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The Peculiarity of Chinese Marital Relationships: Parental Hierarchy and Societal Expectation

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The Peculiarity of Chinese Marital Relationships: Parental Hierarchy and Societal Expectation
and its Impact on Free Love

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I. Abstract

The marital relationship in China takes on its own definitions and expectations as a result of significant research of the tradition, parental hierarchy, and the moral expectations of society. Different time periods in China obtain varied and distinctive practices on marriage and the choice of spouse. From the absolute parents arranged marriage to the gaining of the individuality through nationalism within marriage, the modern Chinese marital relationship correspondingly conveys a combination of free love relating to how society impacts the relationship. This thesis explores the history and formation of the current trend of Chinese marriage practices and provides a comprehensive understanding of how the free love narrative in China is constructed as well as operated. The attributing and reasoning through parental hierarchy grounded in Confucianism framework and individuality liberation engendered from the May Fourth Movement in a nationalist way, this thesis will explain the complexity of the Chinese marital relationship and help readers comprehend the union of individualism and collectivism within Chinese marital relationships. The case study of marriage markets, online cheating activities in China will be the up-to-date instances that intend to exemplify and examine the coexistence of individuality and societal association in Chinese free love's context.

II. Introduction

Chinese marital relationships went through drastic changes over the centuries to reach the unique kind of “free love” which is the ability to freely love and chose the man or woman you want to marry and have children with in modern days. Its distinctive character can be described as a liberated love with a solid parental influence and social moral obligation. Parents’ frequent involvement and societal expectations vis-a-vis Chinese marital relationship certainly suggests to outsiders a pre-notion of a conservative environment with regard to marriage in China. However, it is crucial to understand those seemingly restricted aspects of Chinese marital relationships are not in direct opposition to free love in China. There is no one framework for Chinese marriage practices that one could use to arbitrarily judge the marital practices in China.

Individuals still have the rights and power to select their other half at their own pleasure. In comparison to the early and non-modernized society, marriage was often held in regard to honor and elongate family tradition. These values played a major role in marriage in China. However, modern Chinese marriage laws support love and marital independence. The shift of society wants and even desires are responsible for that. The influence of parents and other aspects of the social context are presented as crucial components of the marriage practices. One may take into consideration the views of parents as well as social expectations. To fully comprehend the formation of such tendencies, it is necessary to pore over the historical facts of Chinese marital relationships and the very beginning of the Chinese free love formation.

This thesis will argue that the abiding and intermingling of parental hierarchy grounded in Confucianism and revolutionary nationalism from the May Fourth Movement initiated the coexistence of a person’s individuality and society’s influence on Chinese marital relationships. The former fact obtains a long lasting prominence due to the originator of parental hierarchy

ideology and Confucius who constructed the base of Chinese ethics through his words that people found instrumental and valuable, especially to the culture. The May Fourth Movement also played a role in re-writing the path of the now modern Chinese society through revolution, which, not only engendered the idea of free love in China (for the first time), but also established certain social norms that are still impacting the everyday lives of Chinese people. After all, both facets are conspicuous enough to influence Chinese marital relationships.

To explore this argument, this thesis will proceed from the methodology to convey the research dedicated to the project. A limitation will be examined and will follow the methodology to indicate the confined information on the aspects of Chinese marital relationship topic. Likewise, the literature review section will present previous and significant research to serve as a foundation of information towards the thesis. The historical overview will provide a comprehensive understanding of the parental hierarchy grounded in the Confucian framework and the formation of free love through May Fourth Movement to its transcended nationalism concept of marital relationship liberation. The case study will offer a more specific observance of the modern Chinese marital relationship. Through the analyzation of the historical overview and the case studies, the readers will go through a journey of extensive information in understanding the topic of Chinese marital relationships, the operation of free love in China, as well the difficulties and adaptations that Chinese individuals are trying to navigate through.

III. Methodology

The research on which this thesis is based was conducted using multiple sources with careful evaluations. Academic journals and books were the main materials used to articulate the thesis argument through historical overview analyzation. News sources were also obtained in completing to the case study in order to offer the readers current and updated information

regarding current Chinese marital marriage trends and how the marriage market is not a remote or obsolete idea but rather a part of the modern partner seeking process. It again showcases the modern Chinese's acceptance toward parents that are involved in the marriage.

This thesis will showcase a plethora of sufficient amount of studies gathered from academic materials on Chinese marriages to explain its occurrence, an overall understanding on marriage in China, and the future of Chinese marital relationship (which cannot be predicted at the moment). Currently, there is no related or existing research found on an alternative trend of Chinese marital relationships within near decades. From this thesis, we can observe a combination of individuality and the impact of society which both defines and characterizes the current Chinese marital relationship. Nevertheless, much like the May Fourth Movement is mentioned throughout this thesis content, another political or social upheaval may or may not be taking place in the future which has the potential to change the course of current model of marriage in China.

IV. Literature Review

The literature review in my thesis will contain the reference of three parts that will examine why individuals in China choose to allow their marriage independence to be influenced by society's intervention. Furthermore, indicating the status of parents within one's marriage and the unique love liberation's formation and alternation in China, the literature review part conveys the base for my thesis point.

While the Confucianism's parental hierarchy legacy has its significance on people's decision, the May Fourth nationalistic movement rendered individuals freedom of spouse choice. In addition, the potent and nationalism centric suggestions that lead to the final marital relationship's choice should still be counseled with society's opinions.

A. Parental Hierarchy Through Confucianism Framework

When discussing marital relationships in China, Chinese parents have a crucial involvement in their children's final choice of spouse. The root for the parental hierarchy need to be learned through Confucianism's view of parents' imperative role within their children's lives with its well established and recorded analects, the consequential impact becomes almost obvious to those who notice. Miles Dawson quotes such family relationship as "duties of universal obligation" where "father and son" indicates the absolute reverence from a child to his or her parents (Dawson 140). Within this codomain, obeying parents is not only a virtue but a universal obligation and so the decision making process within marriages is almost always influenced by the parents' point-of-view. The younger generation of the family tends to link the obedience to their parents' opinions for respect.

