



Asian Profile

Vol. 44, No. 4
August, 2016

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Parental Matchmaking: Is It Really Such A Selfless Act After All? (A Case Analysis of China's Marriage Markets)

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Chen¹ is very worried about her daughter's bachelorette status. She had actively asked all her acquaintances and extended family members to introduce suitable candidates for her daughter and when that came to a dead end, she resorted to making the weekly trip to the local park in the weekends to attend a Marriage Market to participate in "BaiFaXiangQin". Chen's daughter is 27.

When asked why is it so important to her that her daughter marries, she said, "So that people will stop asking me why my daughter is still a 'leftover'."

Chen feels uncomfortable with having a "leftover woman" as a daughter. She dreads family gatherings where other relatives persistently flaunt their grandchildren or their successful son-in-laws.

"There is extreme pressure to get a suitable man for my daughter from relatives, friends and colleagues. I don't like the way people look at me after they learned that my daughter is a 'leftover woman'," she said.

"I want a piece of the action too!" she continued.

This interview was conducted in one of China's many increasingly popular Marriage Markets reveal a different perspective to the matter of Marriage Markets and "leftover women", that perhaps the matter of finding "love" for their single daughters is not that altruistic after all.

In this paper, the author attempt to analyze the reasons behind the requirements stated in flyers and banners prepared by leftover women's parents that adorn the vicinity of Marriage Markets. Also it will explore how these requirements reflect the status, financial and social security gains that they are hoping to acquire from helping their daughters find a marital partner. For the purpose

1. All names are changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

of this paper, the two other criterias that dominate posters in Marriage Markets which are age and education level will not be discussed, as these are the result of an inherent Chinese culture of educational homogamy (Blossfeld and Timm, 2003; Mare, 1991; Kalmijn, 1998) and age hypergamy (England and McClintock, 2010; Goldman, Westoff and Hammerslough, 1984).

This paper also analyzed the content of multiple state media and international news reports, editorials and images on the internet in regard to Marriage Markets and the phenomenon of “leftover” women. The author drew on casual conversations with Chinese parents that have experience participating in Marriage Markets from Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan.

Rather than the traditional view that the motivation behind Chinese parents’ urgency to help their single daughters settle down is purely for the benefit of their lonely daughters, the author argues that the reasons for the escalation of anxiety among Chinese parents surrounding the “leftover women” phenomenon lie in how the union helps obtain or protect their self interests.

What are Marriage Markets?

Since 2004, Marriage Markets have been cropping up in various parks in Beijing, Shanghai, ShenZhen, Wuhan, etc. Marriage Markets are a free platform for parents to help their children find a suitable spouse. The parents born in the 50s or 60s are liken to be the vendors and their goods are their unmarried children, usually born around the 70s, 80s, or 90s (Sun, 2012a).

Parents advertise their children by providing information regarding their unmarried children on papers. The information may include age, height, job, income, education, family values or even a picture of their single children (Winter, 2014; Yang, 2011). Most detail the minimum requirements to “apply” for the unmarried children. The most common criteria are in terms of financial condition, ownership of property, family values, age, and education level. The advertisement is then displayed around the park. Parents paste these paper flyers on trees, park walls or on the pavements for other interested parents’ perusal. The parents are usually stationed around their advertisements, ready to “service” prospective partners’ parents by asking or answering questions. Others come with notebooks to evaluate potential partners’ details (Hunt, 2013). The advertisements are not the only way parents seek out potential mates for their children. Parents also survey the Marriage Market to gauge the market, assess their competitors or to strike up conversations regarding their children with other parents. There are more advertisements from single women compared to men (Hunt, 2013), a reflection of the anxiety of parents of “leftover women” that will be discussed later in this paper.

According to Sun (2012a), most marriage markets started from communities living near to parks. These communities socialize through morning exercise routines mostly. A common conversational topic among such communities is the matter of their unmarried children. This usually leads to the institution of the nascent stage of the Marriage Markets we see today. The practice of matchmaking in a Marriage Market is known as 白发相亲 (baifaxiangqin). 相亲 (xiangqin) can be defined as meeting or dating between two individuals (usually of the opposite sex) under the recommendation of someone else, e.g., parents, neighbours, co-workers, matchmaker, etc. (Zhou, 2009) with the goal of marriage. The goal of dating in China is widely believed to be a mean to finding a marital partner, a more permanent arrangement rather than a casual social partner. While only 14 percent of American students share this view, a distinct 42 percent of Chinese college students in Mainland China aim to find a marital partner through dating (Tang and Zuo, 2000).

