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Insider Perspectives of Mate Selection in Modern Chinese Society

Szu-Yu Lin

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Insider Perspectives of Mate Selection in Modern Chinese Society

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With the increased exposure to Western cultures and the transition towards modernization, Chinese society has experienced substantial social change, which has influenced marital relationships. Although recent research has documented contemporary patterns of marital interaction, less is known about what Chinese adults consider to be an ideal marital partner and what their parent' roles play in the mate selection process. What do contemporary Chinese adults value in a partner? How much parental influence is involved in choosing an ideal marital partner? These questions were addressed by conducting six focus groups in Taipei, Taiwan. The focus groups included a total of 51 participants (male = 25; female = 26) and included separate groups for middle-aged married men, middle-aged married women, younger married men, younger married women, never-married young adult men, and never-married young adult women. The results from qualitative analysis indicated three major themes in an ideal partner: family-of-origin (e.g., similar family background, good relationship with in-laws), personal qualities (e.g., financially stable, responsible), and relationship qualities (e.g., getting along, communicating well, mutual respect, gender equality). These results indicate that contemporary Chinese adults value a combination of traditional Chinese (e.g., similar family background) and Western (e.g. good communication) values. When it comes to parental approval on their marriage, most younger participants reported that they would marry a person despite their parents' disapproval, although many indicated that they would want their parents' approval because it would increase family harmony. The older participants, on the other hand, were more likely to still favor parents having significant influence on who their children marry. Overall, the young Chinese participants showed greater incorporation of Western values than the older participants. These findings suggest that modern Chinese society is being increasingly influenced by individualistic Western values.

Keywords: Chinese mate selection, qualitative research, focus groups, mate selection preferences, parental influence

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
Insider Perspectives of Mate Selection in Modern Chinese Society	1
Literature Review.....	3
Mate Selection in Chinese Culture	3
Traditional Chinese Culture.....	3
Contemporary Taiwanese society.....	4
Summary.....	7
Methods.....	8
Procedures.....	9
Participants.....	11
Measures	11
Analysis	12
Results.....	13
Family-of-Origin.....	13
Good relationship with in-laws.....	14
Similar family background.....	15
Personal Qualities	15
Financial stability.....	15
Responsibility, independence and diligence.....	17
Love.....	17
Physical attractiveness.....	17

Relationship Qualities.....	18
Getting along.....	18
Communication.....	19
Mutual respect and support.....	20
Common values and goals.....	21
Equal partnership.....	22
Differences by Gender, Marital Status, and Age.....	23
Parental Influences.....	24
Parental pressure to get married.....	25
The importance of parental approval.....	26
Discussion.....	29
Ideal Partner.....	29
Parental Influence.....	32
Individualism and Collectivism.....	32
Limitations.....	34
Clinical implications.....	35
References.....	37
Table 1.....	44

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 *Demographics* 44

Insider Perspectives of Mate Selection in Modern Chinese Society

There is a significant knowledge base about marital relationships in traditional Chinese culture. Accounts of traditional family life has been described in great detail in Chinese fiction (Chin, 1972; Tsao, 1958), philosophy (Chin, 2008), and history (Chang, 1991). The norms of three-generational households and the unequal gendered power structure of marriage are well documented (Lu & Lin, 1998). In addition, it is well known that marital relations in Chinese culture has traditionally been characterized by a sense of loyalty and duty (Chen & Li, 2007), rather than the Western ideals of love and romance.

Over the past 75 years, Chinese society has experienced substantial social change, with dramatic economic modernization, universal education, and increased Western interaction and influence. For example, Toro-Morn and Sprecher (2003) indicated that the People's Republic of China is one of the fastest growing markets for Western products such as movies, food, and other material culture. At the same time, Taiwan has also moved toward a modernized, democratic, and industrial society (Han, Li, & Hwang, 2005). Between 1895 and 1945, Taiwan was colonized by Japan, during which time it experienced increased modernization, industrialization, education, and health care (Thornton, Chang, & Sun, 1984). After the separation from Japan at the end of World War II and from Mainland China after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Taiwan moved toward capitalism and eventually democracy, which resulted in the modernization of Taiwan. Also, international business collaborations in urban Taiwan are mostly operated with Western societies, providing opportunities to be influenced by Western culture (Han et al., 2005).

With the increased exposure to Western cultures and transitions to modernization and universal education, both Taiwan and China have experienced substantial changes in gender role

ideology, as well as family structure and norms. For example, family structure has shifted dramatically from intergenerational to nuclear households (Lin, 2009; Xu & Lai, 2004). The increased divorce rates in Taiwan suggest that women have more opportunity and power through education and gender-equality laws on marriage and divorce (Huang, 2005a; Huang, 2005b). Also, the Taiwanese government has promoted egalitarian gender roles, hoping to increase the equal involvement of father and mother with their children (Ho, Ko, Tran, Phillips, & Chen, 2013). A good example of this is recent legislation called The Gender Equality in Employment Act, which offers parental leave for both mothers and fathers in corporations (Council of Labor Affairs, 2008). These policy changes have resulted in an increase in dual-income families and a higher divorce rate in Taiwan.

Changes in family norms are reflected in marital relationships, in general, and mate selection, in particular. In traditional Chinese society, marriage had the primary purpose of maintenance, continuity, and well-being of the larger family system (Xu, Xie, Liu, Xia, & Liu, 2007). Consequently, arranged marriages, where parents choose their children's spouses, was a long-held tradition in Chinese society (Chun & Sue, 1998). However, there is evidence that marriage is transforming from being shaped by external forces or institutional control to personal choice (Chang & Chan, 2007). Chinese people have more autonomy for admiration, romantic love, and mutual respect between individuals in marriage (Chen & Li, 2007).

However, with the values and norms of Confucianism still an important piece of Chinese society, both China and Taiwan are still considered collectivistic societies, emphasizing harmonious interpersonal relationships and interdependence (Lee & Mock, 2005). In addition, the core Confucius principle of filial piety, which is defined as upholding honor for the family and having proper manners with parents and moral responsibility, is still highly valued in the

Chinese societies, including Taiwan (Chen & Yi, 2011; Liu, 2013; Pan, Gauvain, & Schwartz, 2013). Chinese people would like to uphold their family honor by satisfying their parents' wishes and criteria for a mate. Consequently, the norm of filial piety still has an influence on mate selection in Taiwan.

In the context of the interaction between social change and traditional Confucian values and norms, the values, norms, and patterns of mate selection in Taiwan are not well understood. This study used qualitative methods to understand contemporary Chinese values, beliefs, and attitudes on mate selection. Specifically, the study used a focus group methodology to gather Taiwanese adults' perspectives on contemporary attitude about mate selection. With an insider's perspective of contemporary Chinese marriage, we examined how traditional Chinese mate selection values, beliefs, and norms may have changed.