The idea of parental hierarchy is particularly special in regards to considering the needs of the entire family when choosing a spouse. Without such consideration, the harmony of the family might be sabotaged and broken. Confucianism dominated the regime in which married couples shared the same housing with their parents, an atmosphere filled with discords can hardly benefit anyone. Dawson further stated that when choosing a wife, the parents of the bachelor ought to have certain standards for their son to follow, especially since a married wife (based on the traditional Confucius' view) was an element that merged into the husband's family. From then on, there shall be no more bride's side of background to be presented in her new family; she will be given her husband's last name and become the descendant of her husband's ancestors (Dawson 141). Accordingly, Xu Xiaohe and Martin Whyte stated that the belief of family oriented marital relationship's importance is not groundless. The Confucius found point of obeying parents' choice of the spouse actually increases the happiness and produces

compatibility of the couple after their marriage as the research data from Xu and Whyte's thesis has shown. Due to the Chinese parents' profound understanding and consideration for their children, they are aware of the qualities a spouse should have in order to select a perfect match that would benefit their lives in the long run (Xu and Whyte 710).

According to research, children tend to seek out their parents' suggestions when choosing a spouse and put their parents' advice in a pivotal place. Xuewen Sheng emphasizes the notion of family in China and how family plays an essential role in the society. The union of two individuals was believed to be a match of political, social, and economic resources between the two families and this amount of connection concludes the spouse choice. This is why marriage without the approval of parent provision is almost unheard of. According to Sheng's research data, the rate of absolute arranged marriages by the parents to their children had dropped significantly in the past decades, she still states that the final decision of the marriage is often times conducted in a way of "by myself with parents" kind of permission (Sheng 99-102). Furthermore, Margery Wolf's research verifies that the tie between Chinese individuals and their parents becomes even stronger when the children reach adulthood because they now have an obligation to their parents' livelihood. This oftentimes leads to a cramped co-housing situation.

Even for married couples, such obligation will be shared between the two individuals and both of them are held accountable for the well-being of the parents from both families. Even as parents begin to age, they are still very opinionated and involved of their children's marriage decision. This becomes normal as the children want to fulfill their filial piety and so they willingly allow their parents to be involved in their own personal matters (Wolf 219). The significance of Confucianism's parental hierarchy originated with a forceful label of "universal obligations" and later on entrenched into Chinese's social norm that is influencing the Chinese

marital relationship. Eventually, it became a conventional acceptance of the Chinese majority to seek parental approval.

B. Free Love Through May Fourth Nationalism

In contrast to the absolute family tied decision making process of marriage, the idea of free love and marriage came later on in the twentieth century through the May Fourth Movement. Haiyan Lee states that “the May Fourth generation proposed ‘love’ as a symbol of freedom, autonomy and equality”. Furthermore, the movement set the foundation of future liberated Chinese marital relationship (Lee 5). The May Fourth Movement started as a nationalism centric revolution and its purpose was to throw out the hackneyed social norms in order to strengthen the new society. In pursuance of a more enlightened modernity, the topic of free love thusly engendered for the first time.

As a direct result of the movement, the absolute parents contrived marriage slumped and the individuals gained more power of their own choice of partners. Both Sheng and Wolf present the decline of arranged marriages’ rate in contemporary China and how such tradition became obsolete. The majority of their interviewees were in constant denial of family based marriage choice, but a total marriage decision upon their own interest (Wolf 227, Sheng 102).

Furthermore, Xu and Whyte also underline the tension and conflicts between the traditionalists and modernists attitude toward arranged marriages. The movement towards free love believers might deteriorate the relationship between the children and their parents who intend to express a strong intention of controlling their children’s marital relationship choice (Xu and Whyte 719).

In addition, Diandian Li and Lijun Zheng examine the modern love liberation from another extreme aspect. Their research claims that a number of Chinese individuals in committed relationships or marriages are having a high cheating rate through the access of internet.

Although they are not necessarily meeting in real life, they are engaging in conversations behind their partner's backs. This is dishonest and their minds become absent from their current partners and into the emotions and discussions of their online interactions. This online interaction can also turn into a meeting in person. Such an occurrence is explained by Li and Zheng through the base of those who have cheated in marriages. The individuals usually have a seemingly perfect marriage where the partner's choice meets the parents' standards or moral regulations of the society. However, their hearts may beg for differ for reasons that can be either sexual or emotional which eventually leads to seeking satisfaction and excitement from internet due to oppression and wanting to chase after free love (Li and Zheng 10).

May Fourth Movement brought the idea of free love to Chinese marriages in a way that allows individuals to seek what the hearts truly want. Arranged marriages are more prone to involving the family and the family name as a whole, as opposed to the two individuals involved in the union. It is a strong symbol of moral obligation and family that may, unfortunately, become a burden on those who prefer to love freely as opposed to an arranged relationship. In addition to this, having the cloud of a parents control, perspective, and opinion can inspire liberation from love seekers to have freedom in marriage associated with individuality.

C. Marital Relationships under Nationalism

The May Fourth Movement slowly turned the page of the parents involved in their children's marriages in China. However, the inception of May Fourth love liberation is seeded in nationalism. Progressively, the ultra-liberated Chinese marital relationship turned to a "conditional release" where the nationalism aggravators set certain guidelines for marriage seekers to follow. The individuals still have the opportunity and freedom to choose the partners

they want but the stress of social norms is casted on them through the nationalistic narrative.

Tradition in some circumstances can stir up trouble for those wanting to do things differently.

Lee explains that when nationalists are speaking the language of love, they transcend and subordinate the everyday romantic love between individuals and intend to promote the notion of patriotic love (Lee 10). Such kind of love is not solely a love for the nation, but rather for individuals to remember the cause of love and that it should benefit the nation in a long run. This indicates the union of two people is not for a selfish or superficial cause but rather for something meaningful like family and can assist with social and even political reputation.

Elisabeth Croll specifically states that Chinese relationship conventions is changed overnight upon the nationalism's intervention. Arranged marriages became outlawed and young Chinese individuals are now encouraged to pursue their love choice freely. The freedom of choice became a trend that was about to break years and years of tradition and expectation. However, the following nationalistic communist campaigns did not leave the propaganda of advising the people finding a spouse that was based on comradeship and shared revolutionary fervor (Croll 83). Likewise, both Nancy Riley and Margery Wolf mention the communist ideology of equalizing the gender differences and the government's abolishment of the arranged marriage, but to adapt a nationalist narrative, the marital relationship needs to be accustomed to being politically centered (Riley 793, Wolf 218).

