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## **WHY BEING SINGLE?**

**A RESEARCH FOR THE DELAYED MARRIAGE AMONG PEOPLE  
(AGED 25-35) IN SHANGHAI, CHINA**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## *1.1 General information about the thesis paper*

Get married is the rite of passage that coincides with exit from the parental household, solemnizing the establishment of a new household and commitment to a sexual partner (Allan, G. et al, 2003:135), which is a ubiquitous phenomenon across human society. Almost all adult men and women seek to marry or form a permanent stable relationship with another person for the sake of bear children and raise a family in a secure, loving, and fulfilling environment. However, in Shanghai of China, more and more people have exceeded the normal matrimonial age but remaining unmarried, those who are intituled as “Young but Old people (大齡青年 DA LING QINGNIAN)”. It is previously deemed by Chinese people as “A Man Should Get Married On Coming Of Age, A Girl Should Be Married Upon Reaching Womanhood (男大当婚, 女大当嫁 NAN DA DANG HUN, NV DA DANG JIA)”<sup>1</sup>, but nowadays, the conventional conception of marriage seems to be toppled down especially in big cities of China, like Shanghai. “Young but Old people” has turned into an age group in which not being married is statistically normal.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, attracted people’s attention that whether being single is lived as a positive social category for both woman and men. People may pose questions such as: How it comes the delayed marriage? What single young people seek and expect of relationships? Is there any gender difference of staying alone? Are they enjoying the experiences of being single? What are the young people’s plans and expectations about the future of their personal life? To give the reader some idea of what to expect in the following pages, the main concern of this thesis paper is related to the possible causations of being single and the attitude and plans of young people who are somewhat in the shadow of marriage.

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<sup>1</sup> One Chinese aphorism

<sup>2</sup> Particularly in big cities of China like Shanghai, it has become universal that people are over 25 years old but stayed unmarried. The number of these unmarried young people has increased dramatically these years.

## *1.2 The motivation of the thesis paper*

I first attracted into concern the age group of 25 to 34-year-old people who are staying single trend back last Christmas Eve, I was invited to a party by one of my friend - Jenny, who is a single women in her early 30s. I just dumped the 2-years' relationship with my boyfriend at that time, I was moped and took a passive approach to my personal life, I chose to closed my door to the outside world and enmeshed myself like an utterly worthless person. My friend's invitation, however, brought me the opportunity to be recovered – at least at that special night I did not have to stay home alone. The party, which called “Happy Single”, was a small personal party organized by a 34-year-guy, he and all his friends at that party was unmarried single, among the round 50 persons, the youngest was 25 years old and the oldest was 38. It was an amazing night, we all had a good time and most importantly, I made some good friends and through them, I was filled in the share with all the ups and downs of their love thoughts and lives as being single. My thesis, by this point of view, comes from my very close friend who first turned me on to this whole story.

## *1.3 The objectives of the thesis paper*

The objectives of this thesis are three-folded as followings:

- a. To review the overall circumstance impacts on the young people who are single that in the sense of unmarried, which may provide a framework about how these elites delayed their marriage and stay as single.
- b. To investigate the possible reasons of being single, in order to describe the perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of being single.
- c. To propose definite programme of actions for the future development of young people's personal life.

## 2. THEORITICAL RESEARCH

### *2.1 The institution of marriage*

The institution of marriage plays a significant role in nearly all-human societies. The decision of getting married has been interested of Social scientists, as it is a fundamental aspect of human behavior. (Brien and Sheran, 2002:37). Society assumed everybody would find someone and get married, those who had not done so would face social disapproval. (DeGenova and Rice, 2002:70). Be married, as Shmuel mentions, “the individual, at very moment of his life, not only performs given roles and interacts with other people, but is also obliged to ensure some degree of continuity of the social system through this performance”. (Eisenstadt, 2002:25) Some researchers argue that marry with someone could, in a sense, get protection against poor health, financial insecurity, and deviant behaviors. (Linda Waite, 1995:483-507). Marriage has its strong connection to some important actions taken by individuals, which are highly intertwined with other choices (Brien and Sheran, 2002), such as relocation, employment and so on.