According to Sun (2012a), the 白发 (baifa) in the phrase – “白发相亲 (baifaxiangqin)” refers to parents that wish to marry off their unmarried children, usually made up of parents born in the 50s or 60s. The phrase 白发相亲 (baifaxiangqin) can be simply defined as parental matchmaking for children’s marriage conducted mainly through Marriage Markets. This is a relatively new

phenomenon as Marriage Market is still a considerably new development among China's dating platforms.

Matchmaking and introductory intermediaries have long been part of third party intervention for the purpose of facilitating marriage. It has been a tradition that romantic relationships arise from the deliberate intervention of third parties apart from chance encounters between two individuals (Coontz, 2005). Ahuvia and Adelman (1992) propose that the resources available to these third parties including parents are a broad social network, strong opinion about what kind of people belong together and the willingness to apply those judgments on actual people. Parents in China find matchmaking a reliable method but the limited resources available to them have caused them to progressively find more innovative ways, one of that being conducting "baifaxiangqin" in Marriage Markets (Sun, 2012b).

What are "Leftover Women"?

The disparaging phrase "leftover women" otherwise known as shengnü (剩女) is popularly used to describe successful and independent single professional women in their late twenties or early thirties. The term is defined by the Women's Federation as "single women older than 27" in 2007 and was added into the China's Ministry of Education's official lexicon (Fincher, 2014). In 2007, the Chinese Ministry of Education also blamed "leftover women" for having "overly high expectations for marriage partners", in an official explanation of shengnü (剩女).

Women's educational attainment has increased significantly (Hannum and Xie, 2004) and this has led To (2013) to believe that at later stages of economic development, longer schooling tends to delay marriage for both men and women. This inadvertently cause young women to get better paid employment which in turn provides a comfortable financial independence that results in late marriages. The expansion of the service sector in Modern China has brought structural changes in the labor market. This provided more jobs for women in a traditionally chauvinistic society, resulting in more women going into paid employment and moving away from the traditional female role of handling solely household issues.

In addition to that, the prevalence of hypergamy has perpetrated the phenomenon where Chinese women face a narrower potential dating pool as she grows both in terms of age and achievements. According to Qian (2012), women's marriage rate reduce dramatically after they turn 30 while men is reported to have an opposite effect. Older women rarely marry younger men. Ironically, older men often marry women younger than themselves. In fact, men are 50 times more likely than women to marry partners younger than themselves. This "age hypergamy" reduces "leftover women's" marriage prospect greatly. We can conclude from this that the supply of potential partners decreases with age for women but increases for men (Goldman et al., 1984).

The ideology of China's mass media campaign on "leftover women" has been internalized and ingrained in not just the women themselves, the propaganda has successfully affected the masses as well. This results in an intense pressure to marry from not just parents, but also relatives, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. The word "leftover" which is used to describe things that can be discarded has painted successful career women as greedy, selfish, overambitious and picky individuals. *The Xinhua News* column, "Do Leftover Women Really Deserve Our Sympathy?" accused "leftover women" of frequenting nightclubs, participating in regular one-night stands and becoming mistresses to high officials or rich men.

"Girls with an average or ugly appearance ... hope to further their education in order to increase their competitiveness. The tragedy is they don't realise that, as women age, they are worth less and less, so by the time they get their MA or PhD, they are already old, like yellowed pearls." A passage from an article displayed in the Women's Federation read.

Fincher (2014) believes that the state media preyed on the natural insecurities of single women and blew them out of proportion, subjecting them to ridicule and shame by exacerbating their relationship status with various cartoons and illustrations that mock successful and educated women's achievements. It is interesting to note that some had illustrations of disappointed parents accompanying them.

China has shifted from taking more aggressive approaches to using educational campaigns to influencing the public (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005), and the campaign worked so well that *Xinhua News* reported, "more than 90 percent of men surveyed said women should marry before 27 to avoid becoming unwanted". This shows that the media has successfully implanted a derogatory image onto single women in the public's eyes, and the parents of these single women along with them. Parents of "leftover women" are said to be ashamed of having that label attached to their daughters. Take Lin, a successful lawyer in the city of Wuhan; her parents have started making excuses for her daughter to avoid bringing her to family functions.

