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SATISFACTION GUARANTEED IN SPOUSE SELECTION: THE DYNAMICS OF
GENDER AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS IN A CHINESE DATING REALITY
SHOW

by
YUE YIN

Under the Direction of Jenny Zhan, PhD

ABSTRACT

This study examines a popular TV show about heterosexual dating in contemporary China, entitled *Chinese Dating*. This television show provides an ongoing social forum on self-articulations of gender identities and intergenerational interactions regarding dating and spouse selection expectations of the participants. Using grounded theory to guide the data analysis, the findings about the gendered differences of spouse-selection criteria in contemporary China denote deep social and cultural expectations for young men and women in a rapidly changing China. The findings about the negotiation process of the two generations indicate the continuing cultural influence of filial piety, which provides a contrasting understanding for Western readers who have long held individual rights and decision-making as a top priority in spouse-selection. Finally, this study presents a variant of the modernization theory, which argues that industrialization and modernization result in individualism that increases the power of the young and decreases influence of the aged.

INDEX WORDS: Spouse-selection criteria, Gender, Intergenerational relations, Chinese Dating TV show

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YUE YIN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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Yue Yin
2017

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1 INTRODUCTION

Marriage and family have long been core subjects of study in Sociology because changing patterns in marriage and family are often associated with societal changes (Nobles & Buttenheim, 2008; Raymo, 2003; Yu and Xie, 2015). Chinese society has gone through nearly four decades of industrialization and urbanization beginning in the late 1970s. Throughout this development, it is possible to observe changing patterns of family formation, such as prolonged singlehood, delayed parenthood, and increasing individuality in the contemporary Chinese society. These changing patterns of family formation have drawn wide public attention. Words such as “leftover women” and “bare stick” (bachelor men) are invented and widely used in the public and the media to describe the late marriage and prolonged singlehood for both men and women. “Leftover women” is a phrase used to refer to educated professional Chinese women who are not married by their late 20s (Ji, 2015), and “bare stick” describes men who have difficulty in finding a willing partner for marriage. It is common to see anxious parents gathering in parks displaying information about their sons and daughters hoping to find a husband or a wife for their one and only child (Ji, 2015). Numerous dating reality shows have become popular that explore romantic relationships in this changing China (Kan, 2017).

Regardless of these emerging phenomena in dating and marriage in contemporary Chinese society, traditional family patterns and values are still dominant (Xu & Xia, 2014). Spouse selection processes and marriage arrangements are excellent examples. Marriage is still universally expected in China; being single is not acceptable as a social norm (Ji, 2015). Second, per Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China, China does not recognize the legality of same-sex marriage, only heterosexual marriage. Furthermore, spouse selection is a family business, and consequently, marriage is considered the union of two families rather than two

individuals (Pan, 2015; Xu & Xia, 2014). Family members often intervene in the spouse selection process (Hansen & Pang, 2008; Xu & Xia, 2014).

Existing research has attempted to examine emerging phenomena in the Chinese marriage market against the background of the traditional Chinese family ideologies. For example, Chinese women favor a husband with a solid economic status and who is usually a few years older than themselves. This pattern of spouse selection results in men with low socioeconomic status facing “marriage squeeze” in China (Mu & Xie, 2014). Male marriage squeeze is a phenomenon in which marriageable women are outnumbered by marriageable men resulting in failure for men to find a spouse in the marriage market (Dixson et al., 2007). In addition, various studies have examined the struggles and agency of the “leftover women” in the changing context of marriage formation in contemporary China (Ji, 2015; Fincher, 2014). Unfortunately, little is known about the spouse selection criteria used by individual Chinese men and women who are now entering the marriage market. For example, Ji (2015: 1064) describes that “leftover women” in Shanghai are “still invested in the romantic idea of ‘waiting for Mr. Right’.” No known literature has examined the societal meanings or criteria for what makes a “Mr. Right” or a good husband in contemporary China from women’s points of view. Meanwhile, given that in China, parents and extended family members are also involved in the spouse selection process; Filial piety, a cultural norm in China that emphasizes children’s affection and duty towards their parents (Ho, Xie, Liang & Zeng, 2012; Qin, 2013), is known to remain as one of the top criteria for spouse selection among 20-30 year old singles (Xu & Xia, 2014). Thus, seeking a spouse for men and women in China is not only about meeting their individual criteria but also about satisfying their parents’ expectations towards the future in-laws.

However, there is a dearth of literature on the intergenerational differences in spouse-selection expectations and criteria in China.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The significance of the study can be seen in three major aspects: First, study findings add to the literature of gender studies by examining the connotations of spouse selection criteria in contemporary China. The differing gendered criteria for spouse selection may denote deep social and cultural expectations for young men and women in rapidly changing China. These expectations may be entrenched in the changing economic and social structure in the rapidly changing China. Second, this study yields findings that increase the understanding of the role of parents in the spouse-selection process in China. Study results reveal the continuing cultural influence of filial piety while exploring the potential changes that potentially have occurred in the expectations and criteria for spouse selection between parents and children. These findings also provide a contrasting understanding for Western readers who have long held individual rights and decision as a priority in spouse selection. Finally, this study presents a variant of the modernization theory, which argues that industrialization and modernization produce individualism that increases the power of the young and decreases influence of the aged.

To properly understand the cultural meanings of this reality show, a literature background about spouse selection criteria in the U.S. and China is provided below. The literature review will cover three major aspects: the gendered difference in spouse selection criteria, intergenerational differences in selecting marriageable partners, and the social and cultural contexts of spouse selection in contemporary China.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Individual Spouse Selection Criteria and In-law Preference

In Western cultures, individuals are expected to choose their partners based on their own preferences, even though the decisions made by young men and women may be influenced by their parents and relatives. In contrast, dating and spouse selection between young men and women in China involves a much higher degree of involvement from the parents on both sides. To understand the dating experience and processes in contemporary China, one may first have to understand gendered differences in dating or spouse selection criteria through a sociological lens. The first part of this literature review focuses on young men and women's spouse selection criteria. Then, studies on parents' preference in adult children's spouse selection will be reviewed. Finally, I will review the literature on spouse selection criteria in China, and the role of parents in children's spouse selection process.

2.1.1 Gendered Spouse Selection Criteria

Previous research shows that men and women put different emphasis on the other gender's traits when selecting a date or a spouse (Hill, 1945; Sprecher et al., 1994; Buss, 1989). Spouse selection preferences vary based on time and culture. Irrespective of these differences, age and attractiveness in women and social status and wealth in men are shown to be common spouse selection criteria (Li et al., 2013; Chen & Austin, 2017; Li, Valentine & Patel, 2011; Li & Kenrick, 2006). Generally speaking, men value beauty and youth in women, and women value men's status and wealth (Chen et al., 2017). According to sociocultural framework that men and women are socialized according to different gender roles; spouse selection criteria are, therefore, contextual and socially constructed, rather than universal, species-based behavior (Howard et al., 1987; Li et al., 2002; Gagnon and Simon, 1973; Zentner & Eagly, 2015). According to the

sociocultural framework, changes in technology, economy and other transformations within a society create opportunities and restrictions for men and women that influence their spouse selection strategy (Zentner & Eagly, 2015).

2.1.2 Convergent Spouse Selection Criteria

Regardless of the widely-documented gendered spouse preferences, there is a large amount of research noting that men and women's spouse selection criteria are increasingly convergent because gender equality within a society narrows the difference between couples (Zentner & Mitura, 2012; Kalmijn, 2013; Schwartz, 2013). For example, research shows that from 1940 to 2003, in the United States, couples have more resemblance in their educational attainment, and a couple's similar educational attainment may lead to more equivalent earning power (Schwartz & Mare, 2005). Meanwhile, both men and women in the United States pay more attention to each spouse's financial prospects (Buss et al., 2001). Besides the increasing similarities in couple's educational attainment and earnings, prior research suggests that the gendered expectation for physical attractiveness is not that different between men and women. Hatfield and colleagues (2012) found that, especially when selecting a casual dating partner, both men and women have a similar desire to pick a good-looking date. However, increased gender equality within a society does not always associate with more egalitarian spouse selection criteria. Some research shows that there is a positive relationship between women's increase in income and their preference for partners with greater financial resources (Buss & Schmitt, 2011; Gil-Burmann et al., 2002). For example, Moore, Cassidy, & Perrett (2010) found that women are more likely than men to favor higher income online dating profiles regardless of their relative income. This could be explained by two reasons. First, although women prefer men with strong earning ability, the rank of this preference is lower than other expectations for men, if women are

financially independent (Zentner & Mitura, 2012). Second, this could be explained by rigid gender roles in the marriage institution that men hold the role of breadwinner, which normalizes the husband's breadwinner role in the family (Tinsley, Howell, & Amanatullah, 2015).