### *2.2 Relationship between sex activity and marriage*

Kierman, Land and Lewis indicate that there is a crucial relationship between sex, marriage and child-bearing and until the last part of the twentieth century, sex, marriage and child-bearing were as a rule tightly bound together in popular consciousness. (Kierman, Land and Lewis, 1998) However, sex revolution has changed people’s perception of sexual activities, It becomes socially acceptable of the non-marital sexual intercourse. (DeGenova and Rice, 2002:72). Hence, the increasing acceptance of non-marital sexual intercourse has made marriage itself no longer carries the moral force as it once did. (Kierman, Land and Lewis, 1998). On one hand, sexual expression possible at younger ages without necessitating marriage (DeGenova and Rice, 2002:72), and on the other hand there effused more and more cohabiting couples than married couples (Grossbard-Shehtman, 1993), people today may experience a period of cohabitation prior to marriage (Barich and Bielby, 1996). The increased opportunities for non-marital sexual intercourse and the increase acceptance of

non-marital cohabitation are the reasons for the adults to be married at older ages than they used to. (Cooney and Hogen, 1991; Miller and Henton, 1991)

### *2.3 Women's movements impact on delayed marriage*

From a historical, and sociological perspective, some scholars notice that women movement is also an embodiment of delayed marriage. The traditional role for women seems similar in China and the western countries that is named Housewife. Lin Yutang, one of Chinese author and philologist once summarized that “A woman must be a virtuous wife and a responsible mother (贤妻良母 XIANQI LIANGMU).”<sup>3</sup> It has been the definition for Good Women lasting decades in China, which demonstrates women have greater involvement in family roles, women’s main job, therefore, are not limited to childbirth, delight husband and serve in household (Yue, 1997). Alike Moghadam states “women have the disadvantaged position in what is in effect a man’s world.” This disadvantage, “ is manifested in the family, the economy, the polity, and cultural institutions, and it may be differentiated or exacerbated by historical era, or by economic or political system.” (Moghadam, 2000)

Nonetheless, the whole world is experiencing the centuries-long development progress; the growth/process/movement in Economics, Politics, and Society may often impact on colonization of nature, women, workers, indigenous peoples, and traditional cultures and communities. (Miles, 2001). While whether there is advancement in society depends on women would/could have the recognized social class. (Li, Jingzhi et al, 1992) Women themselves, in other words, are struggling to the capacities of subsistence in the face of “development” process, which included: “for the recognition of the value of the goods and services they produce in the home; for men’s equal participation in the workplace; for its social support in the form of child care, income support, health and education services; and for decent wages for chronically underpaid ‘women’s’ clerical, service, and caring work.” (Miles, 2001) It should be noted that the powerful influence women are having on the transformation of culture and society, the factors like increased economic activity and

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Lin, Yutang’s criticism to “Women in present time” in 1936, viewed from website: <http://www.nettuba.net/book/2003new/jing/other/jtgm/004.html> (in Chinese)

professionalisation of the job market, greater education access and success, a decline in domestic duties (Li, 1997; Zhang, 1998; Chatterton et al, 2003) have had remarkable on women's feasibility of the delays in getting married and starting a family.

The above developed the theoretical framework and conceptions alluded for understanding the issue of delayed marriage. To explain the complex situations and conditions regarding the issue occurred in Shanghai, the following chapters will be explored empirically and ethnographically in detail how and why it becomes a ubiquitous trend in modern society.



### 3. METHODOLOGY

Delayed marriage has gone mainstream among young people, the research concerning the subject is a combined literature and empirical study. Data collection for the empirical study was carried out in Shanghai, China during the fieldwork in the month of May and June of 2005.

