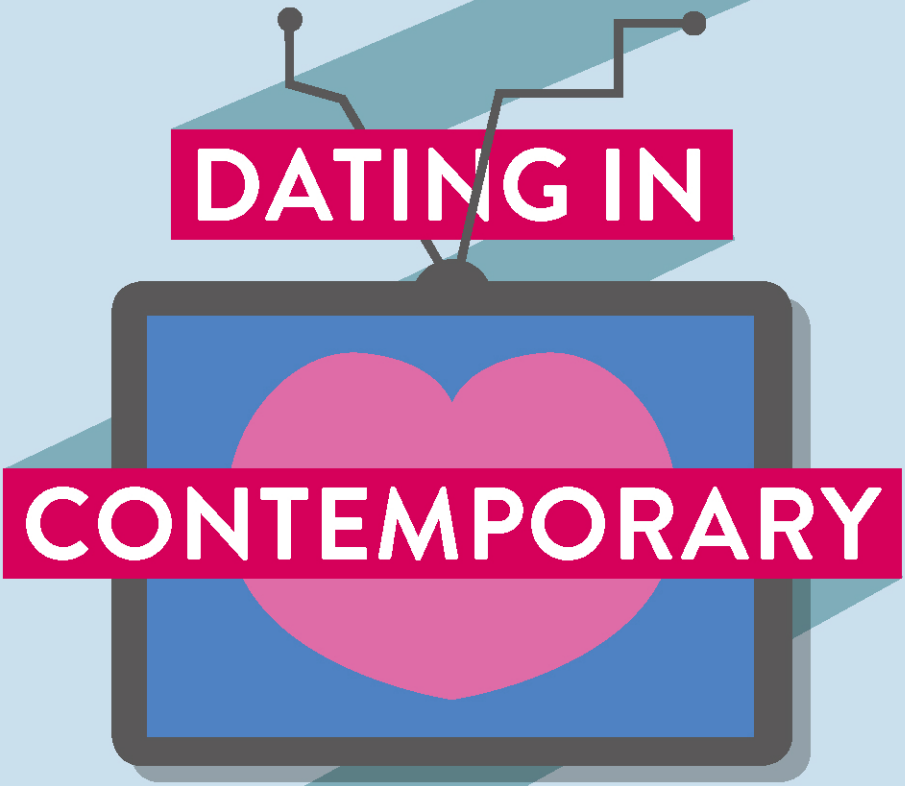
CHAO YANG

TELEVISION & DATING IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA



Identities, Love & Intimacy

Television and Dating in Contemporary China

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Identities, Love and Intimacy

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I would like to dedicate this book to my families
Especially my beloved parents
And to all of my friends

Preface

This book is an empirical investigation into the changing nature of intimacy in contemporary China. It is the first book that provides a unique case study of the romantic subjectivities of young people in the fastest-growing economy and social change. Since the implementation of reform and opening-up policies in 1978, the economic and socio-cultural environment in modern China has experienced a dramatic transformation under the influence of urbanization and globalization, which have facilitated a more individualized identity among Chinese youth. This is the first book that bridges the gap between emergent emphasis on individualization and more pervasive traditional norms and values. Alongside this, love and relationships are often seen as one of the most popular topics in both public debates and private conversations, which motivated my research interests in examining different voices in relation to young people's strategies in approaching and sustaining relationships. Personal relationships are often seen as an important part of personal happiness for the Chinese youth. This book focuses on young people's understandings of various forms of relationships such as cohabitation, extramarital relationships and multiple relationships, which suggests that the traditional familial values in relation to responsibility and marital fidelity have to some extent been challenged and an increasingly diversified understanding of love and romance been observed among young people in China. Dating and relationships are not only a means of examining the changing values and lifestyles in the private sphere, but also mirror the changing societal structure at a micro level.

Alongside this, as a possible neoliberal technology for young people to construct their experiences and values in respect of dating and relationships, the most popular reality TV dating programme, *If You Are the One*, was employed as a way of examining a group of young Chinese professionals' interpretations of the mediated dating text and further exploring how they understand and structure dating and relationships in their everyday lives. This programme has undoubtedly become an important media and cultural artefact reflecting changing values and practices as regards dating and relationships in post-reform Chinese society. This further triggered my interest in exploring the power dynamics between mass media, an increasingly globalized institution, and self-reflexive audiences.

However, seen as a traditionally private and sensitive topic, there is less research on love and intimacy in China than in Western contexts and most of the relevant studies have focused on college students or young people in rural areas. As young urban professionals are more influenced by global media and cultural flows than young people in rural areas, they are often seen as the most representative group in terms of reflecting changing values in the post-reform era. As heterosexuality is often seen as a social norm, my research intends to problematize heterosexual identities to uncover values and practices in relationships that are not seen as problematic. Specifically, this book focuses on the subjectivity of a group of young Chinese professionals in Beijing, who were born in the 1980s and early 1990s and have been greatly shaped by the changing social and cultural environment of the reform era. By examining how urban young people fashion their romantic selves in contemporary China, the research explores how the interplay of state policies, modern family and mediatization has played an important role in creating possibilities for an emerging post-socialist romantic subjectivity. This research further feeds into a broader project of investigating how Chinese youth construct their identities faced with the socio-cultural change in contemporary China.

Acknowledgements

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My appreciation also goes to all my research respondents for taking time to share their values and experiences during the data-gathering process.

Finally, I would like to thank my families, from whom I have gained the kindest encouragement and support during my studies in the UK.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Significance of the Field

Chinese society has experienced a dramatic transformation since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policies in 1978. In the meantime, the process of globalization has accelerated this societal transition, which has had a significant influence upon the identity of Chinese youth (Wang 2006). This book examines a specific group of young people aged between 18 and 30, most of them young professionals who have just started their careers. As a generation born at the beginning of the economic reform era, present-day Chinese young people grew up in an open social environment encouraging personal achievement and consumerism (Rosen 2004; Tian 1998). Thus, Chinese youth tend to hold a more individualistic identity than previous generations who were more influenced by a traditional collective ideology (Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Sun and Wang 2010; Wang 2006; Yan 2003, 2009, 2010a, b).

Alongside this, a growing interest in self-fulfilment and personal happiness is observed in the social reform era, which is often seen as an important characteristic of young people in China (Higgins and Sun 2007). As an important aspect of, as well as a path to achieving, personal happiness, personal relationships are often prioritized on Chinese youth's life agenda and are seen to be greatly associated with their personal development as well as family practices. As most members of the younger

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generation are the only children in their families, their love lives and relationships are a significant concern for their families as well as society as a whole. Changing values regarding love and intimacy have become a key avenue when it comes to examining the identity transformation of the present-day Chinese youth, which is an important element of the socio-cultural transition in the post-Mao era.

The changing relationship-related values and practices in the reform era inspired my research interest in exploring young people's identity construction towards love and intimacy, which feeds into a bigger project about examining the socio-cultural change in post-reform China. Hence, this project intends to examine the social and cultural change in post-reform Chinese society by exploring the relationship formation of Chinese youth, who serve as 'a bridge between the closed, xenophobic China of the Mao years and the globalized economic powerhouse that it is becoming' (Elegant 2007, p. 1). More specifically, it seeks to investigate the main features of young people's dating and relationship practices, including their mate-choosing values and their strategies towards initiating and sustaining relationships, their desires and expectations from personal relationships, as well as the ethics underpinning their relationships.

1.2 Situating the Research

As most of my interview participants from the young generation were professionals born during the first decade of the economic reform era, they tended to form a representative sample group reflecting value change in post-reform China. As a researcher born in Beijing in the early reform period, I am aware that I could be seen as an insider or a member of the sample group. Interestingly, I met some difficulties in identifying myself as a Beijinger while I was growing up, which was likely caused by the social and cultural change of the last few decades. The confusion I experienced towards my own identity construction is one reason I am interested in this research area. Alongside this, the reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One* (非诚勿扰, Fei Cheng Wu Rao, for a detailed programme introduction see Appendix G) has not only become a popular topic among my friends and some relatives from my parents' generation, but has also attracted a few of my acquaintances to apply to take part in the programme. This programme is likely to become an important media and cultural symbol reflecting changing values and practices towards dating and relationships in post-reform Chinese society. This further triggered

my interests in exploring the power dynamics between mass media, an increasingly globalized institution and self-reflexive audiences.

Specifically, my parents and most of their acquaintances have registered permanent residence in Beijing, but they are originally from other parts of China. My father is from a small village in northern China and my maternal grandparents are from southern China, settling in Beijing after my mother's birth. As I travelled to my father's hometown twice a year for the summer and winter holidays, I grew up feeling that this was where I was from, although I could not speak the local dialect. Within this familial environment, I can only speak standard Mandarin, which is different from an authentic Beijing dialect.

Also, educational institutions such as schools shaped my identity. For example, as most of my primary schoolmates' parents are originally from other parts of China, our similar family backgrounds made me feel that I was one of them; we shared a dual identity, being from other parts of China, but living in Beijing. Unlike my primary school, the majority of my classmates in junior high school and high school were from traditional Beijing families and could speak Beijing dialect, which to some extent influenced the way I speak. Especially when I talked to them, I tended to use a Beijing accent. This in a sense helped me gain a Beijing identity, although, at the same time, certain differences between us in terms of family background and the environments in which we grew up were recognized, which made me question my identity as an 'authentic' Beijinger. My identity, which was greatly related to my father's hometown, was further challenged during my undergraduate studies and my two-year work experience in Beijing. As most of my classmates and colleagues are from other parts of China, they often saw me as a Beijing girl who did not speak in a strong Beijing dialect. Some of them tended to compare my personality and characteristics with people from traditional Beijing families and see me as a 'mixed-blood' with parents originally from northern and southern China.

As I was growing up, my identity therefore shifted from a traditional patriarchal clan identity in relation to my father's hometown to an at times ambiguous and complex identity as a Beijinger. These epitomized changing family practices happened after the reforms and during the opening-up period. Specifically, the nationwide rural-to-urban population migration and the one-child policy introduced in 1979 have facilitated the transformation of family ties from a traditional extended family to a nuclear family culture (Fowler et al. 2010; Hesketh et al. 2005; Starr 2001). My own

personal experiences in terms of identity construction reflect the social and cultural change in Beijing. As the capital of China, Beijing has been greatly influenced by globalization and modernization and has become a metropolitan city, gathering a growing number of young migrant professionals from across the country in the last three decades. This resonates with the increasing mobility and diversity of modern Chinese society, which further stimulated my research interest in identity studies vis-à-vis this diversified peer group of urban youth. Alongside this, this research project could be seen as an in-depth study inspired by my master's dissertation, which examined the potential influence of foreign TV dramas on young people's identity construction in China. This project focuses on youth culture and explores identity construction by employing an active audience-research framework. By examining identity construction in the area of love and relationships, this research may be seen as an interdisciplinary project touching upon my research interests not only in media studies but also in family studies, generational studies and gender research.

Alongside this, personal relationships are often seen as an important part of personal happiness for Chinese youth. With the emergence of various forms of relationship, such as cohabitation, extramarital relationships and multiple relationships, the traditional familial values in relation to responsibility and marital fidelity have to some extent been challenged, and an increasingly diversified understanding of love and romance has been observed among young people in China. Love and relationships are often seen as one of the most popular topics in both public debates and private conversations, which motivated my interest in examining different voices in relation to young people's strategies in approaching and sustaining relationships. It is likely that dating and relationships have become not only an avenue to examining the changing values and lifestyles in the private sphere, but also mirror the changing societal structure at a micro level.

In addition, a stereotype is often applied to the younger generation who grew up in one-child families, who are often seen as 'little emperors' placed at the centre of family life and likely to engender a more complicated power dynamic within nuclear family units. As a member of the one-child generation, I sometimes observe a paradoxical mentality among young people in China. Specifically, they intend to hold more individualized values, while they are also inclined to depend upon their families' financial and emotional support, which tends to shape the younger generation's decision-making process. Thus, by examining the role of modern

Chinese families in young people's dating and relationship-related values and practices, an individualization process with Chinese characteristics is likely to be observed, which may connote a special generational identity and build on the existing literatures pertaining to individualization and subjectivity.

Hence, this project has shifted its research focus from mainly looking at audiences' attitudes towards, and interpretations of, reality TV dating programmes into exploring different themes such as emotions in self-centred relationships, generational and gendered difference, as well as relationship ethics in relation to young people's identity construction in terms of love and intimacy. As an adoption of a globalized popular media genre, the reality TV dating programme is not only seen as a visible manifestation of changing values towards dating and relationships, and to a certain extent as a modern catalyst of further change, but also facilitates an in-depth investigation of the research question with a historical dimension. Based on the evolution of the research emphasis, Chapter 2 intends to examine audiences' attitudes to and understanding of the TV dating programme, and Chapter 3 seeks to provide a general discussion about the main features of changing identity in terms of dating and relationships. Furthermore, Chapters 4 and 5 seek to move beyond the immediate impact of the programme on its audiences in order to generate a more complex and contextually nuanced understanding of change via a debate on morality/ethics and an intergenerational comparison. More detailed chapter outlines are introduced in Section 1.5.

1.3 Research Questions

Thus, the key research question is: how do young Chinese people construct love, intimacy and relationships in the post-reform and globalizing era?

Considering the overall aims of the central research question, the following sub-questions were investigated in the data collection process.

1. What are the main reasons and what is the social context for Chinese youth watching the reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One*?
2. What are the attitudes of Chinese youth towards this reality TV dating programme? What are their perspectives towards values about love that are represented in the media text?

3. What are the main factors for Chinese youth in negotiating their relationships with their prospective partners? Is consumption a decisive consideration for them?
4. What are the views of Chinese youth as regards traditional values derived from Confucian ethics, such as filial piety and loyalty as well as early socialist values and practices? How do they relate them to love issues? What differences in attitude towards love and intimacy can be observed between Chinese youth and their parents' generation?

The research aims to explore the main features of an emerging romantic subjectivity of young Chinese people in the post-reform era by examining their values and practices as regards dating and relationships. Thus, it is located in the enquiries of cultural studies, which investigates changing identities in both global and local domains and often uses popular media texts to generate historical and cultural accounts (Denzin and Lincoln 2000b, p. 160; Grossberg and Pollock 1998). Specifically, as a popular cultural phenomenon since 2010, the second wave of reality TV dating programmes may symbolize a new dating era and embodies the complicated dynamics of traditional and modern values in contemporary China. As a popular topic among people in mainland China, the most well-known reality TV dating programme, *If You Are the One*, was employed as an avenue to examine a group of young Chinese professionals' interpretations of the mediated dating text and further explore how they understand and structure dating and relationships in their everyday lives.

To generate authentic and trustworthy data, this research is guided by a constructivist grounded theory and qualitative descriptions are the main research data. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted as the main data-gathering method to build a dialogic platform for young people to construct their dating and relationship-related values and practices, and thematic analysis was employed to generate a data-oriented discussion and further link to existing literatures in the field. By recruiting a comparison group of respondents from the parents' generation, the research further employed a generational approach to examine the changing values and practices as regards personal relationships in two historical periods – the early reform era and the post-reform era. In addition, by actively facilitating the discussion during the interviews, the researcher worked as a data co-creator of the data collection and further connected

the semantic meanings of the interview data with factors that inspired and shaped the subjectivity formation of young people in present-day China.

1.4 Understanding Television, Young People and Dating

By drawing on Foucault's work on subjectivity and the power/knowledge model (1979, 1982), this project employs a constructivist research paradigm, in which love and intimacy are examined as historical constructs, greatly shaped by the socio-cultural environment of Chinese society. The changing values and practices of Chinese youth as regards dating and relationships are likely to reflect a transforming subjectivity of young Chinese professionals. By locating the meaning of love and intimacy in the historical development of contemporary Chinese society, the potentially different value orientations between the pre-reform era and the post-reform era tend to reflect the changing power interplay between self-reflexive individuals and modern institutions such as the state, labour market and family. Hence, individualization studies were employed as a main theoretical framework, as well as feminist approaches examining modern relationships, which were reviewed to provide criticisms of individualization theory and help explore how traditional gendered practices shape Chinese youth's identity formation as regards love and intimacy. By exploring the subjective experiences of young people vis-à-vis love and relationships, this research further feeds into a broader project of investigating how Chinese youth construct their identities in view of the socio-cultural change in contemporary China.

Specifically, this research seeks to examine how Chinese youth understand traditional Confucian and socialist values, as well as modern values advocated since the reform era, in order to develop their own strategies in relation to dating and relationships. Love and relationships were greatly shaped by Confucian moral codes in traditional Chinese society and marriage arranged by parents was a social norm (Pimentel 2000, pp. 32–33; Riley 1994, p. 792). Conjugal ties used to serve the purpose of reproduction and were subordinate to intergenerational ties in traditional patriarchal families. Since the introduction of the 1950 Marriage Law, which abolished arranged marriage, free-choice marriage has been promoted by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In contrast, under the influence of Confucian ideology and socialist morality,

the social environment in terms of love and sexual activities was somewhat repressive in the first three decades of the PRC, and sexual relations only within marriage was a widely accepted social norm. For instance, conjugal ties were often seen as lacking in emotional communication and people's sexual behaviours were suppressed by traditional Yin-Yang doctrine, which guided sex education literature in the 1950s (Evans 1995; Higgins et al. 2002). During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), love and sexual behaviours were further repressed by extreme collective ideology, and expressions of sexuality and sexual products were seen as public taboos (Evans 1995, p. 358; Higgins et al. 2002).

However, seen as a traditionally private and sensitive topic, there is less research on love and intimacy in China than in some Western contexts, and most of the relevant studies focus on college students (for example, Higgins and Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002) or young people in rural areas (for instance, Hansen and Pang 2010; Yan 2003). As young urban professionals are more influenced by global media and cultural flows than young people in rural areas (Castells 2005), they are often seen as the most representative group in terms of reflecting changing values in the post-reform era. Hence, this research focuses on urban youth aged between 18 and 30 to examine identity construction in the sphere of dating and relationships. Specifically, this book examines a group of young Chinese professionals in Beijing, one of the most representative metropolitan cities in terms of reflecting social and cultural change in urban China, and builds up a dialogic space for this particular group of urban youth to construct relationship-related values and attitudes.

The implementation of nationwide economic reforms in the late 1970s is often seen as having facilitated further the distribution of Western values such as free-choice marriage, romantic love and gender equality. They have become the driving force for a sexual revolution in mainland China, in which freer expression of various perspectives on love and relationships among Chinese youth is observed (Cheng et al. 2000; Huang 1998). The meaning of love, which used to be associated with lifelong marriage, is challenged by a separating and divorcing society (Tan 2010). Compared with previous generations, who were greatly influenced by a strict Confucian and socialist morality, members of the young generation often tend to become self-managing subjects able to identify their needs and expectations in terms of love and romance in post-reform China. For instance, the emergence of diversified dating and relationship practices such as cohabitation, online relationships, extramarital relationships,

multiple relationships and one-night stands among urban Chinese youth (Donald and Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang and Ho 2007a, b, 2011) is likely to reflect new desires and anxieties in respect of personal relationships, and mirror a more diversified understanding of love and personal happiness.

As a possible neoliberal technology for young people to construct their experiences and values as regards dating and relationships (Murray and Ouellette 2009; Ouellette and Hay 2008), the reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One* was employed as a key avenue to explore the power interaction between self-reflexive audiences and modern institutions. More specifically, by examining the understandings and attitudes of young Chinese people towards the mediated dating text, the role of mass media as a globalized institution in shaping the socio-cultural environment of present-day China is likely to be observed. Moreover, by linking Chinese youth's interpretations of the programme to love and relationships in their everyday lives, the post-socialist power of modern institutions such as the Chinese state and Chinese family over young people's romantic subjectivity formation is further explored.

Since 2010, Chinese reality TV dating programmes have become a way of establishing romantic relationships and are seen as a key public template when it comes to understanding the changing values in personal relationships in contemporary Chinese society. Specifically, as a globalized media and cultural product, reality TV dating reflects the modern commodity culture, which is likely to arouse new material, emotional and sexual desires and anxieties among Chinese youth (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a; Wang and Nehring 2014). In addition to this, in comparison with the first wave of TV dating programmes broadcast in 1997, which only lasted for a few years (Keane 2002), nowadays Chinese youth are often much bolder in expressing their opinions about love and relationships in public (MacLeod 2010). The popularity of TV dating resonates with a sexual revolution, in which more open expression and individualized values in terms of love and relationships have been observed since the reforms and opening up in 1978. With a shortened time for the partner-choosing process, reality TV dating programmes are likely to connote a new dating era, in which an accelerated relationship is increasingly observed in a fluid modern-life setting.

Furthermore, as a newly invented dating practice for a few Chinese people, reality TV dating programmes tend to focus audiences' discussions about personal relationships, which are likely to be seen as a less sensitive

topic. Reality TV dating programmes thus become an important dialogical platform for viewers to understand the relationship-related values in the programme setting, and this in turn is likely to facilitate a further discussion about relationship approaching and operating strategies and values in everyday lives. Specifically, this research focuses on the most popular Chinese reality TV dating programme, *If You Are the One*, which adapts the globally popular format of the British dating show *Take Me Out*, created by FremantleMedia (Li 2011; Wang 2011; Zhang 2010). Since its debut in January 2010 on Jiangsu Satellite Television, the Chinese dating programme *If You Are the One* has facilitated the production of Chinese TV dating programmes in mainland China. The guests on the programme are selected from different parts of the country and have various educational and professional backgrounds, and some are from other countries or ethnic backgrounds, but speak Chinese (Mandarin). The mate-selection criteria and values as regards love and intimacy on this show may not only reflect representative values of the younger generation, but also some controversial issues concerning social and moral reality in post-Mao China via topics like money worship (金钱崇拜, Jin Qian Chong Bai) and housing mortgage slavery (房奴, Fang Nu) (Li 2011; Wang 2011). Hence, TV dating becomes an important avenue for Chinese youth to construct their identities in terms of love and intimacy.

1.5 Organization of the Book

As discussed in previous sections, the changing socio-cultural environment since the economic reform era has influenced the identity construction of young Chinese people, who are likely to hold more diversified and individualized values vis-à-vis dating and relationships. By examining relationship-related values and practices, including mate-choosing values, desires and expectations regarding love and romance, strategies of approaching and sustaining relationships, as well as relationship ethics, the emergence of a post-socialist romantic subjectivity is likely to be observed. The book explores further how societal transformation in contemporary Chinese society shapes young people's romantic experiences and their value orientations towards love and intimacy by assessing the power dynamics between Chinese youth and modern institutions such as the Chinese state, mass media and the Chinese family. This section provides a more detailed introduction for each chapter and discusses how they feed into the book.

Specifically, Chapter 2 employs an active audience reception framework to explore Chinese youth's understanding of and attitudes towards the most popular reality TV dating programme in post-reform China. As an open-ended dating text, the TV dating programme *If You Are the One* becomes a site for Chinese youth to produce diversified examinations of its authenticity and further serves as an important modern template for the audience to decode love and romance in an everyday setting. By transforming dating from a private practice into a public programme, the mediated dating text may connote a new dating era and resonate with a sexual revolution in which people tend to have more individualized values concerning various forms of relationship, and the free expression of issues surrounding love and sexuality has been observed since the reform and opening up in 1978. As a relatively new type of speed dating, the reality TV dating programme is seen as the epitome of accelerated relationships and helps in understanding the partner-selecting values in a postmodern consumerist culture. By examining audiences' understandings of the interests of the production team and 'ordinary' guests, the role of reality TV, especially the dating programme, in audiences' identity construction is explored.

Chapter 3 explores individualized desires and anxieties in personal relationships, which play an important role in understanding the identity of young Chinese professionals when it comes to love and intimacy in the post-reform era. By introducing Bauman's (2003) concept of the self-centred (or individualized) relationship, this chapter examines the changing emotions and attitudes of young Chinese people towards a lifelong relationship as well as the causes of the transition in dating and relationships. Since the implementation of the open-door policy and one-child policy in the late 1970s, Chinese youth have been greatly influenced by Western values such as free-choice marriage and gender equality, and a child-centred nuclear family culture has further facilitated more individualized values when it comes to pursuing happiness in (sometimes various forms of) personal relationships. In addition to this, a globalized modern commodity culture has further facilitated emotional, sexual and material desires in accelerated personal relationships. With increasing romantic possibilities in a liquid modern-life setting, Chinese youth have more freedom in choosing a partner as well as whether to be in a relationship or not, which makes a lifelong relationship more difficult to achieve or sometimes even less desirable. The easily entered and exited relationship not only reflects a more tolerant attitude towards the changing nature of

emotional attachment in dating and relationships, but may also suggest that Chinese youth have on-the-move and incomplete identities.

Chapter 4 examines the changing ethics in personal relationships by focusing on young people's understandings of traditional Confucian and socialist morality as well as an emerging new ethics within diversified forms of dating and relationships. As Ahmed (2010) indicates in the work *The Promise of Happiness*, a happy relationship is often seen to be shaped by a virtuous self (pp. 205, 208). The interpretations of relationship ethics define Chinese youth's values and practices as regards love and intimacy, which may further imply a changing understanding of personal happiness in the post-reform era. By exploring young professionals' understanding in respect of the traditional social norm – that is, a lifelong marriage – the changing understanding of Confucian moral concepts such as responsibility, marital fidelity and care is examined. This chapter further explores an emerging personal ethics by looking at various phenomena including premarital sex, cohabitation and extramarital relationships, which to some extent challenge the monopoly of marriage when it comes to sexual practices and may connote a changing sexuality focusing on the fulfilment of sexual pleasure rather than procreation purposes. In addition, by looking at some recent non-marital dating practices, such as multiple relationships and short-term relationships, a more individualized and private relationship ethics is examined, which is often seen as drawing upon a new understanding of traditional relationship ethics.

Chapter 5 adopts a generational angle to explore the changing identity of Chinese youth in terms of love and intimacy by looking at a group of participants from the parents' generation. As a historical construct, the identity of Chinese youth on one hand is linked with previous generations, who are likely to influence the younger generation with traditional values. On the other hand, the fast-changing socio-economic environment in the post-reform era has greatly influenced Chinese youth born in the early period of the economic reform era, who have very different identities to members of their parents' generation. Hence, participants from the parents' generation become important subjects when it comes to comparing the changing values towards love and relationships at two historical moments – the early and post-reform eras. Specifically, changing mate-choosing values and attitudes towards love issues, including premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce and extramarital love, are examined, which suggests that the traditional Confucian philosophy and socialist values play a less important role in the formation of personal relationships in post-reform

Chinese society. Alongside this, by assessing the transition in the power dynamic within the family unit, the changing role of modern parents in their offspring's relationships is explored.

Chapter 6 provides a synthesis of the research findings by reviewing key themes discussed in Chapters 2–5 and responding to the research question in relation to Chinese youth's identity construction as regards love and intimacy. Specifically, it offers an in-depth interpretation of the main features of an individualized relationship as observed in post-reform China by linking this to the concept of an individualized personal tie in modern Western societies introduced by Bauman (2003) and identifying its generational and gendered differences compared to relationship-related values and practices in the early reform era. This may suggest an individualization process with Chinese characteristics and building on theories in the field (for example, Bauman 2000, 2001, 2003; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2003, 2010; Giddens 1991, 1992; Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Yan 2009, 2010a, b). By further examining the interplay of factors such as the free market economy, global consumerist culture, modern Chinese family, modern Chinese state and mass media, all of which have impacted on young people's identity formation, the influence of multiple modern institutions is increasingly observed. They are often seen as both facilitating an individualized youth culture and re-emphasizing some traditional Confucian and socialist ideologies. Based on the research findings, theoretical and methodological contributions and reflections are identified, which further guide a brief discussion about the implications of this project in relation to future research and practices.

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CHAPTER 2

TV Dating as a Mediated Dating Text

Since the introduction of the open-door policy in 1978, the changing socio-cultural environment has led to a much bolder expression of dating and sexual matters in both media representations and real lives (Huang 1998; Cheng et al. 2000; Keane 2002). This may symbolize the transition of love and relationships from a traditionally private practice greatly influenced by Confucian culture to an increasingly heated topic in a public setting and only restrained by loosened government censorship. At the same time, the growth of commercial media, which thrives on human interest stories, confessional and reality TV, has fuelled this transition process (Turner 2010). For instance, alongside a number of ways for people to embark on dating relationships in urban Chinese societies, such as newspaper ads in the 1990s and online dating since the 2000s, TV dating has gradually become a new way for people to establish a relationship in recent years (Li 2011).

As the research project examines the identity construction of a group of young Chinese professionals as regards love and romance, the sample group of Chinese youth was situated in an active audience research paradigm, in which the TV dating programme is seen as an avenue to generate the various attitudes and interpretations of audiences with different cultural competencies (Fiske 1987; Hobson 1982). In addition to this, TV dating as a mediated text may have worked as a public template, in which the topic of love and intimacy has tended to become a less private and sensitive issue, facilitating broader discussions among the participants in

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the research project. As audiences often tend to comment on a TV programme in relation to their daily lives (Livingstone and Lunt 1994, p. 82), reality TV dating programmes are likely to become the catalysts for audiences to further relate what they see on-screen to their own dating experiences and values in a real-life setting and help them explore the way they structure their own dating and relationships.

The TV programme *If You Are the One* may have worked as an opportunity for reflection or even as a modern allegory for Chinese youth to identify and construct their values vis-à-vis love and intimacy by comparing the media representation with their experiences and observations about dating and relationships in their everyday lives. According to Richardson's (2000) argument about a crystallized enquiry, televisual platforms are likely to become the 'prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions' (p. 934). That is to say, the TV dating programme could be seen as a mediated simulation of a romantic setting in an urban Chinese society with a representative group of young Chinese professionals as its inhabitants. Audiences are likely to understand the social construction of love and intimacy within a postmodern framework. This is comparable to the one introduced by Jean Baudrillard, who argues that, rather than finding a way to interpret the social reality, people can only create 'a kind of vision, a style, to see and decode' it (cited in Walden 1997, p. 22). Within an open-ended crystallization process (Ellingson 2009, p. 190), Chinese young people were inclined to produce diversified examinations of the programme *If You Are the One* and its possible implications in a modern-life setting in post-reform China.

By introducing the 'encoding/decoding' model, Stuart Hall (1980) provides a possible framework to understand the power dynamic between the audience and the TV programme. The dating programme tends to produce and deliver an authoritative message of the media organization, which is under the dual control of government censorship and the free market economy (Curtin 2007; Hall 1980; Li 2001; Wang 2011). The programme, which aims to build an authentic public-service platform, may reflect both post-socialist institutional ideology and the modern commodity culture. Audiences with different socio-cultural backgrounds are inclined to engage with the media text in different ways and create polysemic meanings, which could be aligned with, negotiated with or opposed to the preconceived reading in the televisual text (Bourdieu 1984; Fiske 1989; Hymes 1972; Morley 1989, p. 18; Skeggs 1992, p. 91). Alongside

this, according to social cognitive theory and cultivation theory, the role of television is greatly associated with audiences' understandings of the 'authenticity' of TV programmes (Bandura 1986, 2001; Gerbner 1998; Gerbner et al. 1980; Gerbner et al. 2002). For instance, audiences are more likely to be influenced by a mediated text if they believe it is real or can identify characters similar to those they might encounter in a real-life setting. By connecting audiences' understandings about dating and relationships in the programme's setting and in their daily lives, the question of the authenticity of the TV dating programme has become a core issue to explore in the crystallized enquiring process.

Thus, this chapter intends to examine how audiences view the TV programme *If You Are the One* as an 'authentic' dating platform and whether it reflects the 'ordinary' urban youth's values in respect of love issues. First, the next section seeks to situate the term 'authenticity' in a dialogue between the private and public domains in relation to personal relationships via assessing audiences' attitudes and feelings about dating practices in a TV programme's setting. Second, section three focuses on audiences' understandings of the role of the production team and the motives of the guests in the programme, which may be seen as a more complicated platform, sometimes beyond the function of relationship-establishment. Then, section four intends to connect the mate-choosing process in the TV dating programme with the postmodern consumerist culture and explore how audiences view the gendered partner-selecting values under a speeded-up programme setting.

2.1 Dating Goes from a Private Practice to a Show in the Public Domain

This section first explores the possible strengths and weaknesses of dating on a public programme by examining Chinese youth's attitudes to it. Then, it intends to examine further whether it is an authentic way to establish a personal relationship under the power dynamic between public and private.

By recruiting 'ordinary' people as participants, reality TV dating programmes (RDPs) may to some extent facilitate the shift of dating practice from a private sphere to a public domain, which tends to be linked with Hermes's (2006) argument that the private-public boundary has been blurred in popular culture. As a public platform for people to approach

love and intimacy, TV dating may offer a performance about relationships generated by 'ordinary' people on a reality programme set, which is likely to be different from relationships being performed in fictional TV genres such as soap operas. As guests on RDPs are likely to hold more individualized values, willing as they are to express diverse feelings and opinions about personal relationships in public, the programme *If You Are the One* may reflect the changing identity of Chinese youth in a more authentic way. In comparison with the first wave of RDPs broadcast in 1997, which lasted only a few years, the new wave of TV dating programmes is likely to be increasingly associated with the social and cultural change in post-reform Chinese society since the start of the twenty-first century.

Since the TV dating programme *If You Are the One*[1] (非诚勿扰, Fei Cheng Wu Rao) was first broadcast in 2010, it has become the most popular TV dating programme in modern Chinese society and has led to the production of RDPs by satellite TV stations across the country (Li 2011; Zhang 2012). As one of the most popular entertainment shows in contemporary China, *If You Are the One* attracts young professionals from across the country as its guests and to some extent may mirror urban Chinese youth's real-life dating practices and mate-selecting values. Alongside this, RDPs, which may offer informal lifestyle guidelines (regarding, for example, the dress code for a blind date or the way to communicate with a potential partner), are likely to work as a neoliberal cultural technology for people to approach love and relationships in post-welfare societies (Murray and Ouellette 2009; Ouellette and Hay 2008).

With the popularity of RDPs since 2010, love and relationships, which were once private and sensitive matters for Chinese people, have been shown in a public space and generated heated discussions in society. According to Habermas (1989), the concept 'public' refers to events

[1] First aired in January 2010 on Jiangsu Satellite Television, *If You Are the One* has been broadcast for about seven and half years. The programme has mainly recruited guests with various educational and professional backgrounds from across mainland China. At the same time, some participants from other parts of the world or with various ethnic backgrounds have also been selected to take part in the programme. The official language of the programme is Chinese (Mandarin). According to Beijing-based CSM Media Research, after screening a total of 343 episodes (till 22 May 2013), its ratings were 2.77 per cent of television viewers, or 36 million, twice as many as the nearest competitor for that time slot.

and occasions that are 'open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs', and television as a main type of mass media tends to work as a possible 'public organ' for people to communicate in a public setting (Habermas 1989, pp. 1–2). By offering an opportunity for guests to share private information such as relationship-related experiences and mate-selecting values on camera, the TV dating programme *If You Are the One* may symbolize a possible transformation of the dating experience in urban Chinese societies. Specifically, by adopting a new form compared to the RDPs broadcast during the last few years of the twentieth century, *If You Are the One* is at times seen as a 'pioneer' among the new wave of RDPs, and the bold and free expression of guests in the programme can be observed. For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

> Former programmes usually in a type of same number of male and female guests, for example, five male guests facing five female guests. It (*If You Are the One*) is like choosing one from 24 and it is divided into several rounds... It is not like some former programmes, which were relatively implicit, not very straightforward. This programme is free. It is very open. The guests can speak everything and may have a quarrel on stage. (Zhang Tao, 24, man, interview)

Alongside this, as a nationwide popular dating programme, *If You Are the One*, which suggests that dating in contemporary China may have gradually shifted from a private practice towards a public experience, often generates controversial ideas among its audiences.

Specifically, dating on a public programme is sometimes seen as a relationship-establishing platform with a better reputation than other dating agencies, as one of my interview participants indicated that:

> It is like people, who buy products on Taobao (an online shopping website), surely would find a shop with higher reputation... The programme is broadcast on TV. Bluntly, not only a live audience but all the people who sit in front of TV watch it. So it is not like some matrimonial agencies which would just give people some unilateral introduction. No one else would know about this. But *If You Are the One* has already got a reputation. (Wang Hong, 23, man, interview)

Some interviewees argued that dating in a mediated public setting might increase the possibility of guests coming across a potential partner both inside and outside the programme setting. For example, Deng Yun, a

23-year-old female website editor, indicated that the programme may have 'a circulation sphere actually wider than dating websites or other ways'. By showing the guests' contact details, the programme is at times seen as providing more opportunities for them, as they are likely to get to know a potential partner from the programme's audiences. TV dating to some extent may facilitate a dating market without regional boundaries and become a possible platform to help enlarge the guests' social network.

However, most respondents tended to see TV dating as an entertainment programme rather than a common way to find a partner. First, some interviewees assumed that, as the cost of TV dating could be high, a televisual platform was a less feasible way to approach a dating relationship for most young professionals. For instance, one of my interviewees stated that:

> I saw some guests were on the stage for many episodes. It would be impossible for a person with a normal job to take part in the programme for so many episodes . . . Guests need to ask for leave and pay the travel expenses. I think the costs of looking for a partner are too high (*laughs*). (Deng Yun, 23, woman, interview)

Second, some interviewees expressed concern about the lack of private and equal communication between two potential partners on a programme set. The public programme setting is at times seen to constrain the expression of individualized needs and private feelings during the mate-selecting process, as one of my respondents argued:

> I think the things that people pay most attention to can be divided into considerations of the mass and of the individual. And this programme inevitably only presents the part that the mass care about, such as so-called income, educational background, social network and hobbies . . . While something about emotions in a relatively exquisite level, such as a male guest's feeling towards a female guest, or her personality and moral quality, which are very important in my mind, are not able to be shown in this programme. (Ma Liang, 24, man, interview)

Another interview participant argued that:

> I think the matter of dating and marriage shouldn't be shown in this way . . . I would have resistance in my heart, if I needed to go on the programme . . . It seems that I want to find a marriage spouse and my

> conditions are like this. All of them can decide whether it is suitable or not. It is like I have exposed everything in front of other people and I feel a bit bare. For me, human nature or romantic relationships are a bit mysterious and hazy. This is so realistic and bare, in which I feel nothing at all and I refuse this kind of relationship. (Hu Jieru, 29, woman, interview)

From the comments above, it seems dating in such a public forum might go against the nature of romantic love, which is traditionally understood as an intimate emotional attachment at a private and individual level. The strong rejection of dating in such a setting may be connected with an ethical concern about the rights of the participants, who tend to be exploited by commercial surveillance (Andrejevic 2004, p. 78; Hill 2008, pp. 173–174).

