

# Young love in contemporary China: Attitudes and behaviors in romantic relationships

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## Abstract

We study the attitudes and behaviors of young people in modern China in their search for love and long-term romantic relationships. Using a sample of 128 Chinese males and females living in China and abroad, survey responses were analyzed to examine their willingness to approach and be approached by the opposite sex, the length of time needed to establish serious relationships, their tolerance toward hookups, as well as their preferences in meeting potential partners and dating activities. Males were more willing to approach females and felt more enjoyment to be approached by females compared to females, with a statistically very significant difference between the two genders ( $p < 0.01$  in both instances). Females appeared to require a longer time to establish serious relationships than males, with a statistically significant difference between the two ( $p < 0.05$ ). There was no statistically significant difference in the level of tolerance toward hookups between males and females. Categorizing the respondents into several age groups and across four geographical regions did not reveal any statistically significant differences either in terms of their attitudes toward these queries. When it comes to the place to meet partners, schools and colleges are on the top of the list (86%), with eating out as the most preferable activity during dating (95%). Males were expected to pay more during the first date (55%), whereas splitting the bills between the two would be more appropriate as the relationships became more stable (56%). Nearly half of our participants prefer not to have any physical contact before establishing any serious relationships, and three-quarters mentioned that the purpose of dating is to get married. Although it could be a little bit surprising for many people who come from a different background, particularly Western culture, the outcome of this study is nonetheless intriguing. Despite globalization, modernization, rapid economic growth, urbanization, and high level of education, many youths in contemporary China appeared to maintain a high moral standard and traditional value of romantic relationships, while some of them seemed to adopt a more western-style of dating and relationships.

*Keywords:* dating, romantic relationships, courtships, hookups, contemporary China, youths, family.

## 1 Introduction

In order to pass on one's genes and sustain a species, courtship rituals are commonplace in both the animal kingdom as well as in many human cultures. In the animal kingdom, a variety of courtship displays, such as a male bowerbird that constructs a bower and an elaborate dancing of the bird of paradise in the deep forests of New Guinea, has attracted many ornithologists, ethologists, and zoologists to document such spectacular mating rituals [1–7]. Among people and across cultures, the purpose of courtship and relationships is getting to know the person you are dating better with the intention of marrying and forming a family.

The roles of women and men have not always been the same in dating and romantic relationship landscapes. There has been an evident difference in the roles of females and males in the process of dating and courtship until the late 20th century [8]. Traditionally, men's economic status and women's

so-called desirability have been the driving determinants of dating and relationship attitudes. However, with changing social roles and an increase of women in the workforce [9], it is reasonable that there is a shift in the younger generation's dating attitudes. This paper intends to examine young Chinese adults' perspectives on dating and romantic relationships in contemporary China.

Dating culture in China is a relatively new phenomenon. In the past, it was uncommon for unmarried Chinese people to have romantic relationships with one another. Xiaohe and Whyte (1990) revealed that arranged marriages have been the norm for all classes in the last few centuries [10]. The arranged marriage system only came under the light of criticism during the early 20th century, as the Chinese revolution began. Furthermore, Western influence helped Chinese youth to foster a voice in mate choice. After Marriage Law was revised in 1980, marriage in China should be based on mutual affection. In addition, no-fault divorce was granted, shifting the ethical foundation of marriage from the "family's stability to the individual's happiness." Hence, Chinese youth came to enjoy unprecedented freedom in choosing their partners. By the late 20th century, China had a revolution in its dating landscape, as exemplified by a 1990 national survey, in which 30% of Chinese youth reported engaging in premarital sex [11].

In previous generations, even if a romantic relationship existed, it was usually with someone who came from the same social class. *Bānpèi* (般配) is an old word to describe a good match. To be considered a *bānpèi*, there are several elements that need to be satisfied [12]. Some elements are familiar characteristics, such as matching family status and economic standing. Others are more individual characteristics: similar tempers, hobbies, or having good chemistry in general. Contrasting to previous generations, attitudes toward dating and romantic relationships among young people in China have undergone significant changes. As society undergoes a rapid transformation, the number of single people has increased. Social norms are also changing as more people become independent. As a result, attitudes toward dating and romantic relationships among young people in modern China have also metamorphosed.

When it comes to dating, the Chinese dating scene is an interesting one. There is an abundance of singles who want to find a partner, and the heaps of people are looking for love. Similar to people from other cultures, Chinese youths have a number of ways to find their dating partners. Some go to traditional and online dating sites, some use social media apps, some just talk with friends, and some turn to matchmakers. Getting to know someone can be difficult, even among those who speak the same language and share similar cultural backgrounds. A lot of Westerners might be surprised to learn that there is an "official" way of asking someone on a date in China. It takes some understanding of the local culture, and some manage to figure out how to approach the opposite sex successfully.

To the best of our knowledge, the attitude and behavior of Chinese youths when initiating dating and relationships is an area that has just begun to be explored. In the past three years, there has been a plethora of journals surrounding this topic. Blair and Madigan (2019) revealed that while most young adults are willing to obtain parental approval, a large portion of them do not [13]. Most Chinese males are more willing to go against their parents' wishes compared to females. Furthermore, males value familial characteristics, whereas females are influenced by their individual characteristics. Studies have also been conducted on how online dating platforms are changing the relationship landscape. For instance, Chan (2020) examined how dating apps have given Chinese youths more discretion in selecting their intimate and sexual partners [14]. Online platforms have opened new doors to socializing and sexual intimacy. Yet, Chinese youths are less likely to use dating apps and online platforms compared to their Western counterparts, since they tend to strive for more organic relationships.

The differences in dating attitudes between China and the Western world do not end here. Due to inherent cultural factors, Chinese youths hold a different perspective on dating compared to Western youths. In another work, Blair and Madigan (2016) explored the different dating cultures of Western and Chinese adolescents: American students are more likely to date young and more frequently, while their Chinese counterparts hold a less liberal view of dating and are less likely to have sex with their dates [15]. Furthermore, the research conducted by Tang and Zuo (2000) concluded that American and Chinese samples varied greatly in their attitudes toward romantic relationships. The average age

to start dating for the first time was 18 years for Chinese and 14.69 for Americans. Even in college, Chinese students were less likely to be dating than their American counterparts [16]. From such dating patterns, it can be concluded that Chinese dating culture is more reserved and conservative compared to other parts of the world.

Taking it a step deeper, trends and patterns of Chinese youth's sexual habits have been researched nearly two decades ago [17]. It appears that China is following the general global, or at least regional, trend in the commodification of sex. However, in the categories of first sex and marriage age, China is distinct: the respondents are much older compared to the participants from other Asian countries. Furthermore, how younger generations initiate sexual intimacy has also been examined in the context of the paradigm of intimate life. Despite the progressive dating life, sexual intimacy is still regarded as a suppressed subject. Moreover, there exists a double standard, in which females are expected to maintain their virginity, while males are allowed to engage in sexual activities. This phenomenon likely translates into why males are more willing to engage in sexually intimate acts at the beginning of a relationship than their female counterparts. Nevertheless, with the development of dating culture, premarital sex is increasing and soon to be seen as normative [18].

To understand the historical perspective of the Chinese people on dating, romantic relationships, premarital sex, hookups, and virginity, it is necessary to examine the philosophical influences that shaped ancient Chinese society. Along with Buddhism and Taoism, Confucianism is one of the most influential philosophies that has contributed to various aspects of Chinese tradition and culture, including personal values, gender roles, as well as family and social relationships. As reflected in ancient Chinese literature, "puritanical"-Confucianism values the virtue of virginity, especially among women, a possession more precious than all the learning of the world. A girl with an outstanding moral would keep her virginity until she gets married, and thus left no room for premarital sex, let alone engage in hookups [19, 20]. Public displays of affection were also discouraged, not only because Confucius taught that love and tenderness should be treated with mistrust but also because they were seen as overly individualistic and could make others feel uncomfortable [21].