Literature Review

Mate Selection in Chinese Culture

Traditional Chinese Culture. In traditional Chinese culture, marriage was universal, occurred at a young age, and was arranged by parents (Yu & Liu, 2014), often with the help of hired go-betweens. The arranged couple typically did not meet their partner until the day of the wedding (Xiaohe & Whyte, 1990). Marriage was viewed as a solemn and important event, with the purpose of marriage being maintenance, continuity, and well-being of the larger family system (Xu et al., 2007). Individual interests and preferences regarding mate selection were of secondary importance in order to promote harmonious interpersonal relationships in the family and in the community (Thornton et al., 1984). Children followed the wishes of their parents because of the strong social norm of filial piety (Pan et al., 2013). Consequently, children

honored and respected their parents by suppressing their wishes and complying with their parents' decisions and expectations (Yeh & Bedford, 2003).

This collectivistic view of mate selection, with the emphasis on parents choosing their children's spouses with an eye towards family and societal harmony, influenced the characteristics that were desired in terms of potential spouses. Some of these characteristics were family-related, with a potential spouse's desirability being tied to the benefits of the union of the two families. For example, the union with a family that maintained or increased social status and political power was desirable (Chun & Sue, 1998).

Desired individual characteristics centered on traditional gender roles. The Chinese idiom, “*男外女内*” (“men take care of external affairs; women take care of internal affairs”), illustrates the traditional role of men as breadwinners and the role of women as caregivers (Walton & Takeuchi, 2010; Yao, 2000). Within the home, the husband's responsibilities were providing financially, disciplining the children, and governing the family, while the wife's responsibilities emphasized nurturing children, taking care of domestic needs, assisting in the fathers' discipline with the children, and maintaining harmonious relationships with other family members (Cook & Dong, 2011; Li & Lamb, 2013; Shwalb, Nakazawa, Yamamoto, & Hyun 2004). In traditional Chinese society, women were housebound, submissive, and second-class (Higgins, Zheng, Liu, & Sun, 2002). Thus, the traditional expectations of gender roles informed the mate selection criteria. For example, Chinese parents preferred men with high social status and good earning capacity and who were industrious when selecting spouses for their daughters (Chang, Wang, Shackelford, & Buss, 2011).

Contemporary Taiwanese society. Research indicates that mate selection norms and patterns are changing dramatically Taiwan. While marriage was universal and occurred at a

young age in traditional Chinese culture, marriage in contemporary Taiwan is no longer universal, and it is happening at older ages (Ji & Yeung; 2014; Yu & Liu, 2014). Most Taiwanese young adults are now postponing marriage until at least 30 (Chen & Chen, 2014).

Much of the increase in age is due to an increasing level of education among Taiwanese young adults, especially among women (Ji & Yeung, 2014; Kuo, Hung & Pai, 2011). Higher education and the attainment of professional careers among Taiwanese women has led to an increase in their age of first marriage and has increased the probability that they will forego marriage, altogether (Chen & Chen, 2014). In addition, increased education and professional opportunities among Taiwanese women have made many of them intolerant of restrictive gender roles associated with traditional Chinese marriages. Thus, marriage is often delayed among Taiwanese women until they have completed their education and until they have found a suitable partner; in some cases, they have opted out of marriage, rather than marry an undesirable partner (Kuo et al., 2011; To, 2013). Educational attainment is also associated with later age at first marriage among Taiwanese men, but those with less education are the ones who are more likely to never marry (Chen & Chen, 2014).

Contemporary single Taiwanese men and women report societal pressure to get married (Higgins et al., 2002; Kuo et al., 2011). Both men and women who are not married at the proper age fear social stigma that no one wants them and that their personal self-worth will be judged negatively by the society (Kuo et al., 2011; Pan, 1993). Nevertheless, many Chinese men and women report that they would rather stay single, if their mate selection criteria are not met (Kuo et al., 2011; To, 2013).

With young adult children now having more of a say in who they marry, it is not surprising that desired characteristics in a spouse have expanded beyond the focus of their ability

to perform gendered responsibilities in the family. A number of studies have examined mate selection preferences in Chinese societies since the turn of the 21st Century (Chang et al., 2011; Cook & Dong, 2011; Guo, Feng & Wang, 2017; Zwick & Fletcher, 2014). For example, Chen, Austin, Miller and Piercy (2015) conducted an online survey of 656 Chinese and 604 American young adults. Participants were asked to rate the minimum mate selection criteria from a list of 21 characteristics. The most highly rated characteristics of the Chinese young adults were (in order) honest and trustworthy, healthy, kind and understanding, friendly, and easygoing.

Although these characteristics reflect characteristics that are not generally associated with traditional Chinese culture, the authors found that traditional Chinese values were still perceived as important. They found that Chinese participants rated a higher level of importance to criteria related to status (e.g., high social status) and family orientation (e.g., good family background), while American participants had a higher preference for personality traits, physical attractiveness, and religiosity. Indeed, there is substantial evidence that Confucian and traditional cultural values still influence the desired mate selection criteria for Chinese people. For example, many studies have found that filial piety is still a desired mate selection criterion for both Chinese men and women (Cook & Dong, 2011; Guo et al., 2017; Pan et al., 2013).

Even though arranged marriages are no longer the norm in Chinese societies, with mate selection moving towards personal choices, research suggests that parents still exert considerable influence on who a child chooses to marry (Pimental, 2000; To, 2013). Kline and Zhang (2009) compared the parental influence on mate selection between American college students and Chinese college students and found that Chinese young adults were significantly more likely to stop dating a person if their parents disapproved. They were also more likely to report that their parents' opinion was important. Descriptive analysis indicated that 69% of the American college

students reported that they would not stop dating a person if their parents disapproved, compared to 36% of Chinese college students. Additional analyses indicated that Chinese college students were more likely to comply to their parents' wishes regarding the decision to marry, seeing that their family's disapproval was an obstacle to marriage.

The continued influence of parents on the mate selection of Chinese young adults is not surprising in the context of the fact that Chinese young adults still hold filial piety as an important value. On the other hand, the fact that 36% of the Chinese college students in Kline and Zhang's (2009) study reported that they would not stop dating a person despite their parents' disapproval and that only 49% of them reported that their parents' approval was important seems to demonstrate the dramatic changes in mate selection patterns in Chinese societies.