Private values towards love and relationships may sometimes become 'problematic' in a public setting, as one of my respondents indicated:

> Like Ma Nuo said that 'I'd rather cry in a BMW', I feel this is a very true and natural expression. When she was on the stage, she just said things she wanted to express boldly. I think this is nothing bad. It is just because this is a public occasion, so it would cause a lot of waves. (Zheng Anchi, 24, man, interview)

At the same time, some respondents expressed concern about the production team's manipulation of the guests, who might express themselves inauthentically on a public set. As guests on a dating programme are likely to become a popular topic among audiences, the programme is at times seen to be facilitating a wide discussion of issues related to their private lives, thereby causing negative emotions. For instance, one of my interviewees, who once applied to take part in *If You Are the One*, expressed her mixed feelings about the programme:

> If they really wanted me to take part in the programme, I'm not sure to go... I think if I went on the stage, I would need to follow the way required by the programme producers to answer questions. If I needed to say something that they required, I don't think this is good... People often judge the guests on the stage and see which one is relatively beautiful, which one is relatively weird and which one is relatively funny. My family think that it would be very silly if I was on the stage and judged by other people. People more or less would think that I have nothing good, as I am not able to marry up to a certain age. So it would not be honourable if I was shown on TV. (Guo Zhenzhen, 28, woman, interview)

Like Zhenzhen, some participants were reluctant to participate in a TV dating show; often, this was their least preferred way of approaching a personal relationship as it would, to some extent, demonstrate their undesirability in a competitive dating market. These concerns resonate with an argument that guests on RDPs are likely to be objectified as sources of entertainment for audiences, who are inclined to see their sometimes 'shameless' performances as 'both attractive and repulsive' (Hill 2008, pp. 173–174).

In addition, although TV dating might be a good way for guests to gain publicity for themselves, it might also have a relatively low success rate in terms of their finding a partner. For example, some respondents observed an unequal level of knowledge between guests and their potential partners in the audience, as one of my interviewees remarked:

> (TV dating) is mainly a way for other people to know the guests, while there is a small opportunity for the guests to know others. Even for female guests, who choose from male guests, it is a small chance for her to select one male guest, who also chooses her . . . Even some people write letters to her, she would have no idea about this person, about what he looks like or his personality. (Deng Yun, 23, woman, interview)

Thus, although the TV dating programme *If You Are the One* obtains a high audience rating across the country, most respondents did not see it as a feasible way to find a partner. At the same time, dating as a traditional practice being shown on a public programme may generate all sorts of ideas and feelings about its staging and scripting strategies among audiences, who tend to question its authenticity. As a subgenre of reality TV, *If You Are the One* may have facilitated a critical viewing culture among its audiences. This is likely to resonate with the idea that reality TV has shifted televisual culture towards a demotic turn, in which ordinary viewers tend to be empowered to construct the 'reality' in media texts based on their own 'moral, ethical and social judgements' (Turner 2010, p. 42).

According to Hill (2005), reality formats, which fuse with elements of both factual and popular television, often claim to present unscripted stories and provide entertainments for audiences (pp. 57–58). For most respondents, *If You Are the One* was seen, first of all, as an entertaining show rather than an effective dating platform, which might suggest that, to a great extent, it follows the tradition of popular fictional television in adopting 'character and speech-focused entertainments' as its main

programming strategy (Kilborn 2003, p. 119). As a format distanced from some sanctioned factual genres such as news and documentary, the scripting strategy of *If You Are the One* generated heated discussion, which may align with the idea that an increasing number of entertainment elements in a reality programme might reduce its authenticity for viewers (Hill 2005, p. 57).

For instance, a few respondents tended to see the programme *If You Are the One* as fully scripted by the production team, which tends to direct the performance of guests in the programme. For them, the programme just aims for high audience ratings and does not have the function of helping people find a partner, as one of my interview participants indicated:

> If a female participant found a date on the stage, she wouldn't take the male guest as her real partner after the show. It is just a show. Anyway, like every programme, they just pretended to be together on the stage to show the audiences. Things would be different after they were off the stage. (Sun Yi, 24, man, interview)

Reality TV is at times seen as a type of mass media that constrains the authentic expression of the guests, who are inclined to perform on this dating platform. As another respondent stated:

> If it broadcasts on TV, it has an off-screen team, which makes up stories for you. There would be words that can be said and words that can't be said. Things can be broadcast and things can't be shown. It will select some special things, which can have some character, to make people like to watch. (Wu Wenze, 26, man, interview)

For some regular viewers of this programme, the discourse of authenticity may become a popular topic, which tends to resonate with the idea that the envisaged performance in reality genres does not stop viewers' assessment of the authenticity of a programme (Hill 2005, p. 66). For instance, according to Sun Chenxue, a 28-year-old female administrator: 'It is successful, because people pay attention to it. I mean many people watch it and discuss it such as whether it is authentic or not.' Although, for most interviewees, the programme was seen as a dating platform, they assumed there could be some mandatory arrangements from the production team

to create dramatic media effects to attract audiences. For example, one of my respondents argued that:

> As it is a programme, the director may guide them (the guests) to talk or to get matched or not, who would give some hard intervention. For example, two people seemed to be very suitable, or people really wanted them to be together or all think that they would be together. In the end, the director wouldn't let them get matched. No matter how many tears this person had. Afterwards, people would begin to comment upon this, which would achieve the aim of propaganda. (Xia Kai, 29, man, interview)

Similarly, anther interview participant tended to see the programme *If You Are the One* as partly scripted:

> Including some very exaggerated statements, for example, Ma Nuo said that 'I'd rather cry in a BMW than laugh at the back of a bike' or some very fat or strange female guests, these were all made up. To increase the 'Kan Dian' (scenes that benefit the spectacle) and attract audiences, they made up their personalities deliberately. (Li Sha, 27, woman, interview)

The production team of *If You Are the One* may not only reflect but also help create 'ordinary' personalities. This is likely to resonate with the new capacities of mass media under a demotic televisual culture, as Turner (2006, 2010) indicates that the reality genre may have become a translator and sometimes an author constructing ordinary identities.

Although my respondents indicated often controversial opinions regarding the authenticity of the 'reality' dating programme *If You Are the One*, most of them tended to connect it to dating and relationships in a real-life setting. They often assumed it to reflect the identity construction of Chinese youth in post-reform Chinese societies, which may align with an idea that reality formats often reveal 'deeper social tensions and developments' (Andrejevic 2004, p. 65). For instance, one of my interviewees stated that:

> I think it relatively suits the values of people from different classes and backgrounds . . . As there are only 24 female guests, it is impossible for them to represent 240 million women. I mean they are not likely to reflect the concept of all women. But it reflects some phenomena in society. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

Hence, the programme may have become a valuable dating text for audiences to identify both the real and fake elements in dating and relationships, and audiences may tend to engage with the mediated text in a more relaxed and thoughtful way. For instance, for some respondents, the programme was a popular topic to share with others, and some other interviewees argued that the programme helped them get access to all sorts of information about love-related issues. Although most respondents did not recognize any changes in their personal lives after watching the programme, they were often able to link the programme to their understanding of, and experiences with, love and relationships. It is likely that, by exhibiting various attitudes towards love and intimacy, TV dating might become a platform that further facilitates a tolerant attitude towards the changing identities of Chinese young people in the social-reform era. This tends to be connected with the idea that the entertaining consumption of demotic TV can generate a soft power towards cultural liberalization among audiences (Sun and Zhao 2009; Turner 2010, p. 163). For example, one of my interviewees pointed out that:

> In fact, the choice for dating and marriage is controversial, as people have different standards. But I think at least the society would become more and more tolerant via this programme, as people have more and more multiple values towards dating and relationships... Actually, it is not like everyone must have a certain suitable partner. He or she could change constantly, including personal conditions under different environments. (Zhou Jun, 29, man, interview)

Overall, by showing dating practice on TV, the programme not only facilitates the expression of diverse values in respect of relationships, but also triggers a critical viewing culture among young Chinese people, who tend to question the authenticity of its scripts. Although reality TV was at times considered as a dating platform with a good reputation and wide acceptance, it was often seen as entertainment rather than a feasible relationship-establishing strategy for most young people in my sample group. Specifically, TV dating is often criticized as having low success rates and as a dating avenue with mandatory arrangements from the production team, a high cost for the participants, and lacking private communication between potential partners. The public programme setting is at times seen as contrary to the nature of romantic love as a private

and intimate attachment, and guests on the programme are likely to become entertainment resources.

2.2 'Ordinary' People in the Context of a Dating Programme

In the previous section, the authenticity of dating practice in a public programme setting was examined, which suggests that TV dating is a less common way for the sample group of Chinese youth to seek a partner, and many respondents tended to have a distant feeling towards the scenes behind the screen. It is likely that, by identifying the similarities and differences between guests on the stage and young people in a real-life setting, the audiences will have a clearer idea about their own identity construction in terms of love and relationships. Hence, this section intends to assess the relationship between audiences and guests by exploring whether Chinese youth see the guests as 'ordinary' people and what they assume their aims are for taking part in the programme *If You Are the One*. As most respondents showed their concerns about TV dating as a feasible strategy for approaching relationships, the motives for watching, and the way for Chinese youth to connect their own relationship-related values and experiences to the guests in the programme are further discussed in this section.

Specifically, some respondents tended to identify that guests in this programme are different from guests in other types of variety shows, which may engage with the idea that, as a subgenre of reality television, TV dating may facilitate the recruitment of ordinary people as its guests (Murray and Ouellette 2009; Ouellette and Hay 2008; Turner 2010). For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

> Theoretically, it is a programme for all the people to take part in, which is not like *Kuai Le Da Ben Ying* (*Happy Camp*, a popular Chinese variety show), as only celebrities can take part in it . . . Of course there are some 'Ji Pin' (extreme cases) and some very excellent ones. But I think most (guests) are ordinary people, normal people. And as they would be shown on TV, there would be a package. In a word, I think they are normal people with some package. (Hao Dongsheng, 27, man, interview)

In addition to this, most interviewees often tended to link the term 'ordinary' to the authenticity of the programme, which may suggest that

ordinary guests are inclined to make a reality programme more real. For example, another interview participant stated that:

> I think it is not completely authentic. They definitely would find some people to enhance the audience rating, such as weirdo, funny people or handsome guys. It is impossible that 24 people are all ordinary people. (Ai Yue, 26, woman, interview)

Although the programme *If You Are the One* is at times seen to recruit 'ordinary' participants to replace the celebrities in traditional television programmes, it may become a platform to produce celebrities, as Andrejevic (2004) indicates that reality genres often embrace a promise of creating 'a lottery of celebrity' among its participants (p. 68). Reality TV is likely to cast the 'ordinary' guests as 'celebrities' in order to enhance the programme's impact and audience rating. However, the TV stars created via reality genres often attract media attention in a very short period of time and correspond to a particular type of celebrity. By introducing the notion of 'celetoid', Rojek (2001) argues that these celebrities are like 'the accessories of cultures organized around mass communications and staged authenticity' (pp. 20–21).

My sample group of Chinese youth often tended to judge the 'ordinariness' of the guests on-screen. Specifically, for some of them, a business operation between the programme and its guests was identified, in which some guests are invited and paid to perform on the programme. For instance, one of my respondents, Zhou Yuxia, a 20-year-old female undergraduate student, said, 'I also heard that they found some beautiful girls in university and paid them some money per hour. Also, some people were on the stage for a very long time, they got paid.'

Some respondents assumed that *If You Are the One* tends to select some guests with 'extraordinary' characteristics from the 'ordinary' applicants to make the programme more attractive to audiences, and one of my interview participants suggested that:

> If I were very ordinary looking, wore very ordinary clothes, spoke in a very ordinary way, came from a very ordinary family and had a very ordinary educational background as well as very ordinary experiences, there would be no dramatic effect. For example, a person broke up for more than 300 times, so he is a person with stories. This person is an overseas returnee,

> very rich, who had a few unsuccessful relationships, as he always suspected that the girls were aiming for his money. Then this person has a special character. (Zhao Wei, 28, man, interview)

From the above statements, the production team is at times seen to select guests with some special relationship-related or work-related experience to make a dramatic effect in the programme, which aligns with the idea that reality TV is a genre creating dramatic pleasure for audiences (Murray and Ouellette 2009, p. 4). This 'extraordinariness' produced in the reality dating programme may resonate with an idea of 'extraordinary subjectivity' introduced by Dovey (2000), who suggests that media narratives tend to be 'grounded in the personal, the subjective and the particular' context (p. 4). Turner (2010) further indicates that 'the excessive, the extraordinary and even the offensive' performance is likely to become an effective programming strategy for reality formats (p. 69). By selecting guests with 'extraordinary' characteristics, the programme is likely to present the exaggerated romantic subjectivities of young Chinese people in the post-reform era, which may influence audiences' identities in terms of love and relationships.

The programme *If You Are the One*, which is often seen as a way of transform an ordinary participant into a celebrity, may generate the desire to become celebrities among its participants. For instance, some interview participants assumed that some less popular actors intend to become celebrities via this platform:

> They need to speak in a bold way and are willing to be blamed by others. Nowadays the social values are not that if people all praise you, then you can become famous. If people all curse you, you can also become famous. So people all work hard towards this direction . . . Some people would make plans for them and ask them to say something, which would generate public hatred or sympathy. (Fan Fang, 27, woman, interview)

Some interviewees assumed the programme intends to maintain the diversity of its guests, which may suggest that it is likely to represent an increasingly fragmented cross-section of Chinese youth. Another interview participant remarked that:

> I think the production team chooses people from all walks of life. You would see 24 female guests with a variety of professional backgrounds,

> educational backgrounds, appearances, and they are from China or abroad, so male guests could choose from a variety of people. (Huang Xinya, 27, woman, interview)

At the same time, some respondents observed that the programme can facilitate the recruitment of guests with good communication skills in a public programme setting. For example, Du Kewei, a 27-year-old female marketing planner, argued, 'They (the guests) must be able to show themselves on the stage. Diffident people can't be on the stage at all, they (the producers) don't want them!' This may fit into a selection criterion for producers introduced by Andrejevic (2004), who indicates that a natural tendency towards self-disclosure is often considered as a 'form of being honest to oneself and others' (p. 106).

Furthermore, *If You Are the One* is seen as a complicated platform combining both the interests of the TV station and the interests of the guests, who may have various reasons for taking part. The programme, which is likely to provide a friends-making platform for young professionals to enlarge their social network, is sometimes seen as a possible way to accumulate social capital (Bourdieu 1984). For instance, the TV dating programme is sometimes seen as a way for the guests to gain popularity among their social network and/or get to know some social resources. An age difference may be observed, as one of my respondents argued:

> My sister is 22 years old. She said her peers said that the reason people went on the show at such a young age was not for a partner, but for letting more people know them and becoming famous. But I think that people older than 26 or 27 aimed to find a partner in the show . . . Maybe it is because the post-90s are different from the post-80s. Now WeChat (an online social platform) is very popular and everyone is adding others. For them (the post-90s), more attention from other people is in vogue. (Wen Jing, 31, woman, interview)

The programme is at times considered a platform for Chinese youth to come across a potential partner with relatively good conditions, as one of my interviewees added:

> They (the guests) may think this is a good way to find a suitable partner from mutual selection. Among these people, some may have relatively high requirements and want to find a partner with better conditions. It's likely that they lack such resources around them. Some other people may also

> want to find a partner and see this as media exposure for them. I heard that for some female guests who didn't find a partner on the stage, many other people got in touch with them. And this was a chance for them. (Li Sha, 27, woman, interview)

Alongside this, guests in the programme are at times seen to have 'impure' motives not related to partner seeking, and these intentions are inclined to make the programme unreal. For example, some respondents tended to question the personal information and motives of the guests in the programme:

> I saw that some guests couldn't be called as leftover women. Some of them may still be university students, who are only 21 or 22 years old and they are surely not eager to find the other half. So why do they come to this programme? Although the status of guests should be real, some guests are said to have a very high position in a company or to be the rich second generation, who come from a wealthy family. When they are marked like this, I would doubt whether this is real or not. As they are excellent, do they really need to attend the programme to find their partners? (Jiang Xin, 24, woman, interview)

Some respondents observed that a few guests on *If You Are the One* got the chance to endorse some commercial brands after they were off the stage. The programme is at times seen as a way for its guests to become actors or benefit their career development:

> Some young people who want to become famous may take the programme as a stunt to show themselves. They may either want to enter into the entertainment industry, or sell books they have written or sell products. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

Another respondent added that:

> For example, some male guests wanted to start a business and they thought why not pay some money to be shown on *If You Are the One*? Then people at least would know something about this brand. Then, if they wanted to start a business, they could write in their CV that they had been to *If You Are the One* and attach a clip link to it. (Hao Dongsheng, 27, man, interview)

A higher ratio of male than female guests who sincerely want to find a partner is at times observed:

> Male guests may have a relatively pure aim such as being fond of a female guest and just coming to the show for her. Also, this programme is relatively hard to participate in, as it is with certain challenges. So I think male guests are more reliable than female guests. (Feng Wanjiao, 27, woman, interview)

Although guests on *If You Are the One* often claim that their sincere aim is to find a partner, audiences tend to believe that some guests may have intentions that differ from mate seeking when taking part in the programme. Guests in the dating programme are likely to use performances to cover their true intentions, which to some extent resonates with an idea that the reality setting tends to facilitate performing ordinariness and naturalness (Bonner 2003; Turner 2010, p. 19). Hill (2005) further argues that the 'performed selves' and 'true selves' are often fused with each other in reality formats (p. 67). Alongside this, viewers tend to identify the guests' motives via examining their personal information and social interactions on the programme set, which may align with Corner (2002)'s argument that the 'true selves' of guests are likely to be projected from 'performed selves' (pp. 263–264). Audiences' concerns about a lack of authenticity in the relationships on a programme set may mirror an uncertainty about the authenticity in dating and relationships in everyday life, in which material interests may sometimes replace intimate emotional attachment.

The programme is sometimes seen as an entertainment platform for the guests, which tends to link with the idea that guests in the programme may want to obtain the special experience of being shown on TV (Syvertsen 2001). For instance, one of my respondents assumed the possible mentality of guests in the programme:

> I don't care much, I just want to be on TV. If you want me to take part in a programme about career, I also want to go. But I feel this programme is more fun and I could be much happier. Anyway, I don't suffer any losses if I go on the show. If I find a date in the show successfully, I win. If not, I also achieve my goal. (Le Jiahui, 26, man, interview)

According to the above example, the programme may facilitate a mediated entertainment for guests in the programme, which may be connected to the game show tradition.

Simultaneously, a boundary between my respondents and the guests in the programme can be observed, which shapes their understanding of TV dating as a way to build a relationship. For example, a different kind of entertainment for the audiences of the programme is likely to be identified, as one of my respondents remarked:

> Audiences are different from people who want to take part in the programme. I'd love to watch it, I may watch it for Meng Fei (the main host) is so handsome, Le Jia (a former guest presenter) is so cool, or this male guest is so silly, this female guest is so money-worship, this is my entertainment, which is very different from being a guest in the show. (Zhao Wei, 28, man, interview)

From the above statements, it seems the motives of audiences watching the programme often differ from those of the guests taking part, and some respondents assumed that audiences are inclined to have a 'Kanke' (spectator) mentality:

> It is real-time and it moves matchmaking on the stage. Audiences feel it is quite new. People all have an attitude of seeking novelty and may want to pay attention to others' privacy. (Shang Juan, 29, woman, interview)

Therefore, in a 'reality' programme setting, TV dating is likely to satisfy audiences' voyeuristic mentality vis-à-vis the private issues of 'ordinary' people (Gray 2009; Murray and Ouellette 2009, p. 4).

At the same time, the diverse and sometimes controversial values and topics represented in this programme are often assumed to create popular pleasures among audiences, which may resonate with the idea that controversy tends to attract audiences' emotional and rational involvement (Livingstone and Lunt 1994, p. 82; Murray and Ouellette 2009). The programme, which offers a dramatic and uncertain 'reality' programme setting, satisfies the the audiences' voyeurism and desire for entertainment with 'ordinary' people with diverse personalities, backgrounds and experiences. For instance, one of my respondents explained that:

> It (the programme *If You Are the One*) provides a contrasting impression. It is likely that the traditional values towards dating and marriage are like this, the topics generated in this programme are relatively conflicting. It is like

> watching a blockbuster, no matter it is a beauty of horror or violence, or some topics about human nature such as Ma Nuo, who said that 'I'd rather cry in a BMW than laugh at the back of a bicycle'. (Zhou Jun, 29, man, interview)

Thus, the controversial attitudes towards dating in contemporary China, which sometimes generate audience disapproval, may serve as entertaining performances, blurring the boundary between reality and fictional genres (Turner 2010, p. 51).

As dating and marriage are popular topics in contemporary Chinese societies, the 'Kanke' mentality is often assumed to combine with a mentality of commenting about the guests in the programme. According to one of my respondents:

> The design of sessions in the programme triggers people's curiosity step by step and attracts them to watch it. Firstly, people can have an initial evaluation towards a male guest and after a video clip has been showed, people can have another judgement towards the man. Thirdly, he may say some stories about himself and people would have another evaluation towards him . . . They also say something about female guests, for example, this female guest is especially assertive, dressing up in a strange way or with a weird personality, which quite suits the spirit of entertainment and gossip! (Du Kewei, 27, woman, interview)

Furthermore, by comparing guests on a programme set with young people in everyday life, TV dating may activate the reflective nature of audiences, who are likely to question, oppose or align with the values of the guests on *If You Are the One*. Specifically, some respondents assumed that the programme is likely to resonate emotionally with audiences as well as inspiring rational thinking about love and relationships, which may be linked with the demonstration and learning function of TV dating as a cultural technology (Murray and Ouellette 2009, p. 9; Ouellette and Hay 2008). For example, audiences may tend to connect the guests in the programme with people around them, as one of my interview participants argued:

> They (the audiences) are likely to be moved by TV dramas, which are not real as they know. When watching this (the programme *If You Are the One*), they can make remarks on the guests' appearance, wow, this young man is not as good as my son! Girl, don't behave like her! (Zhao Wei, 28, man, interview)

Another respondent added that:

> The programme broadcast the vcr (video) of the participants, which would mention some experiences and details of their former relationships. Maybe this male participant had gorgeous or perfect experiences, people may admire him. If some participant had miserable experiences, people may show sympathy for them. Some audiences may have experienced hurtful relationships and the viewers may feel that their experiences are not worse than the participants in the show. No matter it is a feeling of admiration, sympathy or self-satisfaction. The show has a mass basis. (Chu Junqi, 30, man, interview)

The programme may serve as an avenue for audiences to identify and construct their own mate-selecting values by comparing their own conditions and/or dating experiences with those of the guests. For instance, one of my interview participants indicated that:

> Sometimes I may think that this girl has this condition, but she met such a good man. So I may envisage whether I would have such an opportunity or may compare with her to see what my advantages and disadvantages are in the mate-choosing process in the future. But I think for me it doesn't influence my life a lot. I see it as an entertainment and don't take it as a standard for my partner-choosing or life guidance, which would be too childish. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

Zixi's example may suggest that, as an entertaining platform, the programme *If You Are the One* may tend to affect the viewers in a more subtle way.

In addition to the possible differences between watching and participating in the programme, some respondents tended to identify their personality as 'conservative', 'diffident' or 'introverted' and see the guests on the programme as a group of people willing to show themselves in an open manner. Many respondents were inclined to believe that a dating relationship is a private issue and they were not willing to expose it in public. As one of my interviewees stated:

> I wouldn't consider TV dating unless I have to, as I would face nationwide several hundred millions audiences. And my parents would also follow me and my neighbours would ask, wow, this is your daughter, who needs to go on this programme to find a partner. (Huang Xinya, 27, woman, interview)

Some participants may reassert traditional and conservative family values as regards dating and relationships, which tend to be the opposite of the often individualized expressions on the programme set.

Moreover, some interviewees believed that their personalities and values in respect of love issues differed from those of the guests on the programme:

> They (female guests) may compete with other female guests to speak... They may make up a lot and wear high-heel shoes, who may want to be selected by a small boss or some performing company. We are different. (Tang Lili, 23, woman, interview)

Another interview participant explained that:

> I think guests of this programme surely relatively approve of this programme. I mean they accept the values showed in this programme. There are quite a number of people who don't acknowledge these. I think people who don't accept this form wouldn't take part in the programme... Honestly, the aspects the show selects are not my main considerations, while there would be no opportunity for me to show the most valuable characteristics of mine on the stage. (Ma Liang, 24, man, interview)

By separating themselves from the guests on the programme *If You Are the One*, most participants tended to believe that an emotional attachment at a private level is the basis of an authentic dating relationship. This may be connected with an understanding of authenticity introduced by Van Leeuwen (2001) as something revealing the truth of 'a deeply held sentiment' (p. 393). The commercial operation generated by the mediated dating platform is likely to generate an anxiety about inauthentic love and relationships in general.

2.3 An Accelerated Relationship in a Postmodern Consumerist Culture

In the former section, young people's attitudes and understandings about guests on the programme *If You Are the One* were discussed and it initially examined the audiences' assumption about the relationship between the guests and people in an everyday context. This section intends to explore further how Chinese youth view the mate-selecting considerations under a speeded-up programme setting. Specifically, the shortened dating time is

at times seen to facilitate TV dating becoming a matchmaking platform with a hidden rule of 'love at first sight'. For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

> In a short twenty minutes, it is unlikely to judge a person's personality, right? It is still like love at first sight. I choose you, you choose me. General conditions of two people almost satisfy each other's wishes. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

As this example demonstrates, the mate-selecting process is sometimes assumed as a dating 'transaction', in which guests may tend to have a consumerist mentality. TV dating to some extent may repeat a traditional matchmaking script, in which marriage was often arranged by a third party and based on material transactions between the two families. Thus, the popularity of this programme is likely to suggest a market principle in establishing dating relationships, which is likely to resonate with the idea that the changing economic environment in the reform era may have greatly facilitated a mentality of seeing personal ties in terms of material transactions (Osburg 2013, pp. 163–165; Osburg 2014; Zelizer 2005).

Alongside this, this dating programme is at times seen as a successful matchmaking brand in a problematic dating market, in which fulfilled love is sometimes difficult to pursue:

> Nowadays most people, who are at a suitable age for marriage, are young people from the post-80s, and dating and marriage is a very big problem in a relatively competitive society. Unlike people from the former generations, who often had an arranged marriage, the post-80s advocate romantic love and want to find a partner by themselves. So this has become a difficult matter, which attracts people's attention naturally and becomes a market for them to explore. (Hu Jieru, 29, woman, interview)

Another respondent added that:

> It seems to be the first programme like this in mainland China, which has created a well-known brand from the very beginning. When thinking about marriage and dating programmes, *If You Are the One* may firstly come into people's mind. (Deng Yun, 23, woman, interview)

Some interview participants assumed that the programme tends to reflect the commercial interests of all parties, and one of my respondents pointed out that:

> This type of programme finally aims for pure commercial interests, including the people, the media as well as the male and female guests it promotes… As it has been made as a brand, people all want to become famous in it… For example, female guests can become famous via this programme and they can act in films and advertisements. Also, the hosts can become an author of a book and broaden their popularity. They can give a speech somewhere and have a book signing session, which makes a lot of money for them. (Fan Fang, 27, woman, interview)

TV dating is sometimes understood as a commercial platform with its guests as 'commodities'. By simplifying the mate-selecting process, the establishment of a romantic relationship may sometimes become an on-the-spot consumption, which is likely to reflect the postmodern consumerist culture (Bauman 2003). For example, one of my interview participants tended to see female guests on the programme as consumable products searching for qualified purchasers:

> Women, no matter on which level they are, they all choose a man with money and high personal quality. Women think that they can marry a very good man. It is like they expect to sell at a high price. But in fact, they are not necessarily finding the man they want. If they can't find the man, they would sell at a discount (*laugh*)… Actually, this programme should also reflect people in real lives. (Hu Jieru, 29, woman, interview)

Like online dating and flash marriage, TV dating is often based on an assumption of building a dating relationship within a very short period of time, which may connote the nature of an accelerated relationship. As one of my interview participants argued:

> It is a speeded-up programme for female guests to show themselves and there are mutual comments between female guests and a selected male guest. After two to three rounds of PK (player killing), people would find the other half, which is watched by nationwide audiences and commented by the hosts. I think this is speed dating. Honestly this is love at first sight. (Li Sha, 27, woman, interview)

Another interviewee felt that the programme reflected the simple nature of love and romance:

> It is just a dating platform for people to know each other . . . I think it delivers the simplest question of dating and marriage. Love is very simple. This is the basic instinct of human beings. I love you. I can fall in love with you at first sight and feel attracted to you. I just pursue. I just go with you. (Le Jiahui, 26, man, interview)

However, many respondents assumed that it could be difficult for guests on the programme to get to know a potential partner and make a thoughtful choice within a limited dating time:

> Why did they (female guests) let an excellent man go (off the stage) by himself? He may have just said one sentence wrong or not expressed one idea clearly. As it was in a short time, there may be a misunderstanding, which was not explained clearly. (Huang Xinya, 27, woman, interview)

Another interview participant assumed that the guests' choice was likely to be influenced in a public programme setting and might not be a mature selection:

> For one male guest, excluding the time for advertisements, he only has 12 to 15 minutes and he has to make a decision from 24 girls. He may also be influenced by the hosts. He may choose someone he thought very suitable at that moment, but after he was off the stage, there would be a process to get along with the girl . . . I think the choice in the show to a great extent is not a gradual process. It is not a real acceptance. It could be a very initial choice. (Zheng Anchi, 24, man, interview)

Some interview participants tended to question the programme's basic assumption of 'love at first sight' and assumed there would be a running-in period before the establishment of a reliable relationship:

> Of course they get matched in the programme, but this success is just to show the audiences. I heard that after one or two months, two people broke up . . . They accept each other, which can be viewed as a start of getting along with each other or being wait-and-see. But there is still a long way to go before getting married. (Wang Rui, 30, man, interview)

As guests may not know each other very well during the mate-choosing process, an accelerated relationship is at times seen to involve potential risks in the long run:

> In a TV dating programme, as people wouldn't know about the past and social network of a person, it is possible for them to come across a great person and also possible for them not to... I think it was a very small possibility for them to be together afterwards. (Xia Kai, 29, man, interview)

A shortened dating time may have some influence upon the guests' choice in the programme. Specifically, guests may pay more attention to some 'visible' considerations while neglecting emotional interactions in the partner-selecting process. For instance, male guests on the stage are often assumed to place a high value on the appearance of a potential partner:

> Almost all the male guests belonged to the good-looks club (外貌协会, Wai Mao Xie Hui). When they were asked to choose an ideal girl at first sight, unless they had already chosen a particular female guest before taking part in the programme, basically they were members of the good-looks club (who would attach a lot of importance to the appearance of a potential partner). A male guest would use the aesthetic standards of men or himself, as he doesn't know about the personality or family background of female guests. Although he can read female guests' profiles online and watch their expressions in the former episodes, it is only a premise. (Zhou Jun, 29, man, interview)

The programme design may also influence the male guests' choice:

> The first session of the programme setting is to ask them about who is their ideal partner. Facing 24 guests, without any communication, male guests can only see their appearance, which is the dominant factor affecting their choice. Also, within such a short communication, unless there are some female guests with very outgoing personalities, who are likely to expose their personality, basically they all judge by appearance. (Ning Xiaoyan, 27, woman, interview)

The above observations suggest that appearance is often seen as a dominant mate-selection criterion for male guests, which tends to align with the idea that reality-dating programmes reinforce a beauty-centred

traditional femininity (Graves and Kwan 2012). This can be linked to a traditional gendered stereotype in mate choosing, in which men often attach more importance to the physical appearance of a potential partner (Buss and Barnes 1986; Buss 1994; Townsend and Wasserman 1998).

Next to appearance, some respondents assumed that personality would be a relatively important factor in the mate-choosing process, and that male guests may tend to have a comprehensive consideration towards a potential partner. For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

> Male guests would judge a person by her appearance and stature to see whether she is suitable to develop a long-term relationship with. Afterwards, they would see whether a person's temperament, style of conversation, working experience and hobbies are suitable . . . Whether male guests choose to see the female guest's bedroom scene, family background or income, they want to find a woman, who can be shown in public with him and cook in the kitchen, also with her own career and pursuits. There would be fewer over-shallow situations for male guests to only consider a female's appearance. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

Another interview participant assumed that male guests may tend to select a partner with a similar social background:

> If a man has money and high social position and is well educated, he surely would require the female side firstly to be young and beautiful. Secondly, he would see whether the female side matches his level or not. Actually men are more realistic than women. They know which level they are decides what kind of partner they choose. (Hu Jieru, 29, woman, interview)

On the contrary, some male guests are seen as idealistic when selecting a partner:

> They really want to find a partner of their dreams . . . Male participants may have a model . . . They wouldn't require girls that are that excellent or having that good economic background. For males, some of them have male chauvinism and they wouldn't take the family background or financial status of the female side as a priority. While some males want to value the girl's family background, but they wouldn't say it or put it as the preferential conditions. (Chu Junqi, 30, man, interview)

Alongside this, a possible gendered difference in the mate-choosing process is identified:

> I feel that female participants want to find a suitable partner in reality… Female guests would more or less take those as rigid conditions including male's family background, working environment and economic conditions. If male participants in the show are not in good economic conditions or come from rural area, you will see that they surely can't find a date. (Chu Junqi, 30, man, interview)

Like Junqi, many respondents assumed that the economic status of a male guest was often the main consideration for female guests when selecting a partner in the programme. For instance, a popular term describing the ideal partner for women in contemporary Chinese societies, 'Gao Fu Shuai' (tall, rich and handsome), was mentioned by some interviewees, who frequently assumed that 'Fu' (rich) was the most important factor for female guests when evaluating a male guest. It seems that economic condition is often a more important factor than appearance for female guests when selecting a partner in a programme setting, more so than appearance, personality and educational background. For instance, one of my respondents indicated that:

> There is a common value orientation, which is surely very influential. For example, girls surely would have very high requirements towards income and family background of the male side. As soon as she accepts this or says it satisfies her expectation, she would consider whether their personalities match well or not. (Ma Liang, 24, man, interview)

In addition, living pressures may shape people's dating values:

> For people living in big cities such as Beijing, it would cost a lot when they buy a house and a car. Like men, who wouldn't have a development in a short period of time and are potential stocks in a long run, young and beautiful women don't want to choose them. This is a very realistic question. (Fan Fang, 27, woman, interview)

Some interview participants observed that some female guests, who tend to attach less importance to the material condition of a potential partner, are inclined to follow their emotions and fall in love at first sight. This may align with an argument that the post-80s and post-90s generations of

Chinese youth are likely to be influenced by Engels' writings about mutual love as the dominant consideration in dating and marital relationships (Xu 1996, p. 401). For example, one of my respondents argued that:

> I think they follow their emotions about their impression and interactions with a male guest. And for female guests who took part in the show for a long time before they found a date, I think they may have some experiences to compare male participants objectively. (Zheng Anchi, 24, man, interview)

Appearance or economic conditions are often seen to be more important than personality for guests choosing a partner in a programme setting, which goes against the argument that personality is the most important aspect in the mate-choosing process for both men and women in Chinese societies (Higgins et al. 2002; Zhao 2002). The programme *If You Are the One* is, to a large extent, likely to repeat the traditional gendered stereotypes in a partner-choosing process, in which female guests tend to value economic condition while male guests are inclined to attach more importance to the physical appearance of a potential partner (Buss and Barnes 1986; Buss 1994; Townsend and Wasserman 1998). The mate-selection considerations in this context may reflect the partner-choosing values in arranged matchmaking in real life:

> In ordinary life, when I want to introduce a single woman to men, generally they all want to see the photo of the woman first. If I introduce someone to women, they firstly all ask the occupation background of the man. (Ning Xiaoyan, 27, woman, interview)

2.4 Conclusion

Rather than adopting a referential reading to see the guests on the dating programme set as real people in their daily lives (Liebes and Katz 1990, p. 100), my respondents often followed a 'critical-cognitive' viewing mode to see the televisual text as a commercial product and to respond to it with 'a distanced, informed, or analytic approach' (Livingstone and Lunt 1994, p. 71). This engagement framework may further motivate the reflexive nature of the audiences, who tend to assess critically the authenticity of the values as regards dating and relationships on a programme set in relation to those in a real-life setting. The programme *If You Are the*

One, which is often seen to work as a neoliberal cultural technology for Chinese youth to identify and construct their own relationship-related values, may facilitate a new form of identity, fitting into the DIY (do-it-yourself) culture introduced by Hartley (1999, p. 179).