The influential nationalistic marriage guidelines and promotions that work like a repetitive anthem, the Chinese marital relationship expresses its freedom in a way despite being under the pressure of social norms and the need to meet certain standards.

V. Historical Overview

To understand the intricacy among Chinese marital relationship requires one first to avoid the dualism when talking about free love in China. The free form cannot be simply introduced as dispatching from society's opinions but it also does not imply the depreciation of individuality upon the topic of free love.

To comprehend the occurrence of complex Chinese style free love, I conclude that the society interrelated Chinese marriages is the aftereffect of Chinese abiding tradition that grounded in Confucianism's conviction within the parental hierarchy. Furthermore, the May Fourth Movement engendered nationalism brought the notion of love liberation to people but eventually rendered the love freedom into a nationalistic narrative.

A. Confucianism Framework

Ever since Confucianism had been founded, Confucius' philosophy of ethics grew mainstream in China for centuries. Its draconian approach of noble morals was deemed as the foundation of a stable nation and the sounding theory of taking the non-extreme path and always putting others before oneself became prevailing for all people to follow (Dawson 32).

Additionally, the position of each person is also categorized through the respect he or she shall have in a specific hierarchy order (Dawson 139). Upon the marital relationship topic I am analyzing here, I intend to interpret the parental hierarchy within the Confucianism and how the existence of parents affects Chinese marriages.

a. "Listen to Your Parents"

Confucius' parental hierarchy indicates filial piety which is the respect one holds for his or her parents and dedicates to a part of someone's virtue. The respect I am referring to here conveys a sense of obedience and conformity. Dawson points out the "duties of universal

obligation” that Confucius insisted people to follow: The duties explicitly lists the social order of “father and son, husband and wife”, which the latter ones are always subordinate to the former (Dawson 141). Furthermore, these two relationships are also inseparable when talking about the marital relationship. They are dependent upon one another.

To begin with, the social order of “father and son” is a generalization for the relationship between the parents and their children. As children (being the one at a lower position), the parental hierarchy enabled the unconditional reverence from the children in order to accomplish their duties. It is rather crucial to wait for the parents’ order before action. First there is instruction and then action. The order is very important, just as much as family. Likewise upon the topic of marriage, Dawson implies that marriage is more of a family business rather of an individual desire or want. The parents, therefore, have the power to take control over their children’s choice and even preferences. Dawson quotes one example from Confucius’ analects, saying that “If, without awaiting the instructions of their parents and the arrangements of their intermediary, they bore holes to steal a sight of each other, or climb over a wall to be with each other, their parents and all others will despise them” (Dawson 134). Among these lines, we can see that though love and marriage is a seemingly private matter, Confucius’ believed that the adoption of parents’ intervene is a more noble act to follow and marriage ought to be associated with the family.

To further understand how the parents, family and marriage are related, we should also examine the social order between husband and wife. When a woman is married to the family, “the wife was considered to merge herself in her husband’s family, to join in sacrifices to his ancestors and to give her life over to bearing and rearing sons to continue his race and to preserve his ancestral temples” (Dawson 141-142). Along these lines, the wife becomes a new

added on member that not only inhabits with the husband's family but also represents his family as her own. Her future after the marriage also depends on the husband's family. Insofar, both of the wife and husbands' parents have to engage in their union in order to prepare for the subsequent of the marriage. For the husband's' parents, it is choosing a new family member that could embody their clan and for the wife's parents, it is selecting for rest of their daughter's life settlement. Neither could be done in a casual or spontaneous manner that solely relies on their children's own preference.

Likewise, certain regulations had been established for a marriage match. Within Confucianism's framework, only two compatible families could comprise a harmonic union and such compatibility was engaging with not only a family's material circumstance or social status but also its moral standard and household regulation (141). In order to uphold all these regulations, an individual can hardly not reference their parents' opinions to fulfill the rigid marriage prerequisites. As a consequence, the marriage regulations also served as part of Confucius established social obligation that utilized to measure an individual's morality. In order to not fail such social norm, individuals therefore even more firmly believed in the necessity of their parents' interference of their marriage. The dependency of their parents' decisions all made sense at the time within the Confucianism framework and resulted in the individuals following the lead of their parents.

b. The Significance of Marriage

The complexity of a Chinese marriage may generate the individual's doubt of marriage. According to Confucius, the form of marriage itself constructs the building blocks in the basic institutions of the society (Wolf 215). Similar to the previous wife's duty I mentioned above, one of the son's most sacred duties is to provide descendants for his and his father's ancestors (215).

As follows, Dawson furtherly explains the dignity of marriage and of procreation is thought by Confucius and his followers to be such that the husband and wife, together with Heaven, forms a “ternion”, cooperating to people the earth, in that wherever there is true marriage, there God is to give the increase (Dawson 145). This shows the importance of longevity within a marriage regarding the perspective of it being more of a family business as opposed to an individual desire. The status of procreation is valued as the main purpose of a marriage. Even associates with a sense of deity and since neither of the man, woman or heaven could produce a man solely, the process of a marriage like so shows its significance.

After understanding the priority of Chinese marriage, it is more apparent to see why the Chinese culture tends to treat the relationship with much of consideration involving parental consultation and participation.

c. Modern Marriage and the Legacy of Confucianism

Today’s China has gone through dramatic modernization and culture revolution. The impact of Confucius has not reduced its after effect. Marriage and procreation do not bear as much significance as before, but the modern Chinese marriages still engage with high parental participation. There are some things that persist even with changing times.

Though the absolute parental arrange marriage became an obsolete tradition and the rate for such a practice dropped almost completely, there is still a gap between an absolute free choice of an individual’s future soul mate. Xuweng Sheng states the frequent occurrence within modern Chinese mate selection is more of an occasion that “by myself with parent permission” or “by myself with the permission from parents and parents-in-law”. And in a more rural area, her research respondents were more likely to report the instance of their marriage as “by parents with my agreement” (Sheng 162). To such a degree, the parents’ involvement in their children’s

marriage choice is still not negligible. Additionally, the long-lasting parental authorized marriage caused the Chinese individuals' reliance on their parents. In Xu and Whyte's research, they found the young Chinese may ask for their parents' help while choosing a partner. Taking their parents' opinion into consideration was still an important sign of respect. Whether they might be too busy at work or they were too shy to approach a potential date, they found the reliability within their parents' choice (Xu and Whyte 718).

