

# Why Don't People Get Married? A Study On The Factors Influencing The Marriage Intention Of Young People

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**Abstract**

The issue of youth marriage and love has emerged as a prominent social concern in contemporary China, with the youth marriage landscape characterized by a complex interweaving of critical trends: the postponement of first marriages, declining marriage rates, and rising divorce rates. Existing research predominantly focuses on the marriage and love concepts of school-attending youth, yet a significant disparity persists between these conceptual attitudes and actual marriage behaviors. This study breaks through such limitations by redirecting its focus to a broader youth demographic, further exploring their current attitudes toward marriage. By examining their marriage intentions, this research aims to supplement domestic marriage studies and provide a policy-oriented foundation for relevant social interventions.

## 1. Introduction

The difficulty in love and marriage is a severe problem currently faced by Chinese youth. In the *Medium and Long-Term Youth Development Plan (2016-2025)* <sup>[1]</sup> issued by the State Council of China, "youth love and marriage" is designated as one of the ten key development domains for young people, and the plan emphasizes the need to "guide young people in fostering civilized, healthy, and rational attitudes toward love and marriage." In September 2017, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the National Health and Family Planning Commission jointly issued the *Guiding Opinions on Further Improving the Work Concerning Youth Love and Marriage* <sup>[2]</sup>, explicitly stating that "falling in love and starting a family are significant life events and universal needs for young people. Effectively addressing youth love and marriage work not only directly impacts the healthy development of young people but also concerns social harmony and stability." In May 2018, the Love and Marriage Service Committee of the "Voice of Youth" of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China released the *Survey Report on the Love and Marriage of the*

*Contemporary Youth Group*<sup>[3]</sup>. The report indicated that the issues of youth love and marriage have increasingly become a social public topic. The emergence of phenomena such as delayed age at first marriage and declining marriage rates further underscores the severity of the situation regarding youth marriage and love.

Youth's mate selection and marriage issues constitute a fundamental cornerstone for the harmonious and stable development of China's population and society. Whether young people of marriageable age can find suitable partners for love and marriage and get rid of the distress of single life is not only related to the interests of the young people themselves and their families, but also to the social harmony and stability. Therefore, analyzing the factors influencing the marriage intentions of the youth demographic holds significant practical implications. In order to ensure the stability and reliability of the data, this paper adopts a combination of in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys to investigate this issue.

## **2.Literature Review**

### **2.1 Study on the Factors Influencing Marriage Intention**

Marriage intention primarily refers to the willingness of unmarried individuals regarding marriage. There are numerous factors influencing marriage intention. Starting from an economic perspective, Shen Yang and Wang Senhu believe that the current high housing prices have made contemporary unmarried young people feel the dual pressures of economy and psychology, thus affecting their willingness to get married<sup>[4]</sup>. Meanwhile, Yu Yan, Wu Honggeng, and others also delve into the issue from the perspective of home purchasing, arguing that the practice of "buying a home before marriage" has a delaying effect on the marital behavior of the youth demographic. Furthermore, only 37.2% of the respondents expressed willingness to "get married while renting a home."<sup>[5]</sup> Gong Shun, Wang Senhu, and others conducted an analysis of Japanese unmarried youth of marriageable age from a policy perspective. They believed that implementing allowances and subsidies to improve social welfare could effectively enhance the willingness of Japanese young people to get married. However, due to the high cost of childbearing, this approach does not have a significant effect on increasing fertility intentions<sup>[6]</sup>. Ye Wenzhen, Vice President of the China Women's Research Association, Concurrent Professor at Xiamen University, and Doctoral Supervisor, posits from a gender perspective that the increasing substitutability of marriage, the persistence of gender inequality factors within marital relationships, and the "negative demonstration effect" of marriage all influence the marriage intentions of unmarried youth, thereby contributing to the continuous decline in marriage rates<sup>[7]</sup>. Jiang Yue, Vice President of the Marriage and Family Law Research Association of the China Law Society and Professor at the Law School of Xiamen University, points out that the instability brought about by population mobility has also, to a certain extent, dampened people's willingness to marry<sup>[8]</sup>. From the perspective of individualization, Sun Limin believes that, on the one hand, the rapid development of contemporary society has brought immense survival pressure to young people due to social anxiety. On the other hand, the rapid advancement of the internet has increasingly intertwined entertainment with capital, some young people who are inexperienced in the world place their ideal partners too much in the virtual world of the Internet. The parallel occurrence of these two aspects results in people having no time to enter into marriage<sup>[9]</sup>.