2.1.3 In-law Preference

Parents and children may not agree with each other about a selection (Dubbs, Buunk & Taiguchi, 2013; Apostolou et al., 2014). Parent-offspring conflict theory suggests that parents and children obtain different benefits from adding a new family member, so conflicts arise when each party wants to maximize their benefits or lower the costs (Dubbs et al., 2013). Meanwhile, parents also may be vigilant over children's spouse selection because adding a new member to the family may help or threaten the family's survival and reproductive efforts (Apostolou, 2011). In pre-industrial societies, arranged marriage was one way for parents to control their children's spouse choices (Broude & Greene, 1983; Frayser, 1985). In modern post-industrial societies, controlling children's social networks, persuasion or even threats are used by parents to indirectly control their children's spouse choice (Das Gupta, 1997; Goode, 1959).

Parents and children often disagree about certain traits of a potential in-law or have a different hierarchy of preferences for a future family member's traits. Research shows that, in general, parents prefer an in-law who is within the group, such as someone who has the same ethnic background and social class (Buunk, Park & Dubbs, 2008; Apostolou, 2008). For example, South Asian immigrant children in the United States often face great pressure from their parents to marry someone who has the same ethnic, religious and social background (Dugsin, 2001). Meanwhile, children tend to select a spouse who is physically attractive (Buunk et al., 2008). For instance, Chinese immigrant children living in North America value a partner's physical appearance more than their parents, while their immigrant parents emphasize the

traditional values within a potential in-law more than their children (Hynie, Lalonde & Lee, 2006). Besides the favorable traits according to parents, Dubbs and Buunk (2010) found that poor parental investment, lack of creativity and physical unattractiveness, were more unacceptable to mother-in-laws, while traits of low social status, such as poverty and less education in potential in-laws were more unacceptable to fathers-in-laws.

Although research is consistent with the differences between parents' and children's preferred traits in potential family members, research also shows that parents and children eventually prefer candidates who are acceptable to both because adjusting or compromising each party's preferences increase the chances of finding an acceptable partner. Thus, eventually, both parties benefit from reduced conflict (Apostolou, 2009).

In summary, the literature review reveals that an individual's spouse selection criteria are contextual. They change with time and culture. Thus, previous research on men and women's spouse selection criteria in Western societies cannot indicate spouse selection preference in the Chinese context. Furthermore, when research uses predetermined spouse selection criteria, they cannot be applied to a different spouse selection reality; nor can they be suitable or applicable in the Chinese context. In addition, there are parent-child conflicts on spouse selection as well as parent-child compromises during the process. However, earlier literature rarely explored the negotiation process that leads to conflict resolution. This research aims to add to the literature by addressing these issues. The next part of this literature review provides relevant Chinese background to better understand the research context.

2.2 Spouse Selection Criteria: The Chinese Context

2.2.1 *Individual Spouse Selection Criteria*

Prolific research on the subject has found that different social-cultural contexts can influence spouse selection criteria. However, there seems to be a general distinction between spouse selection criteria in individual (such as the U.S.) vs. collective (such as China or Japan) cultures (Buss & Barnes 1986; Boxer, Noonan & Whelan 2015; Higgins et al. 2002; Toro-Morn & Sprecher 2003). Individualist cultures tend to prefer traits in a spouse emphasizing emotional bonding because they value romance and love. Meanwhile, collectivist cultures (China) tend to value family conformity and harmony; thus, they prefer a spouse who can be approved by the family members and the society (Higgins et al., 2002; Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003; Zhang & Kline, 2009).

Besides the different influences on spouse selection criteria from the individualist and collective cultures, Chinese men and women's spouse selection criteria also functions within the unique Chinese sociocultural context. First, Chinese men and women may be influenced by traditional wisdom regarding the culturally embedded spouse selection preferences (Chen et al., 2017). One such proverb, "men dang hu dui" (matching doors and houses), suggests that a good match is between two individuals with compatible family backgrounds, according to the traditional marriage or spouse selection standard. Moreover, the proverb, "jia you chou qi shi ge bao" (ugly wife is a treasure to a family), suggests that men should marry ugly wives because they are dedicated to housework and have fewer chances to engage in extramarital affairs (Chen et al., 2017). Thus, contrary to the sexual strategies theory that men tend to value women's youth and beauty because they are associated with women's ability to bear better genetic offspring (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Chen et al., 2015), a Chinese man, by the traditionally accepted

standards, may choose to marry an ugly wife because she could bring family stability and harmony.

Second, a highly skewed sex ratio, partially due to female infanticide under the one-child policy in China, combined with a social norm of hypergamy lead to a shrinking pool of marriageable women for Chinese men (Ji & Yeung, 2014; Trent & South, 2011). Thus, the combination of the demographic change and the continuity of the social norms may make young men and women of marriageable age change their spouse selection criteria due to the pressure they face in the contemporary Chinese marriage market.

Third, young men and women in China may pay special attention to material necessities, for example, house ownership, due to severe economic conditions (Wei and Zhang, 2011). According to the Marriage Market Survey in 2010, 71% of unmarried women and 48% of unmarried men prefer that their future spouses own a home as a precondition for marriage (Wei, Zhang & Liu, 2017). The rapid real estate development and inflation in China have increased the housing demand for young people before marriage. Ownership of an apartment or house has become a prevalent expectation or pre-condition of marriage in contemporary China.

Previous findings about Chinese men and women's spouse selection criteria shed some light on gendered spouse selection criteria. In a cross-cultural spouse selection of study of men and women from the United States and China, Chen and colleagues (2017) found that Chinese women faced more pressure to marry than their U.S counterparts. Moreover, Chinese women also faced pressure to marry at a young age, which may be explained by the social norm of hypergamy. Meanwhile, similar to the sexual strategies theory, men's wealth and women's age and beauty were also emphasized by their Chinese participants in the study (Chen et al., 2017).

Zhang and colleagues (2014) had an interesting finding regarding the persistent gender norms in contemporary China. They found that women's earning power was negatively related to their investment in romantic relationships. They interpreted this finding as the social context that Chinese women had the earning capacity, but they might not psychologically be prepared to be a provider due to traditional gender norms. In addition, the skewed sex ratio in the Chinese marriage market could also explain the increased level of difficulty for well-established women to find even better-off marriageable partners.

Besides the findings about the gendered spouse selection criteria in China, there are also findings about the convergent spouse selection criteria among Chinese young men and women. For example, Hu and Qian (2016) found that among the post-80's generations in Shanghai, educational homogamy was growing due to the availability of highly educated partners. On the contrary, Mu and Xie (2013) found that age homogamy in China increased from 1960 to the early 1990s and then started to drop after the economic reforms (i.e. the early 1980s) due to the intensified economic pressure, rising consumerism, and a shrinking gender gap. Women's increasing educational attainment made it harder for them to find similar-aged men with higher statuses (Mu & Xie, 2013).

Previous findings on the spouse selection criteria in China showed that there are some similarities between Chinese young men and women and their Western counterparts, for example, the similar preferences for men's wealth and women's youth and beauty. Meanwhile, the Chinese context also generated unique spouse selection criteria: for example, the U-shape age homogamy finding due to the social-economic changes since the early 1980s. Although the previous findings provide us with some insights about the individual spouse selection criteria in China, the majority of research used historical data, which cannot provide us with up-to-date

changes in men and women's spouse preference in the rapidly changing Chinese context.

Moreover, most research used predetermined Western spouse selection criteria, which could not fully explore the spouse selection criteria in the Chinese context (Chen, 2015).

2.2.2 Parental Influence

Previous literature shows that parents always exert influences on children's spouse selection, the degree of such influence varies across different cultures and times (Buunk et al., 2010; Ghimire et al., 2006). When selecting a spouse, Chinese men and women appear to put more emphasis on meeting their parents' expectations than their U.S. counterparts (Chen et al., 2015). Thus, young Chinese men and women are considered more disposed to their parents and elder relatives' influences (Buunk et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2015). Moreover, research shows that children's reception level of parental influence varies by gender in China. Due to the family tradition that sons usually receive more parental investment and are expected to support their parents in old age, they are more receptive towards parents' suggestions when selecting a spouse (Chen & Austin, 2017). However, this pattern has weakened in recent years in urban China (Lei, 2013). When comparing the parental influences on spouse selection between a Chinese sample and a United States sample, Zhang and Kline (2009) found that the stronger the intention towards marriage or a committed relationship, the more influence families exert in the Chinese sample, while this positive association only existed when there were marriage intentions in their United States' sample.