Margery Wolf also points out a close bond between the Chinese individuals and their parents. As with the legacy and heavy influence and belief in Confucianism, children feel the sense of obligation to stay intimate with their older generation in order to take care of them, such as returning a favor. Even after the marriage, the individuals tend not to move too far away from the parents in order to keep a strong and close family relationship (Wolf 219).

Aforementioned, as the wife was deemed to be an addition to the husband's family, the modern Chinese norm shares more of the same than the less. The difference is that it is no longer only the wife who becomes the new member of the household, but the husband is also related to the wife's family. The merge of the families through marriage also concludes the after marriage living conditions that are arranged somewhat still close the parents' household. Unlike before, the wife has to cease the connection totally with her original family, but the modern Chinese after marriage families choose to live with the parents or near parents holds different type of reasons. For urban residents, it is the housing price or work convenience and for rural people, it is more of a shared property and land situation (Sheng 104). Despite all the sound reasons, the intense intimacy that individuals after marriage share with their parents is still an occurrence that uniquely belongs to China. The dependency has yet to change after the Confucianism framework dominated age.

B. Free Love Appearance in the May Fourth Movement

Though the parental control has its consequential status within the Chinese marital relationship, one can never truly categorize it as what the Chinese marriage practice is all about. The sense of free love still plays an equal part when an individual is choosing a partner in modern China. Indeed, the progression of love liberty required a breaking point from the Confucianism framework of parental hierarchy, and that was when the May Fourth Movement overturned the course for Chinese norm of marriage. The May Fourth Movement rewrote the course for a rather oppressed spouse choosing environment and brought some new air to individuals when they are seeking for love and a committed relationship.

Led by a group of student body, the May Fourth Movement took place in May 1919 initially as the response to the falling Chinese society. The advocates for the movement believed nationalism and the retrofit of obsolete social norms could help China achieve modernity and become powerful enough to stand against the western civilization aggression. By the same token, the idea of “free love” being put on the table birthed a symbol of freedom, autonomy, and equality within China. The liberated free love notion was fueled by the iconoclastic spirits. Free choices of spouses shed its weight of family correlation from previous decades and entered the phenomenological realm of the everyday (Lee 5-6). The emancipated love discourse rendered the individuals to look out for love and a potential marriage with less family correlated constraints and limitations. The initiative of spouse choosing process belonged to the people rather than their parents through matchmaking.

Since “the triumph of enlightenment thought over the ‘feudal’ ideology of Confucianism” became the trend of May Fourth generation, the individual’s choice was putting above the society’s and the spontaneous feeling was taking over the stultifying formalism. In order to reach

the step of May Fourth, the progenitors for such movement undoubtedly required accumulated anxiety for rewriting the history of a world strictly bonded to Confucianism framework (5). Nevertheless, the original purpose for the May Fourth Movement was rooted in nationalism. Though the spontaneous love was having its conspicuous moment, it eventually had to submit itself to a nationalistic narrative which intended to associate the notion of free love with a societal context again. However, it drove a different direction from the Confucianism framework and eventually played its shared part to complicate Chinese marriages. “Freedom of love” was once again being limited for people, but in a less constrained circumstance; for instance, society intended to push people to consider their marriage choice in a more collective way that not only the self needs should be met but the society’s norm should be conformed to.

a. Nationalism Approach of Chinese Marriages

The creation of the May Fourth Movement also created nationalism in the sense of it being liberating to individuals. The original purpose for May Fourth Movement was to oppose the western civilization’s aggression and so a considerable amount of voices rose up from political ideologues and called for a total commitment to the nation by subordinating the romantic imperative to that of a revolution. The nationalists further demanded a higher, heroic mode of love activity which transcended and subordinated everyday romantic love to a patriotic love. The notion of self still existed but was classified into two classes of a “smaller self” and a “bigger self”. The former one resembled the needs of individual and so much so categorized as a selfish act that contained less moral value. The latter one required a person putting self into a national framework, which meant that marriage practice and spouse choosing should be related to a national context.

Additionally, as the direct impressionist of the May Fourth Movement, Mao Zedong, the future communist leader further embraced the nationalistic free love to rule the country. When he became the chairman of China, free love ceased to be an affair of unique persons and singular hearts but a sign of political belonging (Lee 5,10, 290). It is not hard to imagine in an era where political upheaval was taking place and everyone was unintentionally included into the context of nation's politics. One cannot simply neglect to consider the nation's limitations and social expectations' influence on their own personal love and marriage choice. The larger social environment created pressure on people that required each one to endure.

Indeed, the brighter side of the nationalism discourse was that arranged marriages were outlawed, and young Chinese men and women were encouraged to pursue their love choice on their own discretion and without parental consent (Croll 134). Many aspects of traditional marriage behavior were also redeemed as illegal such as the child bride or exchange bride for dowry. The new marriage law indeed supported the alternative form of marriage in a more liberal way (Riley 792). However, the principle of marital relationship was once again being pushed to obtain a collective cause. Wolf implied the content of marital relationship during Mao's period should be unswerving selflessness and consciously putting the revolutionary cause in the first place. Furthermore, an individual's choice should not only include the happiness of family life but also for the whole society (Wolf 218). Thusly, even the individuals were freed from the oppression of Confucianism marriage structure, the people were expected to show their loyalty to the organized state and if one chose to select a spouse out of romantic reasons, he or she was taking the risk to be viewed as a self-indulgent lover.

The Mao period guidebook established a new set norm of free love which meant "a shared labor, mutual support in studying, mutual criticism, and comradely solidarity----a

companionate marriage without the romance” (218). The shaped love cause also constructed the modern people's marital relationship.

b. Modern Marriage Under May Fourth Movement Influence

In China's current society, individuals not only gained more freedom while choosing a spouse but even had their own established standards in a much delayed average marriage age of mid or late twenties (Wolf 219). The interviewees of Wolf also expressed appreciation for the modern marriage form where they have the power to veto marriages suggested by their parents (221).