"They are ashamed of me and are afraid that others might speculate the reasons behind why I am still single," said Lin. The intense pressure to marry is a result of the vilification of single career women and the image that they now carry with them is a symbol of shame for many parents. Although it is expected of men to shoulder the financial burden of the family, professional women are regularly stigmatised and are at the butt of diatribes like "selfish", "non-feminine", and "irresponsible to household needs" (Zuo and Bian, 2001).

Criteria Parents Look For in Marriage Markets

Among the minimum requirements stated in posters looking for a potential partner for their daughters in Marriage Markets, a significant pattern is in cognizance. It seems that parents focus on the financial condition, education level, tendency to practice filial piety and whether they already own a house and a car. Almost all of these prerequisites are of a higher standard in comparison with the woman's credentials. China has a persistent tradition of hypergamy where Chinese women tend to marry up in regards to financial and social status (Thornton and Lin, 1994; Xu, Ji and Tung, 2000). Chinese women are known to pay more attention to financial traits – education, occupation, and income (Xu, 2000; Yu, 2011). "Leftover women" with greater financial stability are less likely to marry men with lesser earning power. Is this a result of years of conditioning from parents that aspire to gain something out of their daughters that are traditionally viewed to be more inferior to sons or male relatives comparatively (Gupta, 2003; Chu, 2001; Fincher, 2014; Hull, 1990; Li and Cooney, 1993; Thornton and Lin, 1994)? While more research is needed to verify this, Greenhalgh (1985) believes that, "Put boldly, parents' key strategy was to take more from daughters to give more to sons and thus get more for themselves."

It is interesting to note that there is an absence of personality and trait requirements or descriptions that are commonly found in the introductory and "looking for" pages in online dating sites' profiles (Walther, Slovacek and Tidwell, 2001; Van Gelder, 1985; Lea and Spears, 1995) or personal ads on printed materials (Bolig, Stein and McKenry, 1984; Ahuvia and Adelman, 1992). The lack of qualitative prerequisites for a potential partner for their daughters suggests that parents only look for traits pertaining to their own self interest.

In order to better understand why parents would go through the grueling process of finding a successful and honorable son-in-law, we need to examine the criteria listed on their "advertisements". In the next section, the reasons behind popular requirements for potential son-in-laws will be evaluated. The author will also explore the context in which such criteria came to be the fundamentals of their advertisements for a son-in-law, in addition to understanding the general motivation behind the parents' focus on searching for son-in-laws with strong financial traits in terms of education, occupation and income.

Stronger Financial Capabilities, Better Retirement Plan?

Parents often list “stronger financial capability” as a must-have criterion in their posters. The lack of an established social security and pension system plays a crucial role in the urgency found among parents of unmarried daughter to find a suitable marital spouse for them (Sun, 2012a). Approximately 70 percent of elderly parents need to financially depend on their offspring (Sun, 1998). In China, this problem has been named the “4:2:1” phenomenon, this illustrates the problem where one child has to be responsible for the welfare of two parents and four grandparents (Pozen, 2013; Hesketh, Li and Zhu, 2005). Elderly parents would rely on their children and their children’s marital spouse to provide for them in their retirement years. By 2007, 35.9 percent of the population is still under the one-child policy (Callick, 2007). With largely one-child families, this responsibility will most likely fall on a younger Chinese child, often a daughter that lack the financial ability to do so alone.

Traditionally, sons are permanent members of their natal family and are the main financial support for their natal families even after getting married. Unsurprisingly, parents invest in sons over daughters as sons are viewed to be a better long-term investment (Salaff, 1995; Wolf, 1972). According to public discourse in the past, daughters are seen to be 亏本货 (kuibenhuo), this phrase brings about the meaning where investing in daughters is a waste of time, money and energy. This is because daughters are to serve their husbands’ extended family after marriage (Whyte and Xu, 2003). But due to China’s one-child policy, many urban Chinese families have single daughters and many are without sons.

It is common in Chinese societies for parents to receive financial support from their children (Silverstein, Cong and Li, 2006; Pei and Pillai, 1999). Receiving financial support leads to better psychological well being among parents and are not as susceptible to develop depressive symptoms found among elderly parents (Chou et al., 2004). This is because financially supporting parents is a common act that reflects filial piety. Having a child that practices filial piety helps parents to gain “face” and to avoid the possibility of losing “face” or “mianzi” in their community. According to Ho (1976), “face” can be defined as follow:

“Face is the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from other, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct; the face extended to a person by others is a function of the degree of congruence between judgments of his total condition in life, including his actions as well as those of people closely associated with him, and the social expectations that others have placed upon him. In terms of two interacting parties, face is the reciprocated compliance, respect, and/or deference that each party expects from, and extends to, the other party.”

