

**别纠结女性独立了，最该独立的可是男人们**  
**“Don't get entangled with women's independence, it is men who are in dire need to be independent”**

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**Summary**

*This article explores what is an independent woman by using television series, a trending song, as well as popular images on housewives and working women among the netizens and society in general. Public opinion against being a full-time housewife actually makes women fall into the trap of being an “independent” woman and always try to prove themselves: to support and to take care of the family, at the same time also keep slim figure and look young. Challenging the popular notions of what is an independent woman, it calls for men to be ‘emancipated’ and start taking responsibilities of household chores and bringing up the child.*

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Image: Gu Jia's personality is considered to be both of an "independent woman as well as a full-time housewife" – a scene from the Television series "Just turned thirty"

Actually, if someone likes to do household chores, does not like to go for work, can bear to stay at home and become a full-time housewife/husband – it is absolutely fine. However, the problem is the aspiration of being a "full-time housewife," is not the first choice for majority of women.

The truth is, a few days ago, when I saw "whether being a full-time housewife can be seen as being an independent woman," as the hot topic of discussion in Weibo, my first reaction was ——

"If full-time housewife is also considered to be an independent woman, then there will be no one who can be considered as not independent." In that case, you can also be called an independent woman, I can also be called an independent woman, and everyone can fall under the category.

I surely do not mean to belittle the full-time housewives. It is just that, in my impression, "full-time housewife" and "independent women" are two completely opposite conditions, there exists a mutual transformation between them (for example an independent woman changes into a full-time housewife after marriage, or a full-time housewife after confronting with upheavals in marriage comes out to work, and gradually becomes an independent woman). However, I never thought that these two statuses had the possibility of merging or overlapping. But when I saw one of the fellow netizen say "what is full-time housewife, it is just housewife," doubts started engulfing me.

## I

### **It is very difficult to be a full-time housewife.**

Like author Feng Tang once said: "Literature does have a golden thread,"<sup>1</sup> blindly belittle a woman who returns to be at home by saying: "independent women also have a golden thread, if you do not achieve then there is no need to put feathers on one's own cap," won't this be too arrogant?

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<sup>1</sup> Author Feng Tang has defined golden thread in literature as, "to put it simply, expressing content which can impact the narrow and ignorant worldview and outlook on life. Explore every faintest fire of life, the form of expression must give away all obsolete ways, challenge the limits of language's ability to express and its efficiency". This statement led to several controversies in 2013, which said, "Feng Tang: Literature does have a golden thread" [http://hb.sina.com.cn/news/magazine/2013-02-19/175253909\\_2.html](http://hb.sina.com.cn/news/magazine/2013-02-19/175253909_2.html)

But nowadays people are not much concerned about the golden thread, they only see if you have golden words. *No Worries in the Twenties*,<sup>2</sup> *Just turned thirty*,<sup>3</sup> *I am stuck in the middle and confused endlessly*,<sup>4</sup> – these online phrases,<sup>5</sup> brought together from two popular television soaps have caught the confused state of mind of the youngsters in their 20's.

Both the series had some scenes, on how the college girls imagine the full-time housewives to be, “having tea, arranging the flowers and

<sup>2</sup> Television Series "No Worries in Twenties," shows the frustration and setbacks of four girls in their twenties during the year after graduating from college. All of them have their own problems to solve; however all have an idea as to how to live life and what is important for each, in life.

<sup>3</sup> Television Series "Just Turned Thirty", tells the story of three urban women in their 30s with a wider worldview, how they encounter multiple pressures of life. Perhaps the title indicates that by the time one reaches thirty; one realizes that life is not so easy after all.