Based on prior literature, Chinese parents have more influence over their children's spouse selection process, and children are also more receptive toward parents' preferences than their Western counterparts. Meanwhile, an ideal in-law according to the parents' perspective is not necessarily an ideal spouse in the opinion of adult children. However, little research

examines the negotiation process between parents and children when parent-child conflicts arise about spouse selection criteria in China. Thus, little is known about the generational differences in spouse selection criteria in the contemporary Chinese family, nor is there much research on understanding the negotiation process between parents and children when the conflicts arise. This research aims to examine the gendered spouse selection criteria among Chinese young men and women as well as the parent-child conflicts about the spouse selection criteria in the contemporary Chinese family.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to the Chinese Dating Show

This study is based on qualitative data collected from a Chinese dating show, *Chinese Dating*. The purpose of this study is to examine the connotations of spouse-selection criteria in contemporary China. Specifically, there are three aims in the study. First, I intend to understand the gendered differences in spouse selection criteria. Second, I seek to understand the expectations from the parent generation for the future in-laws in an attempt to understand a) the role of the parents in the spouse selection process for their children; b) intergenerational differences in expectations and criteria for spouse selection. Finally, I attempt to delineate the cultural and social meanings of dating and spouse selection in contemporary China as depicted in reality TV shows, such as *Chinese Dating*.

Chinese Dating was first aired in December 2016. Although dating TV shows in which young men and women come in front of the camera to find their dates or future spouses are not new in China, inviting parents onto the stage along with their children and giving parents veto power on children's dating lives is new and an attractive concept in contemporary Chinese media. Thus, *Chinese Dating* is popular among Chinese viewers. According to the *New York Times*, the first three episodes hit 200 million views online within two months (Kan, 2017).

There are ten episodes in total. Five episodes (episode one, three, five, seven, and nine) feature three female candidates being selected or judged by five sets of male candidates and their parents in each episode. The other five episodes (episode two, four, six, eight, and ten) are about three key male candidates being selected and judged by five sets of female candidates and their families. In each set, there are five families. The sample stage setting in episode one is presented in Figure I (See Appendix B).

Episode one features five male candidates along with their family members, selecting one key female partner. After the introduction of each family, the five male candidates were sent to a waiting room where they could communicate with their parents and the hostess via phone but could not be seen by the one female candidate. The three key female candidates come to the stage one at a time to meet with the parents. If three families show interests in the same key female candidate, she may communicate from the stage and ask questions, such as the male candidates' hobbies, their family background, etc. If the key female candidate receives fewer than three likes from the parents, but one or more hidden male candidates likes her, the male candidates may make their own choices regardless of parents' dislikes.

Similarly, episode two features female candidates and their family members looking for key male candidates. The stage setting is presented in Figure II (See Appendix B).

In this episode, female candidates and their family members sit on the stage, while key male candidates come to the stage one at a time to meet female candidates' family members. The remaining process of the episodes is the same as the episodes featuring male candidates and their families.

3.2 Sample

Each episode includes three key male candidates or three key female candidates. However, episode five, seven, and nine only had two key female candidates respectively. Thus, the total sample includes 15 key male candidates and 11 key female candidates. Each episode has five sets of male candidates and their parents or family members, or five female candidates and their parents or family members for each of the key male or female date. This should have made 25 young men, 25 young women, 25 sets of family members from male candidates' families and 25 sets of family members from female candidates' families. However, the total number of

families in my sample is 48, including 24 male candidates with their families and 24 female candidates with their families. This is due to two reasons. First, there were four male candidates' families and five female candidates' families that had not found an ideal candidate, so they participated in multiple episodes to continue seeking for a date. Second, if one family found their ideal candidate and left the stage, another family was added to take their spot. Due to the above reasons, the total sample size includes 39 male candidates (24 male candidates with their families and 15 key male candidates who came to the stage, one at a time) and 35 female candidates (including 11 key female candidates who came to the stage on at a time and 24 female candidates and their families). Table I (See Appendix A) presents the demographic characters of each candidate's gender, age, career, educational attainment, and residence. The youngest candidates were 22-year-old and the oldest one was 42. All candidates, except two, were never-married heterosexual adults; two were divorced (a 40-year-old woman and a 42-year-old man). 15 candidates mentioned their educational attainments in their self-introductions; they either had a master's degree or above from China or had attained a bachelor's degree overseas.

3.3 Data

During the show, the hostess asked four major categories of questions, covering information about the candidate's personal background, family background, men and women's spouse selection preferences, and parents' or relatives' preferences or expectations for future in-laws. All conversations between the hostess and young men and women, as well as between children and their parents, were transcribed word by word into Chinese. To preserve the original meaning of the language and the rich cultural flavor of the dating show, both coding and analysis of the data were conducted in Chinese. Many researchers have pointed out that word-to-word translation between languages run the risk of losing the meaning of the original language in the

cross-cultural research context (Halai 2007:353). To ensure accuracy of the language translation, the author consulted another bilingual graduate student when translating key sentences used in this paper from Chinese to English; then, the author invited another bilingual scholar to translate back from English to Chinese.

3.4 Analytic Strategy

Principles of the modified grounded theory by Cobin and Strauss (1998, 2015) guided the coding and analysis process. The data analysis started with line-by-line open coding to identify basic concepts, such as height requirement, personality, personal hobbies, breadwinner role, etc. Once the concepts were identified, I grouped them together to create categories. For instance, different height expectations, physical look, weight, etc. were grouped under the category of physical appearance (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Being mature, having positive attitudes about life and being caring were grouped under personality traits. Matching educational attainment, compatible interests and compatible values were related to compatibility by both men and women. They were under the category of “compatibility.” During this process, major categories are developed and refined. Then, I went through the process of axial coding, identifying the frequency and relationships of these categories. The concepts that occurred most often under the same category are treated as key categories. Furthermore, I compared gendered differences within the same category. For instance, both male and female candidates emphasized physical appearance as a key concept, but they refer to different expectations—while a female expected a male candidate to be tall, a male candidate expected a female to be good looking and slender. This level of abstraction through comparison ultimately helped me reach a sociological understanding of the gendered difference in spouse selection criteria.

4 FINDINGS

In this study, I utilized the modified grounded theory to analyze young men and women's spouse selection criteria as well as parents' expectations for their future sons-in-law and daughters-in-law. In the following section, I first present young men's and women's spouse selection criteria, with special attention paid to gender differences. Second, I provide findings of Chinese parents or other family members' expectations and attitudes toward their children's spouse selection. In the process, intergenerational differences are highlighted.

4.1 From Traditional to Egalitarian: Spouse Selection Criteria Among Young Men and Women

Young men and women in this study showed mixed expectations for future spouses—they expressed both traditional and egalitarian criteria. Traditional spouse selection criteria included men's emphasis on women's beauty and women's emphasis on men's economic achievement and stability. These traditional gendered expectations bear little difference in findings from earlier research in different cultural contexts (Trivers, 1972; Chen et al., 2017). Egalitarian expectations included both young men and women prioritization of individual traits (e.g. personalities and compatibilities) instead of placing emphasis on familial responsibilities and the requirement for age hypergamy (Li, Valentine & Patel, 2011; Chen & Austin, 2017).

4.1.1 *Expectations for personality*

Personality was the most frequently mentioned criteria for both men and women (29 out of 39 in men, 33 out of 35 in women). In general, men favored women who had “positive attitudes towards life,” being “mature” and “non-materialistic.” Women are looking for positive, mature and caring men for their dating candidates.

4.1.1.1 Men's expectations for matching in personality

“Having a positive attitude toward life” is seen as the most important personality traits for men in their search for a female dating candidate. For example, Mr. Zhang studied engineering in England. Instead of pursuing a career as an engineer, he owns a fitness club in Shanghai. In his self-description, he said that he himself lived an active and healthy lifestyle and he wanted to find a woman who enjoyed outdoor activities and who held “positive attitudes” towards life as he did, in order that “our love life can be as energetic and healthy as our personal lives.”

Similarly, Mr. Liu, who ran an Airbnb business and practiced the competitive martial art, Muay Thai, in his leisure time also shared a similar view: “My type of woman is someone who is cheerful and outgoing. She likes to laugh even when facing difficulties in life.”

Both Mr. Zhang and Mr. Liu showed confidence and hope in life. They enjoyed having an active lifestyle and being cheerful, even when facing hard times in their careers. Similar expectations of this personality trait were shown in several other candidates' reflections. They expect their future spouse to have positive personalities, allowing them to enjoy life together.