Lin, a regular patron of the Marriage Market in Wuhan thinks that if her youngest daughter marries someone from a stronger financial background, she will not lose “face”. “My eldest daughter married a rich man, and now I can show my daughter and son-in-law off to my friends whenever she buys me expensive branded bags or clothes when she goes to Europe with her husband!” Lin said, flaunting her new Prada bag. When parents in Marriage Markets were asked why they listed “stronger financial capability” as one of the most important criteria in a son-in-law, they responded that their son-in-laws’ salary and willingness to indulge in their wives and parents-in-laws are counted as indicators of their personal claimed success. The virtue of leftover women’s parents is inadvertently judged by their daughters’ ability to marry a rich and spoiling husband.

Wang, a retired teacher wants her only daughter to consider marrying a man with strong financial background so that her daughter can provide her financial support in her old age with her husband’s money. “Nowadays, it is no longer enough for only one person to support two old parents, things are getting much more expensive these day”, Wang said.

This resonated with Sun's (2012a) claim that parents she interviewed in Shanghai's Marriage Market feel that the responsibility of caring for them in their old age will be too much for their child and prefer to find a partner for their child to share this burden with. According to Fong (2002), parents that have an only daughter invest in daughters' education in the absence of the need to invest in sons in terms of properties and education. This suggests that parents are now comfortable in investing in daughters in order to marry someone which is potentially richer and more educated, this will indirectly secure financial support for their old age.

Filial Piety, Who does it really benefit?

Parents citing "filial piety" as a requirement in their posters want to ensure that their son-in-laws would be the kind of man that will help or care for them in their old age. In extreme cases, some are hoping that it would be a uxori-local marriage. Even with the absence of the unconventional uxori-local marriages, parents still expect their son-in-laws and daughters to visit and support them during their retirement years.

In Chinese culture, filial piety is a highly valued virtue that parents strive to cultivate. Filial piety can be shown when children provide care, respect, and financial support to their elderly parents. Children with this virtue can be a great source of happiness and pride (Yan et al., 2005; Hwang and Han, 2010). For many Chinese, happiness is derived from family and children (Hwang and Han, 2010). Chinese parents view having many grandchildren and having children that practice filial piety sources of great happiness. To secure their personal happiness and "retirement plan", Chinese parents prefer to take proactive roles such as participating in Marriage Markets and practicing "baifaxiangqin" to ensure that their children will find a good partner (Sun, 2012a).

Filial piety, the fundamental value in a Chinese family, requires that children or grandchildren respect and care for their parents and grandparents (Thornton and Lin, 1994; Whyte, 2004). The sociologist, Martin Whyte (2004) explained: "In imperial China filial piety was a central value of family life, and the centrality of family life in Confucian statecraft made filial piety a lynchpin for the entire social order. Down through the centuries parents constantly stressed to their children that the way they treated their elders were a central measure of their moral worth." According to Watson (2004), filial piety emphasizes on the son's ability to carry out the necessary duties of providing emotionally and financially for his parents. The elderly are more likely to co-reside with sons than with daughters (Chu, Xie and Yu, 2011; Lei, Strauss, Tian and Zhao, 2013). But, this ancient tradition is met with challenges such as the establishment of the one-child policy and the widespread existence of families without sons.

In the case of families with no sons, the strategy of raising a brother-less daughter as a son became popular out of necessity (Fong, 2002). Fong (2002) believed that parents are applying similar childraising methods regardless of the child's gender in light of the one-child policy. This strategy might not be prevalent in pre-revolutionary China but the concept is far from foreign (Pasternak, 1985; Rofel, 1999). While daughters are traditionally expected to serve and reside with their husbands' parents (Watson, 2004), daughters in postmodern China are playing a much more significant role in the care taking of their parents. More than 30 percent of increment in the matter of matrilocal marriages by 1988 reflects that there is an increase in proportion and acceptance of parents coresiding with their married daughters. The fact that a large amount of families may not have sons to move in with is cited as one of the main reason that contributed to this phenomenon (Pimentel and Liu, 2004). Data from the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) 2011-2012 baseline survey show that about 43 percent of elderly parents aged 60 and above still lived with a child, another 31 percent have a child living in the same neighbourhood, and 13 percent more in the same county but not in the same neighbourhood (Lei, Strauss, Tian and Zhao, 2013). Thus, it is imperative for many parents to find a son-in-law that could potentially provide them