<sup>4</sup> The original proverb; 十岁不愁、二十不悔、三十而立、四十不惑、五十知天命、六十耳顺、七十古稀、八十耄耋 (Shisui buzhou, ershi buhui, sanshi erli, sishi buhuo, wushi zhitianming, liushi ershun, qishi guxi, bashi maomao), says, "No anxiety during teens, twenties are free of regrets, in the thirties one should be independent, no worries in the forties, in fifties one knows one's destiny, in sixties one understands everything one hears, in seventies one becomes ancient and rare, and in eighties one reaches the most advanced age. Clearly it is the forties which are considered years of no worries, twenties are still the years of worries and confusion, however, the series title changes it perhaps to show that in the new generation, during the twenties, they believe they have an idea about life.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase indicates that when you cross twenties and just turn thirty you feel stuck, you can't call yourself to be in the twenties and are also not actually in thirties, one is not sure about one's orientation and goals of life, therefore one is extremely confused. <https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/944716332144464452.html>

chattering the whole day,” complaining about coming last in the line, “she has to try if she can have a child? A day is like 007, even the time to go to the toilet has been added to her schedule,” according to the Tengxun Television Network. However, these people (the housewives) are just the ones who are the main viewers of the two television series, “**Twenties are not confusing**” and “**Just turned thirty**”; they might have changed a few jobs in the three to four year after graduation, so they are not new (in the job market) and also cannot be called veterans. As for them, the youthfulness of the twenties is gone, and they are going to face the thirties in future. This is all the more applicable for women.

Standing at the fork of the twenties, whether to marry or not, work or not are invariably the two pressing issues to be dealt with (In contrast, men have to never face such a dilemma of choosing among the two).



Image: A Myth: Are the working women who are escorted by someone everywhere, actually independent women? (Scene from “The first half of my life”)

Coming back to the earlier question, that is, in an era of independent women, after all who is an independent woman? I think, it is not important to be an “independent woman” per say, but what is important is all that it signifies?

Last year in September, a song was top trending the charts. In this song, named *Mama please don't go to work*, apart from the brainwashing title of the song, “Mama don't go to work,” which keeps repeating itself, other parts of the song are also full of such phrases – it has morally hijacking phrases such as “if you go to work then there will be no-one to play with me,” as well as mentally repressive ones: “Mama even if you work, you won't earn much.”

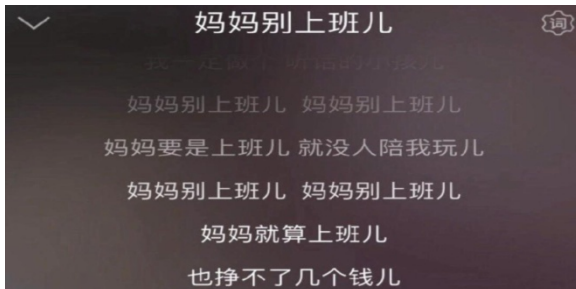


Image: The song “Mother please don't go to work”

What is worth pondering is that the writer of this song has been identified to be a married man. However, he is more interested in criticising others. The group represented by him is the one which is more noteworthy. One such man comments on the song by saying, “These words are very good, there seem to be no problem in it, mothers who work are not earning much, it is so much better to stay back

at home and be with the baby. These days women's lives have no element of femininity.”

In the recent past, a mother in Japan went to the super market with her child, just when she grabbed a pack of potato salad, an unknown old man scolded her and said: “You are a mother and still picking up a potato salad, better make it yourself!” The old man left immediately after scolding, the mother was left standing there dejected. A bystander posted this incident in twitter and soon it aroused the anger of entire Japan. Sometimes, the bigger attack on working women is not the trifles of life, but that even a stranger walking on the street can point a finger at you.



Image: Japan’s TBS Television showed a report on the “Potato salad incident”

Many of them are actually coaxed, cheated or deceived into becoming a “full-time wife.”

Before marriage it would be, “don't go to work, I will provide for you,” after marriage it becomes, “there is no need to go to work, but why can't you clean up the house?” “There is nothing to do at home, why do you still cook so late? Who can tolerate this?” Given the

situation where the whole society does not acknowledge the value of work done by the full-time housewife, stating that a “full-time housewife is also an independent woman,” such a “spiritual victory” is meaningless.