Summary

Chinese societies, including Taiwanese society, have experienced dramatic change in mate selection patterns. Universal, early, and arranged marriages are no longer the norm, and the criteria for mate selection are no longer primarily based on social and political considerations between families. Instead, young adults are now marrying later, and they have increased autonomy regarding who they marry, which has created the opportunity for them to choose a partner based on criteria that are important to them. A number of studies in recent years have examined mate selection preferences among Chinese young adults (Chang et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2015; Cook & Dong, 2011; Guo et al., 2017; Zwick & Fletcher, 2014). However, these studies have primarily used quantitative designs, where researchers have presented Chinese young adults with lists of potential mate selection criteria and had them report which ones are most important to them. Chen and colleagues (Chen et al., 2015) gave their participants the opportunity to write in additional criteria that were not included in the list, which the researchers

qualitatively coded. This is a substantial advance in enabling the respondents to report characteristics that weren't included on predesigned lists. However, only a subset of their participants wrote in additional criteria, and the online design of their study prohibited long elaborations of their write-in responses.

What is needed is a qualitative study that captures the voices of Chinese people as they describe their perceptions of what characteristics are important when looking for a potential marriage partner. Similarly, a qualitative study would allow respondents to explain the potentially complex influence that parents still have on their children's mate selection decisions. A qualitative design that allows for follow-up questions and elaboration would provide much richer data than can be gathered using a quantitative questionnaire. Thus, the purpose of this study was to use focus groups to learn about adults' perceptions of desired qualities of a marriage partner, as well as the influence that parents have on their choice of partners. The two research questions of the study were, (1) what are the views on ideal marital partners among the contemporary Chinese? (2) What is their perception of the role of parental influence decisions of who to marry?

Methods

Data for this study were gathered using focus groups. Focus groups involve an interactive group discussion on a particular topic within an open and non-threatening environment (Krueger, 1988). The open-response format and group discussion often create rich information that is impossible to obtain through individual interviews or quantitative research (Edmunds, 1999). Focus groups are helpful for researchers to understand the phenomenon from a group of people who have experienced the phenomenon and developed their views and perspectives. Due to the practicality and enjoyable environment for participants, focus group research is becoming more

popular in the social sciences, such as in political science, family studies, and marriage and family therapy (Piercy & Hertlein, 2005).

Procedures

The focus group study was approved by the IRB at the sponsoring university. Separate focus groups were conducted in 2015 for men and women in order to facilitate more candid responses to sensitive questions. In addition, rapid societal changes have created cohort differences among married adults in Chinese societies (Pimentel, 2000); consequently, older and younger married adults were interviewed in separate focus groups, with groups being held separately for younger married adults, 39 years or younger, and married middle-age adults between the ages of 40 and 64. These participants were not married couples; rather, they were adults who are married. In addition, focus groups were conducted for never-married young adult women and men. Thus, there were six separate groups: middle-aged married men, middle-aged married women, younger married men, younger married women, never-married young adult men, and never-married young adult women. The design of homogeneity among focus group members in this research was meant to facilitate participants to express their thoughts more freely based on their similarity in terms of age, gender, and marital status (Morgan, Krueger, & King, 1998). The goal was to have eight to ten people in each focus group. Morgan and colleagues (1998) suggested that this size of a focus group creates an environment for each participant to contribute more in-depth information on a topic. Groups that contain fewer than 6 people or more than 12 people have potential to create some difficulty in generating a diversity of ideas or in-depth information from all participants (Green & Hart, 1999).

The participants were recruited by a snowball sampling method by employing 20 to 25 contact people who each recruited four or five potential participants. This strategy has been

utilized in past focus group research to ensure that the gender, age, and marital status requirements of the different focus groups are met (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). The contact people were graduate students at Fu Jen University in Taiwan and targeted potential participants in Taipei City and New Taipei City (Xinzhuang District) areas of Taiwan. This method for recruiting research participants has been used numerous times by faculty in the Child and Family Studies Department at Fu Jen University, and it has proven to be effective and efficient. The participants were compensated a total of US\$ 32.64 (NT\$ 1000) for their participation in the focus group, which is a typical reimbursement rate in Taiwan. In addition, each contact person received an incentive of US\$ 3.26 (NT \$100) for participating in recruitment and another incentive of US\$ 3.26 (NT\$100) for each participant they recruited, which is the rate that faculty at Fu Jen University have used in past research.

Informed consent forms were provided to participants at the beginning of the focus group to inform them of risks and benefits of their participation in the study. After signing the consent forms, the participants completed a one-page questionnaire about demographic information. The focus group started with general information provided to participants, including a welcome statement, a statement about the purpose of study, ground rules (such as confidentiality), and some ice-breaking questions. Then the interview proceeded with questions on the topics of marriage preparation, mate selection norms, characteristics of a desired marital partner, and marital dynamics. In each group, there was one facilitator and one assistant facilitator. The facilitator was responsible for asking questions and guiding the group back to the topic when they got off topic. The assistant facilitator was responsible for handling logistics, recording the focus group session, and taking notes during the focus group, as well as assisting in asking questions.

The facilitators were two graduate students who were in a COAMFTE-accredited marriage and family therapy program. Both were native Taiwanese, and the assistant facilitators were students at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan. The facilitators and the assistant facilitators received training in the method of focus groups and qualities of effective facilitators before they conducted the focus groups (Krueger, 1988).

Participants

A total of 51 participants (male N = 25 (49.02%), female N = 26 (50.98%) were included in the study, and all participants identified themselves as ethnic Chinese. There was a total of six focus group with 7 to 10 participants in each group. As indicated in Table 1, among the single groups, the male focus group had 8 participants, and the female group had 9 participants. The average age was 27.41, and 94.12% were college graduates. Among the younger married groups, 9 males and 7 females participated. Their average age was 31.69, and 68.75% were college graduates. They had been married an average of 3.61 years. Eight males participated in the older marriage male focus group, and 10 females participated in the older married female focus group. Their average age was 51.56, and 22.22% were college graduates. They had been married an average of 23.78 years.

Measures

Open ended questions were used to prompt discussion among the focus group participants. The focus groups discussed a wide range of topics about marriage in Taiwan. The questions that were asked that pertain to the present study included: “What characteristics are women/men looking for in a husband/wife when they are looking to get married?”, “How do you tell the difference between a good husband/wife and not so good husband/wife in Taiwan today?”, What characteristics make up a really good spouse in Taiwan today?”, “What

characteristics should they avoid in a spouse?”, and “How important is it in Taiwan for the parents to approve the marriage? If the parents disapprove, what would women/men do with the relationship?”

Analysis

An audio recording machine was used to record the conversations during the focus group sessions so that the discussion was captured verbatim for subsequent analysis. The audiotapes were then transcribed verbatim in Chinese. The Chinese transcriptions were analyzed by a native Taiwanese graduate student and a team of native Chinese undergraduate students, using standard inductive, qualitative data analytic methods (Cavanagh, 1997; Creswell, 2013; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

The coders developed the codes, categories, and themes directly drawn from the data. The coders determined preliminary coding by immersing themselves in the data by reading each transcript several times and looked for similar and different concepts to create the categories (Cho & Lee, 2014). Similar codes were grouped into the same category. Many categories were reorganized, revised, and refined during the coding process to make sure each category was mutually exclusive in order to establish the final categories (Cho & Lee, 2014). The coders labelled the final thirteen categories as subthemes and organized the subthemes into three main themes of this study. Each main theme, which was accompanied by subthemes, exemplary quotes and examples taken directly from the data, comprised the results of the study.

