his childhood village to celebrate Chinese New Year, his parents had arranged a familiar and depressing task for him: a series of speed dates. Over a week back in rural Jiangxi province, he met half a dozen potential wives in encounters he says felt more like job interviews. He expects to go through the same process next year, without much hope of success.

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For Jin, who works with Liu in the factories of China's Pearl River Delta, the cajoling matchmaker was his second cousin. "My cousin brought [the date] to meet me in a public square in the village, then left us together," Jin recalls. "A few minutes in, this girl made it clear that owning an apartment would be essential, but she could wait till later for a car. And she'd be OK if the apartment wasn't in the centre of the town, but I had to have a deposit of at least 200,000 yuan [about \$22,500]."

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In recent years, the patriarchal Chinese state has launched campaigns warning unmarried urban females over the age of 27 of the perils of becoming "leftover women". But in reality – due to sex-selective abortions, a traditional

preference for sons and the country's one-child policy – there's a far larger cohort of "leftover men".

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Official state media put the male-to-female ratio at 136:100 among unmarried people born since the 1980s. Professor Jin Tiankui, an influential sociologist in China's policy-making circle, predicts that by 2020 there will be 30 million more men than women in the 24–40 age bracket.

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Liu and Jin blame their lack of romantic success on their low social status as migrant workers from rural provinces. The state says there are about 278 million others like them, the backbone of the country's wildly successful manufacturing, construction and service industries. They embody the nation's most intractable problems of inequality – loneliness included.

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In 2010, the main state-endorsed union surveyed thousands of rural migrants in 10 cities across the country, concluding that "the defining aspect of the migrant experience" is a sense of loneliness due to a lack of romantic prospects. A separate survey found that more than 70% of construction workers (almost exclusively rural migrants) reported emotional loneliness as the most painful aspect of their lives.

2010????10??
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Liu is 33 and lonely. As a teenager he left school to help his parents on their farm, but soon ventured south to Shenzhen on the border with Hong Kong, hoping to make more money. When I first met him he was working 12 hours a day, six days a week assembling iPhones at one of the Foxconn plants where Jin now works.

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Without advanced education, Liu is only qualified for insecure, low-skilled jobs. The long hours and low pay make the practicalities of dating more daunting. "It's not because I'm a shy person. I just don't have enough money to feel confident," he tells me. "When a man has money, every woman feels destined to be his girlfriend."

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When Liu is not worrying about his own loneliness, he's feeling guilty about letting his parents down. "They sacrificed so much to bring me up, and all they want to see is that I'm married. But I'm not able to give them that," he tells me. "They try not to put too much pressure on me, but I know they're under a lot of pressure from neighbours and relatives. I have two sisters and I'm their only son." The tradition of continuing the family lineage is strong in China; many rural parents would consider it a terrible failure if their sons did not find a wife.

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This old tradition, banned in the era of Mao, has made a comeback in rural China. There are a number of reasons: the embrace of capitalist and entrepreneurial values; the imbalanced ratio of men to women, which drives a sellers market; and the persistence of patriarchal values which consider women to be properties, owned first by their parents and then their husband.

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The bride's family would be seen to be getting a raw deal – losing both face and a rare opportunity for considerable economic gain – if a fee was not part of the bargain. The amount could range from the equivalent of a few thousand to tens of thousands of pounds, and often proves to be a deal breaker in these negotiations.

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Even if a match is made, things don't always end well. Hasty weddings can lead to hasty divorces; in one county in Henan province, up to 85% of all divorces in the period from 2013 to 2015 involved rural migrant couples. The government has signalled its concern about high divorce rates and "temporary couples" – made up of individuals who marry in their villages and then return to cities to form separate romantic relationships there.

??2013??2015????85%??

In a state that values social stability above all, this growing cohort of millions of disaffected and sexually frustrated young men is an unwelcome development. In a rare move, the Chinese Communist Party used an official policy document to declare its intention to "step up efforts to solve the problems facing second-generation rural migrant workers".

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Of course, loneliness affects migrant women and men alike, and women suffer in myriad ways from broken relationships and disintegrated families. But it's the image of sexually deprived migrant men that figures prominently in the state's anxious imagination.

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For millions like Liu and Jin, the search for love and intimacy – and with it dignity and social worth – goes on.

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