### **2.2 Study on the Factors Influencing Marriage And Love**

The factors influencing attitudes towards love and marriage are complex and diverse. Currently, scholars mainly focus on two aspects: family and society.

From the perspective of marital matching, it is indeed evident that the marriage selection patterns of two generations exhibit a certain degree of similarity. Zhang Yi, employing the concept of "endogamy within social classes," delves deeply into the reasons why homogamous marriages (marriages between individuals of similar social status) can maintain stability across different generations. He emphasized that if parents have a high socioeconomic status and educational level, they tend to guide their children to choose partners with a similar or comparable social status when looking for a spouse, so as to maintain their own social class and the stable marriage chain, and ensure the isomorphism of social classes between "in-laws". Observed from the perspective of intergenerational change, significant transformations in values such as mate selection criteria and notions of love become apparent as time progresses<sup>[10]</sup>. However, Wu Xiaoying points out that against the backdrop of China's social transformation, the traditional family-centered culture is gradually fading and being replaced by an increasingly prominent individual-centered ideology. Family values now place greater emphasis on individual independence, emotional needs, and the space for autonomous choice, rather than adhering to the past notions of "matching social status" ("men dang hui dui" in Chinese, implying compatibility in family background) and "living together for practical reasons."<sup>[11]</sup>

The transformation of family concepts has led to the gradual "desacralization" of the younger generation's views on marriage. Some researchers have pointed out that although there are differences in marriage and love values between the two generations, such conflicts are not irreconcilable. The younger generation tends to engage in communication and negotiation with their parents on issues such as "timing of marriage" and "choice of spouse," in an effort to reconcile the conflict between traditional filial piety and personal choice<sup>[12]</sup>. Meanwhile, the marriage and love values of the parental generation also reflect a blend of tradition and modernity. They strive to strike a balance between conventional universal marital concepts and romantic love perspectives, engaging in profound introspection and reconciliation in their respective ways<sup>[13]</sup>. Liu Zixi and He Jiaojiao further pointed out that, due to the operation of intergenerational transmission mechanisms, the emotional experiences between parents and the family environment have exerted a profound influence on the mate selection criteria and concepts of love of the youth group<sup>[14]</sup>.

Other scholars have conducted inquiries from the perspective of social objective factors, with one key concept being the "marriage market." The term "marriage market," as its name suggests, refers to a space where men and women gather to communicate, negotiate, and establish marital relationships<sup>[15]</sup>. Research has revealed that with the emergence of the migrant labor wave and the large-scale outflow of women, traditional endogamous circles have gradually been replaced by a nationwide marriage market. During this process, significant changes have occurred in mate selection criteria, shifting from being primarily guided by ethical values to increasingly considering market resources as the primary consideration<sup>[16]</sup>.

Against the backdrop of gender imbalance in the population structure and population mobility, some scholars, based on the theory of marriage squeeze, have further explored the phenomenon of "difficulty in getting married" among the floating population within the context of the national marriage market. The term "marriage squeeze" refers to the imbalance in the number of men and women within the marriageable age group, which leads to difficulties in marriage for certain segments of the population. When there are more men than women, it is termed male marriage squeeze, and vice versa for female marriage squeeze<sup>[17]</sup>. The root cause of this phenomenon lies in the imbalance of the matching between the population and resources. As a consequence of the intensifying gender imbalance issue in rural areas, the bride price (or betrothal gift) demanded by women in marriage has been escalating. Based on this, scholars have put forward the theory of

the price asking in the marriage market, and have conducted an in-depth analysis of the mechanism of women's price asking in the marriage market and the flow of the bride price<sup>[18]</sup>. Under the guidance of marriage market theory, research has increasingly focused on male parties who, in order to meet the bride price demands of female parties, have to consolidate their personal resources to make an offer. By further analyzing the sources of the bride price, researchers have revealed the direct cause of rural men becoming "bachelors"—intergenerational payment, which refers to male parties' parents utilizing family assets to cover the bride price<sup>[19]</sup>. If parents are unable or unwilling to make intergenerational payments, it may lead to the failure of a marriage<sup>[20]</sup>. Especially in families with more than two sons, conflicts may arise among brothers due to competition for intergenerational resources. The son who fails in this competition will face difficulties in getting married and may ultimately end up as a "bachelor."<sup>[21]</sup>