Lee (2007) explored the cultural and historical transformation of love in China during the first half of the 20th century. Although there has been a revolution in sexual intimacy in recent decades, the concept of love discussed in this book evolved from traditional Chinese ideas, which centered on duty, obligation, and family, to a more Westernized concept of romantic love, individual choice, and personal happiness [22]. Indeed, following the abolishment of the arranged marriage custom in 1950 and the implementation of no-fault divorce for marriage dissolution in 1980, Chinese youth gained unprecedented freedom in choosing their partners and forming relationships. Consequently, premarital sex, cohabitation, and trial marriage have become less taboo and are no longer stigmatized in Chinese society [11].

Bo and Wenxiu's (1992) study explored shifting attitudes toward sexuality in urban China in the late 1980s. Although conservative views on sexuality still persisted, the study found evidence of growing openness to change and more liberal attitudes. The authors attributed this shift to a range of factors, including evolving gender roles, greater exposure to Western media, and increased mobility and migration [23]. By conducting a nationwide survey on sexual behavior in modern China, Liu (1998) found that Chinese attitudes towards sexuality have become more liberal since the Cultural Revolution, with a decrease in negative attitudes towards premarital sex and extramarital affairs. The survey, which was conducted in 1990 and involved more than 20,000 participants across 15 provinces, revealed that 86% approved of premarital sex, and 30% of Chinese youth reported engaging in such practices [24].

Pan and Yang's (2004) nationwide study on Chinese university students' sexual behavior provided valuable insights into the shifting attitudes toward sexuality and the impact of cultural and social factors on young adults. The research revealed that premarital sex was not uncommon, with 17% of participants reporting having engaged in it, with a higher proportion of males (20%) than females (12.8%) reporting such experiences. Additionally, more than half (53%) of all participants reported having at least one dating partner, and nearly 46% admitted to having kissed during dating [25]. Chi

et al.'s (2012) study, which focused on university students in Hefei, Anhui Province, further investigated a wider range of sexual behaviors. The study found that gender was a significant predictor of sexual-related activities, with males reported more behaviors than females. In addition to engaging in romantic relationships and living in urban areas, which predicted sexual behaviors among females, there were three additional factors that were significantly associated with more sexual behaviors among males, i.e., low educational aspirations, time spent on the Internet, and past sex education experiences [26].

In her doctoral dissertation, Hu (2019) examined the attitudes and experiences of Chinese youth towards sexual behaviors and relationships in the context of changing moral standards and social values. Based on in-depth interviews with 26 Chinese university students, Hu's study revealed that while premarital sex and non-monogamous relationships have become more common among Chinese youths, they still face social and cultural pressures to conform to the traditional norms of sexual morality. The study also highlighted the role of gender, class, and family background in shaping young people's sexual practices and attitudes. Overall, the research sheds light on the complex and evolving landscape of sexuality in contemporary China [27]. Recently, Yu et al. (2022) provided a comprehensive overview of sexuality in contemporary China. The authors introduced sexuality in ancient and modern China, discussed the social contexts that gave rise to a sexual revolution, and presented survey results on recent changes and socioeconomic patterns of sexual attitudes and behaviors among the latest cohort of Generation X and Chinese millennials. Although their findings were consistent with other studies where sexual attitudes have become more liberal and were accompanied by earlier sex debut and more diverse sexual activities, the younger cohorts seem to conduct lower sexual frequency rates than the preceding generations, particularly among highly educated Chinese [28].

Farrer's (2014) book chapter provides valuable insights into the evolving attitudes toward premarital intimacy and sexual behavior among youths in urban China. Drawing on data from qualitative interviews with 68 highly educated Shanghai residents (33 males and 35 females) aged 20 to 28 years, the author observed a growing tendency to separate premarital intimacy from marriage, resulting in an increase in sexual activity among young adults. The new cultural scenario of "love relationships" (恋爱关系 or liàn'ài guānxì) has gained legitimacy, with young people delaying marriage and investing more time in pursuing such informal courtships. Farrer identified globalization, modernization, urbanization, and changing attitudes towards sexuality as the primary drivers of these changes. The author also analyzed the impact of these changes on relationships, sexuality, and family formation in urban China [29].

Dating violence is perhaps the most widely investigated topic when it comes to modern Chinese dating behaviors. Similar to the rest of the world, intimate partner violence is a public health issue [30]. Patriarchal values, women's lack of financial autonomy, low male socioeconomic status, and alcohol consumption have been associated with such violent patterns. Furthermore, Chinese women whose beliefs and experiences are closer to traditional norms that limit gender equality, may be at higher risk of being subjected to intimate partner violence [31, 32]. Despite growing equality and socio-economic reforms, a large number of women are still influenced by traditional male-dominated values, leading to the prevalence of dating violence. Even when considering relatively less hostile environments between genders, many Chinese women in contemporary China still experience dilemmatic male chauvinist double standards in sexual behavior, experiencing pressure to maintain virginity while also facing sexual coercion [33]. Indeed, the transformation of cultural values and a shift toward greater gender equality are required to address these issues.

The literature on the dating landscape of China's newest generation is relatively scarce. Some journal articles have begun to be published in the past few years or so, while previous research has been mostly conducted during the late 20th century. Adding to these published research papers, this article deals with attitudes toward dating and romantic relationships among Chinese youths. They are among the latest cohorts of millennials and the early cohort of generation Z. When the survey was conducted, more than three-quarters of the respondents were aged between 21 and 25 years. They were born in the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s. Most of these youths reside in main-

land China, although some are also located overseas. The participants were coincidentally evenly split between females and males, and many of them were attending or graduated from prestigious universities in China. Following this demographic, this study analyzed the perspective of Chinese youth in three different categories: gender, age, and region. In terms of gender, the results suggest a statistically very significant difference between males and females when it comes to approaching others and their preference for being approached by the opposite sex. However, when it comes to age difference and geographical region, there are little variations in young adults' attitudes. This paper proposes how, despite new ways to meet partners and different social atmospheres compared to previous generations, Chinese youths maintain traditional values in sustaining a romantic relationship.

To complement the body of literature on how youths in contemporary China initiate dating and relationships, as well as whether there is a paradigm shift within the culture in the attitude toward a casual sexual encounter (hookup), we are interested in examining the following research questions:

- When it comes to initiating a dating, what are the feelings of modern Chinese youths approaching or being approached by the opposite gender? We would hypothesize that males, older youths, and overseas Chinese are not only more open to approaching other people but also feel more enjoyable being approached by the opposite gender.
- What are the preferences in pre-dating and dating activities, as well as other logistic dating issues, such as the financial burden, appropriate behavior, and the purpose of dating and courtships?
- How long does it take for Chinese youths to establish serious relationships? Our hypothesis for this question is that it will take a couple of months for them to have comfortable dating before establishing a serious relationship, with females, younger ones, and youths residing in mainland China need longer time than males, older ones, and overseas Chinese, respectively.
- What are their attitudes toward casual sexual encounters? How well does one accept hookups? We hypothesize that many of them (more than half) are pretty open about hookups and accept it accordingly, with males and overseas Chinese are more tolerance than females and those who reside in the mainland China, respectively.

In the context of this article, “hookup” is to be understood as a short and casual sexual encounter between two people who are not in a dating or serious relationship and do not expect anything further. Certainly, many Chinese youths in our study might also adopt some form of ambiguous definition of hookup such as fooling around and kissing [34–37]. Moreover, we also limit our discussion to the traditional relationship between females and males. There is certainly a topic on dating and relationships involving sexuality and gender identity that deserves more attention as well, such as LGBT(Q) in modern China; however, this is not the scope of our discussion and should be addressed elsewhere.