After all, “independent women” is basically a way of addressing and not a title, even if you are assessed as one, there is no prize money.

## II

### Two huge obstacles independent woman cannot get around

The public opinion of resistance against “full-time wife” to some extent reflects the recognition of women’s pursuit to economic freedom. However, what is worrisome is that in this process more and more people are inevitably falling into the trap of being an “independent woman.”

Why am I saying this?

The “independent women” that we know till now, are the ones who takes up most of the housework as per the traditional mindset, and also take charge of their official work, proving that they are capable. Under the indoctrination of these two extremely correct forces, one has to both support as well as take care of the family, at the same time also keep slim and look young, if you cannot do this, then you will be a failure.



Image: Gujia is admired only for her long list of achievements. No one bothers whether it is too tiring.

“Q Daily”, had once summed it up that many “popular notion on independent women,” are actually misconstrued – beautiful, with strong make-up, wearing high-heels; white collar official in a big city, at the least at a director or chief executive level; unmarried or single, must be contemptuous of marriage; strong/manly type of women, known for being tough; at an attacking position “always a general / brother / master,” however, she should be lonely and tough from inside; medium to highly educated, could have studied abroad, economically self-sufficient, could buy a whole set of cosmetic without blinking an eye; keep fit, practice yoga, and have a military-type body management regime...

In case, all of these conditions are met, such a woman can only be in heaven, among mortals how seldom have we heard of it.

But it is still not over. A vicious circle of perfectionism, a trap of consumerism, this is the burden weighing heavy on the head of

contemporary independent women. They say “money never sleeps,” the businessmen who keep hovering around independent women and those who want to become independent women, had long back gained precise benefits from them. Their narrative build-up had been attentive to “nurture” this phenomenon.

Once the beauty and skincare brands start narrating the story of women, we can always see a lot of anxiety: Young stars holding skin care products talking about self-confidence, which definitely cannot replace the self-confidence of normal women. Middle aged women talk in front of the camera about fighting their anxiety of ageing, but the camera never leaves their beautiful and perfect face. It virtually plants a seed in the heart of the women that “only a consumer can resist ageing,” it may work overtime and bear fruit one night. Obviously, the magic cure for weariness is not to take good rest, but to bite ones teeth and reward oneself with an expensive skincare product. After all the advertisement said, “you deserve the best” (most expensive).

As a social animal what one often hears is, “women should be good to themselves,” eight to nine times out of ten such expressions flow out of the advertisements for beauty products, their only target is your already shrivelled wallet.



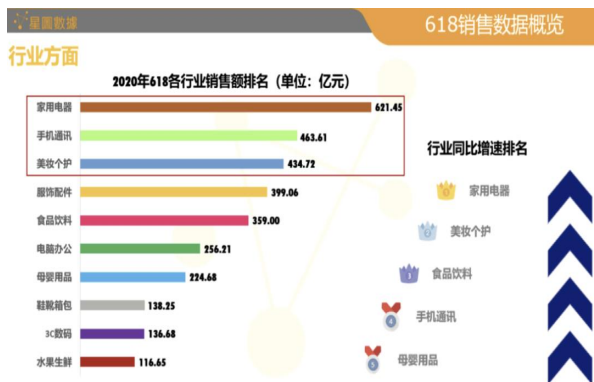
Image: Unsplash

Under the lipstick, both consumers and brands enjoy boundless happiness.

If you thought all women are fools who would be “led by the nose” by these advertisements, then you are wrong. Actually, it is like “chopping off the hands of a whole group” in the name of few corrupt “black sheep,” the most selling products are still the ones used by the whole family, and are not beauty products, clothes, shoes and bags, as one would think.