The research has conducted an in-depth analysis of the multiple squeeze mechanisms suffered by male farmers of marriageable age in the phenomenon of marriage squeeze in rural areas of China. These mechanisms include squeeze resulting from gender structure imbalance at the macro level, squeeze caused by socioeconomic gradient disparities at the meso level, and squeeze triggered by intense inter-individual competition at the micro level. The research points out that the social consequences of gender ratio imbalance among the marriageable population in rural areas often ultimately fall on those marriageable males from bottom-tier families who are at a disadvantaged position in the marriage market. Due to the cumulative effects of multiple factors, these males are most likely to become "bachelors" who struggle to find spouses in rural areas<sup>[22]</sup>.

According to marriage market theory, the research perspective has further shifted to women. Due to regional disparities, there exist two distinct marriage markets: rural and urban. When analyzing the issue of "difficulty in marriage" among women, scholars primarily conduct research based on the mate selection gradient theory. The concept of "mate selection gradient" refers to the tendency in the mate selection process where men generally prefer to choose women of similar or slightly lower social status, while women are more inclined to seek men with an educational level, professional status, and salary income similar to or higher than their own as spouses. This has thus formed the common "man-higher-than-woman" pattern in marital matching.

According to the latest survey data jointly released by the National Population and Family Planning Commission and the matchmaking website Jiayuan.com, among the female group aged between 18 and 25, as high as 70% of the respondents showed a preference for mature and reliable men, that is, the so-called phenomenon of "Uncle Chaser". Meanwhile, the "Survey Report on Chinese Men's and Women's Views on Marriage and Love (2014-2015)" also reveals an intriguing trend: the majority of men generally express a disfavor towards the type of strong, capable, and decisive female career leaders. British artist Gerald Leslie has also expressed similar viewpoints, arguing that "initially, women of higher social status tended to avoid marrying men of lower status. Moreover, in order to win the favor of men of comparable status, these women not only had to compete with women of equal status but also had to confront challenges from women of lower status. Since men of higher status were, to some extent, more likely to choose women of lower status as partners, this resulted in a relatively greater difficulty for women of higher status to find suitable matches, thus giving rise to a surplus phenomenon."<sup>[23]</sup>

Based on the marriage gradient theory, women with advantages in the rural marriage market tend to seek more superior male partners, leading them to often direct their attention towards the urban marriage market. However, in the urban marriage market, compared with urban women, they are in a relatively disadvantaged position and thus face difficulties in "finding a spouse." These women may eventually become "female bachelors" in rural areas, or they could be middle-level women who fail in pursuing upward marriage mobility in rural areas and are

unwilling to accept downward marriage mobility. In the process of continuously postponing their age of first marriage, they may ultimately end up as "leftover women" of advanced age<sup>[24]</sup>.

### 3. Methodology and Procedures

#### 3.1 Theoretical Foundation

The Theory of Planned Behavior, jointly proposed by scholars Fishbein and Ajzen, aims to reveal the decision-making mechanism underlying an individual's behavior<sup>[25]</sup>. This theory emphasizes that an individual's behavioral intention is jointly influenced by subjective norms and behavioral attitudes, and the behavioral intention, in turn, determines the occurrence of actual behavior. Among them, subjective norms involve the expectations and norms of the external world regarding an individual's behavior, while behavioral attitudes reflect the individual's evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the behavior.

Building upon the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Ajzen further introduced the variable of perceived behavioral control to address the limitations of TRA in explaining individual behaviors<sup>[26]</sup>. Perceived behavioral control relates to an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty associated with performing a behavior and is capable of predicting the likelihood of the behavior's occurrence. Consequently, the Theory of Planned Behavior integrates three variables—behavioral attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the formation process of individual behavioral intentions<sup>[27]</sup>.