Dating refers to social activities whereby two people meet with the aim of getting to know each other better with a view to possibly starting a romantic relationship. This can be considered the first stage of getting to know someone. When discussing relationships in this article, we refer to them as romantic relationships. Although relationship and courtship can be and are often used interchangeably in this article, there is a subtle and fundamental difference between the two. The former specifically refers to a close and committed personal association between two people that usually involves romantic love and affection. This is the second stage of becoming acquainted with someone special. Courtship is a traditional dating period before engagement and marriage. It is a more formal and old-fashioned term, typically referring to the period when a couple dates with the intention of finding a life partner. Although we may consider it the third stage before marriage, some couples might argue that their courtship period encompasses both dating and relationships. Courtship tends to be more a intentional and purposeful stage before engagement and marriage, whereas relationships do not always progress to these two subsequent stages. Many couples are in long-term relationships by cohabiting or living together without being married [38–42].

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the research methodology of this study. It covers the participants of our study, the survey that we collected, the procedure of data



collection, and the statistical analysis that we performed. Section 3 outlines the results of our findings. Section 4 discusses the outcomes of our observations and provides a conclusion to our discussion.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Participants

The participants were 128 young Chinese people between 16 and 33 years of age, split in half between females and males. Although they were mostly located in mainland China, some resided overseas. All participants were well-educated, and many of them were enrolled in or graduated from highly ranked and prestigious universities in China. To collect data, we implemented a convenient sampling method. We invited our friends to participate in the survey, and they were also asked to voluntarily spread out the information to their friends. The URL link for the survey was advertised using *WeChat Moments*, a social networking application for *WeChat* users. The participants then voluntarily responded via the same media application. For readers who are not familiar, *WeChat* (微信) is a Chinese instant free messaging, calling, social media, and mobile payment application developed by Tencent. It is similar to *WhatsApp*, which is owned by the American company Meta Platforms and is a primary means of Internet communication in Latin America, the Indian subcontinent, and large parts of Europe, Africa, and Oceania.

### 2.2 Materials

To measure attitudes toward an initial step in dating and relationships (pre- and out-of-dating), we invited the participants to indicate their level of agreement with the following survey questions. The shortened keyword(s) that will be used when explaining the findings are provided in the square brackets. An explanation of the responses to each question follows immediately after the inquiry.

1. [Approaching] On a scale of 1 to 5, will you approach people?  
The response values and their meanings were as follows: (1) completely no, (2) somewhat no, (3) unsure, (4) somewhat yes, and (5) completely yes.
2. [Being approached] On a scale of 1 to 5, do you like being approached?  
The response values and their meanings were as follows: (1) completely repellent, (2) somewhat repellent, (3) unsure, (4) somewhat enjoyable, and (5) completely enjoyable.
3. [Serious relationships] How long does it take to establish a serious relationship?  
The response values and their meanings were as follows: (1) within a week, (2) between one and two weeks, (3) between two weeks and one month, (4) between one and three months, and (5) more than three months.
4. [Hookups] On a scale of 0 to 10, how well do you accept hookups?  
A value of 0 indicates completely unacceptable, whereas a value of 10 indicates completely acceptable.

To investigate the culture of dating and romantic relationships among our respondents, we also asked the following additional questions. We provided several options to all queries, and except for numbers 7 and 8, other questions allowed for multiple responses.

5. [Meeting preference] Where do you prefer to meet the opposite sex or your potential partner?  
The options are as follows: school (including classes, student clubs, etc.), workplace, approaching people in public places (such as on the streets, shopping malls, supermarkets, etc.), bars, through friends' friends (such as being introduced by friends, let's say at some gatherings, etc.), the Internet (including social or dating applications), and others.

6. [Dating activity] What do you usually do on a given date?  
The options are as follows: eating, drinking (such as milk tea or other non-alcoholic beverages, but also may include getting some desserts), going to the cinema and watching movies, outdoor activities (taking a walk, hiking, flying a kite, etc.), singing in a karaoke television (KTV) room, doing handicrafts (do it yourself/DIY stuff), drinking alcohol, and others.
7. [First-date pay] Who should pay for the first date? There are four options for this question: males should pay more, females should pay more, the bills should be split evenly, and the one who initiates the chase should pay more.
8. [Relationship pay] Who should pay for romantic relationships? There are three options for this question: males should pay more, females should pay more, and the bills should be split evenly.
9. [Appropriate] Which of the following are appropriate before establishing a relationship? The options are as follows: holding hands, putting an arm around the shoulder, wrapping an arm around the waist, touching and kissing, having sex, and none of the above.
10. [Purpose] What are your purposes for dating? The options for this question are as follows: hoping to get married, for love, for physical needs, because of boredom and loneliness, because of pride or following the crowd, parents push me to get married, and others.

## 2.3 Procedure

We collected the data through a one-time survey on 25 January 2021, and the questionnaire remained open until 26 January 2021. It took less than 5 minutes to complete the survey, and all participants responded voluntarily via *WeChat*. The survey consisted of questions regarding gender, age, attitudes toward approaching the opposite sex, feelings about being approached by other people, their opinion on the period to establish a serious relationship, their perception of a casual sexual encounter, their preference to meet their potential partners, their dating activity (including who should pay more), their opinion of appropriate behavior before establishing a serious romantic relationship, and their purposes for dating. Although the survey did not ask about the respondents' position, we obtained their geographical location through the Internet Protocol (IP) address, which we converted manually to a set of the twosome province–city information.

## 2.4 Data analysis

All collected data were tabulated and processed into a spreadsheet file that could be opened using either *Microsoft Excel* or *LibreOffice Calc*. We then conducted the statistical analysis of independent *t*-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) using *LibreOffice Calc* Version 6.4.7.2.

# 3 Results

## 3.1 Demographics and overview

Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the participants based on gender. Of the 128 respondents, males and females were split equally, that is, both were 64. The average age of all participants was 22.88 years old, with females and males 22.81 and 22.95 years old on average, respectively. Both sexes, as well as all participants, had a median age of 23. The minimum and maximum ages were 16 and 33 years, respectively, which were both females. The youngest and oldest male participants were 18 and 28 years of age, respectively.

Table 2 shows the demographics of the participants' according to their age group. Although their ages ranged from 16 to 33 (around 17 or 18 years of age difference), the majority of them were between 22 and 24 years old and constituted more than three-quarters of the total participants (98

	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
$N$	64	64	128
$\bar{x} (Q_2)$	22.81 (23)	22.91 (23)	22.88 (23)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants based on sex. Coincidentally, the participants were divided into 50% females and 50% males, with a median age of 23 years.

respondents). Furthermore, the number of females outnumbered males for the age group of 22 years, that is, 24 vs. 13, whereas the opposite occurred for the age group of 24 years, that is, 7 vs. 13. The numbers from both sexes from the other age groups were relatively comparable.

	Age group					Total
	$\leq 21$	22	23	24	$\geq 25$	
$N$	14	37	41	20	16	128
Female	6	24	19	7	8	64
Male	8	13	22	13	8	64

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of participants according to age group. The participants' ages ranged from 16 to 33 years, and more than three-quarters of the participants were 22–24 years old (76.56%).

Table 3 presents the participants' locations. The numbers of females and males in each region did not differ significantly. The majority of them resided in mainland China (88.28%, 113 people), whereas more than 11% participated from overseas (15 people). More than 60% (79 people) of those who lived inside the country were located in the eastern region of China, which encompasses Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Fujian, Hebei, Jiangsu, and Hainan Provinces, among others. Economically, the Eastern region is the most developed area in China, whereas the western region is the least developed one. The latter covers both the northwestern provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi, and Qinghai, as well as the southwestern provinces of Chongqing, Sichuan, and Yunnan. The central region includes Henan, Jilin, Hubei, Jiangxi, Shanxi, Heilongjiang, and Inner Mongolia Provinces. Participants from outside China resided in Britain, the United States, or Singapore. Although geographically Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang Provinces are located in the northeastern region of China, we categorized them as the eastern category for simplicity. Similarly, the southern province of Guangdong is also combined with the eastern category.

