

Navigating Marriage Anxiety in China: Exploring the Interplay of Traditional Confucian Values and Evolving Gender Dynamics Through a Case Study of Social Media Influencers

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Abstract. This paper's primary goal is to determine if young people's marital concern in the dynamic gender gap is connected to the post-epidemic Chinese marriage rates' year-over-year fall. The theory of doing gender forms the basis of this qualitative investigation. The most popular video material and the top five most viewed comments from two influencers who specialize in marriage-related posts were examined in this study using a case study methodology. Based on the differentiation of the content of the two bloggers, this study will therefore analyze influencer C from the perspective of the responsibilities that the man and woman should bear in a traditional marriage and gender inequality, and A from the perspective of the correlation between gender traits and social gender. This research shows that the gender-equalized marriages that most Chinese young people currently expect have been realized to a certain extent in the two netizens. Further evidence that Chinese youth may be holding the two influencers accountable for their expectations of gender-equal marriages comes from the fact that they have garnered 512,000 followers as a result of their defiant actions against the traditional Confucian view of marriage. This further suggests that the traditional Confucian view of marriage is pressuring their own marriages and that they are looking for a way to reject it. The preliminary results of this study may help to shed light on the nature of why young Chinese people are resistant to and even fearful of marriage.

Keywords: Marriage anxiety; social media influencers; doing gender; traditional Confucianism.

1. Introduction

Post-epidemic China is experiencing a collision between Eastern Confucianism and Western humanism, which has prompted Chinese young people to ask a series of questions about the core of their lives, including the concept of marriage [1]. According to Yan Ming, love is the foundation of both Chinese and Western culture and style [2]. When a split develops in a Western marriage, where the husband and wife are relatively independent and autonomous, the woman will bravely revolt against it, escape the bonds of her marriage, and pursue her own happiness once again. The status of husband and wife in the family is generally more equal, with household chores shared and the wife having her own career. In contrast, the formation of the Chinese view of marriage was largely influenced by Confucian ethical thinking. Dong Zhongshu, a great Confucian scholar of the Western Han Dynasty, established the code of conduct for women based on the philosophy of "yang is superior to yin and yin is inferior to yang", which laid the theoretical foundation for the formation of Chinese women's behavioral norms of marriage and love thereafter. Moreover, in the traditional Chinese concept of marriage, men and women only behave according to certain rules of economic and reproductive business, and they do not hope for each other's psychological fit. The East and West view of marriage is vastly different at its origins [2].

The latest statistics released by China's Ministry of Civil Affairs show that China's marriage rate has been decreasing from 9.0% to 5.4% in 2022 [3]. From this data, it can be seen that Chinese young people are choosing not to get married as a group [4]. This phenomenon has also attracted the attention of some scholars, and from their analysis of the reasons for the decline in the marriage rate of young people in China, it can be seen that the social phenomenon of the decline in the marriage rate of young people reflects, to a certain extent, the changes in the most intimate and private personal relationships

in daily life in China today. It mentions the marriageable youth's prudence in marriage and their pursuit of self-life [5, 6]. However, it is not studied in the context of the traditional Confucian cultural influences on marriage and the seemingly normal situations hidden in marriage. This study will use the theory of doing gender as the theoretical basis for the analysis in the debate that follows, taking into account the findings of earlier research reports. Chinese millennials use these platforms as the cornerstone of their social circles, as demonstrated by the marriages of two Internet influencers, C and A, which have received a lot of media attention. This kind of analysis can make people understand more intuitively why these two web celebrities are popular because of marriage, and why they have attracted 512,000 fans. In the meanwhile, by concentrating on the Chinese youth social media platforms, where these two online influencers are headquartered, this study will further investigate whether the group attitude and ideology underlying the dropping marriage intention of Chinese marriageable youths is connected to traditional Confucianism.

2. Literature Review

The theory of "Doing Gender" was proposed by Candace West and Don Zimmerman in 1987 [7]. The theory emphasizes that gender is not merely a biological attribute, but a practice and expression in social interaction, a dynamic and constantly reinvented social construction. The central idea highlights that gender is not a given static trait, but is constantly made and reproduced through speech, behavior, and physical performance in everyday interactions. An in-depth study of gender performances presents a challenge to traditional gender binaries, expands the scope of gender perception, and provides a new theoretical framework for understanding the diversity of gender identities. Doing Gender further explores the possibility of gender incongruence, highlighting the fact that individuals may choose to perform gender performances in social interactions that do not conform to traditional gender expectations. This inconsistency questions the entrenchment of gender norms, which are currently influenced by long-standing Confucianism in China, emphasizing that men are often expected to play the role of the family's primary breadwinner and decision-maker. Men are expected to be responsible for the continuation and prosperity of the family and to assume financial responsibility for the family. In contrast, women are emphasized to be responsible for taking care of the children in the family, guarding the cozy atmosphere of the home, and supporting their husbands' careers. Confucianism emphasizes etiquette and behavioral norms and sets strict expectations for both men and women. Men are expected to exhibit qualities of strength, decisiveness, and responsibility, while women are expected to embody qualities of suppleness, virtue, and kindness. In modern China, although the concept of the husband's duty to his wife has improved, the importance of the family, money and status can still be an important consideration for young men and women in choosing to get married in the present day [7].

3. Traditional Marriage and Gender Inequality in the Case of C

In C's posts, her husband in the face of household chores in a state of absence and refused to take on the household chores even after his wife was injured doing them. In traditional Confucian culture, household chores are naturally categorized as something that women should take full responsibility for. As the saying goes, the husband guides the wife [2]. This scene, which seems so unusual in traditional Confucian society, has caused strong resonance and anger on the internet. In modern China, although the concept of the husband as the wife has improved, the importance of the family, money and status can still be an important consideration for young men and women in choosing to get married in the modern era [6]. The first comment under this blog post focuses on the comment that the owner's mother did all the housework by herself, including the extra chores caused by the father's inviting friends for dinner, while the father was always absent from the housework. Several of the comments that followed have been upset with the father's behavior in the video (see Table 1).