In terms of the actual process of coding, at least two native Chinese coders independently conducted the data categorization and analysis of each focus group. After they finished their coding, they met with the other coders for that focus group and compiled their results and resolved differences to minimize researcher bias and increase the trustworthiness of the findings

(Piercy & Hertlein, 2005). The primary graduate student, or lead, coder took the codes from each of the focus groups and consolidated them into a single set of codes. She shared them with a senior family therapy faculty member, and they discussed the merits and weaknesses of each code. After discussing them, they reached a consensus on a set of codes.

Once a coding scheme was developed, the coders placed each meaningful participant statement into the appropriate category. The lead coder then met with the coders and reviewed their coding. When the lead coder thought that a statement should be moved into a different category, they discussed the issue until a consensus was reached. The lead coder then met with the senior faculty member, and they reviewed the coding. The focus group interviews were subsequently translated into English so that exemplary quotes and examples could be reported in English in the report of the study.

Results

The qualitative analysis found three major themes for an ideal partner for marriage in Taiwan: family-of-origin qualities, personal qualities, and relationship qualities. Each theme had several subthemes.

Family-of-Origin

Many participants discussed the importance of the family-of-origin. Two subthemes of the family-of-origin emerged: good relationship with in-laws, and similar family background. The quality of family-of-origin relations was found to be a significant theme for the majority of female participants. Females of all ages and marital status suggested that the ideal partner having a harmonious relationship with both families was crucial to the marriage. Single males also reported the importance of the family-of-origin. Many participants reported that the similar

family background of the partner would likely increase the harmonious relationship with both in-laws and their family of origin.

Good relationship with in-laws. Over half of the participants in both single female and male focus groups reported the importance of their partner having a good relationship with the in-laws, meaning their own parents. For example, a 36-year old single female woman who has a masters degree and works full-time stated, “Taiwan's society cares about relationships. If two families cannot get along harmoniously, even if the male has a lot of cars and houses, it doesn't matter anymore.” A single female reported, “I would like to have a partner who can have a good relationship with my family. A family-oriented person is very significant, and I want to make sure my parents would like him.” A single male, stated, “It is the same for both boys and girls. If the boy doesn't fit in with the parent in-laws, the marriage will never be harmonious.” Another single male participant reported, “She (my ideal partner) needs to have good EQ, able to socialize with my family. She may be temperamental, but she needs to avoid conflicts. She needs to have her own ways to manage her temperament so that my family would have a good impression on her.”

Interestingly, despite the age of the participants, all the married females reported the importance of getting along with the in-laws, whereas none of the married males made any statements regarding the in-law's relationship. A young married female said, “His parents. The family-in-laws is very important. If the parents-in-law are not easy to get along well, then living together afterward will be a big factor for affecting marriage.” Another young married female also shared, "parents getting along well. It is important to have family being in harmony in a marriage, whether it is the husband's family or wife's family." An older married female also stated, “The mother-in-law is also very important so that the marriage can be maintained.”

Similar family background. Many participants believed that a marital partner with a similar family background was an important quality of an ideal partner. Over half of the focus groups mentioned a Chinese proverb, “ ” (“a marriage between families of well-matched social and economic status”), or similar ideas, during the focus group interviews, demonstrating the importance of the similar family background in mate selection. A single male reported, "Two people must have a certain degree of similarity in their family background. If the difference is too large, you will never understand what the other person is thinking. Although it will not necessarily cause conflict, it creates distances between the couple as time goes by." An older married female stated, "In the past, people said it needs to be a perfect match. Because everyone comes from different families, similar family backgrounds would have similar values and values would be closer." Another older married female, added, “In fact, it is a Chinese traditional concept that martial partners with similar family background are the perfect match. I think we still have this traditional concept even if we have the influence of Western culture.”

Personal Qualities

The second major theme was related to the personal qualities of a desirable partner. Unlike other themes, personal qualities do not involve family or relational qualities. Several subthemes emerged, including financial stability, responsibility and diligence, love and loyalty, and physical attractiveness. Most participants believed that an ideal partner who is mature, responsible, independent, and diligent tends to be more financially stable.

Financial stability. When it comes to marital partner quality, participants from all of the female groups considered finances to be the most important quality, regardless of marital status and age. This personal quality was emphasized because it involves issues of living quality, relationship with the in-laws, and economic pressure. A single female reported that her partner

needs to “be wealthy or be financially stable.” Another single female stated, “Finances is the first consideration.”

For married participants, the importance of financial stability was not taken lightly either. An older married female shared, “The primary consideration for an ideal partner is the economic foundation for sure, or they (the couple) will not want to discuss marriage.” A young married female, said, “In an ideal situation, his (the ideal partner’s) income is stable, and he has his own business.” A young married female added, “A man who is not able to provide financially is unacceptable.”

The men in the study seemed to understand the importance of their own financial stability in the eyes of women. A single male stated, “A stable income, a girl will then want to marry you.” One young married male shared that “it would be impossible that I marry a pretty girl and starve myself if finance is a problem for me. Even if she is very beautiful, it is impossible that she would want to starve to death with me.” An older married male shared a similar ideal that “the wealthier you are, the more women you are able to choose from.”

Some older married participants mentioned that an ideal partner would have certain job skills to work, in general, rather than financial resources, specifically. An older married female stated, “Professional skills and money should be considered” in a marital partner. An older married female regretted that today’s society seems to value money over skills. She said, “People all look at money and the financial foundation (how much saving) nowadays, instead of looking at skills and talents. It used to be said that if boys were hard working, skilled, and then girls would be willing to marry them. This is not the case now. Everyone considers the finances.”

Interestingly, some men did not appreciate the fact that women want a partner who was financially secure. An older married male shared, “I don’t like people nowadays only focusing

on money, and men should have a house.... The concept is getting more and more different than our times.” Another older married male echoed, “Having abilities to work is more important than having money.”

Responsibility, independence and diligence. The majority of the female participants reported the qualities of responsibility, independence, and diligence as important in an ideal partner. A single female reported, “From how diligent he is will show if he could be reliable at work. If he's very diligent and proactive, I don't mind what he does for work.” Another single female stated, “Being responsible is a necessary quality. I don't want to get a man that's spoiled by his family, or I'll have to take care of him after getting married.” Two older married females stated that the man “must be responsible,” and “responsibility is very important.” Another older married female suggested that a man who “does not love working and spends the majority of time on playing video games” does not qualify for marriage.