#### 3.2 Exploratory Interview Design

After a thorough literature review and a systematic organization of relevant theories, this study identified a notable deficiency in current quantitative research on marital intentions, with insufficient reference materials available. In order to enhance the accuracy and depth of the research, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 young individuals. After formulating a preliminary interview outline, targeted questions and in-depth discussions were pursued based on each interviewee's unique responses, so as to comprehensively understand the continuous attention of the younger generation to the concept of marriage and their willingness to get married. Through this process, we summarized the influencing factors of the younger generation's willingness to get married, and combined with relevant theoretical support, we further clarified the research variables and hypotheses of this study.

The following is the content of the interview outline for this study:

- 1. Have you ever been in a romantic relationship?*
- 2. Among your past romantic partners, is there anyone you think you could enter into marriage with?*
- 3. What is your opinion on getting married?*
- 4. Do you have any specific requirements for your future spouse?*
- 5. Do you feel the pressure of being urged to get married? How do you deal with it?*
- 6. Do you think there is an ideal age for getting married?*
- 7. Do you have any married friends around you? Do you communicate with them frequently?*
- 8. How do you perceive the continuous decline in marriage and fertility rates in the country in recent years?*
- 9. What is your current willingness to get married? And why?*

This study takes the Theory of Planned Behavior as its cornerstone. Through in-depth literature

review and meticulous exploratory interviews, it is committed to analyzing the influencing factors of the marriage willingness of the younger generation. After a systematic collation and analysis, we have identified the following key research variables: behavioral attitude, perceived behavioral control, subjective norm, and behavioral intention. Building upon these variables, we further propose the following research hypotheses, with the aim of providing robust theoretical support and empirical evidence for subsequent research:

*H1: The behavioral attitudes of young adults towards marriage have a positive effect on their ultimate marriage intention.*

*H2: The subjective norms of young adults have a positive effect on their ultimate marriage intention.*

*H3: The perceived behavioral control of young adults has a positive effect on their ultimate marriage intention.*

*H4: There is a positive correlation between the behavioral attitudes of young adults towards marriage and their subjective norms.*

*H5: There is a positive correlation between the subjective norms of young adults and their perceived behavioral control.*

*H6: There is a positive correlation between the behavioral attitudes of young adults towards marriage and their perceived behavioral control.*

### 3.3 Scale Design

Based on the previous analysis, under the guidance of the Theory of Planned Behavior, this study has finally formulated six independent variables. At the level of behavioral attitudes, these include instrumental and affective aspects. At the level of perceived behavioral control, it includes the degree of individual information and resource control. At the level of subjective norms, they involve external environmental influences and individual impacts. At the same time, this study has formulated one dependent variable: marriage intention. The specific scale design of this study has made some targeted modifications according to the content of the interviews on the basis of previous studies, making the scale more applicable in this study. The specific measurement indicators of the scale are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Item Design for the Questionnaire Scale Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior

Variable	Level	Item Design	Source
behavioral attitudes	instrumental	I think getting married is a good thing	Tang Junduo <sup>[28]</sup> etc
		I believe that getting married is something valuable	
	affective	The thought of getting married in the future makes me yearn for it	
		The thought of getting married in the future makes me feel happy	
perceived behavioral control	individual information	I can find a suitable significant other on my own	Wang Tiehuan、Zhang Cong <sup>[29]</sup> ; Gui Mei, Huang Yuelin <sup>[30]</sup> ; Lu
		I can enter into a very stable and happy marriage	
		I can reap a perfect marriage through my own efforts	

	resource control	I have ample time to select a marriage partner	Shiyu <sup>[31]</sup> etc
		I have ample time to get along with my future marriage partner	
		I can accept the current marriage costs (including betrothal gifts/dowries and housing prices)	
subjective norms	external environmental influences	Most of my friends around me are already married	Wang Tiehuan、Zhang Cong <sup>[29]</sup> ; Gui Mei, Huang Yuelin <sup>[30]</sup> ; Lu Shiyu <sup>[31]</sup> etc
		My married friends frequently tell me that getting married is a good thing	
		I often come across information related to marriage on social media	
	individual impacts	I will be influenced by my friends around me and start to feel anxious about falling in love and getting married	
		I will feel down due to the pressure from my parents to get married	
marriage intention		I will be influenced by the relevant information on social media and start a relationship	Tang Junduo <sup>[28]</sup> etc
		I am very willing to get married	
behavioral attitudes	instrumental	I think that getting married is a good thing	Tang Junduo <sup>[28]</sup> etc
		I think that getting married is something of value	

## 4.Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

Based on the collected data from the aforementioned scales, we constructed the corresponding model framework in the SmartPLS4 software and imported the meticulously processed valid data. In the PLS algorithm settings, we set parameters of "300 iterations" and "stopping criterion of 8" to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the path model estimation operations. Through this series of steps, we successfully obtained the analysis results shown in Figure 4.1.

