Love, Intimacy and Relationships: Exploring Young Chinese People's Identities in the Post-Reform and Globalizing Era

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Abstract

Since the implementation of reform and opening up policies in 1978, the economic and socio-cultural environment in modern China has experienced a dramatic transformation under the influence of urbanization and globalization, which have facilitated a more individualized identity among Chinese youth. This research focuses on the subjectivity of a group of young Chinese professionals in Beijing, who were born in 1980s and early 1990s and have been greatly shaped by the changing social and cultural environment in the reform era. By examining how young people fashion their romantic selves in contemporary China, the research explores how the interplay of state policies, modern family and mediatisation that have played an important role in creating possibilities for an emerging post-socialist romantic subjectivity. Specifically, Chinese youth often embrace individual freedoms and choices facilitated by the free market economy and consumerist culture, while at the same time draw upon (a sometimes new understanding of) traditional familial values in order to pursue personal happiness in a modernizing society and gain an identity as Chinese in a globalizing era.

More specifically, the subjectivity and power/knowledge model introduced by Foucault's (1979) work *The History of Sexuality* provides a historical interpretive framework to examine the subjectivity transformation of Chinese youth. As a main part of people's identity, love and intimacy are conceptualized as social and cultural constructs shaped by the interaction of modern institutions and the reflexivity of the individual. By employing semi-structured interviews under a constructivist research paradigm, the most popular reality TV dating programme works as a mediated dating allegory and a dialogic platform for young people to construct their relationship related values.

Key words

Love and intimacy / post-socialist subjectivity / Chinese youth / TV dating / identity formation / individualization

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my families

Especially my beloved parents

And to all of my friends

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

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

Alongside this, a growing interest in self-fulfilment and personal happiness is observed in the social reform era, which is often seen as an important characteristic of young people in China (Higgins & Sun 2007). As an important aspect as well as a path to achieve personal happiness, personal relationships are often prioritized on the Chinese youth's life agenda and are seen to be greatly associated with their personal development as well as family practices. As most members of the young generation are the only children in their families, their love lives and relationships are a significant concern of their families as well as the whole society. The changing values towards love and intimacy become a key avenue to examine the identity transformation of present day Chinese youth, which is an important element of the socio-cultural transition in the post-Mao era.

The changing relationship-related values and practices in the reform era inspired my research interest in exploring young people's identity construction towards love and intimacy, which feeds into a bigger project about examining the socio-cultural change in the post-reform China. Hence, this project intends to examine the social and cultural change in the post-reform Chinese society by exploring the relationship formation of the Chinese youth, who serve as 'a bridge between the closed, xenophobic China of the Mao years and the globalised economic powerhouse that it is becoming' (Elegant 2007, p. 1). More specifically, it seeks to investigate

the main features of young people's dating and relationship practices, including their mate-choosing values and their strategies towards initiating and sustaining relationships, their desires and expectations from personal relationships as well as the ethics underpinning their relationships.

Situating the Research

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

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

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

During my growing up, my identity had been shifted from a traditional patriarchal clan identity in relation to the hometown of my father's side to an at times ambiguous and complex identity as a Beijinger. This was likely to be an epitome of changing family practices since the reforms and opening-up period. Specifically, the nationwide rural-to-urban population migration and the One-child policy introduced in 1979 have facilitated the transformation of family ties from a traditional extended family to a nuclear family culture (Fowler et al. 2010; Hesketh et al. 2005; Starr 2001). The above personal experiences towards identity construction were likely to reflect the social and cultural change in Beijing. As the capital of China, Beijing has been greatly influenced by globalization and modernization and has become a metropolitan city gathering a growing number of migrant young professionals from across the country in the last three decades. This may resonate with an increasing mobility and diversity of modern Chinese society, which further stimulated my research interest in identity studies towards this diversified peer group of urban youth. Alongside this, this research project could be seen as an in-depth study inspired by my master dissertation, which examined the potential influence of foreign TV dramas upon young people's identity construction in China. This project focuses on youth culture and explores identity construction by employing an active audience research framework. By examining the identity

construction towards love and relationships, this research may be seen as an interdisciplinary project touching upon my research interests not only in media studies but also in family studies, generational studies as well as gender research.

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

In addition, a stereotype is often applied towards the young generation that grew up in one-child families, who are often seen as 'little emperors' placed at the centre of family life and are likely to engender a more complicated power dynamic within nuclear family units. As a member of the only children generation, sometimes I observe a paradoxical mentality among young people in China. Specifically, they intend to hold more individualized values, while they are also inclined to depend upon their families' financial and emotional support, which tends to shape the young generation's decision-making process. Thus, by examining the role of modern Chinese families in young people's dating and relationship related values and practices, an individualization process with Chinese characteristics is likely to be observed, which may connote a special generational identity and build on the existing literatures pertaining to individualization and subjectivity.

Hence, this project has shifted its research focus from mainly looking at audiences' attitudes and interpretations towards reality dating programmes into exploring different themes such as emotions in self-centred relationships, generational and gendered difference as well as relationship ethics in relation to young people's identity construction towards love and

intimacy. As an adoption of a globalised popular media genre, the reality dating programme is not only seen as a visible manifestation of changing values towards dating and relationships and to a certain extent as a modern catalyst of further change, but also facilitates an in-depth investigation of the research question with a historical dimension. Based on the evolution of the research emphasis, Chapter 4 intends to examine audiences' attitudes and understandings towards the TV dating programme and Chapter 5 seeks to provide a general discussion about the main features of changing identity towards dating and relationships. Furthermore, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 seek to move beyond the immediate impact of the programme on its audiences in order to generate a more complex and contextually nuanced understanding of change via an inter-generational comparison and a debate on morality/ethics. More detailed chapter outlines are introduced in section 1.3.

Research Questions

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

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

1) What are the main reasons and what is the social context for Chinese youth watching the reality television dating programme *If You Are the One*?

2) What are the attitudes of Chinese youth towards this reality TV dating programme? What are their perspectives towards values about love that are represented in the media text?

3) What are the main factors for the Chinese youth in negotiating their relationships with their prospective partners? Is consumption a decisive consideration for them?

4) What are the views of the Chinese youth towards traditional values derived from Confucian ethics such as filial piety and loyalty as well as early socialist values and practices? How do they relate them to love issues? What are the differences in attitudes towards love and intimacy between the Chinese youth and their parents' generation?

The research aims to explore the main features of an emerging romantic subjectivity of young Chinese people in the post-reform era by examining their values and practices towards dating and relationships. Thus, it is located in the inquiries of cultural studies, which investigates changing identities in both global and local domains and often uses popular media text to

generate historical and cultural accounts (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b, p. 160; Grossberg & Pollock 1998). Specifically, as a popular cultural phenomenon since 2010, the second wave of reality TV dating programmes may symbolise a new dating era and embodies the complicated dynamics of traditional and modern values in contemporary China. As a popular topic among people in mainland China, the most popular reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One* was employed as an avenue to examine a group of Chinese young professionals' interpretations of the mediated dating text and further explore how they understand and structure dating and relationships in everyday lives.

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

1.2 Theoretical Framework

By drawing upon Foucault's work on subjectivity and power/knowledge model (1979, 1982), this project employs a constructivist research paradigm, in which love and intimacy are examined as a historical construct, greatly shaped by the socio-cultural environment of Chinese society. The changing values and practices of the Chinese youth towards dating and relationships are likely to reflect a transforming subjectivity of young Chinese professionals. By locating the meaning of love and intimacy in the historical development of contemporary Chinese society, the potentially different value orientations between the pre-reform era and the post-reform era tend to reflect the changing power interplay between self-reflective

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individuals and modern institutions such as state, labour market and family. Hence, individualization studies were employed as a main theoretical framework as well as feminist approaches examining modern relationships were reviewed to provide criticisms of individualization theory and help explore how traditional gendered practices shape Chinese youth's identity formation towards love and intimacy (for more details, see Chapter 2). By exploring the subjective experiences of young people towards love and relationships, this research further feeds into a broader project of investigating how Chinese youth construct their identities facing the socio-cultural change in contemporary China.

Specifically, this research seeks to examine how Chinese youth understand traditional Confucian and socialist values as well as modern values advocated since the reform era in order to develop their own strategies in relation to dating and relationships. Love and relationships were greatly shaped by Confucian moral codes in traditional Chinese society and marriage arranged by parents was a social norm (Pimentel 2000, p. 32-33; Riley 1994, p. 792). Conjugal ties used to serve the purpose of reproduction and were subordinate to intergenerational ties in the traditional patriarchal families. Since the introduction of the 1950 Marriage Law, arranged marriage was abolished and free-choice marriage has been promoted by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In contrast, under the influence of the Confucian ideology and socialist morality, the social environment towards love and sexual activities was repressed in the first three decades of the PRC and sexual relation within a marital tie was a widely accepted social norm. For instance, conjugal ties were often seen as lacking in emotional communication and people's sexual behaviours were suppressed by traditional Yin-Yang doctrine, which guided sex education literature in 1950s (Evans 1995; Higgins et al. 2002). During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), love and sexual behaviours were further repressed by extreme collective ideology and sexual expressions and products were seen as public taboos (Evans 1995, p. 358; Higgins et al. 2002).

However, seen as a traditionally private and sensitive topic, there is less research on love and intimacy in China than in some Western contexts and most of the relevant studies focused on college students (for example, Higgins & Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002) or young people in rural areas (for instance, Hansen & Pang 2010; Yan 2003). As urban young professionals are more influenced by global media and cultural flows than young people in rural areas (Castells 2005), they are often seen as a most representative group reflecting the changing values in the

post-reform era. Hence, this research focuses on urban youth aged 18 to 30 years old to examine the identity construction towards dating and relationships. Specifically, this thesis examines a group of young Chinese professionals in Beijing, which is one of the most representative metropolitan cities that reflects the social and cultural change in urban China, and builds up a dialogic space for this particular group of urban youth to construct relationship-related values and attitudes.

The implementation of the nationwide economic reforms in the late 1970s is often seen to facilitate further the distribution of Western values such as free-choice marriage, romantic love and gender equality. It has become a driven force for a sexual revolution in mainland China, in which a freer expression of various perspectives towards love and relationships among the Chinese youth is observed (Cheng et al. 2000; Huang 1998). The meaning of love, which used to be associated with lifelong marriage, is challenged by a separating and divorcing society (Tan 2010). Comparing with the previous generations greatly influenced by a strict Confucian and socialist morality, members of the young generation often tend to become self-managing subjects able to identify their needs and expectations towards love and romance in the post-reform China. For instance, the emergence of diversified dating and relationship practices such as cohabitation, on-line relationships, extramarital relationships, multiple relationships and one-night stands among urban Chinese youth (Donald & Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang & Ho 2007a, 2007b, 2011) are likely to reflect new desires and anxieties towards personal relationships and mirror a more diversified understanding of love and personal happiness.

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

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

Furthermore, as a newly invented dating practice for a few Chinese people, reality dating programmes tend to focus audiences' discussions about personal relationships, which are likely to be seen as a less sensitive topic. Reality dating programmes become an important dialogical platform for the viewers to understand the relationship-related values in the programme setting, which is likely to facilitate a further discussion about relationship approaching and operating strategies and values in everyday lives. Specifically, this research focuses on the most popular Chinese reality dating programme *If You Are the One*, which adapts a globalised popular format of the British dating show *Take Me Out* created by FremantleMedia (Li 2011; Wang 2011; Zhang 2010). Since its debut in January 2010 on Jiangsu Satellite Television, the Chinese dating programme *If You Are the One* has facilitated the production of Chinese TV dating programmes in mainland China. The guests in the programme are selected from different parts of the country with various educational or professional backgrounds and some guests from other countries or with other ethnic backgrounds, who can speak Chinese (mandarin) also participate in the show. The mate selection criteria and values towards love and intimacy on this show may not only reflect representative values of the younger generation, but also represent some controversial issues towards social and moral reality in the post-Mao China via topics like money worship (金钱

崇拜, Jin Qian Chong Bai) and housing mortgage slave (房奴, Fang Nu) (Li 2011; Wang 2011). Hence, TV dating becomes an important avenue for the Chinese youth to construct their identity towards love and intimacy.

1.3 Organisation of the Thesis

As discussed in section 1.1 and 1.2, the changing socio-cultural environment since the economic reform era has influenced the identity construction of young Chinese people, who are likely to hold more diversified and individualized values towards dating and relationships. By examining relationship related values and practices including mate-choosing values, desires and expectations towards love and romance, strategies of approaching and sustaining relationships as well as relationship ethics, the emergence of a post-socialist romantic subjectivity is likely to be observed. The thesis explores further how the societal transformation in contemporary Chinese society shapes young people's romantic experiences and their value orientations towards love and intimacy by assessing the power dynamics between Chinese youth and modern institutions such as the Chines state, mass media and Chinese family. This section provides a more detailed introduction for each chapter and discusses how they feed into the thesis.

Specifically, Chapter 2 seeks to locate the key concepts of love, intimacy and relationships in Foucault's (1979, 1982) historical constructive framework and provide a theoretical foundation for the research design. As there are more relevant studies in the West, main literatures pertaining to changing relationship-related values and practices in some Western contexts are reviewed and the adaptability of these Western theories are assessed by linking to recent research in the context of China. More specifically, by introducing a notion of 'pure relationship', Giddens (1992) argues that a sexual revolution was observed in some Western countries in the last few decades of the 20C, which promoted the rise of romantic love, gender equality and diversified sexual practices. By reviewing the role of traditional gendered scripts in personal relationships (Jamieson 1998, 1999, 2012) and conflictual desires and anxieties in a fluid postmodern life setting (Bauman 2003), the above theories provide a possible framework to explore how the power dynamics between traditional collective ideology and modern individualized values influence social and sexual norms in the post-reform Chinese society. Alongside this, the concept of globalization and its possible influence on identity

construction are connected with relevant studies in the context of China, which suggest that global media and cultural flows have greatly shaped public culture and advocated new material, affective and emotional desires among present day Chinese youth (Ong & Zhang 2008; Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a; Wang & Nehring 2014). These literatures provide a theoretical framework to examine the power interplay between globalized modern institutions such as mass media, especially reality TV dating programmes and the subjectivity formation of the reflexive audience, which guides the research design in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 intends to identify the philosophical position and methodological approaches used to explore how young Chinese people make their romantic selves in the post-reform era. As socially constructed reality, love and intimacy are examined under a constructivist research paradigm, in which qualitative descriptions generate in a dialogic space is the main research data. Specifically, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis were used as main research tools to explore the understandings and attitudes of Chinese youth towards the mediated dating text and how they relate the reality TV dating programme to dating and relationships in everyday lives. Data evaluation criteria and relevant ethical concerns are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 employs an active audience reception framework to explore the Chinese youth's understanding and attitudes towards the most popular reality TV dating programme in the post-reform China. As an open-ended dating text, the TV dating programme *If You Are the One* becomes a site for the Chinese youth to produce diversified examinations towards its authenticity and further serves as an important modern template for the audience to decode love and romance in an everyday life setting. By transforming dating from a private practice into a public programme, the mediated dating text may connote a new dating era and resonate with a sexual revolution, in which people tend to have more individualized values towards various forms of relationships and a free expression of love issues has been observed since the reform and opening up in 1978. As a relatively new type of speed dating, the reality dating programme is seen as an important epitome of accelerated relationships and helps understand the partner-selecting values in a postmodern consumerist culture. By examining audiences' understandings about the interests of the production team and the 'ordinary' guests, the role of reality TV, especially the dating programme in audiences' identity construction is explored.

Chapter 5 explores individualized desires and anxieties in personal relationships, which play an important role in understanding the identity of Chinese young professionals towards love and intimacy in the post-reform era. By introducing Bauman's (2003) concept of self-centred (or individualized) relationship, this chapter examines the changing emotions and attitudes of Chinese young people towards a lifelong relationship as well as the causes for the transition in dating and relationships. Since the implementation of the open-door policy and one-child policy in the late 1970s, Chinese youth have been greatly influenced by Western values such as free-choice marriage and gender equality and a child-centred nuclear family culture has further facilitated more individualized values in pursuing happiness in (sometimes various forms of) personal relationships. In addition to this, a globalised modern commodity culture has further facilitated emotional, sexual and material desires in accelerated personal relationships. With increasing romantic possibilities under a liquid modern life setting, the Chinese youth have more freedom in choosing a partner as well as being in and out of a relationship, which makes a lifelong relationship more difficult to achieve or sometimes even less desirable. The easily enter-and-exit relationship not only reflects a more tolerant attitude towards changing emotional attachment in dating and relationships, but may also suggest an on-the-move and incomplete identity of the Chinese youth.

Chapter 6 adopts a generational angle to explore the changing identity of the Chinese youth towards love and intimacy by looking at a group of participants from the parents' generation. As a historical construct, the identity of the Chinese youth on one hand is linked with the previous generations, who are likely to influence the younger generation with traditional values. On the other hand, the fast-changing socio-economic environment in the post-reform era has greatly influenced the Chinese youth born in the early period of the economic reform era, who hold a very different identity compared to members of their parents' generation. Hence, participants from the parents' generation become important subjects to compare the changing values towards love and relationships at two historical moments – the early and post reform era. Specifically, changing mate-choosing values and attitudes towards love issues including premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce and extramarital love are examined, which suggest that the traditional Confucian philosophy and socialist values play a less important role in the formation of personal relationships in the post-reform Chinese society. Alongside

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

Chapter 7 examines the changing ethics in personal relationships by focusing on young people's understandings of traditional Confucian and socialist morality as well as an emerging new ethics within diversified forms of dating and relationships. As Ahmed (2010) indicates in the work *The Promise of Happiness*, a happy relationship is often seen to be shaped by a virtuous self (p. 205, 208). The interpretations of relationship ethics define Chinese youth's values and practices towards love and intimacy, which may further imply a changing understanding of personal happiness in the post-reform era. By exploring young professionals' understandings towards a traditional social norm - a lifelong marriage, the changing understanding of Confucian moral concepts such as responsibility, marital fidelity and care is examined. This chapter further explores an emerging personal ethics by looking at various phenomena including premarital sex, cohabitation and extramarital relationships, which to some extent challenge the monopoly of marriage towards sexual practices and may connote a changing sexuality focusing on the fulfilment of sexual pleasure rather than procreation purpose. In addition, by looking at some recent forms of non-marital dating practices such as multiple relationships and short-term relationships, a more individualized and private relationship ethics is examined, which is often seen as drawing upon a new understanding of traditional relationship ethics.

Chapter 8 provides a synthesis of the research findings by reviewing key themes discussed in Chapter 4 to Chapter 7 and responding to the research question in relation to Chinese youth's identity construction towards love and intimacy. Specifically, it offers an in-depth interpretation of the main features of an individualized relationship observed in the post-reform China by linking it to the concept of an individualized personal tie in modern Western societies introduced by Bauman (2003) and identifying its generational and gendered differences compared to relationship related values and practices in the early reform era. This may suggest an individualization process with Chinese characteristics and building on theories in the field (for example, Bauman 2000, 2001, 2003; Beck 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2003, 2010; Giddens 1991, 1992; Hansen & Svarverud 2010; Yan 2009, 2010a, 2010b). By further examining the interplay of factors such as free market economy, global consumerist culture, modern Chinese family, modern Chinese state and mass media that have

impacted upon young people's identity formation, a dual influence of modern institutions is increasingly observed. They are often seen as both facilitating an individualized youth culture and reemphasizing some traditional Confucian and socialist ideologies. Based on the research findings, theoretical and methodological contributions and reflections are identified, which further guide a brief discussion about the implications of this project in relation to future research and practices.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Born at the beginning of the economic reform era, present day Chinese youth, who become more individualistic and less likely to follow the traditional collective ideology than the older generations (Higgins & Sun 2007), have gradually become the main force for driving forth the economic growth and social developments in contemporary China (Elegant 2007). Simultaneously, they have led a sexual revolution in the post-reform China since the beginning of the 21st century (Associated Press 2008; Beech 2006; Brown et al. 2013; CNN 2003). The distinctive generational identity of the Chinese youth, in which personal happiness and individual realization are often given priority on the life agenda (Ci 1994; Sun & Wang 2010; Wang 2002), may represent the changing values in the social reform era (Inglehart 1997; Higgins & Sun 2007; Strauss & Howe 1991). This thesis explores young Chinese people's identity construction towards love and intimacy, which is an important part of a generational identity reflecting the transformative values in the post-reform China. The most popular reality television dating programme was employed as a mediated televisual text for a group of young Chinese professionals to interpret and further link their dating and relationship related values and practices in everyday lives. By reviewing literatures pertaining to key concepts of love and intimacy and factors that shape the romantic subjectivity of young people in modern Chinese societies, this chapter intends to provide a theoretical base for the forthcoming research design and discussion chapters.

Firstly, this chapter reviews major literatures that locate the concepts of sexuality, love and intimacy in a historical constructivist framework to understand the interaction of the traditional collective and the modern individualistic values in the formation of personal relationships. As a sensitive issue in traditional Chinese societies, love and intimacy as a main part of people's identity has been observed in social science research in recent years, but there is less research in China than in Western societies. Hence, the first section critically reviews relevant key theories covering the changing nature of love and intimacy in modern Western societies and assesses the possibility of adaption and connections with the situations in China.

Specifically, Foucault's (1979, 1982) concepts of subjectivity, power/knowledge model and neoliberal governmentality provide a historical interpretive framework to examine love and intimacy, which are seen as a social construct greatly shaped by the interaction between self-reflexive individuals and modern institutions. By employing a neoliberal reasoning, young Chinese people are likely to transform themselves as self-managing subjects, embracing the power interplay between modern institutions such as mass media and modern Chinese family in order to construct their dating and relationship practices. As a core notion assessing the nature of love and intimacy in individualized Western societies, the concept of pure relationship introduced by Giddens (1992) is examined as an idealized relationship pattern and further linked to the understanding of romantic love and gendered practices in personal relationships in the post-reform China. Major criticisms from the feminist scholars are also assessed, which suggest that the conventional prescription in gender and class still have influence on the practices of intimacy (Jamieson 1998, 1999). By looking at conflictual desires towards stability and freedom in relationships, Bauman (2003) criticizes further the ideal concept of pure relationship from the problems and anxieties of the individualized human bonds in liquid life settings, especially under the influence of the postmodern consumerist culture. This is employed as a main theory to explore an increasingly individualized relationship pattern in urban Chinese societies.

Alongside this, main factors such as globalization and mass media that have great influence upon young Chinese people's identity construction are discussed in the second half of this chapter, which provides a theoretical foundation to examine how young Chinese professionals draw upon modern institutions in order to make their romantic selves. Specifically, cultural globalization is assessed by a set of theories such as westernization and cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 1999) and recent studies are reviewed to evaluate further the impact of globalization on the cultural change and identity transformation in contemporary China. As an increasingly globalized modern institution, television has facilitated worldwide cultural flows and produced the possible conditions and cultural resources for identity construction (Barker 1999; Murray & Ouellette 2009; Ouellette & Hay 2008). Hence, literatures exploring the power mechanism between reality television, especially dating programmes and the reflexive audiences are examined, which build an interpretive framework for the research.

2.2 The Transformation of Intimacy in Western Societies

2.2.1 The politics of sexuality

One of the key concepts this thesis draws upon in Foucault's (1979) work *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* is the interpretation of sexuality as a socio-cultural construct. Reviewing the historical formation of sexuality in the past three centuries, Foucault (1979) suggests that sexuality is detached from biological reality and instead it can be understood as a social construct within the modern 'juridico-discursive' power mechanisms. The common repressive hypothesis towards sexuality can be interpreted in a positive way, which reflects people's desires (Foucault 1979, p. 82). Foucault (1979) further notes that sex is not simply a thing to be condemned or tolerated but a thing one managed and administered. With a historical inquiry approach, Foucault (1979) seeks to break through the previous model of legal and institutional power mechanisms and situate sex, a universal phenomenon, in the social mechanisms of power and knowledge. According to Foucault (1979), modern power applies to the individual via knowledge, which serves as its support and instrument, and is historically associated with discourses.

This thesis uses Foucault's (1979, 1982) historical interpretive framework of human beings' subjectivity to examine the changing nature of love and intimacy, which is a central part of people's identity. Like sexuality, love and intimacy are conceptualized as a historical and cultural construction, which is shaped under the interaction of modern institutions and the reflexivity of the individual. Specifically, globalization and free market economy have greatly influenced upon the socio-cultural environment in contemporary Chinese society and further shaped the formation of modern institutions such as the mass media and a modern education system. Under the influence of Western values such as free-choice marriage and gender equality, young Chinese people are likely to embrace knowledge distributed from modern institutions and develop a romantic subjectivity to invent values and practices pertaining to dating and relationships. In other words, Foucault's (1979, 1982) works provide a theoretical foundation to explore how the self-reflexive subjects make their romantic selves in the post-reform era.

With the popularity of television dating programmes in mainland China, it is argued that love and intimacy issues have been transformed from confessions in the private sphere into a show in the public domain, which articulates the desires of the guests via discourses. This, to some extent, resonates with Foucault's (1979) observation of the confession cultural in the Western societies, which has played a central role in the order of civil and religious powers regarding to the production of the truth since the Middle Ages. Specifically, the production of truth, which is closely associated with individual freedom, is formed as some kind of knowledge of pleasure and imparted in the ritual of the confession (Foucault 1979). As a key element in the regime of modern power, confession transforms people's desire into discourses (Foucault 1979) and helps penitents reveal their inner sexual natures and obtain a more precise self-identity (Gutting 2005). Like in Catholic tradition, Confucian culture is often seen to be drawn upon by the Chinese youth as external resources to identify their relationship related values and guide their subjective experiences (for more details, see Chapter 7.2).

By introducing the notion of bio-power, Foucault (1979) provides a neoliberal logic in the formation of subjectivity, in which power excises via the interconnections of knowledge and the techniques of the self and shapes the self-governing subjects. Life, as an object of Foucault's work, is a political issue and bio-power, which shows the complicated interplay between modern power and the body, binds biological and historical elements together in the development of the modern power mechanisms (Foucault 1979). The bio-power embodies a neoliberal philosophy and promotes new forms of subjectivity, which further liberate modern individuals from the repressed juridical system and transform themselves as self-managing subjects (Foucault 1982). According to Foucault (1979), when facing all forms of power from modern institutions, the modern individual produces bio-power, which is 'the power of investing and managing life' and is 'an indispensable element in the development of capitalism' (p. 140-141; Gutting 2005; Horrocks 2004). Neoliberal governmentality is adopted in this thesis to examine the rise of the individual and the individualized personal ties in the post-reform China and modern institutions such as Chinese government, Chinese family and mass media are assessed as neoliberal technologies, which have played an important role for the modern individuals in reconfiguring their identities.

Specifically, the economic reforms in 1978, which introduced market principles, have engendered further economic, political and social changes in contemporary China (Rofel 2007; Tian 1998). As Harvey (2005) argues in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, the neoliberal state works as a modern institution facilitating practices of 'liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (p. 2). Hence, the theories of a socialist market economy and the 'three represents', which symbolize the 'official re-orientation or re-ideologicalization toward a market economy and capitalism' since the 1990s, have further facilitated neoliberal reasoning in restructuring people's life chances and mobility channels (Yan 2009, p. xvi). Following the dramatic economic transition, new cosmopolitan elites, who are members of global networks, have been driving forward cultural exchanges in a globalizing era especially since the entry of the 21st century and their transnational neoliberal policies have great influence on the identity transformation of citizen-subjects in the post-reform China (Kim 2011; Rofel 2007). A new human nature, which embodies sexual, material and affective desires, has been produced under the interplay of the post-socialist power (Foucault 1979; Rofel 2007).

Relevant studies suggest that the remaking of the public culture rather than the transition in political sphere serves as the main force for the reconstruction of identity in the post-reform China (Ong & Zhang 2008; Rofel 2007), which is different from the political democracy in Western societies (Giddens 1992). Like the interdependence-seeking individual in modern European societies, Ong and Zhang (2008) indicate that the identities and practices in China have been greatly influenced by neoliberal principles derived from the institutional changes in the market-oriented economy. The nation-wide privatization has inspired the power of the self within the post-socialist subject, who tends to exercise self-animating practices based on private choices and a calculative logic defined by the free market. Alongside this, a new social space has been formed under the neoliberal reasoning in privatization, which widens the distance between the socialist state power and everyday life and shapes the self-managing subject in contemporary China (Ong & Zhang 2008). Heterogeneous cultural exchanges have shaped public culture, which has become a site 'where Chinese subjectivity is meaningfully defined, sought, and conferred or denied' (Rofel 2007, p. 126). For instance, the globalized media and cultural products like television shows work as the main constitutive factor of public spaces and stories, and the neoliberal desiring subjects tend to discover and reconfigure their identities themselves within this inter-cultural dialogue (Rofel 2007).

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That is to say, facing the global capitalist economy, the Chinese government further adapts a neoliberal governmentality, which is a modern technique to regulate the practices of freed subjects (Foucault 1979, p. 90) and helps to sustain the socialist sovereign (Ong & Zhang 2008). While at the same time, the rise of the individual is still influenced by the politics of the socialist sovereign and is shaped in the framework of the individual-state relationship from afar (Ong & Zhang 2008; Yan 2010a). As a result, the biopolitics of the self-enterprising subject have been reconfigured under the interplay of the privatizing mechanisms and the socialist power, which shape the self-responsible individual in a de-totalized society (Ong & Zhang 2008).

The democratic political and cultural environment is seen to provide an ontological security and essential condition for the democracy of the private domain, which is the matrix for the formation of self-reflexive and self-managing individuals in Western societies (Giddens 1992). With the absence of the political liberalism and the welfare support system, the rise of the individual in contemporary China, has followed an ambiguous logic of localised dynamic modern settings and is limited within economic activities and private lifestyles (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2010). As Yan (2010b) indicates, the traditional Confucian culture and the collective ideology have a long history in the context of China and the Western individualistic values first introduced by reform-minded Chinese elites in early 20th century were mainly interpreted in a framework of individual-state relationship. As the individual identity (the small self) is defined in relation to a collective ideology (the big self), the individual freedom is limited and needs to serve the group interest throughout the 20th century (Liu 1995). Western individualism was seen by the Chinese Communist Party from 1920s to 1970s as an ideological enemy of socialist collectivism distributing selfish and hedonistic morality (Yan 2010b, p. 27). The early understanding of utilitarian individualism, which has been diffused via the mass media and the global consumerist ideology, has been admired in the post-Mao era (Wang 2002; Yan 2009) and to some extent, has shaped the incomplete individual in contemporary China (Yan 2003).