Specifically, although the programme *If You Are the One* is often seen as a subgenre of reality TV, which claims to use an unscripted programming strategy and recruit ordinary people as its guests, most respondents tended to see it as a popular televisual text combining the commercial interests of the production team and its participants. First, a fully or partly scripted programme strategy was identified by my participants, who considered that the programme tends to recruit actors and/or guests with unusual characteristics in order to obtain high audience ratings. Alongside this, many respondents tended to believe that the programme may stimulate the pecuniary intentions of its participants, who desire to change their status from an 'ordinary' person to someone more recognizable in the public domain or to promote their career development. Hence, most respondents adopted a 'Kanke' (spectator) mentality to see the programme as entertainment rather than an authentic relationship-establishing platform. In addition to this, there seem to be interesting parallels between the questioning of the authenticity of the TV programme by audience members and their reflections about what 'authenticity' means in relationships. For instance, as intimate emotional attachment is often considered as the basis for an authentic dating relationship, the commercial interests and operation in a public programme setting may generate viewers' concerns about a lack of authenticity in dating relationships on-screen.

A boundary between guests on the programme and its audiences is observed during the interview process and most respondents tended to separate themselves from the guests by asserting a more traditional and conservative set of values as regards mate seeking. Although the speeded-up programme setting seems to enhance the efficiency in the partner-selecting process, TV dating is often considered as a relationship-building strategy with low success rates and hidden risks for relationship development in the long run. Specifically, the public programme setting is often seen to shape the guests' values and constrain private communication and emotional interaction between potential partners. The shortened dating time may encourage the adoption of a 'love at first sight' approach in the mate-choosing process, whereby guests often attach more importance to some 'visible' and 'realistic' factors such as appearance, family and professional background. Moreover, the programme is often believed to reflect traditional gendered values in the mate-selecting process, in which women

tend to think highly of the economic status of a potential partner, while men are inclined to attach more importance to physical appearance. In an accelerated programme setting, dating is sometimes seen as an 'on-the-spot transaction' between male and female guests, and the programme is likely to reinforce the fusion of a market principle and the script of an arranged marriage, in which material transactions between two families are the basis for establishing a marital bond.

Thus, by critically assessing young professionals' dating practices in the reality programme *If You Are the One*, dating and relationships are likely to become a less private and sensitive issue for Chinese young people, who often embrace a more tolerant attitude towards diverse dating values in the post-reform era. Simultaneously, the popularity of the programme may reflect a problematic dating market, in which free-choice marriage is likely to be more difficult to pursue and the principles behind traditional practices of matchmaking may have been reasserted as the main way for people to choose a potential partner. Although Chinese youth may long for romantic love, they are likely to be under pressure to marry at an early age, which may facilitate more people accepting the use of matchmaking traditions, or at least the principles behind such practices. However, as many respondents believed that a reliable dating relationship is often established after a relatively long period of time, TV dating, which is sometimes seen as a risky dating strategy reflecting a fast-food culture, tended to be either rejected strongly or embraced reluctantly by my respondents. As the considerations of guests on the programme are sometimes thought to reflect partner-selecting values in matchmaking arranged in a real-life setting, the assumed material interests of the guests in the programme *If You Are the One* may further trigger uncertainty towards authentic love and relationships in real life.

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CHAPTER 3

Desires and Anxieties in Self-Centred Relationships

Since the introduction of the open-door policy in 1978, new emotional, material and sexual desires, as well as anxieties, have emerged in personal ties under the influence of globalization and the modern commodity culture (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a; Wang and Nehring 2014). Influenced by Bauman's (2003) work *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, which explores the changing nature of love and romance in the West by looking at the problematic aspects of dating and relationships in a liquid modern-life setting, this chapter examines the unfulfilled feelings and emotions of young people towards relationships in modern Chinese societies. According to Bauman (2003), as an important avenue to identify and achieve personal needs and expectations, the self-centred or individualized relationship, which involves conflicting desires and anxieties between the security of togetherness and a feeling of wariness towards long-term commitment, has been increasingly seen in modern Western societies. As an important part of the transformative processes affecting the identities of the younger generation in post-reform China (Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Wang 2006; Yan 2003, 2009, 2010a, b), self-centred values may further help understand the mate-choosing as well as relationship-operating strategies of Chinese youth nowadays.

Encased in the global media and cultural flows, Western advanced values such as romantic love and free-choice marriage are widely accepted by Chinese youth in the social-reform era (Higgins and Sun 2007;

C. Yang, *Television and Dating in Contemporary China*,
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Yan 2003). It has been observed that contemporary Chinese society is characterized by a high incidence of separation and divorce (Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC 2007; Tan 2010). With growing interest in diverse dating practices such as homosexual relationships, multiple relationships, triangular relationships, one-night stands and extramarital relationships in urban China (Donald and Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang and Ho 2007a, b, 2011), dating practices may have become more complicated, with various forms and intentions. In the context of increasingly fragmented and diversified personal ties in modern Chinese societies, Section 3.1 explores the changing feelings and understandings of young Chinese professionals towards true love or a lifelong relationship, which may reflect the changing meaning of love and intimacy, as well as the malleable identity of urban youth nowadays.

The one-child policy (OCP) in the late 1970s and the nationwide rural-to-urban population movement have facilitated a nuclear family culture as well as the rise of the individual in modern Chinese societies (Fowler et al. 2010; Hesketh et al. 2005; Starr 2001). According to Pan (1993), Western values and the culture of small families have been the driving forces of a sexual revolution since the 1980s, in which 'romantic love and sexual fulfilment' have become a base for Chinese youth to form personal relationships (Burton 1988, p. 65). At the same time, it seems that traditional family values are still influential as regards the identity formation of the younger generation (Zhu 1997), and in some areas intimate relationships are still built upon familial responsibility rather than emotional attachment (Du 2008). The potentially conflicting desires and anxieties driven by both individualized values and Confucian morality are explored in Section 3.2, which suggests that the modern Chinese family is likely to have a dual influence upon the identity of Chinese youth in terms of love and relationships.

With socio-cultural transition in post-reform China, the ideals of romantic love, which used to be defined as a form of intimacy resulting in a lifelong marital bond (Giddens 1992), may not be able to explain fully the increasingly diverse dating practices and rising divorce rate among younger generations. By examining how the young professionals in urban China situate themselves under the dual influence of traditional socio-moral values and more individualized ideas about personal relationships, Section 3.3 explores the reflexive nature of Chinese youth when it comes to changing emotional ties. New understandings of love and romance are likely to mirror the transitional identity of Chinese youth,

who may have more individualized desires and expectations as regards personal ties and their private lives (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a, b).

The popularity of speed dating, flash marriage and flash divorce may further suggest the prevalence of accelerated relationships in post-reform China. This is likely to be linked with Bauman's (2003) argument that the experience of love may sometimes become a modern product 'ready for instant use, quick fixes, instantaneous satisfaction, results calling for no protracted effort, foolproof recipes, all risk insurance and money-back guarantees' (p. 7). At the same time, since the 1990s, materialistic desires resulting from the influence of the global consumerist culture are likely to become a main part of the identity of Chinese youth, who may tend to gain a sense of social and economic status via relationship-related consumption (Adrian 2003, 2006; Rofel 2007). By examining the 'consuming self' of Chinese youth, Section 3.4 explores the possible new desires and anxieties vis-à-vis personal ties in the postmodern consumerist culture.

3.1 Fragmented Relationships in a Modern-Life Setting

According to Heikkila (2007), since the implementation of reform and opening-up policies in the late 1970s, globalization and the free market have become the main driving forces behind modernization and urbanization in contemporary China. Wang (2010) further suggests that globalization has touched upon a broad range of areas in mainland China since the 1990s, 'from fine arts, architecture, tourism and linguistics to international finance, business and educational administration, political economy and geopolitics, urban development and religious studies' (p. 321). Some people argue that most Chinese people believe Chinese society has been experiencing an evolution from a traditional society to a modern one under the influence of globalization (Yang et al. 2011; Kashima et al. 2009). Under the process of nationwide modernization, a series of research indicated that globalization or Westernization might have greatly influenced the values of Chinese youth, whose cultural identities have been dislocated from the traditional morality in favour of more individual-centred values (Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Wang 2006; Yan 2003, 2009, 2010a, b).

However, the global capital and cultural flows have been unevenly distributed among various spaces and people in urban areas are usually

more influenced by globalization than those in rural areas (Castells 2005). A variety of institutionalized inequalities have facilitated an unequal socio-cultural environment in the dual-structured urban-rural societies, in which individual rights are understood as earned privileges rather than basic rights given at birth (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2010; Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Yan 2010b). For instance, Yan (2010b) argues that the household registration system has deprived the rural population of almost all social welfare support and, to a great extent, become a restriction on nationwide labour mobility (p. 7). Hence, it is likely that, in a globalized era, people's identity formation is associated with their regional background, and urban youth may tend to hold more modern values than young people living in rural areas.

In a study examining Chinese youth's attitudes towards sexual matters and mate-choosing values, Higgins and Sun (2007) focus on 1,100 university students from different parts of China, suggesting a possible connection between their attitudes towards different forms of relationship and their regional backgrounds. Higgins and Sun (2007) indicate that young people from urban areas whose parents are educated or with a professional background often hold more liberal attitudes towards love and sexual matters such as premarital love and same-sex relations than youth from rural families. Some other studies (Donald and Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang and Ho 2007a, b, 2011) suggest that a lifelong monogamous heterosexual relationship has become less predominant in urban China and dating practices have become more diversified, with various forms of intimacy such as same-sex relations, triangular relationships, multiple relationships, extramarital relationships and one-night stands.

Since the start of the economic reform era, the nationwide labour migration has become a prominent demographic and socio-economic phenomenon in China (Lin 2013) and about 200 million rural residents have become migrant workers in urban China during the past three decades (Cartier et al. 2005). As a globalized metropolis, Beijing has attracted nationwide human resources and, according to Yang (2013), the young Chinese professionals in an urban host society can generally be divided into three groups including rural-urban migrants, urban-urban migrants and local youth. As most young migrants maintain a movement between the host societies and their hometowns, their attitudes towards social relationships have been greatly shaped by both the communities they grew up in and the receiving societies where they work (Jin et al. 2012; Yang 2013). In other words, young migrants, especially those who

are from a relatively traditional community, may have a dual regional identity as regards love and relationships. Thus, the life stories and values of young migrants when it comes to dating and marriage are likely to be a good avenue for examining the desires and anxieties of young Chinese professionals under the dual influence of traditional morality and modern values in a globalized era.

Hence, this section intends to examine the interview data generated from one of my respondents, Zheng Anchi, a 24-year-old man working at an NGO, who has experienced life in both a relatively traditional society and a metropolis. Using Anchi's narrative about a lifelong relationship, this section intends to explore the changing emotions and malleable identities of Chinese young people when it comes to love and intimacy, as influenced by the modernization and globalization that have taken place in an uneven pattern between rural and urban areas in contemporary China (Castells 2005). Anchi was born in a small town in southern China. He went to university in a big city nearby before finding a job in a metropolis in northern China. The customs and dialects in southern China are often very different from those in northern China. For instance, Anchi grew up in a traditional family, which was closely connected with local clans, and he spoke Hokkien dialect in his hometown. After finding a job in Beijing, a city much bigger and developed than his hometown, Anchi became distanced from his family and the local clans, and his life was increasingly shaped by the metropolitan setting, in which Anchi usually spoke Mandarin to communicate with people from different parts of China. Anchi could be seen as a representative of a subgroup of young professionals, whose attitudes towards love and relationships have been influenced by both the traditional community where they grew up and the modern values of the city where they study or work.

Deeply influenced by traditional family values, Anchi really hoped to have a lifelong relationship with his future spouse. However, a lifetime relationship becomes more difficult to achieve in metropolises such as Beijing. Anchi argues that:

> On one hand, people can go to various places and take part in a variety of activities, which wouldn't be possible in small places. So they will come across all sorts of people, they may encounter someone of the opposite sex who is very attractive. Either of them will create opportunities to have some further development of a relationship. On the other hand, there are many

more such places for people having an affair than those in small places (*laugh*). There are dozens of façades of shops near where I live now. They are all massage shops, all kinds of massage . . . More importantly, it is more about the idea. I think people in the cities are likely to be relatively more open-minded. This 'openness' is good and bad. The bad aspect is like having the other man/woman or other lovers.

Chao: So do you think that people are looking for a lifelong relationship?

Anchi: I think in a society like this people actually attach more importance to a lifelong relationship. It just becomes more difficult to achieve it. I think people will cherish or admire from the bottom of their heart such a relationship, but it will become more and more meaningless in real lives. Because people know a lot of things and there are many temptations. I always think that when people know more, they will be more eager to have true love or a lifelong relationship . . . My family has great influence on me. My family is very stable. If I have a girlfriend, it doesn't have to be stable. But I wish my first wife is my last wife. Of course, this is a thing in the future. I have no idea.

In the interview process, Anchi said he was from Quanzhou and mentioned several times that his hometown is a 'small' place or 'small' town. Actually, Quanzhou is a relatively big city with an urban population of more than a million, so Anchi may come from the rural area of Quanzhou or consider his hometown Quanzhou as a much smaller town when compared with a metropolis like Beijing. The word 'small' represents a relatively less developed and closed society with possibly fewer social opportunities and temptations. A lifelong marriage is seen as a relatively unitary form of relationship in a 'small' society and people having extramarital relations would face 'great pressure' from the 'local clan or local traditions'. This tends to resonate with the idea that the deep-rooted traditional collective ideology still has an influence on people's value orientations and behaviours in modern Chinese societies, especially in underdeveloped areas (Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983; Wolf 1985; Fu and Chiu 2007). In a study examining the values of rural youth towards work and family life, Hansen and Pang (2010) further argue that, although Chinese youth have embraced individual choice in terms of romantic love and limited family size, their identity to some extent is still defined by the collective values of loyalty and responsibility to their family.

The word 'small' may also suggest a society with more traditional and localized values, which are likely to play a dominant role in the formation of personal ties. For instance, Du (2008) indicates that traditional values such as familial and social responsibility are still important aspects in sustaining intimate relationships for the Lahu people in Southwest China, rather than just an emotional attachment between spouses (p. 101). Local customs and family environment have to some extent shaped Anchi's values as regards marriage, and he hopes to find a spouse who fits in well with his family and local customs, with whom he can have a stable marital bond like his parents. He tended to take his mother's expectations into account, which could be allied with the idea that parental involvement is still influential when it comes to marriage-related decisions such as choosing a potential spouse (Pimentel 2000; Riley 1994).

With the development of information and communication technologies, the urban spatial transition has become part of the emergence of a network society, in which social relationships and family cultures have been shifted from a collective pattern to a more individualized fashion (Castells 2005; Russell 2000; Wellman 1999). Bauman (2003) indicates that, in a network society, romantic possibilities are expected to be on-the-move, 'with ever greater speed and in never thinning crowds', and a self-centred relationship in a liquid, modern-life setting is likely to be 'short-lived' (p. xii, 21). With more liberal attitudes towards love and relationships (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a; Wang and Nehring 2014), Tan (2010) argues that there is a 'growing emphasis on what is beneficial to the individual' in terms of relationship-related choice, which to some extent has led to rising divorce rates among young people in contemporary China. In addition, a regional difference can be observed when it comes to personal relationships; Anchi suggests that people in small towns or rural areas are more likely to have lifelong relationships and people in more developed urban areas often face more temptations and less pressure from traditional moral values. This is allied with an idea that divorce rates in more prosperous urban areas are higher than rural districts in contemporary China (Miller and Fang 2012, p. 178). Facing a growing number of romantic possibilities, Chinese youth are more likely to follow their hearts regardless of traditional social and moral values, which is a possible reason for the more fragmented personal ties in urban China.

It is likely that another term – 'openness' – was adopted by Anchi to connote a more diversified and globalized modern society, in which

people are inclined to accept or embrace different ways of life and various forms of relationships. Castells (2005) introduces the notion of the 'global city' as a spatial concept to evaluate the transnational urbanization process, in which disproportionately metropolitan regions tend to form multi-centred structures across the world (Garreau 1991; Hall 2001; Nel.Lo 2001). For instance, Beijing, as a 'global city' in which most of the interview participants are based, is greatly associated with the global economy by modern transportation and telecommunication networks as well as competitive human resources in the global space of flows (Castells 2005). Urban society is likely to embrace a more diversified culture composed of multiple ethnic groups (Castells 2005). Under the process of modernization and globalization, there seems to be a higher degree of social openness in urban Chinese societies than in rural areas (Castells 2005; Farrer 2002; Higgins and Sun 2007). The regional difference observed in Anchi's narrative tends to oppose Bauman's (2003) argument that there are a growing number of romantic opportunities in modern Western societies as a whole, which implies an uneven influence of the process of globalization and modernization in contemporary Chinese societies.

In addition, the term 'openness' may be linked to an argument that people nowadays, that is, in the twenty-first century, are likely to hold a more tolerant attitude towards all sorts of relationships. As research a decade ago suggested, love and sexual matters, such as premarital love, divorce, extramarital love and homosexuality, which used to be seen as social taboos under Confucian philosophy (Higgins et al. 2002; Pimentel 2000; Yan 2003), have become more acceptable to the Chinese youth since China's reform and opening up (Farrer 2002; Farrer and Sun 2003). According to Anchi's narrative, the traditional values concerning love seem to be further eroded. It is possible that the notion of 'openness' may represent a multicultural society, in which people have different understandings of what a fulfilled relationship means and more choices regarding their own relationships. For instance, in research focusing on the role of cultural hierarchies in the dating practices and mate-choosing processes of young people in Beijing, Wang and Nehring (2014) argue that, with more individualized values in respect of personal relationship, dating practices in Beijing have become increasingly diversified with various forms and intentions.

Facing a metropolitan society with more ideas about personal ties, Anchi had a sense of uncertainty and anxiety towards the value system

which he had believed since he was little. He wasn't sure whether he should adapt, or whether he should stick to conventional values, which often connect a romantic relationship with a lifelong promise. For instance, a boundary between dating and marriage was identified by Anchi. He argued that the TV programme *If You Are the One* reflects mainstream values about choosing a dating partner in real life, which in many cases are different from the considerations when selecting a spouse. For him, an emotional tie between partners was the main consideration when starting a dating relationship, which was not necessarily linked with a marital bond in the future. Anchi indicated that, although his family is stable, his girlfriend 'doesn't have to be stable', which may suggest acceptance of different forms of intimacy while in a dating relationship.

Although some liberal values in a metropolitan society had influenced Anchi's attitudes towards dating, as far as marriage was concerned he intended to draw upon traditional family values and have a lifelong relationship. Some other participants indicated that people nowadays often believe marriage is a more serious form of intimacy, which is expected to last for a lifetime, and people are inclined to make more effort to sustain a marital bond than a dating relationship. The different understandings of dating and marriage may be seen as an embodiment of the on-the-move identity of Chinese youth in a fluid modern-life setting, which reflects the increasingly diversified desires and individualized choices as regards various forms of intimacy in post-reform China (Rofel 2007). This further resonates with the idea that the definition of love in modern societies has become more complicated and the romantic definition of love as 'till death us do part' may not be able to explain the individualized practices of intimacy in a liquid, modern-life setting (Bauman 2000, 2001, 2003; Chambers 2012, pp. 34–35). With more liberal values as regards dating, traditional familial values still play an important role in the formation and sustaining of marital bonds (Pimentel 2000; Riley 1994).

However, facing increasingly fragmented and diversified personal ties in Beijing, Anchi expressed a sense of uncertainty and anxiety towards a lifelong marital bond. Some other interviewees mentioned that, although marriage is often seen as a very important form of relationship, with more toleration of divorce, a lifelong marriage may become more difficult to achieve in a fluid and uncertain future setting as well (Tan 2010). As Bauman (2003) indicates, the on-the-move human ties in modern Western societies may make settling down more and more difficult and further inspire a sense of insecurity, which 'prompts to tighten the bonds

yet keep them loose' (p. viii). The changing patterns of dating and relationships in Beijing may be seen as a victory for individual freedom and representative of a desire for diversified forms of personal ties (Rofel 2007; Wang and Nehring 2014), while, with increasing romantic possibilities and more liberal ideas, a fulfilling lifelong relationship as the ideal form of intimacy may have become more difficult to accomplish in modern Chinese societies.

3.2 Self-Centred Relationships in a Nuclear Family Culture

The Chinese family used to be seen as a collective institution directed by Confucian philosophy in a nationwide social control system[1] (Engel 1984; Starr 2001). Under the influence of the OCP in 1979, a demographic pattern of predominantly one-child urban families and two-child rural families was observed since 1995 (Hesketh et al. 2005; Wang 2003). The formation of a small-family culture has transformed the modern Chinese family into a private haven for individual members, who tend to pursue 'intimacy, independence, choice and individual happiness' (Yan 2009, p. xxiv). Chinese youth, who grew up in this nuclear family culture, are likely to have fewer collective values than people from former generations and have acquired a distinctive generational identity, which emphasizes personal happiness and individual realization (Ci 1994; Sun and Wang 2010; Wang 2002). In addition, the modern family is at times seen as less influential unit as regards the socialization of Chinese young people (Fowler et al. 2010), who are inclined to draw more upon modern institutions such as the mass media and higher education in a globalizing era.

[1] The Chinese family was greatly shaped by Confucian culture, as well as work practices, as a self-governing unit under a system of state control for more than 2,000 years. Specifically, several generations of an extended family used to live under the same roof and the family members were required to submit to basic hierarchical relationships between the ruler and the people, the old and the young, father and son, as well as husband and wife. In each of these pairs the former person had a superior position towards the latter one, who 'was expected to offer respect, obedience, and an attitude of deference' (Reid 1999, p. 109).

Simultaneously, influenced by advanced Western values such as romantic love and gender equality, there is a rising interest in pursuing happiness in personal relationships. A sexual revolution, in which people are likely to develop more liberal attitudes towards love and sexual matters, has also been observed in modern Chinese societies since the 1980s (Bullough and Ruan 1994; Burton 1988; Higgins and Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Long and Liu 1992; Pan 1993, 2006b; Pan et al. 2004; Vincent 1991). Born at the beginning of the economic reform era, Chinese youth from the OCP families are inclined to hold more individualized values when it comes to love and relationships. The nuclear family culture may further facilitate more self-centred values towards personal ties, in which Chinese youth are likely to prioritize their own feelings and expectations (Chen 1985; Falbo et al. 1989; Hesketh et al. 2005). Alongside this, with an increasing demand for autonomous mate-choosing and fulfilled love and relationships since the beginning of the twenty-first century (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a; Wang and Nehring 2014), a series of studies suggests that dating practices in urban China have become more diversified with different forms and intentions (Donald and Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang and Ho 2007a, b, 2011). Consequently, self-centred relationships have been increasingly observed among young professionals in urban Chinese societies (Wang and Nehring 2014).

According to Bauman (2003), people in an individualized human bond are 'so desperate to "relate"; yet wary of the state of "being related" and particularly of being related "for good"', which is likely to make relationships 'the most common, acute, deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence' and 'vacillate between sweet dream and a nightmare' (p. viii). That is to say, a self-centred personal tie combines with a feeling of anxiety, which tends to cause hidden risks and uncertainty in a fluid modern-life setting (Bauman 2003). Accordingly, although many participants agreed that mutual commitment in common life is the key factor in sustaining a long-term relationship, which is associated with Bauman's (2003) argument that a feeling of security arises from togetherness and relies upon commitment from both sides, some interviewees observed that, for the OCP children, this sometimes has become more difficult to accomplish. By examining the narratives of some participants from the OCP generation, this section explores the desires and anxieties in self-centred relationships, which are likely to reflect a more complicated view of the identity of Chinese youth. At the same time, by understanding the possibly conflicting ideas about divorce, conventional family values, which

are likely to reinforce unequal gender roles in modern relationships, still exert an influence on the choice of Chinese youth towards personal ties. The ways for Chinese youth to approach or sustain a fulfilled relationship are influenced by both individualized values and traditional socio-moral values, which may suggest a dual impact of the modern Chinese family upon the socialization of the OCP children.

My respondents Tang Lili and Chen Xiaobei, two 23-year-old women, were both from OCP families in Beijing. Since graduating from university a year ago, they had worked as website editors at a news agency, and discussed present-day young people's views on divorce:

Lili: Before marrying someone, I could have a boyfriend first and select someone who suits me best to get married. But if I get married, I don't want to find someone who suits me to have a second marriage. The feeling is like this. Now the trend is still that if people can avoid a divorce, then they don't divorce.

Xiaobei: For some people, like the post-80 s and post-90 s, they may not consider it thoroughly before marriage. And after living together, they may find that their partners are different from the one they dated before, so they just get divorced. It is really rash . . . Now many people want a divorce the second day after getting married, because of matters like who cooks and who washes dishes . . . Divorce used to be an extremely big issue. If I can choose not to divorce, then I wouldn't. Now if we don't live a happy life after getting married, then we divorce.

Lili: And some people may think that after divorce they can still find a partner, as they are capable or have conditions to find someone else. There are many cases like this, especially for men. For a woman, over 30 years or up to 40 years old, she may enter a recession stage. But for a man at this age, he may be in the best period of his career . . . But for people at our age, I think if we don't live happily, we may want to divorce. Sometimes I think people would rather live on their own than bear with each other. I think it is because every family has only one child, many people become very powerful. They can't suffer losses.

Xiaobei: Here is the thing. The only child is relatively selfish.

Like Lili and Xiaobei, some interviewees argued that dating relationships or sometimes even marital bonds could be untied more freely by young people from the OCP generation. Marriage and divorce, which used to be very important matters in people's lives, in some cases may become 'rash'

decisions for some Chinese youth from the post-80 s and post-90 s generations. With the popularity of speed dating and online dating (Wang 2013; Zhang 2005), flash marriage (闪婚, Shan Hun), which refers to a situation in which two people get married after knowing each other for a relatively short period of time, has been increasingly observed in modern Chinese societies (Li 2012). For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

> Some people (who chose to have a flash marriage) in fact get along well after they got married till now. For example, a person always wants to buy something like that and when it appears, he/she would just buy it. Similarly, someone like that (an ideal partner) shows up, so he/she would just get married. (Deng Yun, 23, woman, interview)

The above statement tends to resonate with the idea that some members of the post-80 s generation may prioritize their emotional attachment over rational consideration in a flash marriage, which is inclined to reflect the more individualized and diversified values of the younger generation towards love issues (Li 2012). Chinese youth who choose to have a flash marriage may feel they have found true love, so they tend to not go through a relatively long running-in period to create understanding and tolerance in common life before getting married (Li 2012; Qu 2014). Hence, there is a concern for some that a flash marriage is likely to face potential risks in the future (Li 2012; Miller and Fang 2012). Another interview participant said:

> Actually, I do not support an instant love or flash marriage, which is not a very responsible behaviour towards the other side. I still need to know more deeply about the other side and then to see whether we could enter the next stage. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

Alongside this, Zhang (2005) suggests that self-expectation to settle down and family pressure to marry are possible reasons for young professionals choosing a flash marriage. During the interview process, although each participant may have had a different understanding of personal happiness, many interviewees were inclined to link it with a stable and harmonious relationship or family life, which is often seen as at least one important aspect of their happiness. On the other hand, Yan (2010a) indicates that an 'enterprising self' has been increasingly identified among the Chinese young professionals, who are inclined to pursue individual achievement in

career development (p. 505), so it is likely that young people may have less time for relationships and family lives. As a possible way to pursue personal happiness in a short period of time, flash marriage is likely to reflect efficiency and freedom in private life, which may have experienced great transition since the economic reform era (Ong and Zhang 2008; Tian 1998). As many young professionals may tend to embrace freedom in single life, while reluctant to establish a marital bond with possibly more responsibility and constraint, a flash marriage model is often supported by their parents' generation (Zhang 2005), who often want Chinese young people to marry and have children at a proper age (Higgins et al. 2002).

At the same time, marriage, which is a traditional way for women to live a secure life (Li 2012), may sometimes become less important for some young professional women with higher social status and income (Magistad 2013). With a growing number of young professional women choosing to live a single life, the phenomenon of 'leftover women' (剩女, Sheng Nu), a popular notion defined by China's Women's Federation as unmarried women over 27 years old, has become visible in state-run media since 2007 (Fincher 2012; Magistad 2013). Although people often tend to have more individualized values concerning marriage, 'leftover women' are often seen as having fewer choices in the mate-choosing process (Wang and Nehring 2014). For some interviewees, marriage was sometimes described as a 'task' to complete at a certain stage of their lives or seen as the only path to a happy future. Sun Chenxue, a 28-year-old woman born in Beijing, had worked in administrative support in a hospital for six years. Although Chenxue was enjoying the single life, she expressed worry about the future, as she believed that marriage was a social norm and necessary for future happiness: 'After ten or many years, a woman without a child and husband would be different from a married woman with children. They can't think as normal people'.

By teasing herself as a leftover woman, Chenxue felt she had passed the age of dating and now just aimed to find a suitable spouse. According to her, nowadays many people are introduced to a potential partner and have a flash marriage, which is sometimes detached from true love: 'Because two people are not in a dating relationship, they just want to get married. For people who have similar conditions for marriage, all of them can be a "spare wheel".' Facing pressure to marry, Chenxue expressed her concerns about choosing a marriage partner without a mature emotional attachment, leading to an unstable relationship with a risky future: 'I could not marry for the sake of marriage. But I guess I could be like this in the end. But I may feel not

suitable after getting married and then divorced. After that I find another one, who suits my character and can be with me for a lifelong relationship.'

Chenxue's expressions tended to suggest a patriarchal dominance, in which women are sometimes seen as the love objects of men and this 'love' may only happen up to a certain age. This can be connected with a traditional dating pattern of men preferring younger, smaller and less well-educated partners (Buss 1989; Higgins and Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Pierce 1996). The term 'leftover women' reflects gendered inequality towards a specific group of females, who approach or have passed their thirties. Compared with males from the same age group, 'leftover women' are often seen as undesirable by men and face more pressure to marry from their original families and social customs (Fincher 2014; Magistad 2013; To 2015; Wang and Nehring 2014). In other words, the modern Chinese family, which facilitates the self-centred values in a nuclear family culture (Fowler et al. 2010), has a dual influence on Chinese youth, as it still influences the marital status of some respondents from the younger generation and is likely to reinforce traditionally gendered stereotypes in an arranged marriage.

According to Wang (2013), a flash marriage may sometimes lead to a relatively short-term marital relationship, and flash divorces (闪离, Shan Li) have been increasingly observed among Chinese youth from the OCP generation. As two people may not meet up very often and not get to know each other very well before getting married, a flash marriage, which is sometimes not thoroughly considered by both sides, may lead to quarrels over small things in daily life or even a divorce (Li 2012; Qu 2014; Wang 2013). For example, Xiaobei argued that some people may find their partners 'different' from the person they dated before getting married, and they cannot 'live a happy life' with their spouses any more. Alongside this, Li (2012) argues that, nowadays, young people in China often develop more individualized attitudes towards divorce and traditional marriage ethics, which are closely connected with collective family values, and that stability, in terms of a lifelong marital bond, may have been impacted. With the simplification of divorce procedures since the second Marriage Law in 1980, which stipulates that people can divorce if their emotional attachment is broken (Li 2012), the divorce rate in China has been dramatically increasing from 2.5 per cent in 1979 to 36.7 per cent in 2002 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC 2007). The further simplification of divorce procedures in the Marriage Law in 2003 may be a possible reason for the flash divorce (Miller and Fang 2012; Palmer 2007).

The growing number of flash marriage and flash divorce disputes among the post-80 s in Beijing suggests that long-term relationships have become more and more difficult to achieve by members of the OCP generation (Wang 2013). According to Xu and Ye (2002), around 50 per cent of urban couples experience divorce within seven years of their marriage, personality clashes and economic disputes being the two main causes of marriage dissolution (Miller and Fang 2012; Xu et al. 2007). As the only children in their families, the OCP generation are sometimes described as a 'spoiled generation' (Mooney 2005), who grew up in a child-centred familial environment and obtained most resources and attention from their parents (Fong 2006; Fowler et al. 2010; Lau and Yeung 1996; Wang et al. 2000; Xu et al. 2007). The OCP children may get used to being taken care of by their parents and embrace a sense of self-importance in family life (Chen et al. 2000; Fang 2008; Miller and Zhao 2008). Hence, it is likely that partners from the OCP generation may face difficulty in sustaining a relatively equal relationship in a new environment after they establish their own families and may have mixed feelings towards mutual commitment in a marital bond.

Specifically, by exhibiting more self-centred values as regards family life (Chen 1985; Falbo et al. 1989; Yan 2009), members of the OCP generation are likely to neglect the other side's needs or be reluctant to offer practical care towards their partners in everyday situations. For instance, when faced with all kinds of housework, some of my respondents from the OCP generation, who did not do much housework in their original families, were unwilling to take on more housework after getting married. Sometimes, ambivalent feelings on the part of the OCP children towards selfhood and relationships are observed, which suggests that, although a romantic relationship is often seen as a precondition for young people's happiness, a personal bond may be a barrier to their self-fulfilment.

Although people often have more tolerant attitudes towards love and sexual matters such as divorce (Farrer 2002; Farrer and Sun 2003), divorce is at times seen as a barrier for people, especially the female side, in starting a new relationship. For example, Wang Rui, a 30-year-old man born in Beijing, had worked in the financial industry for six years. Rui was in a relationship and said he would be cautious as regards the marital bond, as the first marriage is very important to young people. Rui argued that, generally, Chinese men do not want to have a divorced woman as their partner, as a divorced woman could be 'worthless' and is like something 'expired, not fresh any more' to him. However, Rui suggested that divorce

sometimes could be a different experience for a man, as there is a saying that a man divorced once could be 'a treasure', who would know how to sustain a marital tie and spoil his wife. This became apparent in the conversation with Wu Wenze, a 26-year-old man from Beijing, who had three years' working experience in the financial industry. Wenze argued that divorce generally becomes a barrier for women to remarry, as they have fewer choices than other women without an experience of divorce. Wenze suggested that single mothers with a child could live a 'miserable' life and it would be more difficult for them to approach a new relationship than those divorced women without children. The gendered difference towards the issue of divorce is likely to reinforce the traditional gender roles in a patriarchal family, in which women are assigned an inferior position to their husbands and assessed by their chastity and fertility (Breiner 1992; Higgins et al. 2002).

Moreover, this gendered difference may be connected with various considerations in the partner-choosing process as, following personality, Chinese men tend to pay more attention to the appearance of a potential partner, while Chinese women are inclined to attach more importance to the economic conditions of the other side (Higgins et al. 2002; Zhao 2002). For people in their thirties and forties, it is likely that a woman may have fewer suitors compared to some younger women, while a man could have accumulated more material wealth than some younger men. This gendered and aged stereotype is likely to reflect the inequality in the dating market, as Wang and Nehring (2014) argue that a single man over 30 may be seen as a 'golden bachelor' (黄金王老五, Huang Jin Wang Lao Wu), while a single woman of the same age is often labelled a 'leftover woman'. This understanding of gendered practice in personal relationships tends to reinforce the scripts of the traditional patriarchal family, in which women took an inferior role compared with their male counterparts (Breiner 1992; Higgins et al. 2002; Pateman 1984, p. 78; Sidel 1972, p. 11; Yang 1992).

3.3 Changing Emotional Ties in an On-the-Move Identity

For some of my respondents, dating was at times seen as a more equal form of relationship for both men and women in contemporary China, in which they could enjoy romantic love and have more choices to find

a suitable partner. Marriage was often seen as a more stable form of intimacy being related to a traditional lifelong companionship. Although my participants often held a more tolerant attitude towards the phenomenon of divorce, it may cause impediments for people, especially for women, to start a new relationship. On the other hand, with the phenomenon of flash divorce and the rising divorce rate among Chinese youth in the post-reform era (Miller and Fang 2012; Tan 2010), divorce may have become a more acceptable social reality and an experience less influenced by traditional social and moral values. For instance, Tan (2010) argues, 'The decision to marry and divorce is influenced by the growing emphasis on what is beneficial to the individual – in a society that has traditionally been taught to prioritize the welfare of the collective.' A lifelong marital bond, as an ideal form of happy relationship, sometimes may not be able to fulfil the self-centred need and expectation of Chinese youth, who may tend to pursue personal happiness via divorce.

For some other interviewees, true love, a serious relationship or marriage did not necessarily mean a lifelong relationship and was not linked with an unknown future. Born in Tianjin, Du Kewei, a 27-year-old female marketing planner, had worked in Beijing for five years. Kewei attached great importance to emotional attachment in a relationship:

> I think young people nowadays pay more attention to their feelings in their heart. For example, if they think that a relationship is not suitable, they wouldn't force themselves to stick to it. I think it is not a question about whether they are fickle in love or not, more self-consciousness is slowly awakening... I think a lifelong relationship is very hard to promise... Just let it be. In this era, it is hard to expect things that happened one day, how could people foresee things in 10 or 20 years' time? It is so unrealistic.
>
> *Chao:* How about the promise people make when they get married?
>
> *Kewei:* I think marriage is like in this stage they are willing to make more commitment for their common things... People want a more stable relationship between both sides, which is a sign of a more intimate relationship... In fact there are a variety of ways of living... I think monogamy is under social conditions. Once upon a time, monogamy didn't exist in matriarchal society. Monogamy didn't exist in feudal society either, while polygamy

existed in this patriarchal society. Real monogamy only exists in the last hundred years, right? So it is not human nature.

Chao: How about love? Do you think people can love someone while still be with someone else?

Kewei: Now people love someone, will they love the person ten years later? That is why I say that sometimes physical derailment rather than mental derailment is because people still love this person but they could look for a sense of freshness. At that time, it is already not a solemn pledge of love. It is likely that they think it is not fine without this person, but life is without any taste. From the cases I heard, people with artistic temperament are more likely to derail or divorce, as they actually place more emphasis on themselves. They are not much constrained by so-called social morality, as this doesn't harm anyone else. So this is not a moral problem . . . For most ordinary people, they may have more rational thinking about this. They may have some self-consciousness, but will think more about responsibility for family and social attitudes towards this, which will suppress their feelings. While for some people with artistic temperament, they would think this is their real emotion. They may divorce and get married with their new partners.