with care taking or a retirement home. It is also likely that parents would want to “approve” of the potential mate of their daughter, compatibility is of great importance to them, it is so important for the parents to “like” the man their daughter choose that their daughter have to take their approval into consideration. There are cases where young women like Shi terminated her relationship with her exboyfriend because, “my father don’t like him, I have no choice.” Ironically, the matter of the parents liking their daughter’s boyfriend is more important than whether the daughter herself likes her boyfriend in many cases. It seems perplexing to many not accustomed to the Chinese culture for such phenomenon to happen, especially in such an intimate relationship structure.

In the West, parents tend to not exert any control in their children’s life when they reach adulthood. Nuclear families are usually found to be isolated from their older relatives, such isolation is widely accepted as a functional adaptation for both the elders and the adult children. Cumming and Henry (1961) believed that such disengagement minimizes the social disruption caused by the elder relatives’ eventual physical decline and mortality. Parents often felt intruded upon and annoyed by their children’s worries (Spitze and Gallant, 2004). Recipients of support, in this case, the parents may not always perceive such support and the under-lying message that they needed their adult children’s assistance in a positive manner (Smith and Goodnow, 1999). In China, this concept can be seen as bizarre to many. Chinese parents still feel that they have the right to decide and mold their adult children’s life. Evidence from recent surveys (Whyte, 1990; Xu and Whyte, 1990) indicates that. Parents remain actively involved in the marriage decisions of their daughters (To, 2013). This is because the decisions and life choices of their children still affect them even after marriage if we take the practice of “filial piety” into consideration. This provides an explanation for the motivation behind the crazed obsession over finding the “appropriate” partner for their leftover daughters.

“It is very important to pick the right son-in-law. I only have a daughter, so my son-in-law is going to be like my son, I don’t want a son that can’t respect and take care of us old folks,” said a very worried Xi. Xi is already 56 and about to retire. When he was asked whether he is worried about retiring and what he planned to do to support himself without his monthly income as a security guard, he lamented, “My daughter is just a secretary, her income alone is not enough to support my wife and I. We were hoping that she can 嫁个好人来养我们老家 (jiagehaorenlaiyangwo menlaorenjia) [to marry a good guy to financially support us].”

Men with no inclination for filial piety are viewed as an unattractive choice for a son-in-law even in love marriages. A sentiment echoed by most of the parents that the author has talked to that had been to Marriage Markets around China. It is intriguing to note how “love between the couple” is viewed to be secondary to their ability to conform to the traditional value of “filial piety”. A value that only benefits the recipients, in this case, the parents.

Do You Have a House or a Car?

It is publicly acknowledged that Chinese are obsessed with buying residential property. So it is no surprise that parents of “leftover women” include the criteria of “must own house or car” in their posters consistently. According to China’s Central Bank, China has an urban home ownership rate of around 85 percent (Fincher, 2014). Chinese women are also known to refuse marriage unless the man owns a home. The Chinese Marriage Situation Survey Report 2011 which was released by the Committee of Matchmaking Service Industries of China Association of Social Workers and Baihe Website indicated that out of 50,384 questionnaires, 92 percent of women surveyed think that a stable income is mandatory for marriage and a whopping 70 percent of women think that men should only get married after buying their own housing properties (Wu, 2012). *People’s Daily* write-up of the survey: “Survey Shows 70 percent of Chinese Women Say Man Must own a House before Marriage.” In another write-up of the survey, the *Xinhua News* website ran the headline –

“Leftover Women Choosing Partners: No Money, No Deal – Having House is Top Priority”. The idea that women demand prospective husbands buy a house before considering marriage with them became a sensational material for state media reports and property sales advertisement (Fincher, 2014). Despite the obsession surrounding the purchase of residential property, cities like Beijing and Shanghai are one of the most expensive cities for real estate (Stohldreier, 2012). Based on this, we can assume that the emphasis on the purchase of a house as prerequisite for men considering proposing has become a stereotype among the Chinese community in Mainland China. The important question that could be raised here is why would such a negative, materialistic opinion and condition continue to be an important criteria for marriage? Who stands to gain from this “transaction”?