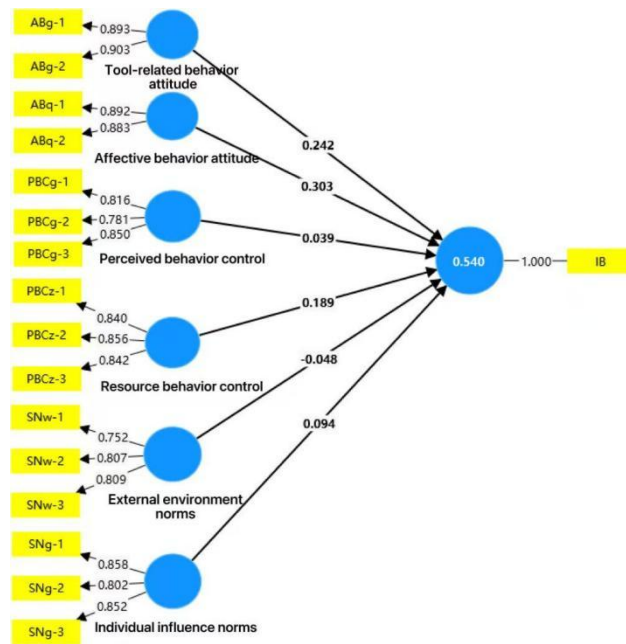


Figure 4.1 Structural Equation Modeling

Based on the aforementioned empirical analysis, we have conducted a comprehensive examination of the hypotheses proposed in this study and summarized the results in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Hypothetical Valid Conditions

No	Content of Assumptions	Results
H1	The behavioral attitudes of young adults towards marriage have a positive effect on their ultimate marriage intention	valid
H2	The subjective norms of young adults have a positive effect on their ultimate marriage intention	valid
H3	The perceived behavioral control of young adults has a positive effect on their ultimate marriage intention	not valid
H4	There is a positive correlation between the behavioral attitudes of young adults towards marriage and their subjective norms	valid
H5	There is a positive correlation between the subjective norms of young adults and their perceived behavioral control	valid
H6	There is a positive correlation between the behavioral attitudes of young adults towards marriage and their perceived behavioral control	valid

## 4.2 Exploration of the Influencing Factors on Marriage Intentions Among Youth Groups Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior

Based on the questionnaire survey and data analysis in Chapter 3, this study can test the hypothesis results from a more scientific and objective perspective. To further analyze the complex and dynamic influence relationships regarding the act of marriage among the younger generation, the study selects ten unmarried youths for in-depth interviews, providing a profound analysis of the aforementioned empirical hypothesis results.



## 4.2.1 Analysis of Influencing Factors under the Theory of Planned Behavior

### 4.2.1.1 The Rising Behavioral Costs Diminish Marriage Intentions Among Youth Groups

Data shows that although China's marriage rate has continued to decline, the cohabitation rate has steadily increased. This phenomenon indicates that the emotional needs of contemporary youth have not diminished; rather, due to considerations of multiple factors, they have chosen to postpone marriage.