From Kewei's expressions, my participants may have conflicting desires as regards both the security of a relationship and the freedom of on-the-move personal ties, and this is likely to be linked with an individualized human relationship in a fluid modern-life setting, in which people are often desperate to 'tighten the bonds yet keep them loose' (Bauman 2003, p. vii). Bauman (2003) further argues that the traditional 'committed' and 'unbreakable' relationship may have been replaced by a more flexible network, in which 'connecting and disconnecting are equally legitimate choices, enjoy the same status and carry the same importance' (p. xii). With more individualized values as regards personal relationships (Higgins and Sun 2007; Wang and Nehring 2014), Chinese youth often embrace more freedom in being in and out of a relationship. That is to say, changing emotional attachment in modern Chinese societies may empower some of my respondents to become self-transforming subjects, who search for their identities by re-evaluating their needs and desires in personal relationships. This idea can be linked to the concept of 'pure relationship' introduced by Giddens (1992), which suggests the reflexive nature of

modern individuals, whose identity formation tends to be shaped by a reliable equal personal tie.

As Bauman (2003) argues, the nature of fulfilled love could be seen as something that emerges from a process of unawareness and becomes an important part of human lives (Bauman 2003, p. 3). For Kewei, a relationship tended to be produced in a 'natural' process, which seems not to be adapted or changed by the people themselves. As people's emotion is inclined to be in transition, the nature of love as an emotional attachment is likely to be in conflict with the formation of a stable relationship.

Facing a potentially changing emotional attachment, Kewei preferred to have a stable relationship in a more 'natural' way without forcing herself or the other side. According to Fromm (1957), a lifelong relationship often needs both sides to make a contribution and have 'true humility, courage, faith and discipline' in the other to face the unforeseen future (p. vii). This suggests that to face an uncertain fate or future, partners need to have some qualities such as being faithful towards the other side and being self-disciplined, which is inclined to represent a rational thinking towards love and relationships. On the contrary, Kewei believed that there is no need to sustain a relationship deliberately and that mutual commitment between partners should be built upon real emotions and true willingness. On one hand, with more self-centred values, it is possible that young Chinese professionals tend to search for true love and identify their real needs without considering much about traditional social and moral values. On the other hand, although Kewei believed that, in a stable relationship such as a marital bond, partners with a deep emotional attachment often tend to make more commitments in respect of their common life, for her a serious relationship is not necessarily bound up with an unpredictable future script.

Alongside this, a possibly transformative nature of true love or emotional attachment is likely to be observed. Specifically, true love can arise out of nothing and can become deeper, lighter or disappear, which may suggest that a serious personal tie may sometimes not relate to a lifelong relationship and people may have various expectations towards true love at different stages of their life. In other words, the identity of Chinese youth as regards love issues is likely to be diversified and unfinished under a fluid modern-life setting. With more liberal attitudes towards love and sexual matters and individualized desires towards personal relationships (Higgins and Sun 2007; Rofel 2007; Wang and Nehring 2014), some respondents in my sample group

tended to follow their hearts without suppressing their real emotions in relationships, which may suggest the emergence of self-centred dating ethics. This further facilitates the tendency of changing emotional ties, which to some extent could be a cause of the increasingly fragmented social bonds in contemporary Chinese society.

At the same time, Kewei expressed an ambivalent attitude towards the concept of loyalty, which is seen as an important part of the traditional morality of family life. She supported the idea that people have the right to pursue their happiness and follow their heart in matters of love, which may reflect increasingly individualized values towards personal relationships (Rofel 2007; Wang and Nehring 2014). However, she also suggested that a derailment could cause disappointment or even a breakdown of an existing relationship and be harmful to children in the family. This is likely to resonate with the idea that the traditional collective values about self-sacrifice in terms of others' needs and conforming to society are still influential in shaping interpersonal relationships in contemporary China (Higgins et al. 2002; Hsu 1985).

Some interviewees expressed the idea that Chinese youth are inclined to place more importance on their feelings in dating relationships, while they may tend to think more rationally about a marital bond. With more individualized values towards private life (Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Rofel 2007; Yan 2009, 2010a, b), Chinese young people may tend to pursue individual happiness by identifying various needs and expectations as regards different forms of intimacy, which are likely to happen at various stages of their lives. This idea is likely to be connected with an argument of Giddens (1992), who suggests that personal relationships tend to activate the self-reflexivity of modern subjects and work as a vital approach for 'self-exploration and moral construction' in modern societies (p. 144). Specifically, some participants believed that campus love is sometimes very different from relationships after graduation. For example, one of my respondents, Chen Xiaobei, a 23-year-old woman, stated that she used to think she would have a 'dramatic' relationship with someone she particularly liked while at university and then marry someone else, who liked her more than she did him, and who matched her well, leading to an 'insipid' marital tie after graduation. Alongside this, campus love is at times seen as having less connection with marriage. Another participant, Su Minzhen, an 18-year-old female university student, indicated that a relationship is a way to obtain a 'good feeling' of having someone to rely upon.

Also, some participants identified a possible relationship between dating and marriage, which are often based on different intentions. Specifically, a dating relationship is often seen as a trial process to identify people's real needs concerning personal ties and help form a relatively 'stable' marital bond later. Changing personal ties during the dating stage are likely to combine both emotional and rational considerations. Fu Zihan is a 27-year-old man born in Beijing and has been working for five years. Zihan had several different jobs before he became an office administrator. Having had three relationships before, for Zihan dating was similar to a 'job searching' process, in which people are likely not to know their needs at the very beginning, and where it is likely people might realise a job isn't suitable for them after doing it for a while. Zihan believed people often would not know what kind of person matched them well before having had a few relationships. However, regarding marriage, Zihan had a different idea, as it is often 'a one-shot deal and hard to change'.

At the same time, some participants expressed the idea that marriage nowadays is not necessarily a very different or more stable form of personal relationship than dating. With the rising divorce rate among the younger generation (Miller and Fang 2012; Tan 2010), Chinese young people in my research were more willing and more likely to follow their real emotions in relationships when facing changing emotional ties. Without much loving feeling, the rational thinking towards human bonds could become less useful in sustaining a marriage. As Wenze argued, 'Now is there any difference between a dating relationship and a marriage? A dead paper, marriage certificate protects people's property, not their emotions.' From this statement, it is likely that Chinese youth may have higher expectations for emotional attachments in a marital bond, which reflects a more complicated understanding of the reasons and emotions underpinning a relationship. The identity of young professionals in urban China may have been shaped by increasingly diversified and fragmented dating practices (Donald and Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang and Ho 2007a, b, 2011), which are likely to facilitate further more individualized values towards personal ties and loosen the close connection between marriage and a lifelong relationship.

For Kewei, although a serious emotional attachment is very important, she preferred not to have too much hope for a lifelong relationship. The expectation of a long-term relationship could have become something 'unrealistic' and less desirable in the liquid life setting that exists nowadays.

Kewei's narrative may further suggest that romantic love, which used to play a key role in people's identity formation and sustaining a long-term marital bond (Giddens 1992), may have shifted from a traditional definition of 'till death us do part', and that now Chinese youth may tend to reconstruct their identity via increasingly on-the-move personal ties. With more equal status between female and male young professionals in economic and social life (Magistad 2013), Chinese women, who traditionally sought to live a secure life via a long-term marital bond (Li 2012), are likely to embrace more choices in their private lives nowadays. A lifelong marriage may have become less important for some young women in urban China when it comes to pursuing personal happiness. Traditional femininity, which used to be closely associated with an inferior gendered role ('the virtue of a woman lies in the lack of talent', cited in Chia et al. 1997, p. 138), may have been further impacted.

3.4 Diversified Desires and Anxieties in a Postmodern Consumerist Culture

According to Bauman (2003), with possible 'promises "to be more satisfying and fulfilling"', an on-the-move personal tie, in which togetherness and separation become equally important choices, is likely to embody a sense of entitlement and freedom (p. xii, xiii). As the promise of a long-term relationship seems to become unreliable, it is possible for some people to have a mentality of enjoying the present without making any effort to envisage future scripts. Without a lifelong mutual commitment drawing upon partners, happiness in a human bond may be generated from a short-lived experience, and this may resonate with Bauman's (2003) observation on the nature of the postmodern consumerist culture, which serves 'no other purpose but pleasure and joy' (p. 46). Bauman (2003) further indicates that consumerist life codes might facilitate a lightness and speed in human bonds, in which people are likely to objectify others as commodities and evaluate them by the pleasure they offer. In addition to this, the desire to consume may make soliciting love a learnable skill and facilitate the experience of love going through a process of being used, disposed of and replaced by other 'products' (Bauman 2003).

With the popularity of speed dating, flash marriage and flash divorce (Li 2012; Wang 2013; Zhang 2005), love and relationships may sometimes become a 'commodity' for Chinese youth as well, who attempt to spend

less time and less effort to approach or sustain a personal tie. For instance, one of my respondents, a 26-year-old man working in the financial industry, Wu Wenze, argued that Chinese men 'may establish a relationship in a week or two weeks' time. Few cases may only take two to three days'. With the development of internet technology, an instant connection via online social platforms may have become a common way to operate a personal tie and this is likely to be connected with Bauman's (2003) idea about 'networks', in which 'moments of "being in touch" are interspersed with periods of free roaming' (p. xii). At the same time, a generational difference in human bonds is likely to be identified, which may resonate with Bauman's (2003) idea that a long-term relationship may have been gradually replaced by connections in a network. For example, another respondent, who had worked in the financial industry for six months pointed out that:

> People in the 1950s and 1960s delivered love letters by mail and had a very romantic and long-term relationship, which doesn't exist any more. Nowadays, people in the society all use WeChat (an online social platform) and QQ (an online chatting platform), which is very quick and a style of 'fast food' relationship. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

Alongside this, as a dominant ideology since the 1990s, consumerist culture has facilitated a process of commercialized individualization among Chinese young people, who tend to attach importance to materialistic terms of happiness and self-realization (Rosen 2004; Yan 2009, p. xxxv; Yang 2011). For instance, Rofel (2007) observes that universal consumption may have become a post-socialist technology of the Chinese women in urban China and material desire is likely to become a main part of their identity as a globalized subject. As a translocal and often transnational technology, the popular bridal photography consumption may have become a way for women in both rural and urban China to position themselves in an imagined global society since the late 1990s (Adrian 2003, 2006; Lozada 2006). Adrian (2003, 2006) further indicates that bridal photography is likely to transform marriage from a ritual event into an excuse for competitive consumption in post-reform China, which may suggest a possibility that, in some cases, material desire could become a decisive factor in relationships.

In addition to this, a comparative mentality towards personal relationships is likely to be observed, as one of my respondents, Tang Lili, a

23-year-old woman, indicated: 'She (Lili's acquaintance) will consider that, five years later, if she finds a husband like this, how her life will be. If she finds a husband like this, she may not have the life level someone else has.' From this expression, some Chinese young professionals may attach importance to the economic status of a potential partner and anticipate a certain living standard, comparing it with that of others in their social networks. This mentality tends to resonate with the idea that relationship-related consumption is likely to become a way for Chinese youth to obtain a sense of social and economic position in their personal networks (Adrian 2003, 2006).

As most participants are young professionals working in Beijing, many of them expressed their feelings about living pressures in this metropolis, with expensive commodities and especially high housing costs. To establish a more stable family and career base in the future, many interviewees believed that material wealth is an important part of an intimate relationship and, for some interviewees, the economic condition of a potential partner is an important consideration. For some young women, a house and car are necessary requirements of a potential partner, as one of my respondents, who had worked as a patent attorney for five years, argued:

> Many women think that if you want to marry me, you should have the capability to make a base for our family, which means house and car... It may not be that important for people who are above 30 years old, because they have already had some economic strength, they may not count on the other half to give her too much economic support. But for younger women, for example, 18 years old or just graduated from university, I think more than half of them still require at least that the other half has house and car. (Shen Nan, 27, woman, interview)

From the above statements, the capability of purchasing a house before marriage may have become a way of identifying a higher socio-economic status and a vital consideration in the mate-choosing process. In other words, it may sometimes become a barrier for young males with a less favourable economic status when pursuing a partner.

Simultaneously, 'naked weddings'[2] (裸婚, Luo Hun) have become a trend among young people in contemporary China (CNTV 2013). According to

[2] Naked wedding is a new term in recent years in mainland China. It means newlyweds without a house, car, diamond ring or grand wedding ceremony.

Shi (2012), a 'naked wedding' means that newlyweds obtain a marriage certificate without purchasing their own house, and may have challenged marriage customs in traditional Chinese society. By using in-depth interviews to explore the reasons for 'naked weddings' in contemporary China, Shi (2012) argues that a 'naked wedding' is often a reluctant choice for Chinese youth, who tend to form a marital bond to better sustain a trustful and intimate relationship and achieve a higher quality of their common life. The marketization process may have further entrenched inequality between the urban Chinese youth and the young rural-urban migrants who are likely to have a lower socio-economic status than the urban-urban or local youth (Lin 2013; Yang 2013). Shi (2012) further argues that people with lower social status are more likely to have a 'naked wedding'.

Although most interviewees expressed their admiration for people who have a 'naked wedding', some of them showed their concerns about it. For instance, born in Qinghe, Hebei, Le Jiahui, a 26-year-old man, has worked in the IT industry in Beijing for four years. Jiahui had been in a relationship for about six months and planned to buy a house and marry his partner, who also worked in the IT industry. Like many young professionals in Beijing, Jiahui felt great pressure as regards the housing issue, which was seen as a dominant factor determining the direction of his relationship and future development. As he explained, 'I still want to develop my career in Beijing, so I need to have a foothold, which is a motivation and a base for my development. If not, no matter how far I go, I may turn into going back to my hometown in the end.' Although the material base for marriage in a metropolis like Beijing could be very difficult to achieve, a 'naked wedding' was not a feasible option for Jiahui, who indicated that 'If people don't tighten their belts to buy a house when getting married, they may never have one afterwards'. Jiahui suggested that people having a 'naked wedding' are likely to face a tough future life, saying, 'Because they will have children and their parents will become older, the risks are too high and there will be a lot of places to use money, meaning they may never have enough savings'.

The conventional values regarding a marital base and the stress of life in modern society may further cause a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety in personal relationships. Facing changing emotional ties in an unpredictable future, it is likely that people may think in a more 'realistic' way and tend to pursue a sense of future life security via material conditions. For instance, a gap between romantic love and marriage is observed in some

interviews. Some participants attached less importance to emotional attachment, the core of romantic love, when they described their considerations towards marriage. Some others thought highly of romantic love, but also attached a set of strict requirements such as economic concerns to it, especially when marriage was taken into account.

Although many interviewees pointed out that certain material conditions are a very important base for a happy relationship, most of them indicated that an intimate emotional attachment is the key factor to sustaining their personal ties. Overevaluating material desires may sometimes bring a new sense of insecurity and frailty in human bonds. For instance, one of my respondents, Du Kewei, a 27-year-old woman, mentioned that one of her classmates in high school may have attached too much importance to the economic condition of the man she married and may have intended to ignore the predictable change and risk in their relationship. Although Kewei respected her classmate's decision, she did not hold a very positive attitude towards their relationship in the long run. As Kewei further pointed out, 'She also knows that entering their family she can't hold her man, who surely would have fun with call girls. But she is willing to do this and she wants this type of life.' Kewei indicated that young people nowadays may have 'more and more diversified and increasingly individualized' considerations towards marriage, but the cases like her classmate 'should be very few'.

Although some interview participants observed that there are people in society who have confluent interests, they usually expressed their own wishes for a lifelong relationship without disturbance of confluent love. Wu Wenze, a 26-year-old man working as a financial project manager, was one of the few interviewees who identified seemingly conflicting desires for both romantic love and confluent interests. Wenze had been in two relationships before and had been trying to date a woman for about three months. He was passionately devoted to finding true love and aimed to find lifelong companionship. Specifically, he held a very serious attitude towards romantic relationships and, for Wenze, his partner was his 'family', and they could not 'just separate at will'. At the same time, he tended to have a different understanding about love and sex:

> I love my girlfriend, then there is impossible that I love another woman, this can be called love. But I love my girlfriend, it is love, it doesn't mean that I can't have sexual relations with another woman. But I can have no love with her. I can have sex and make a thorough break with her. We can have

> nothing in between, or after having sex with her, I can just contact her when I want to or ignore her. Maybe one day my girlfriend is on a business trip, I may contact her. But when my girlfriend is with me every day, I may not contact her, or never contact her ever. (Wu Wenze, 26, man, interview)

From Wenze's example, romantic love was understood as a unique experience, needing to draw upon a special person to fulfil a lifelong trajectory. On the contrary, Wenze did not have any specific consideration as regards the other side in a confluent relationship, which may suggest that some young people are likely to objectify the other side as a disposable and replaceable 'commodity' in a confluent love. Instead of a long-term relationship, people in confluent love are likely to embrace a more casual relationship structure and consider a partner in a confluent love situation as inferior compared with a partner in a romantic relationship.

Wenze explained that dating is based on people's needs 'at a spiritual level', while sex is to fulfil their physical needs. When comparing romantic love and confluent love, Wenze believed that confluent love as a realistic desire is more necessary and easy to obtain, while a romantic relationship is more like an ideal form of personal tie, which is more difficult to achieve in modern societies:

> Spiritual needs are like that people want to eat elixir made by the very high lord, they want to live for ever. Physiological needs are like that they need to eat food to survive. Although they want to eat elixir or ginseng fruit, but it is fine if they could not eat it. However, they still need to have food to be alive. (Wu Wenze, 26, man, interview)

Wenze's idea to some extent may go against Bauman (2003), who suggests that there are increasingly romantic opportunities in a fluid modern-life setting. The confluent interest may become a possible barrier or risk for people when trying to build a romantic relationship. For instance, Wenze suggested that he could not let his future girlfriend or wife know of his desire for confluent love, as this could harm a romantic promise or a lifelong companionship. This may imply that the postmodern consumerist culture, which shapes self-centred dating ethics and multiple desires, could further cause a sense of insecurity among Chinese youth. The case of Wenze is likely to be connected with Bauman's (2003) idea that the definition of love could be polysemic in modern Chinese societies, while

people's anxiety about the changing meaning of love could be seen as part of their composite and incomplete identity.

3.5 Conclusion

Facing a growing number of romantic possibilities in urban China, young professionals are likely to draw upon more self-centred values and pursue a relationship without thinking much about Confucian morality, which may mean a long-term committed relationship is replaced by a more easily entered and exited human bond. As being connected and disconnected become equally important choices, the emergence of an on-the-move personal tie may have greatly influenced the romantic definition of love as 'till death us do part'. The postmodern consumerist culture and the development of online social platforms may facilitate more accelerated relationships, in which love experiences are likely to be built up via instant communication in a network.

Moreover, as a new avenue for people to identify true love and fulfil their desires, being on the move may embody a sense of freedom and may further suggest a possible dislocation between love and marriage, sex and love. A lifelong marriage, as a traditional unitary form of intimacy, is still seen as a common way for young people in China to structure their intimate life and pursue individual happiness. However, with diversified desires when it comes to love and relationships, fulfilled love may have become more difficult to define and a fluid modern-life setting is likely to trigger new anxieties and insecurities, reflecting the incomplete identity of Chinese youth.

Recommended Readings

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CHAPTER 4

Relationship Ethics

A happy relationship is often seen as an important part of personal happiness for young people nowadays. According to Ahmed (2010), happiness is greatly associated with ethics (p. 205). Specifically, a happy life is often built upon a collective moral good, which defines personal happiness as dependent on a virtuous self (Ahmed 2010, pp. 205, 208; Smith 2000, p. 410). According to Fortune (1995), ethics is greatly associated with 'a choice between right and wrong', which further guides people's behaviours, while morality is often linked with a shared understanding among a group of people (p. 19). Compared to previous generations, young professionals in China nowadays are less influenced by traditional Confucian morality and, instead, a more individualized ethics has started to be observed in various forms of relationships (Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Wang 2006; Yan 2003, 2009, 2010a, b). For instance, according to Wang and Nehring (2014), dating practices in Beijing have become more complex than traditional lifelong heterosexual relationships used to be and various forms of relationship, including multiple relationships, triangular relationships, extramarital relationships, one-night stands and homosexual relationships, have been increasingly observed (Donald and Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang and Ho 2007a, b, 2011). The changing social norms pertaining to personal relationships tend to reflect a changing morality in relation to personal happiness. As Ahmed (2010) argues, rather than pursuing a certain mode of happy life, the understanding of happiness should embrace creative subjectivity and the possibility of living diversified

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lives (pp. 218–219). Hence, the changing ethics as regards dating and relationships becomes a vital site to examine the changing identity construction of Chinese youth in respect of love and intimacy in the post-reform era.

Influenced by Ahmed's (2010) interpretation of happiness, this chapter intends to explore the values and strategies of young Chinese professionals towards the fulfilment of expectations and desires in various dating practices and relationships, which reflects the changing relationship ethics of Chinese young people in the post-reform era. By drawing upon the concept of 'the genealogy of morals' (Nietzsche 1956), this chapter intends to examine the relationship ethics of young people in urban China by focusing on their understanding of traditional morality and more recent ethical values in personal relationships. Specifically, section one seeks to explore young people's understanding of traditional Confucian and socialist morality and how these values help in approaching and sustaining a lifelong relationship, which has been the dominant social norm since the pre-reform era. Then, section two looks at the phenomena of premarital and extramarital relationships, which likely reflect new desires and expectations outside the ties of marriage and further challenge traditional moral values concerning a monogamous lifelong marriage. Finally, section three intends to examine young professionals' understanding of diversified forms of relationships such as multiple relationships and short-term relationships, which are likely to reflect the emergence of a new relationship ethics greatly linked with the more recent non-marital dating practices in urban China.

4.1 Understanding Traditional Morality as Relating to Lifelong Marriage

As discussed in the previous chapters, a society more and more characterized by separation and divorce can be observed in the post-reform era. However, for most of my interview participants from the young generation, a lifelong marital tie was often seen as an important constituent and/or path towards personal happiness, which aligns with the argument that marriage often leads to a happy life by providing 'life satisfaction, sex, children and financial benefits' (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 229; Waite and Gallagher 2001). Thus, this section intends to examine how young Chinese professionals sustain a lifelong relationship by focusing on their

understanding of how traditional morality relates to the maintenance of a happy marriage, in areas such as giving care, responsibility, long-term commitment, faithfulness, trust and honesty, all of which originated from Confucian and socialist collective family values.

4.1.1 Responsibility and Loyalty in Relationships

Marriage is often connected with a collective form of happiness – the happy family. As one of my respondents argued:

> Parents set the best example to define a happy and harmonious family. Parents are still married and have a good relationship with grandparents and other relatives. To understand happiness in this type of family, young people could just follow their parents' example... It must be a feeling of a lifelong relationship. (Le Jiahui, 26, man, interview)

The above understanding of a lifelong marriage stands for the functioning of a happy family, which resonates with Colwin's (1982) description of an understanding of marriage as 'based on family, on the creation of family, on keeping family together, on family events, circumstances, occasions, celebrations' (p. 194). The parents' generation is seen to carry on the meaning of 'happy family' and become a template for the understanding of the traditional collective family values, which, to some extent, have influenced young Chinese professionals. This understanding of happiness in relation to a lifelong marriage, as Ahmed (2010) argues, is aligned with the sense of comfortable repetition of a certain type of living (p. 48).

Some other respondents believed that a sense of responsibility towards familial life is the foundation of a lifelong harmonious marriage, which may resonate with a traditional understanding of marital love as 'favour and gratitude between husband and wife' (Pan 2006a, p. 31; Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 19). According to Pan (2006a), the meaning of romantic love was built on the matchmaking principles of 'talented men and beautiful women' after the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), and the Western values of pure love since the early twentieth century (McMahon 1995; Pan 2006a, p. 31). As greatly associated with a deep emotional attachment between partners, romantic love is likely to differ from the traditional understanding of love, which was often seen as subordinate to a marital tie in traditional Chinese society (Pan 2006a, p. 31). The meaning of romantic love may partly overlap with the concept of passionate love, which was seen by some

of my interview participants as an intense and transitory emotional attachment. For example, one of my respondents indicated that:

> It is very hard for people to control passionate love. When it enters into an insipid period, partners have to sustain an insipid feeling and it is likely for them to break up. If partners always keep a state of passionate love, it is likely that they would neglect other things. If this relationship fails in the end, they may have nothing left. If they let it become insipid smoothly, it is likely that they may separate as the time being together reduces. (Fan Fang, 27, woman, interview)

This statement may resonate with a traditional Chinese understanding of passionate love as a negative emotion, which is often linked with dissatisfaction in personal relationships (Shaver et al. 1991). It may suggest a changing nature of romantic love, which makes a long-term relationship difficult to sustain. Romantic love is often seen as an important emotional foundation for a lifelong relationship, while it may also enable a greater freedom for the self-managing Chinese youth to make relationship-related choices when facing emotional change.

Building on the possibly changing nature of love and romance, Mendus (2000) critically discusses the works of enlightenment philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Immanuel Kant, and introduces a moralized form of love in which passionate love is transformed into a more stable affection based on reason (pp. 2–3). According to Mendus (2000), the moralization of emotion, which combines love with moral obligations, is a foundation for the marital commitment of a lifelong relationship (p. 6). An example of moralizing emotion can be seen in members of the parents' generation, whose dating and relationship-related values were greatly shaped by Confucian morality; for most members of this generation, a lifelong marriage is a widely accepted and desirable social norm (for more details, see Chapter 5).

For many participants from the younger generation, moral qualities, including faithfulness and a sense of responsibility towards marital life, were a vital foundation for stable marriage and thus were often seen as an important consideration when choosing a partner, especially a spouse. For instance, responsibility is at times seen as an important factor in transforming a romantic personal tie into a kinship tie and fulfilling a lifelong commitment. One of my respondents argued that:

> Love would disappear after a few years, which is different from kinship ties. As blood is thicker than water, kinship ties last for ever. But relationships are

> in transition, from friendship to love to kinship. Love surely still exists between two people, but it is more about responsibility to family. That's why people need to make a good choice at the very beginning and need to see whether this person is responsible or not. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

Some interview participants believed that responsibility involves rational and ethical thinking about family life, which could be linked with Mendus's (2000) argument in relation to the moralization of love. Specifically, a sense of responsibility is seen as playing a more important role than a short-lived passionate emotional attachment in sustaining a long-term relationship. As Zixi argued, if a romantic emotional tie disappeared in marriage, responsibility would help maintain marital faithfulness within a friendship and/or kinship tie. For some of my participants, responsibility was seen as a solution to possible emotional change in relationships.

Alongside this, different moral principles are likely to be observed and, for Chinese youth, responsibility and long-term commitment are often seen as more important in marriage than in dating relationships. For instance, one of my interviewees, Fu Zihan, a 27-year-old man, indicated that 'Dating is to know, to test and feel. Marriage is responsibility. The former is a basis and condition, while the latter needs to be sustained and to be stable'. From this example, dating practices are often seen as based on an emotional attachment, which involves greater individual freedom within a more flexible form of relationship. Dating relationships are also seen as a testing period for the sustainability of a successful marriage, which combines moral obligations with a lifelong marital commitment. While marriage is understood as a moralized form of relationship, dating relationships are sometimes seen as devaluing moral values. Likewise, another respondent stated that:

> People could indulge their feelings or hurt other people in dating relationships. But it is impossible for them to do this after getting married. Two married people need to maintain this relationship very carefully till the end. If they do not do this, more than 50–60 per cent divorce rate would be the result. (Sun Chenxue, 28, woman, interview)

For my interview participants, love and romance were at times seen as emotions not naturally connected with lifelong relationships. Zihan and Chenxue's statements may further resonate with Mendus's (2000)

argument that a lifelong commitment is often shaped by a legalized and moralized marriage contract.

Furthermore, compared to previous generations, a changing understanding of moral values is observed among Chinese youth, who sometimes draw upon traditional marital ethics as a relationship-maintaining technology rather than a strict moral law. Conventional morality is likely to become a way for young people to develop their subjectivity in terms of personal relationships. For instance, true willingness and intention are often seen as a basis for the responsibility and loyalty in marital life. As one of my respondents remarked:

> If a person is asked to be loyal without any conditions, it is very likely to be a blind loyalty. It is like the relationship between minister and emperor. The emperor asks the minister to die, the minister has to die. Two partners in a dating relationship do not need this kind of loyalty . . . As they have no relations, they are two natural persons in society. They need to be responsible for each other and the parents from both sides. Admiration and common interests may help build their relationship. But it is possible that one day they do not admire each other or have similar interests, so they need to have an awareness of crisis . . . As long as two people can maintain this relationship and operate this well, this loyalty is naturally generated, which is spotted by other people. (Le Jiahui, 26, man, interview)

The above example may connote a new understanding of the Confucian concept of loyalty, which, as Farrer and Sun (2003) indicate, has transformed from an authoritarian principle into an externalized moral resource for young people to draw upon in their personal relationships. Traditional moral values are likely to become a way for young professionals to develop personal rules towards dating and relationships. For instance, in a study about extramarital relationships in Shanghai, Farrer and Sun (2003) observe that Chinese people intend to use rhetorical skills to invent a new moral discourse to explain their extramarital behaviours. Alongside this, loyalty is sometimes seen as the natural result of a successfully operating romantic relationship, which may imply an idea of self-management in relation to an emotional attachment. This is likely to resonate with the traditional Chinese concept of 'Jing Ying' (operation), which was used to describe a way of running a business over the long haul and further implies the operation of a marital relationship. This phrase may involve a metaphor suggesting that sustaining a relationship is based more on management skills than moral obligations.

Another interview participant demonstrated a new understanding of responsibility as regards marital life, indicating that:

> People nowadays all relatively know about themselves and are more likely to pursue things that they want... If they already come to the step of divorce, why don't they still sustain their marriage reluctantly? I think this is not very good and not responsible for their family, family members and their children. (Bai Caijie, 30, woman, interview)

Jiahui and Caijie's comments resonate with a negotiable understanding of the traditional marital commitment, which tends to prioritize a sense of individual choice within an obligatory contract (Finch 1989; Finch and Mason 1993; Weeks 2007, p. 170). As a key component of people's attitude towards love and relationships, the understanding of marital faithfulness is at times seen to imply various choices when facing emotional or other changes in marriage. For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

> People can only resist many temptations if they are loyal... Nowadays people in dating relationships or even married couples may face all kinds of temptations or tough tests. For example, they may live in poverty or not that successful life and it is likely that there are some suitable potential partners around... Actually, my classmates told me a saying that 'sometimes the reason for a man not betraying is because the cost is pretty high or the opportunity costs'... But I think it is not totally like this, as it is not just a comparison about benefits. It is more about people's attitude towards marriage or love. For example, if I betrayed my partner to marry a woman with house and car, I would think whether this is the thing I really want. (Zhou Jun, 29, man, interview)

In the case of Jun, loyalty was seen as an important moral principle as regards personal relationships, which become the main site for young professionals to identify their real needs and desires. Rather than being an externalized moral resource and/or the natural result of a successful relationship, loyalty is understood as an internalized moral value guiding young people's relationship-approaching and maintaining strategies.

Although some respondents demonstrated a traditional understanding of loyalty as a precondition of love and relationships, a crisis in relation to traditional morality in the context of a fluid modern life is observed, which has facilitated increasing romantic and confluent

possibilities and impacted upon the stability of personal relationships. As another interview participant indicated:

> Loyalty is very important, but I think everyone lies. For example, a man has a girlfriend and they love each other very much. But this man has sex with another woman in an unexpected situation. Do you think he should tell his girlfriend or not? . . . I think he should tell, as small lies would not be discovered, but big lies would be discovered sometime. But it is very hard to tell. (Zheng Anchi, 24, man, interview)

The above example suggests that the traditional Confucian and socialist moral values are at times not able to deal with the emerging phenomenon of casual sex among young professionals. For example, a young man involved in an occasional sexual relation may face a moral dilemma about whether to confess to his partner or not. This tends to resonate with the idea that the increasing romantic possibilities in a liquid modern-life setting are likely to trigger uncertainty towards personal relationships (Bauman 2003), which can cause moral anxieties among young people.

Loyalty towards marriage, which used to be a sacred moral law obeyed by the members of the parents' generation, is sometimes seen as a less rigorous principle for Chinese youth in post-Mao Chinat:

> Loyalty is a principle, but it does not mean that people cannot make mistakes. It is acceptable if the other side derails occasionally. As a marital bond lasts such a long time, it is unavoidable for people to fall in love with someone else, but it would be fine as long as he chooses to come back. Making mistake should be allowed, but he cannot stick to it . . . I can also make mistakes. But likewise, I need to make a choice whether to stick to the mistake or come back. This is fair towards both sides. (Guo Zhenzhen, 28, woman, interview)

Zhenzhen's statement may suggest a changing understanding of romantic exclusivity within a marital tie, which aligns with the argument that some flexible elements are likely to reshape the ideal form of marriage (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 232). Anchi and Zhenzhen's statements imply the limitation of traditional moral concepts when it comes to interpreting emerging dating and relationship practices, which are inclined to facilitate a new relationship ethics among the urban youth.

4.1.2 Development of Relationship-Sustaining Strategies

As discussed in the previous subsection, my respondents often expressed individualized understandings of traditional moral values such as responsibility and marital faithfulness, which are at times seen as external resources rather than a strict moral law for maintaining romantic relationships. In addition to these moral and legal obligations in a marriage, Chinese youth tend to develop a set of strategies to sustain long-term relationships. Specifically, some participants believed that generating fresh feelings is important in maintaining a romantic and passionate relationship, which may suggest that emotional attachment can be refreshed and strengthened. For example, one of my respondents pointed out that:

> Some fresh feeling is necessary. Don't they say that there would be 'the seven-year itch' or after being with someone for more than 20 years, people would feel their partners both familiar and unfamiliar with no more passion? So after a long time, people perhaps can make some surprises. For example, look for common hobbies or things that haven't been done for various reasons, go somewhere to have fun, deliberately plan these kinds of opportunities to be together, which can let two people feel good and add a bit of seasoning to an insipid life. (Shen Nan, 27, woman, interview)

Nan's statement may resonate with the definition of romantic love as based on mutual disclosure in a shared life trajectory (Giddens 1992). Giddens (1992) emphasizes the self-reflecting nature of romance and intimacy, which is seen as an important site for the modern subject's identity construction. Specifically, by identifying and/or creating common interests and building them into a mutual life decision, partners are likely to draw upon some flexible elements, which can make a difference in the daily routine from time to time and help sustain passions within a romantic emotional attachment. This relationship-maintaining strategy is likely to reflect an ethics of care in relation to the other side's needs and expectations.

Giving care is often seen as a vital factor in maintaining a personal relationship, which aligns with some empirical research suggesting that practical care is important for successful heterosexual relationships (Jamieson 1999). For example, one of my respondents, Wu Wenze, a 26-year-old man, argued: 'Give care. No matter what people do, they should do it attentively. Dating needs a more diligent manner than most other things.' Likewise, another interview participant remarked that:

> People should remember their partner in their heart attentively and take her seriously. When they have time, they should meet up and have fun together such as eating together. For example, when my partner is tired after work, I would go and pick her up. It is all about small things. (Sun Yi, 24, man, interview)

From Wenze and Yi's statements, the ethics of care may have become dislocated from traditional femininity, in which women were seen to take the main role in providing care, taking on the emotional work in relationships and family life (Jackson and Scott 1997, p. 567). Instead, as Jamieson (1999) indicates, mutual care between partners is often seen as an important way to sustain a relationship. For instance, another interview participant indicated that:

> A relationship is like a boat, which needs two oars to paddle together to make it move. If only one oar works, the boat would only move in circles. Only when two oars work together, the boat can move fast towards a long distance. This needs mutual understanding and tolerance from both sides. She can help with my defects and I can help with hers. (Wang Hong, 23, man, interview)

Compared to previous generations, a changing ethics of care can be observed in the personal relationships of young people in post-reform China. According to Higgins et al. (2002), although the introduction of the 1950 Marriage Law provided a legal foundation for equal rights between the sexes, Chinese women often took an inferior role to their husbands in family life and were assessed by their housekeeping and child-rearing ability. As practical care was expected to be provided by women to other family members, the female side often needed to make great efforts to sustain the marital tie and family network (Rosen 1992). This resonates with a feminist understanding of the marriage contract, which is seen to facilitate pre-scripted gender inequality with the 'consent to the patriarchally ascribed status of superior husband and subordinate wife' (Pateman 1984, p. 78). This is also likely to align with a gendered difference identified in moral theories, in which men are seen as rational and independent beings following the ethics of rights and justice, while women are often seen as emotional and relational beings shaped by the morality of care and nurturance (Gilligan 1982, pp. 159–160; Kittay and Meyers 1987, p. 10).

As a main relationship-maintaining strategy, an ethics of mutual care may emphasize a two-way emotional communication in dating and relationships among Chinese youth in the post-reform era. As one of my respondents stated:

> Dating is a process for two people to get to know each other's personality and so on. For example, he doesn't pick her up. He may think this is not a big problem, but she may think that he surely does not care about her. So it's necessary to communicate and sustain in this situation. (Xia Kai, 29, man, interview)

Moreover, the ethics of mutual care may resonate with rising gender power among young female professionals, who have shifted from main care provider to the dual role of care provider and receiver in relationships. Specifically, women's needs and expectations have been given increasing importance in personal relationships. Compared to some studies in the 1990s, which suggest an inferior role closely associated with housekeeping and child-rearing (Rosen 1992; Zhang 1999; Zhu 1994, p. 183), a transformation of the traditional female gender role can be observed in the past two decades. The ethics of mutual care not only suggests a more equal relationship between heterosexual partners, but may also reflect the traditional feminine characteristics of personal relationships, in which partners, especially the male side, tend to recognize and pay more attention to the other side's emotional and practical needs and expectations.