2.2.2 The rise of romantic love and pure relationship

If Foucault (1979, 1982) focuses on historical development of human being's sexuality, then the work of Giddens (1992) suggests that personal relationships have become a key element for 'self-exploration and moral construction' in the new social conditions of the late 20th century (p. 144). By introducing a notion of pure relationship, Giddens (1992) conceptualizes the reflexive nature of sexuality and love in an ideal way of restructuring intimacy in modern societies, which was seen at the heart of a sexual revolution in the last three or four decades of the 20th century in Western societies. According to Giddens (1992), by setting up clearly personal boundaries and defining the balance for one opening out to the other, a pure relationship follows the principle of equality of personal ties and becomes an essential element for sustaining intimacy in modern societies. Pure relationship is seen to reflect the autonomous principle of modern democracy, in which self-reflexive individual best determines and regulates the conditions of an egalitarian association with the other side (Giddens 1992, p. 189). The formation of pure relationship tends to imply the democratizing of the interpersonal domain and as Giddens (1992) indicates, this has great influence on modern institutions as a whole.

As a key concept examining human being's romantic subjectivity development in Western societies, pure relationship provides a theoretical framework to examine a rising gender and generational power within a more individualized and equalized relationship pattern observed in the post-reform China, which tends to connote the democratization of the private domain. Specifically, with the rise of the self-governing subject, the micro-freedom of the self has influence upon interpersonal relationships, in which the individual has been positioned in a central place of the social networks and an open expression of self-interest has been culturally accepted (Ong & Zhang 2008; Yan 2009). New socialization mechanisms in modern Chinese societies have replaced the authoritarian moralism of Confucian ethics, which supported the traditionally hierarchical Chinese society (Ho 1987, 1994, 1996) and suppressed the personal desires and personal identity in social interactions (Hwang 1999). For instance, it is argued that conjugal ties have replaced the parent-son relationship in the traditionally patriarchal family and become the central relationship in family life, which may suggest that the primary function of the family has been transformed from a collective institution into a private haven for individual members (Yan 2009). As Yan (2009) indicates, following a global trend of the modernization of the family, the individual has been located in the central position of the

family life and a new family ideal has been fostered with 'the pursuit of intimacy, independence, choice and individual happiness' in Chinese societies (Yan 2009, p. xxiv).

Specifically, Giddens (1992) observes a transformation of love in modern Western societies and the rise of romantic love, based on equal emotional ties, reflects the core meaning of the pure relationship. Romantic love, which has replaced economic value and become the main consideration for marriage formation (Borscheid 1986; Stone 1979), draws upon both passionate love and ideals of love, but becomes distinct from both of them (Giddens 1992). As a universal phenomenon, passionate love represents a generic connection between love and sexual attachment, which usually leads individuals to ignore their ordinary obligations. On the other hand, ideals of love are closely linked with the moral values of Christianity in pre-modern Europe and ordinary women usually did not have a right to sexual freedom, which was an expression of power. As a personal narrative that coincided with the emergence of the novel, the ideals of romantic love are associated with freedom and self-realisation for the first time (Giddens 1992). That is to say, romantic love becomes a potential avenue for future development in which self-identity awaits its validation from the discovery of the other and it plays an important role in the long-term life trajectory of a marital relationship by creating a shared history (Giddens 1992). With increased emotional attachment and privacy between couples, romantic love further situates the marital bond within the confines of a limited-size family, which releases the individual from the wider kinship ties (Giddens 1992, p. 26).

Simultaneously, plastic sexuality is introduced by Giddens (1992) to explain the increasing female autonomy and sexual emancipation, which reflect the promise of intimacy and balanced gender power in the pure relationship. Freed from the needs of reproduction, plastic sexuality is used to limit family size and develops further with the spread of modern contraception and new reproductive technologies (Giddens 1992). According to Giddens (1992), the reflexive gender power embodied in plastic sexuality has transformed from the previous male sexual dominance in societies in which female premarital virginity was usually a social and moral norm and has facilitated female sexual equality in most Western societies as well as in other parts of the world. In addition, there is a higher acceptability of an expanded variety of sexual activities and sex has played a more important role in marriage.

With the historical awareness in Foucault's (1979) work, the changing nature of love and sexuality is observed in the post-reform China. The concept of ideal love can be related to strict moral and social codes in traditional China, in which the function of marriage was for reproductive purposes only and where arranged-marriage in accordance with the social hierarchy was a norm. Under the constraints of the patriarchal family, women were perceived as second-class citizens who belonged to their husbands and were assessed for their chastity, fertility and housekeeping ability (Breiner 1992; Higgins et al. 2002). People's attitudes and behaviours towards love and sex were repressed by Confucian philosophy, which sees premarital and extramarital relationships, homosexuality and masturbation as absolute social taboos (Higgins et al. 2002; Pimentel 2000; Yan 2003).

To sum up, the argument emerging here is that Chinese people's love and relationships were traditionally shaped by Confucian culture, which could be seen as similar to the dominance of Christian morality in pre-modern Europe. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, these traditional values still had a dominant influence upon people in Chinese society. For example, Chinese couples were usually characterised by a lack of emotional communication during the first two decades of the Communist period and their sexual behaviours were usually suppressed by traditional Yin-Yang doctrine, which sees sexual excess without a resulting child as a loss of precious energy. These kind of values guided the sex education literature in the 1950s (Evans 1995; Higgins et al. 2002). When it came to the period of Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), love and sexual behaviours were further repressed by extreme collective ideology and any kind of sexual references or expressions were thought to be public taboos (Higgins et al. 2002). Evans (1995) further argues that sex was seen as 'a manifestation of bourgeois idealism and thus detrimental to collective welfare' during that period (p. 358). The traditional Confucian and socialist morality had great influence upon my respondents born in the 1950s and 1960s and was used to establish their conjugal ties during the early reform era (these respondents being from the parents' generation of the present day Chinese youth). For them, marriage is often seen as the only moralized and legalized form of intimacy (Mendus 2000) and sex within marriage was a social norm (for more details, see Chapter 6.3).

It is argued that the rise of romantic love and plastic sexuality has greatly influenced the private life in contemporary China (Yan 2003). According to Higgins and Sun (2007), Western advanced values such as gender equality and free-choice marriage have facilitated a growing interest in relationships and personal happiness in the social reform era. Moreover, Yan (2003) further indicates that nowadays Chinese youth usually choose their spouse autonomously and enjoy romantic love, which is respected by their families and protected by the Marriage Law. Alongside this, people in China now have more liberal and tolerant attitudes towards love and sexual matters such as premarital and extramarital sex, divorce and homosexuality (Farrer 2002; Farrer & Sun 2003), which have furthered changes in marriage customs (Bullough & Ruan 1994; Long & Liu 1992; Pan 1993; Vincent 1991). With the emergence of various forms of dating and relationship practices such as cohabitation, extramarital relationships, multiple relationships and one-night stands in urban China (Donald & Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang & Ho 2007a, 2007b, 2011), a more individualized and private ethics is likely to be observed in personal relationships (for more details, see Chapter 7). This changing relationships ethics may further connote increasingly diversified understandings towards personal happiness (Ahmed 2010). In addition, youth from the cities with educated parents usually showed more liberal attitudes than those from rural backgrounds (Higgins & Sun 2007).

Simultaneously, the implementation of the One-Child Policy (OCP) in 1979 has further transformed the structure of the modern Chinese families towards a limited-size (Brown et al. 2013; *China's Sexual Revolution* 2007; Higgins et al. 2002), which to some extent shapes the social environment for the early development of the Chinese youth. Specifically, the OCP, as a complementary policy to reduce the influence of the strict population containment on the economic reform and the improvement of people's living standards (Zhu 2003), is a key political element towards the changing nature of family practices and has potential influence on the practices of personal relationships in contemporary China. With the promotion of widespread contraceptive methods and family planning services, the total fertility rate in China decreased from 2.9 in 1979 to 1.7 in 1995 and stabilized at around 1.7 with a rate of 1.3 in urban areas and just under 2.0 in rural areas (Hesketh et al. 2005; Wang 2003; Wang 2012). This suggests a distinct demographic pattern of the predominantly one-child urban families and two-children rural families.

After several decades of the OCP, China has transformed from the traditional familial paradigm with generations living together into a nuclear family culture, in which the couple centred, one-child family becomes the dominant social norm, especially in urban areas (Fowler et al. 2010; Hesketh et al. 2005; Starr 2001). Because of the changing family structure, a '4:2:1' phenomenon, which suggests the rising burden in the family support systems, becomes popular and more and more couples are facing pressures from the care of four elderly parents and one child (Jiang 1995; Hesketh et al. 2005; Wang et al. 2012). The socialization of the Chinese youth tends to rely more on the modern institutions such as modern education and mass media in the globalized market-place than on their family. At the same time, the family is still one of the most important social support resource and the OCP has facilitated a changing power dynamic in the parent-child relationship. Specifically, the parents usually place great value and support on the continuation of the family line and the children with few or no siblings are expected to take the filial responsibility for their elders when they age (Fong 2006; Fowler et al. 2010; Xu et al. 2007). The OCP children may grow up in a self-centred even over-spoiled familial environment and they may further lead an individualistic life and pursue their individual happiness and achievements (Chen 1985; Falbo et al. 1989; Hesketh et al. 2005).

Alongside this, the rise of gender power has been observed since the One-Child Policy and the new Marriage Law in 1981. For instance, more and more young urban women tend to have no preference for the sex of their offspring, especially since the 21st century. The data in 2001 National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Survey shows that 37 percent women have no preference for one sex over the other, although 43 percent women preferred to have two children rather than one in urban China (Lin 2003). As female children can carry on the family line, several studies show that the only sons and daughters are often treated equally (Fong 2002, 2006; Fowler et al. 2010; Wu 1996). Deutsch (2006) argues that although the OCP has limitations on the female's self-control of their body, it may transform the traditional gender role of women and promote gender equality in the coming generations. However, one of the characteristics of these approaches to intimacy has been the lack of discussion of patriarchy and traditional gender roles. The next section begins to engage with this.

2.2.3 Feminist approaches towards modern relationships

As the collective socialist value is the mainstream ideology in modern Chinese societies, the rise of the individual in contemporary China is under the dual influences of the post-socialist sovereign and the privatization process in a globalizing era (Ong & Zhang 2008). This contextual difference between China and Western societies is likely to cause a limitation of the ability of Giddens's (1992) work to interpret the socio-cultural change and the formation of self-reflexive individuals in the contemporary Chinese societies. To build a critical dialogue between the traditional and the modern way of understanding the notion of intimacy, this section rethinks the core concept, pure relationship, introduced in Giddens's (1992) work via examining feminist studies of modern relationships, which suggests that the conventional feminine scripts are still influential in the practices of intimacy.

Based on recent empirical studies, Jamieson (1999) critically looks at the concept of pure relationship and suggests that the traditional gender inequalities still have great influence on the forming and sustaining of interpersonal ties, in which people's creative energy more often goes into the relationship-saving strategies rather than into a process of transformation. Jamieson's (1998, 1999, 2012) works provide a theoretical foundation to examine the power interplay between the traditional Confucian and socialist values and the self-reflexive modern subjects in the context of China. Specifically, some relevant studies suggest that the deep-rooted traditional collective ideology still has influence on people's value orientations and behaviours in the modern Chinese societies (Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983; Wolf 1985). For instance, although Chinese youth have embraced individual choices such as free-choice marriage and limited-size family, their identity to some extent is still defined by the collective values of loyalty to the family, in which they respect and take responsibility for the elders (Hansen & Pang 2010). According to Riley (1994), parents' involvement was still influential on choosing the potential partners and relevant marriage decisions for their children at the end of 1980s. Pimentel (2000) introduces a notion of negotiated marriage to describe the dominant position of parents, which is different from completely free-choice marriage.

Alongside this, influenced by the term of family practices (Morgan 1996, 2011), Jamieson (2012) notes that the practices of intimacy, which refers to the processes people create and use to sustain the quality of closeness, can facilitate the traditional inequalities of gender and class

as well as subvert them. This argument explains both the continuity and the social change in the globalizing modern societies. Based on a subjective sense of living related lives (Carsten 2000, 2004; Smart 2007), the experiences of intimate relationships, may tend to fit with or reproduce the conventional family arrangements, in which the heterosexual couples and parenting relationships are institutionalized as cultural norms (Jamieson 2012).

The conventional family prescription is still an influential cultural norm in the formation of personal ties in some areas of China. For example, in a research examining the cultural significance of Lahu people (an ethnic group) in Southwest China, Du (2008) suggests that the intimate relationships of Lahu couples are more often based on the shared familial and social responsibilities than emotional attachment between spouses (p. 101). In addition to this, the traditional pattern of men seeking younger, smaller and less well educated partners and of women seeking older, taller and better educated partners (Buss 1989; Pierce 1996) is observed in China (Higgins & Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002). Some relevant studies note that both men and women in China believe personality is the most important and after that Chinese men value chastity, beauty and health, while Chinese women value intelligence, income and occupation of a partner (Higgins et al. 2002; Zhao 2002).

Morgan (1996) suggests the possibility of 'non-patriarchal (non-oppressive) yet gendered practices' at an interpersonal level (p. 91). Although men usually have more choices concerning issues like domestic work, childcare and money control (Brannen & Moss 1991; Morris 1990; Pahl 1989; Vogler 1994), a sense of intimate and equal relationship can still emerge from mutually caring partners despite gendered or unequal commitments (Backett 1982; Chambers 2012; Jamieson 1999). Mutual care via a more practical way, which is a different dimension from the mutual self-disclosure of the pure relationship, is still the ascendant type of intimacy between couples (Jamieson 1999). This could be further linked to an emerging ethics of mutual care in the post-reform China (for more details, see Chapter 7.2). With an increasingly independent economic status, some of my interview respondents from the young generation tended to see young Chinese women as shifting from the traditional gender role as the main care provider to a dual role of both care provider and receiver. As a relationship-sustaining strategy, the ethics of mutual care is likely to explain the changing gendered practices and power exercise in familial heterosexual relationships.

Although the public discourse about sex and sexuality have been shifted towards an acknowledgement of gender equality and greater tolerance of sexual diversity (Associated Press 2008; Beech 2006; CNN 2003; Weeks 1995), conventional femininity still has great influence on people's daily practices (Jackson & Scott 1997). For example, women usually take on more emotional work and tend to see romantic love as representing a way of structuring their intimate life in the future (Jackson & Scott 1997, p. 567; Hancock 1990). Men are often seen as being more emotionally withdrawn from relationships and tend to define their identities through sex (Giddens 1992, p. 59-60; Mansfield & Collard 1988; Thompson & Walker 1989). Alongside this, in-depth studies show that gender difference is still dominant in sexual behaviours, in which heterosexual sex is seen as something that men do to women (Jamieson 1999). This gender-line between females and males regarding to love and sexual matters are further linked to the discussions regarding young Chinese people's values and attitudes towards various forms of dating and relationship practices such as cohabitation, extramarital relationships and multiple relationships (for more details, see Chapter 6 and 7). Overall, from the review of feminist studies, traditional Confucian family values are likely to shape young Chinese people's dating and relationships and provide a theoretical framework to understand the gendered practices in present day China.

2.2.4 Risks in individualized human bonds

By protecting individual rights and freedoms, the welfare state support was often seen as a main characteristic of Western individualization. However, it has been reduced under the influence of multidimensional-globalization and this process further liberates the individual from the state-based individuality, which has promoted a self-responsible biography since the 21st century (Foucault 1982; Yan 2010b). Without the ontological security provided by the welfare system (Giddens 1991), the individualization process has been intensified under a set of uncertain and liquid postmodern settings (Bauman 2001), which may result in a risk society (Beck 1992). In the previous section, the pure relationship introduced in Giddens's (1992) work was examined, which corresponds to the rise of the self-reflective individual in modern Western societies as an ideal way of forming equal interpersonal ties and generating a narration of the self. By further reviewing Bauman's (2003) work *Liquid Love*, this section

intends to explore the problematic characteristics of the individualized human bonds in the globalized capitalist circumstances and the postmodern consumerist culture.

One of the key issues emerging from Bauman's (2003) work that has critical relevance for my thesis is the risks and anxieties generated in a more individualized human relationship, which is 'the most common, acute, deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence' (p. viii) and reflects the composite and unfinished identity in modern Western societies. Young people in present day China usually hold more individualized values compared to members of previous generations and are likely to be greatly influenced by a fluid modern life setting in an increasingly separating and divorcing society (Hansen & Svarverud 2010; Higgins & Sun 2007; Sun & Wang 2010; Tan 2010; Wang 2006; Yan 2003, 2009, 2010a, 2010b). Hence, Bauman's (2003) work provides a theoretical base to explore the main characteristics of a possibly individualized relationship pattern in the context of China, which may connote a transforming romantic subjectivity of young Chinese professionals (for more details, see Chapter 5).

According to Bauman (2003), affinity, which intends to be as unconditional, irrevocable and unbreakable as kinship, could be untied freely in modern societies. As togetherness and separation become personal choices with all options staying open, denizens in modern societies are usually desperate for the security of togetherness, while they are wary of long-term commitment and limited freedom in the 'forever' relationships (Bauman 2003). These conflicting desires help to generate a kind of 'individualization' in relationship, which 'prompts to tighten the bonds yet keep them loose' (Bauman 2003, p. vii). For instance, as connecting and disconnecting become equally legitimate choices, social networks, which are dispersed and usually on the move, replace the old-fashioned committed relationships such as place-based communities and become a major way for the formation of interpersonal ties in modern societies (Bauman 2003; Wellman et al. 2006). This changing relationship pattern is employed to examine the emergence of accelerated and diversified dating and relationship practices such as online relationships, flash marriage (闪婚, Shan Hun) and flash divorce (闪离, Shan Li) in the context of China (for more details, see Chapter 5).

By examining the changing nature of love in modern Western societies, Bauman's (2003) work provides a theoretical base to understand the emotional, sexual and material desires in a postmodern consumerist culture observed in contemporary Chinese society. Specifically, according to Bauman (2003), the romantic definition of love as 'till death us do part' is unable to serve the radical transformation of kinship structures in a separating and divorcing society. Based on the notion of confluent love emphasizing 'the achievement of reciprocal sexual pleasure' (Giddens 1992, p. 62), Bauman (2003) further notes that the nature of confluent love obeys the rules of the postmodern consumerist culture. Specifically, desire, as a main part of the powerful consumer identity, may replace the committed love and make partnerships become on-the-spot consumption (Bauman 2003). The nature of consumerism facilitates the lightness and speed in consumerist life code, which may treat other humans as objects of consumption and judge them by the volume of pleasure they are likely to offer (Bauman 2003). For instance, in *Cold Intimacies*, Illouz (2007) indicates that the intimate relationship is increasingly intertwined with political and economic models, in which emotional capitalism and consumer culture may further shape the interpersonal relationship as 'dispassionate, rationalized, and susceptible to crass utilitarianism' (p. 109).

Consumerism, as a dominant ideology creating and maintaining individual status and distinctiveness since the late 1990s, has further transformed the collective ethics promoting self-sacrifice and hard work into an individual-centred ethics emphasizing personal happiness and self-realization with concrete and materialistic terms (Yan 2009, p. xxxv). Since the market-oriented reforms in 1978, the consumer rights have been protected by both the market and the state with the development of consumer associations and individual advocates (Croll 2006; Hooper 2005; Palmer 2006; Yan 2009) and the consumer rights consciousness has become the most developed individual rights in China (Hooper 2005; Yan 2010b). Yang (2011) suggests that *iChina* (2010) actually represents a commercialized individualization in Chinese societies, in which consumerism is at the central place. As part of the global commodity culture, a consumerist life code becomes a common feature of Chinese youth (Rosen 2004), who may tend to pursue materialistic security in a relationship. For instance, a female guest in the TV dating programme *If You Are the One* said that even if a date went bad, 'I'd rather cry in a BMW' (MacLeod 2010). The possible conflictual desires and anxieties of young Chinese professionals towards personal relationships under a postmodern consumerist culture are further examined in Chapter 5.5.

In addition, with the dismantled state power and increasing self-autonomy, human relationships may have become an area of anarchy in 'a properly constructed and smoothly functioning' world (Bauman 2003, p. 71). For instance, new risks and anxieties are distributed via frail human bonds, as people are inclined to feel insecure and are exhausted in these easily enter-and-exit relationships. Bauman (2003) intends to draw upon the concept of moral economy, which covers the motives and acts to support the long-term commitments in human relationships and depends upon the creativity and responsibility of the modern individuals towards a risky future. For example, the film *No Strings Attached* (2011) directed by Ivan Reitman is likely to reflect Bauman's (2003) opinion when facing a problematic sexuality nowadays, people still need traditionally committed love. The concept of moral economy is linked to relationship-sustaining strategies of young Chinese people, who tend to draw creatively upon traditional values such as responsibility and marital fidelity to fulfil their needs and expectations for a lifelong relationship (for more details, see Chapter 7.2).

To sum up, as social and cultural constructs, sexuality, love and intimacy are examined in Foucault's (1979, 1982) historical interpretive framework of human being's subjectivity transformation. Specifically, the rise of the individual in modern Western societies has great influence on the transformative nature of love and intimacy (Giddens 1992; Bauman 2003), and at the same time, the traditional structural inequalities in gender, age and class are still influential in shaping the practices of intimate relationships (Jamieson 1998, 1999, 2012). By further linking the theories reviewed in the Western context to relevant studies in the context of China, this section provides a theoretical foundation to explore a romantic subjectivity shaped by power dynamics between the traditional collective ideology and modern individualized values in the post-reform China. In the subsequent section, main literatures pertaining to factors including globalization and mass media that have influenced young Chinese people's identity configuration towards love and intimacy are further examined, which provide a more specific interpretive framework to understand the bio-politics of modern individuals in contemporary Chinese society pertaining to relationship related values and practices. Simultaneously, literatures in relation to reality TV, especially TV dating programme and audience reception theories provide a theoretical framework for the research design, in which reality TV dating programme is seen as a mediated allegory and a dialogic avenue for young Chinese people to construct their identity towards love and relationships.

2.3 Televisual Culture in a Globalizing Era

2.3.1 Globalization and identity

Since the implementation of the open-door policy in 1978, China has gradually become an economic powerhouse under the process of industrialization and modernization and has played a progressively important role in the globalizing world. The process of globalization has become a major force for democracy and for the rise of the individual in modern Chinese society (Zwingle 1999). This section reviews the definitions and features of globalization and discusses relevant theories towards cultural globalization, which has facilitated the radical transformation in people's private lives. As this thesis focuses on the romantic subjectivity of young Chinese people, this section provides a possible interpretive framework in exploring how the globalization process has shaped the socio-cultural environment in the post-reform Chinese society and further influenced the identity construction of Chinese youth towards love and intimacy.

Globalization has become an increasingly influential notion in human science research since the early 1990s (Featherstone & Lash 1995). Harvey (1990) notes that globalization is a space-time compression process and Albrow (1990) defines it as 'all the processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society' (p. 9). One of the distinctive characteristics of the global society is the weakening influence of boundaries of nation-states and the relations in economic, political, social and cultural spheres have been growingly intensified across borders of different regions (Holm & Sorensen 1995, p.1). Media technologies, as well as modern transportation, serve as two main approaches in the process of globalization, which provides increasing opportunities for intercultural understanding (Gries et al. 2011; Rofel 2007).

Simultaneously, identity, which is a central issue in human sciences, has become more complicated under the influence of globalization (Gramsci 2000; Weeks 1990). As a sense of personal location (Weeks 1990, p. 88), Rutherford (1990) suggests that identity is the only way for people to represent themselves and be recognized by other people. Identity is about difference, which represents 'an experience of change, transformation and hybridity' and 'acts

as a focus for all those complementary fears, anxieties, confusions and arguments that accompany change' (p. 10). According to Hall and du Gay (1996), the identities of many populations and cultures have become more and more fragmented and fractured in a globalizing era (p. 4). At the same time, under the influence of global media and cultural flows, the identities of mass populations are still local, metropolitan, provincial or national nowadays, which tend to be based on language, religion, geography, history, ethnicity, collective memory and political power apparatuses (Castells 1997; Straubhaar 2007). Lipschutz (1992) further suggests that most people usually assert local loyalties but want to share in global values and lifestyles.

Within the highly developed communication technology, mass media, which has played a dominant role in global culture flows, has increasingly influenced the identity construction of most populations (Hachten & Scotton 2007). Specifically, the popularity of commercialized Western media products has facilitated the distribution of a corporate ideology derived from global capitalism and consumerism (Herman & McChesney 1997, p. 35). Western media corporations have played an important role in the diffusion of Western popular culture to other parts of the world (Hachten & Scotton 2007). For instance, mass-cultural icons such as McDonalds, Microsoft, Dallas, Michael Jackson and Nike have become popular worldwide (Tomlinson 1999, p. 83), which to some extent has fostered the conveying of Western life styles (Hachten & Scotton 2007). Latouche (1996) generalizes the phenomenon of globalized uniformity and standardization of lifestyles with a concept of Westernization (p. xii, 3), which covers the impact of the Western consumer cultures and a set of cultural values such as personal liberty and human rights (Tomlinson 1999, p. 89).

In Latouche's (1996) model, the West, as a cultural entity, is at the centre of worldwide cultural flows and the domination of the West results in Western cultural imperialism which challenges the diversity of local cultures in non-Western countries. As one of the earliest theories of cultural globalization, cultural imperialism assumes that the hegemony of central cultural products have great influence on people's ideology and direct the way in which people make sense of their lives (Tomlinson 1999). According to Tomlinson (1999), cultural imperialism represents 'a number of fairly discrete discourses of domination: of American over Europe, of "the West over the rest" of the world, of the core over the periphery, of the

modern world over the fast-disappearing traditional one, of capitalism over more or less everything and everyone' (p. 80).

However, the reception of cultural imports, which builds on people's own cultural resources, is in the process of interpretation, mutation, adaptation and indigenization and is usually in a dialectical fashion (Appadurai 1990; Lull 1995; Robins 1991; Tomlinson 1991, 1999). Confronted with the interpretative modes of the social science that was called 'cultural studies' by the 1960s and the 1970s, the media effects research has been transformed from the analysis of what texts do to the audience to what texts mean to them, which is a fundamental difference from mass-communication studies (Nightingale 1996). The active subjective experience has been put in an important position and the social nature of the media and audience studies has been discovered, which focuses on the audiences' negotiation and interpreting of media content (Gitlin 1978; Hall 1980). For instance, facing different versions of love and romantic scenes on the global mass media such as Hollywood and Bollywood, people tend to see the discourses of intimacy in a more individualistic dialogue, in which the audiences may imitate, modify or subvert the media scripts when situating their own relationships (Banaji 2006; Duncombe & Marsden 1995; Uberoi 2006; Jamieson 2012).

According to Wang (2010), globalization is an ineluctable historical development, which 'represents a new stage of development in worldwide modernization' (p. 321). To join the global economy and catch up with the developed West, the Chinese government has repositioned itself to adopt further the transnational capitalism since 1978 and its influence has become more flexible and loosened, with its socialist cultural-ethic modes rather than the model of territorial civic nationalism being its most salient manifestation (Duara 2003). Specifically, globalization has touched upon a broad range of areas in mainland China since the 1990s, 'from fine arts, architecture, tourism and linguistics to international finance, business and educational administration, political economy and geopolitics, urban development and religious studies' (Wang 2010, p. 321). Globalization and free market, which are embedded within one another, are often believed as the main forces for modernization and urbanization in contemporary China (Heikkila 2007; Kashima et al. 2009; Yang et al. 2011).

Alongside this, the process of globalization has great influence upon the subjectivity formation of young Chinese people in the post-Mao era (Rofel 2007). Take the young women in urban China for example, universal consumption, a main aspect of their identities, is seen as a post-socialist technology of the self, which embodies freedom and the material desire of a globalized subject (Rofel 2007). Based on fieldwork in 1996-1998 in a southern Chinese village, Lozada (2006) notes that as a cultural technology of globalization, photography can express the communal identity of the villagers and reflects the way people positioning themselves in the modernization of the Chinese societies. By examining the popularity of bridal photography consumption in Taiwan and mainland China, Adrian (2003, 2006) argues that photography has become a translocal technology in the globalized commodities, which may transform marriage from a ritual event into a competitive consumption in an imagined global community.

With the incoherent mixture of the official socialist moral code and the capitalist market values, the failure to establish a viable social order to support the economic transition may result in a potential crisis of the society and the self in contemporary China (Wang 2002). For instance, due to the superficial understanding of the Western societies and culture as well as the Chinese history and civilization process, two conflicting attitudes, national nihilism and magnified empty patriotism were observed among the college-educated Chinese youth (Wang 2006). For the former group of people, the West, or especifically the US, is 'advanced and developed' (Chen 2004, p. 15) and to a great extent they tend to accept the Western lifestyles. While facing the criticisms about China, the latter group is usually over-sensitive and intolerant (Wang 2006).

2.3.2 Reality television and audience studies

Television, as a dominant medium in world-wide Sinophone societies, covered 92 percent audiences in mainland China by 2000 (Li 2001; Zhu & Berry 2009). In Barker's (1999) study *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*, he notes that television has become 'an increasingly globalized set of institutions and cultural flows providing proliferating resources (representations) for identity construction' (p. 33). As television texts are polysemic and open (Fiske 1987), audiences are able to interpret the programmes in their own way (Hobson 1982) and may re-construct their own desires (Grossberg 1984). They may further re-evaluate their

lifestyles and status when they recognize different ideologies represented in TV programmes and this may challenge their existing ideological worldviews (Wober 1998). Specifically, this thesis adopts the framework of active audience research in the mode of cultural studies and audiences are seen as subjects, who are able to interpret the media content in their own way and creatively appropriate mass media for their own purposes. By examining the relationship between reality TV and audiences' identity formation, this section provides a possible framework to explore how young Chinese people draw upon reality TV as a cultural technology to construct relationship-related values in the post-reform China. It reviews relevant literatures in relation to reality dating programmes and audience studies in the framework of positivist approaches and cultural studies, which are further linked to the emergence of reality dating programmes in the context of China.