Among the numerous economic factors influencing youths' willingness to marry, the bride price stands out as one of the most contentious expenditures. Each year, a significant number of news reports describe cases where pre-marital couples break up due to disagreements over betrothal gifts. However, opinions on this issue differ between genders. A considerable proportion of male youths no longer support the notion that marriage should entail paying a hefty bride price, “*This is kind of a leftover from traditional society, and honestly, the situation now is even worse than before... I can get behind giving symbolic gifts as part of the ritual, but asking for hundreds of thousands of yuan in bride price? That just feels unnecessary to me. If my partner insists on that, I'd probably have to rethink the relationship.*”(A01) “*The bride price thing is tricky. Sometimes when I read the news, I feel like both men and women have their own valid points. For now, I think if the amount makes sense and it's being used for a good reason, it's totally acceptable.*”(A02) However, female youths hold a different perspective on the same issue, “*I think the bride price is like a security fund for the woman. After all, getting married means forming a small, new family, and you definitely need some startup capital. How else are the two of them supposed to make a living?*”(A04) “*I'm definitely in favor of the bride price. It's not just about showing respect for the woman; it's also a form of security for her after marriage. After all, getting married and having children takes a toll on a woman—it's not just about losing her youth, but also a lot of energy and mental well-being. So, having some material security is necessary.*”(A06)

In addition to betrothal gifts—a major expense with significant regional variations—another economic barrier hindering the younger generation from entering marriage is the persistently high housing prices. The concept of “needing to buy a house before marriage” is deeply ingrained in the minds of Chinese people as descendants of an agrarian society. Consequently, the affordability of a substantial mortgage becomes a crucial factor that contemporary youth must consider before entering marriage. “*You can't just bring up marriage if you haven't bought a house. Even if my girlfriend is cool with it, her parents probably won't be. But buying a place means blowing all your savings and borrowing from your folks too. So I'm just... waiting, I guess. Gotta see how it goes.*”(A02) “*I do want to get married, but we haven't bought a house yet. If we do, we'd definitely have to pay the mortgage together. But I'm not graduating until next year, and I haven't even landed a job yet. I have no idea what my salary will be like—how am I supposed to get married in that situation?*”(A10) Unlike the issue of the bride price, where opinions may differ between genders, the heavy economic burden associated with buying a house is a point of consensus among both men and women. This factor significantly impacts the marriage intentions of contemporary young people.

Contemporary youth have certain requirements for quality of life, and the phenomenon of scrimping and saving to buy houses or save money, as seen in the older generation, is rare. Instead, a greater number of young people opt to prioritize fulfilling their daily needs first and saving only when they have surplus financial capacity. This pattern results in younger individuals having relatively smaller savings, making it challenging for them to independently meet the necessary financial expenditures for marriage. Consequently, the age at which they get married

tends to be postponed repeatedly.

#### 4.2.1.2 The imagination of marriage inversely affects one's Marriage Intention

Contrary to the prevalence of anti-marriage and child-free narratives online, the majority of young people still choose to get marry or hold expectations for marriage. This is partly due to the profound influence of traditional ideologies and partly because most young people retain a positive imagination about marriage in their minds. While most young people envision marriage as pure and beautiful, only a fraction feel confident that they can enter a marriage that lives up to their ideals. Another segment believes they are not fortunate enough to encounter a lifelong companion, and thus, they cannot embark on a fulfilling marriage. Consequently, they opt to reject marriage from its very inception.

Although a fulfilling marital life holds considerable appeal for the majority of young people, easily sparking thoughts of romantic involvement and even marriage, on the other hand, based on self-assessment, interviewees tend to compare their own circumstances with those around them, thereby influencing their marriage intention. This presents a certain contrast to traditional stereotypes: rather than blindly choosing to enter marriage upon witnessing others' happy lives, individuals are more prudent in evaluating their own conditions before deciding to take the marital plunge. *"Whether to get married or not is hard to say—it's a complicated thing, I feel like my family and friends around me influence me more. Like, the most perfect marriage I know is my brother and sister-in-law. I've always seen them as the ideal model, but then I think to myself, 'I probably can't live up to that.' So sometimes it just feels like getting married wouldn't make much sense for me.(A01)"* Despite observing relatives around them entering into very happy and fulfilling marriages, there are still respondents who believe they cannot meet such standards, thus adopting a negative attitude towards marriage.

Much like how some interviewees become more rigorous in assessing their own situations after witnessing others' blissful marital lives, there are also a segment of interviewees who, upon observing the deficiencies in others' marital experiences, gain a clearer sense of direction regarding the marital life they are about to embark on. *"My friend married into a wealthy family, like they have really good conditions. But she doesn't have much say at home—she can't even do things the way she wants most of the time. Watching her makes me feel bad. So I figure I don't need to find someone super well-off. I just want a two-person life where we can do whatever we want every day.(A07)"*

The journey from the inception of the idea of marriage, through the influence of multifaceted factors, to the eventual formation of behavioral intention is a protracted and fraught with uncertainty. Each interviewee may develop distinct thoughts prompted by varying circumstances, which could ultimately lead to entirely disparate outcomes.