Thankfully, the blogger eventually chose to divorce her husband, who was absent from family life, on the advice of the influencer and her own will [8, 9].

Table 1. Comments on C's Video

The content of the most popular blog post	Commenter	Top 5 comments on this post
After cutting her hand when washing dishes after a fight with her husband, the daughter helps her mother with the dishes, while her husband is absent from the household labor.	A	My mom bought a ton of food to prepare since my dad insisted on showing his visitors a good time. My mom wanted to tidy up after supper, so I let her do it while I waited to gather. My dad then went to talk with them. My mother was exhausted, so she took a shower and went to bed. When my father returned, the plates had been seized. When my father returned, he saw that the dishes had been seized. I stated that whoever had invited me should take them, and he said, "What's wrong with letting me do a little housework?" I said nothing, simply refusing to take them. I didn't respond to his suggestion to wait for my mother to pick them up tomorrow; instead, I smashed all the bowls in front of him, making it impossible for anybody to eat without taking away the chopsticks.
	B	It's over, I've been following the show since the first episode.
	C	Why would Dad say Mum enjoys not doing the dishes next time she'll cut on purpose too? Because he purposely gets it wrong on top of a lot of household things he doesn't want to do, flip-flops wrong, out of tune and out of mind. That way, his mum and his wife never need him to do it again, and he enjoys the relief that comes from being such a smarty-pants, which is why he's mischievous.
	D	That's why Minglan in Zhifou (TV Series) said you should turn around in time, and you must not wait for a life to wear out and regret it.
	E	Why do the nameless chores all become my work?

4. Gender Traits and Social Gender in the Case of A

In contrast, A, as a male, is by default expected to bear more of the financial burden in East Asian societies, and they are portrayed as powerful and rough in traditional Chinese societies in the past [2]. However, A's image as a rugged salesman does not find a home in the same way that traditional men do. A realized that his appearance was not satisfactory, so by posting a request for help on the Internet, he received enthusiastic replies from others, and ultimately, an improved his outward appearance, and also harvested love without a significant improvement in his financial situation. A, a year later, released his own transformation before and after the posts, released his wedding photos, and thanked the replies for their help. The comments below the post also expressed their shock and blessings (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comments on A's Video

The content of the most popular blog post	Commenter	Top 5 comments on this post
A changed his appearance through the advice of netizens and finally gained love.	F	My own ordinary is terrible, but the success of the netizens (refer to A) is even more disturbing!
	G	Others (refer to A) have already married, but the one who gave advice is still single.
	H	Then I'll give one last piece of advice: don't slack off after marriage, or you'll be the same as your old picture again in three years...
	I	The gears of your destiny are clunking.
	J	The front-page brushes you from single to married!!!? And I'm still single!

The two bloggers' popular experiences both go some way to contradict traditional Confucian notions of marriage. In their initial posts, it can be seen that they were in the traditional Confucian conception of marriage [2]. One was a female blogger who had worked hard as a housewife during her marriage but was unable to gain the respect of her husband, who was often absent from homework. The alternative is a male blogger of marriageable age who has no choice but to turn to citizens for help because he is unable to find a desirable partner because of his appearance. Since the issue of traditional Confucian marriage struck a chord with most netizens, they shared their own similar experiences and left their suggestions in the comments section. Through the interaction in the comment section, it can be also seen that the younger generation felt angry and empathetic when the husband of C is absent from the family life and will also express their envy and blessing when A gain happiness. It can be said that what the younger generation rejects is not marriage, but the stereotypes of marriage under the influence of Confucian culture. Nowadays, what young people expect to change in marriage is that men and women should share the responsibility together, instead of one being responsible for the same, which will slowly manifest itself in life and cause many family conflicts; they expect that men and women who have not yet had a partner at the marriageable age can change themselves by recognizing their own problems and attracting others by their own charms, instead of blindly believing that their own conditions are superior and throwing problems to others. The problem is thrown to others. Behind the popularity of the two, there is a change in the emerging generation's expectations of marriage [10].

5. Conclusion

Therefore, in the analysis of the two typical influencers, C and A, it is further learned that the mainstream social media, with the emerging generation as the user base, pays more attention to the two netizens' thoughts and rebellious behaviors towards the traditional Confucian gender traits and marriage, and this attention has led to the two influencers gaining a total of 513,000 followers. However, it has also been noted that curiosity, empathy, and their own expectations for equal marriage relationships are the main reasons why their defiance of traditional Confucian gender and marriage norms has drawn so much attention. In today's society, young people pay more attention to their own lives, to the concept of equality in a relationship and to the shared responsibilities of both partners in a marriage (citing individualization), which is contrary to the traditional Confucian concept of marriage, making some young Chinese people suffer from the pressure of the traditional concept of marriage from the outside, and they are not able to satisfy their own expectations of equality in marriage relationships. As a result, the marriage rate in China has gradually decreased from 9% to 5.4%. Chinese young people have also been generating anxiety about their own marriages as a group, which is temporarily soothed by the rebellious behavior of the two netizens in their reflections on traditional Confucian gender traits and marriage. However, aiming to alleviate Chinese young

people's anxiety about marriage in a dynamic society, the government needs to introduce relevant policies to improve the equal protection of any gender group in marriage, and also call on all sectors of society to pay more attention to the mental health of Chinese young people, to break through the limitations of the traditional concept of marriage, and to reduce stereotypes in marriage, as well as to advocate for the promotion of equality and equality for the current society.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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