Nonetheless, the inherited nationalism free love idea left modern individuals with the burden of criteria while selecting their soul mate. When talking about romance, many still feel the necessity to shun away from the topic and indicated that lesser amount was going on in their marriage rather than the accepted principle of “working for the good of the country, studied hard to increase their knowledge so they could contribute more to their work units, and not being afraid of hard work” (221). Moreover, the unselfish way of marriage casted a sense of obligation on individuals while choosing a lawful spouse. More than often, the modern individuals express the intention of wanting a spouse who possessed good looks along with financial security and earning power. Based on Wolf's research, these requests can hardly be ruled into a decent realm of spouse choosing. Nevertheless, the already liberated Chinese marital relationship is not refined to use other traditional means to seek their desirable spouse as people are constantly seeking “true love”.

VI. Case Study

A . Parents Arranged “Marriage Market”

To exemplify the Chinese parents' involvement in their children's marital relationship, the thesis specifically asserts the case of the marriage market. It embodies the literal meaning of a market where the market actors are arranged from direct parents to remote elder kinfolks of the other adults who are eligible to be married in town. Through the market, they exchange personal information including finances, age, height, and even the astrology signs of their unmarried bachelors or bachelorettes at home in order to pair them up with a potential match. More specifically speaking, the market itself also resembles a trial blind date spot for the parents. They are able to obtain a head start in the spouse choosing process of their children and be on the lookout for someone they are more satisfied with. In contrast, not many of the single population are involved in the market to deal with their own marriage business. However, there were a few who were found by Journalist Linda Miao Li and Larisa Epatako who were merely visiting this matchmaking site for fun.

They believe the convenience of matchmaking is rather remote from their own beliefs and modern day partner seeking procedures, especially since the process of finding love and the practice and tradition of marriage have changed considering the marriage reform from the May Fourth Movement. The parent arranged marriages are the furthest things from their minds in terms of life companionship as they are devoted to finding romance in their own ways and sources. The modern singletons' requirement of a relationship exceeds the goals of what their parents are looking for, such as financial ability and stable family background. They crave and long for a deeper level of connection such as emotions, hobbies, and compatibility of personalities. The focus is upon choosing a partner that ultimately shares a few differences from the very superficial facets the parent groups have for them. (Li 1, Epatako 2).

However, despite a few diversions between parents and children's center of attraction, the singleton populations are not against their parents' matchmaking business operating in the marriage market. Likely to the case in section of "Modern Marriage and the Legacy of Confucianism", some of the young adults who are eager to get married to someone willingly let their parents help. They have faith in the elders' choice as the parents selected future partners. Although it may not match on a deeper emotional level, it would be without a doubt that their partner would be able to take care of the family financially. This also showcases the older generations' preferences in a future son-in-law or daughter-in-law who is someone who could easily meet the standard of social expectations. When it came to face the stress from society's judgements, the parents arranged married individuals to be more carefree and settle for a long partnership for both themselves and the entire family (Xu and Whyte 718).

As a result, the emergence of parents arranged marriage market is not a coincidental resemblance of the parents directed matchmaking convention within the Confucianism framework but the product of such tradition's continuation. The May Fourth Movement surely reduced the coercive marriage dominance from the parents but it did not subtract their presence altogether from participating in the marriage decision making process. The parents still have the notion that their involvement could secure their children a date who could bring "happiness, stability and pride for the family" (Li 1). Thusly, one can easily find the stigma of parental hierarchy through the case of marriage market as the concept of "family" is comparatively significant on the spouse choosing list. Much like the time even before the May Fourth Movement, parents believe they have the authority to participate in their children's relationships and lives to ensure a wholesome match and successful family blend.

Though many of the parents from the marriage market claim that their actions and matchmaking deal are for the sake of their singletons at home, some selfish motives are still evident. The marriage practice in China symbolizes the two families are coming together and they want to pick a future son-in-law or daughter-in-law who is able to walk on the same path with as little to no trouble at all. It's about bringing in someone but not disrupting the healthy environment. While they do want what is best for their children, the marriage has to fit into certain requirements.

One way to show the intent behind the parents' self-motives among the matchmaking deals within the marriage market is that a majority of children are not informed of what information is being given about them. However, even they later find out what their parents are plotting secretly, they still would not take any serious complaints against them. More than often, the young adults just conform to the set up and politely message or call the blind date out of parents' obligation .

In like manner, Epatko identifies the Chinese marriage market as a popular matchmaking spot that is designed more for parents than for their children since there are few young faces can be found through the market while the aged group was eager to read the information of others' children. She points out the parents' fascination with the matchmaking deals within the marriage market as they display great initiatives by taking serious notes of the information then negotiating thoroughly with potential future son-in-law or daughter-in-law's parents.

Li took a more personal encounter within the marriage market as she actually went to the marriage market in attempt to find a date for herself. For herself as a "20 something, American-educated and Chinese speaking young lady", she found herself "immediately surrounded by huge groups of parents, grandparents, middle-aged men and women, and the occasional late 30s

woman” (Li 1). Her ears were filled with excited chatters as the parent groups were eagerly trying to promote and “sell” their sons to her. Additionally, the selling points that parents were introducing about were mostly their sons’ salaries and outstanding looks such as the height and facial features; and one aunty seems to really prepared her work as she tried to approach Li through her son’s zodiac sign, which was a Scorpio, and it supposed to be perfectly matched with Li’s zodiac sign (Li 1).

Epatko later describes this very traditional resembling approach as the marriage market as a place where “your mom sets you up on your first date” (Epatko 1). The deals that go on the parents organized market is all about their children’s future marital partners especially when the parents are hanging up pictures and personal information of their sons and daughters over the trees in the park with the intention to meet another potential candidate. Li also found that many of the parents even utilized eye catching patterned umbrella to attract those passing by and they would print out their bachelors and bachelorettes’ information in a neat way and stick it on the umbrella for people to read (Li 1).