Love. None of the males in the study or any of the married females mentioned that their ideal partner would love them or show affection. Only two single female participants reported that their ideal partners needed to love them. One single female stated, “My first consideration is to make sure he is nice to me. I think if the boy loves the girl more, things will be a lot easier.” The other single female shared, “I care a lot if my future husband loves me or not. Those who like to play around and cheat on girls are not acceptable.”

Physical attractiveness. Only a few participants mentioned physical appearance as one of their ideal partner's criterion. More than half of the single female participants reported that the physical characteristics of a husband are important, but it was more in terms of their future children's physical appearance, rather than the man, himself, being attractive. For example, one stated, “Genetic consideration is required. Height and appearance influence your children.”

There were a few females, though, who said that the person cannot be “too ugly either.” One young married male suggested, “Ideally, people look for men who are rich, tall, and handsome and women who have a fair skin, wealthy, and pretty.” However, he reported that physical appearance is not one of his ideal partner’s criteria. In fact, the male participants in this study did not consider physical attraction as a primary criterion because other qualities seemed to be more important to them. A young married male stated, “It is impossible to find a spouse who takes care of the children, fulfill domestic needs, is employed, and beautiful at the same time. It is impossible that you can find someone with all the idea qualities.” Another young married male, shared that “if my finances are a problem and my ideal partner is fine with it, I would be with her even if she is larger in her physical size (less attractive).”

Relationship Qualities

Relationship qualities are interpersonal attributes regarding how a person interacts with his or her partner. There were five subthemes in relationship qualities that emerged from the data: getting along, communication, mutual respect and support, common values and goals, and equal partnership. Results from the analysis indicated that the younger participants had greater emphasis on this theme than the older participants did.

Getting along. Many participants reported getting along with their partners is an important aspect of an ideal partner. A young married female said, “A person who can easily get along is important. I want to be with a person who I can be myself and be very comfortable with.” Most of the participants believed that the partner’s personality and a good fit between their two personalities largely determines whether they can get along or not. A single female stated, “He (my ideal partner) has to be nice to me and our personality fits each other.” A young married female participant reported, “Personality is very important. If he is hard to get along,

how can we together for the rest of the life?” An older married female participant shared, “(an ideal partner) depends on whether his personality matches with me.” The personality can be referred as a person who is “optimistic and easy-going,” according to a single male participant. To know if a person’s personality matches with their partner, an older married female suggested that couples should evaluate if “the couple can tolerate of each other’s personality before entering marriage.” Without compatibility in personality, a single male believed, “The couple will get into fights whenever they are together if two people’s personality don’t match.” A young married male participant reported, “If two people’s personalities match, both people can discuss things together. If they face any challenge or difficulty, they can share and talk about it together.”

The partner’s quality of getting along with each other was particularly important among young male participants. More young male participants reported the importance of getting along with the partner, especially the single male participants, whereas only a few female participants mentioned it. None of the older male participants emphasized this quality. A single male shared, “Finding someone that fits my personality is the most important part. I don’t really care about other things. Is she able to get along with me, or I can get along with her? I think this is the most important, while the other qualities are not very important.” Similarly, one young married male participant reported, “It is about finding a suitable person. Because I have thought to myself, is marriage about finding someone who is right for you, or is it to find someone you love? My point of view is to be with a suitable person who can adjust herself to my personality. Thus, I chose the one that was most suitable, allowing me to live comfortably for the rest of my life.

Communication. Communication refers to the ability to resolve conflicts and discuss challenges in the relationship. Participants suggested that the relationship has fewer conflicts and

can reach a harmonious state when partners know how to communicate with each other. A single female stated that her ideal partner needs to “know how to communicate.” A single female reported, “It is important to be able to communicate. Two people have to live daily with each other; therefore, communication is very important.” A single male participant said, “Communication skills are quite important. She (my ideal partner) needs to have good EQ (emotional intelligence) and be able to socialize with my family. She needs to have the communication skills to solve the problems in the relationship. I think for two people to get along, communication is the most important thing to have.” One older married female stated, “If there is good communication and interaction between the husband and wife, this is a better marriage quality.” Another older married female participant suggested, “The partner can’t be too self-centered. People who are too self-centered can’t communicate with others.” A single male shared, “I think it is necessary to understand the change that the other person tries to make in the marriage. Two people work together and put in effort to change for the better for the family’s sake. A couple does not simply bear the burdens of an extra person, but a home and family. Thus, a person needs to know how to communicate and understand with each other.” A single female said, “If I am thrilled and happy to share my passion, I would get very frustrated when my partner does not listen to me or care about my interests.” Good communication was most commonly mentioned by women in the study, although a few men mentioned it.

Mutual respect and support. Some participants reported that their partners need to respect and support of them. The couple needs to have the quality of understanding each other and accepting who they are. Understanding facilitates mutual respect. With mutual respect, the participants reported that the relationship is more harmonious and has fewer conflicts. A single male stated, “Both husband and wife need to adjust themselves to be compassionate and tolerate

of each other as possible. We can get along and avoid a lot of trouble, such as divorce. I think adjusting for other's personality is the key to harmonious relationship." One single female reported, "We both need to appreciate and respect each other." Two older married female participants reported the importance of mutual respect and support too. One older married female stated, "Mutual respect is very important" in the relationship, and the other one agreed and added, "Understanding your partner and be considerate of each other is very important."

Common values and goals. Many participants reported that a partner with common values and goals is important, although more females than males mentioned it. For example, over half of the older married female participants suggested this quality is important in an ideal partner. One single female stated, "Our values cannot be too different because we will live together." Another single female participant agreed, "Having common interests is an important factor." A single male reported, "I personally feel that the most important thing is values, which must be nearly the same." With common values and goals, the couple can get along better and have more positive interaction. Another older married female added, "(Similar) values are important. Only in this way we can have an endless chat." The same religion is one of the common values mentioned among the older married participants. An older married female shared, "The couple can share the same belief. Beliefs are also important. For example, Christians marry Christians. It is easy to get into disagreement if they are in different religions." One older married male reported, "Having a shared religious belief is important." Other participants suggested that the ideal partner needs to have the same goal of entering a marriage and working as a couple. One single female reported, "My spouse has to have the same goals with me, having a willingness to enter a marriage and start the next phase of life." A single male suggested that the partner needs to have "the desire of settling down. This mindset needs time to

prepare, and it is very important before getting married.” An older married female also reported, “He (the ideal partner) must have the desire to settle down so that the partner can enter a marriage.”