### 4.2.2 Analysis of Individual Factors among Youth Groups

#### 4.2.2.1 The Pursuit of Self-Actualization Encroaches upon the Space for Marriage

With the gradual rise of feminism in recent years and the outbreak of the global #MeToo movement, an increasing number of young people have prioritized their personal development above all else. The traditional notion of "starting a family and establishing a career" has been gradually replaced by the ethos of "self-reliance and self-improvement." Moreover, the influence of such movements extends beyond women; a considerable number of men have also been swept up in this wave, believing that personal development is of utmost importance and that matters

such as marriage can be "put on hold for now."*"Since I'm still studying, and it's the crucial period leading up to graduation recently, pursuing a Ph.D. is generally quite demanding. It's really hard to spare some energy for a romantic relationship. As a current Ph.D. student, it's tough for me to give my girlfriend enough companionship.(A01)"**"I think it's better to focus on myself right now. Having a good degree and finding a satisfying job are more important. I'm not forcing the marriage thing—after all, dating doesn't have to lead to marriage. Honestly, whether I get married or not, it's not a big deal."*(A06) *"I'm pretty laid-back about this whole marriage thing. It doesn't matter to me whether I get married or not.(A05)"*. Thus, it can be seen that marriage, which was previously referred to as a "major event in life," has seen its importance repeatedly diminished with the development of society.

The widespread adoption of higher education has led to a notable consequence: late marriage is becoming increasingly common. Typically, university graduates are around 22 years old, having reached the legal marriage age in China. However, a considerable proportion of university students opt to pursue postgraduate studies, with some even planning to pursue a doctoral degree. Although the government has revised policies to support graduate students in getting married during their studies, this remains a non-mainstream choice. Compared with marriage, more young people consider successful graduation and securing a stable job as higher priorities, leading to repeated delays in the age of marriage.

#### 4.2.2.2 Hedonism Exerts a Pronounced Inhibitory Effect on Marriage

Currently, the majority of youths of marriageable age are in a phase of struggling to make ends meet. This demographic must not only take care of themselves and achieve independence but also plan for their future—such as purchasing houses and cars. These practical economic issues already impose significant pressure on them, and matters like dating and marriage only further exacerbate their burdens. As a result, a substantial number of young people have begun to exclude marriage—a commitment requiring self-devotion and sacrifice—from their life plans.

Regarding the social phenomenon of the declining marriage rate year by year, all ten interviewees deemed it a natural occurrence and an inevitable path in the course of social development.*"These days, people's family values are getting weaker. In the past, if there were problems at home, folks would put up with them because they thought keeping the family together was the most important thing. But nowadays, most people aren't willing to tolerate that—they put themselves first. That's why so many relationships break up while dating, and even marriages end in divorce. Relationships just fall apart easily now, and it's hard to even get to the point of marriage.(A01)"* *"In the past, people thought getting married or being in a relationship was a big deal, so they were more cautious about it. But now, most people just follow their hearts when it comes to dating. They start and end relationships casually, so it's hard to have a lasting outcome.(A02)"* A considerable number of interviewees believed that the decrease in the marriage rate was due to the fact that modern people's pursuit of family and intimate relationships no longer resembles that of the past. Some interviewees also approached the issue from the perspective of their own pursuit of hedonism.*"These days, people date based on whether they like someone, not really worrying about compatibility or anything. If they like each other, they just give it a shot. If they realize they're not a good fit after a while, they break up quickly and move on to the next person. Everyone's just living in the moment, so long-term relationships are rare.(A06)"*

Modern individuals place an increasingly significant emphasis on their self-needs, which holds considerable positive implications from the perspective of personal pursuit. It signifies that today's young people are developing their own independent opinions and perspectives, enabling

them to clearly and definitively pursue what they desire without being constrained by traditional notions. “*Right now, I have a pretty negative view of marriage. I don't see the point in getting married, and I wouldn't actively say I want to get married or anything.* (A01)” “*I'm just not really into getting married. It doesn't seem meaningful to me. I'm good as I am—being single means I only need to take care of myself, no need to worry about much else.* (A04)” However, all issues exist on a continuum rather than in black-and-white dichotomies. It is unwise to completely negate an alternative choice based on one-sided views.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestion

Similar to the ancient Chinese saying “Each land nurtures its own people,” diverse social backgrounds give rise to distinct cultures and ideologies. China's agricultural civilization, with a history exceeding ten thousand years, has consistently emphasized family production and life stability—a legacy that persists to this day. Traditionally, the milestone of “getting married and having children” marked the end of one's youthful recklessness and the onset of a stable family life. However, in contemporary society, it is no longer feasible to compartmentalize young people's lives using such criteria. The rapid development of modern society coexists with enduring traditional ideologies, a phenomenon that inevitably prompts a series of reflections.

### 5.1 The Impact on Traditional Family Concepts

In his work *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, Mr. Fei Xiaotong elaborated on the definition of family: “Anthropology regards the family as a reproductive community constituted by parent-child relationships, where these relationships form the structural foundation, and the reproductive function serves as its core task.” He further pointed out that the unique and close development of family communities in China stems from the clear division of gender roles: men were responsible for outdoor labor, while women stayed at home, focusing on childrearing if not working in the fields<sup>[32]</sup>. However, with the rise of feminism, traditional gender role divisions have gradually faced challenges. Today, the traditional family model of “men working outside, women managing domestic affairs” has become increasingly rare, and whether to have children after forming a family has become a matter of choice that more and more people need to make. When the element of “having children” in the traditional concept of “getting married and having children” gradually becomes less significant, the importance of “getting married” itself also diminishes.

In Mr. Fei Xiaotong's perspective, there are notable disparities between the nature of families in rural China and those in Western countries. Our families not only fulfill the fundamental function of reproduction but also shoulder multiple roles in politics, economy, and religion. However, with the continuous advancement of globalization, the nature of families in China has begun to undergo a process of “burden reduction,” with the multifaceted functions carried by families gradually diminishing. In the past, marriage was a necessary means to realize a series of family functions, but now the pathways to achieve these functions have diversified. To stimulate childbirth, the state has legally granted legitimate rights to out-of-wedlock children through legislative measures. Paradoxically, this initiative has unexpectedly reduced young people's enthusiasm and confidence in marriage. This unanticipated development undoubtedly poses new challenges and warnings to national legislative bodies, calling for more prudent consideration of future legal adjustments.

### 5.2 The Erosion of Responsibility among Youth Caused by Ideological Openness

In modern society, many young people exhibit a superficial cognition of responsibility, often feeling confused about its core connotations. Numerous young individuals regard romantic relationships as mere emotional exchanges, believing that as long as both parties share mutual affection, there is no need to delve into profound issues such as responsibility, obligation, and social morality. What they pursue more is self-fulfillment and instant gratification within romantic relationships, rather than upholding long-term commitments. It is noteworthy that some young people even shift the focus of their romantic endeavors towards satisfying physiological needs, while neglecting spiritual compatibility.

Current data reveal a continuous decline in China's marriage rate, accompanied by a growing trend of cohabitation. More notably, the number of induced abortions in the country remains alarmingly high, constituting a worrisome social phenomenon. According to the latest report from the National Bureau of Statistics, China recorded 9.76 million induced abortions in 2022. When accounting for unofficial data from private clinics and hospitals, this figure surges to over 12 million, with more than half occurring among young women under 25 years old. This demographic often exhibits a high level of curiosity and impulsivity towards sexual relationships. However, without proper guidance and management, such behaviors may lead to severe physiological and psychological problems. The act of nurturing life should inherently be a process filled with reverence and respect, yet the growing prevalence of such reckless behavior in modern society undoubtedly reflects a lack of responsibility.

Thus, there is an urgent need to guide young people in establishing healthy and rational concepts of love and responsibility, enabling them to face the essence of romance and sexuality squarely and avoid immoral extremes. Through education and guidance, we should assist them in fostering correct values and enhancing their sense of responsibility and respect for marriage, family, and society, thereby achieving harmonious development for both individuals and society.

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