Under the process of privatization and market liberation, reality television has been developed as one of the mainstream programming strategies in the US TV industries since the late 1980s and it has become worldwide popular since the 1990s (Murray & Ouellette 2009; Raphael 2004). In *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, Murray and Ouellette (2009) situate reality TV, an important generic forum, in the transition of tele-visual culture and discuss its contributions to the global institutional and cultural developments with a recent collection of articles covering genre, industry, interactivity and cultural power. According to Murray and Ouellette (2009), a variety of specialized subgenres such as talent contest, gamedoc, dating programme, makeover programme and docusoap have been developed in recent years, which has facilitated reality TV becoming a widely recognized cultural form. By presenting 'real' people in ordinary and extraordinary situations, reality TV has facilitated diversified television culture via changing business practices in TV industries and altering audiences' expectations (Carter 2003). It has further promoted 'media convergence, interactivity, user-generated content, and great viewer involvement in television' (Murray & Ouellette 2009, p. 2).

Alongside this, as a social and cultural technology located in the history of governmentality, reality television has played a proliferating role in the process of citizenship training and has facilitated a 'do-it-yourself' policy in the forming of self-management and self-caring modern subjects (Andrejevic 2009; Ouellette & Hay 2008; Rose 1996). Dean (1999) suggests that

governmentality is about 'how we think about governing others and ourselves in a wide variety of contexts' (p. 209). Foucault (1982, 1991) further locates the notion of governmentality in the context of particular societies and particular institutional rationalities and suggests that the power distributed from authorities exercises in modern societies and influences the subjects via specific skills, regimens, devices and technologies. Liberalism, which reflects the political reason of the postmodern state and the rising private institutions, is a paradox and it refers to a particular governmentality, governing through freedom (Foucault 1991). Modern individuals seek the state and private authorities for their own authority (Rose 1999) and they see themselves as 'well-regulated and responsibilized' free-subjects, who can govern themselves properly with the technologies of the self (Barry et al. 1996, p. 8).

As 'a new form of neoliberalized social service, social welfare, and social management' (p. 18), reality TV has great influence on empowering audiences to govern themselves as liberal enterprising citizens via privatization, personal responsibility and consumer choice (Ouellette & Hay 2008). The development of free market economy in contemporary China has promoted a self-regulating system and compatible governmental reasoning about efficiency and freedoms, especially in private sphere (Ong & Zhang 2008). However, with less support from the welfare state and the inequality in wealth, labour and social status promoted by privatization, individuals, who are better positioned than others, may exercise more liberal rights than those that are theoretically accessed by all citizens (Chasin 2002). The political and cultural environment further facilitates the shaping of needy individuals, who intend to actualize themselves via 'privatized spheres of lifestyle, domesticity, and consumption' (p. 12), while television has become a useful resource to provide techniques and create life politics for the self-animating subjects (Ouellette & Hay 2008).

As a specialized subgenre focusing on dating and relationships, reality dating programmes (RDPs) fuse gendered performances with the promise of authentic personalities of the ordinary people and provide audiences with multilayered discourses and experiences (Gray 2009). With diversified strategies, RDPs represent love and intimacy, traditionally a private issue in both Western and Asian societies, in the form of entertainment television, which has gained increasing popularity in the global context. Gender, as a highly performative element of identity, is at the centre of reality dating programmes (Butler 1990; Gray 2009; West &

Zimmerman 1987), which could provide various images of gender roles and behaviours. RDPs not only offer various pleasures, but may also open up the space for both participants and viewers to rethink the discourse of the 'real' in the shows and evaluate gender expectations and the appropriate dating behaviours in their everyday lives (Gray 2009).

The format of RDPs was originally generated from game shows in the late 1960s under the process of sexual revolution and the RDPs such as the US programme *America's Dating Game* (ABC), the Australian *Perfect Match* (Network Ten) and the British *Blind Date* (ITV) usually inherited and further developed the entertainment tradition (Fiske 1990; Gray 2009; Hetsroni 2000). By screening dating and relationships, many RDPs meet the early voyeuristic yearnings of the audiences who desire to know the 'authentic' stories that happened in private life spaces (Gray 2009). RDP has become one of the mainstream formats on the prime-time US television since the 21st century and it has become a popular subgenre in a wider context under the process of worldwide media and cultural flows (Gray 2009). Compared to the first phase in the development of the US television, broadcasting in contemporary China is a cultural resource for conjoining the political ideology and private interests. With the relatively loose media regulation and operation in the reform era, China has become part of global flows of media-cultural products and there is a transition in domestic media products which better serve the audiences' demand rather than serving purely political or ideological reasons (Chang et al. 2002). However, compared to the increasingly merchandised media products produced by Western media conglomerates, the domestic media products have often been criticized as lacking creativity (Curtin 2007).

Reality television was first introduced to mainland China in the 1990s (Li 2011) and the first domestic talent contest *Super Girl*, which adapted the format of *Pop Idol*, has triggered the popularity of reality TV programmes in the post-reform China since 2004. As the production and broadcasting of reality programmes is under the regulation of the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT), the subgenres of reality TV are under-developed and talent contests and reality dating programmes, which adapt popular Western patterns, are the main formats in the TV market of mainland China. According to McMurria (2009), citizen participation has been encouraged in talent contest and the values in the reality programme may have challenged the authority of the government, which intends to promote socialist

ideologies and resist the influence of Western popular cultures. The SARFT cut down primetime entertainment shows by two-thirds in early 2012 and further promoted programmes that distribute traditional virtues and socialist core values to boost the country's own soft power (BBC News 2012). For example, the Zhejiang satellite's dating programme *Run Toward Love* was shut down and all the reality programmes 'have toned down references to material wealth and sex' (Yang 2010). Comparing with the reality shows in Western societies, the producers (or the hosts) of the reality programmes in mainland China may refer to the socialist mainstream values as a primary standpoint while making a comment on the stories or personal accounts of the participants.

Some relevant studies suggest that the popularity of the RDPs in China is due to a range of reasons, including the intense competition in the reform era, the high standards for mate selection as well as the pressure from families (Li 2011; Zhang 2012). RDPs are likely to serve as a new type of dating which aims at helping the needy individuals find an ideal date in a short time (Li 2011; Zhang 2012). Specifically, dating was usually arranged by a third party in traditional China, and with the rise of the individual in the Chinese society since 1978, the dating patterns have been developed in increasingly modern ways such as the newspaper ads in the 1990s and the popular internet dating since the 2000s (Li 2011). According to Li (2011), nowadays Chinese youth often focus on their personal developments in careers and sometimes have little time to devote to relationships. Thus, the television dating format creates possibilities for the mutual understandings in a relatively authentic environment compared to the settings of newspaper ads and dating websites and it may suggest the accelerated relationships in which the participants need to make a decision about their dates in less than twenty minutes. In addition, the development of the modern matchmaking technology like internet and TV dating has opened up the possibility for intercultural relationship, as people from various location or nationalities have more opportunities to meet up (Li 2011).

As an important subgenre with polysemic texts, the relationship between reality dating programme and its audiences was conceptualized in different theoretical frameworks. For instance, the positivist tradition suggests that the media's influence can be measured through empirical studies and this approach is adopted in the interpretive modes of cultivation theory

and the social cognitive theory. First introduced by George Gerbner and his colleagues in the 1970s, the cultivation theory becomes one of the main approaches to examine the relationship between television viewing and its long-term effect on audiences. Specifically, it suggests that television as a special media text vividly portrays virtual reality and audiences tend to adopt the beliefs and perspectives that coincide with the presented images (Gerbner 1998; Gerbner et al. 1980; Gerbner et al. 2002). Combined with social cognitive theory, in which audiences are reflective consumers, some cultivation theorists suggest that the RDPs may teach or remind viewers about appropriate gender norms in relationships in different contexts (Bandura 1986, 2001). The participants on RDPs are seen as a real peer group and the audience are seen to identify more easily with the dating show characters than those in fictional genres (Strasburger 1995). For instance, by conducting a survey with 197 young adults and analysing 64 hours of the US dating programmes, Ferris et al. (2007) further note that viewers who perceive higher realism, are more likely to be influenced by the gender stereotypical attitudes represented in the RDPs.

However, one of the limitations of the framework of cultivation theory is that when examining media effects, it does not offer broad space for the involvements and various interpretations of the audiences. According to Katz et al. (1974), the precise degree of the media influence is related to the level of viewer involvement in a constructivist framework and it could be partly traced back to the uses and gratification theory, which suggests that the various purposes of media consumption may bring different gratifications. Audiences are positioned as having a more active role in the constructivist theory, in which they usually have a watching purpose such as learning or entertainment (Aubrey et al. 2003; Rubin 1984; Ward 2002). With the identification of particular characters, the viewers are able to test out the 'reality' in TV programmes (Fabes & Strouse 1987; Huesmann & Eron 1986; Huesmann et al. 2003; Potter 1986; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). For instance, using self-reporting questionnaires from 334 undergraduate students at the University of California, Zurbriggen and Morgan (2006) examine American youth's viewing habits and indicate that the amount of RDP viewing, which is mediated through viewer involvement, is positively correlated with the acceptance of gendered attitudes and sexual beliefs represented in the reality dating shows. This result, based on cultivation theory and a constructivist approach, suggests that television is one of the important sources in the socialization of the adolescents and young adults, which shapes their sexual identity and gender roles in their intimate relationships (Bachen & Illouz

1996; Brown & Steele 1995; Ward 2003). In addition, Zurbriggen and Morgan (2006) indicate that more male audience members used RDPs for learning than did female viewers, while no gender difference was observed when audiences watch something with entertainment purposes in mind.

Furthermore, key research employing the framework of cultural studies suggest that the contradictory gendered ideas in the reality dating shows work as one of the most important neoliberal sources for the modern individuals' identity formation. Like game shows, the traditional entertainment function is the core of the reality dating programmes and with rock-'n'-roll music, many RDPs follow the rules of carnivalesque spectacles in which a range of various femininities and masculinities are on display (Fiske 1989; Gray 2009; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 2011; Stark 1997). With the observation of the Roman carnival in Goethe's work *Italian Journey*, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) further develops the idea of carnivalesque in his research about the medieval folk cultures in which the hierarchic and 'serious' feudal society was parodied with good humour and the participants of the carnival enjoyed the merriment in an atmosphere of absolute familiarity, equality and freedom. The popularity of RDPs may be seen as one of the carnivalesque practices in the postmodern world, in which the participants enjoy the revelry offers by themselves (Bakhtin 1984; Gray 2009; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 2011). With diversified gender performances, both the traditional gender roles and the modern gender ideas can be dramatically present in the television dating festival. The viewers, who obtain fun and laughter from the dating carnivals, may release themselves from the real life and identify the traditional patriarchal ideas based on their own gendered performance in everyday lives (Bakhtin 1984; Eco 1984; Freud 1960; Powell 1988).

With the use of Western popular songs at the beginning of the show, most reality dating programmes in China adopt the format of the British dating show *Take Me Out* to produce a carnivalesque dating atmosphere. The programme setting of *If You Are the One* to some extent suggests a feminist spirit, which corresponds to women's more active roles in relationships and the growing number of females pursuing men in contemporary China (Tan 2012). This may destabilize the traditional gender expectations in which men were given increased power at the beginning of a relationship (McCormick & Jesser 1983; Rose & Frieze 1993). For instance, female participants on the show have the initial chance to dismiss the

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hope of the male contestants and the male participants need to survive in three trials including first impression, introductory videos and the interview scripts presented by his family and friends before they have the chance to choose their dates. Also, some funny sounds and animations are used in the show *If You Are the One*, which may further grab the viewers' attention to the dramatic performance of the participants.

Reality dating programmes are usually criticized by the Chinese government as delivering vulgar and materialist values in an overly entertaining environment (BBC News 2011; Yang 2010), in which the identities and behaviours of the participants may dislocate from the mainstream social and moral codes. The unruly women on the reality show *If You Are the One* often generate nation-wide discussions about money worship and some unruly women on the show may suggest a reproduction of the traditional gender ideas as females often consider the financial status as an important element in mate selection (Buss & Barnes 1986; Buss 1994; Townsend & Wasserman 1998). For instance, facing a potential 33-year-old suitor, a female participant said that 'you say that you're good at what you do, but then how can you still just be a salesman' (Yang 2010). 'I'd rather sit and cry in the back of a BMW', said Ma, a 22-year-old female participant on the show, when asked by a male participant about if she would like to go on a bicycle ride with him (MacLeod 2010; Yang 2010). Her words became a popular witticism and many viewers joined the dating carnival by sending Ma marriage proposals attached pictures of themselves in BMWs (Yang 2010).

The dating attitudes and behaviours of the Chinese youth, which are presented on popular RDPs, may be shaped by the traditional Chinese culture in which family, especially parents, are the most important determinants in young people's relationship (Zhang 2012). Culture, as a system of shared beliefs, customs and behaviours, is an important component in the formation of people's interpersonal roles (Singer 1982; Pearson et al. 2003; Zhang 2012). The expressions of courtship habits and mate selection criteria in popular media texts are often related to stereotypic gendered expectations in a given cultural context, which may have influence on shaping the viewers' identities in their own relationships (Baize & Schroeder 1995; Hatfield 1988; Koestner & Wheeler 1988; Morgan 1982, 1987; Signorielli 1989; Whissell 1996). By examining young Chinese people's watching motives and diversified

interpretations towards the most popular Chinese reality TV dating programme, a critical viewing culture and a transformative romantic subjectivity are explored in Chapter 4.

2.4 Conclusion

By drawing upon Foucault's (1979, 1982) historical interpretive framework, this chapter examined the changing nature of love, sexuality and intimacy in modern Western societies and further linked the Western theories to recent studies in the context of China, which provides a theoretical framework to explore a possible new romantic subjectivity of young Chinese people in the post-reform era. Specifically, since the economic reform era (1978 to present), Western values such as romantic love, free-choice marriage and gender equality have been promoted and a more tolerant attitude towards love and sexual matters have been increasingly observed (Bullough & Ruan 1994; Cheng et al. 2000; Higgins & Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Huang 1998; Long & Liu 1992; Pan 1993; Vincent 1991). By examining the rise of romantic love and plastic sexuality in Western societies in the last few decades of the 20th century (Giddens 1992), the theory pertaining to a pure relationship is employed to assess a sexual revolution observed in contemporary Chinese society. By examining recent studies in relation to traditional gendered inequalities in the practices of intimate relationships, Jamieson's (1998, 1999, 2012) works provide a possible theoretical framework to explore the social power mechanism between the traditional Confucian and socialist values and the reflective modern subjects in present day China. Based on the concept of 'individualized relationships' (Bauman 2003), a new relationship pattern reflecting desires and anxieties influenced by a consumerist culture in a fluid modern life setting provides an interpreting framework to examine the role of globalized modern institutions such as mass media in shaping young Chinese people's identity construction towards dating and relationships.

Alongside this, literatures in relation to the main social and cultural forces including state policies, globalization and mediatisation that shaped the identity construction of young Chinese people were reviewed. These provide an interpretive framework to explore an emerging subjectivity within the power interplay of traditional collective ideology and modern individualized values. Specifically, the implementation of the reforms and opening-up policies has facilitated a neoliberal reasoning among Chinese youth, whose identity has been greatly shaped by global media and cultural flows (Ong & Zhang 2008; Rofel 2007). For

instance, reality TV dating has become a cultural technology for modern subjects to construct their values and practices towards love and relationships (Murray & Ouellette 2009; Ouellette & Hay 2008; Rofel 2007). At the same time, a socialist ideology facilitated by the modern Chinese state is still influential on the subjectivity development of Chinese youth, who are likely to be defined in an individual-society-state relationship (Ong & Zhang 2008; Yan 2010a). Influenced by the socialist ideology and the global market economy, modern institutions such as the Chinese family and mass media are likely to shape the younger generation's romantic subjectivity formation in different ways, which is further explored within an active audience studies framework.

Chapter 3. Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This thesis, which could be seen as a part of a broader research focusing on the social change in the post-reform China, intends to explore the identity construction of Chinese youth towards love issues via examining their attitudes and understandings towards a mediated dating text and further assessing their strategies in approaching and operating relationships in everyday lives. As the core concepts of the research, love and intimacy, are examined as 'socially constructed' reality in the framework of a qualitative research. Specifically, the nature of the social reality is investigated via its representations produced in the interconnected interpretive and material practices such as interviews, and the researcher often draws upon a naturalistic approach to grasp the meanings of the empirical data regarding how individuals make sense of their lives (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, p. 3, 8).

This chapter seeks to find an appropriate research design, which emphasizes the effective strategies to answer the specific research question (LeCompte & Preissle 1993, p. 30) as set out earlier. As a process, it links the theoretical perspectives underpinned by the philosophical stances of a researcher to a methodological approach (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, p. 22) and includes a set of interrelated components, which follows a logical precedence of ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods (Grix 2002; Hay 2002, p. 5). Hence, this chapter intends to follow this internal logic and provide a detailed discussion about the research design of the project. Specifically, the second section examines issues related to ontology and epistemology in social research and identifies a philosophical position that guides a research strategy in the project. Then, under this methodological framework, specific research tools for data collection and data analysis are assessed in the third section. In addition, practical issues including data evaluation criteria, ethical issue and a self-reflexive process towards the data gathering and interpretation are further discussed in the subsequent sections.

3.2 Philosophical Position

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* first published in 1962, Kuhn (1970) introduces the notion of paradigm to assess the common approach for researchers to operate their subjects in the history of natural sciences. Guba (1990, p. 17) further refers it to some basic beliefs

closely associated with a set of ontological, epistemological and methodological premises, which guide a qualitative researcher to situate and act in the research context. Differing from the paradigm shift and substitution in the natural science research (Kuhn 1970), nowadays the major paradigms and perspectives towards social sciences, which aim to explain the human actions and the social processes, can be operated in various qualitative studies with multiple evaluation criteria (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, p. 18). This section firstly reviews the core concepts – ontology, epistemology and methodology in the general social research paradigm and examines alternative inquiry paradigms such as positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism based on Denzin and Lincoln's (2000a) historical review about qualitative theorizing and practices in North America since the 20th century. Following the discussions about the major paradigms organizing qualitative research, this section identifies the ontological and epistemological questions about this research and fit it into a suitable interpretive framework.

As the most important component in a research paradigm, the ontological position outlines the beliefs towards the nature and the constitution of social reality. It is closely linked with the foundation of knowledge and is a starting point logically followed by the epistemological and methodological assumptions in any research process (Blaikie 2000, p. 8; Grix 2002; Hay 2002, p. 63). Correspondingly, epistemology refers to the theories and models that direct the knowledge production process and the methodological strategy stresses the logic of the research procedures, the strengths and weaknesses of the research techniques (Grix 2002). For instance, early social researchers, who inherited the Enlightenment tradition and scientism, often reduced the human being to an 'object' with universal and unchanging nature and drew upon the generalization of the quantitative data to measure the social phenomena and human experiences (Bryman 2001, p. 12-13; Grix 2002; Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 179; Packer 2011, p. 5; Polkinghorne 1989). A positivist paradigm, which assumes a naïve realist ontology, dualist epistemology and experimental and quantitative research strategy, was a dominant framework for qualitative research from the early 1900s to 1950s and researchers often attempted to achieve rigorous objectivity devoid of personal biases in their interpretations and writings (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a; Guba 1990, p. 22; Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 168).

However, facing the rapid social transition and changing life experiences in modern societies, the positivist paradigm, which seeks to discover the stable reality of the world and the nature of the human beings from an objectivist's point of view, has become less adaptable (Flick 1998, p. 2-3). A post-positivist research paradigm, adopting an objectivist and critical epistemology to explore the approximately accessible reality (Guba 1990, p. 22; Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 168), began to gain power from 1950s to 1970s. During this period, grounded theory method, as a systematic strategy providing guidelines for qualitative data collection and analysis, was introduced, which worked as a revolutionary methodological approach moving qualitative research towards theory development and challenging the dominant quantitative paradigmatic traditions (Glaser & Strauss 1965, 1967, 1968). It may have the potential to combine the rigorous methodological criteria from the objectivist tradition with constructivist perspectives and guide the qualitative practices in a more flexible way (Charmaz 2000). At the same time, the rise of the new interpretive perspectives such as critical theory, feminism and phenomenology has drawn the research focus of qualitative practices towards the voice of the lower-classes since the post-war period and researchers often call for the emancipation of the society and the self by adopting the post-positivist epistemology in their research process (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, p. 14; West 1989, chap. 6).

Alongside this, constructivism, as a new paradigmatic framework, has gradually become one of the most important approaches since the 1970s. Guided by the anti-foundational ontology, constructivists question the unvarying and universal standards of social reality and lean toward negotiated criteria to interpret the multi-constructed realities within different contexts (Hiley et al. 1991; Lincoln & Guba 2000; Rabinow & Sullivan 1979). With the awareness of the richness of human consciousness, constructivists presume that humans are self-interpreting beings and there is a 'real world' defined by the creative human mind, which can invent and modify the conceptual framework to grasp the meanings of social experiences (Charmaz 2000, p. 523; Fay 1996; Potter 1996; Schwandt 2000, p. 197-198). Schwandt (2000, p. 198) introduces an 'expressivist-constructivist theory' to explain the constructivists' epistemological stances, in which the meanings of the social phenomena are co-produced via the mutual negotiation and construction in a dialogic encounter (Bernstein 1983; Bryman 2001, p. 16-18; Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, p. 15; Grondin 1994; Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 168; Taylor 1991). The qualitative researcher often works as a self-reflexive bricoleur, who reassembles the pieced representations together and reconstructs a picture of a community

narrative (Charmaz 2000, p. 522; Nelson et al. 1992, p. 2; Weinstein & Weinstein 1991, p. 161), which may become alterable in different historical moments (Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 167).

According to the discussions above, the controversies between foundational and anti-foundational ontologies often direct different epistemological positions, which further influence the methodological design. To reconstruct the identity of the Chinese youth towards love and intimacy, this project is closely associated with the inquiries in the field of cultural studies, which consider the issues about 'community, identity, agency and change' in the global-local sphere from a historical point of view (Grossberg & Pollock 1998, cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2000b, p. 160). Alongside this, popular media text is often seen as a site for the production of the economic, political, cultural and historical account (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b, p. 160). Thus, by focusing on the most popular nation-wide television dating programme, this thesis intends to examine the meanings generated from the audiences' interpretations and negotiations of the representation of love and relationships in this programme. The TV dating programme, which may symbolize a new dating era, further works as a dialogical platform for Chinese youth to discuss relationship related values and experiences under a real life setting in the social reform era. In addition, the relationship between the mass media, especially the reality television dating programme and the identity construction of young people in contemporary Chinese societies is explored.

By drawing upon the historical realism or relativism ontology, transactional epistemologies and dialogic methodologies (Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 161), cultural studies can be adapted to the different interpretive frameworks such as critical theory, constructivism and post-positivism, in which multiple criteria are employed to evaluate the meanings of the cultural practices (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b, p. 161). As this project seeks to assess the meanings in the inter-subjective domain in a particular historical moment, it is guided by an interpretivist and transactional epistemology. However, rather than adopting a critical theory framework, which seeks to call for social democracy and equality among people with different gender, age, class and ethnic backgrounds, this project mainly seeks to understand and reconstruct the subjective meanings generated from a specific group of Chinese youth. Thus, this research is

inclined to be located in the constructivist paradigm to assess the social reality from a relativist point of view.

Specifically, this project intends to explore the context-based social reality guided by an anti-foundational ontology or 'a historical ontology of ourselves' (Foucault 1984, cited in Packer 2011, p. 6), which sees the human being as a self-managing and self-improving subject structured in different historical and cultural backgrounds (Foucault 1979, 1982). In other words, identity is presumed as a historical construction and the nature of love and intimacy is considered as a socio-cultural construct made by the self-interpreting subject, who may have different understandings towards what is love and how to structure an intimate relationship. The literatures assessed in the previous chapter suggest that the identity towards love issues may have transformed from the traditional collective values towards more individualized ones under the social and cultural change in the post-reform and globalizing era. Thus, the ontological question explores the nature of love and intimacy in the social reform era via examining the way a group of young professionals living in the city embark on their personal relationships and the social change may be mirrored in the understandings about the traditional and modern values towards love issues. The media text is considered as a site to produce meanings towards the multiple-constructed social reality, which is seen to be reflected in the discourses of the audiences.

The epistemological question of this research seeks to find out how a specific group of Chinese youth engage with and make sense of media texts and further explore how they structure their personal relationships in daily lives. In other words, this project is located in the discipline of active audience studies by focusing on a group of young professionals living in an urban environment and examining their media consumption and the reproduction of meanings. Specifically, this research intends to assess the understandings of Chinese youth towards the representation of love and intimacy in Chinese mainstream media by focusing on their interpretations of a popular televisual dating programme as text. The audiences' motives and media consumption habits are investigated in order to examine the social context of the viewing process. With the audiences' interpreting and negotiating of the media content, this research seeks to understand how these audiences relate their lives to the participants and to what extent the television content reflects the social reality in urban China. As the popularity

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of TV dating is likely to symbolize a new dating era, this audience study further fits into a social research exploring the identity of this group of Chinese youth towards love and intimacy in an everyday life setting.

In general, following these philosophical stances, the data gathering process for this research, which aims to explore the audiences' understandings about the televisual text and the way Chinese youth structure their personal relationships in real lives, is directed by the active reception theory. Specifically, this project focuses on a group of Chinese youth, who are viewed as self-managing subjects shaped by the particular historical and cultural background of the post-reform China. The popular reality television dating programme *If You Are the One* is seen as a site producing daily conversations and discussions, which represent and construct the identities of the Chinese youth towards love and intimacy. Language is viewed as a creative activity to configure the subjective meanings and the narrative constructions become the core empirical data in the research (Bond 1990; Maines 1993). Correspondingly, the methodological approach, which is guided by a constructivist grounded theory, intends to build up a dialogical space to generate qualified descriptions and reconstruct the social reality via its representations. For instance, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews are likely to be adopted to create the narrative data. Then, qualitative analysis is employed to code and refine the empirical data and the categorized data may be connected to concepts such as romantic love, filial piety, individualized relationship, loyalty and consumerist culture to interpret the traditional and modern values towards love issues in contemporary China.

3.3 Research Methods

3.3.1 Sample

In order to examine Chinese youth's identity construction towards love and relationship issues, this research focuses on a specific socio-economic group of young professionals aged 18 to 30 years old working in the cities of mainland China. Most of my participants had a higher educational background and their diversified professional identities did not seem sufficiently significant in shaping their views towards love and intimacy. As heterosexuality is often seen as a social norm, my research intends to problematize heterosexual identities to uncover values and practices in personal relationships that are not seen as problematic. Thus, this

research employs a heterosexual dating programme as a dialogical avenue to explore further young Chinese people's subjective experiences towards dating and relationships in everyday life setting.

Higgins and Sun (2007) note that 'generation is one type of national subculture that reflects the value priorities during a country's particular historical period'. Significant social, political, and economic events that occurred during a birth cohort's impressionable pre-adult years will result in a generational identity comprised of a distinctive set of values, beliefs, expectations, and behaviours that remain relatively stable throughout a generation's lifetime (Inglehart 1997, Strauss & Howe 1991). According to Sun and Wang (2010), the Chinese can be grouped into four generations in relation to four particular social movements in China after 1949: 'the Great Leap Forward' (1958-1961), 'the Cultural Revolution' (1966-1976), 'the beginning of economic reform' (from 1978), and 'the societal transition' (1992 to present). Since 1992, Chinese society has experienced a total transformation, including changes in the economic system, political atmosphere, education and health-care systems, mass communication and daily life.

In this research, the target sample group mainly involves members of the post-80s, who belong to the generation born in the first decade of the economic reform era and are considered to be the carriers of the changing values in the post-reform China. Specifically, their childhoods were in an economic system changing from the planned system to a market-based system and when they grew older they met the 'societal transition', which was thought to be an ideal period for them to form their views of the world and their own lives. Meanwhile, they are the first generation of the national population control policy, so their identity is likely to be shaped by the changing family culture in the reform era. At the same time, a comparative group of participants from the parents' generation aged from 44 to 58 years old were recruited to explore the identity of the target sample group from the parents' point of view and examine the different understandings of love and relationships between the two generations. Therefore, purposive and snowball sampling were used in this project (Tonkiss 2004, p. 199) and the acquaintances of the researcher were seen as main informants to help with the recruitment of participants by explaining the research to the possible respondents in their social networks.

Semi-structured interviews were expected to be conducted from July to September 2013 in mainland China and the project aimed to recruit 30 participants from the young generation and 10 respondents from the parents' generation. As Chinese young people working or studying abroad are a group of audiences of the programme, a small pilot focusing on Chinese youth in Newcastle was conducted to test the question schedules for the semi-structured interviews in the last week of May and early July 2013. This helped the researcher modify the questions and gain some experiences about how to conduct fieldwork as well as some initial ideas about the research topic.

The interview samples were mainly chosen from Beijing, the capital of the PRC. As a representative city reflecting the social and cultural change in the post-reform China, Beijing is a key site gathering young professionals with different backgrounds from across the country. As love and intimacy is a traditionally sensitive and private topic, the researcher mainly recruited participants belonging to the social networks of her acquaintances. She tended to establish a familiar and trustful relationship with the respondents by working as a data co-producer in order to direct a free-flowing conversation with naturalistic data (Burgess 1982; Byrne 2004; Mason 1996, p. 36-38; Spradley 1979). Specifically, the researcher's acquaintances were asked to introduce the researcher to the potential attendants and help them get familiar with each other before the interview, which to some extent turned the interview setting towards an informal conversation. From July to early September 2013, the acquaintances of the researcher worked as gatekeepers with access to their personal networks and to a large extent, they helped with participant recruitment via introducing the research project to potential interviewees such as their relatives, friends and colleagues. These informants played an important role in helping send supplementary interview questions to the former interview respondents in late September.