The second most important trait in personality that men were looking for was “maturity.” Literature in the West generally emphasizes beauty and youth in men's marital selection desires (Li, Valentine & Patel, 2011; Li et al., 2002; Li & Kenrick, 2006). However, findings in this study showed that some Chinese men, especially men around legal marriage age in China (21 years old) would prefer that their future spouse be mature, considerate, and not overly emotional. For example, Mr. Huang, a 23-year-old young man, was unemployed but dreamed to be a singer. He made his self-introduction by singing a rap song. He came to the show to look for a future spouse because of parental pressure. Mr. Huang said: “I want to find someone who is mature. I don't care if she is older than me, as long as we share the same value towards life.” Mr. Zhou,

who is also 23-year-old, held a similar view. He emphasized having feelings for each other in a relationship, and the importance of maturity in a woman instead of a woman who is younger than himself.

The young men who emphasized maturity were those in their early 20's. Some of them had no prior romantic relationships and some only had limited dating experience. For this reason, these young men seemed to have not established their own understanding and expectations for marriage and life. Their understanding of romantic relationships and marriage were influenced by their parents and the traditional marriage values in Chinese society. Women's role in the traditional Chinese family was to take care of the husband and the family, to be considerate and not emotional (Chen, 2005; Ni, 2002; Yu & Su, 2006). The young men in their early twenties on the show expected to find a mature woman who was considerate and caring and who fit into the traditional women's role in the Chinese family.

The third trait emphasized by male candidates was non-materialism. Several male candidates expressed their dislike of women who only pay attention to men's financial power rather other positive personal traits. In the traditional Chinese culture, being diligent and frugal was perceived as a virtue, especially for women (Chen, 2005; Yu, 2006). However, the economic reforms in the 1980's, the rapid speed of globalization and the invasion of materialism from developed societies have eroded the traditional Chinese value of frugality and diligence. In 2011, a prevalent statement from young women quickly triggered heated discussions in the public media about the emerging social phenomenon of materialism. The statement goes, "I would rather cry on a BMW than laugh on a bicycle." This idea of being practical and seeking for affluence has affected the younger generation's expectations in selecting their future spouse (Zavoretti, 2016).

Findings in this study revealed that the emphasis of materialism in spouse selection was gender specific. For example, Mr. Wu, a 26-year-old law firm partner who also owned four real estate properties in metropolitan Beijing, said that he would like to have his wife to be in charge of all his finances in the future. However, “too much material would blind one’s eyes and heart,” so he was very wary of dating or marrying someone who *only* cared about money.

In a similar way, Mr. Xu, a 28-year-old successful business owner, who owned two companies, said: “I have realized my material dream. Now I am looking for a hostess of the family to build our future together. I want her to be simple and not just like my money.”

The emphasis on non-materialism was salient for male candidates who were already financially affluent. They were well aware that their financial power was playing an important role in the marriage market. They did not deny their breadwinner role in the family; however, they also did not want their love life to be overtaken by material desires. On the contrary, although some of the female candidates were wealthy and materially affluent, none of them worried that men would be interested in them only for their money.

In summary, personality criteria indicated both traditional and egalitarian expectations. Men wanted to build an interesting life with a woman who had positive attitudes towards life because these men emphasized hope and positivity in life themselves. Meanwhile, they also sought traditional women’s role and virtue, such as being caring, considerate, and frugal.

4.1.1.2 Women’s expectations for personality

For women, being caring was the most important trait in personality in their search for future husbands. Women preferred a partner who was gentle, kind, and emotionally supportive in their lives. This point of view is consistent with women’s spouse selection criteria in Western societies (Dalgleish et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2004; Carpenter et al., 2009). Earlier research has

shown that women desired significantly more emotional support than men do in a relationship (Xu and Burleson, 2011). Women were more likely than men to seek nurturing and understanding in a relationship while men were more likely to seek control (Michelson, Helgenon & Weiner, 1995; Jensen, Rauer & Volling, 2013).

In contemporary Chinese society, young women also showed a similar desire of finding someone who could fulfill their emotional needs. For example, Miss Zhu got her master's degree in England and now she was a partner of the biggest online dating platforms in China. After her graduation, she went back to China and was focusing on her career. She said that after her career took off, she wanted to settle down with someone "who is warm, considerate, and able to provide companionship in life for me."

Miss Gao, who ran an online merchandise store, shared a similar view as Miss Zhu. She said: "I want a man who cares about me and knows how to take care of me." Young women in China are seeking men who have the awareness of women's emotional needs and who are sensitive enough to offer emotional support in their relationships.

The second trait that women are looking for in a man is a positive attitude towards life, including being outgoing, interesting and having a sense of humor. Similar to men, women also want to spend their lives with someone who has a compatible personality. Miss Luo was in graduate school majoring in media studies. In her self-description, she said that she was outgoing and loved to make interesting short videos at her leisure time. In fact, all Miss Luo's family members were in the entertainment industry, and according to Miss Luo, they were all cheerful and outgoing people. Thus, she wanted to find a man who shared similar positive personality traits because "a dull man won't be suitable for me and he must have positive attitudes and interesting thoughts."

Miss Liang holds a similar view. She herself keeps an active lifestyle and has a positive attitude: “I like to travel and I love sports. I want to be with someone who is positive towards life like I am.” Just like men, women, who themselves hold hopeful and cheerful attitudes toward life, also emphasized that the potential partners should exhibit positive attitudes towards life. Both young men and women want to be in a relationship with mutual love and want to share and build interesting lives together.

The third trait emphasized by female candidates was maturity. For young women who emphasized maturity as a personality trait, they associated an older age with maturity in men. For example, Miss Guo, who was a video game hostess, wanted to find someone who was like “an elder brother” to her because an elder brother within a Chinese family is someone who was in charge and took care of the rest of the family members.

Similarly, Miss Ma also wanted to find someone who was older than her, because “a mature man knows how to treat my friends and family with politeness.” Although these young women preferred men who were older than themselves, the reasons differ from the practice of hypergamy in the U.S. (Chen & Austin, 2017; Li, Valentine & Patel, 2011). In the U.S., older age in men suggests accumulated wealth and economic power, thus, women preferred older men. Young women in China, however, associated older age in men to maturity as a personality trait instead of an economically driven explanation.

4.1.2 Expectations for physical appearance

The second most frequently mentioned criteria for both men and women was physical appearance. Physical appearance in this study meant body shapes, look and height. In comparison to women, men placed heavier emphasis on the physical beauty aspect of their future spouse (fifteen men comparing to seven women). Men also had detailed physical and appearance

expectations for women, such as women's body shapes, face, hands, and feet. On the other hand, most women candidates in the show only considered height as an important criterion in evaluating men's physical appearance.

4.1.2.1 Men's expectations of women's physical appearance

Men put heavy emphasis on women's physical appearance. This is in accordance with existing literature about dating in the West (Chen & Austin, 2017; Li, Valentine & Patel, 2011; Li & Kenrick, 2006). For example, Mr. Xie, a 29-year-old lecturer at a university, had two criteria for his future spouse. Besides requiring the woman to have an interesting personality, he stated that his future spouse should have long legs. Before he was sent to the waiting area, he reminded his parents three times that he wanted his future spouse to have long legs.

Mr. Zhen, a 28-year-old, came from a prestigious family background. His father was one of the founders of the Chinese stock exchange market and his mother was a government cadre. Mr. Zhen himself earned his master's degree from a private university and was an entrepreneur of a successful social media platform in China. He said: "I have a simple requirement: she is slim, tall and beautiful." However, his parents suggested that he select a woman who has a similar educational background. Mr. Zhen insisted that what he wanted was a beautiful woman.

4.1.2.2 Women's expectations of men's physical appearance

Contrary to men's detailed and varied physical appearance expectations, the majority of women showed concern only about men's height. For example, Miss Feng, a graduate of the University of California, Los Angeles, was a partner of a social media company in Beijing. When describing her spouse selection criteria, she told the hostess that she did not have a height requirement towards men. However, immediately, she followed up by saying: "I can accept a man's height around 1.78 meters, but I don't like a man who is too short." Thus, "no height

requirement towards men” for Miss Feng meant that first, she did not have an extremely rigid requirement about men’s height such as requiring men at a height above 1.80 meters (5’10’’), which is common in China. Second, her height requirement was not rigid by saying “around 1.78 meters”, which allowed a certain range of variation in men’s height. Interestingly, Miss Feng herself was once being rejected by her ex-boyfriend's family because they thought she was too short for their son (she is 1.5 meters in height, which is 4’11’’).