	Gender				Total
	East	Central	West	Overseas	
$N$	79	24	10	15	128
Female	36	14	5	9	64
Male	43	10	5	6	64

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of participants by region. The majority of participants (61.72%) resided in the eastern region, with nearly 80 out of 128 respondents identified from this area.

The bar chart in Figure 1 presents the responses of the participants to the four queries related to sexual behavior. The chart is an effective tool for comparing and analyzing responses across all four



queries. The first three questions were rated on a scale of 1 to 5 and are represented by blue, red, and green bars, respectively. The fourth question, depicted by yellow bars, is rated on a scale of 0 to 10 and is about hookups. The chart shows that the majority of respondents considered approaching the opposite sex in public places somewhat unacceptable, while feeling unsure when being approached by others. It also reveals that many young Chinese people who were dating would take more than one month but less than three months to establish a serious relationship. Notably, the chart indicates that hookups are largely unacceptable among our respondents, as indicated by the tall yellow bar on the left-hand side.

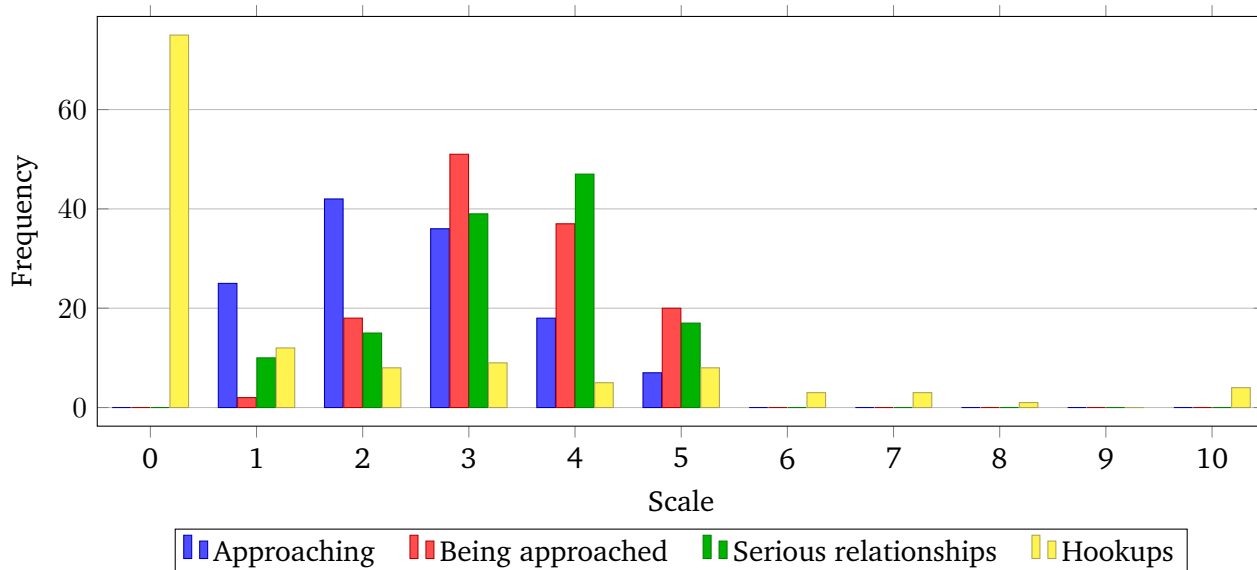


Figure 1: (Color online) Bar chart representation of the responses to query No. 1–No. 4 for all participants. The first three questions are on a scale from 1 to 5 (described by the blue, red, and green bars, respectively), whereas the fourth question on hookups ranged from 0 to 10 (depicted by the yellow bars).

### 3.2 Gender

Table 4 displays the independent  $t$ -test results in terms of gender differences for the first four survey questions (that is, No. 1–No. 4). On the one hand, we observe that in terms of their willingness to approach other people (in this case, and most cases, other people mean the opposite sex), males are more willing to do so compared to females, although the average values for both genders of less than 3 can be interpreted as less willing to take the initiative. The female average of  $\bar{x}_F = 2.188$  was closer to somewhat no, whereas the male average of  $\bar{x}_M = 2.875$  was closer to unsure, but more into the domain of “no” rather than the domain of “yes.” On the other hand, when it comes to being approached by the opposite sex, the average values for both genders larger than 3 suggest that both males and females enjoy the encounter slightly, albeit still having a degree of uncertainty. The female average of  $\bar{x}_F = 3.172$  was closer to unsure, whereas the male average of  $\bar{x}_M = 3.688$  was between unsure and somewhat enjoyable. It should not come as a surprise that males feel more enjoyment than females when the opposite sex approaches them. In both cases, there were statistically significant differences between males and females in their willingness and enjoyment when they approached the opposite sex ( $p = 0.0004 < 0.01$ , extremely significant) and being approached by others ( $p = 0.0023 < 0.01$ , extremely significant). The effect sizes for “Approaching” and “Being approached” were both moderate, with Cohen’s  $d = 0.641$  and  $d = 0.521$ , respectively.

Regarding the establishment of serious relationships, it would not be a surprise if females needed more time for the process than males, as indicated by their higher average time frame ( $\bar{x}_F = 3.578$

vs.  $\bar{x}_M = 3.141$ ). From these values, both genders seem to agree that more than one month must pass before moving on to more serious courtship, but less than three months on average. The mean difference between males and females in their time frame when establishing serious relationships was statistically significant ( $p = 0.0238 < 0.05$ ), with a moderate effect size of Cohen’s  $d = 0.404$ .

When it comes to their attitudes toward accepting a casual sexual encounter, it is interesting that both genders exhibit low average values, even though males seem to be more permissive than females ( $\bar{x}_M = 1.969$  vs.  $\bar{x}_F = 1.118$ ). These low means suggest that both genders in general did not really accept hookups in their search for romantic lives. Despite the mean difference for this survey question, there was no statistically significant difference between males and females in their attitude toward casual sexual encounters ( $p = 0.0792 > 0.05$ ), with a small effect size of Cohen’s  $d = 0.313$ .

Query	Mean		Standard deviation		$t_{crit}$	$p$ -value	Cohen’s $d$
	Female	Male	Female	Male			
Approaching	2.188	2.875	1.022	1.120	3.625	0.0004*	0.641
Being approached	3.172	3.688	1.022	0.957	2.948	0.0023*	0.521
Serious relationships	3.578	3.141	1.020	1.139	1.979	0.0238*	0.404
Hookups	1.188	1.969	2.115	2.828	1.767	0.0792	0.313

\*significant at  $\alpha = 0.01$  level \*significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$  level

Table 4: Summary of independent  $t$ -tests for the four survey questions by comparing the mean difference between females and males. There were extremely statistically significant differences between males and females in their willingness to approach the opposite sex ( $p = 0.0004 < 0.01$ ) and their enjoyment of being approached by others ( $p = 0.0023 < 0.01$ ). There was a statistically significant difference between both sexes in terms of the time frame to establish a serious relationship ( $p = 0.0238 < 0.05$ ). All three situations had a moderate effect size.

Figure 2 displays the bar charts of the responses to the four queries based on the sex of the respondents. The chart is divided into four panels, with each panel corresponding to a query. The charts offer a visual representation of how male and female respondents differed in their responses to these questions. The blue bars on the left-hand side of each chart represent male participants’ responses, while the red bars on the right-hand side represent female participants’ responses. The first three queries range from 1 to 5 and are about Approaching, Being approached, and Serious relationships. The fourth query, which concerns Hookups, ranges from 0 to 10.