Correspondingly, when the “deal” is “sealed”(after two parents find a matching possibility), it is the happiest moment of their whole day as their efforts are paying off. There is no further hesitations for the parents to exchange the contact information of their children. They simply believe the potential exaggerated information of other singletons they learned from the trees and umbrellas and could wait no longer to set up their children for a blind date. Though Li’s research shows the blind date’s success rate is rather low (not mention a possible marriage), the young singletons would still attend such unspontaneous and loath assignment due to the obedience and parental hierarchy value they have been brought up with (Epatko 2, Li 2).

It is important to examine the continuing parents' overpower of their offspring in the case of intimate relationship between the two individuals. The marriage in fact becomes a blended family. As the legacy of Confucianism framework, the marriage market in China is an inevitable production. Whether the singletons are in support or feel reluctant toward the existence of the marriage market, they still sense the necessity to incorporate their parents into the context of spouse choosing procedure. Even if their parents are not one of the dealers among others in the marriage market, their opinions will eventually still carry the weight on their children's minds.

B. Online Cheating Game

The May Fourth Movement engendered nationalism and gave people certain constrained notion on choosing future partners. The May Fourth Movement is also interconnected with emancipated love and marital relationships. The movement itself still empowered the individuals in China to look for the desired one relentlessly, especially after the topic of love had been highly liberated and discussed about for more than half a century. Many modern singletons are not afraid to seek for what their heart desires. However, as the former section mentioned, sometimes the parental hierarchy could be a little bit too intense to resist and social expectations for a relationship also laid a burden on people's marital choices.

Inevitably, some people give in to the force of parents and social expectations and give up to a seemingly perfect date who may have not shared a deeper level of connection with them. By all means, such kind of marriage is externally perfect but internally dreadful leading to the high dissatisfaction among the couples. In order to not break the harmony within the family or fail the social expectations, an online cheating population is generated in China through the stress and unhappiness resulting from their own marital relationships. The emerging dating app industry as well allowed such actions to take place. Since the internet is not as translucent as the

reality world, true love seekers find the mean to hide behind the screens with sealed identities while looking for a love connection away from their disconnected marital relationships.

Apart from the parental hierarchy pressure and societal notions, the online cheating case exemplifies a rather desperate group who is actually rebelling the social restrictions. Marriage is like a business and so loyalty is crucial. Much resembles the spirit of May Fourth Movement with the faith in true love although their actions are immoral and irresponsible, they are bold as it simulates a lot of facets from the revolution of May Fourth Movement. In other words, the May Fourth is the originator of such rebels as they are convicted in love and would risk to look out for true connections.

Li and Zheng state that the Chinese in committed relationships or marriages are had a high cheating rate through the means of internet. More specifically, the booming dating apps and industry became the popular spot for the lonely souls to find potential relationships that could rekindle the passion within their hearts. The convenience of the internet is a portal to a new world where a relationship is ultimately unconditioned and unrestrained. No one could judge another's choice; the height, financial situation, occupations, or social affiliations. One can freely pursue another based on a deeper reason such as personality and common interest. Likewise, some people are not satisfied with reality of relationship due to the fact they are trapped in a "perfect match" with someone who seemly shares common social status. However, the individual suffers from lack of compatibility as they might be more interested in someone with a lower social status than them or someone who is attractive but not necessarily intelligent.

For example, Li and Zheng provided an instance in which a well-educated married man with high paying salaries was attracted to a karaoke bar host, and her job is categorized in the same area as prostitution. Their reputations based on social status are completely different. He

connected with the karaoke bar host online based on her attractive profile pictures. Although this husband is being unfaithful, he has an obedient wife at home who also has a socially praised background but her look was not so much a catch. The husband later claimed that their marriage union just “seemed right” at the moment, but there certainly was not much else going on. In addition, the passion was missing from the very beginning of their union and they are just superficially happy. Additionally, the internet finally satisfied his needs and wants of having someone attractive and the constant flirting and sexting revived his boring and dreadful life that drained him mentally (Li and Zheng 6).

The example within this online cheating game case demonstrates the frustration of Chinese individuals when they are facing the dilemma of social expectation. On one hand, they feel the obligation to be married or paired up with someone who is socially acceptable. Much like the nationalism transcended the course of love after the May Fourth Movement, love has all aspects of external burden. During the post May Fourth Movement period, people were looking for someone that was “politically righteous” and a shared nationalism value. While in modern days, the political value turns out to convey more facets as the Chinese society is progressing economically. Earning ability, educational level, and also family background are all taken into account when forming a marital relationship. Sheng’s research even shows that when an individual is coming from a divorced family, his or her chance for winning a potential partner is lower than the others since the Chinese society values a harmonic family and believes that the individuals who have divorcee parents much likely to fail their own future marriage too (Sheng 105).

On the other hand, in order to maintain the “face” of a marriage practice, Chinese individuals sometimes are suffering internally and crave for something way different than what

the so-called “face” could even provide. Thus, the quick and easy access to other men and women on dating apps and websites becomes an easy habit. Selecting a partner based on the looks and an uncensored conversation connects people with unhappy individuals as a vent to release their needs. In like manner, the thesis demonstrates that numerous users express an unfulfilled feeling within their current marriage or partnership which is formed through societal expectation and looking for a partner through the internet gave them the freedom to go after what they truly want. A number of users do not only stop at the step of cheating online, but they are also taking it to another step of divorcing or leaving their partners to be with their true love from the internet. The seemingly rebellious and outrage act however bears the resemblance of the discussion of love in May Fourth Movement. It is the revolution to the social oppression to have love and a connection between two individuals as a weapon to fight against the stressful social expectation.

Nevertheless, when putting such rebellious acts in a larger social context, the limitations are still applied to the individuals who choose to go after certain desires. The research reflects that after such a bold approach they imply that the new relationship needs to be treated with extreme caution as they will suffer from constant fear and social judgments (Li and Zheng 8). The modern Chinese marital relationship assured people with free choice but the individuals after all cannot achieve total freedom and the very intimate and privacy part has to be constantly exposed to a collective framework. The social standard guided marital relationship sometimes can pressure individuals to seek a match that is not truly what their hearts are desiring. The seemingly perfect spouse certainly makes the individual an honorable man or woman but behind perfection might be the ugly truth that one has been hide just for the individual to look good on the outside.