To sum up, by examining the various understandings and attitudes of Chinese youth towards traditional Confucian and socialist moral concepts such as loyalty, responsibility and care, a more individualized relationship ethics was observed among my participants. Specifically, compared to the previous generations, responsibility and marital faithfulness are interpreted as less restricted moral principles and are at times seen as external moral resources for the self-managing subjects to draw upon as relationship-maintaining strategies. Confucian and socialist values are at times seen as a traditional moral text inviting new interpretations and thus tend to be a way for young people to develop personal rules towards love and relationships. For instance, the changing ethics of care, which has started to emphasize mutual care and understanding between partners, is often seen as shifting the traditional female role as care providers and may further suggest changing gendered practices in relationships. Furthermore, by drawing upon new interpretations, which see traditional

morality as a relationship-saving strategy rather than an internalized moral guide to personal relationships, young people may embrace increasing flexibility and individual freedom, while at the same time facing more challenges to the stability of their relationships.

4.2 Changing Morality towards Premarital and Extramarital Relationships

In the previous section, ethics in relation to a lifelong marital relationship was discussed. Under a fluid modern-life setting, my respondents tended to draw upon traditional moral values as well as some relationship-saving strategies to maintain a lifelong marriage. Alongside this, a crisis of Confucian and socialist morality is likely to be examined, which is sometimes seen as not being able to explain increasingly diversified dating and relationship practices. Hence, this section seeks to explore changing relationship ethics by looking at young people's attitudes towards premarital and extramarital relationships, which may further suggest a changing understanding of personal happiness in the post-reform era.

According to Ahmed (2010), 'Happiness is consistently described as the object of human desire, as being what we aim for, as being what gives purpose, meaning and order to human life' (p. 1). Happiness is thus often linked with a moral and meaningful human life, as Adam Smith (2000, p. 410) argues that the operation of a virtuous life is a successful path to personal happiness. By following the traditional Confucian and socialist morality, a lifelong monogamous relationship is often seen as the ideal form of fulfilled relationship, greatly associated with happiness within a future life trajectory. According to one of my respondents:

> When I entered into a marriage, I would feel that he is my husband and I may feel that he is my family ten years later. In this process, he would be part of my life. My parents may pass away someday and my children may grow up and marry. He would be the one who accompanies me to the end of my life. So I would feel that I need to sustain a relationship with this only person who would accompany me to the end. (Tang Lili, 23, woman, interview)

With the emergence of various forms of dating and relationships in post-reform China, a more tolerant relationship ethics was likely to be accepted by the young people in my sample group. As discussed in the previous chapters, premarital sex and cohabitation are gaining wider acceptance

among Chinese youth and extramarital relationships, observed in the post-reform era (Farrer 2002; Farrer and Sun 2003; Pan 1993, Zhang et al. 2004), are likely to reflect changing sexual norms in dating and relationships. As Ben-Ze'ev (2004) argues, a sexual revolution is identified, in which premarital and non-marital sexual practices tend to challenge the traditional social norm of sexual monopoly within a marital tie (p. 242). Marriage, which used to be closely associated with personal happiness, may have become a less unique and dominant form of relationship.

4.2.1 Changing Sexual Norms in Premarital Relationships

With the increasing popularity of cohabitation among Chinese youth, premarital sex, which used to be a social taboo for the members of the parents' generation, may have become more morally acceptable (Burton 1990; Farrer 2002; Yan 2003). The purpose of cohabitation is often understood as associated with a legalized form of relationship – marriage. As one of my respondents commented:

> As young people in a passionate dating relationship want to have an intimate relationship with the other half, cohabitation is a good way for them to know each other . . . Now premarital cohabitation is not universally accepted. Many parents think that the premise of cohabitation is a legal marriage, but I personally support premarital cohabitation, namely a trial marriage, which in a way can relatively reduce the divorce rate. (Fu Zihan, 27, man, interview)

For Zihan, cohabitation was seen as a process of getting to know the other half, which connotes a self-reflexive avoidance of potential risk in future married life. Hence, rather than drawing upon traditional mechanisms of relationship making, which emphasized proximity and kinship ties, nowadays the stability of young people' relationships depends on their understanding of and familiarity with the other party. That is to say, cohabitation becomes a site to test and develop young professionals' relationship-managing skills prior to a lifelong marriage. It is seen as the pre-stage of a more stable marital relationship. This opposes the argument that the experience of cohabitation will bring a lesser degree of commitment and a more flexible nature into the marital bond (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 233).

Some interview participants believed that cohabitation is a test period for a more committed relationship – a lifelong marriage. Cohabitation is understood as a premarital practice. As another interview participant stated:

> Many people have a trial marriage or cohabit before getting married to see if they can get along well with their partners . . . It is quite normal for people to have premarital sex. Sexual life is a standard for people's future marital life. If their sexual life is not happy, two people may not marry happily, as it is a part of their life, at least a part of their night life. Why do they have a trial marriage? If a man, for example, has some problem like sterility, the female side may not be able to have a child in the future. How could a woman not mind about this? (Tang Lili, 23, woman, interview)

From the above example, the popularity of cohabitation is likely to connote a shopping metaphor in the modern commodity culture – trying before buying. Young people may have a mentality that objectifies a potential partner as a product. Premarital sex is likely to become an important aspect for young professionals in testing the suitability of their partners for future life, which implies the centrality of sexual health and fulfillment in personal relationships. Premarital sexuality is seen as an important site to test the reprosexuality of the other side, which, as Warner (1991) argues, refers to 'the interweaving of heterosexuality, biological reproduction, cultural reproduction, and personal identity' (p. 9). At the same time, premarital sexuality, emphasizing sexual pleasure and satisfaction, is sometimes seen as a move away from the procreation purpose of traditional conjugal ties. This understanding of premarital sex may suggest that young people tend to attach more importance to good sex, which is likely to become a contemporary criterion for a happy marital tie.

Some respondents believed that the premise of cohabitation is a mature relationship, often with an expectation of marriage, which may resonate with the argument that premarital sex is most likely to happen between future spouses (Pan 1993). For instance, one of my respondents remarked that:

> Cohabitation without aiming for marriage is not responsible for both sides . . . If the female side is pregnant, will she have the baby? Will they stop cohabitating at a certain age or get married at a certain point in time? . . . Parents will also worry whether they are going to have a baby or not. This seems not to be serious or reliable. The aim of cohabitation should be marriage. (Tang Lili, 23, woman, interview)

The above statement is likely to imply that cohabitation is a transition period to a traditional Chinese relationship. Chinese youth sometimes see cohabitation as a moralized relationship by linking it to a lifelong marriage, which may suggest that traditional morality, to some extent, has shaped the understanding of Chinese youth as regards new forms of relationships.

With the popularity of cohabitation without a marriage licence, marriage as a form of legalized relationship is likely to become less dominant among young people. Some interview participants predicted that cohabitation would further evolve from a morally accepted relationship to a legalized relationship. As one of my interview participants suggested:

> As the society has developed, cohabitation is not illegal ... In fact, people's morality could not accept this at that time. They stood at the highest point of morality and blamed other people who cohabitated without a marriage licence as being very dirty. Now this will not happen, as people's morality accepts this ... Gradually, people will think cohabitation is the same as a de-facto marriage, which means that although two people do not have a marriage certificate protected by law, all their friends and social relations recognize that they are a couple ... If a person has a stable partner, then this is a de-facto marriage, which is no different from marriage ... Marriage law is to protect people's property, tax and health care, which is an action of the state to protect marital relationships. De-facto marriage is also protected, although it is not certified. (Le Jiahui, 26, man, interview)

For Jiahui, cohabitation was likely to function as a de-facto marriage, which was seen as an alternative choice for young professionals in structuring their personal relationships. Some young people intend to seek legal procedures to protect their rights in cohabitating relationships, which may suggest that the current marriage law is at times seen as incapable of responding to the increasingly diversified relationships among urban Chinese youth.

Cohabitation is at times seen as independent from marriage, as a non-marital relationship rather than a premarital relationship, as one of my respondents argued:

> One of my male colleagues has been in relationships for about 10 years and changed three partners ... It is said that he loved each of them with his heart and soul from the beginning to the end, including his current girlfriend. Now their relationship is very stable, but he does not have any plan for

> marriage. Neither does his girlfriend. They may be really a new type of people . . . His girlfriend may have at least three months on business trips (every year). She is also a particularly independent and capable woman . . . He may feel that he does not need to take marriage as a premise to rely on a person. They may think that they are in a dating relationship, so there is someone to take care of them, which seems to be no different from marriage. I mean from the benefit angle . . . If they got married, there would be another responsibility (*laugh*), which would also add a constraint to their relationship. I think he may just want to gain the benefit, but does not want to take those responsibilities . . . (Shen Nan, 27, woman, interview)

For Nan, her colleague belonged to 'a new type of people', who may intend to pursue happiness in a more flexible and uncertain relationship. Cohabitation is seen as a relatively stable form of relationship, which, like marriage, embraces a sense of stability, while on the other hand being seen as less restricted by traditional moral values such as responsibility towards the other side. So cohabitation is likely to become an alternative to marital ties for some Chinese youth, who may hold a new identity as regards personal relationships. As Ben-Ze'ev (2004) indicates, cohabitation often includes the benefits of a marital tie, in which partners embrace a convenient mutual care, 'increased sexual access, and lower financial costs and risks' (p. 232). Compared to marriage, cohabitation is seen as a less committed relationship and often embraces greater change in personal ties (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 233). The more independent position of the female side in the cohabitation could be observed, which may align with Ben-Ze'ev's (2004) argument that cohabitors tend to reject the restrictions of traditional gender roles and value independence, rather than interdependence, in a marital relationship (p. 233). However, when understood as a non-marital relationship, cohabitation is sometimes seen as less morally acceptable among Chinese youth.

Furthermore, the popularity of cohabitation among young Chinese professionals in big cities may suggest a changing understanding of what makes a happy relationship. According to Mendus (2000), marriage vows imply an unconditional commitment towards lifelong companionship (p. 79). If marriage is a legal contract ensuring a meaningful future life, cohabitation is likely to be an arrangement with a conditional promise, which embraces more freedom and greater change within the personal tie. When cohabitation is intended as a trial or pre-stage en route to a marital tie, it is seen to have a transforming

nature, its purpose to prepare for a future marital life. When it is not seen as leading to marriage, it tends to offer both stability and flexibility within a personal relationship, which is likely to become an alternative choice to marriage.

Like premarital relationships, extramarital relationships are increasingly observed in reform China. For instance, in a survey about extramarital sex among urban residents between 1988 and 1990, Zha and Geng (1992) argue that about 29 per cent of married men and 23 per cent of married women have engaged in extramarital sex (p. 13). Being in opposition with traditional moral values, which advocate monogamous lifelong marriage, extramarital love was often highly disapproved of by urban youth (Wiederman 1997; Zha and Geng 1992). In the next subsection, young people's attitudes to and interpretations of extramarital relationships are discussed, which may imply a changing understanding of relationship ethics as regards marriage.

4.2.2 A Changing Morality towards Extramarital Relationships

Compared to a lifelong marital bond, cohabitation is often seen as containing emotional intensity as well as greater freedom for an emotional change within a short period of time (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 233), which to some extent prioritizes a temporary form of personal happiness. This understanding of cohabitation is likely to resonate with Layard's (2005) definition of happiness as a sense of joyful feeling (p. 6). As Schoch (2006) indicates in *The Secrets of Happiness*, this understanding of happiness, which is dislocated from a traditionally meaningful life, is 'a much weaker, much thinner, happiness' aiming for 'mere enjoyment of pleasure' (p. 1). If a lifelong marriage represents Confucian and socialist morality, this sense of happiness is often believed to exist within the increasingly diversified forms of relationships, such as extramarital affairs, which do not have a traditional moral root. For instance, one of my respondents indicated that:

> There are some men having affairs with single women, but they would not promise anything to the females. He still shows other people that he loves his wife and children very much... While being with his wife, he also wants to find a stable girlfriend. He may think this feeling is good. (Ai Yue, 26, woman, interview)

As Yue's comment demonstrates, some married Chinese men intend to fulfil their desires regarding personal relationships by conducting clandestine extramarital affairs with single women, which resonates with the argument that people are likely to fulfil romantic desires using both marital love and some relationships outside of the arena of monogamous marriage (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 230; Lawson 1988, pp. 21–27). As discussed in the previous section, marriage is often seen as a morally sanctioned and legalized form of relationship, which tends to bind emotional attachment with moral obligations towards a marital life (Mendus 2000). An extramarital relationship is likely to become an avenue to pursue pure romance and/or serve as a solution for a possible emotional change in people's marital lives. For instance, by interviewing people involved in extramarital relationships in Shanghai, Farrer and Sun (2003) discovered that romantic feelings (ganqing) are often seen as positive and legitimate motives for extramarital love, which is at times seen as a supplementary emotional attachment to the existing marital relationships (pp. 14–15). This implies a different understanding of traditional responsibility and faithful marital relationships, which may further suggest the emergence of a more negotiable personal ethics when it comes to extramarital relationships.

The above example also implies that people in extramarital relationships tend to prioritize their marital tie in public and show more respect and romance to their spouses, which is likely to align with the argument that their lover is often seen as a 'third party' (Di San Zhe) as far as the existing dyadic marital bond is concerned (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 17). Some Chinese youth intend to attach more importance to performing moral duties in their marital life, while at the same time inventing some new values as regards extramarital love, which is often seen as a less committed relationship, without risking the stability of the marital bond. This resonates with the idea that people in extramarital relationships are likely to negotiate the purpose of marriage as establishing and sustaining a familial life, and thus they tend to show their responsibility at an institutional level rather than being responsible to a monogamous relationship or to their spouse (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 9). This new moral discourse, which implies an occasional disconnection between responsibility and marital fidelity, may further connote the rise of the individual within traditional marital relationships.

Alongside this, some female respondents envisaged a possible emotional change in their (future) marital life and often drew upon

traditional moral values to restrict their feelings and sustain a marital relationship. One of my interview participants stated that:

> If I got married, I may come across someone I love, but this was not conflicting towards responsibility. These are two different things... People need to see whether they attach more importance to responsibility or to their personal emotions... For me, responsibility is very important and other things are likely to be subordinate to responsibility. (Bai Caijie, 30, woman, interview)

Caijie's statement may suggest that people often need to make a choice between a marital tie and extramarital relationship, which is likely to resonate with the idea that extramarital relationships could cause conflicts in terms of the responsibilities and commitments within marital life (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 14). As discussed in Section 4.1, the traditional moral concept of responsibility is sometimes seen as an external moral resource, which tends to generate a self-help ethics for young professionals when making relationship-related decisions. For example, some interview participants believed that, to sustain a marital bond, people need to develop strategies to control their emotions and avoid changing an emotional tie into a physically intimate relationship, as one of my respondents argued:

> People should control their behaviours... The spirit of human being is fickle. For example, a woman suddenly sees a man and feels excited. She feels that he is very handsome and charming, which is the type she admires. This is okay, not a problem. But people cannot go too far and think about this all the time. They should have some degree (of self-control). (Hu Jieru, 29, woman, interview)

The above statements suggest that, facing increasing romantic opportunities in modern society, young people tend to develop self-managing skills to restrict their feelings and avoid the formation of a much deeper emotional attachment outside marriage. Specifically, some young people intend to shape their romantic feelings outside marriage at a mental level, which may facilitate individual freedom within a form of 'Platonic love', while at the same time helping to sustain existing monogamous marital relationships. Hence, relationship management is likely to become the new mechanism of a successful relationship, which may further imply that maintaining a lifelong marital relationship is more important than

short-term gratification to some Chinese youth. This may align with the argument that a moral evaluation often directs the hierarchies of happiness. As Ahmed (2010) indicates, 'Some forms of happiness are read as worth more than other forms of happiness, because they require more time, thought, and labor' (p. 12). The comments of the above female interview participants were likely to resonate with an idea that traditional morality as regards female chastity shaped the relationship-related values and behaviours of young Chinese professionals in the post-Mao era (Pan et al. 2004, pp. 419–420).

Although relationship-management skills tended to be employed by some respondents as a strategy to sustain dyadic relationships, emotions are at times seen as difficult to control, and the emergence of extramarital love is likely to imply an increasing freedom in fulfilling emotional and sexual desires, at times with multiple partners. As one of my interviewees remarked:

> I would not restrict myself, as I feel fickle in love in my heart . . . I could know that I have a boyfriend or I have a husband, but sometimes when I have good feelings towards someone, it cannot be restricted by my thoughts . . . Even if I refused the invitation of this person today, after going back home and facing my boyfriend, I would show that I was not that passionate towards him. It is impossible that I have good feelings towards someone and (after) I think this is not allowed, then I just do not have good feelings any more. (Tang Lili, 23, woman, interview)

Lili's statement suggests a dislocation from the self-managing ethics discussed in the previous examples, which imply that some young professionals intend to prioritize their passionate feelings in personal relationships. This could be linked to an empirical study focusing on female sexuality based on self-reported data collected in national surveys in 2000 and 2006, which suggests that Chinese women in long-term relationships had the highest prevalence of multiple sexual partners (Huang et al. 2011, p. 102). This finding negates some cross-cultural comparative studies, which indicate that passion and romance were often seen as less important elements when establishing personal ties in Chinese society than in some more individualistic Western societies (Fitzpatrick et al. 2001; Gao 2001; Hatfield and Rapson 2002; Triandis et al. 1993). Alongside this, the above example may resonate with a possible new phenomenon of 'love American style' introduced by Lange et al. (2015).

This recent research suggests that Chinese online dating users are likely to be influenced by a globalized romantic culture and attach more importance to passionate emotional attachment when approaching personal relationships (Hatfield and Rapson 2002, 2005; Hatfield et al. 2012).

The internet has become a new site for young people in China to pursue personal relationships in recent years (Jacka et al. 2013, pp. 60–61). With the popularity of online games, it is likely that some Chinese youth intend to look for a happy relationship in the virtual space. The ethical rules concerning online relationships are at times seen to be controversial among young people, which may resonate with the idea that virtual relationships are less shaped by traditional Confucian and socialist moral values (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 12). For instance, one of my respondents indicated that some internet games are likely to fulfil the users' emotional needs in extramarital relationships:

> There is a game called Western Journey on NetEase (a Chinese website). In that game, men and women could call the other side husband or wife and they also raise children together. They do not know each other, but they play very well. I don't mean the game is good, but the virtual space in it is very good... It is like living a life in it, which is a spiritual sustenance. Also, some people don't have happy families and when they see others, whose husbands treat them very well or are very capable, some women would have this thought (to have an extramarital relationship). Similarly, some men may think that other people's wives are very thoughtful. (Xia Kai, 29, man, interview)

For most interview participants, extramarital relationships were often seen as not fitting into a traditional socialist and Confucian moral value system. Compared to the previous generations, young people often have a more tolerant attitude towards extramarital love and a calculating reasoning is sometimes observed when faced with romantic possibilities outside marital life. For instance, one of my respondents observed a comparative mentality in relationships:

> People nowadays seem to have a mentality to try different things and want to have more things. If a man only has one woman, he would always think whether there is someone better, so he always wants to have a try... Many people have this mentality. They would be with someone first and have a new partner when someone (more) suitable shows up... It is not that good, but it should not be seen as a problem. It is fine for people to ride a donkey

> while looking for a horse, but they should be responsible for the 'donkey' while they are riding it. They should stop where it should stop. It is understandable if they see someone secretly outside, but they cannot go too far. (Guo Zhenzhen, 28, woman, interview)

The above statement may suggest that dating is often seen as a partner-selecting process, which may reflect a comparative mentality in relationships and the possibly competitive nature of romantic love. Love, especially true love, is likely to become increasingly uncertain and influenced by the greater romantic possibilities in a fluid modern-life setting. Romantic love, which used to be identified in dating relationships and be associated with a lifelong marital bond, is likely to become more difficult to define and extramarital relationship may sometimes become a site to reconstruct the needs and desires surrounding personal relationships, which may reflect the on-the-move identity of Chinese youth.

Extramarital relationships are at times seen as products reflecting the modern commodity culture and some young people tend to have a consumerist mentality whereby they try new things without eventually buying them. In addition to this, the above statement implies a rhetorical code of responsibility introduced by Farrer and Sun (2003), who argue that, for some Chinese youth, extramarital relationships do not count as moral transgressions, as long as the parties involved carry out their responsibilities within the existing marital life (p. 19). By envisaging possible extramarital affairs of the other spouse, young professionals intend to develop a new understanding of responsibility, which aligns with a willingness to forgive in order to sustain marital relationships (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 20). These more tolerant attitudes towards extramarital relationships are likely to be connected with the idea that responsibility has been increasingly defined by market principles and self-centred ethics rather than traditional Confucian and socialist moral law for urban youth (Farrer and Sun 2003).

Alongside this, a gendered difference in extramarital love is observed, as Ai Yue, a 26-year-old woman, indicated: 'After getting married, it seems that women would focus on family life with all their heart. It seems that men are likely to have this kind of thing (extramarital affair).' This statement may suggest that women, who used to take a traditional familial role in marital life, have better self-control than the male side when it comes to possible emotional change. Some participants argued that men are likely to want to fulfil their sexual desires with multiple

partners, which is often seen as a reason for an extramarital relationship. As one of my interviewees stated:

> I have agreed with a sentence by Freud very much since junior high school. He talked from a male's angle and he said that for males there are only two desires. One is to become a great man, which can be understood in a broad way like achieving money and wealth. The other one is the desire for sex... Of course, some things will attract a man, such as spiritual communication and common interests at a deep level, but these are on the basis of sex. (Zheng Anchi, 24, man, interview)

The above expression resonates with the concept of 'confluent love' introduced by Giddens (1992), which is seen as aiming to fulfil a 'reciprocal sexual pleasure' within a more casual form of personal tie (p. 62). This tends to be linked with the notion of grey women introduced by He (2005), which refers to mistresses and 'second wives' (Er Nai) of men belonging to the economic and political elite. A gendered economy is likely to be observed, in which sexual and emotional exchanges between men with good economic and socio-political status and women's youth and beauty are often seen as the main justification for extramarital relationships (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 16; Xiao 2011). This is likely to resonate with a utilitarian reasoning and market principle as regards personal relationships (Osburg 2013, pp. 165–169; Osburg 2014; Zelizer 2005).

A gendered difference in the motives for and consequences of pursuing extramarital relationships is likely to be identified. Another interview participant indicated that:

> Men may have extramarital sex for physical reasons or for novelty. He still put his wife in his heart and nobody would replace her. If his wife does not know about this, he may keep having extramarital affairs. But if a woman has an affair, she may really subvert the family. If a woman has another man in her heart, she may really change her family. (Wang Rui, 30, man, interview)

Rui's statement may suggest a gendered difference in understanding the meaning of extramarital relationships. This resonates with a 'sexual double standard' assumed by some Chinese men, who believe that married women are often more serious about extramarital relationships than married men (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 26). As Farrer and Sun (2003) indicate, Chinese men often interpret their extramarital relationships with the

rhetorical code of 'play', which refers to a casually structured relationship based on sexual exchange and is a way to express a strong masculine characteristic.

For both Chinese men and women, the meaning of extramarital relationships tends to be greatly associated with a legal marriage, which is often seen as a vital aspect in achieving personal happiness. For example, Chinese men are more likely to conduct an extramarital love secretly, while at the same time prioritizing their marital tie as the more meaningful relationship. An extramarital relationship is likely to become a subordinate or complementary dating practice compared to married life. Chinese women, on the other hand, may either avoid an extramarital relationship by attaching more importance to their marital life or intend to legalize an extramarital love by transforming it into a marital relationship. Thus, extramarital love could be a process of reapproaching personal happiness based on traditional values.

Although Chinese youth are likely to have more tolerant attitudes towards extramarital relationships, they are often seen as lacking internal moral acceptance within a marital tie. According to Farrer and Sun (2003), as extramarital affairs are likely to cause huge emotional pain to spouses, deception is often seen as a rhetorical code for the involved parties to sustain marital relationships (p. 22). Faced with evidence of a partner's extramarital relationships, young people at times developed self-deception skills so as to 'trust' their spouses in order to sustain a marriage (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 22). For instance, one of my respondents indicated that her husband had engaged in an affair and the extramarital relationship became paralleled with their marriage. The betrayal of her husband caused her a lot of anxiety and damaged her faith in marital fidelity:

> People attach less and less importance towards loyalty in marriage. They only consider the unhappy things in (marital) life and forget the monogamous feeling in marriage and the exclusion (of other romantic possibilities). Or they have already put it at a less important position constantly and attach more importance to their temporary happy feeling. (Fan Fang, 27, woman, interview)

The above statement may suggest a subverted understanding of happiness hierarchies, in which a lifelong marital tie is seen as a more morally valuable happiness than other forms of relationships, which are pursuing

a transitory happy feeling (Ahmed 2010, p. 12). The above case tends to resonate with the idea that extramarital relationships are often seen to harm the 'romantic exclusivity' that is the 'most profound commitment' within a marital bond (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 232).

Overall, by looking at younger people's attitudes to and understandings of premarital and extramarital relationships, a changing relationship ethics emphasizing market principles and consumerist mentality is likely to be observed among urban youth. Specifically, cohabitation is often seen as a premarital practice and a trial marriage, which tends to connote a risk-avoidance mentality towards a future marital life. Some young people intend to invent new moral discourses to interpret desires and expectations within extramarital relationships, which implies a negotiated understanding of a traditional Confucian and socialist moral concept – responsibility. For instance, some people intend to prioritize their moral duties in marital life, while conducting extramarital relationships clandestinely to fulfil their emotional and/or sexual desires. The popularity of premarital and extramarital sexual relations may suggest a changing sexual norm and a dislocation from reprosexuality, which emphasizes the procreation purpose in traditional conjugal ties. Rather than following Confucian and socialist morality and matchmaking practices within traditional lifelong marriage, urban youth tend to develop self-help ethics to approach and/or sustain their personal relationships, which may imply that a relationship-management mechanism may have become a new strategy in the operation of successful relationships.

4.3 Emergence of New Ethics in Non-Marital Dating Practices

With the emergence of new forms of dating practices such as multiple relationships, open relationships and one-night stands in the post-reform era (Donald and Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang and Ho 2007a, b, 2011), the meaning of personal relationships, which used to be greatly associated with Confucian and socialist morality, is likely to become more complex. For example, the understanding of true love is at times dislocated from an emphasis on a lifelong commitment, as one of my respondents indicated:

> Some people in my generation surely think highly of it (a lifelong relationship). But as time passed by, people surely attach not that much importance to it and it would be fine if they once had a relationship. If it was

> true love, it would be fine even if it just lasted for one day. If it was fake love, it was not meaningful, even if it lasted for the whole life. (Hao Dongsheng, 27, man, interview)

As discussed in Chapter 3, a possible separation of dating and marriage is examined among Chinese youth, who often embrace more freedom in dating relationships. From the discussions in Section 4.1 and 4.2, a more self-centred relationship ethics can be observed. Young people intend to prioritize their desires and expectations and draw upon external resources including traditional Confucian and socialist moral values as well as market principles and consumerist mentality to generate legitimized interpretations of personal ties such as cohabitation and extramarital relationships. Thus, a possible new ethical framework emerges when interpreting the various forms of dating practices, which may further reflect a changing understanding of personal happiness as recognized by Chinese youth. In opposition to traditional understandings of romantic love, these dating practices are likely to reflect the social and cultural change in contemporary Chinese society. Hence, this section intends to examine the attitudes of Chinese youth towards the diversified needs and desires in different forms of dating relationships, such as multiple relationships, open relationships and short-term relationships.

Some of my interview participants intended to draw upon traditional moral values to understand these diversified dating practices, which are often seen as temporarily separating them from a marital relationship. Compared to a traditional lifelong marital relationship, non-marital ties are often described as relatively short-term relationships with sometimes more than one partner, and these attitudes reflect the importance of traditional morality in shaping people's values towards personal relationships in the long run. For example, one of my respondents argued that:

> One of my university classmates was like this. His family was rich and he was handsome. Many girls liked him. He had one stable girlfriend. He told other girls that he had several girlfriends and if the female side could accept this, he could start a relationship with her. But he would not tell his 'real' girlfriend that he also had other girlfriends . . . He was fickle in love. His 'real' girlfriend came to see him. He would tell people around to keep things secret. But a few years after graduation, he still got married to his 'real' girlfriend. (Ai Yue, 26, woman, interview)

The above example may imply that some young people intend to pursue one relatively stable relationship, while at the same time seeking to establish new personal ties in a more casual and flexible manner. This understanding of multiple relationships combines Pei's (2011) examination of two types of multiple sexual relationship (more than one sexual relationship within a specific time period) in post-reform Shanghai, among which one group of women tended to have relatively stable partners, while the other group had engaged in more flexible and open relationships (p. 401). Yue's statement may suggest that people in multiple relationships are likely to prioritize one of the relationships and connect it to a future marriage. Multiple relationships are seen as a premarital practice taking place within a relatively short period of time and having a transitory nature, looking towards a traditional monogamous marital tie in the long run.

As discussed in Section 4.2.1, cohabitation has been gaining increasing popularity among young people in urban China and is often seen as a premarital practice that aims to test the compatibility between partners and fulfil sexual desires. According to a study exploring changing female sexuality based on two national probability surveys in 2000 and 2006, Huang et al. (2011) illustrate that in 2006 about a quarter of Chinese women aged from 18 to 29 years reported more than one lifetime sexual partner, and women in cohabiting relationships were about three times more likely to report two or more lifetime sexual partners than single women (p. 99). Multiple relationships are likely to become part of premarital practice for some young professionals, who intend to embrace both stability in a long-term cohabitation and flexibility in some relatively short-term relationships. It is also likely that young cohabitors would conduct serial cohabitations with two or more sexual partners before getting married.

Some interview participants believed that young people in multiple relationships are often transitioning from a one-to-many into a one-to-one relationship, which suggests that multiple relationships could be a process of selecting a suitable spouse. For instance, the popular reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One* could be seen as imitating a mate-selecting process with multiple potential partners, in which one male participant intends to choose a partner from 24 female guests. The popularity of reality TV dating programmes may imply that multiple partners in dating relationships is likely to become an increasingly legitimate social phenomenon in everyday life. For example, users of

matchmaking websites are sometimes seen as having multiple relationships, as another interview respondent remarked:

> One of my friends is a VIP user of baihe.com and jiayuan.com (Chinese dating websites), which constantly recommend suitable women to him . . . He has a very simple goal to find a suitable partner, whom he could marry in the future . . . He gets to know this one . . . He also gets to know that one . . . For some people, this is a selecting process. For some others, this is a not that responsible process. (Xia Kai, 29, man, interview)

From the above example, the increasing choices in terms of multiple relationships were likely to cause confusion for some of my participants, who at times could not identify their real needs when it came to personal relationships. As multiple relationships are often seen as existing in a short period of time, the meaning of a multiple relationship is at times understood as pursuing a temporary gratification, which is the opposite of a responsible relationship emphasized by traditional morality. For instance, multiple relationships are sometimes seen as detached from the traditional nature of dating practices, which used to be associated with a deep emotional attachment that guided the trajectory of a shared future life.

As a possible way to choose a suitable partner, people in multiple relationships are at times seen as reducing their emotional investment in each relationship. The understanding of love in multiple relationships is sometimes seen as different from the emotional attachment within a monogamous relationship, which often has paramount importance in the self-identification process and is greatly associated with a shared future life trajectory (Giddens 1992). For instance, another interview participant indicated that:

> For people changing girlfriends frequently, if he does not behave like a hoodlum or seek stimulus, he is just on his way to pursue the other half and explore the results he wants most. If this one is not okay, for a minimum cost, (he) just turns to another one quickly. It is no use to go through a running-in period. (Le Jiahui, 26, man, interview)

The above comment may suggest a consumerist mentality at work in the mate-choosing process. Specifically, some young people intend to look for potential partners while in a one-to-one dating relationship and objectify multiple partners as refundable products. This may further be connected

to an argument that people in multiple relationships are likely to have shallower feelings towards their partners, who are at times seen as easily replaceable sexual objects (Klesse 2007, p. 137). Consequently, non-marital dating practices may resonate with a subverted understanding of personal happiness, which is often seen as linking with greater time and effort (Ahmed 2010, p. 12).

In addition to this, the development of online dating websites and social platforms have, to a great extent, facilitated multiple relationships among Chinese young people in the post-reform era, which could indicate that the internet has further facilitated increasing mobility in a modern-life setting (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 235; Huang et al. 2011, p. 102). Multiple relationships are likely to challenge a widely accepted social norm, in which romantic love is often seen as associated with a relatively stable form of relationship. For instance, people involved in multiple relationships are at times seen as less likely to settle down to a one-to-one relationship. As one of my interview participants stated:

> One of my classmates contacts many women. A woman may say that if they plan to marry in the future, there is no need to rent two places, as both rents are very high. If they live together, they can save a lot. They can cook together, which is very happy. But my classmate says that this is not fine, as he contacts other women . . . Nowadays people in two situations cannot find a partner. One is that they really cannot find a partner, as they have no friends from the opposite sex. The other one is that they have too many . . . (Xia Kai, 29, man, interview)

Kai's statement suggests that some young professionals are likely to pursue on-the-move personal relationships, which resemble a networked relationship structure differing from a traditional monogamous personal tie (Bauman 2003). A gendered conflictual expectation is observed, in which the male side seeks to pursue multiple partners, while the female side intends to sustain a one-to-one relationship. The above example is likely to be linked with other empirical studies which suggest that men are more likely to commit to extra-marital sex than women, both in China and other cultural contexts (Atkins et al. 2001; Wiederman 1997), and that this is more likely to cause negative emotions on the female side (Jankowiak 2008). For example, another respondent indicated that:

> Some men could like his girlfriend very much. But he may be seduced by his ex-girlfriend or some other woman, he cannot help (conducting

> extramarital sex)... But he does not deny that he indeed cannot separate from his girlfriend and he does not want to break up with her. Those things are just 'interludes'. He only wants to marry her... A man says 'I'm going to marry you. Is this still not enough to express my feelings for you?' But women do not think so. (Chen Xiaobei, 23, woman, interview)

From the above example, multiple relationships are seen to hurt the emotions of the female side, which is likely to align with the argument that, for people in a romantic relationship, personal happiness is often seen as associated with a monogamous personal tie (Ben-Ze'ev and Goussinsky 2008, p. 20). Alongside this, my respondents seldom mentioned women's experiences or desires for multiple relationships. This not only implies that there are fewer females desiring to have multiple partners, but also indicates a sexual double standard observed in some previous studies, which suggest that women involved in multiple relationships often face more pressures and censure from public moral discourses than their male counterparts (Farrer 2002; Jankowiak 2008; Milhausen and Herold 1999, 2001). Specifically, some studies focusing on female sexuality argue that women with multiple partners are often seen as gaining a bad reputation, while men involved in multiple relationships are at times seen as having a more impressive economic status and capable sexual competence (Fang 2005; He 1994; Pan 2005; Pei et al. 2007).

Likewise, another interview participant added that:

> Extramarital sex used to be like murder, which is unacceptable... People around would say, how could he behave like this? How could he be unfaithful to her? Now it would be fine as long as he does not let her know and keep it a secret... People used to think that they could not accept themselves to behave like this and they could not accept other people around them either. Now it turns into that they would not do it but it does not matter that people around do it. Then it would change gradually to that it does not matter that they do it... This is a trend no matter people admit it or not. (Tang Lili, 23, woman, interview)

This statement is likely to connect to a transition of relationship ethics in the post-reform era, which has shifted from a sacred moral law supported by the state's administrative system and work units in the Maoist era (Bakken 2000; Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 2; Zha and Geng 1992). A changing moral and social environment has facilitated an

increasingly casual structure for personal relationships. The tendency of young male professionals towards casual sexual relationships could be linked to a traditional gendered stereotype, in which male sexuality in terms of multiple sexual partners to some extent repeats a polygamous pattern in feudal societies (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 16; Osburg 2014; Xiao 2011). Some young women expressed their uncertainty and inability to manage male sexual desires in respect of multiple sexual relationships, which tend to shape women's subjectivity in actualizing their own expectations in relationships. Female inferiority in heterosexual personal ties is likely to reinforce an unequal gender role in traditional patriarchal families, in which men held a dominant position, while women were often objectified by their male counterparts. This may further resonate with Simone de Beauvoir's observation of the interdependence of an autonomous man and a dependent woman in personal relationships (cited in Benjamin 1988, p. 7).

The above examples, in which multiple relationships are conducted by the male side, while the female side is devoted to monogamy, may reflect a different structure between multiple relationships and open relationships, which seemed to be rarely observed by my respondents. For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

> In some cases, both sides have affairs. It means that the one who has extramarital love allows his or her partner to have an affair too . . . Wife swapping exists in another group of people including a few people . . . It means two couples exchange wives. I saw it in French films. This exists in China, too . . . People live in different ways. I do not agree with them, but this does not mean that I completely negate them. (Chu Junqi, 30, man, interview)

Like Junqi, although some interview participants did not have a tendency to pursue multiple relationships, they often expressed a more tolerant and less judgemental attitude towards love and relationships, which are often seen as issues associated with the privacy of the involved parties. An increasingly loosened moral environment is likely to be observed.