On the one hand, when looking at the differences between genders, we can observe that the majority of both males and females considered approaching the opposite sex in public places as somewhat unwilling. However, more males were willing to approach others than females, and conversely, more females were less willing to approach others than males. On the other hand, the bars seem to shift to the right on the matter of being approached by other people. While the majority of males considered being approached somewhat enjoyable, the majority of females felt unsure when being approached by the opposite sex. Only a small minority from both sexes considered to be approached by others were completely unacceptable.

Regarding the time needed to establish a serious romantic commitment, there were noticeable differences between the two sexes. Males tended to prefer a shorter period, while females favored to lengthen the time. The majority of males believed that between two weeks to one month is sufficient time to establish a serious relationship, while the majority of females felt that it takes more than one month but less than three months to move on to a more serious commitment. Although premarital sex is becoming more common among young people in contemporary China, conservative attitudes toward hookups remain prevalent, even when accounting for gender differences. The majority of both males and females reported that hookups were entirely unacceptable, which is reflected in a strongly right-skewed histogram. Notably, a greater proportion of females than males held this view, with 43 females

indicating complete unacceptability compared to 32 males. However, there were a few outliers, with one female and three males expressing the opinion that the hookups were entirely acceptable.

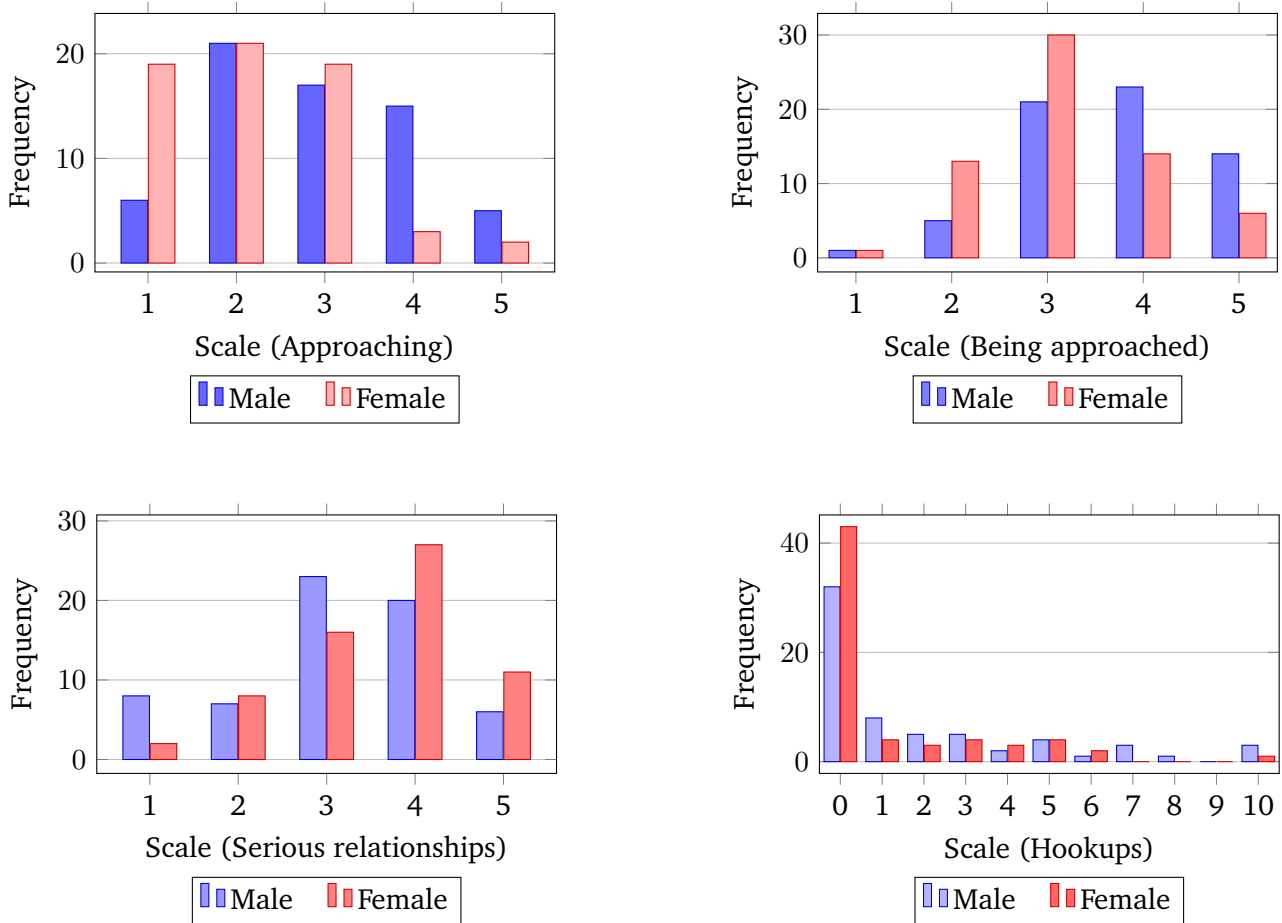


Figure 2: (Color online) Bar chart representation of the responses to query No. 1–No. 4 based on sex. The male and female responses are represented by blue and red bars, respectively. The first three questions are on a scale of 1 to 5, whereas the fourth question on hookups covers from 0 to 10. (Top left panel) Approaching, (Top right panel) Being approached, (Bottom left panel) Serious relationships, and (Bottom right panel) Hookups.

### 3.3 Age

As displayed in Table 2, we categorized the participants into five age groups. Table 5 presents a summary of the one-way ANOVA for the four survey questions mentioned in Subsection 2.2. There were no statistically significant differences in their attitudes toward approaching, being approached, periods for establishing serious relationships, and hookup permissiveness across the five different age groups.

### 3.4 Region

As shown in Table 3, we categorized the participants into four distinct geographical regions. Table 6 presents a summary of the one-way ANOVA for the four survey questions listed in Subsection 2.2. The results were similar to those obtained by categorizing the participants by age group. No statistically significant differences were observed in the four attitude categories across the four geographical regions.

Query	Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Approaching	Between Groups	2.8307	4	0.7077	0.5543	0.6963
	Within Groups	157.0433	123	1.2768		
	Total	159.8750	127			
Being approached	Between Groups	6.3451	4	1.5863	1.7263	0.1484
	Within Groups	113.0220	123	0.9189		
	Total	119.3672	127			
Serious relationships	Between Groups	3.0749	4	0.7687	0.6287	0.6249
	Within Groups	150.3938	123	1.2227		
	Total	153.4688	127			
Hookups	Between Groups	52.6358	4	13.1589	2.1507	0.0785
	Within Groups	752.583	123	6.1186		
	Total	805.2188	127			

Table 5: Summary of single-factor ANOVA for the four survey questions across the five age groups. None of the age groups showed a statistically significant difference in any of the four categories considered in the survey.

### 3.5 Correlation and effect size

Table 7 reveals the Pearson’s correlation coefficients  $r$  between each of the first four survey questions for all participants. The corresponding  $p$ -value follows below each  $r$ -value and is given in parentheses. The level of significance is indicated either by an asterisk for  $\alpha = 0.05$  or a star for  $\alpha = 0.01$ .

On the one hand, a statistically very significant positive correlation value with moderate effect size was observed between the willingness to approach the opposite sex and the enjoyment of being approached by other people,  $r(126) = 0.3386$ ,  $p = 0.0001 < 0.01$ . A similar characteristic also appeared between willingness to approach the opposite sex and level of tolerance toward hookups,  $r(126) = 0.2277$ ,  $p = 0.0097 < 0.01$ . On the other hand, a small effect size of a positive correlation coefficient, but not statistically significant, was perceived between the enjoyment of being approached by other people and the level of tolerance toward hookups,  $r(126) = 0.1523$ ,  $p = 0.0861 > 0.05$ .