The example of Chinese high online cheating rate shows a conditioned release of individuality in the modern world. In order to find what one's heart truly desires from a spouse, which might be publicly shamed as shallow criteria like appearance, and money, the passionate individual turns to the world of internet. He or she does not want to give up the eagerness for true love but meanwhile is also worried about social critics over his or her choice of love. However, the fact that forbidden cyber romance is reportedly still coming out to the real world after all still embodies the existence of emancipated love and marriage practice in China as there will always be a group of population attempt to stand against the social norm.

The phenomenon of cyber cheating reflects the liaison between society and individuals. On one hand, the individuals are chasing after what the hearts want for a marital relationship. On the other hand, the society still has its authoritative stress over the people's spouse choosing. Social expectation plays a major role in the way people perceive one another. With the marriage market being an acceptable and traditional way of matchmaking, having individuals find their own way to their spouses through a computer screen can be deemed irresponsible and immoral.

VII. Analysis of Confucianism and May Fourth Movement

Two major influences of China (parental hierarchy grounded in the Confucianism and the nationalism generated from May Fourth Movement) enabled the coexistence of individualism (where one can make their own spouse choice) and collectivism (where one cares much about the societal norms) that Chinese marital relationship embodies.

A. Marriage under Confucianism

Having the support from parents is an indispensable element when Chinese marriage is taking place. The root for the substantial parental involvement can be traced back to the Confucianism belief. Its adoption of parental hierarchy determined the status difference between

the elders and the younger. As Dawson writes that among the five basic human hierarchies created by Confucianism, the “parents and their children” relationship is listed as the top two above everything else. Such relation also indicates the unconditional obedience from the children to their parents (Dawson 137).

With the background of parental hierarchy, we should also understand the meaning of marriage in the Confucianism framework in order to see how these two can be related. Dawson states the significance of Chinese marriage cannot be simply understood as the connection between two individuals. The essence of a marriage is the union of two families with compatible values and social status (Dawson 137). Thusly, to create a better circumstance for all, parents’ say-so in their children’s marital decision become imperial. The final marriage partner decision would not only influence the future for the parents’ children but also for themselves.

Furthermore, the unequal relationship between man and woman in a marriage under Confucianism's influence also laid the foundation for parents’ participation of the marriage. Similar to the parental hierarchy, Dawson also lists the hierarchy between husband and wife which leaves the female partner little to no sense of individuality within a marriage. Instead of becoming an appendix to her husband’s family, the wife has to cut all the ties with her own family and totally immerse herself into the family she is married to. She could no longer worship her own ancestors but only his husband’s (Dawson 141). To such a degree, it is not hard to understand why parents would be worried and take their children’s marriages as their own business to run. For the parents from both sides, it is a decision that will be associated with their child’s and family’s future.

B. Modern Marriage under Confucianism Influence

The contemporary Chinese marriage though has claimed its independence from parental restrictions after May Fourth but the involvement of parents within their children's marital life is still not negligible. As I mentioned in the last part, decades of tradition cannot easily be vanished after one big political turmoil, and there are certain reasons why parents' authority stays.

Sheng examines one of those reasons through her research among modern Chinese families where she finds Chinese people and their families usually share a close bond. Likewise to the wife's situation in Confucianism dominating age where the woman had to be merged to her husband's household, the modern marriage serves a resembling purpose. The contemporary Chinese marriages intermingle two Chinese families together instead of two individuals only. So not only the wife but also the husband becomes a member of his wife's family. In like manner, the social activities within the two families are going to more frequent. Even after marriage, the individuals will still accommodate their housing choices to be somewhere in the vicinity of their parents'. For the rural Chinese's interviewees of Sheng, the majority of them will just share one big household with all the kinfolds. For the city dwellers, they often times will be settling in the same neighborhood with their parents'. In addition, such intimate family connection can hardly not lead the children to neglect the opinions of their parents' upon choosing a spouse. Though their suggestions lost sovereignty but they will still be on their children's minds (Sheng 162-164).

The close family bondage also resulted in the Chinese children's profound reliance and trust in their parents. Xu and Whyte's exploration of Chinese marriage reflects the busy young modern Chinese generations will give out their spouse choosing rights to their parents due to their insufficient social time outside the work. Even with the awareness that their parents' choice

might not be the one they would love genuinely but they believe in the choice will surely be the one that is suitable for them in every aspect (Xu and Whyte 178)

C. Marriage under May Fourth Movement

The May Fourth Movement is a nationalism centric upheaval which organized by progressive students in 1919 to overturn the western invaders in China. They believed that by changing the blind following of old tradition, such as Confucianism, could assist China and its people from the invaders' coercive aggression. They promoted individuality and the abandonment of the relationship hierarchy among people. Besides, the May Fourth Movement advocated that everyone should obtain their rights of free choices.

In this fashion, free love was put on the table through such movement, and Chinese marital relationship became more personal oriented than a matter of parents' choice. The progenitors of May Fourth Movement considered that free love symbolized the individuality and the liberation from the parental hierarchy (Lee 34). It was an era for people to celebrate being spontaneous.

Nevertheless, the nationalistic nature of May Fourth Movement later on transcended the idea of free love to a higher state which also redefined the standard for love in marriage. The very personal centric decision could no longer be deemed as a moral one and instead, it was being called out as a selfish act. As someone who ultimately followed their own desire while selecting a significant other half, he or she would be criticized as not considering for the needs of the country. To relate love and nation, the society promoted a relationship which two individuals ought to share same rightful political values. And the nationalists believed by doing so could the country be more unified and strong (Croll 34).

To emphasize the guidelines for a nationalistic marriage, the advocators later on established terms such as “small self” and “bigger self” to suggest an individual to sacrifice the needs of small self in order to achieve the stage of bigger self, who were more likely to put the nation and others before oneself (Lee 6). Though the “bigger self” propaganda was interfering with people’s marital relationships but it did not constrain one’s choice totally like before during the Confucianism’s age. People had the rights to veto others’ choice of spouse for them such as their parents’. And they could choose to stay single if they could not find a fitful one. One evidence could be found through Mao’s alternation of Chinese marriage law during the 1950s. Elisabeth Croll recorded the law that claimed the people’s freedom in marital relationships and abolishment of parents’ interference. However, such law still came with a radical marriage suggestion where the personal attraction was nowhere to be found and “union for revolution” became the key for a marital relationship (Croll 38).