Multiple relationships are at times understood as more difficult to sustain and are likely to cause negative feelings. As another interview participant commented:

> Some people live a hard life, as a one-to-one relationship would be surely different from a one-to-many relationship. They feel scared every day,

> which would be very tiring . . . One of my cousins is like this. He has several girlfriends in Beijing, Hangzhou and some other places. He often makes mistakes when he chats on QQ (an online chatting network) or makes phone calls. When he chats to the wrong person, the other side would question him and he would need to tell all kinds of lies. (Xia Kai, 29, man, interview)

Some participants believed that a stressful modern life facilitated the emergence of multiple relationships, which are seen as a new form of relationship, less restrained by traditional moral values and involving an increasingly higher level of individual freedom. For instance, some interview participants believed that a lifelong relationship is at times not understood as a vital path towards personal happiness for Chinese youth:

> It is possible that instead of a husband, they have many single friends . . . It is possible (for them) to have some one-night stands and so on . . . They just want to live freely. They may feel that coping with bosses already takes enough responsibility and they do not want to let this influence their lives . . . It takes some proportion in the high income group . . . They have very big pressures and live a very fast pace of life. (Shen Nan, 27, woman, interview)

The above example resonates with some previous studies focusing on female sexuality, which suggest that young women with higher educational backgrounds and white-collar jobs are more likely to have more than one lifetime sexual partner (Huang et al. 2011, p. 99; Huang 2008; Pei 2007; Zhang 2007). A possible devaluing of traditional morality could be inferred and personal relationships are at times seen as dislocating from a traditional responsible marital tie.

Alongside this, multiple relationships are often seen as a way to achieve the confluent interests of Chinese youth, who intend to draw upon multiple partners to fulfil their sexual desires. For example, one of my respondents indicated that:

> A variety of people all find 'Pao You' (booty calls) nowadays . . . People have relatively high pressure and they want to release pressure. They cannot all go for call girls, which is not a very good thing and the feeling is not that right. Also, it is likely that some women also have this need. As men have this need and women have this need, it makes two needs to get matched. (Guo Zhenzhen, 28, woman, interview)

This statement suggests that the short-term dating practices among Chinese young people aiming for sexual pleasure are likely to indicate a separation of romantic love from sexual relations (Pan 2006a, p. 34). The increasing pressure of living life in modern Chinese society is at times seen as a justification for transgressing traditional morality, which points towards an opposition between tradition and modernity. The stressful modern life can suspend the alignment with traditional values. Alongside this, with the emergence of multiple sexual relationships, female sexual desire is increasingly observed (Huang et al. 2011; Pei 2011). Compared to a traditional female sexuality greatly shaped by monogamous marriage, multiple relationships for young women are likely to reflect the emergence of an alternative sexuality requiring more equalized gender practices (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 24; Pei and Ho 2006).

Furthermore, people's needs and desires as regards personal relationships tend to be greatly associated with their understandings of romance and personal happiness, as one of my interviewees pointed out:

> Relationships can be divided into many levels. At the initial level, people think that love is a mutual attraction of hormones. It is a very simple attraction between the opposite sexes. If a relationship is understood in this way, it would surely meet setback in the end. This love surely would dissolve and people would feel that love is gone. Some people sublimate a relationship and they think that a relationship is about two people being together, in which they have equal pain and gain. Of course, two people in a relationship are to make the other side happy . . . Both of them would obtain something, as she gains a family and he gains a family, too. Being together is the way to sustain a family. If people understand a relationship at this level and they have married with someone with the same values, they should be willing to believe that they could sustain a lifelong relationship. (Hu Jieru, 29, woman, interview)

From the above statement, the moral values of Chinese youth towards love and romance tend to become more diversified, which is likely to resonate with the argument that the understanding of personal relationships in a fluid and uncertain modern-life setting involved greater 'social complexity, moral pluralism and sexual diversity' (Weeks 1995, p. 11).

4.4 Conclusion

By drawing upon Ahmed's (2010) discussion about ethics and happiness, this chapter has examined the changing morality towards dating and relationships in post-reform China by looking at the needs and desires in various forms of relationships and how these relationships fit into the understandings of personal happiness of Chinese young people. As an important moralized and legalized form of personal relationship (Mendus 2000), a lifelong marital relationship, which is associated with traditional Confucian and socialist morality, is often seen as a vital aspect of personal happiness for Chinese youth. A new understanding of traditional morality is observed among young Chinese professionals, who often see traditional moral values such as responsibility, care and faithfulness as part of a relationship-sustaining strategy rather than a strict moral law. In other words, traditional ethics, which used to be a dominant moral guide when it came to relationship-related behaviours, is likely to become a negotiated principle and an external moral resource for young professionals, who are likely to become empowered modern subjects developing personal rules and strategies as regards relationships. This understanding tends to resonate with Foucault's (1979, 1988) argument in relation to the transformation of Christian sexual ethics under the technology of the self-managing modern subjects in the Western context (Rabinow 1994, p. 254).

With the emergence of cohabitation and extramarital relationships in the post-reform era, changing sexual norms were observed by my participants, which tend to challenge the monopoly of sexual relationships within a marital bond. In a loosened social and moral environment, some new elements are likely to fit into the traditional ethics as regards lifelong monogamous marriage, which is now becoming a less unique and dominant form of personal relationship. The meanings of premarital and extramarital relationships are often greatly associated with a moralized and legalized marital tie, which may suggest that Chinese young people tend to draw upon traditional morality to interpret some new forms of relationships. For instance, cohabitation is often seen as a short-term trial relationship, which is likely to facilitate a more stable marital bond, while extramarital relationships are understood as opposite to traditional monogamous lifelong marriage. Hence, these young people tend to avoid the development of extramarital emotional attachment in order to prioritize

an existing marital relationship or intend to legitimize an extramarital love by transforming it into a legal marriage.

Some new desires and expectations are observed in cohabitation and extramarital relationships, which may imply some new ethical values towards love and romance. For example, cohabitation is at times seen as an alternative to a marital tie, which tends to reflect young people's desires for both stability and greater freedom in personal relationships. Extramarital relationships are seen as reflecting the emotional and/or sexual desires of Chinese youth towards multiple partners. Cohabitation and extramarital relationships are at times understood as non-marital relationships, which are seen as dislocating from the traditional ethical values as regards relationships and being greatly shaped by market principles and the modern commodity culture (Farrer and Sun 2003; Osburg 2013, pp. 165–169; Osburg 2014; Zelizer 2005). The emergence of premarital and extramarital relationships is likely to reflect a new sexuality that differs from the traditional Confucian reprosexuality that aims for reproduction (Warner 1991, p. 9), instead prioritizing sexual gratification in personal relationships (for more details, see Section 4.2.1).

Alongside this, the emergence of various forms of dating practices such as multiple relationships and short-term relationships are likely to connote a separation of dating and marriage. These new forms of personal relationships are often seen as ways to pursue a momentary happiness, which challenges the moral distinction of a lifelong marriage as a higher level of happiness in traditional hierarchies. For instance, diversified dating practices, which are often characterized as short-term relationships with sometimes multiple partners, are seen as a way to achieve sexual fulfilment and release pressure in a stressful modern-life setting. Sexual relationships are likely to shift from a singular purpose linked to procreation, facilitated by traditional moral values, to sexual pleasure, being greatly associated with personal happiness.

The emergence of new dating practices is likely to imply the formation of a self-centred relationship ethics in personal relationships, in which partners would prioritize their own needs and expectations and link their personal happiness to greater freedom within a relationship. My respondents often tended to hold a more tolerant attitude towards various forms of personal relationships, which are increasingly shaped by the involved parties rather than any general moral principles. For instance, with increasing romantic possibilities provided by popular online dating and social platforms, the emergence of multiple relationships may reflect a greater

mobility in a fluid modern-life setting (Huang et al. 2011, p. 102), which is likely to make the definition of true love more complex and less connected with a lifelong marriage. Young people often tend to understand these new forms of relationships by linking their meanings with a lifelong marital tie under a traditional ethical framework. For example, multiple relationships and short-term relationships are sometimes understood as a more efficient way to select a spouse with reduced risks and costs. On the other hand, facing multiple partners, young people are likely to have a comparative mentality, which tends to trigger greater uncertainty as regards real needs in a monogamous marital tie.

In addition, a changing gender practice and power dynamic is observed among my participants. First, a new understanding of the ethics of care emerges, in which the female side is often seen as shifting from traditional familial carer to the dual role of both care provider and receiver. Consequently, the ethics of mutual care, which emphasizes a two-way communication between partners, reflects rising gender power and the feminine nature of personal relationships. Second, young male professionals are often seen to be more likely to conduct extramarital relationships or multiple relationships than their female counterparts, which may repeat a polygamous pattern seen in traditional patriarchal societies. This tends to connote a traditional male superiority and dominance in personal relationships, while women involved in multiple sexual relationships are more likely to be sanctioned by public morality (Farrer 2002; Jankowiak 2008; Milhausen and Herold 1999, 2001). At the same time, the emergence of female multiple relationships may imply a subversion of the traditional male-dominated relationship, in which 'female vulnerability [is] victimized by male aggression' (Benjamin 1988, p. 9). Young female professionals are likely to develop private ethics and strategies to fulfil their needs and expectations, which could facilitate a more complicated power dynamic within personal relationships.

Overall, having grown up in a fluid modern-life setting, young Chinese people in my sample group were at times seen to be detached from traditional values (Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Sun and Wang 2010; Wang 2006; Yan 2003, 2009, 2010a, b), which may imply new forms of affect that can be understood in the context of new emotional engagements and investments. For example, the various forms of dating and relationships discussed in this chapter reflect the diversified desires of young people, who are likely to have, at the same time, the desire for lifelong monogamous relationships as well as for more casual forms of dating practice. By linking the meaning of diversified relationships with

traditional morality, Chinese young people often intend to understand their needs and expectations as regards relationships within a moral framework, which is often seen as greatly associated with personal happiness in contemporary Chinese society. That is to say, the traditional Confucian and socialist values still shape the moral foundation of a happy relationship for Chinese youth, while some new desires, in various forms of personal ties, may reflect the emergence of new ethical considerations, which are likely to connote the incomplete identity of Chinese youth and the possible emergence of a new ethical framework embracing diversified and negotiable principles.

The emergence of personal ethics is likely to resonate with a transformation of relationship ethics, which has shifted from a strict Confucian and socialist moral law in the Maoist era into a more private and individualized ethics, and is seen as less shaped by the Marriage Law (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 2). The popularity of some new forms of dating and relationships such as cohabitation, online relationships and multiple relationships has facilitated more liberal attitudes and freedoms in people's private lives. These may have led to an ethical anarchy, which tends to call for some new rules and more capacity within the post-socialist legal and moral system to interpret the increasingly diversified forms of personal relationships.

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CHAPTER 5

Gendered and Generational Differences towards Relationships

As a historical construction, people's identities are assumed to involve both difference and interconnection between generations (Gramsci 2000; Rutherford 1990). This incomplete and changing nature of identity (Hall 1990) provides a theoretical framework to explore the identity transition towards love and intimacy in post-reform China. Specifically, the identity of Chinese youth nowadays tends to be linked with the previous generations, and their parents' generation is likely to have great influence on them. At the same time, the fast-changing economic and social environment since the reform and opening up (1978 to the present) has shaped the identity of today's younger generation, who are expected to hold a very different attitude to and understanding of love and intimacy compared to their parents' generation (Higgins and Sun 2007). Thus, this chapter intends to adopt a generational angle to explore Chinese young people's identity construction towards love and romance in the post-reform era by assessing the value orientations of a group of participants from their parents' generation. The generational similarities and differences as regards dating and relationships help us understand how and to what extent the dramatic socio-economic changes in contemporary China have influenced the identity construction of young people.

First, Section 5.1 explores changing identities in relation to dating and relationships in the reform era by comparing people's relationship-related values in two different historical periods. As most interviewees from the

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parents' generation were born in the 1950s and 1960s and established their dating relationship during the first decade of the reform era, their relationship-building approaches and mate-choosing considerations tended to reflect the value orientations of young people in the early reform era. Hence, Section 5.1 explores the parents' generation's understandings of, and attitudes towards, both the dating values of their own generation in the initial reform period and those of the younger generation in the post-reform era. The possible generational difference is likely to reflect the social and cultural changes in contemporary Chinese society in the past two decades.

Then Section 5.2 intends to place the changing identities with regard to love and intimacy within a dialogue between conventional and modern values. As members of the parents' generation often grew up in an extended family with several generations living together, they were expected to be greatly influenced by collective and hierarchical family values directed by Confucian culture, which was the dominant ideology in traditional Chinese societies (Bond and Hwang 1986; Fairbank and Reischauer 1973; Stover 1974). Under the influence of the privatization process and the nuclear family culture in the reform era, Chinese young people nowadays tend to assert more individualized values in personal relationships (Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Yan 2003, 2009). As a generation which went through both a traditional period and the reform era, members of the parents' generation are likely to have a better understanding and awareness of the changes in dating and relationships since the economic reform in 1978. Thus, Section 5.2 intends to examine the parents' generation's understanding of the changing value orientations towards various issues such as premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce and extramarital love in post-Mao China.

Finally, Section 5.3 intends to compare the exercise of power between parents and the younger generation in the past and nowadays to explore the changing values and attitudes towards love and relationships inside the family unit. As members of the parents' generation often experienced the changing role from being the offspring in an extended family to being a parent in a small-sized family in the past three decades, they may be an ideal subject for examining the transition in intergenerational power dynamics by looking at the changing role of modern parents in the post-Mao era. Hence, Section 5.3 intends to compare the role of parents in young people's mate-choosing processes in the early and post-reform periods by exploring parents' influence on

potential relationships and choosing a potential partner, as well as the negotiation process between the two generations.

5.1 Changing Mate-Choosing Values in the Post-Reform Era

This section intends to explore how the dramatic economic and social change in the reform and opening-up era (1978 to present) has influenced the identity of Chinese youth as regards love and relationships by examining the possible gendered and generational differences in mate-selecting values between young people nowadays and their parents' generation. As most participants from the parents' generation were born in the 1950s and 1960s, their identity in respect of love and relationships was likely to be shaped by both the script of arranged marriage in traditional Chinese societies and the values promoted since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. At the same time, as most interviewees established their dating relationships between the late 1970s and 1980s, their identity in terms of dating and relationships tended to reflect the value orientations in the early stage of the economic reform era. In this section, the participants from the parents' generation become a means to compare young people's identity in two historical periods. First, it traces back the values involved in partner-choosing at the very beginning of the economic reform era by assessing the changing social environment and dating values during the first three decades of the PRC. Then it explores the attitudes and understandings of the parents' generation towards the mate-selecting values of Chinese youth in the post-reform era.

With the social revolution in the early decades of the PRC, arranged marriage, which used to be the dominant way of establishing a marital bond in traditional Chinese societies, has been abolished and free-choice marriage, which builds upon mutual love between two spouses, has been advocated by the Chinese government (Osburg 2013, p. 163). From then on, the nature of marriage may have been gradually transformed from a traditional script characterized by a material transaction between two families into a modern contract at an individual level. Alongside this, Diamant (2000) observes that people's mate-choosing values during the first two decades of the PRC were shaped by the Chinese Communist Party's demarcation of social classes as marriage between partners with

similar class backgrounds was greatly promoted. In other words, the marriage formation may have become part of the state's political ideology and, to some extent, repeated the principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' (门当户对) behind traditional arranged marriage, in which being introduced to a marriage partner from a family with similar social rank was the norm.

For instance, one of my interviewees, Zhao Guizhen, a 75-year-old woman who married in the late 1950s, argued that social status was important for marriage at that time. As her partner was from a military cadre with a 'progressive' political position, Guizhen's family was investigated and their marriage would not have been approved if she had been from a 'bad' class background. As Guizhen remembers, 'They needed to see my family condition, which could not be landlord, rich peasant, anti-revolutionary, evildoer or Rightist.' The class-matching principle further influenced people's mate-selecting values in the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), in which being married to a partner with good class status tended to provide political security for the family (Osburg 2013, p. 164).

With the fast development of the economy in the post-1978 era, Osburg (2013) observes a changing division of social classes in contemporary Chinese society, in which entrepreneurs with growing wealth have gradually obtained a competitive position in dating markets (p. 164). This may suggest that the state's ideology and people's partner-choosing values have been influenced by an economic value system in a globalizing era. At the same time, the principle behind the conventional script of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' may have become an influential value orientation fitting into various historical periods. As one of my respondents stated:

> When we were young, firstly two families should be 'Men Dang Hu Dui', which is the same now. There were different social trends in different eras. For example, in 1960s and 1970s, (ideal suitors were) 'Gen Hong Miao Zheng' (people with red roots) and the working class led everything. At that time, it was likely that workers were popular. In the 1980s, it was likely that people working in the army were relatively popular, as their job was relatively stable and was well paid in every aspect. Since the reforms and opening up, bosses and moneybags (have become popular). I think this depends on the background of each era. But I think there are things that remain essentially the same despite all apparent changes. Basically the educational background and family background of both sides should be relatively similar, which is likely to have a high success rate, as it is likely that they would be able to communicate more easily. (Wen Feng, 50, woman, interview)

Alongside this, the promotion of free-choice marriage since the early period of the PRC, setting people free from the traditional arranged marriage, has resulted in a transitional period for people to adapt to the new values in marriage formation. For example, for most interviewees born in the 1950s and 1960s, being introduced to a potential partner by a third party was often seen as the main way to establish a personal relationship, and they often had only one dating relationship before marrying. At the same time, some interview participants identified the matchmaking script in the late 1970s and 1980s as being different from the more old-fashioned arranged marriage in traditional Chinese societies. As one of my respondents pointed out:

> When I was young, generally people would find a spouse via introduction by acquaintances or friends. As when I was young, 'Fu Mu Zhi Ming, Mei Shuo Zhi Yan' (marriage arranged by parents and matchmakers) had been reduced. It was not like the marriage of my parents, which was decided by my grandparents from my dad's side about things like to marry a woman from which family and the date to get married. (Deng Qingquan, 55, man, interview)

As a generation grew up in a relatively closed socio-cultural environment, the popularity of matchmaking suggests that young people in the 1980s weren't motivated to take the initiative in approaching a relationship and the traditional values tended to constrain the development of emotional attachment between people from opposite sexes. For instance, another interview participant indicated that:

> In our era, men and women were not allowed to have physical contact. Men and women did not talk to each other. They were all introduced to a partner via parents or friends. (Wen Feng, 50, woman, interview)

Zhu Menghua, a 47-year-old woman, added that 'It was not like that a person wanted to find someone or liked someone . . . The key was that someone would help them to build a relationship'. The above examples are likely to suggest that people in the early reform era often took a passive role in establishing an intimate relationship. This may engage with a traditional understanding of a Chinese notion, *yuan*, which originated from a Buddhist belief and emphasizes the vital role of fate in relationship development (Chang and Holt 1991, p. 51; Goodwin and Tang 1996, p. 296; Yang 1992, p. 20; Yang and Ho 1988).

For some younger participants from the parents' generation, free-choice marriage, which develops between acquaintances such as classmates and colleagues, was gradually seen as another way of building a dating relationship during the late 1980s and early 1990s. For instance, assessing matchmaking practices, a more natural dating experience in free-choice marriage tended to be identified by some respondents:

> People who know a partner by themselves would experience a process, in which they get to know a partner and develop a relationship unconsciously. This whole process is relatively complete. If they were introduced to a partner by someone else, it would have a relatively strong aim. (Wang Xiao, 47, woman, interview)

With the social trend of free-choice marriage, many participants from the parents' generation were introduced to several potential partners before establishing a dating relationship. Compared with the very old-fashioned script of matchmaking, Chinese youth in the 1980s had more choices in the partner-choosing process. At the same time, young people in the early reform era tended to think highly of a potential partner's personal quality, which was sometimes seen as a more important factor than traditional principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' (partners with similar family backgrounds). For example, Zhu Menghua, a 47-year-old woman, argued that 'People in the past, we all thought that kind-heartedness of a person is the first consideration. Good personality is the most important'. Similarly, another interview respondent indicated that:

> Once people found a spouse with good personality, they did not care about the family background of the other side. It would be fine for them to strive for a life in the future. They would not be afraid of poverty or tiredness, as love was at the first place. (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

Like Xiuyun, many participants from the parents' generation had a similar understanding of 'love', which was seen as an intimate emotional attachment between partners with a lifelong commitment and a willingness to suffer difficulties in a shared future life. In other words, young people in the early reform era tended to attach a lot of importance to familial responsibility and morality in a marital relationship.

Many participants from the parents' generation believed that young people nowadays are likely to attach more importance to the material

conditions of a potential partner, which is often seen as a vital difference between the parents' generation and the younger generation in the post-reform era. Alongside this, the dramatic economic change of the past few decades is often considered as the main cause for the reorientation towards material factors in the mate-selecting process. The pre-reform Chinese society was underdeveloped and most people used to live in similar material conditions, which could be a reason for people attaching less importance to the economic status of a potential partner. For instance, one of my respondents stated that:

> At that time, there were no rich people in China. There was not a household with 10,000 yuan. People only became rich since the reform and opening up. Before 1980, people were generally like this. There was no rich or poor. You were not rich and I was not rich either. So people were the same. People were not picky. (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

Many interview participants observed that people's living standards have been greatly enhanced since the reform era, especially since the 1990s, and the economic status of a potential partner has become an increasingly important consideration in young people's mate-choosing processes. As Goodman and Zang (2008) indicate, with the emergence of a group of 'new rich' in the early 1990s, increasing inequality in the reconfiguration of socio-economic resources has been observed in contemporary Chinese society. The 'new rich', which often include entrepreneurs and professionals with high economic status (Chen 2002, pp. 403–404, 408, 411; Liu 2006, p. 507; Tomba 2004, pp. 4–5, 7–8), are often seen as holding a competitive position in the dating markets. For instance, some interview participants tended to identify that most guests in the TV dating programme *If You Are the One* are from this small group of economic elites:

> When I watch *If You Are the One*, the female guest is either a manager or an assistant manager . . . How could there be so many white-collars and so many female intellectuals, men are so rich and women are that capable? (Zhu Menghua, 47, woman, interview)

The guest-choosing strategy may not only generate scepticism about the ordinariness and authenticity of the participants, but also help in establishing a platform for a group of desirable potential partners, which is likely to be a reason for the popularity of the programme *If You Are the One*.

Alongside this, young people nowadays are at times seen to reassert traditional matchmaking values, in which material transactions between partners from similar family backgrounds become the premise for establishing a marital bond. A shared mentality is likely to be identified, in which finding a partner with economic and/or social capital is at times seen as a shortcut to achieving personal happiness in the future:

> All classes have already been solidified. If a person wants to achieve personal development or live a better life or pursue a more comfortable or richer life, it is likely that striving for such a life totally by themselves has become more difficult than that in 1980s and 1990s. So they are likely to seek for a relatively convenient way to achieve this. They would prefer to find a rich partner with rich social resources. At the very beginning, they would start from possibly a hundred rather than zero. The platform would be relatively high. Or simply say that they do not need to do anything and can have everything. But this is an ideal, which is not necessarily accomplished. Many people or more and more people think that this is a way to choose a partner. (Zeng Ning, 44, woman, interview)

A gendered difference has been identified in young people's mate-selecting process, in which women think highly of a male partner's economic condition, while men tend to attach more importance to a female partner's physical appearance. For example, another interview participant argued that:

> Generally speaking, women firstly would see whether the other side has a house and a car or not . . . No matter how ugly a man is, as long as he has money, there could be a queue of beautiful women following him. (Deng Qingquan, 55, man, interview)

Qingquan's statement may align with a market principle in relationships, which involves a transaction between men's socio-economic status and women's youthful beauty (Zelizer 2005). This has parallels in the attitudes and practices of a traditional arranged marriage, which emphasized a material transaction between two families.

Some interview participants believed that high living pressures, especially the expensive housing price in urban China, tend to shape young people's mate-choosing values, with house and car often seen as necessities for building a marital tie. This high material requirement in the partner-choosing process may sometimes cause anxiety for both the younger generation and their parents' generation:

> Now young people worry a lot. They need to buy a house and do not have enough money. (A house) costs several hundred million yuan and for a young man who just had a job, how could he have so much money? He needs to rely on his parents. If his parents don't have so much money, he would be worried. He would have to drop high requirement and look for a partner at a lower level. (Wen Feng, 50, woman, interview)

As a generation thinking highly of traditional moral values in relationships, most participants from the parents' generation believed that Chinese youth in the post-reform era often attach more importance to some 'visible' factors such as physical appearance and economic condition in their mate-choosing process, which is often seen as the main difference between the two generations. In addition, material conditions are often seen as a more important factor in the matchmaking script than a relationship naturally formed between two parties:

> I know from newspapers and mobile news something like no house cannot get married . . . If two people come across and have good emotional attachment, they would also aim to strive for their family. As they believe that they would have all these things in the future, they do not care much about whether they have these things now. If a person is introduced to someone, they would firstly say that their family has a house and a car. This is a step. (Wang Xiao, 47, woman, interview)

Xiao's statement to some extent suggests that mass media is likely to shape the understanding of the parents' generation as regards the values in the younger generation's partner-choosing process. As the most popular television dating programme, *If You Are the One* is likely to have great influence on the parent's generation:

> From the programme *If You Are the One*, money is put at the first place. When a man appears on the stage, they (the female guests) would firstly see whether he is handsome or not and then they would ask about money, whether he has car and house . . . I think people neglect the nature of a man, which is the most important. (Zhu Menghua, 47, woman, interview)

The money-centred mate-choosing criterion is sometimes connected to a 'realistic' character of the post-reform era:

> Finding love without money is no use . . . An era creates a group of people. Our era was not like this. This era is realistic. It would not be right if people in this reality were not realistic. (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

The above comments to some extent resonate with the younger generation's understanding of partner-choosing values as represented in the TV dating programme *If You Are the One*, which may suggest that the programme tends to facilitate a market principle within a traditional matchmaking script.

5.2 Changing Values towards Traditional Morality in Diversified Relationships

Compared with former generations, Chinese young people today are often seen as a generation with more individualized values towards dating and relationships (Higgins and Sun 2007; Wang and Nehring 2014). As discussed in Chapter 5, the privatization process and the modern commodity culture in a globalizing era may have generated diversified desires and anxieties among young professionals in the post-reform era, who often hold more tolerant attitudes towards various forms of relationships such as premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce and extramarital love. As a generation greatly influenced by traditional Confucian culture and socialist morality, most participants from the parents' generation often saw these diversified forms of relationships as immoral in the late 1970s and 1980s. They may have become observers of the value transition in the reform and opening-up eras. This section intends to assess the changing attitudes towards traditional values in personal relationships by examining the parents' generation's understandings of the characteristics of people in the early reform era and Chinese youth nowadays.

As one of the main personal relationships, the conjugal tie used to follow the Confucian ethics of 'Wu Lun' (Five Cardinal Relations) in traditional Chinese societies, in which the female side was in an inferior position in relation to the male side and was assessed by her chastity and fertility (Breiner 1992; Higgins et al. 2002; Sidel 1972, p. 11; Yang 1992). The code of 'Wu Lun' not only facilitated a gendered inequality, but also formed a hierarchical age pattern in a traditional patriarchal family, in which a senior member had a higher status than a junior one (Bond and Hwang 1986, p. 215).

Under the influence of Confucian culture, love and sexual relations were greatly linked with reproduction within marriage, while other forms of relationships, such as premarital and extramarital love, were suppressed (Higgins et al. 2002). As discussed in the previous section, although free-choice marriage has been promoted since the early period of the PRC, the Confucian philosophy still has great influence upon people's mate-choosing values. In other words, Confucian culture, which was inherited and fused with socialist morality in the Maoist era, may have a great impact on the personal relationships of young people in the early reform era. Specifically, as a generation establishing their marital bond in the late 1970s and 1980s, most participants from the parents' generation believed that sexual behaviour within marriage was the only legitimate form of intimacy, and premarital sex was often seen as being out of line with socialist values. For instance, one of my respondents indicated that:

> As at that time the Cultural Revolution was just finished, it would be fine if a person is corrupt for some money, but a person would be done if he or she made some mistake in this aspect. It would be an everlasting shame for the person. Nobody would see him or her as a normal person. He or she would be seen as a pest of society. People would not say that he or she had an illegal cohabitation, but would say that they behaved like a hoodlum. (Deng Qingquan, 55, man, interview)

The above example is likely to align with the idea that love and sexual expression and behaviour, which were seen as harmful to socialist collective values (Evans 1995, p. 358), were greatly repressed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

In addition, a gendered difference, in which women were more influenced by traditional Confucian ethics towards love and relationships, is identified. For example, female participants from previous generations often believed that chastity was a vital criterion in assessing women in the pre-reform era. As one of my interviewees argued:

> We even did not know how women give birth to a baby in our era. How could people dare to cohabitate? They would be drowned by others' spittle... Women were all virgins when they got married... Women themselves did not dare to. Once they were not (a virgin)... Nobody would want them. At that time, people thought very highly of this... If a man did not want a woman, she had to die, as she could not bear losing face like that. (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

Xiuyun's comments suggest that women in the Maoist era were often wary of having premarital sex, which tended to fall outside the scope of public morality and reduced a woman's chances of marrying. Thus, women in the early decades of the PRC were likely to position themselves as love objects evaluated by their male partner based on chastity and virtue and often took a passive role in dating relationships. This may indicate a continuity in attitudes and values regarding women's role in marriage between the pre-PRC era and the early PRC period.

Although female participants from the parents' generation tended to have more choices in the mate-choosing process, they often had only one dating relationship before entering into a marital bond. It was likely that, even if a dating relationship did not go well, the female participants, who were greatly influenced by Confucian ethics, would probably stick to their partner in order to show their chastity. Some slightly younger participants from the parents' generation, who built their dating relationships in the early 1990s, sometimes had more than one dating relationship before getting married. Some of them tended to have a more tolerant attitude towards premarital sex, and cohabitation was sometimes seen as a matter more related to economic than moral concerns:

> People at that time didn't have conditions to cohabitate . . . It was mainly because that they didn't have a house and their economic conditions were not good. They didn't have that much money, as the income at that time was not that high . . . It has become not difficult for families to accept their single children to rent a place outside . . . It was impossible for children to live outside in the past. Nowadays people all accept this and they also have this economic condition. Also, nowadays the whole society is fluid, there are more outsiders. Many people are far away from their hometown and live somewhere else. They are on their own, which is a very common situation. Besides, they really want to find someone to warm and comfort each other (*laugh*). (Zeng Ning, 44, woman, interview)

Ning's statement may resonate with the sexual revolution observed since the 1980s, in which people tended to have more individualized values as regards love and relationships, which were often seen as important in terms of people's self-fulfilment and personal happiness (Pan 1993). Alongside this, with the accelerated development of the economy and nationwide labour mobility, cohabitation was at times seen as a common social phenomenon among the urban Chinese youth nowadays. Some

participants from the younger generation tended to see cohabitation as an effective way of reducing housing costs and an important trial period before marriage:

> Cohabitation can reduce the living cost, as renting a place is expensive. It would be cheaper if two people lived together. Also, as nowadays people prefer a rational marriage, cohabitation is also a trial before marriage. I think it is also good. People usually cohabitate and if they feel good, then they would get married. Few people separate after cohabitation, people around me are all like this. On the contrary, people who do not cohabitate before getting married, their marriage instead is not stable. (Feng Wanjiao, 27, woman, interview)

Although most participants from earlier generations believed that cohabitation between partners has become a social phenomenon among young professionals in the post-reform era, they often had different attitudes towards it. For instance, as a participant from the grandparents' generation, Zhao Guizhen, a 75-year-old woman, was strongly against cohabitation and trial marriage, which are often seen to involve premarital sex. For Guizhen, love and sexual relations without a marriage licence go against traditional moral values:

> Since the reform and opening up, people have learned from other countries. They do not learn anything good, but learn something bad (*laugh*). In this case (cohabitation), women all suffer losses. Nobody wants them... This (trial marriage) is not right. They (men) just have fun with their partner and when they had enough fun, they would not want their partner. I think they are sick. Men take advantage of a trial marriage. Some people may have many trials. They think it is fun to be with unmarried women, while it is not fun with a marriage spouse. They are all bastards. They are the worst people. (Zhao Guizhen, 75, woman, interview)

Like Guizhen, a few female participants from the parents' generation, especially those with female offspring, had a more reserved or negative attitude towards premarital sex, in which the female side could become a 'victim' in a relationship. They often saw marriage as a more legitimate form of relationship, which protects the rights of the female side in a long-term relationship:

> In our era, very few people cohabitated. Cohabitation without getting married or being pregnant without getting married was not a good lifestyle

> and was seen as immoral . . . For a woman, no matter it was her first time to have sexual relations or not, if they cohabitated but in the end the male side did not marry her, abortion would be very harmful to her body. (Liu Lan, 53, woman, interview)

The conservative attitude towards premarital love is likely to influence some young professionals nowadays, who tend to follow traditional Confucian ethics in their own dating and relationships. For example, one of my respondents said that:

> First of all, I can accept this (cohabitation), I can accept everything. But I'm not sure if other people can accept it . . . I mean our former generations or say common customs, or say relatives . . . I feel I have my principles, I should not do this. Maybe it is because I have not got married yet. If I got married and then got divorced, I may not care about this kind of thing. But now I cannot . . . I feel these are my own thoughts. I don't ask other people to do things in my way. I only want to be free from any compunction and feel more comfortable. (Sun Chenxue, 28, woman, interview)

In addition, some Chinese men are seen to have a more tolerant attitude towards their own sexual relations, while using traditional values to assess a female partner. This could be a reason for some women nowadays reasserting a more traditional set of values towards love and relationships. For instance, one of my interviewees argued that:

> For some men, although they want to have premarital sex, they still have a strong virgin complex. On the first day of their marriage, if they found that their wife was not virgin, their first response would think whether she had sexual relation or was in a relationship with another man . . . Some women don't care about this at all. If they found a rich husband afterwards and wanted to prove this, they spend money to fix their hymen. There are too many cases like this, as I saw some information posted in gynecological magazine, which said that this hospital can fix this and that hospital can do this as well (*laugh*). (Deng Qingquan, 55, man, interview)

The popularity of cohabitation, which suggests that women attach less importance to traditional moral values in relation to premarital sex, may have facilitated a rising gender power and a more equal relationship between partners. The independent economic status of young female professionals in the post-reform era is at times seen as a reason for a more tolerant attitude

towards premarital sex. This may resonate with the idea that a labour-market-based individualization in Western societies since the 1960s has gradually released females from the traditional gender role (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). For example, one of my respondents stated that:

> The girl is very capable and the guy may just be her affiliation. But I think girls with this thought may be easier to cohabitate, as she may think that virginity does not matter to her and she has a lot of other advantages... They may all feel that cohabitation is indifferent... I think in Europe and the USA, many independent professional women, don't they all feel this indifferent? Maybe when other aspects are strong, she may think that to lose the first time is not that important. (Shen Nan, 27, woman, interview)

The more independent economic status of young female professionals may be a reason for the changing values towards divorce in post-reform China. As another interview participant stated:

> Why did people in the old society not divorce? Women did not have power and money. Their economy was not independent. Now women have a source of income and do not need the other side to support them. So the divorce rate is very high. People do not care much about it. (Zhao Guizhen, 75, woman, interview)

Guizhen's statement engages with the idea that more fragmented relationships and rising divorce rates have been observed in contemporary Chinese society. Unlike women from previous generations, who often followed Confucian ethics in respect of conjugal ties, women nowadays have more individualized values when it comes to being together or apart.

Influenced by Confucian culture, Chinese people used to define themselves first and foremost as 'relational being[s]' and each family member tended to take on a pre-scripted role to maintain harmony within hierarchical family life (Bond and Hwang 1986, p. 215). People's choice of marriage was shaped by collective family values, which had a significant influence upon respondents from the parents' and grandparents' generations. For example, some of my interview participants tended to see getting married as a way of supporting their original family. As one of them stated:

> Indeed I got married not for myself, but for looking after my family. My siblings were too young and they needed someone to look after them and to

> help them. Also, my parents needed someone to help them work at home as well. (Liu Lan, 53, woman, interview)

By contrast, some relatively young participants from the parents' generation were able to show resistance towards their family's intervention in their relationships, which corresponds with the rise of the individual since the economic reform era. For instance, one of my respondents rejected her parents' proposal of a potential partner:

> In my family, parents always say that people have to marry . . . When I was just 21 or 22 years old . . . they started to introduce a partner to me. I was very young at that time and I did not have this awareness before they had started to urge me. As my parents got married when they were very young and my mom already gave birth to a child when she was 20. (He Aijia, 46, woman, interview)

Aijia refused to start a relationship in response to pressure from her family and remained single when we had the interview.

For most participants from the parents' generation, divorce was seen as a decision harmful to the harmonious family order and was condemned by the socio-moral values in the pre-reform era. As one of my respondents pointed out:

> No matter what happens, people would be unwilling to divorce. People would sustain a family. They were afraid that divorce would make them lose face or be harmful to their child. Even if a couple could not get along with each other, they would still sustain their family . . . If it was in the past, two people got married and got divorced after a few years. Other people would gossip about them. They would discuss how the woman was and how the man was. Sometimes they were not able to endure the pressure. Some people would fall ill or die. (Liu Lan, 53, woman, interview)

Lan's argument resonates with the idea that people often prioritized a 'social self' and behaved in line with social norms in traditional Chinese societies (Yang 1981, p. 161). Divorce, which was seen as a failure in one's personal relationship, was likely to become a barrier for people when it came to fulfilling their role in the lives of their family, as well as interpersonal networks, before the reform and opening-up era. In comparison with people from Europe and America, Chinese people were often seen to be wary when it came to divorce. Another interviewee indicated that:

> They have a very heavy burden of their family and they do not want to get rid of it. They are not able to break up thoroughly, as there are too many attached things including families of both sides', their children or their faces. Or it is because their moral values, as they think that they cannot divorce... Anyway Chinese people are relatively tired and they are constrained by relatively many things. (Zeng Ning, 44, woman, interview)

As the above example demonstrates, participants from the parents' generation were often greatly influenced by collective family values in a highly interdependent society, in which individuals kept a close relationship with other family members with 'unquestioning loyalty' (Hofstede 1983, p. 83).

Some participants from the parents' generation believed that people in the post-Mao era are less influenced by collective family values and have more choices in terms of personal relationships, which is often seen as a reason for the rising divorce rate and emergence of diversified relationships such as extramarital love.