The researcher took the respondent differences and the research context into account and arranged the meeting in appropriate time and space, which was accessible and convenient to the participants (Converse & Schuman 1974, p. 53; Tonkiss 2004). The individual interviews were mainly arranged in community centres, education institutions and internet cafes. Although most interviews had only one attendant, in some cases a couple or two colleagues

were interviewed together. Informal conversations in an everyday life setting were also used as an approach to collect empirical data. For example, a participant from the parents' generation was interviewed while she was driving. In addition, with face-to-face interviews as a main data collecting method, interviews via email were used to produce qualitative narrative data. For example, two participants filled in a questionnaire that had the same question schedule as in the interviews and some supplementary questions for one respondent were collected in this way. Until the end of September, 59 participants were interviewed and among them, 42 were young people aged from 18 to 30 years old (25 females and 17 males), 10 were people from the parents' generation aged from 44 to 58 (7 females and 3 males), six people aged from 31 to 37 and one elderly interviewee aged 75 years old. Among all the respondents aged 18 to 30 years old, 14 people were single, 14 of them were in dating relationships and 14 of them were married. The following sections seek to critically assess the data collection and analysis techniques and relate them to this project on the basis of their theoretical perspectives, key features and relevant practical issues.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interview

As a technique widely used in modern societies to collect information in groups and individuals, the interview has become a universal practice for both qualitative and quantitative inquiries during the past decades (Atkinson & Silverman 1997; Fontana & Frey 2000, p. 646-647; Holstein & Gubrium 1995, p. 1; Mishler 1986, p. 23; Silverman 1993, 1997). Within different questioning contexts, Bryman (2004) observes three types of interviews including structured interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview. Among them, the questions in a structured interview are usually in a closed format with fixed options for the respondents to choose (Bryman 2004; Fontana & Frey 2000, p. 649). A structured interview is predominantly used as a research tool for quantitative research, especially survey research, which often intends to establish neutral and generalized knowledge about the social reality with social statistics representing a particular population (Seale 2004). In response to this, a structured interview is often conducted in a straightforward and impersonal manner, in which the interviewer is required to be a friendly listener without evaluating or judging the responses from the participants (Converse & Schuman 1974).

As two types of qualitative interviews, semi-structured or unstructured interviews often adopt a general question schedule with more open-ended questions and are more flexible to conduct than structured interviews (Bryman 2004). Without forcing a pre-established category scheme on the data generation and analysis process, qualitative interviews, which provide the participants with more opportunities to give personal perspectives and allow for unusual answers, are more productive when exploring a new area and can be helpful for inquirers with limited knowledge of a research topic (Bryman 2004; Rubin & Rubin 1995). A qualitative interview is often underpinned by a historical ontology and a constructivist epistemology, which sees the identity of the human beings as a historical and cultural construction in a process of subjective transformation (Foucault 1979, 1982). Therefore, a qualitative interview under a constructivist framework often seeks to rely upon an equal dialogic communication, in which the participants are encouraged to express their experiences and perspectives in their own words and the researcher engages in this conversation by sharing ideas and feelings (Byrne 2004, p. 182; Fontana & Frey 2000, p. 653; Taylor & Bogdan 1984, p. 7). By drawing upon the meaning co-creation between the inquirer and the interviewee in the inter-subjective sphere, a qualitative interview works as an in-depth purposive conversation (Burgess 1982; Byrne 2004; Mason 1996, p. 36-38; Spradley 1979).

Focusing on the individual's lived experience and perspectives, qualitative interviews are seen as an appropriate method to obtain more personal perspectives and to achieve an in-depth understanding of love and intimacy, which is a topic potentially sensitive and controversial in the context of China. As a commonly used qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted in this project. According to Wengraf (2001), semi-structured interviews are a research tool with 'high-preparation, high-risk, high-gain, and high-analysis' (p. 5) and the interview schedule, which reflected the researcher's understanding of the research topic informed by the theories reviewed in the previous chapter, tended to have an open-ended nature for the production of qualitative descriptions. As the researcher often plays an important role as a meaning co-creator in the data collection process, she aimed to build up a friendly and trustful relationship with the interviewees via the support of the gatekeepers. For example, the researcher's acquaintances often helped introduce the research topic and the inquirer to the participants at the beginning of the interviews and occasionally accompanied the respondents during the interview process. As a result, the respondents often viewed the researcher as a new friend or one of them, in front of whom they felt free to express

themselves and the researcher sought to encourage the attendants to articulate their opinions and feelings.

Specifically, semi-structured interviews were adopted in this project to explore the changing meaning of love issues in the post-reform China via examining people's understandings towards a popular TV dating programme, which was seen as a template to investigate the contemporary ways for people to approach dating and relationships. Generational difference was taken into account to explore the social and cultural change in an in-depth way. Chinese young professionals aged 18 to 30 years old were seen as target samples and a comparative group of participants from their parents' generation, who were expected to obtain a diversified generational identity towards love and intimacy due to the various historical and social environments they grew up, were also involved in the interview process. Therefore, the research designed question schedules for the younger generation and the older generation respectively. More specifically, a detailed question list was designed to examine the younger generation's attitudes and values towards the reality TV dating programme and their understandings and experiences towards love and relationships in everyday lives. At the same time, a more general question schedule was employed for the respondents from the parents' generation to explore the generational differences towards relationship-related values (for more details, see Appendix D and E). Among all the interviews, most were organized in 40 to 60 minutes sessions and a few interviews with participants from the younger generation were conducted in one to two hours.

This research recruited 42 interviewees aged 18 to 30 with different professional backgrounds and explored the research topic from their attitudes towards the reality TV dating show, the main factors for them to choose a date and their understandings towards the traditional and modern values in structuring a dating relationship. For instance, the respondents' attitudes towards the TV dating programme, as a recently developed way of partner choosing, was examined and this was further linked to the understandings about different ways for young professionals to start a dating relationship in real lives. The programme was seen as a site to connect the respondents' lived experience to the guests via assessing their understandings towards the main factors for the guests in the programme to select a partner, which again led to their own considerations towards partner choosing. By examining the relationship between

the understandings about the programme and the way that young professionals organize their own relationship, the role of reality TV dating programme was expected to be assessed. Questions related to controversial issues such as pre-marital sex, extra-marital relationships and divorce were included in the schedule to assess further the conventional and modern values towards love and intimacy. Alongside this, ten individual interviews were conducted with participants from the older generation aged from 44 to 58 in order to investigate their attitudes towards the TV show, their perspectives towards the identities of the younger generation and their understandings of some traditional and modern values pertaining to love issues.

3.3.3 Analytical approach: thematic analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), qualitative analytic methods such as grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative analysis and thematic analysis are commonly employed under a constructivist research paradigm and these methods all start an analysis via looking for, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within the data. Among them, narrative analysis emphasizes themes within one data item such as interview(s) from one respondent, which tends to guide the data interpreting process to a biographical focus (Murray 2003; Riessman 1993). Grounded theory analysis, discourse analysis and thematic analysis often focus on an entire data set, which may include, for example, interviews from a target group of participants, so they were seen as more suitable research tools to understand the interview data set.

Specifically, grounded theory offers a rigorous system of methods to conduct a qualitative data analysis, which aims to develop a useful theory (Glaser 1992), and discourse analysis emphasizes the relationship between text and context, which tends to investigate the latent meanings generated in certain social structures (Burman & Parker 1993). At some points, thematic analysis overlaps with grounded theory and discourse analysis. For instance, similar to grounded theory, thematic analysis does not rely upon any pre-conceived coding system and the generated themes are strongly associated with the interview data itself (Patton 1990). In other words, thematic analysis can be seen as a major process within grounded theory (Ryan & Bernard 2000). Like discourse analysis, thematic analysis under a constructivist research paradigm is directed by the epistemological position, which believes that the social reality is context-based truth and the interview data is supposed to have been generated in

specific social and cultural contexts. Comparing with grounded theory and discourse analysis, thematic analysis is an approach that does not require much theoretical and technological knowledge, which is seen as an accessible and flexible way for early researchers (Braun & Clarke 2006). Hence, thematic analysis was employed at the first stage in a grounded theory interpretive framework to examine the semantic meaning of the interview data, which was further linked to relevant literatures in the context of China in order to develop a possible theory in the field.

This research intended to identify possible themes emerging from the interview data set and examine their interconnections to interpret the research topic. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme is a 'patterned response or meaning' (p. 82), which implies important information about any aspects of the research question, and the prevalence of a potential theme in the entire data set and the different voices would both be taken into account in the theme seeking process. Although the interview schedule was designed on basis of the theories and concepts reviewed in the previous chapter, the theme finding process tended to adopt an inductive or data-driven method, which did not conform to any pre-existing theories. Under a constructivist paradigm, the researcher played an active role in both the data collection and the data analysis process (Taylor & Ussher 2001; Ely et al. 1997, p. 205-206). By becoming familiar with the interview data, the researcher tended to understand the research topic by selecting a group of interrelated themes as well as sub-themes from the data set and mapping the connections among them. This project intended to understand the meanings and implications of the patterns in an in-depth way by linking them to the theories and concepts reviewed in the former chapter (Braun & Clarke 2006; Patton 1990).

As a process of identifying patterns, analysing the coded data and reporting the themes and issues in relation to the research interest, a rigorous thematic analysis draws upon a set of systematic procedures (Reicher & Taylor 2005, p. 549). By dividing the data analysis process into six steps including familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, naming themes and producing the report, Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a practical guide for conducting thematic analysis, which tends to direct the data analysis process in this research. They suggest that data analysis is a recursive process, in which writing starts at the very beginning and tends to be revised when obtaining a better

understanding of the data set. In this project, as the transcribing of recordings would take several months, the data analysis was conducted before obtaining all the interview data. The identified themes may change and new themes were expected to emerge when more and more information built into the interview data set.

The data transcribing process, which started in September 2013, played an important role in helping the researcher become familiar with the interview data and generate some initial thoughts about the coding (Riessman 1993). The researcher was aware that interviews are almost ethnographic, so the recordings were translated from Chinese to English manually in order to capture the respondents' meanings and experiences. The transcribing process lasted about eight months and it was also part of the interpretation process. The finished transcriptions were annotated with initial comments. In this phase, a potential coding scheme tended to be established via reading and re-reading the interview data. The coding process, which aimed to organize the interview data into meaningful groups, tended to emphasize the empirical data itself without framing it by any pre-established framework (Tuckett 2005). A group of possible themes such as authenticity, accelerated relationship and choice, which were defined according to the existing literatures relevant to the research topic before conducting the fieldwork in China, to some extent guided the initial coding process in a systematic way. After finishing about ten interview transcriptions by the end of October 2013, the researcher started identifying initial codes, which reflected the features of the interview data that can be linked to the research topic, and collated relevant data extracts under each code. Specifically, a list of themes and codes such as the authenticity of the reality TV dating programme, mate-choosing values, traditional dating ethics including responsibility and marital faithfulness, accelerated relationships and self-centred dating practices including pre-marital and extramarital relationships were identified.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), visual representation such as a mind-map is a good way to analyse the coded data and collate them into potential themes, which are seen as the units of analysis with a broader meaning than codes. The possible themes and sub-themes identified before may be helpful in examining the codes and data extracts, which may fit into them or combine into some possible new themes. Patton (1990) suggests that themes should be categorized with the principle of internal coherence and external distinctiveness. For

instance, by looking at the codes and possible themes identified by the end of October 2013, the researcher tended to pick up a potential theme, which was about the risks in human bonds, and started writing an analysis with the possible sub-themes and the collated data extracts to form a coherent and consistent account. This was a process used to define and name the theme in relation to the research question. By the end of April 2014, the first draft analysis chapter about desires and anxieties in self-centred relationships was finished. As the interview transcription was almost completed, more themes were expected to be analysed at a later stage and integrated further into a thematic map, which would be reviewed and modified before writing up the full report.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000a), the validity and reliability of early qualitative inquiry was greatly associated with a 'value-free' objectivist research from a natural science tradition, which employs semantic and syntactic description and designative representation to rationally reconstruct the scientific knowledge of the social reality (Schwandt 2000, p. 196; Shapiro 1981; Taylor 1985, 1995). With the emerging new paradigms such as semiotics and social constructivism since the blurred genre period (1970-1986), axiology has become an important premise subsuming values related to 'ethics, aesthetics, and religion' into the inquiry process (Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 169). It began to transform the nature of qualitative research from the 'objective', experimental and rigorous analysis towards a more open-ended, interpretive and naturalistic approach (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, p. 15; Geertz 1973, 1983). The conventional evaluation criteria such as validity as rigorous objectivity has been challenged, and authenticity and trustworthiness may have become new criteria in understanding the context-based truths (Guba & Lincoln 1989, p. 245-251; Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 178-179; Schwandt 1989).

Constructivism often directs the research to an open-ended nature rather than a single interpretive truth and the multi-voiced representation has facilitated qualitative inquiry towards a postmodern turn since the 1990s (Best & Kellner 1997; Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, p. 3, 17; Hertz 1997, p. xi-xii). According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), the validity issue for the new-paradigmatic researcher becomes more complex and the valid knowledge often depends upon the combination of the rigorous methodological practices from a positivist tradition and

the negotiated criteria related to constructivism (p. 178). For constructivists, the criteria for truth claim towards social reality is closely connected to the narrative consensus generated in the discourses of the stakeholders of a specific community, which may transcend the conflict of relativity and objectivity and reflect the temporal and historical conditions for the formation of the community (Bernstein 1983; Lincoln 1995; Polkinghorne 1989; Rorty 1979; Schwandt 1996).

Hence, under the constructivist paradigm, this project intended to build up a dialogic space for the meaning co-creation in a subjective and inter-subjective domain and to explore the audiences' constructions towards the relationship between the reality television dating programme and their private lives. As both the positive and interpretive research traditions share some basic features (Hammersley 1987), thus commensurability on a methodological level becomes possible (Guba & Lincoln 1981, 1982, 1989, 1994; Lincoln & Guba 1985; 2000, p. 169). To gain valid empirical data within an open-ended paradigmatic framework, the methodological design was located in a constructivist grounded theory, directing the fieldwork and the data analysis with a system of methods with rigorous criteria, which require that the developed theory fits the data and can be modified when the conditions change (Glaser 1978, 1992). For instance, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews were employed in this project to collect the narrative data and comparative methods were used to categorize and refine the qualitative data into various concepts within an initial theoretical framework.

3.5 Ethical Issues

As love and intimacy is a private and controversial issue, the research was conducted in a sensitive manner and ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of all the participants, who were briefed that they can withdraw from the research at any moment. To reduce the potential risks, this research adhered to the ethical framework offered by ESRC and the main topics and procedures for interview were clearly conveyed to the respondents to make sure all the participants have a clear idea of the project and their contribution to it. The potential risks of the project were reflected in the participant consent form as well.

Specifically, participants in semi-structured interviews were given an oral introduction and an information sheet about the aim and the question schedule of the research and they were informed that they are free to ask any questions about the research. As recording is a primary means of collecting data, a more detailed participant consent form including the consent for recording were required to sign by every participant before conducting the research. The recordings were only used to trace the conversations by researchers and pseudonyms were used when quoting the opinions from a particular participant in the thesis to make sure participants are not identifiable outside the interview context (Byrne 2004).

The different cultural backgrounds of the participants were taken into account and the researcher aimed to respect the cultural diversity of the respondents and be sensitive when wording questions and moderating interview conversations. At the same time, the researcher clarified that there are not good or bad understanding towards the research topic and the respondents were encouraged to express themselves in an authentic and trustworthy manner, in which all the perspectives and controversial ideas were valued by the researcher. The researcher assured all the respondents about the anonymization of their responses and that they could withhold responses if they wanted.

As the identity of former generations was expected to be more influenced by traditional values and Confucian culture, the research topic may be more sensitive and private to them than to the younger generation, so the individual interviews were conducted with full consideration of confidentiality and anonymity. When conducting the interviews with the participants from the previous generations, the reflexivity of the interview questions was given a particular concern (Holland & Ramazanoglu 1994) and the question list of the semi-structured interview paid attention to the wording to suit the thinking framework of the older generations.

Participants contributed to the semi-structured interviews were provided a written debriefing document at the end of the conversation. The participant debriefing document recovered the purpose of the research and included information about when and how the results would be available. It was an important way to acknowledge the participants' contribution and the

debriefing document included the researcher's contact details to help participants obtain further information about the project. The potential risk to the researcher mainly involved in the conducting of semi-structured interviews, which may include participants that the researcher is unfamiliar with before conducting the research. As purposive and snowball sampling was used, most respondents were contacts of the researcher's acquaintances. Hence, the acquaintances usually accompanied the researcher to the interview and helped the researcher get familiar with the participants before conducting the fieldwork.

3.6 Reflexivity

Under a constructivist research paradigm, this investigation employed in-depth interviews to explore the dialogic meaning of the respondents, who were expected to have diversified understandings towards the televisual text as well as diverse relationship related values and practices. As one type of qualitative interviews, semi-structured interviews are often seen as a suitable method for respondents to express private feelings and attitudes in their own words and the researcher tends to work as a data co-creator in order to facilitate the interview conversations (Burgess 1982; Byrne 2004, p. 182; Fontana & Frey 2000, p. 653; Mason 1996, p. 36-38; Spradley 1979; Taylor & Bogdan 1984, p. 7). Thus, I conducted the interviews in an open and inclusive manner and worked as an active listener by showing my understandings and acceptance of the respondents' values and opinions. A few interview participants expressed their interests in knowing my attitudes towards some questions, and where it was necessary, I disclosed some of my ideas pertaining to love and relationships. I rarely judged or added any opinions that would be opposite to my interviewees' statements, which helped establish a supportive and friendly conversational environment and encourage my interview participants to discuss freely their values and experiences about personal relationships. This may imply a slightly different understanding of the role of a researcher as a data co-producer introduced by 'expressivist-constructivist theory' (Schwandt 2000, p. 198), which emphasizes a negotiation and construction between researcher and interview respondents in the data collecting process (Bernstein 1983; Bryman 2001, p. 16-18; Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, p. 15; Grondin 1994; Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 168; Taylor 1991).

Alongside this, being aware of a generational difference between the two groups of respondents, I developed two approaches to build a trustful relationship with my interviewees,

which is often seen as an important factor in generating authentic interview data (Blumer 1969; Lofland & Lofland 1984, 1995). Specifically, as a member of the young generation born at the beginning of the reform era, I intended to establish an equal and relaxed conversation with participants from the younger generation. As respondents from the parents' generation were more influenced by traditional Confucian and socialist values and see love issues as a private topic, I conducted the interviews with participants from the previous generations with a more respectful and sensitive manner, and a relaxed dialogical environment was built. The interviews were conducted in internet cafés, restaurants, community centres and meeting rooms in the respondents' companies, which provided a comfortable environment for the interviewees and facilitated a free discussion. A few respondents expressed their concerns about the use of their interview recordings and they were worried that the audio documents could be uploaded on-line or circulated in their social networks, which may disclose their private thoughts and/or have bad influence on their reputation or personal relationships. Hence, during the data collecting process, where necessary I often reassured my respondents that the recordings would only be used as confidential and anonymous resources for academic research. This may imply the paramount importance of information security for doing research in an internet age.

As my interview respondents were informed that the interview topic was about young people's attitudes and understandings of the reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One* and value orientations of Chinese youth towards love and relationships, some of them were likely to indicate some values widely accepted in public domain during the interview process. For instance, most of my interview participants expressed their needs and expectations towards a lifelong relationship, which is often seen as a traditional and safe option facing public criticisms towards the emergence of various forms of relationships such as extramarital relationships and multiple relationships. As my interviewees were informed that I had been a research student studying in the UK, some of them were likely to assume that I hold a liberal attitude towards love and sexual matters and thus tended to express a more tolerant attitude towards the diversified dating and relationship practices in urban China.

During the data collection and analysis process, a different understanding of young people's identity construction between generations could be observed. For the parents' generation,

young people born in the reform era were often seen as a generation dislocated from traditional collective family values who attached more importance on individual happiness and achievement (Chen 1985; Falbo et al. 1989; Hesketh et al. 2005). While on the other hand, an increased emphasis on traditional Confucian and socialist values were likely to be observed among members of the young generation, who often intended to employ traditional values as an important cultural technology in approaching and sustaining an increasingly individualized relationship. This may suggest a fusing of traditional resources such as matchmaking principles, responsibility and marital faithfulness with an individualized youth culture in a fluid modern life setting, which may further connote a more complex interplay between tradition and modernity. Finally, my data analysis mainly drew upon interview data collected among respondents from the younger generation and the interview data of participants from previous generations was seen as a complementary and comparison data set.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design of this project by exploring its philosophical stance and methodological strategy, which worked as a guidance to situate the researcher in the field and as a data interpreter. Specifically, under a constructivist research paradigm, semi-structured interviews were conducted to build a dialogic platform to examine how Chinese youth understand the televisual text and how they relate it to dating and relationships under a daily life setting. A thematic analysis was conducted to understand the meanings generated from the narrative constructions of the research participants and further assess the identity construction towards love and intimacy of young people in the social reform China. In addition, issues in relation to evaluation criteria and ethical concerns about the research project were examined.

Chapter 4. TV Dating as a Mediated Dating Text

4.1 Introduction

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

As the research project examines the identity construction of a group of Chinese young professionals towards love and romance, the sample group of Chinese youth were situated into an active audience research paradigm, in which the TV dating programme is seen as an avenue to generate various attitudes and interpretations of audiences with different cultural competencies (Fiske 1987; Hobson 1982). In addition to this, TV dating as a mediated text may have worked as a public template, in which the topic of love and intimacy tends to become a less private and sensitive issue, and facilitated broader discussions among the participants in the research project. As audiences often tend to comment on a TV programme in relation to their daily lives (Livingstone & Lunt 1994, p. 82), RDPs are likely to become a catalyst for audiences to further relate it to their own dating experiences and values under a real life setting and help explore the way they structure their own dating and relationships.

The TV programme *If You Are the One* may have worked as an opportunity for reflection or even as a modern allegory for Chinese youth to identify and construct their values towards love and intimacy by comparing the media representation with their experiences and observations about dating and relationships under an everyday life setting. According to Richardson's (2000) argument about a crystalized inquiry, the televisual platform is likely to

become the 'prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions' (p. 934). That is to say, the TV dating programme could be seen as a mediated simulation of a romantic setting in an urban Chinese society with a representative group of Chinese young professionals as its guests. Audiences are likely to understand the social construction of love and intimacy within a postmodern framework. This is comparable to the one introduced by Jean Baudrillard, who argues that rather than finding a way to interpret the social reality, people can only create 'a kind of vision, a style, to see and decode' it (cited in Walden 1997, p. 22). Within an open-ended crystallization process (Ellingson 2009, p. 190), Chinese young people were inclined to produce diversified examinations of the programme *If You Are the One* and its possible implications under a modern life setting in the post-reform China.

By introducing the 'encoding/decoding' model, Stuart Hall (1980) provides a possible framework to understand the power dynamic between the audience and the TV programme. The dating programme tends to produce and deliver an authoritative message of the media organization, which is under the dual control of the government censorship and the free market economy (Curtin 2007; Hall 1980; Li 2001; Wang 2011). The programme, which aims to build an authentic public-service platform, may reflect both post-socialist institutional ideology and the modern commodity culture. Audiences with different socio-cultural backgrounds are inclined to engage with the media text in different ways and create polysemic meanings, which could be aligned with, negotiated with or opposite towards the preconceived reading in the televisual text (Bourdieu 1984; Fiske 1989; Hymes 1972; Morley 1989, p. 18; Skeggs 1992, p. 91). Alongside this, according to social cognitive theory and cultivation theory, the role of television is greatly associated with audiences' understandings of the 'authenticity' of TV programmes (Bandura 1986, 2001; Gerbner 1998; Gerbner et al. 1980; Gerbner et al. 2002). For instance, audiences are more likely to be influenced by a mediated text if they believe it is real or if they can identify similar characters under an everyday life setting. By connecting audiences' understandings about dating and relationships in the programme's setting and in their daily lives, the question about the authenticity of the TV dating programme has become a core issue to explore in the crystalized inquiring process.

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

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

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

By recruiting 'ordinary' people as its guests, RDPs to some extent may facilitate the shift of dating practice from a private sphere to a public domain, which tends to be linked with Hermes's (2006) argument that the private-public boundary has been blurred in popular culture. As a public platform for people to approach love and intimacy, TV dating may offer a performance about relationships generated by 'ordinary' people on a reality programme set, which is likely to be different from relationships being performed in fictional TV genres such as soap operas. As guests in RDPs are likely to hold more individualized values to express diversified feelings and opinions towards personal relationships in public, the programme *If You Are the One* may reflect the changing identity of Chinese youth in a more authentic way. Comparing it with the first wave of RDPs broadcasted in 1997 and which lasted only for a few years, the new wave of TV dating programmes is likely to be increasingly associated with the social and cultural change in the post-reform Chinese society since the 21st century.

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

With the popularity of RDPs since 2010, love and relationships, which were once private and sensitive matters for Chinese people, have been shown in a public space and generated heated discussions in society. According to Habermas (1989), the concept 'public' refers to events and occasions that are 'open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs' and television as a main type of mass media tends to work as a possible 'public organ' for people to communicate under a public setting (Habermas 1989, p. 1-2). By offering an opportunity for guests to share private information such as relationship related experiences and mate-selecting values on camera, the TV dating programme *If You Are the One* may symbolize a possible transformation of the dating experience in urban Chinese societies. Specifically, by adopting a new form compared to the RDPs broadcasted during the last few years of the 20th century, *If You Are the One* is at times seen as a 'pioneer' among the new wave of RDPs and a bold and free expression of guests in the programme is observed. For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

> Former programmes usually in a type of same number of male and female guests, for
> example, five male guests facing five female guests. It (*If You Are the One*) is like
> choosing one from twenty-four and it is divided into several rounds… It is not like

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

some former programmes, which were relatively implicit, not very straightforward. This programme is free. It is very open. The guests can speak everything and may have a quarrel on stage. (Zhang Tao, 24, man, interview)

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

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

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

Some interviewees argued that dating under a mediated public setting may increase the possibility for guests to come across a potential partner both inside and outside the programme setting. For example, Deng Yun, a 23-year-old female website editor indicated that the programme may have 'a circulation sphere actually wider than dating websites or other ways'. By showing the guests' contact details, the programme is at times seen as providing more opportunities for its guests, who are likely to get to know a potential partner from the audiences of the programme. TV dating to some extent may facilitate a dating market without regional boundaries and become a possible platform to help enlarge the guests' social network.

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

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

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

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

Another interview participant argued that:

> I think the matter of dating and marriage shouldn't be shown in this way… I would have resistance in my heart, if I need to go on the programme… It seems that I want to find a marriage spouse and my conditions are like this. All of them can decide whether it is suitable or not. It is like that I have exposed everything in front of other people

and I feel a bit bare. For me, human nature or romantic relationship is a bit mysterious and hazy. This is so realistic and bare, in which I feel nothing at all and I refuse this kind of relationship. (Hu Jieru, 29, woman, interview)

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

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

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

At the same time, some respondents expressed their concerns about the production team's manipulation of its guests, who may deliver an unauthentic expression on a public set. As guests in a dating programme would be shown under a public setting and are likely to become a popular topic among audiences, the programme is at times seen to facilitate a possible wide discussion about issues related to their private lives and cause negative emotions. For instance, one of my interviewees, who once applied to take part in *If You Are the One*, expressed her mixed feelings towards the programme:

If they really wanted me to take part in the programme, I'm not sure to go… I think if I went on the stage, I would need to follow the way required by the programme producers to answer questions. If I needed to say something that they required, I don't

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think this is good… People often judge the guests on the stage and see which one is relatively beautiful, which one is relatively weird and which one is relatively funny. My family think that it would be very silly if I was on the stage and judged by other people. People more or less would think that I have nothing good, as I am not able to marry up to a certain age. So it would not be honourable if I was shown on TV. (Guo Zhenzhen, 28, woman, interview)

Like Zhenzhen, some participants expressed a reluctant feeling towards being a guest in a TV dating programme, which was often assumed as their least preferred way to approach a personal relationship and to some extent as showing their undesirability in a competitive dating market. These concerns may resonate with an argument that guests on RDPs are likely to be objectified as entertainment resources for the audiences, who are inclined to see their sometimes 'shameless' performances as 'both attractive and repulsive' (Hill 2008, p. 173-174).

In addition, although TV dating could be a good way for its guests to publicize themselves, it may have a relatively low success rate for them to find a partner on the programme set. For example, some respondents observed an unequal level of knowledge between guests and the potential partners among audiences, as one of my interviewees remarked that:

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

Thus, although the TV dating programme *If You Are the One* obtains a high audience rating across the country, most respondents did not see it as a feasible way to find a partner. At the same time, dating as a traditional practice being shown on a public programme may generate

all sorts of ideas and feelings towards its staging and scripting strategies among audiences, who tend to question its authenticity. As a sub-genre of reality TV, *If You Are the One* may have facilitated a critical viewing culture among its audiences. This is likely to resonate with an idea that reality TV has shifted televisual culture towards a demotic turn, in which ordinary viewers tend to be empowered to construct the 'reality' in media texts based on their own 'moral, ethical and social judgements' (Turner 2010, p. 42).

According to Hill (2005), reality formats, which fuse with elements of both factual and popular television, often claim to present unscripted stories and provide entertainments to audiences (p. 57-58). For most respondents, *If You Are the One* was seen as first of all an entertaining show rather than an effective dating platform, which may suggest that to a great extent it follows a tradition of popular fictional television adopting 'character and speech-focused entertainments' as its main programming strategy (Kilborn 2003, p. 119). As a format distancing from some sanctioned factual genres such as news and documentary, the scripting strategy of *If You Are the One* generated heated discussion, which may align with the idea that the increasing number of entertainment elements in a reality programme may reduce its authenticity to the viewers (Hill 2005, p. 57).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hence, the programme may have become a valuable dating text for the audiences to identify both the real and fake elements in dating and relationships and the audiences may tend to engage with the mediated text in a more relaxed and thoughtful way. For instance, for some respondents, the programme was a popular topic to share with others and some other interviewees argued that the programme helped them get access to all sorts of values towards love issues. Although most respondents did not recognise any changes that could have happened in their personal lives after watching the programme, they were often able to link

the programme to their understandings and experiences about love and relationships. It is likely that by exhibiting various identities towards love and intimacy, TV dating may become a platform further facilitating a tolerant attitude towards the changing identities of Chinese young people in the social reform era. This tends to be connected with an idea that the entertaining consumption of demotic TV can generate a soft power towards cultural liberalization among audiences (Sun & Zhao 2009; Turner 2010, p. 163). For example, one of my interviewees pointed out that:

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

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

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

In the previous section, the authenticity of dating practice under a public programme setting was examined, which may suggest that TV dating was a less common way for the sample group of Chinese youth to seek a partner and many respondents tended to have a distant

feeling towards the scenes behind the screen. It is likely that by identifying the similarities and differences between guests on the stage and young people under a daily life setting, the audiences may have a clearer idea about their own identity construction towards love and relationships. Hence, this section intends to assess the relationship between the audiences and the guests by exploring whether Chinese youth see the guests as 'ordinary' people and how they assume the aims for them to take part in the programme *If You Are the One*. As most respondents showed their concerns about TV dating as a feasible strategy for approaching relationships, the watching motives and the way for the Chinese youth to connect their own relationship related values and experiences to the guests in the programme are further discussed in this section.