In the recent 618 large-scale promotional activities, the sales of electronic home appliances were worth 62.145 billion RMB, far more than any other industry. In the four giant electronic products websites, Tianmao, Dongjing, Pinduoduo and Suning, industries like large household appliances, mainly air conditioners (32.631 billion RMB), living appliances, mainly sweeping robot, (11.157 billion RMB), and kitchen appliances, mainly air purifier and air fryer (7.285 billion RMB), contributed maximum to the overall internet sale volume. In comparison, the personal care products regarded as the “contested area,” contributed only 28.102 Billion RMB and

beauty products were even less at 6.235 billion RMB.



The list of commodities sold in 618, 2020 (in billion):  
**Electronic home appliances:** 62.145; **Mobile** 43.472;  
**Beauty care** 43.472; **Clothing** 39.906; **Food and beverages** 35.900; **Computer** 25.621; **Mother and baby products** 22.468; **Shoes and Luggage** 13.825; **3C products** 13.668; **Fresh fruits** 11.665

Image: Household appliances bag the first position in 618 promotion sale.

Just consider it again, whether it is “double eleven” or “618,” every time there is online promotion sale, the biased calculation method which can be compared to the last difficult sum of Jiangsu maths,<sup>6</sup> will make you feel the that married women are the most difficult to maintain. Abused by the netizens even as they take care of the whole family, alas! When are these times going to end for women?

### III

#### Not Women, Men need to be more Emancipated

Two days ago, news about a “woman requesting men to share household chores” went viral, which attracted wide attention of

the netizens. To be precise, an Indian woman named Subarna Ghosh filed an online petition, appealing to the Indian Prime Minister to encourage all Indian men to equally share the household chores. Ironically, the petition said: “Is it imprinted on the handle of the broom, ‘only to be used by women’?” What about in the manual for washing machine or gas stove? Then why is it that majority of the men do not perform their share of household chores?”



Image: In India, perhaps you can see such an image of a man only in a photograph.  
 Source: Tu Chung Creativity

According to a report of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in 2018, the average time spent by Indian women on unpaid care was 312 minutes in a day, whereas men only spend 29 minutes. In rural areas, the average time spent by women was 291 minutes and by men it was 32 minutes. As per an Oxfam report, the time spent by Indian women and girls on unpaid work exceeds 3 billion hours. If all the work done by them is paid as per the market value, the GDP of India will increase by 1,000 billion INR. Till 22 July, this

<sup>6</sup> The national college Mathematics entrance test in Jiangsu is believed to be the most difficult one in China.

petition was already supported by 70,000 people.

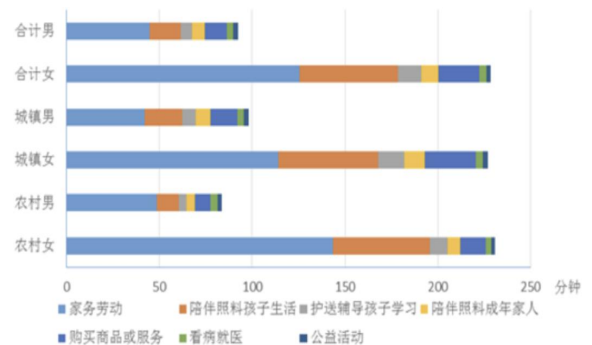


Image: Majority of the Indian houses do not have washing machines, washing clothes with hands are very difficult.  
Source: Touch Creation

As the news reached China, the netizens were invariably angry at the injustice, “Just for the hope that men would share the household chores, they needed to urge the Prime Minister – the Indian women are so pitiable.” Then what about in China? In 2018, the National Statistical Bureau issued a national level survey on time spent by people. It also included the time spent on unpaid labour. As the name suggests, unpaid labour is work which needs to be remunerated, but is not remunerated. It includes housework, child care and accompanying the child, guiding the child in studies, taking care of elderly, shopping and other services, taking care of the sick and public welfare etc.