We further observed that there were negative correlation values between the third survey question on the length of time to establish a serious relationship with the remainder of the other three variables. Among the Chinese youths in our study, the willingness to approach the opposite sex and the period in establishing a serious relationship were negatively correlated with moderate effect size and very significant statistically,  $r(126) = -0.3348$ ,  $p = 0.0001 < 0.01$ . A similar characteristic was also observed between the enjoyment of being approached by other people and the time needed to form a serious relationship,  $r(126) = -0.2790$ ,  $p = 0.0014 < 0.01$ . Our respondents also exhibited statistically significant and moderate negative correlations for the period required for a stable relationship and their tolerance toward hookups,  $r(126) = -0.2264$ ,  $p = 0.0102 < 0.05$ .

### 3.6 Preference, activity, and purpose

Table 8 displays the results of the survey questions that asked about their preference to meet someone special, their dating activity, including what is appropriate behavior before establishing a serious relationship and who should pay for both the first date and any established relationships, as well as the purpose of dating. Except for the queries on who should pay more, that is, Questions No. 7 and 8, other questions allow respondents to give multiple answers, and thus the total number of both cases and their corresponding percentages exceed 100%.

Regarding the place of preference to meet the opposite sex or their potential dating partners, our findings suggest that the majority of Chinese youths in our study prefer to meet them at schools,





idea for couples, according to young people in China, is going out for meals, with the majority of them (more than 95% or 122 cases) usually doing this. Going out to visit cinemas and watching movies is certainly another romantic thing to do for young Chinese couples, with nearly 90% or 115 cases doing that. Eating out would not seem complete without getting some desserts or ordering some drinks, usually tea or coffee, but certainly non-alcoholic beverages, so that our new couples can spend time a little bit longer getting to know each other better. More than 70% (92 cases) preferred pursuing this activity. When the weather is nice, doing some outdoor activities can also be fun for many Chinese couples in our study, with nearly two-thirds (64% or 82 cases) taking a walk with their partner, going hiking at a hill or mountain, visiting a nearby beach, riding bicycles, or even flying a kite while having a picnic. Singing in a karaoke television room, making some handicrafts, or even drinking alcohol moderately can also be considered fun yet wholesome dating activities, where the preference for these activities ranges from a quarter (26% or 34 cases) to less than two-fifths (38% or 48 cases).

Now that dating couples would like to progress to a more serious relationship, issues about money always come out, and they certainly would discuss who should pay more at this stage of a relationship. Although more than half said that males should pay more on the first date, approximately the same number of people (72 cases or 56%) voted for splitting the bills between the two during a steady relationship. A significant number of voters (56 cases, 44%) said that males still should pay more. Similar to the previous case, none of the participants suggested that females should pay more in a relationship.

When it comes to appropriate behavior between couples before they establish a serious relationship, nearly half of them (47% or 60 cases) said that extending an arm around the shoulder was fine, less than one-third (33% or 42 cases) opted that holding hands is alright, only one-eighth (13% or 16 cases) expressed that wrapping an arm around the waist would be acceptable. A small yet visible minority considered touching and kissing (8% or 10 cases) and having sex (7% or 9 cases) appropriate. However, nearly half of the participants (49% or 63 cases) did not consider all the aforementioned behaviors appropriate for dating.

When asked about the purpose of dating, 75% (96 cases) of our respondents declared that they hope to get married one day, and nearly 70% (89 cases) picked out seeking love. Less than 30% (35 cases) dated because they felt lonely or combated boredom, and less than 20% (22 cases) went for a date to satisfy their physical needs. A small minority of participants did so because of pride or following a crowd (7% or 9 cases), and only 3% or 4 cases went out to date because their parents were pressuring them to marry.

## **4 Discussion and conclusion**

### **4.1 Limitation**

This study admits several limitations. First, the sample size of 128 people may have been too small to accurately describe the overall youth population of the entire country. Related to this small sample size, the second limitation is that our study focused on the particular demographics of young people, namely those who were studying or graduated from prestigious and favorite universities in China. Although this can be a strong point of our study because it targeted a specific group of highly educated and academic achievers from Chinese millennials and Generation Z, the findings presented in this study revealed only a small portion of the entire youth population. Those who attended lower-tier colleges, including vocational schools, and those who did not attend college might have different opinions regarding dating and relationships.

Third, we asked about neither their relationship nor their marital status. We would not worry too much about the latter because nowadays, not only in China but also across many regions in Asia, highly educated couples tend to marry later in their lives. However, it would be interesting to determine the former regarding whether our respondents were single, currently dating, or in a serious relationship. Even for those who were still single, several possibilities could be explored, such as single but not

looking for a partner, single and looking, had dated before but did not manage to establish a serious relationship, not currently in a relationship but had been in at least one in the past, or currently in a relationship. With this information, we could further investigate whether there were different attitudes in terms of approaching the opposite sex, being approached by others, or the levels of tolerance toward hookups.

## 4.2 Discussion

To initiate dating and relationships, two people need to meet somewhere, sometime. In-person approaches, whether males approaching females or females being approached by males, can be an effective way for the two parties to connect, initiate dating, and form romantic relationships. Owing to wide-ranging cultural norms and personal preferences, the exact prevalence of males approaching females in public places can be difficult to determine. In some cultures and societies, such as in the West, such behavior can be considered common and even expected, whereas in others, such as in China and other Eastern cultures, it might be less common, discouraged, or even frowned upon. At the individual level, however, some people feel more confident and comfortable than others when it comes to approaching someone they are attracted to in a public setting, and thus they are more likely to do so. However, other factors such as gender roles, social norms, and cultural differences can influence the likelihood of males approaching females in public places, or vice versa, females being approached by males in public places. (The sexes can always be switched, of course.)

To answer our **first research question** regarding the attitudes of young people in China toward approaching and being approached by the opposite sex in a public setting, a short answer is that they seem reluctant to do so. As we observe in Section 3, the mean values of “Approaching” for both sexes are closer to somewhat no for females and unsure for males, whereas the mean values of “Being approached” are closer to unsure for females and somewhat enjoyable for males. From this finding, we confirmed the first part of our hypothesis that males were more willing to approach females and at the same time, they also felt more enjoyment of being approached by females. These differences were statistically very significant with a moderate effect size. We could not confirm both the second and the third parts of our first hypothesis regarding age differences and geographical locations. There was no evidence that older youths were more willing to approach or felt more enjoyment of being approached by the opposite sex than their younger counterparts. A similar situation was also observed when comparing Chinese youths who resided overseas with those who lived in mainland China. The differences were not statistically significant in both instances of age groups and geographical locations, in both categories of “Approaching” and “Being approached.”

Examining the correlation between “approaching behavior” and “enjoyment of being approached,” our findings indicate a moderate, yet meaningful, positive correlation. This suggests that as the inclination to initiate contact with someone increases, so does the satisfaction derived from being approached by that person. However, the moderate effect size implies that while the correlation is significant, it may not be entirely driven by this relationship and could be influenced by other factors. Individuals who are willing to approach the opposite sex in public places may have a higher level of confidence in themselves and their abilities to interact with others. They have developed social skills such as the ability to initiate a conversation, to make others feel at ease, and to exhibit some charisma by engaging with the opposite sex. They might also be more open-minded and less judgmental of other people. Thus, this combination could make them more likely to enjoy being approached by the opposite sex.

The relatively low average values for “Approaching” and “Being approached” can be explained by cultural backgrounds and the rise of technology. For the former, some contexts in the traditional Chinese culture dictate strict gender roles and conservative social norms. These cultural norms may emphasize the importance of maintaining a particular level of reservation and formality between males and females when they interact in public settings. Hence, neither a direct approach nor physical contact was encouraged. People who grow up in traditional Chinese culture also strive to maintain a positive image and reputation to avoid losing a “face” (面子 or miànzi), a sociological concept to act appropriately as regarded by others [43–46]. Advancing to strangers by making a direct approach to

the opposite sex can be exposed to risking loss of face not only for the person who approaches but also for the other party being approached. Nevertheless, thanks to globalization and the influence of Western culture, many younger generations in China, particularly those who grow up in urban settings or live in more liberal areas, do not strictly follow these traditional cultural norms. Consequently, the attitudes and behaviors surrounding dating and relationships are also rapidly changing and were impacted by this globalization.