However, does it mean the parents lost their total say-so in their children’s marriage and the marital relationship became an ultimate personal matter? The answer is no. Though the parents lost the despotic domination of their children’s marriage through the May Fourth Movement, the tradition under Confucianism framework is hard to be wiped out since it lasted for centuries in China. The nationalist promotion of marital relationship also offered Chinese marriage a new standard that requires the individual’s’ choice of the marital relationship to address the social norm and be less self-centered.

D. Modern Marriage under May Fourth Nationalism Influence

The nationalism did create a more liberal dating pool for individuals from Confucianism proscriptions. The updated marriage laws abolished the arrange marriages of the individuals and some other deviancy such as child marriage through parents’ permission. The new atmosphere

brought hope for young generations at the time to embrace their individuality and the opportunity of a free marriage. However, the nationalism soon transcended meaning of marriage and directed the individuals to pick a future partner based on political consciousness to fit the nationalistic social norm at the time. Croll refers the marital relationship post to May Fourth is built on “common political thinking and on the foundation of struggling together for the revolutionary cause”. Thus, an individual’s political status became one’s most compelling asset. Eventually, after the nationalism revolution cooled down, the political status transformed to the social status where an individual’s “occupation, cultural level and family background” all needed to be taken into the consideration upon choosing a spouse. In addition, through Croll’s research that individuals do care a lot about others’ judgement on their own marriage as a result of political interfered marriage. While before the government would shame marriage without political involvement as a selfish act, the modern people are facing a related fear of people would be looking down on them if they marry someone who has a background that is not socially acceptable (Croll 83, 95).

VIII. Conclusion

The character of Chinese marital relationships has transitioned multiple times over decades. The focus on choosing a partner is constantly shifting. But in modern times, young men and women who desire to find a spouse have a variety of combinations and impacts their own personal lives more so than others. I do not imply that there is no personal choice being made for the marriage matter, but there is a high participation of the parents and consideration of the others more than oneself solely.

The abiding Confucianism parental hierarchy and revolutionary May Fourth nationalism movement allow the coexistence of a person’s individuality and society’s influence on Chinese

marriage practice. This peculiar character constructed the modern individuals' spouse choosing habit where one cannot simply predict the marital relationship in China with a simple word or follows a one way direction.

The Confucianism belief of parental hierarchy enabled the parents' participation within their younger generation's marriage decision. Through generations of inveteracy of such conviction, parents' existence and opinions cannot be simply extracted when talking about marriage. Modern individual's' acceptance of parents' intervention does not only show an obligated respect due to the parental hierarchy but also a tradition that Chinese marriage and partner choosing conveys and has the tendency to carry on as a unique character.

The "booming" marriage market reassures the conspicuous status of parents and their participation within their children's love affairs. As the continuation of the parental hierarchy discourse, they are certainly entitled to practice their authority within their children's spouse selection process and offer multiple opinions to guide their children to make a decision in parents' favor, especially when their potential future daughter-in-law or son-in-law's family will be affiliated with theirs.

On the other hand, other situations such as the limited housing availability in China and the busy schedules of current young generations all dictate the amount of the parents' involvement in the marriage practice. By giving the parents their trust of their future spouse choice, the Chinese people certainly reflect a close connection to the family which shares less of so-called obligation but more of an intimate relationship. In other words, the bond between one another inside a family also rationalizes the frequent parents' engagement in children's life decision in modern society.

In addition, while the May Fourth Movement marked the beginning of individual's love and marital relationship's independence, its nationalism nature pushed an ultimate love liberation to be criticized with the considerations for the others and the whole society. It intends to urge the people to view their choices in a social context and to ditch the selfish act as choosing someone based on shallow reasons. But the nationalistic criteria however also has its own superficial aspect with its established guidelines in hope for the individuals to follow and complete a seemingly perfect match that may or may not share a deeper and internal emotion connection.

The first glance of such marriage and relationship character might lead people to consider the Chinese marital relationship does not have a total liberation but the approach of nationalism in fact generate people's deliberation upon their own marriage choice. Selfish or not, at the end of the day, the rights of making a final choice are still obtained by the Chinese individuals. No written laws are prohibiting them from being with someone they truly feel unfound of and cannot stand. The online cheating case materialized such freedom as there are multiple individuals who are willing to bear the stress of society's judgement and bring the "forbidden love" offline to the reality. Sure, there is criticism and voices of objection from the public but no one could physically stop such a relationship. The freedom belongs to the individuals and real love is accessible.

Furthermore, a tactful choice might apply more advantage to the individual than damage. Sometimes when a momentary heated love affair is fading away, what is left to people are merely regrets and disappointments. Similarly, a marriage that is societal oriented also applies to the collectivism practice that Chinese tend to follow. A choice can simply be made by oneself but will also able to benefit others in the long run.

The Chinese marital relationship conveys two seemingly but very contradicting aspects of a frequent societal correlation and a spontaneous individuality. But the fact is that the free love in China merges the two together to form a peculiar character that solely dedicated to the Chinese style marriage which allows the two to walk on the same path and create the harmony between total freedom and social expectations.

It is also in this way can a very publicized marriage market being opened by parents every morning with massive bachelors and bachelorettes' personal information being exchanged through the third party while an online cheating game is operating under the table among the married or committed ones during the night. Besides, in modern China, the two beliefs of marital relationship are not polarized from each other but instead tolerates each other's differences. This leads to further research in the way these couples handle conflict and what beliefs are tolerated within the family environment.

All things considered, the peculiarity of current Chinese marriage is analyzed through this thesis but the future of Chinese marital relationship is still hard to predict as people have very contradicting attitudes toward parental hierarchy and social expectations. The fact still remains that some people are willing to give in to the external forces and some are trying to rebel all they can, the thesis cannot see where this kind of contravention will lead to, although the result would be interesting regardless. The possibility of another social upheave is not unimaginable and everything could change its course over the time too. But for now, the marital practice in China continues to navigate through the parental hierarchy and society expectations.

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