Compared with people from previous generations, Chinese youth nowadays are often criticized as having a weaker sense of responsibility and tend to withdraw from a relationship in a more flexible and casual manner when facing challenges and difficulties. As one of my respondents stated:

> People have limited coping capability. They may break up when their family comes across something. They would not be able to face the difficulty together. People in the past were likely to conquer the hardship by working hard together. Now people just break up if they cannot live together. (Zhu Menghua, 47, woman, interview)

Some participants showed anxiety towards divorce, which is seen to facilitate a possible disharmony in Chinese society. For example, another interview participant argued that:

> It is said love is dramatic, marital life is insipid. I think it would be relatively good if people can make do with this ordinariness. I think nowadays many families are likely to become disharmonious after getting married, but I think they are worth being praised as long as they do not divorce... If people feel they need to make do with a life and want to (change) their partner, it would be a mess if people in this situation all got divorced. (Wen Feng, 50, woman, interview)

Since the implementation of the second Marriage Law in 1980, marriage, which used to be connected to the state's ideology (as discussed in the previous section), may have become a private choice for young people:

> Now people can have property notarization before marriage and can choose to or not to publicize their marital status, which all belong to personal privacy. In the past, before people got married, the organization they affiliated with would investigate it. Now people would not know whether a person is married or not. (Wang Xiao, 47, woman, interview)

The simplification of the procedures of divorce since the introduction of the Marriage Law in 1980 and 2003 (Li 2012; Miller and Fang 2012; Palmer 2007) may have further enabled divorce to become a personal choice less influenced by traditional social values:

> In the past, people would not get divorced right away. They would be persuaded and be weighed the advantages and disadvantages. If they could stick to the relationship, they would not divorce. Now as long as a couple could not get along well with each other, they could divorce at once. (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

A changing attitude towards divorce is observed:

> In the past, when people said that someone got divorced, this person would feel faceless or ashamed. Now people don't think in this way. They would not feel surprised to hear about this and they would think it is a matter of others that has nothing to do with them. (Wang Xiao, 47, woman, interview)

The above statements not only suggest a more tolerant attitude towards divorce, but can be linked with Hofstede's (1983) argument about an individualized society, in which self-managing subjects tend to embrace an increasingly loosened interpersonal network (p. 83).

The changing attitude of Chinese youth towards extramarital love was observed by the participants from the parents' generation. As a form of intimacy greatly disapproved of by socialist morality before the reform era, the emergence of extramarital love in post-Mao China is often seen to reflect the more liberal attitude of young people, which resonates with the argument outlined in Chapter 5 that young people nowadays are likely to have diversified desires as regards dating and relationships. As members of

the previous generations often thought highly of the marital relationship, the phrase 'extramarital love' was seen as a provocative issue to discuss with respondents from the parents' generation.

For many participants, the reform and opening-up policy may have facilitated the emancipation of people's minds from traditional family values, which is the main reason for the emergence of extramarital relationships. As one of my respondents argued:

> Now this (extramarital love) becomes casual. If people hear about this, it seems that they approve this... In the past, if there was a person like this, he or she may not be able to live, as people's words would drown him or her. Who would dare to do this in the past? (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

Zhu Menghua, a 47-year-old woman, added that 'In the past, if people all blamed the person, it was likely to drag him or her out of this relationship'. Xiuyun and Menghua's statements tend to exemplify the ways in which traditional values in a collective interpersonal framework influenced people's relationships in the pre-reform era. The increase in living standards since the economic reform era is seen as a possible reason for the phenomenon of extramarital love, which was often criticized by interviewees from the parents' generation:

> If people just have enough money for living, they would not have these things (the other man or the other woman). They would be very tired after work. How could they do these things? When people live a life too rich, they would think about something that they should not think about and do something that they should not do. (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

As discussed in the previous section, a lifelong marriage was often seen as the only legitimate form of intimacy for most interview respondents from the parents' generation, who often considered other forms of relationships as pursuing an instant or short-term gratification. For instance, one of my respondents stated that:

> Now people would pursue a temporary joy and happiness rather than a permanent one. People can divorce after getting married. People can also have a trial marriage and cohabitation. There are all kinds of forms. Even a

> teenage girl wanted to find a husband who could be her grandpa. (Liu Lan, 53, woman, interview)

Lan's statement to some extent resonates with the popularity of accelerated personal relationships in post-Mao China discussed in Chapter 5, and a lifelong marital bond may now be a less desirable or more difficult choice for Chinese youth. For instance, one of my participants argued that the fast-developing society and internet culture tend to facilitate a changing identity for the younger generation regarding a lifelong marital bond:

> I think they never think about this matter, a lifelong relationship. They are likely to think about things in the near future . . . They seldom have an awareness of a lifelong relationship and a golden marriage after getting married for fifty years . . . It is related to the development of the society, which changes too fast. They are a generation that grew up with the internet. Are there any things that last for a long time on internet? . . . The trend changes from time to time. It counts to be long if a trend can last for three years . . . So this generation does not have any staying power. (Zeng Ning, 44, woman, interview)

Overall, for most participants from the parents' generation, a lifelong marriage was widely accepted as the social norm and sexual relations within a marital bond were often seen as the only legitimate form of intimacy, which resonates with the idea discussed in the previous section that Confucian philosophy and socialist morality were a huge influence upon people in the early reform era. Although free-choice marriage and gender equality have been advocated since the 1950 Marriage Act (Evans 1995, p. 359; Higgins et al. 2002), an often asymmetric power relation between men and women in relationships has been observed during the late 1970s and 1980s, which tends to be linked with the idea that a male-centred culture originating from Confucian familial values was still influential in dating and relationships during the early reform era (Chia et al. 1997; Xie and Lin 1997; Zhang 1999, p. 64; Zhu 1994, p. 183; Zhu 1997). Specifically, many participants from the parents' generation believed that the collective family values in Confucian philosophy imposed more restrictions upon the female side in relationships, in which women often took a subservient role and were assessed according to their sexual faithfulness in respect of their husbands. For example, women in the early reform period often had a wary feeling towards premarital sex and divorce,

which could place the female side in a vulnerable position in a relationship and become a barrier for women wanting to marry or remarry.

Alongside this, a generational difference as regards various forms of relationship is identified. Specifically, issues including premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce and extramarital love, which were outlawed by the dominant moral values in the initial period of the reform and opening up, have become increasingly common in post-reform Chinese society. Increasing income inequality, changing living conditions and nationwide labour mobility are often seen as the main causes for the changing attitudes towards diversified forms of relationship. This may align with the argument that the privatization and modernization processes, which facilitated the rural-to-urban population mobility and a small family culture, are the main forces driving the changing social values towards love and sexual matters (Pan 1993). The fast-developing economy since the late 1970s has not only facilitated the changing economic status of Chinese youth, but may also have further caused a transition in the social sphere.

For instance, one of my respondents, Deng Qingquan, a 55-year-old man, argued that 'The society has developed, which was caused by the reform and opening up. Since the reform and opening up, everything has been brought in, especially sexual openness'. Likewise, another interview participant indicated that:

> Now there is a sexual revolution since primary school. It would be even more (open) in high schools and universities. There is a higher degree of openness in ways of communication, which is also an emancipation of people's minds... I mean the concept towards the opposite sex is not like that several decades ago, during which time that physical contact was not allowed between men and women... Men and women did not talk to each other at that time. If a woman had good feelings towards someone, she could not express it. She could only for example write it in her diary or talk to her female friends privately. It was no way to express. Nowadays the revolution towards sex is a clear contrast to the imprisonment at that time. (Wen Feng, 50, woman, interview)

Qingquan and Feng's statements align with an idea that a sexual revolution has been observed since the 1980s, in which people have tended to adopt more individualized values towards dating and relationships (Bullough and Ruan 1994; Burton 1988; Higgins and Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Long and Liu 1992; Pan 1993, 2006b; Pan et al. 2004; Vincent 1991).

Specifically, a more open discussion about love and sexual matters has been observed in both mass media, such as newspapers, radio and television, and people's everyday lives since the economic reform era (Cheng et al. 2000; Huang 1998), and the nationally popular reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One* is often seen as an example, in which young people are much bolder in expressing their opinions about love and intimacy in public. Furthermore, the economic reform and open-door policy, which facilitated China joining the cultural flow in a globalizing era, are often seen as the main cause of the changing identity of the younger generations. Like Qingquan, many interview participants believed that Chinese youth have been greatly influenced by Western values as regards dating and relationships in a globalizing era. This is likely to be linked to Ong and Zhang's (2008) argument that the free economy and globalization have shaped the social and cultural environment in contemporary Chinese society, in which people tend to have more democratic values in respect of their private lives.

At the same time, the sexual revolution may have facilitated changing gender relations in personal relationships. For instance, many participants from the parents' generation observed a common phenomenon of cohabitation and a rising divorce rate among young people in urban China, which can be connected with the idea that people frequently have more tolerant attitudes towards various forms of relationship in the post-reform era (Farrer 2002; Farrer and Sun 2003). Furthermore, with an independent economic status, young female professionals are ready to embrace a more equal position in personal relationships, which is often seen as a main reason for the emergence of diversified dating practices such as cohabitation. However, some respondents from the parents' generation, especially those with female offspring, held negative attitudes towards the changing practices in dating and relationships, which are often seen to go against traditional morality and lead to a changing power dynamic inside the family unit. The values of the parents' generation are likely to have an influence upon some young female professionals, who are inclined to reassert more traditional dating values.

5.3 Intergenerational Power Dynamics towards Dating and Relationships

As discussed in Sections 5.1 and 5.2, members of the parents' generation, who often follow both the Confucian and socialist ideology in their personal relationships, are seen as holding more traditional collective

family values than the younger generation, who, on the contrary, embrace more individualized values when it comes to mate-choosing and various forms of relationship. This section intends to examine the changing values towards dating and relationships in contemporary Chinese society by comparing the influence of family culture on people's partner-selecting processes in pre-reform and post-reform China.

In traditional Chinese society, parents often played a vital role in their offspring's spouse-choosing process and a marriage arranged by parents was the accepted social norm. Although arranged marriages have been abolished since the establishment of the PRC (Osburg 2013, p. 163), being introduced to a potential partner by parents has always been a way for people to build a marital bond. As discussed in Section 5.1, for most participants born in the 1950s and 1960s, matchmaking was often seen as a common way of finding a partner in the early reform era, and parents often played an important role in approving their offspring's relationship. For example, one of my participants argued that:

> I remember when my sister was dating someone and my dad did not allow her to do this. He really used stick to beat her until they broke up, as my original family thought my sister was not old enough to have a spouse and it was not fine if she didn't work hard. In the past, people still needed to be obedient. (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

Xiuyun's statement may suggest that, although free-choice marriage has been advocated since the 1950s, the Confucian family values of the 'Five Cardinal Relations' (Wu Lun), in which the parent-son relationship ranks above conjugal ties (Bond and Hwang 1986, p. 215), are still an influence on members of an extended family. Marriage was often seen as a way to carry on the family line and develop intergenerational ties within a family unit. This aligns with the idea that the family was seen as a collective institution, in which the needs and desires of individual family members tended to be marginalized in the pre-reform and early reform eras (Baker 1979; Yan 2009). Traditional family values were transmitted to young people in the early reform era via their parents' generation, who often held an authoritative position in an intergenerational power flow.

Many interviewees from the parents' generation believed that young people in the 1970s and 1980s often selected a partner based on their parents' advice, which may resonate with the idea that parents' involvement was still influential in partner-choosing and marriage-related

decisions until the end of 1980s (Pasternak 1986; Riley 1994; Whyte 1990; Xu and Whyte 1990). Matchmaking in the early reform period was sometimes a repetition of the conventional script of arranged marriages. As one of my respondents stated:

> When we were young, if I didn't become a soldier and stayed at home, I could say that I had no right (to choose a spouse)... For example, my parents introduced a girl to me. They thought she was very nice, but I was strongly against them. Unless people strongly resist to this, nowadays many people rather die than accept this. Unless I behaved in this way, it would be more or less an arranged marriage... In our era, it was really like this, especially for people in rural areas. As I came to Beijing, I made a decision to choose my spouse. (Zhang Song, 58, man, interview)

It was argued by some slightly younger respondents from the parents' generation that young people may have resisted their parents' interference in their dating and relationships in the 1980s and 1990s, which suggests that marriage formation has been gradually transformed from a family matter to an individual choice since the economic reform era. For example, another respondent indicated that:

> In the 1980s, many people had a personality and ideas... There were also some (parents) who interfered quite a lot. But I felt the result of their interference was just the opposite towards what they wished. It would be better for them to leave us alone. (Zeng Ning, 44, woman, interview)

Furthermore, a changing intergenerational power dynamic towards dating and relationships can be identified in the post-reform society. For example, many parents nowadays are seen to respect their offspring's choice of partner. As one of my interview participants argued:

> Now it seems that parents usually do not intervene much in this. People are too free... Because nowadays it is relatively open. Also, for the only children in their families, as long as they live a good life, generally parents would not get much involved. (Liu Lan, 53, woman, interview)

Lan's statement links to an idea discussed in Section 5.2 that the introduction of the open-door policy and one-child policy in the late 1970s has to a great extent shaped a child-centred nuclear family culture, in which young people often hold more individualized values as regards personal

happiness and self-achievement with increasing support from the parents. A more democratic intergenerational family practice can be observed, in which parents are often willing to adopt a more equal position instead of a dominant role in traditional hierarchical families (Fong 2006; Fowler et al. 2010; Xu et al. 2007).

A decline in parents' control over their children's partner-selecting process is likely to be observed. As one of my interviewees indicated:

> Honestly, they would leave us and would not come back home, (if we ask them to do so). There is no way to control children nowadays. They have higher education than us. They said that we did not catch up with the social trend... It is reversed. We have to be obedient to them. (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

Like Xiuyun, some interview participants were greatly influenced by traditional family values and felt frustrated towards young people who, as discussed in Section 5.2, are more likely to be influenced by modern institutions such as mass media and education than their family.

In addition, some interview respondents observed an intergenerational negotiation during Chinese youth's mate-selection process, in which the younger generation may tend to have access to more power than their parents' generation:

> People find a partner by themselves and their parents are not willing to accept the person. It is also likely to (succeed), if they had a nice talk and tried to persuade their parents. (Zhang Song, 58, man, interview)

Song's statement suggests a power subversion in the 'parent-son' relationship in the Confucian philosophy of 'Wu Lun', which may resonate with the idea that the traditional understanding of filial piety has been modified since the social reform era (Hwang 1999). An intergenerational negotiation may have been more welcomed by members of the parents' generation. For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

> To follow someone obediently is actually blind loyalty, which I never agree with. But in that era and under that background, it was likely that some things had to be done in this way and people had no choice. Now people are all well-educated. If they are not satisfied with something, both sides can

> communicate and even have a fierce debate to reach an agreement, which I think is a joyful way for both sides. (Wen Feng, 50, woman, interview)

As members of the parents' generation were often greatly influenced by Confucian and socialist spouse-selecting values, they are inclined to direct their offspring's dating and relationships with their own values. For instance, familial responsibility, which is seen as the premise of a lifelong relationship, often becomes the main concern for the parents' generation. As one of my respondents stated:

> I can only point some questions about the person's (her daughter's future partner) quality including how he interacts with people and deals with matters, his moral values and his views of life and world (*laugh*). Also, his attitudes towards his spouse, his families and his work . . . He should be responsible for families. (Zeng Ning, 44, woman, interview)

Although most parents nowadays tend to support their children's choice, some of them also offer advice in relation to the traditional principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui', which presumes the marriage between partners with the same class background as a social norm. For instance, one of my participants commented that:

> Overall, as parents, we relatively respect her own choice. But we would give her certain guidance. At the beginning, I would inculcate her with an idea to find someone 'Men Dang Hu Dui'. Now she considers something in a dating relationship and in the future she would consider another situation in their everyday lives. If the living habits and family background of the other side is not that (good), there surely would be conflicts in their future life. (Wang Xiao, 47, woman, interview)

For some participants from the younger generation, 'Men Dang Hu Dui' may have been inherited in their own value orientations and become a guide for their marriage formation, which may suggest that the parents' involvement is sometimes still a great influence on young people's dating and relationship-related decisions. For example, one of my respondents believed that her parents, who had had a happy and steady marriage, had set a good example for her and to a great extent had shaped her own values towards personal relationships:

> They just want me to find a respectable family and a reliable person. This is similar to my own requirement. When my mom talked about other people, she may want me to listen to this. She said it is still need to be 'Men Dang Hu Dui'. It means that I do not aim to marry into a high-status family or marry someone whose family is much worse than mine. Of course my mom wants me to find a wealthy family with better economic conditions, so I could have less burden. (Li Sha, 27, woman, interview)

Some interview respondents tended to consider their parents' advice about the family condition and economic status of a potential partner, which may suggest that the traditional principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' to some extent has been facilitated and adapted within a globalized free economy and consumerist culture in the post-reform era. A gendered difference is also identified, as parents with female offspring often attach more importance to their potential partner's economic condition. As one of my interviewees remarked:

> My parents require the other side to have a certain material base, especially for people like us who strive for a life in other cities outside of my hometown. Actually they do not have any requirement about the savings or car of my potential partner, but a house is necessary. For my parents' generation, once we have a house, we can have a stable life... It makes sense. It would avoid a lot of trouble to have a house. Also, once people have a house, they would have a sense of belonging in an unfamiliar city and gradually reduce the unfamiliar feelings. This is a comfort in heart. But I cannot find someone casually only because of a house. (Jiang Xin, 24, woman, interview)

Although, nowadays, young female professionals often have their own income, Xin's parents' concerns about her potential partner may repeat a conventional script about women having to rely on their husbands for economic support.

Alongside traditional familial values such as responsibility and matchmaking principles, regional and cultural proximity are often considered by members of the parents' generation when they evaluate a potential partner for their offspring. For instance, Deng Yun, a 23-year-old female website editor, was born in a small town in southern China and had worked in Beijing, a metropolitan area in northern China, for three years. Yun is the second child in her family and her parents hoped she would settle down in her hometown:

> Many people including my parents all wished that I could find a partner from the local area . . . They mean a person from my hometown in Hunan, which is in a smaller domain . . . as there are many dialects in Hunan. Although I can generally understand them, but there are still some differences . . . They said clearly that it (the family background of the other side) cannot be too bad or too good. They want me to find a local person, mainly because that the families of my sister and my brother-in-law live quite near, only eight-minute walk. Now two families can take a walk together every day, very convenient . . . My mom said that either I come back and find a partner from local area, or find a partner in Beijing with house and car . . . I think they are very reasonable . . . because I also think in this way (*laugh*). (Deng Yun, 23, woman, interview)

Like Yun, some participants from the younger generation mentioned that many parents hope their children find a partner with a similar regional background, which may reflect the principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui', as people from the same area are often seen as sharing similar culture, dialect and customs. The regional closeness, which is often seen as facilitating convenience in the intergenerational communication process, may repeat the collective family values in traditional Chinese society. As Pimentel (2000) indicates, although the small family culture has been widely accepted in post-reform China, especially in urban areas, the mutual support between the two generations, in which the parents' generation tends to help their offspring with childcare and the younger generation is expected to take care of their aged parents, are still very important.

Although regional proximity is often seen as the main way to strengthen an intergenerational tie, unlike the previous generations, who used to live within an extended family, some members of the parents' generation hope to live independently from their married children. For example, one of my respondents argued that:

> As nowadays women all want to live on their own and do not want to live with parents-in-law. Actually parents-in-law do not want to live with their son and daughter-in-law either. If they live together, conflicts would be unavoidable. If they live together, they would always need to be respectful towards each other as guests. This is fine if they live for a day or two days, they cannot bear with it in a long run. (Deng Qingquan, 55, man, interview)

Qingquan's statement may resonate with the idea that a more individualized lifestyle has gradually been accepted among older generations in the

post-reform era (Thøgersen and Ni 2010), which tends to engender a more complicated interconnection between the parents and the younger generation.

5.4 Conclusion

As a generation that grew up in the early decades of the PRC, my participants from the parents' generation were often greatly influenced by Confucian ethics and socialist morality towards personal relationships, and their partner-selecting decisions were to a great extent influenced by their parents' involvement, which may have repeated the script of arranged marriages in traditional Chinese society. Alongside this, the traditional matchmaking values 'Men Dang Hu Dui' tended to fuse with the government's class identification in the early reform era, in which marriage formed between partners with similar class backgrounds was promoted. Marriage in the initial reform period was mainly seen as a way to carry on the family line and serve the intergenerational ties of an extended family. It was under the macro control of the government's political ideology.

Although young people in the early reform era tended to have relatively more choice in choosing a partner, they often had only one dating relationship before entering into a marital bond. A lifelong relationship was often seen as the social norm and sex within the marital bond was often seen as the only legitimate form of intimacy in the 1970s and 1980s. Dating practices were shaped by the traditional matchmaking script and were often seen as preparing the stage for a marital tie, which may resonate with the idea that a dating culture was not identified during the early stages of the reform and opening-up eras (Xu and Whyte 1990). With the enduring power of patriarchy, the Confucian familial philosophy was still very influential in terms of women's relationship-related values and a gendered inequality in dating and relationships was often seen in the early reform period (Chia et al. 1997; Xie and Lin 1997; Zhang 1999, p. 64; Zhu 1994, p. 1831; Zhu 1997). For instance, as chastity used to be a vital criterion for evaluating a woman, premarital sex was often seen as reducing the marriageability of a woman and condemned by the socialist public morality. Divorce and extramarital love, which were seen to go against collective family values and lead to a changing role in family life, were often condemned as demonstrating a lack of responsibility in the initial reform era.

By assessing the values of Chinese youth nowadays, a dramatic change in personal relationships, which to a large extent have transformed from family matter to individual choice in post-reform China, has been observed by my interview participants from the parents' generation. With a decline in parental control of young people's relationships in contemporary Chinese societies, a child-centred nuclear family culture has gradually changed the power dynamic in the parent-son relation defined by Confucian values, in which children were required to be obedient to their parents. Specifically, most respondents from the parents' generation tended to support their offspring's partner selection and a negotiation process may have become the common way to reach intergenerational agreement, which facilitates a more democratic family practice in post-Mao China. However, facing more individualized mate-choosing values and more diversified forms of relationship, such as cohabitation, divorce and extramarital relationships, in the post-reform era, some participants expressed their frustration at being unable to guide their offspring as regards traditional dating values. The changing power relations inside the family unit may further suggest a transition in the social structure of modern Chinese society, which has transformed in the last two decades from a highly interdependent collective one into a more individualized one with loosened interpersonal networks.

With the influence of modern institutions such as modern education and mass media in a globalizing era, some participants from the parents' generation believed that the mate-choosing values presented in mass media, especially in the nationally popular dating programme *If You Are the One*, reflect the dating values of youth in everyday life, which suggests that reality television as a cultural technology may have shaped the identity of Chinese youth towards love and intimacy (Murray and Ouellette 2009; Ouellette and Hay 2008). Simultaneously, the changing attitude towards love and relationships in the post-reform era may suggest a change in gender relations in post-Mao China. Unlike women in traditional Chinese society, young female professionals nowadays are often empowered by a more independent economic status, which often leads to a more equal position in personal relationships.

A generational interconnection is also identified, in which Confucian and socialist values tend to be distributed via the parents' generation and to some extent still influence young people nowadays. Specifically, the traditional matchmaking principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' is often seen as being facilitated within a free-market economy and was

reasserted by some participants from the younger generation. Some members of the parents' generation, especially those with female offspring, were inclined to guide their children to choose a potential partner with a similar or better family condition and economic status, which to some extent repeats the material transaction in an arranged marriage. In addition, some values behind 'Men Dang Hu Dui', such as regional and cultural proximity, tend to be linked to a relatively close mutual support between the parents and the younger generation, which suggests that marriage formation is often not only a personal choice, but also an important way of sustaining intergenerational communication in contemporary China. Although young people nowadays embrace more freedom in dating and relationships, marriage formation is often seen as the union of two families, which indicates that traditional collective family values have fused with an individualized youth culture in post-reform China.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

In this research, I worked through a range of Western theoretical paradigms such as individualization theories and audience studies and employed these to investigate young people's romantic subjectivity in a non-Western context – the post-reform and globalizing China. Rather than seeing myself as an uninvolved observer from a classic interpretivist point of view (Bernstein 1983; Hirsch 1976; Prus 1996, p. 196), I positioned myself as a constructivist with a particular gendered and cultural biography and spoke self-reflexively with certain moral values (Denzin and Lincoln 2000a, p. 18; Rouse 1996; Schwandt 1989). As there is a permanent dialogue between the traditional Chinese set of values and Western influences, I have relied on my own expertise as a native of the research setting when conducting the data gathering and analysis. This non-Western subjectivity helped me reflect on the adaptions needed for this body of theory and mediate between the theories and my respondents during the research process.

This chapter reviews the main themes discussed in the previous discussion chapters, including self-centred desires and anxieties towards personal relationships, changing gendered practices and sexual norms, as well as an emerging private and individualized ethics in various forms of dating and relationships in the post-reform era. It provides a synthesis of the research findings and further discusses its original theoretical and methodological contributions to knowledge in the

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field. By examining, first, the main features of young people's practices and attitudes towards love and relationships, and then further exploring the influential factors pertaining to changing identity in post-reform Beijing, the emergence of a post-socialist romantic subjectivity is assessed. Specifically, young Chinese professionals often intend to become self-managing subjects and draw upon cultural resources generated from modern institutions such as the Chinese government, mass media and the Chinese family to construct a more individualized identity towards love, intimacy and relationships in the post-reform and globalizing era. The book feeds into a broader project of exploring the power dynamics between the socio-cultural transformations in contemporary China and builds on existing literatures of identity studies and individualization theories. In addition, the research approach and the findings help identify gaps and areas that lack exploration. Recommendations and implications for further research are also discussed.

6.1 Summary of Findings

6.1.1 Significance of the Research

Based on the interview data collected from June to September 2013, a more self-centred (or individualized) personal relationship is increasingly observed among Chinese young professionals, who tend to prioritize their own needs and desires within dating and relationships. This builds on existing literatures examining the rise of the individual in contemporary Chinese society (Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Wang 2006; Yan 2003, 2009, 2010a, b) and could be seen as an application of Bauman's concept (2003) of individualized relationships in the context of post-reform Beijing. The discussion of individualized relationships is evident in the following themes:

- Individualized Relationships and a Philosophy of Happiness
- Changing Social and Sexual Norms – From Procreation to Sexual Fulfilment?
- Generational Differences towards Relationship Practices and Ethics
- Changing Gendered Practices towards Dating and Relationships

6.2 Individualized Relationships and a Philosophy of Happiness

According to Bauman (2003), a self-centred relationship often connotes conflictual desires for choices and freedom as well as security and stability within personal bonds. With the emergence of various forms of relationships such as divorce, cohabitation, extramarital relationships, multiple relationships and one-night stands in urban China (Farrer 2002; Huang et al. 2011; Li 2002; Tan 2010; Zha and Geng 1992), young Chinese people are likely to have various expectations towards dating and relationships. My research further suggests a diversified understanding towards romantic love, which is seen as less associated with traditional lifelong commitment and increasingly shaped by changing emotional attachments and confluent sexual desires. As love and romance were often greatly associated with a relatively fixed identity in relation to a shared future life trajectory (Giddens 1992), the new emotional and sexual desires in my research appear to facilitate an increasingly fragmented and diversified personal relationship, which tends to reflect the on-the-move identity of Chinese young professionals. In addition, the changing nature of love and intimacy observed in my empirical findings suggests an increasingly diversified understanding of personal happiness, which has shifted from the traditional happiness hierarchy that sees a lifelong heterosexual marriage as having a higher moral value than other forms of relationships aiming for temporary gratification (Ahmed 2010, p. 12). An increasingly individualized happiness philosophy is observed, which is likely to challenge a traditional singular understanding of a 'happy' relationship and encourage the development of a creative subjectivity in embracing diversified lifestyles (Ahmed 2010, pp. 218–219).

6.3 Changing Social and Sexual Norms – From Procreation to Sexual Fulfilment?

The diversified values and practices towards love and romance may further imply the changing nature of sexuality from traditional procreational purposes into something that aims at sexual pleasure and fulfilment, which may suggest that a good sexual life has become an increasingly important part of life for young people in China. The sample group of Chinese youth often expressed more understandable and less judgemental attitudes towards various forms of relationships

such as divorce, premarital sex, extramarital relationships and multiple relationships, which reflects a more tolerant social and cultural environment. This could be linked to the sexual revolution observed since the reform and opening-up era (Bullough and Ruan 1994; Higgins and Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Long and Liu 1992; Pan 1993; Vincent 1991). Compared to relationship-related values during the first three decades of the PRC, young people in the reform era often embrace a different kind of relationship, which is often seen as gaining increased privacy and personal freedom. With growing interests in diversified dating and relationship practices (Farrer 2002; Farrer and Sun 2003; Pan 1993; Zhang et al. 2004), changing social and sexual norms are observed, in which the dominance of sexual relations within heterosexual marriage is challenged. For instance, premarital cohabitation and multiple dating practices were seen as more acceptable partner-choosing strategies and as a trial period for a satisfying future marital life by some of my respondents from the young generation. The emergence of extramarital and non-marital dating practices such as multiple relationships, open relationships and one-night stands are likely to connote new intentions as well as sexual and/or emotional desires towards personal relationships (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a; Wang and Nehring 2014).

Facing increasingly fragmented and diversified dating and relationship practices, the sample group of Chinese youth sometimes expressed a relatively conservative attitude towards their own relationship-related practices, which are seen as being shaped by both traditional collective familial values as well as some modern individualized values. For instance, with a rising divorce rate among the younger generation (Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC 2007; Tan 2010; Xu and Ye 2002), a lifelong marriage, as an ideal form of happy relationship, is seen as more desirable but more difficult to achieve. Divorce is often considered as a more acceptable option while at the same time a last resort for young professionals. With an increasing rate of extramarital relationships in the post-reform era (Zha and Geng 1992, p. 13), a desire for multiple partners is noticeable among some young people. Extramarital relationships are occasionally seen as complementary and subordinate to marriage, which, as a traditional legalized and moralized relationship, is often prioritized in young people's life agendas. An increased emphasis on Confucian and socialist values such as responsibility and marital faithfulness is observed among some

Chinese youth, who tend to draw upon traditional values in their partner-selecting process and develop self-managing skills to avoid extramarital relationships when facing romantic possibilities outside marriage.

It is likely that most young professionals in my sample group were more influenced by traditional morality and thought highly of a lifelong marriage, which may imply that traditional collective familial values are more influential and/or more widely accepted in public discussions. This may suggest that Confucian and socialist values have become key resources for Chinese youth to construct their expectations and desires regarding individualized relationships, which tends to imply the recalibration of traditional norms into more progressive relationships. For instance, some young people intend to generate new interpretations of traditional Confucian concepts such as responsibility and marital fidelity, which are at times seen as external moral resources and are employed by self-managing subjects as relationship-sustaining strategies. Also, an ethics of mutual care and communication is increasingly observed within young people's relationships, which tends to connote a development of personal rules based on the traditional script of women as care providers in familial lives.

Furthermore, the complex power dynamics between traditional and modern values may imply a difference between a self-centred relationship in a Western context and in the context of China, which could be seen as a main feature of an individualization with Chinese characteristics. Specifically, by drawing upon new understandings of traditional Confucian values, young professionals are likely to gain a unique identity as Chinese in a globalizing era. The newly emerging individualized relationship is often built on traditional value systems, which may imply an interdependent relationship between tradition and modernity. This may resonate with 'a Westernized Chinese subjectivity', introduced by Chow (2003, p. xi), who indicates that ethnicity is a socio-historical force and serves as a cultural technology for Chinese people to develop a collective identity. By reasserting traditional values, personal relationships are likely to become a way for Chinese youth to identify themselves as a modern subject, which, as Bond (1991) argues, is different from both traditional Chinese and Westerners. This tends to be further linked to an argument that people tend to (re)assert a local or national identity, while at the same time embracing global values and lifestyles (Lipschutz 1992).

6.4 Generational Differences towards Relationship Practices and Ethics

By examining a group of respondents born in the 1950s and 1960s, a generational difference as regards traditional collective familial values pertaining to love and relationships is observed, which are often seen as transforming from a general moral law in the pre-reform era into a more negotiable and private ethics fusing with an individualized youth culture in the post-reform period. Participants from the parents' generation are seen as a comparison group helping identify the changing power dynamics between traditional collective values and modern self-centred values in the past three decades.

More specifically, although free-choice marriage, which is based on mutual love and consent between spouses, has been advocated since the 1950s (Evans 1995, p. 359; Osburg 2013, p. 163), being introduced to a potential partner was often seen as the main way to initiate a conjugal tie for members of the parents' generation. This suggests that young people in the early reform era often took a relatively passive role in establishing their relationships. Alongside this, my respondents from the parents' generation were often greatly influenced by the traditional matchmaking values of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' (marriage formed by spouses from families with similar social rank) and socialist class ideology promoted by the government (Diamant 2000) and usually had only one dating relationship serving as a pre-stage for marriage. Conjugal ties formed in the 1970s and 1980s were seen as an important way of accomplishing and reinforcing a pre-scripted role in an extended family, in which young couples take filial responsibility for their aged parents and raise children to carry on the family line. This may reflect a vital aspect of the identity of the parents' generation, who lived as 'relational being[s]' in order to sustain a harmonious and hierarchical family life (Bond and Hwang 1986, p. 215). Personal happiness was often understood as being greatly associated with 'unquestioning loyalty' towards kinship ties (Hofstede 1983, p. 83), which may further imply a highly interdependent social structure in the early reform period.

As a key factor in fulfilling a lifelong commitment, personal quality, especially moral quality, was often seen as an important consideration in the spouse-choosing process in the early reform era. This could be linked with a traditional understanding of marital love, which was seen as an intimate emotional attachment fused with moral obligations towards

family life (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 19; Mendus 2000, p. 6; Pan 2006a, p. 31). Sexual relations were monopolized within lifelong marriage, which was the social norm during the Maoist and early reform era. On the contrary, premarital sex, divorce and extramarital relationships, which were likely to impact on the fulfilment of familial roles and responsibilities within marriage, were greatly disapproved of by public morality. For instance, premarital sex was often seen as an abnormal or immoral behaviour, which used to cause the reduction of women's marriageability, and divorce and extramarital relationships were greatly sanctioned by public opinion, being viewed as likely to harm the involved parties' reputation and future lives. According to my participants from the parents' generation, personal relationships in the pre-reform and early reform era were often greatly shaped by collective institutions such as the extended family. This may imply a repetition of a state population control mechanism in traditional patriarchal Chinese society, in which families worked as self-governing units following Confucian hierarchical relationships between the old and the young, father and son, as well as husband and wife (Engel 1984; Reid 1999, p. 109; Starr 2001).

The changing nature of personal relationships from a family matter to an individual choice has been increasingly observed in the past two decades, which may further connote a transforming parental involvement in relationship cultivation. Specifically, younger people in the post-reform era often take a more active role in identifying and pursuing their needs and expectations as regards personal relationships, which are increasingly supported by members of the parents' generation. For instance, compared to the parents' generation, younger people in the post-Mao era often embrace more strategies in approaching personal relationships such as newspaper advertisements in the 1990s and online social platforms as well as dating websites since the 2000s. A decline of parents' involvement in their offspring's personal relationships is observed, which at times caused frustration among some of my respondents born in the 1950s and 1960s, as their children tended to participate in various forms of dating practices and/or refuse to follow their advice in the partner-choosing process. So a negotiation process between the parents' generation and the younger generation is likely to become a common way of reaching intergenerational agreement, which indicates a subverted power flow from parents to offspring in traditional patriarchal families and the emergence of what could be seen to be a more democratic family culture (Fong 2006; Fowler et al. 2010; Hesketh et al. 2005; Xu et al. 2007).

6.5 Changing Gendered Practices towards Dating and Relationships

Changing gendered practices towards dating and relationships are observed, which are often seen as the main component of changing identity in the post-Mao era. For instance, for my respondents from the parents' generation, female chastity was often seen as a main criterion for a good woman, and premarital sex, which was condemned by socialist morality, was viewed as causing the reduction of women's marriageability. Compared to their male counterparts, women's sexuality was more restricted by both Confucian and socialist values during the early reform era (Chia et al. 1997; Xie and Lin 1997; Zhang 1999, p. 64; Zhu 1994, p. 183; Zhu 1997), which tended to repeat an unequal gendered practice in traditional patriarchal families. With equal opportunities provided by a modern education system, my sample of young female professionals nowadays appears to have a more independent economic status and hold more liberal attitudes towards various forms of sexual practices compared to women from their parents' generation. For example, with the nationwide labour mobility in the post-reform era, premarital cohabitation is often seen as a more acceptable and common choice for urban women working away from their hometowns. This may connote the increasingly equal position of young women in personal relationships and to some extent align with a labour market based on individualization in Western societies since the 1960s (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995), in which women are emancipated from a traditional family role and embrace more freedom in career development.

Rising gender power is observed in dating and relationship-related practices, in which the traditional inferior female gender role shaped by a script of 'superior husband and subordinate wife' (Pateman 1984, p. 78) is likely to be subverted. For instance, an ethics of mutual care emphasizing a two-way emotional interaction as well as practical care between partners is observed in young people's relationships, which tend to challenge the woman's role as housekeeper and care provider in family life in the early reform era (Rosen 1992; Zhang 1999; Zhu 1994, p. 183). Young female professionals in the post-reform era are often seen as taking the dual role of care provider as well as receiver, which may reflect more balanced gendered practices in relation to love and romance (Bullough and Ruan 1994; Higgins and Sun 2007; Pan 1993; Pan et al. 2004; Yan 2003). This may further imply the increasingly feminized nature of personal relationships,

in which men are attaching more importance to the other side's needs and expectations and providing more emotional as well as practical support to their partners.