Equal partnership. Traditionally, the roles of men and women are the breadwinners and the caregivers, respectively, with men having more power in the relationship (Walton & Takeuchi, 2010; Yao, 2000). Unlike these traditional Chinese gender roles, many young married participants in the study reported that it was important for an ideal partner to value equality in a partnership. More female participants expressed the desire for their partner to treat her as an equal. In the young married female focus group, a woman suggested that men who are “very male chauvinist and traditional are not appropriate. He needs to be considerate of the domestic needs and help taking care of the children.” Another woman stated that men who “help doing the housework and take care of children is good enough.” Two of the young married female participants complained that their spouses rarely assist the domestic needs and expect the women to fulfill the traditional gender role, thus expressing their belief that ideal partners are equal and equitable in the relationship.

Among the older married participants, some males still held more traditional gender roles in a marriage. One older married male shared that “women just need to be kind and take good care of the family.” Another older married male reported that women should have the quality of “three obediences and four moral standards” which is the idea of people of our age.” The participant is referring a set of Confucian moral principles specifically for women. The three obediences refer to a woman’s obedience to her father, to her husband, and to her sons when she is widowed. Another older married male stated, “Women just need to be nice and listen to their husband. According to my age, my wife should listen to my opinions more. Even though two

people have different views, I believe that I am more intelligent than she is. My decision is better, so I think my wife should listen to my thoughts and decisions.” None of the older married female participants reported gender equality as a quality of an ideal partner, but they mentioned the generational transition towards gender equality in contemporary Chinese society. One older married female reported, “Previously, housework was generally women’s responsibility. Now, the men will help out the chores, which it is more mutual. Young men are now willing to share the house chores.” Another older married female stated, “Nowadays, both husband and wife want to be treated equality. They will have better relationship and marriage when they are equal in interaction and communication.”

Differences by Gender, Marital Status, and Age

Overall, female participants reported more traits of their ideal partners than male participants. In other words, females in the study reported more qualities of an ideal partner than did males. Both female and male participants, regardless to the marital status and age, equally reported the importance of family of origin in their ideal partners. However, female participants reported more personal quality traits than male participants. For example, only women reported that the ideal partner should be financial stable, independent, responsible, and diligent. Male participants seemed to understand the expectations of female partners regarding these expectations and preferences. In regards to the qualities of love and physical attractiveness, only a few females, but none of the males, reported that these qualities were important in an ideal partner. In the relationship qualities for the ideal partner, both male and female participants equally reported the importance of having a partner who they can getting along with and share common values. However, males focused only on getting along and having common values; they did not report other relationship qualities in an ideal partner. On the other hand, both single and

married female participants reported additional relationship quality traits of their ideal partners, including communication, mutual respect and support, and equal partnership. A few males mentioned and acknowledged that they were expected to possess these traits.

Interestingly, there were not many differences regarding marital status. The only exception was that, among the female younger groups of participants, only the married females talked about the importance of having an equal partnership. None of the young single female participants reported it as an important quality in an ideal partner.

There were substantial differences in the ideal partner qualities between ages, with more traditional values among the older participants. The older participants, especially males, held more traditional values than the younger participants. For example, they held more traditional beliefs regarding gender roles and marital power, believing men as the breadwinner, women as the caretakers, and men with more to say in decision-making and conflicts. Besides holding more traditional values, few older participants emphasized financial stability as a criterion for an ideal male partner. Most older male and female participants believed that the ability and the willingness to work were more crucial than simply being financial stable.

Parental Influences

The results of the qualitative analysis suggested that many participants still hold some levels of Chinese traditional values on in-group harmony when it comes to parental approval on their marriage, while some have incorporated the values of the Western individualism and are much less affected by their parental influences. Overall, the younger participants reported being less influenced by their parents' attitudes of a prospective marriage partner, although most of them, especially females, have not completely let go of the traditional values of in-group harmony. On the other hand, the majority of the older participants held more traditional values

regarding parental influence on mate selection. In terms of gender differences, young female participants reported being more influenced by their parents than young male participants.

Parental pressure to get married. Both young female and male participants reported experiencing parental pressure to get married, although more female participants reported such pressure. A single female reported, “My parents don’t want me to procrastinate my marriage until I am thirty.” She shared that she is expected to “get married before thirty years old and have a child.” A young female participant shared that “getting married is to satisfy my family and fulfilling my parents’ expectation.” A young married woman said, “If it were not for my parents’ wish and expectations to get married, I would not have been married. I really think marriage is unnecessary. That’s how I felt when I got married.” A single female stated, “Getting married feels like a way to get approval. If you are not married, your family might think there are some problems with you, ‘why don’t you get married?’ That is why I say getting married is a way to prove yourself that you’re a normal or a mature person.” A male participant stated, “We are often living under other people’s expectations. When we are single, our parents ask when we are getting married. When we get married, they ask when we are going to have children, what brand of car do I drive? They compare so much that I don’t know why these things are necessary. I feel trapped.” Another male shared that “My mother is getting older. If I’m not married, it might cause her to worry. We are their (my parents’) only people to rely on. Now, we need to put our parents into consideration when we make choices.” An older married female participant stated, “I know a couple who dated for 8 years and chose not to get married. Their parents pushed them to get married. They are now finally married, but the couple has decided to not have any children.” She seemed to be frustrated that the couple did not want to get married or have any children in the marriage.

Some participants also commented on the parental pressure they feel not only to get married, but also on the traditional wedding rituals. For example, a single female shared that “The traditional wedding rituals are to satisfy the parents, to save the parents’ face. If you skip it, they might get mad. It might become a war between the parents and the daughter. The daughter might think it’s her own business, but the parents think it’s the family’s event.”

The importance of parental approval. Most participants reported that their parents’ approval did not matter in their marital decision. One single female shared, “I don’t think it’s that important to get approval from my parents. Because people who I like are different from what my mom would like; that’s why I think just informing my mom would be fine.” Another single female, believed that “asking for permission (on marriage) is ridiculous.” She said, “no one has the right to tell if you should get married or not because you live your own life.” One young married female stated, “My parents didn’t have any impact on my decision.” A one single male stated, “According to the trend of the society, parents’ opinions on marriage have become less and less important. Based on people around me, many people think parents’ suggestions on marriage are merely suggestions that they may not take. If people want to get married, others’ opinions cannot stop them.” He also shared that he would “just get married and notify the parents” when he gets married. An older married woman stated, “I will let them do whatever my children want if they want to get married. My daughter got married after 7 or 8 years of dating. No one in the family disapproved her marriage.” In addition, an older married male stated, “I will ask my children to bring their boyfriend or girlfriend to us. My wife and I can observe their behavior and know whether this person is good or not. Later on, we will give suggestions to my children, but they may still choose not to listen.”

Some participants clarified that they would still ask for their parents' approval to marry someone, but it was mostly a way to notify their parents about their decision, rather than asking approval. A single female reported, "Some ask for permission on marriage just to inform the parents and gain acknowledgement from them. If the parents disagreed, they would still get married." A young married male shared that when he asked for his parents' approval, "they (parents) knew they couldn't change my decision. Asking for my parents' approval was more like notifying them of my decision. If they disapproved it, they knew they couldn't change my choice."