According to Fincher (2014), young Chinese might feel the need to achieve a sense of economic security through the purchase of a home. Some might see property as an attractive investment option and many cited the lack of rights as renters as the few key reasons for their insatiable need to buy a home. Hukou-related rights also come into play, as purchasing a home will grant them rights such as subsidized healthcare and better schooling options for their children. If all of these “benefits” do not directly affect parents, then why do parents in Marriage Markets consistently asked for a man that has already purchased a home and a car? Why do parents almost constantly blatantly ignore stating other criteria that would otherwise only affect their children such as personal traits, habits or even hobbies? The author argue that the issue of property and car ownerships do aid parents in their personal agendas and that the widely accepted concept of marrying with this precondition is a result of parents’ conditioning.

Early 2014, the story of a man that proposed with US\$ 33000 in cash folded into origami roses went viral. The man, which was only known to be called Mr. Chen came up with this idea because his girlfriend’s mother was not happy with the fact that Mr. Chen wanted to marry her daughter without first buying a house and a car. The sensational news was circulated in major online platforms around China and had even caught the attention of international news organizations like *The Telegraph* (Phillips, 2014; Han, 2014). Most young Chinese especially men associate property buying with showing filial piety and a way to exercise their obligation to the family, some were reported saying that pressure from their parents or elders is the reason behind their need to purchase a house (Fincher, 2014; Zhang, 2011). The social norm of purchasing a home before or after marriage is so inherent that derogatory terms like 裸婚 (luohun) is attached to couples that marry without a house or have plans to buy one (Waldmeir, 2012).

Properties in cities like Shanghai and Beijing are so exorbitantly priced that most of the time, the only way to afford it is to get parents, relatives, friends and the couple themselves to finance it together. Most of the time, the money is pooled to buy properties for sons or male relatives. Even in the past, the men were expected to provide the marital home, this became the benchmark of marriage, thus it was natural for the son and his parents to provide a house to improve their son’s chances at marriage (Fong, 2002). In the absence of a son, male relatives like cousins and uncles are prioritized. The Third Survey on the Social Status of Women in 2010 show that 51.7 percent of married men have claims to being the sole owner of their home.

Parents of daughters are known to refuse buying homes for their daughters, this is because the parents want to save money to contribute to the buying of a home for a male relative to improve his marriage prospect. Some daughters were even asked to contribute to the property buying of a male relative (Fincher, 2014). With their only daughter left without any financial capability to purchase a home, parents hope to find a son-in-law that already has a house. Some parents view it as a form of payment for “giving away” their daughter to the man and his family. Ru, a retired teacher insisted that her future son-in-law must have already bought a home. “I brought up my daughter till she is successful and marriageable, and the man can’t even compensate me with a house. A man that can’t even afford a house is shameful and letting my daughter marry a man like that will make me ‘lose

face’,” Ru said. Ru’s daughter is a successful manager in a multinational company. At the age of 29, she is a “leftover woman”.

Again, the issue of “face” is being brought up. The masculinity of a man is tied to his ability to own a home. Thus, just like for Ru, it is unacceptable to many parents, especially parents of successful “leftover women” for their daughters to marry a “weak” man.

“People will wonder what is wrong with my daughter and my family, to settle for such an incapable man. That is unacceptable”, Ru insisted.

With this criterion in place, parents are able to protect their “face” and their reputation; they also get to collect their funds to contribute to the purchase of a home for a male relative. Thus, it is only natural that parents think that this criterion is of utmost importance. As long as Chinese parents take pride in their daughters’ ability to marry a rich, successful man, this requirement will always be on the list of “looking for” in Marriage Markets’ flyers.

Conclusion

Non-relational factors such as parental approval still affect the choice of partner (Goodwin, 1999). Majority of children are still subject to opinions and expectations of parents regarding their marital endeavours (To, 2013). According to Riley (1989), nearly 45 percent had received introduction to potential spouses from their parents. Although parents no longer have a need to use marriage as a way to increase hands in the field like in the past (Croll, 1984), parents of brotherless daughters secure provision of old age support and security primarily through their daughter’s marriage, this mirrors the traditional purpose of marriage in Chinese society (Potter and Potter, 1990), a purpose that serves no purpose to the individuals directly involved in the marriage. The flyers and posters in Marriage Markets reflect how parents use marriage to largely attain their self interests and to a certain extent, ignore the essence of a romantic relationship for their daughters. According to Becker’s (1973; 1974; 1981) theory of marriage, individuals marry only when the union’s utility value exceeds the utility from being single. It is interesting to note that the utility expands to greatly benefit parents as well.

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