An increasingly complicated interplay between Confucian morality and modern individualized values is observed, in which young female professionals are often more shaped by traditional values pertaining to relationship-related decisions and practices than their male counterparts. For instance, although divorce has become a more acceptable choice for young people, it is seen as a possible barrier for women when embarking on a new relationship, which may resonate with the idea that traditional Confucian values are still an influence on Chinese youth (Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983; Wolf 1985). Most of my female respondents expressed a wary feeling towards extramarital relationships or multiple relationships, which suggests that women in multiple sexual relationships are more likely to be condemned by public morality (Farrer 2002; Jankowiak 2008; Milhausen and Herold 1999, 2001). Young male professionals are often seen as more likely to conduct extramarital relationships and multiple relationships, which may objectify the female side as a victim in male-dominant relationships (Benjamin 1988, p. 9). This may suggest a male sexual desire as regards multiple partners and tend to resonate with the notion of male superiority within polygamous relationships in feudal societies, which is likely to reinforce the enduring power of traditional patriarchy (Farrer and Sun 2003, p. 16; Osburg 2014; Xiao 2011).

In response to the traditional male dominance in personal relationships, young female professionals tend to generate private ethics and strategies to fulfil their own needs and desires in personal relationships. For instance, when facing romantic opportunities outside marriage, some young women intend to follow traditional Confucian morality and reassert the importance of traditional female chastity and marital faithfulness in order to sustain a lifelong marriage. On the other hand, an increasing number of women assert their sexual desire as regards multiple partners, and this could be observed in various forms of relationships, such as multiple relationships and one-night stands, which may reflect a new femininity challenging the script of traditional male-centred relationships. This may further support Foucault's (1979, 1988) argument that modern subjects employ technologies of the self to identify and pursue diversified emotional and sexual expectations as regards personal relationships, which facilitated a transition in relationship ethics in Western societies (Rabinow 1994, p. 254).

6.5.1 *Influential Factors on Identity Construction towards Dating and Relationships*

As discussed in 6.1.1, compared to members from the parents' generation, a more individualized personal relationship is increasingly observed among Chinese youth, who often hold diversified mate-choosing values, embrace various forms of relationship-approaching and sustaining strategies, and develop private ethics to guide relationship-related decisions and practices. This subsection intends to further explore the changing power dynamics between traditional collective values and modern individualized values in the post-reform era by looking at the interplay of factors that have impacted on young people's identity construction in terms of dating and relationships.

First, mass media, which is an increasingly privatized modern institution shaped by the free-market economy as well as a public organ distributing socialist political ideology under government censorship (Curtin 2007; Li 2001, p. 3; Wang 2011), tends to work as an effective avenue to explore the power relations between modern individualized values and traditional collective values. Reality TV dating programmes have become a relatively new platform for young Chinese professionals to embark on dating relationships since the late 1990s, and the most popular show, *If You Are the One*, which has led the second wave of reality TV dating programmes since 2010, is examined as a modern allegory within a crystallized enquiry in an audience study framework.

Specifically, the popularity of reality TV dating may reflect a diversified dating culture, in which young people tend to have more individualized mate-choosing strategies and values. This is likely to be both caused by as well as further facilitating the sexual revolution observed since the economic reform era, in which a growing interest in self-expression as regards love and relationships in the public domain has been observed (Cheng et al. 2000; Huang 1998; Inglehart 2003, pp. 105–106). As aiming to build an authentic public service platform, the programme could be seen as a government-supported cultural technology (Murray and Ouellette 2009; Ouellette and Hay 2008), which feeds into an individualized youth culture and further shapes the social and cultural environment of dating and marriage.

The reality TV dating programme is seen as an imitation of increasing romantic possibilities in a modern-life setting and as an incarnation of an accelerated-relationship scenario, in which dating becomes on-the-spot

consumption. For instance, in a public programme setting, guests in the reality TV dating programme are at times seen as lacking private interaction and intending to draw upon traditional matchmaking values in the mate-choosing process, in which male guests tend to attach a lot of importance to a partner's physical appearance and female guests are likely to think highly of the economic status of the other side. TV dating is often seen as reflecting a combination of traditional matchmaking principles and postmodern consumerist culture in the context of a globalized popular media genre, which may resonate with a market principle emphasizing efficiency and material transaction within personal relationships (Osburg 2013, pp. 163–165; Osburg 2014; Zelizer 2005). This may further suggest that mass media, especially reality TV dating shows, tend to work as modern institutions, not only mirroring value orientations in the post-reform era but also producing media content with both neoliberal logic and socialist ideology, which are likely to influence Chinese youth's identity construction in a more subtle way.

By exploring audiences' attitudes towards and understandings of the programme *If You Are the One*, two different viewing cultures could be observed, in which members of the parents' generation are more likely to adopt a referential viewing and be influenced by mediated reality (Liebes and Katz 1990, p. 100). The programme is often seen as a way for the parents' generation to understand young people nowadays, which may reflect the learning function of television introduced in cultivation and social cognitive theories (Bandura 1986, 2001; Gerbner 1998; Gerbner et al. 1980; Gerbner et al. 2002).

Young Chinese professionals tend to generate polysemic understandings, which may resonate with, negotiate or be opposite to the pre-coded meanings within televisual texts (Bourdieu 1984; Fiske 1989; Hall 1980; Hymes 1972; Livingstone and Lunt 1994, p. 71; Morley 1989, p. 18; Skeggs 1992, p. 91). For example, respondents from the young generation often questioned the authenticity of the programme by identifying the possible commercial interests of the programme's production team as well as those of the guests. The programme was seen as an entertaining resource rather than a reliable way to approach a personal relationship for most respondents from the sample group. Specifically, as one type of speed dating, reality TV dating is at times considered to reflect a fast-food culture and contain potential risks as regards the development of future relationships, which will involve the rejection of some young people. Young audiences often (re)identify their own needs and expectations

regarding dating and relationships by analysing the mate-choosing values of guests on the programme. The emergence of a more active and critical viewing culture among Chinese youth may further connote a questioning of the authenticity of relationships in everyday lives, in which true love and/or free-choice relationships may have become more difficult to achieve and traditional matchmaking principles tend to be re-emphasized as a sometimes reluctantly adopted solution for young people when establishing their relationships.

Second, modern Chinese families, which are often seen as both facilitating an individualized youth culture and reinforcing traditional gendered stereotypes, tend to play a dual role in young people's identity formation as regards love and relationships. The one-child policy in force since 1979 has facilitated a small family culture, in which the only children are often placed at the centre of family life and gain most resources and support from their parents (Fong 2006; Fowler et al. 2010; Lau and Yeung 1996; Wang et al. 2000; Xu et al. 2007). Growing up in a child-centred familial environment, young professionals nowadays are often seen as having gained generational power and holding more individualized values, which may make a romantic relationship built upon mutual interaction and support difficult to achieve. For instance, Chinese youth, who tend to prioritize their own needs within personal relationships, are at times seen as neglecting their partners' expectations and/or being reluctant to provide practical care to the other side. Compared to their parents' generation, young people nowadays are at times seen as lacking the staying power needed to fulfil a lifelong marital commitment, which is likely to be a reason for the rising divorce rate and increasingly fragmented personal ties in urban China.

The Chinese family is also seen as an influential institution, passing on traditional Confucian and socialist ideology in relation to spouse-choosing values as well as gendered and age stereotypes when it comes to personal relationships. For instance, the traditional matchmaking principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' (marriage between families with similar social rank) is seen as being fused with a market principle and working as a hidden rule of marriage formation for some young people, who tend to follow their parents' examples and link personal happiness with a lifelong marriage and harmonious family life. Although most of my respondents from the young generation thought highly of emotional attachment, which was seen as a base for personal relationships, the economic conditions of a potential partner were an important consideration in young people's mate-choosing

process. This may repeat the script of material transaction between two families within traditional arranged marriage and resonate with the idea that relationship-related consumptions are at times seen as a way for some young people to pursue material desires and achieve economic and social status (Adrian 2003, 2006; Rofel 2007). This spouse-choosing value tends to emphasize regional and cultural proximity between partners, which is sometimes seen as a way of facilitating communication within extended families and reducing the risk of potential problems in future marital lives. In other words, the reassertion of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' may imply a familial impact upon young people's marriage formation, which is not only seen as a personal choice, but also a way to unite two families in order to carry on and maintain intergenerational ties.

In addition, speed dating and flash marriage are at times seen as being supported by members of the parents' generation (Zhang 2005), who tend to guide their offspring to marry and have children at an appropriate age. The popular phrase 'leftover women', referring to single women over 27 years old, was first used in state-run media in 2007 and has drawn increasing attention in both public debates and private conversations (Fincher 2012; Magistad 2013). Personal relationships are at times seen as less important for 'leftover women', who are likely to attach more importance to their educational and professional development. At the same time, women approaching or over 30 years old are often seen to face more pressure to marry from their family and social customs, as compared with males in the same age group (Fincher 2014; Magistad 2013; To 2015). 'Leftover women' may imply a gendered and age inequality, in which women of a slightly older age are at times seen as having fewer choices or being less desirable for men (Wang and Nehring 2014). The use of 'leftover women' in state media and private conversations among family members is likely to reinforce a traditional male-centred relationship pattern, in which women were seen as objects of love, and marriage had to be accomplished at a certain age in order to achieve personal happiness. This could potentially be seen as the influence of socialist power via mass media and modern family upon people's relationship-related values and practices, which may connote a state apparatus governing marriage and population.

Hence, the modern Chinese state, which is seen to facilitate both a free-market-oriented neoliberal reasoning and some residual socialist ideology such as collective family values, tends to play a dual role in shaping the socio-cultural environment in post-reform China. This may resonate with

Ong and Zhang's (2008) argument that nationwide privatization and the global market economy have triggered the formation of a new social space, in which we see the rise of self-managing subjects who are embracing more freedom and a calculating reasoning as regards their private lives and are less influenced by the socialist sovereign. The revisions of the Marriage Law in the reform era may further feed into a self-centred decision-making mechanism in relation to dating and relationships. For instance, with simplified divorce procedures since the revisions of the Marriage Law in 1980 and 2003 (Li 2012; Miller and Fang 2012; Palmer 2007), divorce, which used to be a family matter and sanctioned by work units, is often seen as an individual choice for Chinese people.

Alongside, with neoliberal governing principles, the Chinese government is seen to distribute socialist power from afar, which tends to further shape the individualized life politics of young people in China (Ong and Zhang 2008). For example, with the emergence of various forms of dating and relationships, such as cohabitation and multiple relationships, a more self-centred relationship ethics is likely to be formed among Chinese youth. However, heterosexual marriage, which is protected by the Marriage Law and conforms to socialist family values, is still the only officially supported personal tie and is often seen to influence significantly young professionals' understandings of other forms of relationships.

Overall, the above factors, which have impacted upon young people's identity as regards love and intimacy, are likely to feed into the individual-society-state relationship introduced by Yan (2010a). By employing neoliberal governmentality, the Chinese government has facilitated the formation of a set of modern institutions such as the free-market economy, nuclear families, educational system, legal system and mass media, which tend to both facilitate the rise of the individual and re-emphasize traditional collective values and socialist ideology. A self-centred relationship could be seen as demonstrating Foucault's concepts of technology of the self and subjectivity as a historical construct (1979, 1980, 1982, 1988). For instance, young Chinese professionals are often seen as transforming into self-managing subjects in the post-reform era and developing personal understandings towards the reality dating programme *If You Are the One*, which serves as a cultural technology for them to identify their own mate-choosing values as well as approaches. An individualized personal tie is likely to align with a democratic turn observed in family practice, which has attached increasing importance to individual interests and happiness

and challenged the traditional hierarchical social mechanism (Ho 1987, 1994, 1996; Hwang 1999; Yan 2009, p. xxiv). Chinese youth are often seen as gaining emotional and economic support from their families, which is likely to reshape an interdependent relationship between the rising individual and nuclear family. In other words, the self-centred values within personal relationships are at times seen as feeding into a collective family culture and contributing to the harmony of intergenerational ties.

6.6 Methodological Contributions

This project touches upon a number of research areas, including generational studies and audience studies, which could be seen as explorations of employing an interdisciplinary approach in examining identity construction as regards love and intimacy. Specifically, this research refers to a crystallized interpreting framework (Ellingson 2009, p. 190; Richardson 2000, p. 934), which provides a postmodern approach to examine the research question. The popular Chinese reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One* is seen as a mediated simulacra of Chinese youth's dating and relationships in their everyday lives. By building a dialogic platform within an audience research paradigm, this research examines audiences' understandings of the televisual text and further develops its sociological interest in exploring young Chinese professionals' identity construction towards love and relationships in a real-life setting. As love and relationships are traditionally private and sensitive issues, the audience approach to a great extent helped me build rapport with my respondents and became an ice breaker for the participants to talk about relationships during the interview process.

By drawing upon Foucault's (1979, 1982) historical enquiring framework in studying the development of subjectivity, this project recruited a comparison group of respondents from the parents' generation, who helped examine the identity transformation in respect of love and intimacy since the reform era. By comparing dating and relationship-related values and practices in two historical periods – the early reform era and the post-reform era – this generational approach helps locate the individualization process in the context of China within a historical framework and further builds on existing individualization theories (for example, Bauman 2000, 2001, 2003; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2003, 2010; Giddens 1991, 1992; Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Yan 2009, 2010a, b). By adopting a generational angle, a more complex power interplay between

tradition and modernity in shaping the subjectivity formation of present-day Chinese youth is observed, which tends to add new interpretations to Foucault's (1979, 1982) works pertaining to human beings' subjectivity transformation. Specifically, traditional Confucian and socialist values and practices facilitated by modern institutions such as the nuclear family and mass media are sometimes seen as important cultural resources for young Chinese people to construct their identities as regards love and intimacy. This is likely to suggest the dual role of modern institutions, which may both promote the formation of neoliberal subjects and suppress the romantic subjectivity development in contemporary Chinese society.

Alongside this, by using semi-structured interviews as the main research method, this investigation uses a qualitative approach for exploring identity construction as regards dating and relationships. Compared to most relevant studies employing social survey methods, such as questionnaires or structured interviews, and following a quantitative tradition (for example, Higgins and Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Huang et al. 2011; Pan 1993; Pan et al. 2004), this project provides a more in-depth understanding of identity construction in post-reform Chinese society and adds some new research experience to the field. In addition, as a research technique inherited from a romantic individualist tradition of the late 1960s (Seale 2004, p. 106), semi-structured interviews help to bring a demotic turn in exploring ordinary young Chinese people's identity construction as regards love and intimacy, which may enhance the capacity of generalizing the findings for a wider population. This tends to build on qualitative studies focusing on the romantic identities of people with special dating and relationship-related experiences such as extramarital relationships and/or multiple relationships (Farrer and Sun 2003; Pei 2011; Xiao 2011).

6.7 Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

By employing in-depth interviews, the research findings discussed in the previous sections present the identity construction as regards love and intimacy of a specific group of young professionals working in Beijing. As the respondents have various family as well as professional backgrounds, and Beijing is a metropolitan city attracting young professionals from all over the country, the research findings are to some

extent representative of a bigger group of Chinese youth, who have higher educational backgrounds and are working in urban China. Alongside this, by recruiting participants from the parents' generation, the research further examined the present-day younger generation's identities in respect of love and intimacy by comparing the changing values between the early and post-reform eras. This small sample group is intended to be exploratory rather than representative. Further research could develop this transgenerational comparison approach by focusing on the participants from previous generations in order to explore how the socio-cultural change in contemporary Chinese society has shaped the subjectivity of people who grew up in an extended family culture and who often have siblings, as compared to the one-child generation (1979 to present).

The emergence of individualized relationships, which draws upon a neoliberal logic and understanding of traditional Confucian and socialist values in post-reform China, may reflect an individualization with Chinese characteristics, which could feed into the Chinese government's ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Like the individualization process during the twentieth century, nowadays the rise of the individual is still shaped by the collectivist ideology of the Chinese state (Liu 1995; Yan 2010b). Hence, to further build on individualization theories, future research could focus on the changing nature of the meaning of individualization.

Alongside this, by examining diversified needs and desires in an individualized relationship, personal relationships become an important way of further exploring the changing nature of intimacy. Simultaneously, as a responsive state policy is called for in order to enhance the capacity of the current Marriage Law, future research may include some comparative studies focusing on the policy-making in China and in some Western countries in order to benefit the further revision of relationship laws in the post-reform era.

Moreover, a regional influence in relation to young people's identity construction is observed. For example, with the emergence of various forms of dating and relationship practices in urban China (Farrer 2002; Huang et al. 2011; Li 2002; Tan 2010; Wang and Nehring 2014; Zha and Geng 1992), urban youth are often seen as holding more tolerant attitudes towards relationship-related values and practices (Higgins and Sun 2007), which may resonate with an urban-rural division facilitated by the unequal distribution of the

impact of globalization and the free-market economy (Castells 2005). Thus, it would be worth capturing global flows and their impact on relationship formation in future research.

In addition, data analysis is mainly based on narrative data generated from the qualitative interviews. As social surveys and in-depth interviews are the main research tools in existing studies exploring identity formation as regards love and intimacy, future research may design new methodological approaches in this field.

6.8 Conclusion

This book has examined the emergence of a post-socialist romantic subjectivity in post-reform China by looking at young Chinese people's values and practices as regards love and relationships. Specifically, by comparing mate-choosing values, strategies in initiating and sustaining personal relationships, as well as relationship ethics in the early reform era and the post-reform era, present day Chinese youth often tend to prioritize their own needs and expectations in their love lives and embrace a more individualized relationship pattern. Alongside this, by examining young professionals' attitudes towards various forms of dating and relationships such as premarital cohabitation, extramarital relationships and multiple relationships, a more tolerant socio-moral environment is observed. This promotes increasing freedom in embracing different relationship styles and suggests that personal relationships have become a more private and individualized issue, greatly defined by the involved parties. Moreover, by exploring how young people make their romantic selves, a more complex power interaction between young Chinese people and modern institutions such as government policies, the Chinese family and mass media is observed, which may suggest a subjective experience drawing upon both traditional collective ideology and modern individualized values. This negotiated relationship between tradition and modernity is likely to suggest an individualization process with Chinese characteristics, which tends to build on existing literatures pertaining to identity studies and individualization theories. Overall, by exploring how young Chinese people structure their love and intimate lives, this book feeds into a broader project of examining identity transformation in the context of the post-reform and globalizing Chinese society.

Recommended Readings

Benjamin, J. (1988) *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. London: Virago.

Bond, M. H. (1991) *Beyond the Chinese Face: Insights from Psychology*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Bullough, V. L. & Ruan, F. F. (1994) Marriage, Divorce, and Sexual Relations in Contemporary China. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*. 25 (3), pp. 383–393.

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Magistad, M. K. (2013) China's Leftover Women, Unmarried at 27 [online]. *BBC News*. 21 February. Available from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21320560 [Accessed 26 December 2015].

Osburg, J. (2014) Tough Love: Money and Mistresses in the Middle Kingdom [online]. *Foreign Affairs*. 12 June. Available from: http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141562/john-osburg/tough-love [Accessed 26 December 2015]

Rabinow, P. (ed.) (1994) *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984)*. London: Penguin.

To, S. (2015) *China's Leftover Women: Late Marriage Among Professional Women and Its Consequences*. Oxon: Routledge.

Appendices
Appendix A Participant Information Sheet

I am a PhD student at Newcastle University. This research seeks to investigate the representation of love issues in Chinese mainstream media, audiences' interpretation and negotiation of the media content, and its possible influences on the identities of Chinese youth. Using in-depth interviews as the main research method, this project will ensure the confidentiality of all participants, and the collected data will only be used for academic research.

The interview schedule will focus mainly on attitudes towards love and intimacy in contemporary China, including the main reasons for watching TV dating programmes; attitudes towards values concerning love and relationships represented in the mainstream media; opinions on some traditional values concerning love and marriage; young people's mate-choosing values; opinions on some controversial issues about love and relationships represented in some popular TV dramas or some trendy phrases on the internet; and different attitudes towards dating and relationships between the Chinese youth and their parents' generation.

The interviews will usually last 45–60 minutes and the recordings will only be used as research materials. The thesis will make sure the

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confidentiality of all the participants is always respected. When quoting the opinions of a particular participant, a pseudonym will be used.

Participants are free to ask questions at any time before and during the study by contacting the researcher. The participation of every participant is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time.

If you would like to participate or ask for further information, please contact: Chao Yang, School of Arts and Cultures, c.yang@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix B Participant Consent Form

Title of Project:

1. I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet dated _____.
2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.
3. I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.
4. I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalized for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.
5. The procedures regarding confidentiality (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymization of data, etc.) have been clearly explained to me.
6. If applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, audio, video or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.
7. The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.
8. I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.
9. I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.

Name of participant (print)..... Signed..... Date.....
Name of researcher taking consent (print)..... Signed..... Date.....

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Appendix C Participant Debriefing Sheet

The proposed project aims to explore the influence of the media on the identity transformation of the younger generation in contemporary China. Specifically, it will explore the representation of love issues on Chinese mainstream media, the audiences' interpretation and negotiation of the media content, and its possible influences on the identities of Chinese youth. Based on the proposed topic, in-depth interviews are employed as research methods. The questions in the interview intend to focus on the following aspects:

i. The main reasons for Chinese youth watching TV dating programmes; their attitudes towards the values about love and relationships represented in the TV dating programme *If You Are the One*
ii. The opinions of the young people on some traditional values in relation to love and relationships
iii. The main factors for Chinese youth when choosing their spouse
iv. The different attitudes towards love and relationships between the younger generation and their parents' generation

This project will ensure the confidentiality of all the participants and the collected data will only be used for academic research. Unfortunately, it is impossible to provide individual feedback regarding your participation in the interview. The final report of this research is expected to finish in June 2015. If you would like to receive a copy of the report summarizing the findings, please leave your contact information with Chao Yang (e-mail: c.yang@ncl.ac.uk).

Many thanks for your time!

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Appendix D Interview Schedule – Young People

1. How often do you watch the reality television programme *If You Are the One*? What do you think of this programme? (authenticity)
2. What do you think are the main reasons for the popularity (high ratings) of this programme?
3. What do you think are the main reasons for people to take part in the show?
4. What do you think are the main considerations for female/male participants in the programme when choosing their dates? Do you think this programme reflects mainstream values towards love issues? Which aspects do you consider when you choose your date? Why?
5. Tell me about the different ways that young people find a partner. Which ways did you use (or consider using) to find a partner? (TV dating) Why?
6. According to the host (the show on 5 May 2013), male participants from Taiwan, followed by Hong Kong and Heilongjiang, have the highest success rate in finding a date on the show. What do you think of this statistic?
7. What do you think of participants from other countries or districts? Is it common for people to find partners with different ethnic backgrounds? Would you consider a partner from another country or part of China? Why?
8. What do you think of long-distance relationship (marriage)? Would you consider it? Why?s

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9. Do your family members (for example, your parents) provide any advice about your prospective partner? How do you feel about their advice?
10. Do you think people are looking for a lifelong relationship? Do you think that applies to you? In your experience, what do you need?
11. What do you think of happiness or success in your life?
12. Do you think money is an important part of a relationship? (go Dutch, gift, 'naked wedding', money worship)
13. Is cohabitation common? Why is this? How do you think people feel about this?
14. What do you think are the best ways to sustain a dating relationship or marriage? (honesty, loyalty) What do you think is the relationship between love and marriage?
15. Some participants in the show mentioned that are divorced. What do people think of the phenomenon of divorce nowadays? Do you think divorce is a barrier for people starting a new relationship?
16. Do you know people who have had an affair while in a relationship? Why do you think that was? (common/main reason) Have you ever been in that position? Would you consider having an extramarital love affair after getting married? Why?
17. Why do people have relationships? Why is it seen as important? Is it increasingly important to be seen in a relationship? If someone is not in a relationship, how do you/others view him/her?
18. In your opinion, what are the differences between men and women towards love and relationships? (aim/attitude/representation)
19. Have you experienced any changes in any aspects of your life after watching the television dating programme *If You Are the One*?

Appendix E Interview Schedule – Parents' Generation

1. Do you often watch the reality television programme *If You Are the One*? What do you think of this programme? (authenticity)
2. What do you think are the main considerations for female/male participants in the programme when choosing their date? Do you think this programme reflects the mainstream values of the Chinese youth towards love and intimacy? Why?
3. When the participants in the reality TV dating programme find a date, do you think they find true love? What do you believe is an ideal love? What do you think is the relationship between love and marriage?
4. If your son or daughter is single, do you consider the reality TV dating programme as a way for them to find an ideal partner? Why?
5. How did you meet your spouse? What were the popular ways for people to find their partners when you were young?
6. What were the main considerations for people in your generation when choosing a partner? What do you think are the main factors for the youth nowadays?
7. Did your family members (for example, your parents) provide any advice about your prospective partner? How did you feel about their advice? (filial piety)
8. Do you think a lifelong relationship is important in your life? Why? What about youth nowadays?
9. What do you think is the best way to sustain an intimate relationship (or marriage)? (loyalty)

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10. Do you think it is common for couples to have extramarital affairs? What is your attitude towards this?
11. Do you think material wealth is an important consideration in a dating relationship? What is your attitude towards terms such as 'naked wedding' or 'money worship'?
12. Was cohabitation before marriages common when you were young? Do you think it is acceptable that young people live together before getting married? Why?

Appendix F Participants' Information

Pseudonym	*Birth place*	*Education*	*Professional background/ Work experience*	*Dating status/Times of relationships*	*Interview Time/ venue*
Wen Jing (female, 31)	Beijing	MA degree	Foreign trade company employee (3.5 years)	Single looking (1)	02/07/2013 4–5 pm McDonald's, Beijing
Zheng Anchi (male, 24)	Quanzhou, Fujian	BA degree	NGO employee (2 years)	Single looking (1)	02/07/2013 7.30–8.30 pm Ai meng xiao zhen restaurant, Beijing
Sun Chenxue (female, 28)	Beijing	BA degree	Hospital administration support (6 years)	Single looking (0–1)	04/07/2013 8–8.40 pm Cui wei Mall, Beijing
Shen Nan (female, 27)	Beijing	BA degree	Patent attorney (5 years)	Married (1.5)	05/07/2013 7–9 pm Starbucks, Beijing
Wang Xiao (female, 47)	Beijing	MA degree	Management (more than 20 years)	Married with a daughter (1)	06/07/2013 3.30–4 pm Car in motion, Beijing
Feng Wanjiao (female, 27)	Hubei	BA degree	Children's brand agent (5 years)	Married (3)	08/07/2013 11–11.40 am San yuan mei yuan snack bar, Beijing
He Aijia (female, 46)	Cili, Hunan	College diploma	Accountant (more than 20 years)	Single looking (0)	10/07/2013 2.40–3.10 pm McDonald's, Beijing
Chu Junqi (male, 30)	Zhoukou, Henan	MA degree	Car industry consultant (5 years)	Married (several times)	12/07/2013 12.30–1.30 pm Pa mi er restaurant, Beijing

(*continued*)

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(continued)

Pseudonym	*Birth place*	*Education*	*Professional background/ Work experience*	*Dating status/Times of relationships*	*Interview Time/ venue*
Zhao Wei (male, 28)	Heihe, Heilongjiang	MA degree	IT industry product manager (4 years)	Married (1)	13/07/2013 12.40–3 pm 202 restaurant, Beijing
Sun Yi (male, 24)	Beijing	BA degree	Website IT staff (1 year)	In a relationship (3 or more)	14/07/2013 12.50–1.50 pm Haijun yard, Beijing
Deng Yun (female, 23)	Xinhua, Hunan	BA degree	Website content editor (3 years)	Single looking (0)	15/07/2013 2.50–4.20 pm Yoshinoya, Beijing
Ai Yue (female, 26)	Beijing	BA degree	Administrative support (3 years)	Married (2)	16/07/2013 7.40–8.50 pm McDonald's, Beijing (with her husband)
Deng Qingquan (male, 55)	Beijing	BA degree	Retired military officer (37 years)	Married with a daughter (1)	17/07/2013 1.50–2.30 pm Haijun yard, Beijing
Li Sha (female, 27)	Beijing	MA degree	Advertising (2 years)	Married (2)	19/07/2013 7.51–9.20 pm Duo le zhi ri bakery, Beijing
Le Jiahui (male, 26)	Qinghe, Hebei	BA degree	IT industry (4 years)	In a relationship (3)	20/07/2013 2.40–4 pm Upper bank coffee, Beijing
Song Zixi (female, 24)	Beijing	MA degree	Finance and investment (6 months)	Single looking (1)	23/07/2013 6.40–7 pm & 8–8.40 pm Wei shi restaurant, Beijing
Fan Fang (female, 27)	Beijing	MA degree	Finance and bank (2 years)	Married for 2 years with a son (2)	27/07/2013 2.15–3.15 pm McDonald's, Beijing

(continued)

Pseudonym	*Birth place*	*Education*	*Professional background/ Work experience*	*Dating status/Times of relationships*	*Interview Time/ venue*
Chen Bing (male, 28)	Hengyang, Hunan	College diploma	Game industry operation director (6.5 years)	Married (1)	27/07/2013 7.50–8.40 pm Haijun yard, Beijing (with his wife)
Hu Jieru (female, 29)	Hengyang, Hunan	BA degree	Patent attorney (7 years)	Married (2)	27/07/2013 8.50–10.10 pm Haijun yard, Beijing
Huang Xinya (female, 27) Hao Dongsheng (male, 27)	Xingtai, Hebei Fangshan, Beijing	PhD in biology Doctor of Medicine	Fast eliminating industry scientist (1 year) Doctor (1 year)	Married (1) Married (1)	28/07/2013 2–4 pm Nan hu yi yuan neighborhood, Beijing (a couple, interviewed at the same time)
Du Kewei (female, 27)	Tianjin	BA degree	Market planning (5 years)	In a relationship (4)	30/07/2013 7.20–9 pm Chamate restaurant, Beijing
Tang Lili (female, 23) Chen Xiaobei (female, 23)	Beijing Beijing	BA degree BA degree	Website editor (1 year) Website editor (1 year)	In a relationship (2) In a relationship (4)	31/07/2013 9.30–11.30 am Office in a news agency, Beijing (two colleagues, interviewed at the same time)
Jiang Xin (female, 24)	Shangqiu, Henan	BA degree	Reporter (1 year)	In a relationship (1)	31/07/2013 2.30–3.10 pm Same venue in the news agency
Zhou Jun (male, 29)	Shaoyang, Human	BA degree	Newspaper editor (6 years)	Single looking (1)	31/07/2013 3.30–4.10 pm Same venue
Ma Liang (male, 24)	Jining, Shandong	BA degree	Website editor (2 years)	Single looking (0)	31/07/2013 4.30–5.10 pm Same venue

(*continued*)

(continued)

Pseudonym	*Birth place*	*Education*	*Professional background/ Work experience*	*Dating status/Times of relationships*	*Interview Time/ venue*
Jin Moli (female, 28)	Qingdao, Shandong	MA degree	Administrative support (2 years)	Single looking (0)	02/08/2013 10.11–10.52 am Office in an automotive vehicle research association, Beijing
Shang Juan (female, 29)	Binxian, Heilongjiang	BA degree	Finance, project management (6 years)	In a relationship (1)	02/08/2013 11–11.30 am & 12.37–1 pm Same venue in the research association
Xia Kai (male, 29)	Panshi, Jilin	BA degree	IT staff (6 years)	In a relationship (2)	02/08/2013 2–2.50 pm Same venue
Bai Caijie (female, 30)	Siping, Jilin	BA degree	Administrative support (7 years)	Single (1)	02/08/2013 3.10–3.40 pm Same venue
Fu Zihan (male, 27)	Beijing	BA degree	Office support (5 years)	Single looking (3)	03/08/2013 1.53–2.11 pm McDonald's, Beijing (further questions by email)
Ning Xiaoyan (female, 27)	Dalian, liaoning	MA degree	Marketing staff in fast eliminating industry (3 years)	Married (2)	03/08/2013 5.17–6.07 pm Shui chuan shi coffee, Beijing
Wang Yanli (female, 24)	Beijing	BA degree	Accountant (2 years)	In a relationship (1)	06/08/2013 8–8.40 pm Haijun yard, Beijing
Meng Qifeng (male, 27)	Shijiazhuang, Hebei	MA degree	Marketing assistant (8 months)	Single looking (1)	10/08/2013 6.44 pm Beijing, via email

(continued)

Pseudonym	*Birth place*	*Education*	*Professional background/ Work experience*	*Dating status/Times of relationships*	*Interview Time/ venue*
Wu Wenze (male, 26)	Beijing	BA degree	Financial project manager (3 years)	Single looking (2)	11/08/2013 11.26–12.52 pm KFC, Beijing
Zhang Tao (male, 24) Zhang Tao's girlfriend (female, 22)	Beijing Fengtai Xingtai, Hebei	College diploma Junior high school	Retail industry (2 years) Retail industry (5 years)	In a relationship (4) In a relationship (4)	14/08/2013 1.40–2.25 pm KFC, Beijing (two people in a relationship, interviewed at the same time)
Su Minzhen (female, 18) Zhou Yuxia (female, 20)	Henan Henan	University student (grade one) University student (grade two)	Student (2 months) Student (2 months)	Single/in a relationship (1) Single (2)	14/08/2013 2.51–3.47 pm KFC, Beijing (two people who worked temporarily as cashiers together, interviewed at the same time)
Zhang Xiuyun (female, 52) Zhu Menghua (female, 47)	Beijing Beijing	High school College diploma	Freelance (28 years) Retired (26 years)	Married with a 28-year-old son (1) Married with a 20-year-old daughter (1)	16/08/2013 2.45–3.20 pm KFC, Beijing (two colleagues who worked in a supermarket at the same time, interviewed together)
Wang Rui (male, 30)	Beijing	BA degree	Project manager in financial industry (6 years)	In a relationship (3)	17/08/2013 3.40–4.30 pm McDonald's, Beijing
Wen Feng (female, 50)	Hainan	MA degree	Management in a state-owned enterprise (30 years)	Married with a 25-year-old son (1)	17/08/2013 5.50–6.30 pm Haijun yard, Beijing

(*continued*)

(continued)

Pseudonym	*Birth place*	*Education*	*Professional background/ Work experience*	*Dating status/Times of relationships*	*Interview Time/ venue*
Wang Hong (male, 23) Wang Hong's wife (female, 23)	Beijing Beijing	Junior high school Technical secondary school	Supermarket staff (4 years) Nursery teacher (3 years)	Married (5) Married (3)	18/08/2013 2.30–3.20 pm KFC, Beijing (newlyweds, interviewed at the same time)
Zhang Song (male, 58) Zhou Bin (male, 48)	Yantai, Shandong Beijing	Junior high school Junior high school	Supermarket staff (39 years) Supermarket staff (30 years)	Married with a 32-year-old son (1) Married with a 23-year-old daughter (1)	18/08/2013 3.40–4.20 pm KFC, Beijing (two colleagues, interviewed at the same time)
Liu Lan (female, 53)	Hainan	College diploma	Pharmacist (36 years)	Married with a 27-year-old daughter (1)	19/08/2013 3–3.40 pm McDonald's, Beijing
Zeng Ning (female, 44)	Beijing	BA degree	Journalist (20 years)	Married with a 15-year-old daughter (3)	23/08/2013 6–6.40 pm Haijun yard, Beijing
Deng Huayu (male, 27)	Beijing	MA degree	Freelance (2 years)	In a relationship (3)	24/08/2013 11 am, Beijing, via email
Zhao Guizhen (female, 75)	Hengyang, Hunan	Junior high school	Retired (32 years)	Married with 3 daughters and a son (1)	29/08/2013 7–8 pm, Haijun yard, Beijing
Guo Zhenzhen (female, 28)	Beijing	MA degree	NGO employee (2 years)	In a relationship (2)	09/09/2013 1.20–2.10 pm Si Chuan Mei Shi restaurant, Beijing
Tao Junru (female, 23)	Anhui	MA degree	Marketing analysis (1 year)	Single looking (1)	10/09/2013 1.40–2.25 pm Yoshinoya, Beijing

Appendix G Programme Introduction (*If You Are the One*)

If You Are the One (非诚勿扰, Fei Cheng Wu Rao) is a Chinese reality TV dating programme produced by Jiangsu Satellite Television (JSTV). It adapts a globalized format originated from a British dating show, *Take Me Out*. The programme currently airs on JSTV on Saturday and Sunday nights at 9.05 pm. It has mainly recruited guests with various educational and professional backgrounds from across mainland China. At the same time, some participants are from other parts of the world or various other ethnic backgrounds. The official language of the programme is Chinese (Mandarin). The programme is hosted by Meng Fei and two guest presenters.

First broadcast on 15 January 2010, *If You Are the One* has become the most popular dating programme in mainland China. In the first half of 2010, the show broke ratings records, with some 50 million people watching every episode, an audience second only to the CCTV evening news broadcast *Xinwen Lianbo*. According to Beijing-based CSM Media Research, after screening a total of 343 episodes (till 22 May 2013), its ratings were 2.77 per cent of television viewers, or 36 million, twice as many as the nearest competitor for that time slot.

In each episode, 24 female guests stand in an arc, each behind a podium with a light that they initially turn on. The women face a single man, who chooses one of them as his 'heartbeat girl' as soon as he is revealed on the stage. The single man uses two to three video clips to provide some

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personal information such as occupation, interests, love history and friends' opinions. During each video clip, each of the women decides whether or not he is still 'date-worthy' in her opinion by keeping her light on or turning it off. After surviving three rounds, the single man can choose a date from the female guests who kept their lights on for him and his 'heartbeat girl' will be revealed. A new procedural option ('burst light'), enabling a woman to signal a special interest in the man, was introduced to the programme in the episode broadcast on 20 October 2012. Occasionally the host will mention successful couplings from previous shows.

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