Some participants stated that if their parents did not approve of their partner, they would try to change their parents' minds. A single male reported that he would "calm my parents' worries and concerns down because I need to keep this potential wife." One single female shared that "If my parents' reasons don't matter to me and they disapprove, I will convince my parents." A single male stated, "If my parents disagree with my marriage, I will ask them why. Why do you disagree? What can we change? If you cannot give us a specific reason, their disagreement is meaningless. Ask parents what they dislike about the girlfriend. If it's something changeable, then change and gain their trust."

Although most participants did not believe that their parents' approval was a deciding factor, they still expressed a desire for them to like their partner because it would enhance harmony in the family. A single female shared that "I think everyone should be able to date whoever they want, but if I could get parents' approval, it's even better." Another single female reported, "In our family, marital approval or disapproval probably isn't an issue. However, I still hope everyone can get along and have a peaceful relationship, or it would be a pain to experience disharmony between parents and my spouse. If my family doesn't like him and I still love him, I

will still get married with him. My hope is that we at least have a peaceful relationship with my family even if my parents disapproves of my partner.” A single male suggested, “Men and women face similar situations. If a man could never fit into the in-law’s ideal frame, this marriage will be a struggle for everyone.” Another single male shared that “If parents dislike her (marital partner), the marriage will be a long journey to harmony in the future.”

Some participants were influenced by their parents’ criteria on a marital partner so that they would fulfill their parents’ expectations. A single male, shared that “parents sometimes are not negotiable. Thus, when it comes to marriage, we need to be really careful and marry the girl that meet up my parents’ expectations.” A young married female stated, “My dad brainwashed me pretty well. He taught me to date someone that has higher degree and higher income than I do. If he doesn’t meet these conditions, I don’t dare to take him to visit my parents. I would only bring boys that meet up the criteria of my parents.” A single female reported, “Parents would ask if this guy has a car or a house; where does he live? Does the guy's mother like you? I need to make sure my mother likes this person. Sometimes it's hard to find the perfect balance and what they want. I think it is very hard.”

A few participants reported that parental disapproval would probably lead to difficulty in continuing their relationship with their partner. A single female shared that “If my parents’ reasons were not important to you and they stand firm in their disagreement, I would run away from them.” Another single female stated, “I think it’s really important to gain my parents’ approval! I love my family; the person I want to marry is someone that I love too. I want him to like my family and my family likes him because it will strengthen our relationship.” Another female reported that she would probably delay her marriage until her parents approved. She said, “My partner and I can’t do much about the disapproval. The relationship would probably not

move on too fast. If I were married, I would not rush into having children. If I were not married, my partner and I would cohabit. In this way, I would wait for the time to prove my parents that my partner and I have a good relationship.”

Discussion

Ideal Partner

The purpose of the study was to examine the qualities of an ideal partner and parental influences on mate selection among contemporary Chinese. The qualitative analysis from the focus groups indicated three major themes for an ideal partner for marriage in Taiwan: family-of-origin qualities, personal qualities, and relationship qualities, with several subthemes under the three major themes. The results indicate that contemporary Chinese adults value a combination of traditional Chinese (e.g., similar family background) and Western (e.g. good communication) values.

Having a harmonious relationship with both the partner and the in-laws was crucial for the Chinese adults in the study. They reported that the ideal partner who has a good relationship with in-laws and a similar family background, which are two of the subthemes of family-of-origin, increases the probability for harmonious family relationships. This suggests that Taiwanese adults still hold the collectivistic values of maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships (Lee & Mock, 2005). These results are similar to those found by Chen and colleagues (2015), who found that Chinese young adults were more likely than U.S. young adults to value a good family background in a potential spouse. However, in contrast to the findings in the present study, the Chinese young adults in the Chen and colleagues (2015) study rated a good family background as less important than personal qualities, such as being healthy, being friendly, being easy going, kind, and understanding.

Being financially stable was the main personal quality that the participants in the study, especially women, looked for in an ideal partner. The finding that financial stability is an important quality of a good husband is consistent with previous research. In Chang and colleagues' (2011) study of young adults living in Shanghai, females only rated being kind and being healthy as being more important than the qualities of being a college graduate, being intelligent, and having good earning capacity in a marriage partner. Additional analysis indicated that the importance of financial stability had become increasingly important since the early 1980's. Moreover, the studies by Chen and colleagues (2015) and Chang and colleagues (2011) both found that this quality was more important among females than males.

Unlike adults from Western societies, who highly value physical attractiveness and feeling loved by their partner (Boxer, Noonan, & Whelan, 2015), love and physical attractiveness were rarely mentioned by the participants in the study as being important qualities in a potential marital partner. This finding is consistent with findings from the Chang and colleagues (2011) study, which found that physical attractiveness was rated as having low importance among Chinese females, and only as moderately important among Chinese males. Also, in the study by Chen and colleagues (2015) physical attractiveness was only ranked 15th out of 21 qualities among the Chinese participants. Similarly, cross-cultural studies have found that U.S. participants rated physical attractiveness as significantly more important than Chinese participants (Chen et al., 2015; Kline & Zhang, 2009).

In addition, although previous research has found that filial piety is still a desired mate selection criterion for both Chinese men and women (Cook & Dong, 2011; Guo et al., 2017; Pan et al., 2013), none of the younger participants in the study reported filial piety as a criterion of their ideal partner. Only a few older participants reported that filial piety is an important trait in a

partner. These findings, which came as a result of study participants volunteering criteria of an ideal partner, rather than responding to a list of possible criteria, suggest that traditional values have become less important in the mate selection criteria of Chinese young adults.

Within the relationship quality theme, the ability to get along with their partner was the most common desired quality. Interestingly, most of the participants related the ability of getting along with their partner as primarily a function of their partner's personality, as well as the two partners having personalities that meshed well together. The importance of a partner's personality is echoed in the study by Chen and colleagues (2015), where they found in their content analysis of respondents' answers to open-ended questions that personality was the most frequently quality mentioned.

Some participants, especially women, mentioned the importance of having an equal relationship. This finding is consistent with previous research that has found that the traditional gender roles, with men as breadwinners and women as caregivers (Walton & Takeuchi, 2010; Yao, 2000) and being housebound, submissive, and second-class (Higgins et al., 2002), have diminished among the younger participants. The results showed, though, that some older participants still hold more traditional values on gender role and decision-making in the marriage.

Overall, the findings concerning the ideal partner's criteria suggest that contemporary Chinese adults are influenced by Western values but have not completely deserted the traditional Chinese values despite gender and marital status. Moreover, the younger Chinese adults are more influenced by Western values than the older Chinese adults.