Regarding the rise of technology, many youths today—including young people in China—enjoy more options to meet people, make friends, and find potential dating partners. Indeed, social media and platforms for online dating have transformed the way people connect and form relationships. This may likely reduce the frequency of offline meetings, such as approaching and being approached by the opposite sex in public places. Delving further into whether the Internet is among one of the most preferred platforms to meet a potential dating partner, our findings suggest that this is not the case. Only 26 cases (20%) preferred doing so. Nonetheless, this argument still provides a further implication of whether there is a difference between sexes, for those who prefer meeting the opposite sex via the Internet, when it comes to approaching and being approached in an online setting, whether in Western or Chinese culture. A further investigation is certainly needed to address this question.

In the following paragraphs, we provide answers to the **second research question**: What are the preferences in pre-dating and dating activities, as well as other logistic dating issues, such as the financial burden, appropriate behavior, and the purpose of dating and courtships? This covers the period before any dating activities occurred to the established relationships. We argue why many respondents prefer to meet their potential dating partners in the educational environment and through friends who would introduce someone to them. We discuss the most common activities during dating, explaining why males should pay during the first date, and why the bills should be split for any incurred cost during relationships. After discussing the response to the third research question, we return to an item in the second research question regarding appropriate behavior during the early stage of courtship but before establishing a committed relationship. After explaining the answer to the fourth research question, we return to the final item in the second research question regarding the very purpose of dating itself.

As discussed in Section 3, many Chinese youths who participated in our study preferred to meet their potential dating partners in an academic setting, such as schools, colleges, or universities. This result is hardly surprising because many of our respondents are college students and university graduates, and they can also be considered as academically-minded people by surviving the fierce competitions in the national Chinese college entrance examinations known as the *gāokǎo* (高考). Even for students who do not attend first-tier colleges, it makes sense that university campuses still become a popular choice for finding potential dating partners and eventually forming long-term romantic relationships. In short, these institutions provide a supportive and suitable social environment for these young people to experiment with love and discover their identities. Furthermore, given the levels of dating and interpersonal intimacy that occur there, many Chinese college campuses are often regarded as “love havens” [11].

There are at least four reasons for why young people in China may prefer to encounter their potential dating partners in this academic setting: convenience, shared interests and experiences, safety, and peer/social pressure. Schools and universities provide a convenient and accessible environment for many young people to gather, meet, and interact with their peers of a similar age group. Although Chinese universities are less diverse than European or American campuses, these institutions still attract diverse student bodies and often bring together individuals from various backgrounds. Thus, it smooths the process for youths and adolescents to come across potential dating partners who possess different interests, exhibit distinct personalities, and share unique perspectives. Being in a school or university provides common ground and shared experiences for students. They have plenty of time to observe each other, either from a distance or from working together. The bond of friendship creates a sense of camaraderie, sparks romantic impulses, and increases the likelihood of forming relationships. For example, students in the same course or club may share interests and goals that can bring them

together.

Schools and universities are generally considered to be safe environments. Young people may feel more comfortable approaching and being approached by the opposite sex in these settings. They may also feel more protected by the presence of authority figures, such as teachers, lecturers, professors, and administrative staff. In some cases, peer pressure plays an important role as well. When everybody is pairing off and forming relationships except oneself, the single individual may feel the coercion to find a boyfriend/girlfriend in order to be socially accepted. Some students also think that once they graduate from college and start to work in a company, they will be very busy and the golden opportunity for dating will disappear. Hence, they attempt to race with time in finding a partner before graduation.

It is interesting to discover that our participants preferred to meet their potential dating partners through friends' introduction over the workplace. Due to the relatively young demographics, it is possible that some respondents who were still studying did not opt for the workplace. Those who were already working were aware that employment is a busy life and thus provided a little time for romantic experiments. In either case, the participants' preference for being introduced by friends or relatives when finding potential dating partners may reflect more traditional cultural values, the importance of trust and personal connections, and the desire for a more efficient and socially acceptable way of finding not only potential dating partners but also future spouses. For example, see [47–50].

Because family and social connections are highly valued in traditional Chinese culture, the involvement of friends and relatives in the dating and relationship process may reflect this emphasis on maintaining close associations and seeking the approval of those closest to them. Moreover, being introduced to a potential dating partner by a friend or relative may increase the level of trust and comfort between the two individuals, the one who introduces and the other whom being introduced. These introductions often come with personal recommendations and references, for which each individual might obtain a little bit background information about the other person through friends and relatives. They often have a better understanding of their loved one's preferences, characters, personality, and interests, and thus making it less challenging for them to introduce love-seeker individuals to potential partners who would be a good match. Having this knowledge will further assist in establishing a foundation of trust and reliability in the relationship not only between the couples but also among all of them, including the third parties. Consequently, after the trust is build and confidence is accumulated, this path can be seen as a safer option than "cold calling" by directly approaching the opposite sex in public places.

Although there are wide variations and can be tailored to each couple's interests and preferences, the responses to common dating activities among young Chinese couples are not surprising. The most important aspect of a date is spending quality and quantity of time together as a couple and building a deeper connection with each other. However, some factors, such as budget, location, and personal interests, may influence the decision in choosing particular dating activities. An overwhelming majority of our participants opted for the classic date option by dining out in a restaurant or café for a meal. Going to the cinema and watching movies together can also be enjoyable thing to do as a couple. For those who are energetic, carrying out outdoor activities, such as going for a walk, hiking, or visiting a park, can be fun and an active way to spend time together. Other activities are abundant in options, including but not limited to attending cultural events, such as a concert, play, or art exhibition to immerse in cultural experience, engaging in adventure sports, such as skydiving or rock climbing, engaging in surprising experiences, such as taking a hot air balloon or going to a surprise pop-up event, doing voluntary work, or even relaxing at home by cooking a meal together or watching a movie.

When it comes to who should pay for during the first date, the result is again hardly surprising. It is not only in Chinese culture but also in other cultures as well that traditionally, males are often expected to be the primary breadwinners and provide the financial needs for their families, or in the case of dating couples, the female they invited to go out with. They are also often seen as protectors and expected to take leadership roles in many life affairs, including dating and relationships. After all,

it is just a courtesy and polite thing for males to pay for the first date. Indeed, this act of gentlemanly is a genuine sign of respect and demonstrates their interest in the females they are dating.

When it comes to who should pay for in serious, established relationships, our respondents exhibit a progressive view on this matter and were not dictated by the traditional gender roles or cultural norms. The expectation that males should pay more for activities during relationships does not turn out to be universal and wanes as time progresses. Many couples have begun to challenge these traditional gender roles and expectations in romantic relationships. More and more couples are choosing to split the bill or take turns in paying for activities they do together. This is a rather different scenario with Farrer's (2014) findings whereby couples who are in true love relationship should display a sense of responsibility, which generally perceived as males protecting females in various aspects of lives, including providing them materially [29].

This brings us to the **third research question** on the period needed for young people in China to transition themselves from dating to serious relationships. Similar to couples in other countries, the length of time it takes for dating couples in China to establish a serious relationship can vary widely. Some couples may transition themselves relatively quick, whereas others may take a longer time. Although there exists no particular time frame, our findings suggest that more than one month must pass before moving to serious relationships. Certainly, this timeline can be influenced by various factors, such as individual or couple preferences, personal and relationship goals, the nature of interactions, feelings toward one another, societal norms, or even family expectations. From our analysis, we could only confirm a fraction of our hypothesis, namely that females appeared to require a longer time to establish serious relationships than males, with a statistically significant difference between the two sexes ( $p < 0.05$ ). The significant difference was neither observed across different age groups nor geographical locations.