In China, the average time spent by men in unpaid labour is 1hr 32 minutes, whereas for women it is 3 hrs 48 minutes. Does it still appear to be fair? If we look at the rate of

participation in unpaid labour, for men it is 55.3% and for women it is 84.2% respectively. In other words, nearly half of the Chinese men do not participate in unpaid labour at all. Among the 24 hours a day, the time he spends in cooking, taking care of children, and accompanying the family is actually zero.



Top-down: total men, total women, urban men, urban women, rural men, rural women.

Left-right: Sky Blue: House work; Orange: Accompanying the child; Grey: Escort and guide the child in studies; Yellow: Taking care of elderly at home; Dark blue: Grocery shopping; Green: Seeing a doctor; Navy Blue: Public service

Image: The average time spent by people on unpaid work as per region and gender/ 2018, national survey on time spent<sup>7</sup>.

However, as compared to the perfectly invisible “widowed parenting” in the family on one side, what is most ridiculous is, normally his (husband) voice is never heard, the moment she (wife) goes wrong, he jumps out to blame her unscrupulously. It is like “corpse rising (from the dead).” This has been perfectly interpreted in the phrase “father’s love is like a mountain,” since he is “motionless”; as for a husband, he is like a dormant volcano, which

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed table on the time spent on unpaid labour as per gender in China and India, see <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54757>



only erupts occasionally, scaring the ladies to death.

To tell you the truth, for these group of men and their criticism of women, it would serve them better to actually make themselves independent, stop their passive resistance by staying back in office or going to bar or hanging around in underground garage after the office hours, and start bearing the responsibility of house work and take care of the child.

In the words of a woman writer Hou Hongbin:

“I think one must popularise the concept of ‘independence.’ Women’s independence is quite old. Actually women generally have a job, their problem is when they have to also provide for others, and carry their burden too. What needs to be advocated is the concept that ‘men need to be independent.’ Men need to know that they will not die without a woman. They can also cook, they can also wash cloths, and they can also celebrate the New Year on their own. They can lead an orderly life. They don’t need to depend on a woman, and just like women they also have hands and legs. The moment their parents or women leave them, they don’t have to cry and feel they are completely

good for nothing. One can still survive without a bride...”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, all human beings must seek independence, whether men or women. Merely talking about “women’s independence” and keeping mum about “men’s emancipation,” is undoubtedly an act of hooliganism.

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### Chinese readers’ Comments:

1. At present, how many women are provided for by men, don’t even start? If you and your wife swap with each other, you do the housework, bring up the child, your husband will try to earn

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<sup>8</sup> The author Hou Hongbin feels men should also be independent. / Weibo

money? Oh, maybe you don't have a husband?

2. Whether it is a man or a woman, whether independent or not independent, all this is basically a concept, which is based on the social division of labour formed by the different features of men and women. It is just a division of labour, labour does not have any high or low, the division is different. As per physiological, social and cultural background, division of labour is formed naturally. What kind of work would be more suitable for women and men, this is natural, formed by the natural choice of social development. If in one case, in a family the woman's ability to earn is stronger then she could bear the responsibility to earn, and the man can bear the responsibility at home, whether it is a man or a woman, can one accept the psychology behind this situation, if one can then there is no problem.

3. Women who are truly independent do not have the time to argue about this topic, other than doing the things in hand by managing with the partner, and see in messages in mobile, like my case right now...

4. I am an older unmarried man, at present apart from working and providing for myself, I also buy vegetables and cook, clean, and solve all sorts of trivial issues of life. I can't imagine, once married if I will give all household task except my work for the women to do.

5. On the one hand you want independence and on the other hand you want to be provided for, who do you think you are! One of the strengths of an independent woman is, to be economically independent.

**Series Editor:** Hemant Adlakha

**Editor's note:** All photographs are from the original article in Chinese

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*The views expressed here are those of the translator and not necessarily of the Institute of Chinese Studies*

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