Parental Influence

Results of the study indicated that most of the younger Chinese participants, both single and married, reported that their parents' disapproval of their marital partner would not determine whether or not they would go ahead with the marriage. Some participants clarified that they would still ask for their parents' approval to marry someone, but it was mostly a way to notify their parents about their decision, rather than actually asking approval. Only a few younger participants reported that parental disapproval would probably lead to a decision to not to go ahead with the marriage. Findings indicated that females were more likely than males to be influenced by their parents, which is consistent with previous research that also found that Chinese females were more influenced on mate selection issues (Guo et al., 2017).

These findings suggest a shift in the influence of parents on mate selection in Chinese culture. Whereas the approval of parents on their child's marital choice has been a traditional aspect of Chinese culture, the influence of parents has been declining towards more individual choice among young adults.

Individualism and Collectivism

The findings of this study are best viewed from the perspective of individualism and collectivism. Individualistic and collectivistic societies have different values and beliefs on marriage and mate selection. Individualist cultures emphasize the concept of autonomy and independence from the in-group. Individualism values personal autonomy, self-fulfillment, personal responsibility, freedom of choice and, personal attributes (Hofstede, 1980; Waterman, 1984; Schwartz, 1990). The "individualistic marriage" focuses on love, expression of personal feelings, self-development and personal fulfillment that transcend gender (Cherlin, 2004; Loscocco & Walzer, 2013), and a successful marriage meets each spouse's needs for personal

growth and self-actualization (Cherlin, 2004). Individualism promotes personal growth and liberates partners from traditional constraints, reflecting decreased religious, family, and social influences (Amato, 2014). The changes in family life, such as the increase of nonmarital cohabitation, divorce, and nonmarital childbirth, and the decrease in marital childbirth, suggest the decline of social control over spouses in individualistic marriages (Amato, 2014).

In contrast, in collectivistic societies, the goals of the group are higher priorities than personal autonomy and choice, and conformity to group norms and hierarchy is the basic concept of collectivism (Triandis, 1995). When it comes to mate selection, individualism values personal decision and romantic relationships (Dion & Dion 1993), while collectivism values interpersonal bonds, responding to the needs of others, and subjugating one's own desires and needs for the good of the family and larger society (Higgins et al., 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1999). Family collectivism, or obligations to family members, is a prominent cultural value in Chinese tradition, strengthened by Confucianism (Pan et al., 2013). Confucianism values are consistent with collectivism and have traditionally had a prominent impact on people's socialization and moral cultivation in Chinese and many Asian countries (Pan et al., 2013). With the collectivistic emphasis of in-group harmony and obedience, marriage has the function of bringing two clans together, which is not merely decided by two people wanting to get married (Whyte, 1992). Thus, mate selection has traditionally not been an individual choice for Chinese couples (Thornton & Lin, 1994).

Using the individualism-collectivism theoretical perspective to interpret the results of the study, the expressed freedom of most of the young adults to choose their own partner, regardless of their parents' opinion of their choice of partners, reflects the increasing influence of individualistic values in Chinese culture. On the other hand, the findings of the study also

indicate that the collectivistic value of promoting in-group harmony has not completely deserted most Chinese young adults. Many participants, especially females, expressed a desire for their parents to like their partner because it would enhance harmony in the family, but they reported that their parents' disapprove would not change their mind about marrying a person that they had chosen. To maintain the harmony in the family, some participants stated that, if their parents did not approve of their marital partner, they would try to convince or change their parents' minds. If satisfying parents on their martial partners is not a concern for the Chinese participants, participants would not express the hopes that their partners are liked by their parents nor try to change their parents' minds.

Limitations. Two limitations of this study are the sample size and the application to different regions of Chinese population. First, the sample size of the focus group was relatively small. Although the overall sample of 51 participants may not be considered small by the standards of qualitative research design, these 51 adults were divided into six focus groups, representing different demographic characteristics. A second focus group for each of the six groups of participants would have increased the sample size and robustness of the findings. Second, the participants were recruited in urban Taiwan, and the result may not generalize completely to the Chinese population in Mainland China or other regions in the world. The Chinese population in each region may experience different degrees of Western influence. , especially the level of the modernization of each the region. Third, the older married participants in the study were less educated than the other groups of participants. Consequently, some of the different responses by the older groups could reflect a difference in participants' education, rather than representing only societal changes in the attitudes and patterns of mate selection.

Despite these limitations, the qualitative nature of the study allowed for a richness of data that adds important information about mate selection preferences and the influence of parents on their marital choice decision. Instead of simply responding to a predetermined list of possible ideal qualities in a spouse or to a categorical question about if they would honor their parents' disapproval of a potential marital partner, the participants in the focus groups were able provide much more nuanced information. For example, while previous research had found that personality is an important issue in choosing a partner (Chen et al., 2015), the participants in the focus groups were able to elaborate on the ideas of "good personality", such as having a personality that matches each other enabling them to get to get along with one another in a relationship. In addition, the focus groups participants were able to contextualize their decision to marry a person even if their parents disapproved of their choice in a marital partner.

Clinical implications. It is important for therapists to be aware of the levels of Westernization in each individual when working with the Chinese population. It is easy to stereotype Chinese individuals and couples as still embracing traditional, collectivistic values, as well as traditional norms and patterns of marriage. The results of this study point out two important findings that are relevant to therapists. First, therapists need to be aware of changing values and norms in Chinese society as Western and individualistic cultural values influence Chinese society. It is clear that marital patterns and norms are changing in China. Second, it is also clear from the results of this study that there is substantial variation in the pace and level of change. While the influence of Western and individualist values on Chinese marriages is clear, not all Chinese adults, even young adults, have adopted them. For example, although most of the younger cohort of participants reported that they would marry someone despite their parents' disapproval, there were some who said that they would try to convince their parents and wait

until they changed their mind, and a few reported that they would likely terminate the relationship. Thus, therapists need to be sensitive and not generalize individuals' values and beliefs about mate selection to all members of Chinese societies.

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Table 1

Demographic

Variables	Single (<i>n</i> = 17)	Married <40 (<i>n</i> = 16)	Married >40 (<i>n</i> = 18)
Male, N (%)	8 (47.06%)	9 (56.25%)	8 (44.44%)
Female, N (%)	9 (52.94%)	7 (43.75%)	10 (55.56%)
- Age, mean (SD)	27.41 (5.88)	33.25 (3.61)	51.5 (5.07)
- % of College Graduates	16 (94.12%)	11 (68.75%)	2 (22.22%)
- % Employed Full-time	5 (29.41%)	13 (81.25%)	6 (33.33%)
Marriage Length (year), mean (<i>SD</i>)	-	2.61 (3.01)	23.78 (7.35)
Number of children, mean (<i>SD</i>)	-	1.00 (0.73)	2.28 (0.89)

Note: SD = Standard Deviation