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

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

In addition to this, most interviewees often tended to link the term 'ordinary' to the authenticity of the programme, which may suggest that ordinary guests are inclined to make a reality programme more real. For example, another interview participant stated that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some interviewees assumed that the programme intend to maintain the diversity among its guests, which may suggest that the programme is likely to represent an increasingly fragmented identity of the Chinese youth, as another interview participant remarked that:

> I think the production team chooses people from all walks of life. You would see 24 female guests with a variety of professional backgrounds, educational backgrounds, appearances and they are from China or abroad, so male guests could choose from a variety of people. (Huang Xinya, 27, woman, interview)

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

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

> My sister is 22 years old. She said that her peers said that people went on the show at such a young age was not for a partner, but for letting more people know them and becoming famous. But I think that people older than 26 or 27 aimed to find a partner in the show… Maybe it is because that the Post-90s are different from the Post-80s.

Now WeChat (an on-line social platform) is very popular and everyone is adding others. For them (the Post-90s), more attention from other people is in vogue. (Wen Jing, 31, woman, interview)

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

They (the guests) may think this is a good way to find a suitable partner from mutual selection. Among these people, some may have relatively high requirements and want to find a partner with better conditions. It's likely that they lack such resources around them. Some other people may also want to find a partner and see this as a media exposure for them. I heard that for some female guests who didn't find a partner on the stage, many other people got in touch with them. And this was a chance for them. (Li Sha, 27, woman, interview)

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

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

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

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

Another respondent added that:

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

A higher ratio of male guests than female guests wanting sincerely to find a partner in the programme is at times observed, as another respondent indicated that:

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

Although guests in *If You Are the One* often claim that they aim to find a partner sincerely, audiences tend to believe that some guests may have intentions that differ from mate-seeking when taking part in the programme. Guests in the dating programme are likely to use

performances to cover their true intentions, which to some extent resonates with an idea that reality setting tends to facilitate performing ordinariness and naturalness (Bonner 2003; Turner 2010, p. 19). Hill (2005) further argues that the 'performed selves' and 'true selves' are often fused with each other in reality formats (p. 67). Alongside this, viewers tend to identify the guests' motives via examining their personal information and social interactions on the programme set, which may align with Corner (2002)'s argument that the 'true selves' of guests are likely to be projected from 'performed selves' (p. 263-264). Audiences' concerns about a lack of authenticity of relationships on a programme set may mirror an uncertainty about the authenticity in dating and relationships in everyday lives, in which material interests may sometimes replace intimate emotional attachment become a dominant feature.

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

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

According to the above example, the programme may facilitate a mediated entertainment for guests in the programme, which may be connected to the game show tradition for early reality dating programmes (for more details, see Chapter 2.3.3).

Simultaneously, a boundary between my respondents and the guests in the programme can be observed, which shapes their understandings towards TV dating as a way to build a

relationship. For example, a different kind of entertainment for the audiences of the programme is likely to be identified, as one of my respondents remarked that:

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

From the above statements, the watching motives of the audiences often differ from the aims for guests to take part in the programme and some respondents assumed that audiences are inclined to have a 'Kanke' (spectator) mentality, as another interview participant argued that:

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

Therefore, under a 'reality' programme setting, TV dating is likely to satisfy audiences' voyeurism mentality towards private issues of 'ordinary' people (Gray 2009; Murray & Ouellette 2009, p. 4).

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

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It (the programme *If You Are the One*) provides a contrasting impression. It is likely that the traditional values towards dating and marriage are like this, the topics that generated in this programme are relatively conflicting. It is like watching a blockbuster, no matter it is a beauty of horror or violence, or some topics about human nature such as Ma Nuo, who said that 'I'd rather cry in a BMW than laugh at the back of a bicycle'. (Zhou Jun, 29, man, interview)

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

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

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

Furthermore, by comparing guests on a programme set with young people in everyday life, TV dating may activate the reflective nature of the audiences, who are likely to question, oppose or align with the values of the guests on *If You Are the One*. Specifically, some respondents assumed that the programme is likely to generate audiences' emotional resonance as well as rational thinking towards love and relationships, which may be linked with a

demonstration and learning function of TV dating as a cultural technology (Murray & Ouellette 2009, p. 9; Ouellette & Hay 2008). For example, audiences may tend to connect the guests in the programme to people around them, as one of my interview participants argued that:

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

Another respondent added that:

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

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

Sometimes I may think that this girl has this condition, but she met such a good man. So I may envisage whether I would have such an opportunity or may compare with her to see what my advantages and disadvantages are in mate-choosing process in the future. But I think for me it doesn't influence my life a lot. I see it as an entertainment

and don't take it as a standard for my partner-choosing or life guidance, which would be too childish. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

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

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

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

Some participants may re-assert a set of traditional and conservative family values toward dating and relationships, which tend to be opposite towards the often individualized expressions on the programme set.

Moreover, some interviewees believed that their personalities and values towards love issues differ from those of the guests on the programme, as one of my respondents stated that:

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

Another interview participant explained that:

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

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

4.4 An Accelerated Relationship in a Postmodern Consumerist Culture

In the former section, young people's attitudes and understandings about guests in the programme *If You Are the One* were discussed and it initially examined the audiences' assumption about the relationship between the guests and people in an everyday context. This section intends to explore further how the Chinese youth view the mate-selecting considerations under a speeded-up programme setting. Specifically, the shortened dating time is at times seen to facilitate TV dating becoming a matchmaking platform with a hidden rule of 'love at first sight'. For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

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

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

Alongside this, this dating programme is at times seen as a successful matchmaking brand in a problematic dating market, in which fulfilled love is sometimes difficult to pursue, as one of my interview participants indicated that:

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

Another respondent added that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is a speeded-up programme for female guests to show themselves and there are mutual comments between female guests and a selected male guest. After two to three rounds of PK (player killing), people would find the other half, which is watched by

nationwide audiences and commented by the hosts. I think this is speed dating. Honestly this is love at first sight. (Li Sha, 27, woman, interview)

Another interviewee assumed that the programme reflects a simple nature of love and romance, as he explained that:

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

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

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

Another interview participant assumed that guests' choice is likely to be influenced under a public programme setting and may not be a mature selection, as he remarked that:

For one male guest, excluding the time for advertisements, he only has twelve to fifteen minutes and he has to make a decision from twenty-four girls. He may also be influenced by the hosts. He may choose someone he thought very suitable at that moment, but after he was off the stage, there would be a process to get along with the

girl… I think the choice in the show to a great extent is not a gradual process. It is not a real acceptance. It could be a very initial choice. (Zheng Anchi, 24, man, interview)

Some interview participants tended to question the basic assumption of the programme as 'love at first sight' and assumed that there would be a running-in period before the establishment of a reliable relationship. For example, one of my respondents indicated that:

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

As guests may not know each other very well during the mate-choosing process, an accelerated relationship is at times seen to involve potential risks in a long run, as one of my interview participants argued that:

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

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

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

The programme design may have influence upon male guests' choice, as one of my interview participants indicated that:

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

The above expressions may suggest that appearance is often seen as a dominant mate-selection criterion for male guests, which tends to align with an idea that reality dating programmes may reinforce a beauty-centred traditional femininity (Graves & Kwan 2012). This can be linked to a traditional gendered stereotype in mate choosing, in which men often attach more importance to the physical appearance of a potential partner (Buss & Barnes 1986; Buss 1994; Townsend & Wasserman 1998).

Followed by appearance, some respondents assumed that personality may be a relatively important factor in the mate-choosing process and male guests may tend to have a

comprehensive consideration towards a potential partner. For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

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

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

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

On the contrary, some male guests are seen as idealistic when selecting a partner, as one of my respondents argued that:

They really want to find a partner of their dreams… Male participants may have a model… They wouldn't require girls that are that excellent or having that good economic background. For males, some of them have male chauvinism and they wouldn't take the family background or financial status of the female side as a priority.

While some males want to value the girl's family background, but they wouldn't say it or put it as the preferential conditions. (Chu Junqi, 30, man, interview)

Alongside this, a possible gendered difference in mate-choosing process is identified, as he further explained that:

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

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

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

In addition, living pressures may shape people's dating values, as another interview participant added that:

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

Some interview participants observed that some female guests, who tend to attach less importance towards material condition of a potential partner, are inclined to follow their emotions and fall in love at first sight. This may align with an argument that the Post-80s and Post-90s generations of the Chinese youth are likely to be influenced by Engels's writings about mutual love as the dominant consideration in dating and marital relationships (Xu 1996, p. 401). For example, one of my respondents argued that:

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

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

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

4.5 Conclusion

Rather than adopting a referential reading to see the guests on the dating programme set as real people in their daily lives (Liebes & Katz 1990, p. 100), my respondents often followed a 'critical-cognitive' viewing mode to see the televisual text as a commercial product and to respond it with 'a distanced, informed, or analytic approach' (Livingstone & Lunt 1994, p. 71). This engagement framework may further motivate a reflexive nature of the audiences, who tend to assess critically the authenticity of the values towards dating and relationships on a programme set in relation to those in an everyday life setting. The programme *If You Are the One*, which is often seen to work as a neoliberal cultural technology for the Chinese youth to identify and construct their own relationship-related values, may facilitate a new form of identity fitting into the DIY (do-it-yourself) culture introduced by Hartley (1999, p. 179).

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

considered as the basis for an authentic dating relationship, the commercial interests and operation under a public programme setting may generate viewers' concerns about a lack of authenticity towards dating relationships on screen.

A boundary between guests on the programme and its audiences is observed during the interview process and most respondents tended to separate themselves from the guests by asserting a more traditional and conservative set of values towards mate seeking. Although the speeded-up programme setting seems to enhance the efficiency in the partner-selecting process, TV dating is often considered as a relationship-building strategy with low success rates and hidden risks for relationship development in a long run. Specifically, the public programme setting is often seen to shape the guests' values and constrain a private communication and emotional interaction between potential partners. The shortened dating time may facilitate the mate-choosing process to follow an assumption of 'love at first sight', in which guests often attach more importance to some 'visible' and 'realistic' factors such as appearance, family and professional background. Moreover, the programme is often believed to reflect traditional gendered values in the mate-selecting process, in which women tend to think highly of the economic status of a potential partner, while men are inclined to attach more importance to the physical appearance of the other side. Under an accelerated programme setting, dating is sometimes assumed as an 'on-the-spot transaction' between male and female guests and the programme is likely to reinforce the fusion of a market principle and a script of an arranged marriage, in which material transactions between two families is the basis for establishing a marital bond.

Thus, by critically assessing young professionals' dating practices in the reality programme *If You Are the One*, dating and relationships are likely to become a less private and sensitive issue for Chinese young people, who often embrace a more tolerant attitude towards diversified dating values in the post-reform era. Simultaneously, the popularity of the programme may reflect a problematic dating market, in which free-choice marriage is likely to be more difficult to pursue and the principles behind traditional practices of matchmaking may have been re-asserted as a main way for people to choose a potential partner. Although the Chinese youth may long for romantic love, they are likely to be under pressure to marry at an early age, which may facilitate more people to accept the use of matchmaking traditions or

at least the principles behind such practices. However, as many respondents believed that a reliable dating relationship is often established after a relatively long period of time, TV dating, which is sometimes seen as a risky dating strategy reflecting a fast-food culture, tended to cause a strong rejection or become a reluctant choice for my respondents. As the considerations of guests on the programme are sometimes thought to reflect partner-selecting values in matchmaking arranged under an everyday life setting, the assumed material interests of the guests in the programme *If You Are the One* may further trigger uncertainty towards authentic love and relationships in real lives.

Chapter 5. Desires and Anxieties in Self-centred Relationships

5.1 Introduction

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

Encased in the global media and cultural flows, Western advanced values such as romantic love and free-choice marriage are widely accepted by Chinese youth in the social reform era (Higgins & Sun 2007; Yan 2003). It was observed that contemporary Chinese society is characterised by a high incidence of separation and divorce (Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC 2007; Tan 2010). With growing interests in diversified dating practices such as homosexual relationships, multiple relationships, triangular relationships, one-night stands and extra-marital relationships in urban China (Donald & Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang & Ho 2007a, 2007b, 2011), dating practices may have become more complicated with various forms and intentions. In the context of increasingly fragmented and diversified personal ties in modern Chinese societies, section 5.2 explores the changing feelings and understandings of Chinese young professionals towards true love or a lifelong relationship, which may reflect the changing meaning of love and intimacy as well as an on-the-move identity of the urban youth nowadays.

The One-Child Policy (OCP) in late 1970s and the nationwide rural-to-urban population movement have facilitated a nuclear family culture as well as the rise of the individual in modern Chinese societies (Fowler et al. 2010; Hesketh et al. 2005; Starr 2001). According to Pan (1993), Western values and the culture of small-families were the driving forces of a sex revolution since the 1980s, in which 'romantic love and sexual fulfilment' have become a base for Chinese youth to form personal relationships (Burton 1988, p. 65). At the same time, it seems that traditional family values are still influential towards the identity formation of the younger generation (Zhu 1997) and in some areas intimate relationships are still built upon familial responsibility rather than emotional attachment (Du 2008). The potentially conflicting desires and anxieties driven by both individualized values and Confucian morality are explored in section 5.3, which suggests that the modern Chinese family is likely to have a dual influence upon the identity of the Chinese youth towards love and relationships.

With socio-cultural transition in the post-reform China, the ideals of romantic love, which used to be defined as a form of intimacy associated with future trajectory in a lifelong marital bond (Giddens 1992), may not be able to explain fully the increasingly diversified dating practices and rising divorce rate among younger generations. By examining how the young professionals in urban China situate themselves under the dual influence of traditional socio-moral values and more individualized ideas about personal relationships, section 5.4 explores the reflexive nature of the Chinese youth towards changing emotional ties. The potentially new understandings towards love and romance are likely to mirror the transitional identity of Chinese youth, who may have more individualized desires and expectations towards personal ties and private lives (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a, 2010b).

The popularity of speed dating, flash marriage and flash divorce may further suggest a seemingly accelerated relationship in the post-reform China. This is likely to be linked with Bauman's (2003) argument that the experience of love may sometimes become a modern product 'ready for instant use, quick fixes, instantaneous satisfaction, results calling for no protracted effort, foolproof recipes, all risk insurance and money-back guarantees' (p. 7). At the same time, since the 1990s materialistic desires under the influence of the global consumerist culture are likely to become a main part of the identity of Chinese youth, who

may tend to gain a sense of social and economic status via relationship related consumption (Adrian 2003, 2006; Rofel 2007). By examining the 'consuming self' of the Chinese youth, section 5.5 explores the possible new desires and anxieties towards personal ties under the postmodern consumerist culture.

5.2 Fragmented Relationships under a Modern Life Setting

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

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

In a study examining Chinese youth's attitudes towards sexual matters and mate-choosing values, Higgins and Sun (2007) focus on 1100 university students from different parts of China, suggesting a possible connection between their attitudes towards different forms of relationship and their regional backgrounds. Higgins and Sun (2007) indicate that young people from urban areas whose parents are educated or with a professional background often hold more liberal attitudes towards love and sexual matters such as pre-marital love and same sex relations than youth from rural families. Some other studies (Donald & Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang & Ho 2007a, 2007b, 2011) suggest that a lifelong monogamous heterosexual relationship has become less predominant in urban China and dating practices have become more diversified, with various forms of intimacy such as same-sex relations, triangular relationships, multiple relationships, extramarital relationships and one-night stands.

Since the start of the economic reform era, the nationwide labour migration has become a prominent demographic and socio-economic phenomenon in China (Lin 2013; Zhan 2005) and about 200 million rural residents have become migrant workers in urban China during the past three decades (Cartier et al. 2005). As a globalized metropolis, Beijing has attracted nationwide human resources and according to Yang (2013), the Chinese young professionals in an urban host society can be generally divided into three groups including rural-urban migrants, urban-urban migrants and local youth. As most young migrants maintain a movement between the host societies and their hometowns, their attitudes towards social relationships have been greatly shaped by both the communities they grew up and the receiving societies where they work in (Jin et al. 2012; Yang 2013). In other words, young migrants, especially for those who are from a relatively traditional community, may have a dual regional identity towards love and relationship. Thus, the life stories and values of young migrants towards dating and marriage are likely to be a good avenue to examine the desires and anxieties of Chinese young professionals under the dual influence of traditional morality and modern values in a globalized era.

Hence, this section intends to examine the interview data generated from one of my respondents, Zheng Anchi a 24-year-old man working at an NGO, who had experienced life in both a relatively traditional society and a metropolis. By understanding Anchi's narratives

about a lifelong relationship, this section intends to explore a potentially changing emotion and on-the-move identity of Chinese young people towards love and intimacy under the process of modernization and globalization, which has taken place in an uneven pattern between rural and urban areas in contemporary China (Castells 2005). Anchi was born in a small town in southern China. He had gone to university in a big city nearby before he found a job in a metropolis in northern China. The customs and dialects in southern China are often very different from those in northern China. For instance, Anchi grew up in a traditional family, which was closely connected with local clans and he spoke Hokkien dialect in his hometown. After finding a job in Beijing, a city much bigger and developed than his hometown, Anchi's life had been distanced from his family and local clans and had been increasingly shaped by a metropolitan life setting, in which Anchi usually spoke Mandarin to communicate with people from different parts of China. Anchi could be seen as representative of a sub-group of young professionals, whose attitudes towards love and relationship have been influenced by both the traditional community where they grew up and modern values in the city where they study or work.

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

On one hand, people can go to various places and take part in a variety of activities, which wouldn't be possible in small places. So they will come across all sorts of people, they may encounter someone of the opposite sex who is very attractive. Either of them will create opportunities to have some further development of a relationship. On the other hand, there are many more such places for people having an affair than those in small places (laugh). There are a dozen of façades of shops near where I live now. They are all massage shops, all kinds of massage… More importantly, it is more about the idea. I think people in the cities are likely to be relatively more open-minded. This 'openness' is good and bad. The bad aspect is like having the other man/woman or other lovers.

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

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

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

The word 'small' may also suggest a society with more traditional and localized values, which are likely to play a dominant role in the formation of personal ties. For instance, Du (2008) indicates that traditional values such as familial and social responsibility are still important aspects that sustain an intimate relationship than just an emotional attachment between spouses for the Lahu people in Southwest China (p. 101). Local customs and family environment to some extent had shaped Anchi's values towards marriage, as he indicated that

he hopes to find a marriage spouse matching well with his family and local customs and have a stable marital bond like his parents. He tended to take his mom's expectation into account, which could be allied with an idea that parents' involvement is still influential in marriage-related decisions such as choosing a potential marriage spouse (Pimentel 2000; Riley 1994).

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

It is likely that another term – 'openness' – was adopted by Anchi to connote a more diversified and globalized modern society, in which people are inclined to accept or embrace different ways of life and various forms of relationships. Castells (2005) introduces a notion of the 'global city' as a spatial concept to evaluate the transnational urbanization process, in which disproportionately metropolitan regions tend to form a multi-centred structure across the world (Garreau 1991; Hall 2001; Nel.Lo 2001). For instance, Beijing, as a 'global city' in which most of the interview participants are based in, is greatly associated with the global economy by modern transportation and telecommunication networks as well as competitive

human resources in the global space of flows (Castells 2005). Urban society is likely to embrace a more diversified culture with a multi-composition of different ethnic groups (Castells 2005; Waldinger 2001). Under the process of modernization and globalization, there seems to be a higher degree of social openness in urban Chinese societies than that in rural areas (Castells 2005; Farrer 2002; Higgins & Sun 2007). The regional difference observed in Anchi's narratives tends to oppose Bauman's (2003) argument that there are a growing number of romantic opportunities in modern Western societies as a whole, which implies an uneven influence of the process of globalization and modernization in contemporary Chinese societies.

In addition, the term 'openness' may be linked to an argument that people nowadays are likely to hold a more tolerant attitude towards all sorts of relationships since the 21st century. As research a decade ago suggested, love and sexual matters such as premarital love, divorce, extra-marital love and homosexuality, which used to be seen as social taboos under Confucian philosophy (Higgins et al. 2002; Pimentel 2000; Yan 2003), have become more acceptable by Chinese youth since China's reform and opening-up (Farrer 2002; Farrer & Sun 2003). From Anchi's narratives, the traditional values towards love issues seem to be further eroded. It is possible that the notion 'openness' may represent a multi-cultural society, in which people may have different understandings of what a fulfilled relationship means and may have more choices regarding their own relationships. For instance, in a research focusing on the role of cultural hierarchies in the dating practices and mate-choosing process of young people in Beijing, Wang and Nehring (2014) argue that with more individualized values towards personal relationship, dating practices in Beijing have become increasingly diversified with various forms and intentions.

Facing a metropolitan society with more ideas about personal ties, Anchi had a sense of uncertainty and anxiety towards the value system which he had believed since he was little. Anchi suggested that he is not sure about whether he should, whether he is willing to or whether he is able to stick to conventional values, which often connect a romantic relationship with a lifelong promise. For instance, a boundary between dating and marriage was likely to be identified by Anchi. He argued that the TV programme *If You Are the One* reflects mainstream values towards choosing a dating partner in everyday lives, which in many cases

are different from the considerations for selecting a marriage spouse. For him, an emotional tie between partners was a main consideration to start a dating relationship, which was not necessarily linked with a marital bond in the future. Anchi indicated that although his family is stable, his girlfriend 'doesn't have to be stable', which may suggest a possible tendency of change and acceptance towards different forms of intimacy whilst in a dating relationship.

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

However, facing increasingly fragmented and diversified personal ties in Beijing, Anchi expressed a sense of uncertainty and anxiety towards a lifelong marital bond. Some other interviewees mentioned that although marital tie is often seen as a very important form of relationship, with more tolerant values towards divorce, the promise of a lifelong marriage may become unstable to achieve under a fluid and uncertain future setting as well (Tan 2010). As Bauman (2003) indicates, the on-the-move human ties in modern Western societies may make settling down become more and more difficult and further inspire a sense of insecurity, which 'prompts to tighten the bonds yet keep them loose' (p. viii). The changing patterns of dating and relationships in Beijing may be seen as an achievement of individual freedom and desire towards diversified forms of personal ties (Rofel 2007; Wang & Nehring 2014). While

with increasing romantic possibilities and more liberal ideas, a fulfilled lifelong relationship as an ideal form of intimacy may have become more difficult to accomplish in modern Chinese societies.

5.3 Self-centred Relationships under a Nuclear Family Culture

The Chinese family used to be seen as a collective institution directed by Confucian philosophy in a nationwide social control system[2] (Engel 1984; Starr 2001). Under the influence of the One-Child policy (OCP) in 1979, a demographic pattern of predominantly one-child urban families and two-children rural families was observed since 1995 (Hesketh et al. 2005; Wang 2003). The formation of a small family culture has transformed the modern Chinese family into a private haven for individual members, who tend to pursue 'intimacy, independence, choice and individual happiness' (Yan 2009, p. xxiv). Chinese youth, who grew up in this nuclear family culture, are likely to have fewer collective values than people from the former generations and acquired a distinctive generational identity, which emphasizes personal happiness and individual realization (Ci 1994; Sun & Wang 2010; Wang 2002). In addition, the modern family is at times seen a less influential unit towards the socialization of Chinese young people (Fowler et al. 2010), who are inclined to draw more upon modern institutions such as mass media and higher education in a globalizing era.

Simultaneously, influenced by Western advanced values such as romantic love and gender equality, there is a rising interest in pursuing happiness in personal relationships. A sexual revolution, in which people are likely to develop more liberal attitudes towards love and sexual matters, has also been observed in modern Chinese societies since the 1980s (Bullough & Ruan 1994; Burton 1988; Higgins & Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Long & Liu 1992; Pan 1993, 2006b; Pan et al. 2004; Vincent 1991). Born at the beginning of the economic reform era, the Chinese youth from the OCP families are inclined to hold more individualized values towards love and relationships. The nuclear family culture may further facilitate more self-centred values towards personal ties, in which Chinese youth are likely to prioritize their own

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

feelings and expectations (Chen 1985; Falbo et al. 1989; Hesketh et al. 2005). Alongside this, with increasingly personal desires towards autonomous mate-choosing and fulfilled love and relationship since the 21st century (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a; Wang & Nehring 2014), a series of studies suggest that dating practices in urban China have become more diversified with different forms and intentions (Donald & Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang & Ho 2007a, 2007b, 2011). Consequently, self-centred relationships have been increasingly observed among young professionals in urban Chinese societies (Wang & Nehring 2014).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Like Lili and Xiaobei, some interviewees argued that dating relationships or sometimes even marital bonds could be untied more freely by young people from the OCP generation. Marriage and divorce, which used to be very important matters in people's lives, in some cases may become 'rash' decisions for some Chinese youth from the Post-80s and the Post-90s generations. With the popularity of speed-dating and on-line dating (Wang 2013; Zhang 2005), flash marriage (闪婚, Shan Hun), which refers to a situation in which two people get married after knowing each other for a relatively short-period of time, has been increasingly observed in modern Chinese societies (Li 2012). For instance, one of my respondents argued that:

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

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

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

Alongside this, Zhang (2005) suggests that self-expectation to settle down and family pressure to marry are possible reasons for young professionals to choose a flash marriage. During the interview process, although each participant may have had a different understanding of personal happiness, many interviewees were inclined to link it with a stable and harmonious relationship or family life, which is often seen as at least one important aspect of their happiness. On the other hand, Yan (2010a) indicates that an 'enterprising self' has been increasingly identified among the Chinese young professionals, who are inclined to pursue individual achievement in career development (p. 505), so it is likely that young people may have less time towards relationships and family lives. As a possible way to pursue

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

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

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

for the sake of marriage. But I guess I could be like this in the end. But I may feel not suitable after getting married and then divorce. After that I find another one, who suits my character and can be with me for a lifelong relationship'.

Chenxue's expressions tended to suggest a patriarchal dominance, in which women are sometimes seen as the love objects of men and this 'love' may only happen up to a certain age. This can be connected with a traditional dating pattern of men preferring younger, smaller and less well educated partners (Buss 1989; Higgins & Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Pierce 1996). The term 'leftover women' reflects gendered inequality towards a specific group of females, who approach or have past their 30s. Compared with males from the same age group, 'leftover women' are often seen as undesirable by men and face more pressure to marry from their original families and social customs (Fincher 2014; Magistad 2013; To 2015; Wang & Nehring 2014). In other words, the modern Chinese family, which facilitates the self-centred values under a nuclear family culture (Fowler et al. 2010), has dual influence upon the Chinese youth, as it is still influential towards the marital status of some respondents from the younger generation and is likely to reinforce traditionally gendered stereotypes in an arranged-marriage.

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

(Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC 2007). The further simplification of divorce procedures in the Marriage Law in 2003 may be a possible reason for the flash divorce (Miller & Fang 2012; Palmer 2007).

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

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

Although people often have more tolerant attitudes towards love and sexual matters such as divorce (Farrer 2002; Farrer & Sun 2003), divorce is at times seen as a barrier for people,

especially the female side, in starting a new relationship. For example, Wang Rui, a 30-year-old man born in Beijing, had worked in financial industry for 6 years. Rui was in a relationship and he said that he would be cautious towards a marital bond, as the first marriage is very important to young people. Rui argued that generally Chinese men do not want to have a divorced woman as their partner, as a divorced woman could be 'worthless' and is like something 'expired, not fresh anymore' to him. However, Rui suggested that divorce sometimes could be a different experience for a man, as there is a saying that a man divorced once could be 'a treasure', who would know how to sustain a marital tie and spoil their wives. This became apparent in the conversation with Wu Wenze, a 26-year-old man from Beijing, who had three-year working experience in financial industry. Wenze argued that divorce generally becomes a barrier for women to remarry, as they would have fewer choices than other women without an experience of divorce. Wenze suggested that single mothers with a child could live a 'miserable' life and it would be more difficult for them to approach a new relationship than those divorced women without children. The gendered difference towards the issue of divorce is likely to reinforce the traditional gender roles in a patriarchal family, in which women were assigned an inferior position to their husbands and were assessed by their chastity and fertility (Breiner 1992; Higgins et al. 2002).

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

5.4 Changing Emotional Ties under an On-the-move Identity

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

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

> I think young people nowadays pay more attention to their feelings in their heart. For example, if they think that a relationship is not suitable, they wouldn't force themselves to stick to it. I think it is not a question about whether they are fickle in love or not, more self-consciousness is slowly awakening… I think a lifelong relationship is very hard to promise… Just let it be. In this era, it is hard to expect things that happened one day, how could people foresee things in ten or twenty years later? It is so unrealistic.
>
> Chao: How about the promise people made when they get married?
>
> Kewei: I think marriage is like in this stage they are willing to make more commitment for their common things… People want a more stable relationship

between both sides, which is a sign of a more intimate relationship… In fact there are a variety of ways of living… I think monogamy is under social conditions. Once upon a time, monogamy didn't exist in matriarchal society. Monogamy didn't exist in feudal society either, while polygyny existed in this patriarchal society. Real monogamy only exists in the recent a hundred years, right? So it is not human nature.

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

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

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

for their identity by re-evaluating their needs and desires in personal relationships. This idea can be linked to the concept of 'pure relationship' introduced by Giddens (1992), which suggests a reflexive nature of modern individuals, whose identity formation tends to be shaped by a reliable equal personal tie.