Other female candidates held a rigid height requirement. For example, Miss Yu, at 1.80 meters (5’10’’) in height, said: “my boyfriend must be taller than me.” No matter how tall the female candidates are, they always want their partner to be tall or taller than themselves. The height requirement for women is very explicit in this study.

4.1.3 Expectations for Compatibility

Compatibility is the third most frequently recurring theme in spouse selection criteria for both men and women. Compatibility in this study had two categories: detailed and general compatibility. The detailed compatibility included compatible educational attainment and close geographical locations; General compatibility referred to compatible interests, hobbies, and values towards life.

4.1.3.1 Men’s expectations for compatibility

Both general and detailed compatibilities were mentioned by men. For general compatibility, the majority of men focused on sharing similar hobbies and having similar values towards life. For example, Mr. Yang was born in New Zealand and he was a manager of an international company. He told the hostess that his mother was a fitness model for a long time and his father won first place in a Cross Fit competition. He was into fitness as well. Thus, he wanted to find a woman who “must love exercising.” Other male candidates mentioned that the

woman they chose must hold values towards life compatible to their own because it would be easier to get along with each other in their future lives.

Only two male candidates offered details about what they meant by compatibility: one emphasized comparable educational backgrounds; the other preferred a closer geographical location. Mr. Wu was 42 years old, divorced, and he had two daughters attending primary school. In his self-introduction, he told the audience that he had triple master's degrees, had traveled to more than 30 countries, and owned an accounting firm in Hong Kong. He wanted to find a woman who held a bachelor's degree or above, was under 28 years old and with a similar international travel experience. Another male candidate was living in Taiwan. He preferred that his future partner was living in Taiwan as well.

4.1.3.2 Women's expectations for compatibility

Different from men, only the general compatibility expectation was mentioned by female candidates. For example, Miss Li emphasized compatible hobbies. She was a hostess of video game competitions and she had a passion for video games, so she wanted her date to share her interest in video games.

Similarly, Miss Zhi, who was a Ph.D. candidate, wanted her date to have compatible values, i.e. compatible worldviews and life philosophy so that they could communicate with each other easily and hold meaningful conversations. Although women did not require the detailed compatibility, it was implicit in their expectations. For example, the above-mentioned Miss Zhi had dual master's degrees and was a Ph.D. candidate. In order to meet her requirements of sharing compatible values and having meaningful conversations, her partner would have to share a similar intellectual vocabulary as did Miss Zhi. Thus, the expectation for similar educational attainment was included implicitly in the general compatibility.

In summary, findings in this study showed that spouse selection criteria for young men and women in contemporary Chinese society displayed both traditional and egalitarian ideals. Both men and women shared the expectation of having positive attitudes towards life. These young men and women enjoyed an active lifestyle and hopeful outlook in life, so they expected their future spouse to have positive personalities. This will allow them to enjoy life together. This emphasis on individual interest and lifestyle is in contrast with the traditional patriarchal expectation of Chinese family ideal which views marriage as an institution to fulfill familial responsibilities and obligations instead of seeking for personal happiness.

For men, the expectation for the qualities woman to be mature and non-materialistic may reflect the continuation of the traditional gender role and virtue in the Chinese family. Male candidates continue to expect women candidates to be caring and supportive of her future husband and other family members.

For women, the expectation for caring and emotionally sensitive men reflects egalitarian ideas among young women in China. In the traditional patriarchal Chinese families, an emphasis was put on fulfilling the familial responsibilities rather than meeting or even acknowledging women's emotional needs. In the meantime, the maturity expectation for men reflects more of the traditional patriarchal family ideal. Only a mature man can play a caring and responsible male role within the family.

As shown, young men and women's spouse selection criteria reflected both traditional and egalitarian ideologies. Possible explanations could be that young men and women in China were exposed to and were more amenable towards western individualist ideologies and romantic ideas. Meanwhile, they were under the influence of traditional Chinese family values from formal education and their older family members.

4.2 Parents' Expectations in Children's Spouse Selection

Existing literature showed that parents and children generally had different spouse-selection preference, for example, children favored spouses who were physically attractive more than their parents, while parents preferred in-laws to be family oriented, such as wanting to have children and investing time and money in the future family (Apostolou, 2010, 2015; Buunk & Solano, 2010; Dubbs, Buunk & Taniguchi, 2013; Dubbs & Buunk, 2010; Perilloux, Fleischman, & Buss, 2011). Meanwhile, research on Chinese parents' involvement in matchmaking showed that Chinese parents preferred future in-laws to be willing and able to provide old age support (Huang et al. 2012). This study offers findings that detailed parental preferences for in-laws. Data analysis showed that Chinese parents valued the traditional gendered division in the family. They expected their future sons-in-law to play the breadwinner role in the family by having a stable and promising career and also taking part in domestic chores. As for daughters-in-law, Chinese parents expected women to play a supportive role in the family and be in charge of most of the house chores.

4.2.1 *Expectations for son-in-law*

Fathers in this reality show emphasized future sons-in-law's dedication and ambition in their career. This finding is consistent with Apostolou's (2010) research that traits, including good economic prospects, wealth and favorable social status, were valued more in a son-in-law than a daughter-in-law. In particular, the division of labor ascribes different tasks and roles to men and women in a given society (Brown, 1991). Thus, parents value traits associated with the ability to acquire resources more in a son-in-law than in a daughter-in-law. For example, Miss Chen's father was too busy to attend *Chinese Dating* due to his work so he recorded a short video to help his daughter to find a spouse. Miss Chen's father first apologized to his daughter

for not accompanying her to choose her “Mr. Right” and he said to the camera: “I love my daughter very much. I hope the gentleman that my daughter ends up with has a solid economic base so that my daughter won’t live too hard a life.” Besides the economic requirement, fathers held a high expectation for sons-in-law’s career status. For example, Mr. Zhou, the male candidate, was a chef who worked in a government cafeteria. He told the hostess that taught himself to code computers in his spare time, and he planned to work in the IT industry next year because he thought it paid well, and was an untimely more promising career path. However, fathers of female candidates thought that Mr. Zhou did not have a stable career because he switched from one professional area to another, which could bring uncertainty in a couple’s future life, even though Mr. Zhou had a clear career plan. Furthermore, many fathers mentioned that they preferred their future sons-in-law to have accumulated a certain amount of wealth before marriage. Thus, Mr. Zhou, a cafeteria chef, did not fit female candidates’ fathers’ expectations. Fathers’ expectation to future sons-in-law was career centered -- the young man should not only be dedicated to his career but also have a career in a promising, prestigious industry.

Mothers, similar to fathers, favored future sons-in-law to be financially responsible for the family. Instead of directly demanding young men’s financial success, female candidates’ mothers expressed their selection criteria in a more modest manner. For example, Ms. Liu said: “I hope the gentleman can shoulder a man’s responsibilities within a family.” This statement implied that Chinese mothers expected young men to be the breadwinners in the family and also that they expect young men to help out with the domestic chores in future family life. This was possibly because mothers themselves had been in charge of house chores. They perhaps hoped

their daughters would have some help from their future husbands in the area of household labor. Thus, they favored young men who could help their daughters in their future family life.

Age was also a key issue for mothers. Mothers did not prefer younger men because they linked age with financial power and maturity in men (Zhang, Harwood & Hummert, 2005; Luo et al., 2013). For example, Mr. Liu was a 23-year-old young man who was working in metropolitan Shenzhen. He started school early and graduated earlier than his peers. Thus, at this young age, he had already gained years of working experiences and become a marketing manager in his company. Mr. Liu liked playing basketball and preparing fine dinners for his family and friends in his spare time. Mr. Liu considered himself a family guy and he came to *Chinese Dating* to meet the parents of potential dating partners with sincerity. However, all the mothers rejected Mr. Liu due to his young age. Mother Dong said: “I think, for men, after 25 years old would be a better age to consider marriage and family. Right now, at Mr. Liu’s age, he should focus on his career instead of thinking about starting a family.” Similarly, mother Xiao also thought that 23 years old was too young an age to form a stable personality so it was too early to tell whether Mr. Liu could be a family guy or not. Moreover, mothers displayed gendered age discrimination in men and women. For example, mother Cheng said: “For men, the older, the more valuable they are,” implying that the older the man, the more wealth he would accumulate and the more mature he could be. However, while mothers valued older men, they discriminated against older age in women. The majority of the parents of daughters preferred sons-in-law who were a couple of years older than their daughters because, in their mind, women were more vulnerable to the aging process. Mother Cao said to Mr. Liu: “Look, you are 23 years old now, a very young age for a man. After 20 years, you will be 43, a golden age for men. However, after 20 years, my daughter will no longer hold her beauty. By then, will you still love

her?” Mothers showed their concern about the fading affections toward their daughters from future husbands.

