



Wu Shuping

*SINGLE  
IN  
THE  
CITY*

*A Survey of  
China's  
Single Women*



# Single in the City

## A Survey of China's Single Women

Wu Shuping



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# Preface

Wu Shuping

It is six years ago that I published *A Survey of Single Women*. Although the book had some impact, was serialized in several newspapers across China, and the online hit rate was high, its success has always surprised me, for I prefer my “pure literature.”

I used to pen newspaper column on emotions, so it was inevitable I'd write a book in this subject area, but I was so pious about “pure literature,” I thought it not worthy of the time and effort. So when I published *Body Odor* at the end of 2008, I said in the preface that I would no longer write about emotions. Out of the blue, this year, I was contacted by editor Liu of Foreign Languages Press with a view to publishing it in English, and I was fated to publish this kind of book again. Perhaps in the future I really won't touch emotional topics for sure.

Revising and reviewing the original text, some six years later, I felt really ashamed. I admit that I was superficial then, and in the case of several people the interview was so simplistic that I deleted it without mercy. In fact, I did so for half of the texts, replacing them with new interviews and unpublished cases. The interviewees came not only from major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, but also from Chengdu, Wuhan, Xiamen, Hangzhou, Yueyang, etc. These days people tend to lead mobile lives so it is not

easy to define where they are from: consequently, this survey is not classified by city as in the original version. Instead, this book has been re-titled as *Single in the City*.

Many people reading surveys of private emotions will ask: Is this stuff true? Of course they are, but I should make clear that oral interviews are different from written reports, and since the book cannot be written in oral language, they are not verbatim. But the stories themselves and the specific details are absolutely true.

Several points need mentioning. The ages given are those at the time of the interview, not current ages, for which one would need to add between one or six years. Those interviewed (where they could be contacted or their current information is available) are still single – or to be more precise — unmarried. It seems that in this age of unwed women, the question of marriage is not an easy one.

In many media I've been called an "expert in emotions," but this is an exaggeration, since I am far from being an expert. I'm just an ordinary media guy, an ordinary writer, at most a student in the psychology of emotions, with a little knowledge and my own views gained in the course of my work.

Nor am I a psychiatrist. I must labor this point, since whenever I have published works on emotions many readers have written to me for psychological consultation, seeking answers to mental confusion.

In each interview, I was a mere faithful chronicler; it was my duty to record a private life as completely as possible. As for the contemporary emotional, psychological, family and social issues reflected in these stories, I think it's better to leave them to real scholars to study, and for readers to ponder.

So much for the preface.

## A Determined Singleton

*Interview location:* a café in Haidian District, Beijing

*Interviewee:* Liu Yue

*Age:* 28

*Profile:* head of the administrative office of a real estate company. From Sichuan, bachelor's degree, previously a personnel secretary and office manager.

*A 28-year-old can't be considered too old for marriage, and it is hard to say she'll remain single all her life, but Liu describes herself as a "confirmed singleton."*

*Apart from this rendezvous, we met up a few times later. Liu impressed me deeply with her distinctive personality and her "drift northward" from Shenzhen.*

*I remember being a bit surprised the first time I saw Liu: how come such a beautiful woman would choose to stay single?*

*In order to break the ice and create a relaxed atmosphere, I told her: "You should enter a beauty contest."*

*"Too old," she replied. Eight years ago I'd have considered it if I was bored. But I'm not tall enough — only 1.66 meters. Ten extra centimeters on my height, and it would be OK."*

*"To be honest," she continued, "if my friend hadn't told me you'd come all the way from Shenzhen I really didn't want to do this interview. Feelings are difficult to explain. But I spent several years in Shenzhen, and I have a soft spot for the place."*

*I sat by the window with Liu, and the slanting sun shone in, bringing a little warm feeling — a precious commodity in the Beijing winter. Liu's face became more animated. The waiter brought our coffees. We sipped, and Liu began to talk about herself.*

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I went to college in Beijing, and graduated, you know its name but please don't mention it. After graduation I went to Shenzhen for further development; my first action was to seek out the help of a former fellow-student.

Generally, if you study in Beijing you prefer to stay and find work in the capital, instead of going to another city. But my classmate was doing very well with a U.S. company in Luohu, Shenzhen, and had become the envy of all. So I longed to go to Shenzhen to check out its "streets paved with gold" and its "sky full of opportunity."

My contact had ridden her luck for three years in Shenzhen, starting as an ordinary clerk and was now an assistant general manager. She had a chauffeured car to get about, carried a laptop around all day; whatever was the current fashion, she had it; she never walked but rushed. In a word, the bird had become a phoenix in a matter of a few years. Back then she was simply my idol.

She recommended me to a large enterprise in Futian District which engaged mainly in real estate. My job, in personnel administration, was a bit miscellaneous, but not tiring, in fact kind of laid-back for a fast-paced city like Shenzhen. So I felt fairly content. Just graduated, I did not have too much ambition.

Within days of starting the job I was being invited to eat out by male colleagues, and also by acquaintances outside the company. Some people even slipped notes into my desk drawer, asking me out for tea.

To be honest, I was only 22 at the time and not keen to fall in love too early, so I pretended not to understand or be interested in the attentions of many people.



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Later, one man did take my fancy. He was the younger brother of our boss at headquarters. The company HQ was in Shanghai, and the boss was chairman of the board there. His brother's name was Ouyang. Let's not go into more detail on names.

Despite the family relationship, Ouyang was not our company's general manager. Maybe because he was young, or for some other reason, he was just manager of the planning department.

Ouyang was only 27 years old that year. For a modern man, 27 is no age at all; so, I always assumed he was not married. And he never had a girlfriend with him.

You could not call Ouyang handsome, but he was relatively tall and robust, 1.80 meters and almost 90 kg. It's not because we broke up that I say he isn't good looking, really there is nothing handsome about him at all.

I'd be lying if I said my feelings for him had nothing to do with vanity.

Unlike other guys Ouyang was not always pestering me to go out to dinner. He liked to stop by my office for a chat during office hours. There were three of us working in my office. My two female colleagues also seemed to like talking to him, not afraid of a ticking off from the general manager.

At first, I didn't know he was the brother of the "big boss," so I did wonder why so many people were so solicitous toward him? And the strange thing about him was that he would sit and sit, chatting for ages, and people seemed somewhat in awe of him, even though he was not the general manager.

Later, what with the relatively long time he spent chatting to me,