Examining the correlation values between the variable of "Serious Relationships" and the variables "Approaching" and "Being Approached" reveals that as the time required to establish a serious relationship increases, the willingness to approach the opposite sex and the enjoyment of being approached by others decreases proportionately. This suggests that individuals who are bold enough to approach others in public settings tend to be more eager to establish serious relationships than those who are timid. Meanwhile, those who welcome being approached by the opposite sex are likely to move more quickly towards settling down with their dating partner. The correlation between approaching and serious relationships was found to be stronger than the correlation between being approached and serious relationships, both of which had moderate effect sizes.

Ultimately, we are fully aware that the most important factor when establishing serious relationships is the level of mutual commitment, understanding, and emotional connection between the individuals involved. Although the timeline may vary widely, the outcome that females may take longer to transition themselves from dating partners into serious relationships is not illegitimate at all. Some females may want to take more time in getting to know their partner and build a deeper emotional connection before committing to a serious relationship. Others would like to ensure that they share similar values, goals, and future plans before moving forward. Cultural and societal norms certainly contribute to their decisions, such as traditional Chinese culture that puts more emphasis on conventional gender roles or places greater importance on stability and long-term commitment in relationships.

Regarding appropriate behaviors in connection to dating couples before they established any serious relationships, the cases were divided into half-half when it came to displaying physical affection. Half of the cases viewed that establishing clear physical boundaries is essential, particularly in the early stages of a relationship. Thanks to traditional cultural values that emphasize the importance of maintaining personal propriety and moral virtue, many of them viewed physical affection to be reserved for more serious relationships or after marriage. They were mindful of their partner's comfort level and respected their wishes by avoiding any physical contact altogether, which can be common in the Western cultures. These include holding hands, putting an arm around the shoulder, wrapping an arm around the waist, touching, kissing, or even having a sexual relationship. However, we also noticed that in many cases, some levels in physical contacts seem to be acceptable to contemporary



Chinese youths.

The body language of extending an arm around the shoulder versus wrapping an arm around the waist has distinctive meanings. The former usually means that the couples are friends, whereas the latter means that they are typically dating, in a relationship, or married. On the one hand, an arm around the shoulder is often seen as a more casual form of physical affection that can signal comfort, support, or a desire for closer physical contact. It can be utilized to signal a sense of connection and camaraderie between couples, without necessarily implying a deeper level of intimacy. On the other hand, an arm around the waist is commonly associated with a more intimate form of physical affection and romantic gestures between courting couples. Because the act suggests for a closer physical contact, it can signal a desire for emotional closeness, conveying a sense of comfort, protection, and possessiveness. However, the meaning is not rigid and can have different meanings depending on the individuals, context, or even cultural norms. They are in the same manner that holding hands can be seen as a sign of a friendly gesture or casual relationship on the one hand, and a symbol of affection, love, and commitment on the other hand.

However, we also observed that a small minority of Chinese youth were quite open when it comes to physical contacts, going against the traditional values, so to speak. They voiced that touching, kissing, and even engaging in sexual relationships were acceptable before establishing any serious commitment. This leads us to the **final and fourth research question**, which investigated their attitudes toward hookups.

With nearly 60% voted hookups as completely unacceptable (75 people, with 32 males and 43 females), we understand that many young people in China still would like to maintain the traditional values of moral virtues, despite the prevalent of premarital sex and many campus colleges in modern China being dubbed as “love havens.” From this finding, we could not confirm the first part of our hypothesis for the fourth research question. Furthermore, although the overall attitudes between the two sexes indicated that males tended to be more permissive than females, the difference was not statistically significant. Similarly, by grouping into different geographical regions, we did not observe that the difference between young people who reside in China or overseas was statistically significant either. Hence, we could not accept the hypothesis regarding the level of tolerance toward hookups.

A small minority of 3% (4 persons with 3 males and 1 female) thought that hookups were completely acceptable, suggesting a shift in the cultural paradigm. They may even challenge the Confucian-based traditional norms and embrace more permissive Western cultures on sexuality. Indeed, some of them may view hookups as a way to explore their sexual identity, enjoy physical intimacy without any commitment, or as a form of casual entertainment. Others may engage in hookups because they feel that it is much easier or less complicated than the progressive yet conventional process of dating or forming a romantic relationship, courtship, engagement, and marriage. Still, other people who attempted in coping with boredom, loneliness, or other emotional needs may participate in casual sexual encounters.

By considering the correlation values between “Hookups” and “Serious relationships,” we observe that there was a negative correlation between these two variables. Specifically, Chinese youths who require a shorter period to establish a serious relationship are more accepting and tolerant of hookups. Conversely, those who are less tolerant and more disapproving of hookups are less willing to approach the opposite sex and derive less enjoyment from being approached in a public setting.

### 4.3 Conclusion

The present study explored the dating habits and attitudes of young, educated individuals in contemporary China. Despite its limitations, patterns were observed in their preferences, attitudes, and behaviors in their pursuit of love and long-term romantic relationships. The study found that many Chinese youths preferred schools, colleges, or universities as prime locations to meet potential dating partners or to be introduced by friends, relatives, or someone whom they knew rather than by directly approaching the opposite sex in public places. The differences across sexes were found to be statistically very significant when it comes to males being more willing to approach and enjoying being

approached more than females. The results also demonstrated that females tended to require a longer period of time in establishing a serious relationship than males, and this difference was also statistically significant. However, there was no significant difference in the level of acceptance toward casual sexual encounters between the two sexes, as the majority generally disapproved of hookup practices. The study found that physical intimacy was preferred to be delayed until a serious relationship was established, and that the ultimate goal of dating was to eventually get married. These findings suggest that while some young people in China have adopted Western-style dating practices, many still uphold moral values and traditional attitudes in their dating and romantic relationships.

Indeed, our study sheds light on the unique dating landscape of young people in modern China, providing valuable information for those in the fields of education, policymaking, and social sciences. By exploring the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of this population, educators, policymakers, and researchers can develop initiatives, policies, and educational programs that support the development of healthy dating relationships and long-term romantic partnerships. In the future, it will be interesting to observe any shifts in these attitudes and behaviors, and their potential impact on family formation, sexual health, and overall social outcomes in China. Further research is needed to delve deeper into the underlying factors that influence these attitudes and behaviors, as well as to track their evolution over time.

## Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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No.	Survey question	Options	Number of cases	Case percentage	Box plot comparison (100%)
5	Meeting preference	School	110	85.94	
		Introduced	79	61.72	
		Workplace	51	39.84	
		Internet	26	20.31	
		Public places	16	12.50	
		Bars	9	7.03	
		Others	3	2.34	
6	Dating activity	Eating	122	95.31	
		Movies	115	89.84	
		Drinking	92	71.88	
		Outdoor	82	64.06	
		KTV	48	37.50	
		DIY	43	33.59	
		Alcohol	34	26.56	
		Others	10	7.81	
7	First-date pay	Males	71	55.47	
		Split	48	37.50	
		Initiator	9	7.03	
		Females	0	0.00	
8	Relationship pay	Split	72	56.25	
		Males	56	43.75	
		Females	0	0.00	
9	Appropriate	None	63	49.22	
		Arm-shoulder	60	46.88	
		Holding hands	42	32.81	
		Arm-waist	16	12.50	
		Kiss-touch	10	7.81	
		Having sex	9	7.03	
10	Purpose	Getting married	96	75.00	
		Love	89	69.53	
		Lonely	35	27.34	
		Pride-crowd	9	7.03	
		Parents	4	3.13	
		Others	3	2.34	

Table 8: (Color online) Results of survey questions 5–10 on meeting preferences, dating activities, and the purpose of dating. Except for questions 7 and 8 on who should pay more on the first date, as well as in relationships, all other questions allow for multiple answers. The outcomes for each item were arranged from large to small, according to the total number of votes for each case. The corresponding bar plots are presented in the far right column.