In summary, both fathers and mothers in this reality show preferred sons-in-law who could play the traditional men’s role in a family, such as being a breadwinner, taking care of the family and being mature.

4.2.2 *Expectations for daughter-in-law*

Parents’ expectations of daughters-in-law were in line with the requirements of women in the traditional patriarchal family in Chinese society (Chien & Yi, 2014; Xie & Zhu, 2009). Based on data analysis of the reality show, Chinese parents preferred women who were good at doing housework and who showed a willingness to provide support for their future husbands.

Male candidates’ fathers’ expectations for future daughters-in-law were extremely gender specific. They placed heavy emphasis on women’s submissive role in family life, such as being tolerant, kind-hearted and playing a supportive role in their son’s’ business. Women’s subordination in the family has been widely known in Chinese history (Chen, 1998; Johnson, 1983; Stacey, 1983) and was evident in *Chinese Dating*. For example, father Fu said: “I want my future daughter-in-law to be generous and tolerant. She cannot be angry about every little thing in life.” Similarly, Father Sheng expressed a similar expectation for his future daughter-in-law: “I want her to not lose her temper often. I hope the couple can live a stable and peaceful life.” In these fathers’ eyes, women were supposed to suppress their emotions. They are supposed to subjugate their own feelings to the well-being of their husbands and husbands’ families. They wanted their sons to avoid women who openly expressed their emotions. These fathers’ statements revealed that they upheld the traditional gendered expectation for women—to be submissive, yielding, tolerant and quiet.

Being supportive as a wife is a prevailing required quality for a woman from the male candidates' fathers' points of view. Young women should support their son's career development. Parents expressed their expectations of the daughter-in-law to know how to manage finance since their sons or themselves have a family business. In one family, the father was a successful real estate businessman, he expected the daughter-in-law to know how to do business. The father said: "We want her to know how to do business because we two (parents) want to retire since we are getting older. And the young couple should take over our family business."

Similarly, Mr. Zhang's uncle suggested Mr. Zhang find a woman who knows how to manage finances at home, because "although Jinli (Mr. Zhang) knows how to make money, he is bad at keeping and managing the money." Thus, a woman who had sufficient financial skills could play a good supporting role to Mr. Zhang, the potential future husband. Although most female candidates mentioned their economic independence, fathers largely neglected to mention those young women's financial power and career achievements. They were still hoping that their sons would find someone who could play a supplemental and caring role in the family, regardless of young women's independent career choices or education.

Mothers generally held similar expectations for daughters-in-law to those of fathers. However, they had an additional requirement—being healthy, which, according to mothers, could indicate a woman's reproductive abilities. For example, Mother Peng, who herself was a senior nutritionist, did not like female candidates with cold hands because cold hands indicated a poor reproductive condition of the woman. She asked the hostess for the permission to feel the hands of each female candidate. Even if she liked a candidate, she would still not choose her as a potential daughter-in-law if the candidate had cold hands. Mother Lu shared a similar view. She

said: “I want her to be healthy because I want to be a grandmother as soon as possible. I prefer to have more than one grandchild. Four would be ideal, two boys and two girls. We love a big family.”

4.3 Gender Differences in in-law Selection

Parents generally preferred future in-laws to fit in the traditional gender roles of a Chinese family. In this schema, a son-in-law should be the financial provider who holds a prestigious professional position. Additionally, mothers expected a son-in-law to help with house chores. Meanwhile, mothers displayed gendered age-discrimination against young age in men and older age for women. Meanwhile, the traditional gendered expectation for women persisted among parents in their search for a daughter-in-law. They continued to believe that a young woman should be tolerant, submissive and a help to her husband, including being good at financial management if the husband owned a business. In addition, mothers also expected daughters-in-law to bear grandchildren for them, so they insisted on daughters-in-laws being healthy.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored gendered and intergenerational spouse selection criteria as displayed in a contemporary television reality show, *Chinese Dating*. Findings revealed mixed results: Both traditional and egalitarian spouse selection criteria were found in individual’s spouse selection criteria. Their parents preferred future in-laws to fulfil the traditional gendered expectations in the family.

5.1 Changing Social and Cultural Practice of Dating: The East vs. the West

Study findings about young men and women’s spouse selection criteria revealed that personality compatibility was at the top of the criteria list for both men and women. This result is

in contrast with the assertion from earlier studies regarding the dichotomy between individualistic and collective cultures. According to this assertion, individuals from individualistic cultures value the idea of romantic love in their spouse selection process, while individuals from collective cultures value group harmony and cohesion (Buunk, Park & Duncan, 2010). Findings in this study show that young men and women in contemporary China do emphasize romantic feelings in their relationship. They perceive personality compatibility and mutual happiness as one of the most important criteria in spouse selection. Western scholars in future studies may need to be more cautious about over-generalization in dichotomizing the East and the West when examining cross-cultural behaviors, such as dating and spouse selection. In the era of globalization, integrations and cultural influences could be mutual and interactive between countries and societies.

5.2 Understanding the Social Context in China

The emphasis of positive attitudes toward life in a future spouse, as shown by most of the participants in *Chinese Dating*, may also reflect the actual experience of hope and stress of the single-child families in China. The One-Child Policy has dramatically reduced the number of family members within an entire generation (Logan & Spitze, 1996; Ward & Spitze, 1998; Zeng, 1991). In 2005, the number of the one-child generation was around 90 million according to Xinhua news agency. A new family structure, 4-2-1 (four grandparents, two parents, and one child), is becoming the dominant family form in China, especially in urban China (Zhang & Goza, 2006). The demographic information of the candidates in this study shows that the majority of the young participants of *Chinese Dating* are born after 1979, which is after the implementation of the One-Child Policy. They are expected to assume the family responsibilities of taking care of their parents since they are the only child in their families. Coming to their

marriageable age, they are also about to face the pressure of parents' expectations for eldercare, while they concurrently will have to raise their own kids. They are called the "sandwich generation," due to the double pressure of being the middle generation (Zhan, 2006). Thus, marrying someone who has positive attitudes towards life and who has a willingness and temperament to perform the duties of filial piety will be one important criterion that the only children have to keep in mind during their selection of a future spouse.

5.3 Gendered Expectations in Contemporary Dating Criteria

Maturity is an interesting subcategory within personality traits of dating criteria. Both young men and women used the word "chengshu" (mature) as a criterion for their future spouse. In Chinese, "chengshu" describes a personality trait that is in contrast to being childish or naive. However, when giving detailed descriptions about a mature man and woman, young men and women resort to traditional expectations. For a mature man, a female candidate would describe him as being someone who is older and has already established in his career. For a man, a mature woman is someone who is understanding and who knows how to take care of family members. The connotations of the word "maturity" used by the young men and women clearly denote gendered expectations very similar to traditional spouse selection criteria. However, in order not to look outdated or unromantic in front of the audiences, they rephrased the traditional spouse criteria into a personality trait, i.e. maturity. The new vocabulary acting as a disguise of traditional values might be an important aspect to explore and examine for future gender studies researchers.

Physical appearance, in general, is important to both young men and women. This result is in accordance with previous research that children pay more attention to their future spouse's looks than their parents do (Buunk & Solano, 2010). The current study shows that physical

appearance is an important spouse selection criterion for both young men and women in contemporary China.

5.4 Love as a Commercial Product

As discussed earlier in the findings section, Chinese women place more emphasis on the importance of physical appearance over wealth and status. This could be explained by women's increasing financial freedom due to their rising educational and professional attainments. Since they do not have to rely on men financially, they can afford to pick and choose a husband with physical appeal instead of just finding a provider for their future family. Furthermore, male images in China are changing under the influence of the global ideology of consumerism (Benwell, 2002; Beynon, 2002; Edwards, 2003). Song and Lee (2012) presented a detailed discussion about men's lifestyle magazines in China, which "serve to promote a particularly hybrid version of masculinity and consumer culture, as a mingling and intermixing of Western influence" (2012:351). With the rise of a consumerist lifestyle in contemporary China, this new male image is an educated, well-maintained, mature, middle-class man (Song and Lee, 2012). Meanwhile, this new dominant masculine image is co-constructed by women through social interaction (Davis, Rogers & Bryson, 2014). Thus, women's expectation for men's physical appearance help to reinforce a "Mr. Tall Wealthy Handsome" male image on the top of the hierarchy of masculinity in contemporary China (Luo, 2017). Women's expectations of men's physical appearance may relate to the rise of women's financial independence from men as well as the new formation of hegemonic masculinity in contemporary China, that is, besides being wealthy alone, being a man in contemporary China, also means being tall and handsome.