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

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

Alongside this, a possibly transformative nature of true love or emotional attachment is likely to be observed. Specifically, true love can arise out of nothing and can become deeper, lighter or disappear, which may suggest that a serious personal tie may sometimes not relate to a

lifelong relationship and people may have various expectations towards true love at different stages of their life. In other words, the identity of Chinese youth towards love issues is likely to be diversified and unfinished under a fluid modern life setting. With more liberal attitudes towards love and sexual matters and individualized desires towards personal relationships (Higgins & Sun 2007; Rofel 2007; Wang & Nehring 2014), some respondents in my sample group tended to follow their heart without suppressing their real emotions in relationships, which may suggest the emergence of self-centred dating ethics. This further facilitates the tendency of changing emotional ties, which to some extent could be a cause for the increasingly fragmented social bonds in contemporary Chinese society.

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

Some interviewees expressed an idea that Chinese youth are inclined to place more importance on their feelings in dating relationships, while may tend to think more rationally about a marital bond. With more individualized values towards private life (Hansen & Svarverud 2010; Rofel 2007; Yan 2009, 2010a, 2010b), Chinese young people may tend to pursue individual happiness by identifying various needs and expectations towards different forms of intimacy, which are likely to happen during various stages of their lives. This idea is likely to be connected with an argument of Giddens (1992), who suggests that personal relationships tend to activate the self-reflexivity of modern subjects and work as a vital approach for 'self-exploration and moral construction' in modern societies (p. 144). Specifically, some participants believed that campus love sometimes is very different from relationships after graduation. For example, one of my respondents, Chen Xiaobei, a 23-year-

old woman stated that she used to think that she would have a 'dramatic' relationship with someone she particular likes whilst at university and marry someone else, who likes her more than she does and matches her well, to have an 'insipid' marital tie after graduation. Alongside this, campus love is at times seen as having less connection with marriage, as another participant, Su Minzhen, a 18-year-old female university student indicated that a relationship is a way to obtain a 'good feeling' of having someone to rely upon.

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

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

practices (Donald & Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang & Ho 2007a, 2007b, 2011), which are likely to facilitate further more individualized values towards personal ties and loosen the close connection between marriage and a lifelong relationship.

For Kewei, although a serious emotional attachment is very important, she preferred not to have too much hope for a lifelong relationship. An expectation for a long-term relationship could have become something 'unrealistic' and less desirable under a liquid life setting nowadays. Kewei's narratives may further suggest that romantic love, which used to play a key role in people's identity formation and sustaining a long-term martial bond (Giddens 1992), may have shifted from a traditional definition of 'till death us do part' and now Chinese youth may tend to reconstruct their identity via increasingly on-the-move personal ties. With more equal status between female and male young professionals towards economic and social life (Magistad 2013), Chinese women, who traditionally sought to live a secure life via a long-term marital bond (Li 2012), are likely to embrace more choices in private lives nowadays. A lifelong marriage may have become less important for some young women in urban China to pursue personal happiness. Traditional femininity, which used to be closely associated with an inferior gendered role and see 'the virtue of a woman lies in the lack of talent' (cited in Chia et al. 1997, p. 138), may have been further impacted.

5.5 Diversified Desires and Anxieties under a Postmodern Consumerist Culture

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

the experience of love to go through a process of being used, disposed and replaced by other 'products' (Bauman 2003).

With the popularity of speed dating, flash marriage and flash divorce (Li 2012; Wang 2013; Zhang 2005), love and relationships may sometimes become a 'commodity' for the Chinese youth as well, who attempt to spend less time and less effort to approach or sustain a personal tie. For instance, one of my respondents, a 26-year-old man working in financial industry, Wu Wenze, argued that Chinese men 'may establish a relationship in a week or two weeks' time. Few cases may only take two to three days'. With the development of internet technology, an instant connection via on-line social platforms may have become a common way to operate a personal tie and this is likely to be connected with Bauman's (2003) idea about 'networks', in which 'moments of "being in touch" are interspersed with periods of free roaming' (p. xii). At the same time, a generational difference in human bonds is likely to be identified, which may resonate with Bauman's (2003) idea that a long-term relationship may have been gradually replaced by connections in a network. For example, another respondent, who had worked in financial industry for half a year pointed out that:

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

Alongside this, as a dominant ideology since the 1990s, consumerist culture has facilitated a process of commercialized individualization among Chinese young people, who tend to attach importance to materialistic terms of happiness and self-realization (Rosen 2004; Yan 2009, p. xxxv; Yang 2011). For instance, Rofel (2007) observes that universal consumption may have become a post-socialist technology of the Chinese women in urban China and the material desire is likely to become a main part of their identity as a globalized subject. As a translocal and often transnational technology, the popular bridal photography consumption may have become a way for women in both rural and urban China to position themselves in an imagined

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global society since the late 1990s (Adrian 2003, 2006; Lozada 2006). Adrian (2003, 2006) further indicates that bridal photography is likely to transform marriage from a ritual event into a competitive consumption in the post-reform China, which may suggest a possibility that in some cases material desire could become a decisive factor in relationships.

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

As most participants are young professionals working in Beijing, many of them expressed their feelings towards living pressures in this metropolis with expensive commodities, especially high housing costs. To establish a more stable family and career base in the future, many interviewees believed that material wealth is an important part of an intimate relationship and for some interviewees, the economic condition of a potential partner is an important consideration. For some young women a house and a car are necessary requirements for a potential partner, as one of my respondents, who had worked as a patent attorney for 5 years argued that:

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

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From the above statements, the capability of purchasing a house before marriage may have become a way to identify a higher socio-economic status and a privilege in the mate-choosing process. In other words, it may sometimes become a barrier for young males with lower economic condition to pursue a partner.

Simultaneously, 'naked weddings[3]' (裸婚, Luo Hun) have become a trend among young people in contemporary China (CNTV 2013). According to Shi (2012), a 'naked wedding', means that newlyweds obtain a marriage certificate without purchasing their own house, may have challenged marriage customs in traditional Chinese society. By using in-depth interviews to explore the reasons for 'naked wedding' in contemporary China, Shi (2012) argues that a 'naked wedding' is often a reluctant choice for Chinese youth, who tend to form a marital bond to better sustain a trustful and intimate relationship and achieve a higher quality of their common life. The marketization process may have further entrenched inequality between the urban living Chinese youth and the young rural-urban migrants who are likely to have a lower socioeconomic status than those urban-urban or local youth (Lin 2013; Yang 2013). Shi (2012) further argues that people with lower social status are more likely to have a 'naked wedding'.

Although most interviewees expressed their admiration for people who have a 'naked wedding', some of them showed their concerns about it. For instance, born in Qinghe, Hebei, Le Jiahui, a 26-year-old man, had worked in IT industry in Beijing for four years. Jiahui had been in a relationship for about half a year and planned to buy a house to get married with his partner, who also worked in IT industry. Like many young professionals in Beijing, Jiahui felt great pressure towards the housing issue, which was seen as a dominant factor determining the direction of his relationship and future development, as he explained that 'I still want to develop my career in Beijing, so I need to have a foothold, which is a motivation and a base for my development. If not, no matter how far I go, I may turn into going back to my hometown in the end'. Although the material base for marriage in a metropolis like Beijing could be very difficult to achieve, a 'naked wedding' was not a feasible option for Jiahui, who

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

indicated that 'If people don't tighten their belts to buy a house when getting married, they may never have one afterwards'. Jiahui suggested that people having a 'naked wedding' are likely to face a tough future life, saying that 'Because they will have children and their parents will become older, the risks are too high and there will be a lot of places to use money, they may never have enough savings'.

The conventional values regarding a marital base and the life stress in modern society may further cause a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety in personal relationships. Facing changing emotional ties in an unpredictable future, it is likely that people may think in a more 'realistic' way and tend to pursue a sense of future life security via material conditions. For instance, a gap between romantic love and marriage is observed in some interviews. Some participants attached less importance to emotional attachment, the core of romantic love, when they described their considerations towards marriage. Some others thought highly of romantic love, but also attached a set of strict requirements such as economic concerns to it, especially when marriage was taken into account.

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

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

I love my girlfriend, then there is impossible that I love another woman, this can be called love. But I love my girlfriend, it is love, it doesn't mean that I can't have sexual relations with another woman. But I can have no love with her. I can have sex and make a thorough break with her. We can have nothing in between, or after having sex with her, I can just contact her when I want to or ignore her. Maybe one day my girlfriend is on a business trip, I may contact her. But when my girlfriend is with me every day, I may not contact her, or never contact her ever. (Wu Wenze, 26, man, interview)

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

Wenze explained that dating is based on people's needs 'at a spiritual level', while sex is to fulfil their physical needs. When comparing romantic love and confluent love, Wenze

believed that confluent love as a realistic desire is more necessary and easy to obtain, while romantic relationship is more like an ideal form of personal tie, which is more difficult to achieve in modern societies, as he indicated that:

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

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

5.6 Conclusion

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

Moreover, as a new avenue for people to identify true love and fulfil their desires, being on-the-move may embody a sense of freedom and may further suggest a possible detachment between love and marriage, sex and love. A lifelong marriage, as a traditional unitary form of intimacy, is still seen as a common way for young people in China to structure their intimate life and pursue individual happiness. However, with diversified desires towards love and relationship, fulfilled love may have become more difficult to define and a fluid modern life setting is likely to trigger new anxieties and insecurities, which reflect an incomplete identity of the Chinese youth. As this chapter focussed on desires and anxieties in increasingly fragmented and diversified relationships, the next chapter will examine generational and gendered differences between present day Chinese youth and members of their parents' generation to explore further how the changing socio-cultural environment in the post-reform era shape young Chinese people's relationship approaching strategies and mate-choosing values.

Chapter 6. Gendered and Generational Differences towards Relationships

6.1 Introduction

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

First, the next section explores the changing identities in relation to dating and relationships in the reform era by comparing people's relationship-related values in two different historical periods. As most interviewees from the parents' generation were born in the 1950s and 1960s and established their dating relationship during the first decade of the reform era, their relationship building approaches and mate-choosing considerations tended to reflect the value orientations of the young people in the early reform era. Hence, section 6.2 explores the parent's generation's understandings and attitudes towards both dating values of their own generation in the initial reform period and the young generation in the post-reform era. The possible generational difference towards love and romance is likely to reflect the social and cultural change of contemporary Chinese society in the past two decades.

Then section 6.3 intends to place the changing identities towards love and intimacy within a dialogue between conventional and modern values. As members of the parents' generation

often grew up in an extended family with several generations living together, they were expected to be greatly influenced by collective and hierarchical family values directed by Confucian culture, which was the dominant ideology in traditional Chinese societies (Bond & Hwang 1986; Fairbank & Reischauer 1973; Stover 1974). Under the influence of the privatization process and the nuclear family culture in the reform era, Chinese young people nowadays tend to assert more individualized values in personal relationships (Hansen & Svarverud 2010; Yan 2003, 2009). As a generation which went through both a traditional period and the reform era, members of the parents' generation are likely to have a better understanding and awareness of the changes in dating and relationships since the economic reform in 1978. Thus, section 6.3 intends to examine the parents' generation's understanding of the changing value orientations towards various issues such as premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce and extra-marital love in the post-Mao China.

Finally, section 6.4 intends to compare the exercise of power between the parents' and the young generation in the past and nowadays to explore the changing values and attitudes towards love and relationships inside a family unit. As members of the parents' generation often experienced the changing role from being an offspring in an extended family to being a parent in a small-sized family in the past three decades, they may have become an ideal subject for examining the transition in intergenerational power dynamics by looking at the changing role of modern parents in the post-Mao era. Hence, section 6.4 intends to compare parents' role in young people's mate-choosing process in the early and post reform periods by exploring parents' influence upon a potential relationship and choosing a potential partner as well as the negotiation process between the two generations.

6.2 Changing Mate-choosing Values in the Post-Reform Era

This section intends to explore how the dramatic economic and social change in the reform and opening up era (1978 to present) has influenced the identity of the Chinese youth towards love and relationships by examining the possible gendered and generational differences in mate-selecting values between young people nowadays and their parents' generation. As most participants from the parents' generation were born in the 1950s and 1960s, their identity towards love and relationships were likely to be shaped by both the script of arranged marriage in traditional Chinese societies and the values promoted since the establishment of

the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. At the same time, as most interviewees established their dating relationship between the late 1970s and 1980s, their identity towards dating and relationship tended to reflect the value orientations in the early stage of the economic reform era. In this section, the participants from the parents' generation become an avenue to compare young people's identity in two historical periods. Firstly, it traces back the values involved in partner-choosing at the very beginning of the economic reform era by assessing the changing social environment and dating values during the first three decades of the PRC. Then it explores the attitudes and understandings of the parents' generation towards mate-selecting values of the Chinese youth in the post-reform era.

With the social revolution in the early decades of the PRC, arranged marriage, which used to be a dominant way to establish a marital bond in traditional Chinese societies, has been abolished and free-choice marriage, which builds upon mutual love between two spouses, has been advocated by the Chinese government (Osburg 2013, p. 163). From then on, the nature of marriage may have been gradually transformed from a traditional script characterised by a material transaction between two families into a modern contract at an individual level. Alongside this, Diamant (2000) observes that people's mate-choosing values during the first two decades of the PRC were shaped by the Chinese Communist Party's demarcation of social classes as marriage between partners with similar class backgrounds was greatly promoted. In other words, the marriage formation may have become part of the state's political ideology and, to some extent, it may have repeated the principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' (门当户对) behind traditional arranged marriage, in which being introduced to a marriage partner from a family with similar social rank was a norm.

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

(1966-76), in which being married with a partner with good class status tended to provide political security for the family (Osburg 2013, p. 164).

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

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

Alongside this, as free-choice marriage has been advocated since the early period of the PRC, which meant setting oneself free from the traditional arranged marriage and it resulted in a transitional period for people to adapt to the new values in marriage formation. For example, for most interviewees born in the 1950s and 1960s, being introduced to a potential partner by a third party was often seen as the main way to establish a personal relationship and they often had only one dating relationship before marrying. At the same time, some interview

participants identified a matchmaking script in the late 1970s and 1980s as being different from a more old-fashioned arranged marriage in the traditional Chinese societies, as one of my respondents pointed out that:

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

As a generation grew up in a relatively closed socio-cultural environment, the popularity of matchmaking was likely to suggest that young people in the 1980s did not have a strong intention to take the initiative to approach a relationship and the traditional values tended to constrain the development of emotional attachment between people from opposite sexes. For instance, another interview participant indicated that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Like Xiuyun, many participants from the parents' generation had a similar understanding of 'love', which was seen as an intimate emotional attachment between partners with a lifelong

commitment and a willingness to suffer difficulties in a shared future life. In other words, young people in the early reform era tended to attach a lot of importance to familial responsibility and morality in a marital relationship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A gendered difference is likely to be identified in young people's mate-selecting process, in which women would think highly of a male partner's economic condition, while men tend to

attach more importance to a female partner's physical appearance. For example, another interview participant argued that:

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

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

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

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

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

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in a script of matchmaking than a relationship naturally formed between two parties, as another respondent indicated that:

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

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

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

The money-centred mate-choosing criterion is sometimes connected to a 'realistic' character of the post-reform era, as another interview participant added that:

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

The above expressions to some extent resonate with young generation's understanding towards partner-choosing values represented in the TV dating programme *If You Are the One*, which may suggest that the programme tends to facilitate a market principle within a traditional matchmaking script (for more details, see Chapter 4.4).

6.3 Changing Values towards Traditional Morality in Diversified Relationships

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

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

Under the influence of Confucian culture, love and sexual relations were greatly linked with reproduction within marriage, while other forms of relationships such as premarital and extramarital love were suppressed (Higgins et al. 2002). As discussed in the previous section,

although free-choice marriage has been promoted since the early period of the PRC, the Confucian philosophy still had great influence upon people's mate-choosing values. In other words, the Confucian culture, which was inherited and fused with the socialist morality in the Maoist era, may have great impact upon the personal relationships of young people in the early reform era. Specifically, as a generation establishing their marital bond in the late 1970s and 1980s, most participants from the parents' generation believed that sexual behaviour within marriage was the only legitimate form of intimacy and premarital sex was often seen as being greatly sanctioned by the socialist values. For instance, one of my respondents indicated that:

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

The above example is likely to align with an idea that love and sexual expression and behavior, which were seen as harmful towards the socialist collective values (Evans 1995, p. 358), were greatly repressed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

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

> We even did not know how women give birth to a baby in our era. How could people dare to cohabitate? They would be drowned by others' spittle… Women were all virgins when they got married… Women themselves did not dare to. Once they were not (a virgin)… Nobody would want them. At that time, people thought very highly of

this… If a man did not want a woman, she had to die, as she could not bear losing face like that. (Zhang Xiuyun, 52, woman, interview)

Xiuyun's expressions suggested that women in the Maoist era often had a wary feeling towards premarital sex, which tended to cause the blame of the public morality and the reduction of the chances for women to marry. Thus, women in the early decades of the PRC were likely to position themselves as love objects evaluated by their male partner based on chastity and virtue and often took a passive role in dating relationships. This may indicate a continuity in attitudes and values regarding women's role in marriage between the pre-PRC era and the early PRC period.

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

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

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Ning's statement may resonate with a sexual revolution observed since the 1980s, in which people tended to have more individualized values towards love and relationships, which were often seen to be important in people's self-fulfillment and personal happiness (Pan 1993). Alongside this, with the accelerated development of the economy and nation-wide labour mobility, cohabitation was at times seen as a common social phenomenon among the urban Chinese youth nowadays. Some participants from the younger generation tended to see cohabitation as an effective way to reduce housing costs and an important trial period before marriage, as one of my respondents argued that:

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

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

Since the reform and opening up, people have learned from other countries. They do not learn anything good, but learn something bad (laugh). In this case (cohabitation), women all suffer losses. Nobody wants them… This (trial marriage) is not right. They (men) just have fun with their partner and when they had enough fun, they would not want their partner. I think they are sick. Men take advantage of a trial marriage. Some

people may have many trials. They think it is fun to be with unmarried women, while it is not fun with a marriage spouse. They are all bastards. They are the worst people. (Zhao Guizhen, 75, woman, interview)

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

In our era, very few people cohabitated. Cohabitation without getting married or being pregnant without getting married was not a good lifestyle and was seen as immoral… For a woman, no matter it was her first time to have sexual relations or not, if they cohabitated but in the end the male side did not marry her, abortion would be very harmful to her body. (Liu Lan, 53, woman, interview)

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

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

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

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

The popularity of cohabitation, which suggests that women attach less importance towards the traditional moral values in relation to premarital sex, may have facilitated a rising gender power and a more equal relationship between partners. The independent economic status of young female professionals in the post-reform era is at times seen as a reason for a more tolerant attitude towards premarital sex. This may resonate with an idea that a labour market based individualization in Western societies has gradually released females from the traditional gender role since the 1960s (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). For example, one of my respondents stated that:

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

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A more independent economic status of young female professionals may be a reason for the changing values towards divorce in the post-reform China, as another interview participant indicated that:

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

Guizhen's statement engaged with an idea that a more fragmented relationship and a rising divorce rate have been observed in contemporary Chinese society (for more details, see Chapter 5.2). Unlike women from previous generations, who often followed Confucian ethics towards conjugal ties, women nowadays have more individualized values towards being together or apart.

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

> Indeed I got married not for myself, but for looking after my family. My siblings were too young and they needed someone to look after them and to help them. Also, my parents needed someone to help them work at home as well. (Liu Lan, 53, woman, interview)

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

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

Aijia had not started a relationship under her families' pressure and remained single when we had the interview.

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

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

Lan's argument resonated with the idea that people often prioritized a 'social self' and behaved under the anticipation of social norms in traditional Chinese societies (Yang 1981, p. 161). Divorce, which was seen as a failure in one's personal relationship, was likely to

become a barrier for people to fulfil their role in their family lives as well as interpersonal networks before the reform and opening-up era. Comparing people from Europe and America, Chinese people were often seen to have a wary feeling towards divorce, as another interviewee indicated that:

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

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

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

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

People have limited coping capability. They may break up when their family comes across something. They would not be able to face the difficulty together. People in the

past were likely to conquer the hardship by working hard together. Now people just break up if they cannot live together. (Zhu Menghua, 47, woman, interview)

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

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

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

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

The simplification of the procedures of divorce since the introduction of the Marriage Law in 1980 and 2003 (Li 2012; Miller & Fang 2012; Palmer 2007) may have further facilitated divorce to become a personal choice less influenced by traditional social values, as another interview participant indicated that:

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

A changing attitude towards divorce is observed, as one of my interviewees stated that:

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

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

A changing attitude of Chinese youth towards extra-marital love was observed by the participants from the parents' generation. As a form of intimacy greatly disapproved by the socialist morality before the reform era, the emergence of extra-marital love in the post-Mao China is often seen to reflect a more liberal attitude of young people, which resonates with the argument discussed in chapter five that young people nowadays are likely to have diversified desires towards dating and relationships. As members of the previous generations often thought highly of a marital relationship, the phrase of 'extra-marital love' was sometimes seen as a sensible issue to mention or discuss for respondents from the parents' generation.

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

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

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

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

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

Now people would pursue a temporary joy and happiness rather than a permanent one. People can divorce after getting married. People can also have a trial marriage and cohabitation. There are all kinds of forms. Even a teenage girl wanted to find a husband who could be her grandpa. (Liu Lan, 53, woman, interview)

Lan's statement to some extent resonated with an accelerated personal relationship in the post-Mao China discussed in chapter five and a lifelong marital bond may sometimes become a less desirable or more difficult choice for the Chinese youth. For instance, one of my participants argued that the fast-developing society and the internet culture tend to facilitate a changing identity for the younger generation regarding a lifelong marital bond, as she expressed that:

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

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

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

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

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

Qingquan and Feng's statements aligned with an idea that a sexual revolution has been observed since the 1980s, in which people tended to have more individualized values towards dating and relationships (Bullough & Ruan 1994; Burton 1988; Higgins & Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Long & Liu 1992; Pan 1993, 2006b; Pan et al. 2004; Vincent 1991). Specifically, a more open discussion about love and sexual matters has been observed in both mass media such as newspapers, radio and television as well as in everyday lives since the economic reform era (Cheng et al. 2000; Huang 1998), and the nation-wide popular reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One* is often seen as an example, in which young people are much bolder to express their opinions about love and intimacy in public. Furthermore, the economic reform and the open-door policy, which facilitated China to join the cultural flow in a globalizing era, are often seen as the main cause for the changing identity of the younger generations. Like Qingquan, many interview participants believed that Chinese youth have been greatly influenced by the Western values towards dating and relationships in a globalizing era. This is likely to be linked to Ong and Zhang's (2008) argument that the free-economy and globalization have shaped the social and cultural environment in contemporary Chinese society, in which people tend to have more democratic values towards private lives.

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

6.4 Intergenerational Power Dynamics towards Dating and Relationships

As discussed in the section 6.2 and 6.3, members of the parents' generation, who often follow both the Confucian and socialist ideology in their personal relationships, are seen as holding more traditional collective family values than the younger generation, who, on the contrary, embrace more individualized values towards mate-choosing and various forms of relationships. This section intends to examine the changing values towards dating and relationships in the contemporary Chinese society by comparing the influence of family culture upon people's partner-selecting process in the pre-reform China and the post-reform era.

In traditional Chinese society, parents were often played a vital role in their offspring's spouse-choosing process and a marriage arranged by parents was the accepted social norm. Although arranged marriages have been abolished since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (Osburg 2013, p. 163), being introduced to a potential partner by parents has always been a way for people to build a marital bond. As discussed in section 6.2, for most participants born in the 1950s and 1960s, matchmaking was often seen as a common way to find a partner in the early reform era and parents often played an important role in approving their offspring's relationship. For example, one of my participants argued that:

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

Xiuyun's statement may suggest that although free-choice marriage has been advocated since the 1950s, the Confucian family values of the 'Five Cardinal Relations' (Wu Lun), in which parent-son relationship is above conjugal ties (Bond & Hwang 1986, p. 215), were still influential on members of an extended family. Marriage was often seen as a way to carry on the family line and develop intergenerational ties within a family unit. This aligns with an idea that the family was seen as a collective institution, in which the needs and desires of

individual family member tended to be marginalized in the pre-reform and early reform era (Baker 1979; Yan 2009). The traditional family values had been transmitted to the young people in the early reform era via their parents' generation, who were often holding an authoritative position in an inter-generational power flow.

Many interviewees from the parents' generation believed that young people in the 1970s and 1980s often selected a partner based on their parents' advice, which may resonate with an idea that parents' involvement was still influential in partner-choosing and marriage-related decisions until the end of 1980s (Pasternak 1986; Riley 1994; Whyte 1990; Xu & Whyte 1990). Matchmaking in the early reform period was sometimes repeating a conventional script of arranged marriages, as one of my respondents stated that:

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

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

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

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

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

Lan's statement was likely to link to an idea discussed in chapter 5.3 that the introduction of the open-door policy and one-child policy in the late 1970s to great extent has shaped a child-centred nuclear family culture, in which young people often hold more individualized values towards personal happiness and self-achievement with increasing support from the parents. A more democratic inter-generational family practice can be observed, in which parents are often willing to adopt a more equal position instead of a dominant role in traditional hierarchical families (Fong 2006; Fowler et al. 2010; Xu et al. 2007).

A decline in parents' control upon their children's partner-selecting process is likely to be observed, as one of my interviewees indicated that:

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

Like Xiuyun, some interview participants were greatly influenced by the traditional family values and felt frustrated towards young people, who as discussed in chapter 5.3 are more

likely to be influenced by modern institutions such as mass media and education than their family.

In addition, some interview respondents observed an inter-generational negotiation during the Chinese youth's mate-selection process, in which the young generation may tend to get access to more power than their parents' generation, as one of my respondents remarked that:

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

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

> To follow someone obediently is actually blind loyalty, which I never agree with. But in that era and under that background, it was likely that some things had to be done in this way and people had no choice. Now people are all well-educated. If they are not satisfied with something, both sides can communicate and even have a fierce debate to reach an agreement, which I think is a joyful way for both sides. (Wen Feng, 50, woman, interview)

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

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

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

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

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

They just want me to find a respectable family and a reliable person. This is similar to my own requirement. When my mom talked about other people, she may want me to listen to this. She said it is still need to be 'Men Dang Hu Dui'. It means that I do not

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aim to marry into a high-status family or marry someone whose family is much worse than mine. Of course my mom wants me to find a wealthy family with better economic conditions, so I could have less burden. (Li Sha, 27, woman, interview)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As nowadays women all want to live on their own and do not want to live with parents-in-law. Actually parents-in-law do not want to live with their son and

daughter-in-law either. If they live together, conflicts would be unavoidable. If they live together, they would always need to be respectful towards each other as guests. This is fine if they live for a day or two days, they cannot bear with it in a long run. (Deng Qingquan, 55, man, interview)

Qingquan's statement may resonate with an idea that a more individualized lifestyle has been gradually accepted among older generations in the post-reform era (Thøgersen & Ni 2010), which tends to engender a more complicated interconnection between the parents and the young generation.

6.5 Conclusion

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

Although young people in the early reform era tended to have relatively more choice in choosing a partner, they often had only one dating relationship before entering into a marital bond. A lifelong relationship was often seen as a social norm and sex within a marital bond was often seen as the only legitimate form of intimacy in the 1970s and 1980s. Dating practices were shaped by the traditional matchmaking script and were often seen as preparing the stage for a marital tie, which may resonate with an idea that a dating culture was not identified during the early stage of the reform and opening up era (Xu & Whyte 1990). With the enduring power of patriarchy, the Confucian familial philosophy was still very influential on women' relationship-related values and a gendered inequality in dating and relationships

was often seen in the early reform period (Chia et al. 1997; Xie & Lin 1997; Zhang 1999, p. 64; Zhu 1994, p. 183; Zhu 1997). For instance, as chastity used to be a vital criterion for evaluating a woman, premarital sex was often seen as reducing the marriageability of a woman and condemned by the socialist public morality. Divorce and extramarital love, which were seen to go against the collective family values and lead to a changing role in family life, were often condemned as a lack of responsibility in the initial reform era.

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

With the influence of modern institutions such as modern education and mass media in a globalizing era, some participants from the parents' generation believed that the mate-choosing values presented in mass media, especially in the nation-wide popular dating programme *If You Are the One* reflect the dating values of youth in everyday lives, which suggests that reality television as a cultural technology may have shaped the identity of Chinese youth towards love and intimacy (Murray & Ouellette 2009; Ouellette & Hay 2008). Simultaneously, the changing attitude towards love and relationships in the post-reform era

may suggest a change in gender relations in the post-Mao China. Unlike women in traditional Chinese society, young female professionals nowadays are often empowered by a more independent economic status, which often leads to a more equal position in personal relationships.

A generational interconnection is also identified, in which the Confucian and socialist values tend to be distributed via the parents' generation and to some extent are still influential upon young people nowadays. Specifically, the traditional matchmaking principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' is often seen as being facilitated within a free market economy and was reasserted by some participants from the young generation. Some members from the parents' generation, especially those with female offspring, were inclined to guide their children to choose a potential partner with similar or better family condition and economic status, which to some extent repeats the material transaction in an arranged marriage. In addition, some values behind 'Men Dang Hu Dui' such as regional and cultural proximity tend to be linked with a relatively close mutual support between the parents and the young generation, which suggests that marriage formation is often not only a personal choice, but also an important way to sustain an intergenerational communication in the contemporary China. Although young people nowadays embrace more freedom in dating and relationships, marriage formation is often seen as a unity of two families, which indicates that the traditional collective family values have fused with an individualized youth culture in the post-reform China.