According to the sociocultural framework, men and women's spouse selection criteria are contextual. The results indicate that contemporary Chinese young men and women may have

adopted some changes in their spouse selection criteria to live up to a romantic ideology, and in response to the rising consumerist culture in contemporary China. Meanwhile, those young Chinese men and women who choose a reality TV show as their platform to find a spouse, not only show that they are not shy about asserting their criteria in front of national and international audiences, but they also suggest that love and marriage are becoming marketable consumer goods in contemporary China.

5.5 Negotiation between Traditions and Modernity

As shown in the findings of this study, parents' preferences for in-laws reflect more traditional gender expectations than those of their children. For instance, parents expect a son-in-law to be a provider, and a daughter-in-law to be a good homemaker. This intergenerational difference in spouse selection criteria, as explained in conflict theory, is due to parents and children wanting to maximize the benefits towards themselves. For example, by selecting a son-in-law with status and wealth, parents can increase their own social status (Ertem & Kocturk, 2008; Dubbs et al., 2013), and by selecting a daughter-in-law with the family oriented traits, they can secure their care in old age (Riley, 1994; Dubbs et al., 2013).

As discussed earlier, parents and children in the show, *Chinese Dating*, had conflicts regarding priorities of a suitable spouse. While the young generation emphasize good look or physical appear; the parent generation emphasized hard work and practical housekeeping skills because "a pretty face cannot grow rice." However, as repeatedly shown in *Chinese Dating*, parent-child conflicts were usually resolved by the surrender of the children to parents' wishes. The acceptance of parents' opinions may be explained by three reasons. First, being filial or *xiao* appears to be a continuing moral principle in China in the process of spouse selection for candidates. Before establishing a family and absorbing a new member into the family, yielding

one's own will to one's parents in a seemingly very personal decision, to a Western perspective, continues to be a familial decision in China, as shown in *Chinese Dating*. It is probably due to this very reason that this reality show became very popular as soon as it is aired in China.

Secondly, most of the dating candidates are from the one-child generation. The pressure to fulfill filial responsibilities of parental care whether through marrying a good provider or a good housewife may have become a task of the young generation even before the journey of their own marital life. Undoubtedly, the one child phenomenon plays a central role in the lives of the parents. Four pairs of eyes are staring at, and scrutinizing, this one future couple they hope will fulfill all needs of the future parents. Not consulting parents or meeting parents' expectations in spouse selection is likely to cause much family conflict and disturbance. Even though good parents do appear to listen to their children's wishes, children appear to listen to their parents more often in finding the "right" date or future spouse. Third, many, if not most, of the candidates came to the show due to parental pressure. Fulfilling parents' wishes when under parental pressure is a convenient and easy progression. Using this logic, I argue that when young people do find their own dates or fall in love on their own terms, they may not be so willing or so easy to yield their own feelings and emotional commitment to their parents' demands. This TV show depicts a certain sector of the population who delay marriage due to various reasons. To what extent young people "fall in love" and find their own spouse, to what percentage of contemporary marriages are actually initiated by parents, or a third party, is yet another question that deserve more sociological research. This research has expanded the literature on gender and intergenerational spouse selection criteria in contemporary China.

As the sample is derived from a reality TV show, *Chinese Dating*, there are some inherent limitations. First, the sample is drawn from a selective TV show, which greatly limit the

representation of the real population under study. For example, the demographic information about the candidates shows that all candidates are either middle or upper-class city residents. Thus, their spouse selection criteria may be different from those from lower class or rural residents in China. Secondly, the research is based on a reality dating TV show. Candidates may alter their behavior knowing that they are on television. Thus, they may say or do things to meet public expectations even though they may not really believe or act in such a way. Third, spouse selection criteria from the show has a selective bias. Candidates who participated all expressed a strong willingness to get married. What are the criteria for those people who do not have an eagerness to get married, but only intend to date for the time being? What do their intergenerational relationship look like? These questions remain to be answered. The lengthening singlehood in China emerges in all types of people, those who may take singlehood as an alternative to marriage are enlarging. Future studies may benefit the understanding of dating not just as a precursor to marriage, but an alternative to singlehood, a notion widely spread in the West, yet quite new and growing rapidly in China.

Despite of these limitations, this research has provided a sociological understanding of spouse selection criteria in contemporary China by looking into young men's and women's and their parents' expectations. The research helps to extend not only the understanding of the practice of spouse selection process in contemporary Chinese society, but also the socio-cultural context of this process. Only by understanding the process of this intergenerational negotiation in a rapidly changing China can one appreciate the juxtaposition of traditions and modernity in the making of a new Chinese family in contemporary China.

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APPENDICES

5.6 Appendix A

Table 1 Demographic Data of the Candidates

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Career	Education	Residence	Note
Li	F	30	Ph.D. Candidate	Dual Master's degree	Japan	
Wang	F	40	Small business owner		Shanghai	Single mom with a son
Zhang	F	27	Entrepreneur	Master	Shanghai	
Liu	M	27	Kindergarten principle	Bachelor	Shenyang	
Chen	M	23	Free	N/A	Shenyang	
Yang	M	29	Entrepreneur	Master (England)	Shanghai	
Zhao	M	33	Vice president of an investment company	Master (Qing Hua)	Beijing	
Huang	M	28	Teacher	N/A	Changzhou	
Zhou	M	23	N/A	N/A	Dalian	
Wu	M	26	Entrepreneur	N/A	Beijing	
Xu	M	30	Chef	N/A	Sichuan	
Sun	M	28	Entrepreneur	N/A	Changzhou	
Hu	F	25	Small business owner	N/A	Guangzhou	

Zhu	F	37	Radio host	N/A	Taiwan	
Gao	F	25	Administrator in government-owned	N/A	Shanghai	
Lin	F	29	Piano teacher	N/A	Shanghai	
He	F	29	Secretary	N/A	Shanghai	
Guo	F	27	Staff member	N/A	Beijing	
Ma	F	33	Graduate student	NYU	Shanghai	
Luo	F	23	Radio host	N/A	Guangzhou	
Liang	F	22	Entrepreneur	Bachelor (USA)	Beijing	
Song	M	25	Sale man	N/A	New Zealand	
Zheng	M	35	Small business owner	N/A	N/A	
Xie	M	24	Professional athlete	N/A	Dalian	
Han	M	23	Manager	N/A	Guangzhou	
Tang	M	35	Manager	N/A	Australia	
Feng	M	30	Entrepreneur	N/A	Nanjing	
Yu	F	24	Assistant lawyer	N/A	N/A	
Dong	F	26	Designer	N/A	Dalian	
Xiao	F	28	Entrepreneur	N/A	Beijing	

Cheng	F	27	Real estate agent	N/A	Dalian	
Cao	F	27	English teacher	Master (USA)	Beijing	
Yuan	F	27	Small business owner	N/A	Nanjing	
Deng	M	22	Family business	N/A	N/A	
Xu	M	33	Manager (financial)	N/A	Hong Kong	
Fu	M	34	Journalist	N/A	N/A	
Shen	M	28	Manager	N/A	Beijing	
Zeng	M	32	Manager	USA	N/A	
Peng	M	34	Small business owner	N/A	Chongqing	
Lue	M	33	Small business owner	N/A	Taiwan	
Su	M	32	English teacher	N/A	Guizhou	
Lu	F	29	Actress	N/A	Dalian	
Jiang	F	27	Entrepreneur	N/A	N/A	
Cai	F	28	Administrator	N/A	Beijing	
Jia	F	24	Manager	N/A	N/A	
Ding	F	23	Teacher	N/A	N/A	
Wei	F	28	Designer	N/A	Beijing	

Xue	F	N/A	Radio host (video game)	N/A	Shanghai	
Ye	M	25	Small business owner	N/A	N/A	
Yan	M	23	Teacher	N/A	Shandong	
She	M	28	Entrepreneur	Master (oversea)	N/A	
Pan	M	42	Manager	Triple Master	Hong Kong	Divorced, two children
Du	M	26	Staff member in hospital	N/A	Guangzhou	
Dai	M	28	Consultant	N/A	From USA	
Xia	M	26	Lawyer	N/A	Beijing	
Zhong	F	24	Radio host (video game)	N/A	N/A	
Wang(汪)	F	25	Administrator	N/A	N/A	
Tian	F	27	Secretary	Bachelor (Singapore)	Wuhan	
Ren	F	28	Entrepreneur	Bachelor (USA)	Beijing	
Jiang	F	25	Graduate student	Beijing Movie University	Beijing	
Fan	M	26	Manager	N/A	Chengdu	
Fang	M	23	Designer	N/A	Beijing	
Shi	M	31	Music producer	N/A	Shanghai	

Yao	M	26	Radio host(video game)	N/A	Shanghai	
Tan	M	28	Manager	N/A	Chengdu	
Liao	M	27	Architect	Bachelor (oversea)	Beijing	
Zou	M	26	Entrepreneur	N/A	Hangzhou	
Xiong	M	31	N/A	Canada with maple card	Beijing	
Jin	F	24	Manager	N/A	Tianjin	
Lu	F	25	Music teacher	N/A	Beijing	
Hao	F	26	Staff member	N/A	Shanghai	
Kong	F	28	Chef	From England	Shanghai	
Bai	F	27	Manager	Master (Hong Kong)	Jiangsu	
Cui	M	29	Professor	N/A		

Appendix B

Episode One: male candidates and their parents selecting female candidates

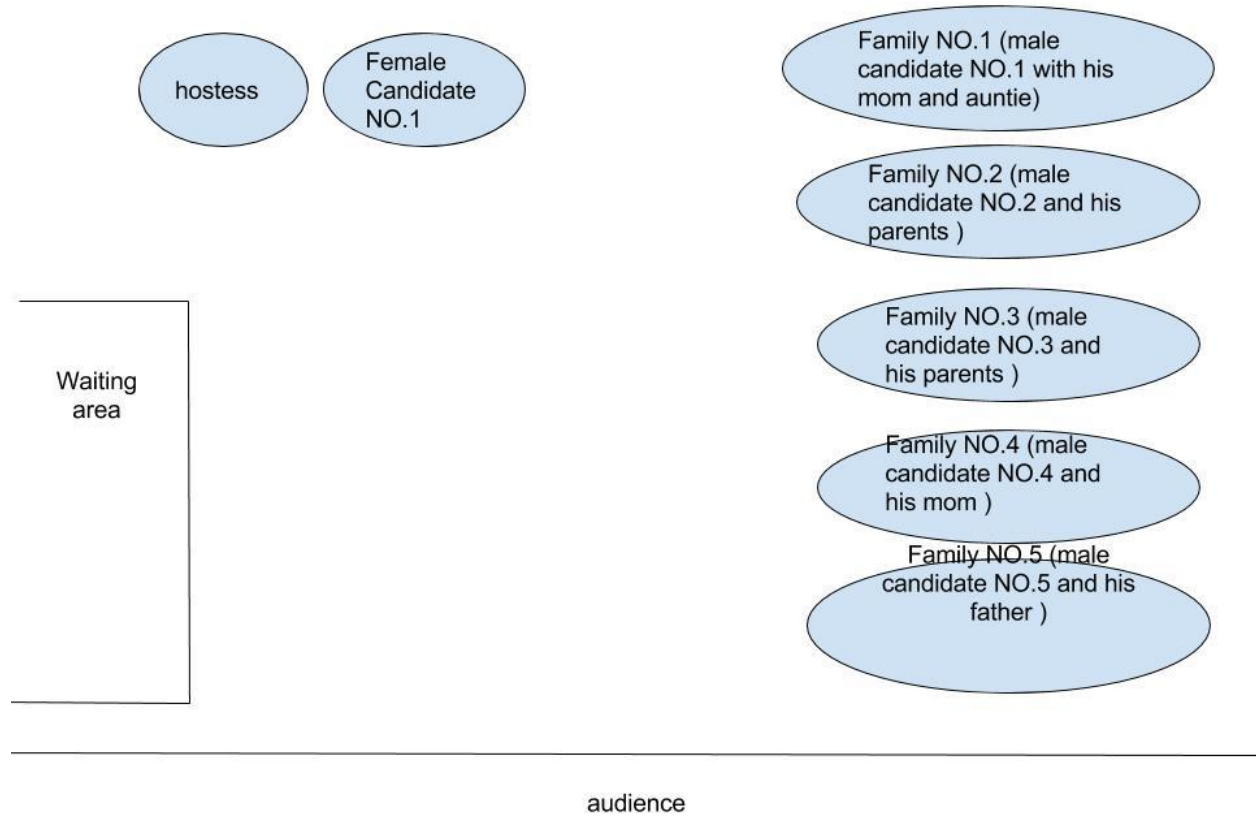


Figure 1 Stage Setting: Male candidates and their parents looking for female candidates.

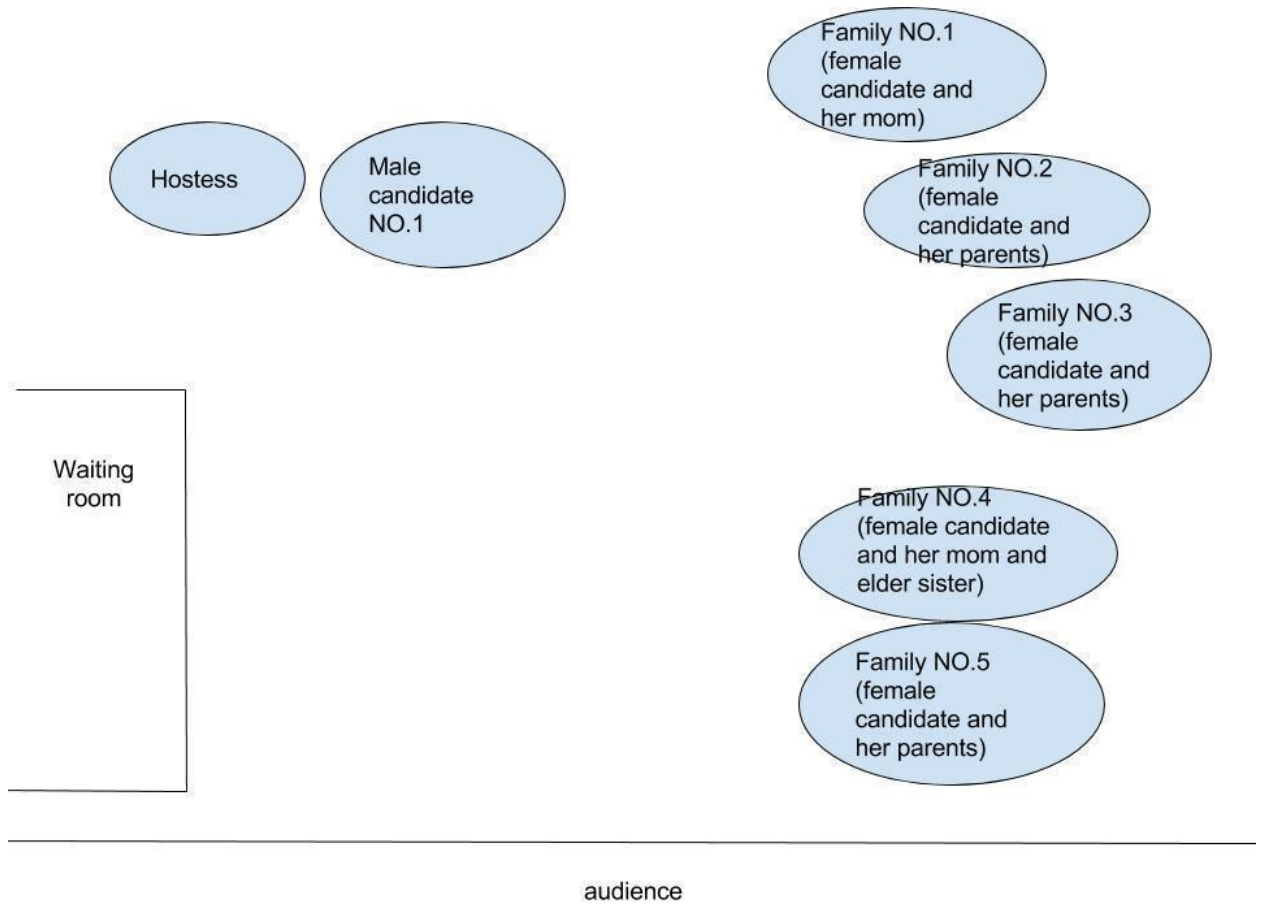


Figure 2 Stage Setting: Female candidates and their parents looking for male candidates.