Chapter 7. Relationship Ethics

7.1 Introduction

A happy relationship is often seen as an important part of personal happiness for young people nowadays. According to Ahmed (2010), happiness is greatly associated with ethics (p. 205). Specifically, a happy life is often built upon a collective moral good, which defines personal happiness as under the control of a virtuous self (Ahmed 2010, p. 205, 208; Smith 2000, p. 410). According to Fortune (1995), ethics is greatly associated with 'a choice between right and wrong', which further guides people's behaviours, while morality is often linked with a shared understanding among a group of people (p. 19). Compared to the previous generations, young professionals in China nowadays are less influenced by the traditional Confucian morality and instead a more individualized ethics has started to be observed in various forms of relationships (Hansen & Svarverud 2010; Wang 2006; Yan 2003, 2009, 2010a, 2010b). For instance, according to Wang and Nehring (2014), dating practices in Beijing have become more complex than traditional lifelong heterosexual relationships used to be and various forms of relationships including multiple relationships, triangular relationships, extra-marital relationships, one-night stands and homosexual relationships have been increasingly observed (Donald & Zheng 2008; Li 2002; Wang & Ho 2007a, 2007b, 2011). The changing social norms pertaining to personal relationships tend to reflect a changing morality in relation to personal happiness. As Ahmed (2010) argues, rather than pursuing a certain mode of happy life, the understanding of happiness should embrace a creative subjectivity and a possibility of living diversified lives (p. 218-219). Hence, the changing ethics towards dating and relationships becomes a vital site to examine the changing identity construction of Chinese youth towards love and intimacy in the post-reform era.

Influenced by Ahmed's (2010) interpretation of happiness, this chapter intends to explore the values and strategies of young Chinese professionals towards the fulfilment of expectations and desires in various dating practices and relationships, which reflects changing relationship ethics of Chinese young people in the post-reform era. By drawing upon the concept of 'the genealogy of morals' (Nietzsche 1956), this chapter intends to examine relationship ethics of young people in urban China by focusing on their understandings of traditional morality and more recent ethical values in personal relationships. Specifically, section two seeks to explore young people's understandings of traditional Confucian and socialist morality and how these

values help approach and sustain a lifelong relationship, which has been a dominant social norm since the pre-reform era. Then, section three looks at the phenomena of premarital and extramarital relationships, which are likely to reflect new desires and expectations outside a marital tie and further challenge the traditional moral values towards a monogamous lifelong marriage. Finally, section four intends to examine the young professionals' understandings of diversified forms of relationships such as multiple relationships and short-term relationships, which are likely to reflect the emergence of a new relationship ethics greatly linked with the more recent non-marital dating practices in urban China.

7.2 Understanding Traditional Morality towards a Lifelong Marriage

As discussed in the previous chapters, a society more and more characterised by separation and divorce can be observed in the post-reform era. However, for most of my interview participants from the young generation, a lifelong marital tie was often seen as an important constituent and/or path towards personal happiness, which aligns with an argument that marriage often leads to a happy life by providing 'life satisfaction, sex, children and financial benefits' (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 229; Waite & Gallagher 2001). Thus, this section intends to examine how young Chinese professionals sustain a lifelong relationship by focusing on their understandings of traditional morality in relation to operating a happy marriage such as giving care, responsibility, long-term commitment, faithfulness, trust and honesty, which originated from Confucian and socialist collective family values.

7.2.1 Responsibility and loyalty in relationships

Marriage is often connected with a collective form of happiness – the happy family, as one of my respondents argued that:

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

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

Some other respondents believed that a sense of responsibility towards familial life is the foundation of a lifelong harmonious marriage, which may resonate with a traditional understanding of marital love as 'favour and gratitude between husband and wife' (Pan 2006a, p. 31; Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 19). According to Pan (2006a), the meaning of romantic love is built on the matchmaking principles of 'talented men and beautiful women' since Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and the Western values of pure love since the early 20th century (McMahon 1995; Pan 2006a, p. 31). As greatly associated with a deep emotional attachment between partners, romantic love is likely to differ from the traditional understanding of love, which was often seen as subordinate to a marital tie in traditional Chinese society (Pan 2006a, p. 31). The meaning of romantic love may partly overlap with the concept of passionate love, which was often seen by some of my interview participants as an intense and transitory emotional attachment. For example, one of my respondents indicated that:

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

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

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

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

> Love would disappear after a few years, which is different from kinship ties. As blood is thicker than water, kinship ties last forever. But relationships are in a transition, from friendship to love to kinship. Love surely still exists between two people, but it is more about responsibility to family. That's why people need to make a good choice at the very beginning and need to see whether this person is responsible or not. (Song Zixi, 24, woman, interview)

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

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

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

For my interview participants, love and romance were at times seen as an emotion not naturally connected with a lifelong relationship. Zihan and Chenxue's statements may further resonate with Mendus's (2000) argument that a lifelong commitment is often shaped by a legalized and moralized marriage contract.

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

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

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

suggesting that sustaining a relationship is more based on management skills than moral obligations.

Another interview participant demonstrated a new understanding of responsibility towards a marital life, as she indicated that:

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

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

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

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

Although some respondents demonstrated a traditional understanding of loyalty as a precondition towards love and relationships, a crisis in relation to traditional morality in the context of a fluid modern life is observed, which has facilitated increasing romantic and confluent possibilities and impacted upon the stability of the personal relationships, as another interview participant indicated that:

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

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

Loyalty towards marriage, which used to be a sacred moral law obeyed by the members from the parents' generation, is sometimes seen as a less rigorous principle for the Chinese youth in the post-Mao China, as one of my interview participants argued that:

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

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

7.2.2 Development of relationship-sustaining strategies

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

Some fresh feeling is necessary. Don't they say that there would be 'the seven-year itch' or after being with someone for more than 20 years, people would feel their partners both familiar and unfamiliar with no more passion? So after a long time, people perhaps can make some surprises. For example, look for common hobbies or things haven't been done for various reasons, go somewhere to have fun, deliberately

plan this kind of opportunities to be together, which can let two people feel good and add a bit of seasoning to an insipid life. (Shen Nan, 27, woman, interview)

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

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

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

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

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

Compared to previous generations, a changing ethics of care tends to be observed in personal relationships of young people in the post-reform China. According to Higgins et al. (2002), although the introduction of the 1950 Marriage Law provided a legal foundation for the equal rights between two sexes, Chinese women often took an inferior role towards their husband in family lives and were assessed by their housekeeping and childrearing ability. As practical care was expected to be provided by women to other family members, the female side often needed to make great efforts in sustaining a marital tie and the family network (Rosen 1992). This resonates with a feminist understanding of the marriage contract, which is seen to facilitate pre-scripted gender inequality with the 'consent to the patriarchally ascribed status of superior husband and subordinate wife' (Pateman 1984, p. 78). This is also likely to align with a gendered difference identified in moral theories, in which men are seen as a rational and independent being following the ethics of rights and justice, while women are often seen as an emotional and relational being shaped by the morality of care and nurturance (Gilligan 1982, p. 159-60; Kittay & Meyers 1987, p. 10).

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

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

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

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

7.3 Changing Morality towards Premarital and Extramarital Relationships

In the previous section, ethics in relation to a lifelong marital relationship was discussed. Under a fluid modern life setting, my respondents tended to draw upon traditional moral values as well as some relationship-saving strategies to maintain a lifelong marriage.

Alongside this, a crisis of Confucian and socialist morality is likely to be examined, which is sometimes seen as not being able to explain the increasingly diversified dating and relationship practices. Hence, this section seeks to explore the changing relationship ethics by looking at young people's attitudes towards premarital and extramarital relationships, which may further suggest a changing understanding of personal happiness in the post-reform era.

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

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

With the emergence of various forms of dating and relationships in the post-reform China, a more tolerant relationship ethics was likely to be accepted by the young people in my sample group. As discussed in the previous chapters, premarital sex and cohabitation are gaining a wider acceptability among Chinese youth and extramarital relationships are observed in the post-reform era (Farrer 2002; Farrer & Sun 2003; Pan 1993, Zhang et al. 2004), which are likely to reflect changing sexual norms in dating and relationships. As Ben-Ze'ev (2004) argues, a sexual revolution is identified, in which premarital and non-marital sexual practices tend to challenge the traditional social norm of sexual monopoly within a marital tie (p. 242). Marriage, which used to be closely associated with personal happiness, may have become a less unique and dominant form of relationship.

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7.3.1 Changing sexual norms in premarital relationships

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> One of my male colleagues has been in relationships for about 10 years and changed three partners... It is said that he loved each of them with his heart and soul from the beginning to the end including his current girlfriend. Now their relationship is very stable, but he does not have any plan for marriage. Neither does his girlfriend. They may be really a new type of people… His girlfriend may have at least three months on business trips (every year). She is also a particularly independent and capable woman… He may feel that he does not need to take marriage as a premise to rely on a person. They may think that they are in a dating relationship, so there is someone to take care of them, which seems to be no different from marriage. I mean from the benefit angle... If they got married, there would be another responsibility (laugh), which would also add a constraint to their relationship. I think he may just want to gain the benefit, but does not want to take those responsibilities… (Shen Nan, 27, woman, interview)

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

Furthermore, the popularity of cohabitation among young Chinese professionals in big cities may suggest a changing understanding of a happy relationship. According to Mendus (2000), marriage vows imply an unconditional commitment towards a lifelong companionship (p. 79). If marriage is a legal contract ensuring a meaningful future life, cohabitation is likely to be an arrangement with a conditional promise, which embraces more freedom and greater change within a personal tie. When cohabitation works as a trial or pre-stage towards a marital tie, it is seen to have a transforming nature and its purpose was to prepare for a future marital life. When it is not seen as leading to marriage, it tends to offer both stability and flexibility within a personal relationship, which is likely to become an alternative choice to marriage.

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

7.3.2 A changing morality towards extramarital relationships

Compared to a lifelong marital bond, cohabitation is often seen as containing emotional intensity as well as greater freedom for an emotional change within a short period of time (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 233), which to some extent prioritizes a temporary form of personal happiness. This understanding of cohabitation is likely to resonate with Layard's (2005) definition of happiness as a sense of joyful feeling (p. 6). As Schoch (2006) indicates in *The Secrets of Happiness*, this understanding of happiness, which is dislocated from a traditionally meaningful life, is 'a much weaker, much thinner, happiness' aiming for 'mere enjoyment of pleasure' (p. 1). If a lifelong marriage represents Confucian and socialist morality, this sense of happiness is often believed as existing within the increasingly diversified forms of

relationships such as extramarital affairs, which do not have a traditional moral root. For instance, one of my respondents indicated that:

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

As Yue's expression demonstrated, some married Chinese men intend to fulfil their desires towards personal relationships by conducting clandestine extramarital affairs with single women, which resonates with an argument that people are likely to fulfil romantic desires from both marital love and some relationships outside of the arena of monogamous marriage (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 230; Lawson 1988, p. 21-7). As discussed in the previous section, marriage is often seen as a morally sanctioned and legalized form of relationship, which tends to bind emotional attachment with moral obligations towards a marital life (Mendus 2000). An extramarital relationship is likely to become an avenue to pursue pure romance and/or serve as a solution for a possible emotional change in people's marital lives. For instance, by interviewing people involved in extramarital relationships in Shanghai, Farrer and Sun (2003) argue that romantic feelings (ganqing) are often seen as positive and legitimate accounts for the motives of extramarital love, which is at times seen as a supplementary emotional attachment towards the existing marital relationships (p. 14-15). This implies a different understanding of traditional responsible and faithful marital relationships, which may further suggest the emergence of a more negotiable personal ethics towards extramarital relationships.

The above example also implies that people in extramarital relationships tend to prioritize their marital tie in public and show more respect and romance to their spouses, which is likely to align with an argument that their lover is often seen as a 'third party' (Di San Zhe) towards an existing dyadic marital bond (Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 17). Some Chinese youth intend to attach more importance to performing moral duties in their marital life, while at the same time invent some new values towards extramarital love, which is often seen as a less committed relationship without risking the stability of a marital bond. This resonates with an idea that

people in extramarital relationships are likely to negotiate the purpose of marriage as establishing and sustaining a familial life and thus they tend to show their responsibility at an institutional level rather than be responsible to a monogamous relationship or to their spouse (Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 9). This new moral discourse, which implies an occasional disconnection between responsibility and marital fidelity, may further connote the rise of the individual within traditional marital relationships.

Alongside this, some female respondents envisaged a possible emotional change in their (future) marital life and they often drew upon traditional moral values to restrict their feelings and sustain a marital relationship, as one of my interview participants stated that:

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

Caijie's statement may suggest that people often need to make their choice between a marital tie and an extramarital relationship, which was likely to resonate with an idea that extramarital relationships could cause conflicts towards responsibilities and commitments within marital lives (Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 14). As discussed in section 7.2, the traditional moral concept of responsibility is sometimes seen as an external moral resource, which tends to generate a self-help ethics for young professionals to make relationship-related decisions. For example, some interview participants believed that to sustain a marital bond, people need to develop strategies to control their emotions and avoid changing an emotional tie into a physically intimate relationship, as one of my respondents argued that:

> People should control their behaviours... The spirit of human being is fickle. For example, a woman suddenly sees a man and feels excited. She feels that he is very handsome and charming, which is the type she admires. This is ok, not a problem. But

people cannot go too far and think about this all the time. They should have some degree (of self-control). (Hu Jieru, 29, woman, interview)

The above statements may suggest that facing increasing romantic opportunities in a modern society, young people tend to develop self-managing skills to restrict their feelings and avoid the formation of a much deeper emotional attachment outside marriage. Specifically, some young people intend to shape their romantic feelings outside marriage at a mental level, which may facilitate individual freedom within a form of 'Platonic love', while at the same time help to sustain existing monogamous marital relationships. Hence, relationship management is likely to become a new mechanism of a successful relationship, which may further imply that maintaining a lifelong marital relationship is more important than short-term gratification to some Chinese youth. This may align with an argument that a moral evaluation often directs the hierarchies of happiness, as Ahmed (2010) indicates that 'Some forms of happiness are read as worth more than other forms of happiness, because they require more time, thought, and labor' (p. 12). The expressions of the above female interview participants were likely to resonate with an idea that the traditional morality towards female chastity shaped the relationship-related values and behaviours of the young Chinese professionals in the post-Mao era (Pan et al. 2004, p. 419-420).

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

I would not restrict myself, as I feel fickle in love in my heart… I could know that I have a boyfriend or I have a husband, but sometimes when I have good feelings towards someone, it cannot be restricted by my thoughts... Even if I refused the invitation of this person today, after going back home and facing my boyfriend, I would show that I was not that passionate towards him. It is impossible that I have

good feelings towards someone and (after) I think this is not allowed, then I just do not have good feelings anymore. (Tang Lili, 23, woman, interview)

Lili's statement suggested a dislocation from a self-managing ethics discussed in the previous examples, which are likely to imply that some young professionals intend to prioritize their passionate feelings in personal relationships. This could be linked to an empirical study focusing on female sexuality based on self-reported data collected in national surveys in 2000 and 2006, which suggests that Chinese women in long-term relationships had the highest prevalence of multiple sexual partners (Huang et al. 2011, p. 102). This finding negates some cross-cultural comparative studies, which indicate that passion and romance were often seen as less important elements when establishing personal ties in Chinese society than in some more individualistic Western societies (Fitzpatrick et al. 2001; Gao 2001; Hatfield & Rapson 2002; Triandis et al. 1993). Alongside this, the above example may resonate with a possible new phenomenon of 'love American style' introduced by Lange et al. (2015). This recent research suggests that Chinese on-line dating users are likely to be influenced by a globalised romantic culture and attach more importance to passionate emotional attachment when approaching personal relationships (Hatfield & Rapson 2002, 2005; Hatfield et al. 2012).

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

There is a game called Western Journey on NetEase (a Chinese website). In that game, men and women could call the other side husband or wife and they also raise children together. They do not know each other, but they play very well. I don't mean the game is good, but the virtual space in it is very good… It is like living a life in it, which is a

spiritual sustenance. Also, some people don't have happy families and when they see others, whose husbands treat them very well or are very capable, some women would have this thought (to have an extramarital relationship). Similarly, some men may think that other people's wives are very thoughtful. (Xia Kai, 29, man, interview)

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

 People nowadays seem to have a mentality to try different things and want to have more things. If a man only has one woman, he would always think that whether there is someone better, so he always wants to have a try… Many people have this mentality. They would be with someone first and have a new partner when someone (more) suitable shows up… It is not that good, but it should not be seen as a problem. It is fine for people to ride a donkey while looking for a horse, but they should be responsible for the 'donkey' whilst they are riding it. They should stop where it should stop. It is understandable if they see someone secretly outside, but they cannot go too far. (Guo Zhenzhen, 28, woman, interview)

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

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

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

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

The above expression resonates with the concept 'confluent love' introduced by Giddens (1992), which is seen as aiming to fulfil a 'reciprocal sexual pleasure' within a more casual

form of personal tie (p. 62). This tends to be linked with a notion of gray women introduced by He (2005), which refers to mistresses and 'second wives' (Er Nai) of men belonging to the economic and political elite. A gendered economy is likely to be observed, in which sexual and emotional exchanges between men with good economic and socio-political status and women's youth and beauty is often seen as main justification for the motives of extramarital relationships (Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 16; Xiao 2011). This is likely to resonate with a utilitarian reasoning and market principle towards personal relationships (Osburg 2013, p. 165-169; Osburg 2014; Zelizer 2005).

A gendered difference in the motives and consequences for pursuing extramarital relationships is likely to be identified, as another interview participant indicated that:

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

Rui's statement may suggest a gendered difference in understanding the meaning of extramarital relationships. This resonates with a 'sexual double standard' assumed by some Chinese men, who believe that married women are often more serious towards extramarital relationships than married men (Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 26). As Farrer and Sun (2003) indicate, Chinese men often intend to interpret their extramarital relationships with the rhetorical code of 'play', which refers to a casually structured relationship based on sexual exchange and is a way to express a strong masculine characteristic.

For both Chinese men and women, the meaning of extramarital relationship tends to be greatly associated with a legal marriage, which is often seen as a vital aspect in achieving personal happiness. For example, Chinese men are more likely to conduct an extramarital love secretly, while at the same time prioritize their marital tie as the more meaningful relationship.

An extramarital relationship is likely to become a subordinate or complementary dating practice compared to married life. While Chinese women may either avoid an extramarital relationship by attaching more importance to their marital life or intend to legalize an extramarital love by transforming it into a marital relationship. Thus, having extramarital love could be a process to re-approach a personal happiness based on traditional values.

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

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

The above statement may suggest a subverted understanding of happiness hierarchies, in which a lifelong marital tie is seen as a more morally valuable happiness than other forms of relationships, which are pursuing a transitory happy feeling (Ahmed 2010, p. 12). The above case tends to resonate with an idea that extramarital relationships are often seen to harm the 'romantic exclusivity', which is the 'most profound commitment' within a marital bond (Ben-Ze'ev 2004, p. 232).

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

7.4 Emergence of New Ethics in Non-marital Dating Practices

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

> Some people in my generation surely think highly of it (a lifelong relationship). But as time passed by, people surely attach not that much importance to it and it would be fine if they once had a relationship. If it was true love, it would be fine even if it just lasted for one day. If it was fake love, it was not meaningful even if it lasted for the whole life. (Hao Dongsheng, 27, man, interview)

As discussed in chapter five, a possible separation of dating and marriage is examined among the Chinese youth, who often embrace more freedom in dating relationships. From the discussions in section 7.2 and 7.3, a more self-centred relationship ethics is likely to be observed. Young people intend to prioritize their desires and expectations and draw upon external resources including traditional Confucian and socialist moral values as well as market principles and consumerist mentality to generate legitimised interpretations of personal ties such as cohabitation and extramarital relationships. Thus, a possible new ethical framework tends to emerge when interpreting the various forms of dating practices, which may further reflect a changing understanding of personal happiness of Chinese youth. In opposition to traditional understandings of romantic love, these dating practices are likely to reflect the social and cultural change in contemporary Chinese society. Hence, this section intends to examine the attitudes of Chinese youth towards the diversified needs and desires in different forms of dating relationships such as multiple relationships, open relationships and short-term relationships.

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

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

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

As discussed in section 7.3.1, cohabitation has been gaining increasing popularity among young people in urban China and is often seen as a premarital practice aiming to test the compatibility between partners and fulfil sexual desires. According to a study exploring changing female sexuality based on two national probability surveys in 2000 and 2006, Huang et al. (2011) illustrate that in 2006 about a quarter of Chinese women aged from 18 to 29 years old reported more than one lifetime sexual partners and women in cohabiting relationships were about three times more likely to report two or more lifetime sexual partners than single women (p. 99). Multiple relationships are likely to become part of premarital practice for some young professionals, who intend to embrace both stability in a long-term cohabitation and flexibility in some relatively short-term relationships. It is also likely that young cohabitors would conduct serial cohabitations with two or more sexual partners before getting married.

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

social phenomenon in everyday lives. For example, users of matchmaking websites are sometimes seen as having multiple relationships, as another interview respondent remarked that:

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

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

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

> For people changing girlfriends frequently, if he does not behave like a hoodlum or seek stimulus, he is just on his way to pursue the other half and explore the results he

wants most. If this one is not ok, for a minimum cost, (he) just turns to another one quickly. It is no use to go through a running-in period. (Le Jiahui, 26, man, interview)

The above expression may suggest a consumerist mentality in the mate-choosing processes. Specifically, some young people intend to look for potential partners whilst in a one-to-one dating relationship and objectify multiple partners as refundable products. This may further be connected to an argument that people in multiple relationships are likely to have shallower feelings towards their partners, who are at times seen as easily replaceable sexual objects (Klesse 2007, p. 137). Consequently, non-marital dating practices may resonate with a subverted understanding of personal happiness, which is often seen as linking with greater time and effort (Ahmed 2010, p. 12).

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

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

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

> Some men could like his girlfriend very much. But he may be seduced by his ex-girlfriend or some other woman, he cannot help (conducting extramarital sex)… But he does not deny that he indeed cannot separate from his girlfriend and he does not want to break up with her. Those things are just 'interludes'. He only wants to marry her… A man says that 'I'm going to marry you. Is this still not enough to express my feelings for you?' But women do not think so. (Chen Xiaobei, 23, woman, interview)

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

Likewise, another interview participant added that:

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

This statement is likely to connect to a transition of relationship ethics in the post-reform era, which has shifted from a sacred moral law supported by the state's administrative system and work units in the Maoist era (Bakken 2000; Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 2; Zha & Geng 1992). A changing moral and social environment has facilitated an increasingly casual structure of personal relationships. The tendency of young male professionals for casual sexual relationships could be linked to a traditional gendered stereotype, in which male sexuality in terms of multiple sexual partners to some extent repeats a polygamous pattern in feudal societies (Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 16; Osburg 2014; Xiao 2011). Some young women expressed their uncertainty and inability in managing male sexual desires towards multiple sexual relationships, which tend to shape women's subjectivity in actualising their own expectations in relationships. The female inferiority in heterosexual personal ties is likely to reinforce an unequal gender role in traditional patriarchal families, in which men held a dominant position, while women were often objectified by their male counterparts. This may further resonate with Simone de Beauvoir's observation of the interdependence of an autonomous man and a dependent woman in personal relationships (cited in Benjamin 1988, p.7).

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

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

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

Multiple relationships are at times understood as more difficult to sustain and are likely to cause negative feelings, as another interview participant expressed that:

Some people live a hard life, as a one-to-one relationship would be surely different from a one-to-many relationship. They feel scared every day, which would be very tiring… One of my cousins is like this. He has several girlfriends in Beijing, Hangzhou and some other places. He often makes mistakes when he chats on QQ (an on-line chatting network) or makes phone calls. When he chats to the wrong person, the other side would question him and he would need to tell all kinds of lies. (Xia Kai, 29, man, interview)

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

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

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

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

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

This statement suggests that the short-term dating practices among Chinese young people aiming for sexual pleasure are likely to indicate a separation of romantic love from sexual relations (Pan 2006a, p. 34). The increasing pressure of living a life in modern Chinese society is at times seen as a justification for transgressing traditional morality, which points towards an opposition between tradition and modernity. The stressful modern life can suspend

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the alignment with traditional values. Alongside this, with the emergence of multiple sexual relationships, female sexual desire is increasingly observed (Huang et al. 2011; Pei 2011). Compared to a traditional female sexuality greatly shaped by monogamous marriage, multiple relationships for young women are likely to reflect the emergence of an alternative sexuality requiring more equalised gender practices (Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 24; Pei & Ho 2006).

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

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

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

7.5 Conclusion

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

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

Some new desires and expectations are observed in cohabitation and extramarital relationships, which may imply some new ethical values towards love and romance. For example, cohabitation is at times seen as an alternative choice towards a marital tie, which tends to reflect young people's desires for both stability and greater freedom in personal relationships. Extramarital relationships are seen as reflecting the emotional and/or sexual desires of Chinese youth towards multiple partners. Cohabitation and extramarital relationships are at times understood as non-marital relationships, which are seen as dislocating from the traditional ethical values towards relationships and being greatly shaped by market principles and the modern commodity culture (Farrer & Sun 2003; Osburg 2013, p. 165-169; Osburg 2014; Zelizer 2005). The emergence of premarital and extramarital relationships is likely to reflect a new sexuality differing from the traditional Confucian reprosexuality aiming for reproduction (Warner 1991, p. 9) to one that would prioritize sexual gratification in personal relationships (for more details, see Chapter 7.3.1).

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

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

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

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

Overall, having grown up in a fluid modern life setting, young Chinese people in my sample group were at times seen to be dislocated from traditional values (Hansen & Svarverud 2010; Sun & Wang 2010; Wang 2006; Yan 2003, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), which may imply new forms of affect that can be understood in the context of new emotional engagements and

investments. For example, the various forms of dating and relationships discussed in this chapter reflect the diversified desires of young people, who are likely to have at the same time desires towards a lifelong monogamous relationship as well as more casual form of dating practices. By linking the meaning of diversified relationships with traditional morality, Chinese young people often intend to understand their needs and expectations towards relationships within a moral framework, which is often seen as greatly associated with personal happiness in contemporary Chinese society. That is to say, the traditional Confucian and socialist values still shape the moral foundation of a happy relationship for the Chinese youth. While some new desires in various forms of personal ties may reflect the emergence of new ethical considerations, which are likely to connote an incomplete identity of Chinese youth and a possible forthcoming of a new ethical framework embracing diversified and negotiable principles.

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

Chapter 8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

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

This chapter reviews the main themes discussed in the previous discussion chapters, including self-centred desires and anxieties towards personal relationships, changing gendered practices and sexual norms as well as an emerging private and individualized ethics in various forms of dating and relationships in the post-reform era. It provides a synthesis of the research findings and further discusses its original theoretical and methodological contributions to knowledge in the field. By examining first the main features of young people's practices and attitudes towards love and relationships, and then further exploring the influential factors pertaining to the changing identity in the post-reform Beijing, the emergence of a post-socialist romantic subjectivity is assessed. Specifically, young Chinese professionals often intend to become self-managing subjects and draw upon cultural resources generated from modern institutions such as Chinse government, mass media and Chinese family to construct a more individualized identity towards love, intimacy and relationships in the post-reform and globalizing era. The thesis feeds into a broader project of exploring the power dynamics between the socio-cultural transformations in contemporary China and builds on existing literatures of identity studies and individualization theories. In addition, the research approach and the findings help identify gaps and areas that lack exploration. Recommendations and implications for further research are also discussed.

8.2 Summary of Findings

8.2.1 Significance of the research

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

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

Individualized Relationships and a Philosophy of Happiness

According to Bauman (2003), a self-centred relationship often connotes conflictual desires for choices and freedom as well as security and stability within personal bonds. With the emergence of various forms of relationships such as divorce, cohabitation, extramarital relationships, multiple relationships and one-night stands in urban China (Farrer 2002; Huang et al. 2011; Li 2002; Tan 2010; Zha & Geng 1992), young Chinese people are likely to have various expectations towards dating and relationships. My research further suggests a diversified understanding towards romantic love, which is seen as less associated with traditional lifelong commitment and increasingly shaped by changing emotional attachments and confluent sexual desires. As love and romance were often greatly associated with a relatively fixed identity in relation to a shared future life trajectory (Giddens 1992), the new emotional and sexual desires in my research appear to facilitate an increasingly fragmented and diversified personal relationship, which tends to reflect an on-the-move identity of Chinese young professionals (for more details, see Chapter 5.2 and 5.4). In addition, the changing nature of love and intimacy observed in my empirical findings suggests an

increasingly diversified understanding of personal happiness, which has shifted from a traditional happiness hierarchy of seeing a lifelong heterosexual marriage as having a higher moral value than other forms of relationships aiming for temporary gratification (Ahmed 2010, p. 12). An increasingly individualized happiness philosophy is observed, which is likely to challenge a traditional singular understanding of a 'happy' relationship and encourage the development of a creative subjectivity in embracing diversified lifestyles (Ahmed 2010, p. 218-219).

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

The diversified values and practices towards love and romance may further imply a changing nature of sexuality from a traditional procreation purpose into one aiming for sexual pleasure and fulfilment, which may suggest that a good sexual life has become an increasingly important part for young people in China. The sample group of Chinese youth often expressed more understandable and less judgmental attitudes towards various forms of relationships such as divorce, premarital sex, extramarital relationships and multiple relationships, which reflects a more tolerant social and cultural environment. This could be linked to a sexual revolution observed since the reform and opening up era (Bullough & Ruan 1994; Higgins & Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Long & Liu 1992; Pan 1993; Vincent 1991). Compared to relationship-related values during the first three decades of the PRC, young people in the reform era often embrace a different kind of relationship, which is often seen as gaining increased privacy and personal freedom. With growing interests in diversified dating and relationship practices (Farrer 2002; Farrer & Sun 2003; Pan 1993; Zhang et al. 2004), changing social and sexual norms are observed, in which the dominance of sexual relations within heterosexual marriage is challenged. For instance, premarital cohabitation and multiple dating practices were seen as more acceptable partner-choosing strategies and as a trial period for a satisfied future marital life by some of my respondents from the young generation. The emergence of extramarital and non-marital dating practices such as multiple relationships, open relationships and one-night stands are likely to connote new intentions as well as sexual and/or emotional desires towards personal relationships (Rofel 2007; Yan 2010a; Wang & Nehring 2014).

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

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

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

Generational Differences towards Relationship Practices and Ethics

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

More specifically, although free-choice marriage, which is based on mutual love and consent between spouses, has been advocated since the 1950s (Evans 1995, p. 359; Osburg 2013, p. 163), being introduced to a potential partner was often seen as a main way to initiate a conjugal tie for members of the parents' generation. This suggests that young people in the early-reform era often took a relatively passive role in establishing their relationships. Alongside this, my respondents from the parents' generation were often greatly influenced by traditional matchmaking values of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' (marriage formed by spouses from

families with similar social rank) and socialist class ideology promoted by the government (Diamant 2000) and usually had only one dating relationship serving as a pre-stage for marriage. Conjugal ties formed in the 1970s and 1980s were seen as an important way to accomplish and reinforce a pre-scripted role in an extended family, in which young couples take filial responsibility for their aged parents and raise children to carry on the family line. This may reflect a vital aspect of the identity of the parents' generation, who lived as 'a relational being' in order to sustain a harmonious and hierarchical family life (Bond & Hwang 1986, p. 215). Personal happiness was often understood as being greatly associated with 'unquestioning loyalty' towards kinship ties (Hofstede 1983, p. 83), which may further imply a highly interdependent social structure in the early reform period.

As a key factor to fulfil a lifelong commitment, personal quality, especially moral quality, was often seen as an important consideration in the spouse-choosing process in the early reform era. This could be linked with a traditional understanding of marital love, which was seen as an intimate emotional attachment fused with moral obligations towards family life (Farrer & Sun 2003, p. 19; Mendus 2000, p. 6; Pan 2006a, p. 31). Sexual relations were monopolised within lifelong marriage, which was the social norm during the Maoist and early reform era. On the contrary, premarital sex, divorce and extramarital relationships, which were likely to impact on the fulfilment of familial roles and responsibilities within marriage, were greatly disapproved by public morality. For instance, premarital sex was often seen as an abnormal or immoral behaviour, which used to cause the reduction of women's marriageability and divorce and extramarital relationships were greatly sanctioned by public opinions, which were likely to harm the involved parties' reputation and future lives. According to my participants from the parents' generation, personal relationships in the pre-reform and early reform era were often greatly shaped by collective institutions such as the extended family. This may imply a repetition of a state population control mechanism in traditional patriarchal Chinese society, in which families worked as self-governing units following Confucian hierarchical relationships between the old and the young, father and son as well as husband and wife (Engel 1984; Reid 1999, p. 109; Starr 2001).

The changing nature of personal relationships from a family matter to an individual choice was increasingly observed in the past two decades, which may further connote a transforming

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

Changing Gendered Practices towards Dating and Relationships

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

1995), in which women are emancipated from a traditional family bound role and embrace more freedom in career development.

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

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

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

8.2.2 Influential factors on identity construction towards dating and relationships

As discussed in 8.2.1, compared to members from the parents' generation, a more individualized personal relationship is increasingly observed among Chinese youth, who often hold diversified mate-choosing values, embrace various forms of relationship approaching and sustaining strategies and develop private ethics to guide relationship related decisions and practices. This sub-section intends to further explore the changing power dynamics between traditional collective values and modern individualized values in the post-reform era by looking at the interplay of factors that have impact on young people's identity construction towards dating and relationships.

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

reality dating programmes since 2010, is examined as a modern allegory within a crystalized enquiry in an audience study framework.

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

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

By exploring audiences' attitudes and understandings towards the programme *If You Are the One*, two different viewing cultures between generations could be observed, in which

members of the parents' generation are more likely to adopt a referential viewing and be influenced by mediated reality (Liebes & Katz 1990, p. 100). The programme is often seen as a way for the parents' generation to understand young people nowadays, which may reflect the learning function of television introduced in cultivation and social cognitive theories (Bandura 1986, 2001; Gerbner 1998; Gerbner et al. 1980; Gerbner et al. 2002).

Young Chinese professionals tend to generate polysemic understandings, which may resonate with, negotiate or be opposite to the pre-coded meanings within televisual texts (Bourdieu 1984; Fiske 1989; Hall 1980; Hymes 1972; Livingstone & Lunt 1994, p. 71; Morley 1989, p. 18; Skeggs 1992, p. 91). For example, respondents from the young generation often questioned the authenticity of the programme by identifying possible commercial interests of the programme production team as well as those of the guests on the screen. The programme was often seen as an entertaining resource rather than a reliable way to approach a personal relationship for most respondents from the sample group. Specifically, as one type of speed dating, reality TV dating is at times considered as reflecting a fast-food culture and containing potential risks in the development of future relationships, which tend to cause rejection of some young people. Young audiences often (re)identify their own needs and expectations in dating and relationships by analysing mate-choosing values of guests on the programme. The emergence of a more active and critical viewing culture among Chinese youth may further connote a questioning of the authenticity of relationships in everyday lives, in which true love and/or free-choice relationships may have become more difficult to achieve and traditional matchmaking principles tend to be re-emphasized as a sometimes reluctant solution for young people to establish their relationships.

Secondly, modern Chinese families, which are often seen as both facilitating an individualized youth culture and reinforcing traditional gendered stereotypes, tend to play a dual role in young people's identity formation towards love and relationships. The One-child policy in force since 1979 has facilitated a small family culture, in which the only children are often placed at the centre of family life and gain most resources and support from their parents (Fong 2006; Fowler et al. 2010; Lau & Yeung 1996; Wang et al. 2000; Xu et al. 2007). Growing up in a child-centred familial environment, young professionals nowadays are often seen as gaining a generational power and holding more individualized values, which may

make a romantic relationship built upon mutual interaction and support difficult to achieve. For instance, Chinese youth, who tend to prioritize their own needs within personal relationships, are at times seen as neglecting their partners' expectations and/or being reluctant to provide practical care to the other side. Compared to their parents' generation, young people nowadays are at times seen as lacking staying power to fulfil a lifelong marital commitment, which is likely to be a reason for the rising divorce rate and increasingly fragmented personal ties in urban China.

The Chinese family is also seen as an influential institution passing on traditional Confucian and socialist ideology in relation to spouse-choosing values as well as gendered and age stereotypes towards personal relationships. For instance, the traditional matchmaking principle of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' (marriage formed by spouses from families with similar social rank) is seen as being fused with a market principle and working as a hidden rule of marriage formation for some young people, who tend to follow their parents' examples and link personal happiness with a lifelong marriage and a harmonious family life. Although most of my respondents from the young generation thought highly of emotional attachment, which was seen as a base for personal relationships, the economic conditions of a potential partner was seen as an important consideration in young people's mate-choosing process. This may repeat a script of material transaction between two families within traditional arranged marriage and resonate with an idea that relationship-related consumptions are at times seen as a way for some young people to pursue material desires and achieve economic and social status (Adrian 2003, 2006; Rofel 2007). This spouse-choosing value tends to emphasize a regional and cultural proximity between partners, which are sometimes seen as a way to facilitate communication within extended families and reduce risks in future marital lives. In other words, the reassertion of 'Men Dang Hu Dui' may imply a familial impact upon young people's marriage formation, which is not only seen as a personal choice, but also a way to unite two families in order to carry on and maintain intergenerational ties.

In addition, speed dating and flash marriage are at times seen as being supported by members of the parents' generation (Zhang 2005), who tend to guide their offspring to marry and have children at an appropriate age. A popular phrase 'leftover women' referring to single women over 27 years old, was firstly shown in state-run media in 2007 and has drawn increasing

attention in both public debates and private conversations (Fincher 2012; Magistad 2013). Personal relationships are at times seen as less important for 'leftover women', who are likely to attach more importance to their educational and professional development. At the same time, women approaching or over 30 years old are often seen to face more pressure to marry from their family and social customs compared to males in the same age group (Fincher 2014; Magistad 2013; To 2015). 'Leftover women' may imply a gendered and age inequality, in which women at a slightly older age are at times seen as having fewer choices or being less desirable for men (Wang & Nehring 2014). The use of 'leftover women' in state media and private conversations among family members is likely to reinforce a traditional male-centred relationship pattern, in which women were seen as objects of love and marriage had to be accomplished at a certain age in order to achieve personal happiness. This could be seen as a potential influence of socialist power via mass media and modern family upon people's relationship related values and practices, which may connote a state apparatus governing marriage and population.

Hence, the modern Chinese state, which is seen to facilitate both a free-market oriented neoliberal reasoning and some residual socialist ideology such as collective family values, tend to play a dual role in shaping the socio-cultural environment in the post-reform China. This may resonate with Ong and Zhang's (2008) argument that the nation-wide privatization and global market economy has triggered the formation of a new social space, in which the rise of self-managing subjects are embracing more freedom and a calculating reasoning towards private lives and are less influenced by the socialist sovereign. The revisions of Marriage Law in the reform era may further feed into a self-centred decision-making mechanism in relation to dating and relationships. For instance, with simplified divorce procedures since the revisions of marriage law in 1980 and 2003 (Li 2012; Miller & Fang 2012; Palmer 2007), divorce, which used to be a family matter and sanctioned by work units, is often seen as an individual choice for Chinese people.

Alongside with neoliberal governing principles, the Chinese government is seen to distribute socialist power from afar, which tends to further shape the individualized life politics of young people in China (Ong & Zhang 2008). For example, with the emergence of various forms of dating and relationships such as cohabitation and multiple relationships, a more self-

centred relationship ethics is likely to be formed among Chinese youth. However, heterosexual marriage, which is protected by the Marriage Law and conforms to the socialist family values, is still the only officially supported personal tie and is often seen to influence significantly young professionals' understandings of other forms of relationships.

Overall, the above factors that have impacted upon young people's identity towards love and intimacy are likely to feed into an individual-society-state relationship introduced by Yan (2010a). By employing neoliberal governmentality, the Chinese government has facilitated the formation of a set of modern institutions such as free market economy, nuclear families, educational system, legal system and mass media, which tend to both facilitate the rise of individual and re-emphasize traditional collective values and socialist ideology. A self-centred relationship could be seen as demonstrating Foucault's concepts of technology of the self and subjectivity as a historical construct (1979, 1980, 1982, 1988). For instance, young Chinese professionals are often seen as transforming into self-managing subjects in the post-reform era and developing personal understandings towards the reality dating programme *If You Are the One*, which serves as a cultural technology for them to identify their own mate-choosing values as well as approaches. An individualized personal tie is likely to align with a democratic turn observed in family practice, which has attached increasing importance towards individual interests and happiness and challenged the traditional hierarchical social mechanism (Ho 1987, 1994, 1996; Hwang 1999; Yan 2009, p. xxiv). Chinese youth are often seen as gaining emotional and economic support from their families, which is likely to reshape an interdependent relationship between the rising individual and nuclear family. In other words, the self-centred values within personal relationships are at times seen as feeding into a collective family culture and contributing to the harmony of intergenerational ties.

8.3 Methodological Contributions

This project touches upon a number of research areas including generational studies and audience studies, which could be seen as an exploration of employing an inter-disciplinary approach in examining identity construction towards love and intimacy. Specifically, this research refers to a crystalized interpreting framework (Ellingson 2009, p. 190; Richardson 2000, p. 934), which provides a postmodern approach to examine the research question. The popular Chinese reality TV dating programme *If You Are the One* is seen as a mediated

simulacra of Chinese youth's dating and relationships in everyday lives. By building a dialogic platform within an audience research paradigm, this research examines audiences' understandings towards the televisual text and further develops its sociological interest in exploring young Chinese professionals' identity construction towards love and relationships in a real life setting. As love and relationship are traditionally private and sensitive issues, the audience approach to great extent helped me build rapport with my respondents and became an ice breaker for the participants to talk about relationships during the interview process.

By drawing upon Foucault's (1979, 1982) historical enquiring framework in studying the development of subjectivity, this project recruited a comparison group of respondents from the parents' generation, who helped examine the identity transformation towards love and intimacy since the reform era. By comparing dating and relationship related values and practices in two historical periods – the early reform era and the post-reform era, this generational approach helps locate the individualization process in the context of China within a historical framework and further builds on existing individualization theories (for example, Bauman 2000, 2001, 2003; Beck 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2003, 2010; Giddens 1991, 1992; Hansen & Svarverud 2010; Yan 2009, 2010a, 2010b). By adopting a generational angle, a more complex power interplay between tradition and modernity in shaping the subjectivity formation of present day Chinese youth is observed, which tends to add new interpretations to Foucault's (1979, 1982) works pertaining to human beings' subjectivity transformation. Specifically, traditional Confucian and socialist values and practices facilitated by modern institutions such as the nuclear family and mass media are sometimes seen as important cultural resources for young Chinese people to construct their identity towards love and intimacy. This is likely to suggest a dual role of modern institutions, which may both promote the formation of neoliberal subjects and suppress the romantic subjectivity development in contemporary Chinese society.

Alongside this, by using semi-structured interviews as the main research method, this investigation uses a qualitative approach for exploring identity construction towards dating and relationships. Compared to most relevant studies employing social survey methods such as questionnaires or structured interviews and following a quantitative tradition (for example, Higgins & Sun 2007; Higgins et al. 2002; Huang et al. 2011; Pan 1993; Pan et al. 2004), this

project provides a more in-depth understanding of identity construction in the post-reform Chinese society and adds some new research experience to the field. In addition, as a research technique inherited from a romantic individualist tradition of the late 1960s (Seale 2004, p. 106), semi-structured interviews help to bring a demotic turn in exploring ordinary young Chinese people's identity construction towards love and intimacy, which may enhance the capacity of generalizing the findings to a wider population. This tends to builds on qualitative studies focusing on romantic identities of people with special dating and relationship-related experiences such as extramarital relationships and/or multiple relationships (Farrer & Sun 2003; Pei 2011; Xiao 2011).

8.4 Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

By employing in-depth interviews, the research findings discussed in the previous sections present the identity construction towards love and intimacy of a specific group of young professionals working in Beijing. As the respondents have various family as well as professional backgrounds and Beijing is a metropolitan city gathering nation-wide young professionals, the research findings to some extent are representative of a bigger group of Chinese youth, who have higher educational background and are working in urban China. Alongside this, by recruiting participants from the parents' generation, the research further examined the present day younger generation's identities towards love and intimacy by comparing the changing values between the early and post-reform era. This small sample group intended to be exploratory rather than representative. Further research could develop this trans-generational comparison approach by focusing on the participants from previous generations in order to explore how the socio-cultural change in contemporary Chinese society has shaped the subjectivity of people who grew up in an extended family culture and who often have siblings compared to the one-child generation (1979 to present).

The emergence of an individualized relationship, which draws upon a neoliberal logic and an understanding of traditional Confucian and socialist values in the post-reform China, may reflect an individualization with Chinese characteristics, which could feed into the Chinese government's ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Like the individualization process during the 20th century, nowadays the rise of individual is still shaped by the collectivist ideology of the Chinese state (Liu 1995; Yan 2010b). Hence, to further build on

individualization theories, future research could focus on the changing nature of the meaning of individualizations.

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

Moreover, a regional influence in relation to young people's identity construction is observed. For example, with the emergence of various forms of dating and relationship practices in urban China (Farrer 2002; Huang et al. 2011; Li 2002; Tan 2010; Wang & Nehring 2014; Zha & Geng 1992), urban youth are often seen as holding a more tolerant attitude towards relationship related values and practices (Higgins & Sun 2007), which may resonate with a urban-rural division facilitated by an unequal distribution of the impacts of globalization and of the free market economy (Castells 2005). Thus, it would be worth capturing global flows and their impacts on relationship formation in future research.

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

8.5 Conclusion

This thesis examined the emergence of a post-socialist romantic subjectivity in the post-reform China by looking at young Chinese people's values and practices towards love and relationships. Specifically, by comparing mate-choosing values, strategies in initiating and sustaining personal relationships as well as relationship ethics in the early reform era and the post-reform era, present day Chinese youth often tend to prioritize their own needs and

expectations in their love lives and embrace a more individualized relationship pattern. Alongside this, by examining young professionals' attitudes towards various forms of dating and relationships such as premarital cohabitation, extramarital relationships and multiple relationships, a more tolerant socio-moral environment is observed. This promotes increasing freedom in embracing different relationship styles and suggests that personal relationships have become a more private and individualized issue greatly defined by the involved parties. Moreover, by exploring how young people make their romantic selves, a more complex power interaction between young Chinese people and modern institutions such as government policies, Chinese family and mass media is observed, which may suggest a subjective experience drawing upon both traditional collective ideology and modern individualized values. This negotiated relationship between tradition and modernity is likely to suggest an individualization process with Chinese characteristics, which tends to build on existing literatures pertaining to identity studies and individualization theories. Overall, by exploring how young Chinese people structure their love and intimate lives, this thesis feeds into a broader project of examining identity transformation in the context of the post-reform and globalizing Chinese society.

Appendices

Appendix A Participant Information Sheet

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

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

The interview usually lasts 45-60 minutes and the recordings will be only used as research materials. The thesis will make sure the confidentiality of all the participants is always respected. When quoting the opinions from a particular participant, a pseudonym will be used.

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

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

Appendix B Participant Consent Form

Title of Project:

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

Name of participant (print) …………….…….Signed…………….……Date………………

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

Appendix C Participant Debriefing Sheet

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

The questions in the interview intend to focus on the following aspects:
(i) The main reasons for Chinese youth watching TV dating programmes; the attitudes of them towards values about love and relationships represented in the TV dating programmes *If You Are the One*
(ii) The opinions of the young people towards some traditional values in relation to love and relationships
(iii) The main factors for Chinese youth to choose their spouse
(iv) The different attitudes towards love and relationships between the young generation and their parents' generation

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

Many thanks for your time!

Appendix D Interview Schedule – Young People

1) How often do you watch the reality television programme *If You Are the One*? What do you think of this programme? (authenticity)

2) What do you think are the main reasons for the popularity (high ratings) of this programme?

3) What do you think are the main reasons for people to take part in the show?

4) What do you think are the main considerations for <u>female/male</u> participants in the programme to choose their dates? Do you think this programme reflects mainstream values towards love issues? Which aspects do you consider when you choose your date? Why?

5) Tell me about the different ways that young people find a partner. Which ways did you use (or consider to use) to find a partner? (TV dating) Why?

6) According to the host (the show on 5th May 2013), male participants from Taiwan followed by Hong Kong and Heilongjiang have the highest success rate in finding a date in the show. What do you think of this statistics?

7) What do you think of participants from other countries or districts? Is it common for people to find partners with different ethnic backgrounds? Would you consider to have a partner from other countries or other parts of China? Why?

8) What do you think of long-distance relationship (marriage)? Would you consider it? Why?

9) Do your family members (for example your parents) provide any advice towards your prospective partner? How do you feel about their advice?

10) Do you think that people are looking for a lifelong relationship? Do you think that applies to you? In your experience, what do you need?

11) What do you think of happiness or success in your life?

12) Do you think that money is an important part of a relationship? (go Dutch, gift, 'naked wedding', money worship)

13) Is cohabitation common? Why is this? How do you think people feel about this?

14) What do you think are the best ways to sustain a dating relationship or marriage? (honesty, loyalty) What do you think is the relationship between love and marriage?

15) Some participants in the show mentioned that they got divorce before, what do people think of the phenomenon of divorce nowadays? Do you think that divorce is a barrier for people to start a new relationship?

16) Do you know people who have had an affair whilst in a relationship? Why do you think

that was? (common/ main reason) Have you ever been in that position? Would you consider having an extra-marital love affair after getting married? Why?

17) Why do people have relationships? Why is it seen as important? Is it increasingly important to be seen in a relationship? If someone is not in a relationship, how do you/others view him/her?

18) In your opinion, what are the differences between men and women towards love and relationship? (aim/ attitude/ representation)

19) Have you experienced any changes in any aspects of your life after watching the television dating programme *If You Are the One*?

Appendix E Interview Schedule – Parents' Generation

1) Do you often watch the reality television programme *If You Are the One*? What do you think of this programme? (authenticity)

2) What do you think are the main considerations for <u>female/male</u> participants in the programme to choose their date? Do you think this programme reflects mainstream values towards love and intimacy of the Chinese youth? Why?

3) When the participants in the reality dating programme find a date, do you think they find true love? What do you believe is an ideal love? What do you think is the relationship between love and marriage?

4) If your son or daughter is single, do you consider the reality TV dating programme as a way for them to find an ideal partner? Why?

5) How did you meet your spouse? What were the popular ways for people to find their partners when you were young?

6) What were the main considerations for people in your generation to choose a partner when you were young? What do you think are the main factors for the youth nowadays to choose their partners?

7) Did your family members (for example your parents) provide any advice towards your prospective partner? How did you feel about their advice? (filial piety)

8) Do you think a lifelong relationship is important in your life? Why? What about youth nowadays?

9) What do you think is the best way to sustain an intimate relationship (or marriage)? (loyalty)

10) Do you think it is common for couples to have extra-marital affairs? What is your attitude towards it?

11) Do you think material wealth is an important consideration in a dating relationship? What is your attitude towards terms such as 'naked wedding' or 'money worship'?

12) Do you think cohabitation before marriage is common when you were young? Do you think it is acceptable that young people live together before getting married? Why?

Appendix F Participants' Information

Pseudonym	Birth place	Education	Professional background/ Working experience	Dating status/ Times of relationships	Interview Time/venue
Wen Jing (female, 31)	Beijing	MA degree	Foreign trade company employee (3.5 years)	Single looking (1)	02/07/2013 4-5pm McDonald's, Beijing
Zheng Anchi (male, 24)	Quanzhou, Fujian	BA degree	NGO employee (2 years)	Single looking (1)	02/07/2013 7.30-8.30pm Ai meng xiao zhen restaurant, Beijing
Sun Chenxue (female, 28)	Beijing	BA degree	Hospital administration support (6 years)	Single looking (0-1)	04/07/2013 8-8.40 pm Cui wei Mall, Beijing
Shen Nan (female, 27)	Beijing	BA degree	Patent attorney (5 years)	Married (1.5)	05/07/2013 7-9pm Starbucks coffee, Beijing
Wang Xiao (female, 47)	Beijing	MA degree	Management (More than 20 years)	Married with a daughter (1)	06/07/2013 3.30-4pm Car in motion, Beijing

Feng Wanjiao (female, 27)	Hubei	BA degree	Children's brand agent (5 years)	Married (3)	08/07/2013 11-11.40am San yuan mei yuan snack bar, Beijing
He Aijia (female, 46)	Cili, Hunan	College diploma	Accountant (More than 20 years)	Single looking (0)	10/07/2013 2.40-3.10pm McDonald's, Beijing
Chu Junqi (male, 30)	Zhoukou, Henan	MA degree	Car industry consultant (5 years)	Married (several times)	12/07/2013 12.30-1.30pm Pa mi er restaurant, Beijing
Zhao Wei (male, 28)	Heihe, Heilongjiang	MA degree	IT industry product manager (4 years)	Married (1)	13/07/2013 12.40-3pm 202 restaurant, Beijing
Sun Yi (male, 24)	Beijing	BA degree	Website IT staff (1 year)	In a relationship (3 or more)	14/07/2013 12.50-1.50pm Haijun yard, Beijing
Deng Yun (female, 23)	Xinhua, Hunan	BA degree	Website content editor (3 years)	Single looking (0)	15/07/2013 2.50-4.20pm Yoshinoya, Beijing
Ai Yue (female, 26)	Beijing	BA degree	Administration support (3 years)	Married (2)	16/07/2013 7.40-8.50pm McDonald's, Beijing (with her husband)

Deng Qingquan (male, 55)	Beijing	BA degree	Retired military officer (37 years)	Married with a daughter (1)	17/07/2013 1.50-2.30pm Haijun yard, Beijing
Li Sha (female, 27)	Beijing	MA degree	Advertisement (2 years)	Married (2)	19/07/2013 7.51-9.20pm Duo le zhi ri bakery, Beijing
Le Jiahui (male, 26)	Qinghe, Hebei	BA degree	IT industry (4 years)	In a relationship (3)	20/07/2013 2.40-4pm Upper bank coffee, Beijing
Song Zixi (female, 24)	Beijing	MA degree	Finance and investment (Half year)	Single looking (1)	23/07/2013 6.40-7pm & 8-8.40pm Wei shi restaurant, Beijing
Fan Fang (female, 27)	Beijing	MA degree	Finance and bank (2 years)	Married for 2 years with a son (2)	27/07/2013 2.15-3.15pm McDonald's, Beijing
Chen Bing (male, 28)	Hengyang, Hunan	College diploma	Game industry operation director (6.5 years)	Married (1)	27/07/2013 7.50-8.40pm Haijun yard, Beijing (with his wife)
Hu Jieru (female, 29)	Hengyang, Hunan	BA degree	Patent attorney (7 years)	Married (2)	27/07/2013 8.50-10.10pm Haijun yard, Beijing

Huang Xinya (female, 27)	Xingtai, Hebei	PhD in biology	Fast eliminating industry scientist (1 year)	Married (1)	28/07/2013 2-4pm Nan hu yi yuan neighborhood, Beijing (interviewed a couple at the same time)
Hao Dongsheng (male, 27)	Fangshan, Beijing	Doctor of Medicine	Doctor (1 year)	Married (1)	
Du Kewei (female, 27)	Tianjin	BA degree	Market planning (5 years)	In a relationship (4)	30/07/2013 7.20-9pm Chamate restaurant, Beijing
Tang Lili (female, 23)	Beijing	BA degree	Website editor (1 year)	In a relationship (2)	31/07/2013 9.30-11.30am Office in a news agency, Beijing (interviewed two colleagues at the same time)
Chen Xiaobei (female, 23)	Beijing	BA degree	Website editor (1 year)	In a relationship (4)	
Jiang Xin (female, 24)	Shangqiu, Henan	BA degree	Reporter (1 year)	In a relationship (1)	31/07/2013 2.30-3.10pm Same venue in the news agency
Zhou Jun (male, 29)	Shaoyang, Human	BA degree	Newspaper editor (6 years)	Single looking (1)	31/07/2013 3.30-4.10pm Same venue

Ma Liang (male, 24)	Jining, Shandong	BA degree	Website editor (2 years)	Single looking (0)	31/07/2013 4.30-5.10pm Same venue
Jin Moli (female, 28)	Qingdao, Shandong	MA degree	Administration support (2 years)	Single looking (0)	02/08/2013 10.11-10.52am Office in an automotive vehicle research association, Beijing
Shang Juan (female, 29)	Binxian, Heilongjiang	BA degree	Finance, project management (6 years)	In a relationship (1)	02/08/2013 11-11.30am & 12.37-1pm Same venue in the research association
Xia Kai (male, 29)	Panshi, Jilin	BA degree	IT staff (6 years)	In a relationship (2)	02/08/2013 2-2.50pm Same venue
Bai Caijie (female, 30)	Siping, Jilin	BA degree	Administration support (7 years)	Single (1)	02/08/2013 3.10-3.40pm Same venue
Fu Zihan (male, 27)	Beijing	BA degree	Office support (5 years)	Single looking (3)	03/08/2013 1.53-2.11pm McDonald's, Beijing (further questions by email)

Ning Xiaoyan (female, 27)	Dalian, liaoning	MA degree	Marketing staff in fast eliminating industry (3 years)	Married (2)	03/08/2013 5.17-6.07pm Shui chuan shi coffee, Beijing
Wang Yanli (female, 24)	Beijing	BA degree	Accountant (2 years)	In a relationship (1)	06/08/2013 8-8.40pm Haijun yard, Beijing
Meng Qifeng (male, 27)	Shijiazhuang, Hebei	MA degree	Marketing assistant (8 months)	Single looking (1)	10/08/2013 6.44pm Beijing, via email
Wu Wenze (male, 26)	Beijing	BA degree	Financial project manager (3 years)	Single looking (2)	11/08/2013 11.26am-12.52pm KFC, Beijing
Zhang Tao (male, 24)	Beijing Fengtai	College diploma	Retail industry (2 years)	In a relationship (4)	14/08/2013 1.40-2.25pm KFC, Beijing (interviewed two people in a relationship at the same time)
Zhang Tao's girlfriend (female, 22)	Xingtai, Hebei	Junior high school	Retail industry (5 years)	In a relationship (4)	
Su Minzhen (female, 18)	Henan	University student (grade one)	Student (Two months)	Single/ in a relationship (1)	14/08/2013 2.51-3.47pm KFC, Beijing (interviewed two people who worked temporarily as cashiers together)
Zhou Yuxia (female, 20)	Henan	University student (grade two)	Student (Two months)	Single (2)	

Zhang Xiuyun (female, 52)	Beijing	High school	Freelance (28 years)	Married with a 28 year old son (1)	16/08/2013 2.45-3.20pm KFC, Beijing (interviewed two colleagues worked in a supermarket at the same time)
Zhu Menghua (female, 47)	Beijing	College diploma	Retired (26 years)	Married with a 20 year old daughter (1)	
Wang Rui (male, 30)	Beijing	BA degree	Project manager in financial industry (6 years)	In a relationship (3)	17/08/2013 3.40-4.30pm McDonald's, Beijing
Wen Feng (female, 50)	Hainan	MA degree	Management in a state-owned enterprise (30 years)	Married with a 25 year old son (1)	17/08/2013 5.50-6.30pm Haijun yard, Beijing
Wang Hong (male, 23)	Beijing	Junior high school	Supermarket staff (4 years)	Married (5)	18/08/2013 2.30-3.20pm KFC, Beijing (interviewed a new couple at the same time)
Wang Hong's wife (female, 23)	Beijing	Technical secondary school	Nursery teacher (3 years)	Married (3)	

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

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

If You Are the One (非诚勿扰, Fei Cheng Wu Rao) is a Chinese reality TV dating programme produced by Jiangsu Satellite Television (JSTV). It adapts a globalized format originated from a British dating show *Take Me Out*. The programme currently airs on JSTV on Saturday and Sunday nights at 9:05 pm. It has mainly recruited guests with various educational and professional backgrounds from across mainland China. At the same time, some participants are from other parts of the world or with various ethnic backgrounds. The official language of the programme is Chinese (Mandarin). The programme hosts by Meng Fei and two guest presenters.

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

In each episode, 24 female guests stand in an arc, each behind a podium with a light that they initially turn on. The women face a single man, who chooses one of them as his 'heartbeat girl' as soon as he is revealed on the stage. The single man uses two to three video clips to provide some personal information such as occupation, interests, love history and friends' opinions. During each video clip, each of the women decides whether or not he is still 'date-worthy' in her opinion by keeping her light on or turning it off. After surviving three rounds, the single man can choose a date from the female guests who kept their lights on for him and his 'heartbeat girl' will be revealed. A new procedural option ('burst light'), enabling a woman to signal a special interest in the man, was introduced to the programme in the episode broadcasted on 20 October 2012. Occasionally the host would mention success stories of couples formed on previous shows.

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