#### 3.1 The study site selection

I chose Shanghai as my site of conducting the research on delayed marriage not only because I am a resident of Shanghai, I am living and working in this great modern city but most importantly, Shanghai is appraised as “a vibrant, exciting and continually changing place where the East has a Western flavor but the true nature of a traditional Chinese culture can still be seen”. As a “Dragon Head” leading the whole nation the economic development, Shanghai thereby attracts numerous elites join as new residents. Among them, quite a number are single, addition with the original residents, the delayed marriage has arose people’s concern. I actually simply want to get a better grasp on the realities of the city I live in and I am curious to understand a little more about the people’s single life in particular their conception on marriage.

#### 3.2 *Choice of methodology*

At the very beginning when I decided to do the research regarding the delayed marriage issue, I considered to make a quantitative survey among the large number of single young people in the big Shanghai city. That means I have to measure certain variables and certain generalize. Nevertheless, as my research questions developed, I realized that using a quantitative method would not be preferable in answering my questions, since my focus was rather to examine *why* those young people stay as single since they all have high education background, high IQ and high income that regarded as “White Collar” and on the other hand, to demonstrate *how* they attempt to put efforts on their marriage issue. I came to the conclusion that a questionnaire or a structured interview method would limit the scope of

information that the respondents would give me and that it might function as a way to simplify and generalize to explain the very complicated environment those people are facing and the attitude, the behavior they have. As Domholdt said, rather than searching for generalizations, qualitative research looks for “a deep understanding of the particular”. (Domholdt, 1993:127) Also it is noted by Kvale and Maxwell that qualitative research has more advantages in finding rather sensitive social issues, like awareness, experience, individual behaviors and social situations to answer the question why and how these behaviors and actions happen. (Kvale, 1996:103 and Maxwell, 1996:19-20) It is, therefore, as stated by Kvale, qualitative method has gained a strong position within delayed marriage issue research because it provided the possibilities for people to understand the real situation of the young people and understanding is a means for changing the condition studied. (Kvale, 1996:72) Thus, I thought that making semi-structured in-depth interviews would be a better way to gain an understanding of these young people’s experiences.

### *3.3 Secondary Sources*

The secondary data relevant to the subject matter was collected from various sources, which included literatures, newspapers/magazines as well as the reports from government and previous research projects.

To supplement the empirical data with overall marriage patterns and information of previous quantitative studies, literature collection is essential. The available literature on marriage in general was very comprehensive; I found numerous books concerning marriage conception as well as the phenomenon of delayed marriage both outside and inside China. However, less literature was found for the point of view of the delayed marriage on young people with high qualifications, and the literature about such phenomenon happens in China was even more limited. That means too few studies have been made for the delayed marriage among those elite. The literature was available in the libraries at Lund University, Fudan University and Shanghai Library.

I also use some data relating to single population and marriage movement, which were mainly taken from the statistic reports of Shanghai Government and the

newspapers/magazines published in China, also from the web-based resources. Some data came from the research project the author herself did in Shanghai City. Apart from these, there were some judgments and opinions obtained by the author in the discussions, exchanges of views between the author and her friends both in Sweden and China. The literature and the data in Chinese were translated into English either in the footnotes or the reference list.

### *3.4 Interviewees selection*

There might be thousands of people involved in a survey by quantitative research method, while in doing qualitative research; it's impossible to have such big involvement. The number of interviews of the qualitative research, as pointed by Kvale, could therefore imply the quality of the analysis would deteriorate. (Kvale, 1997:98-99) I designed a questionnaire and made one-to-one interviews with the 18 young people who had responded my survey, one interview with Director of TV station, and two additional interviews with the Matchmaker Web Initiator. The small number of interviews is due to the limited time of fieldwork and the limited time for the analysis to each interview. The adequate small number of interviews also made it possible for me to understand each story in the results of general, precise and trustworthy level.

The main target group for the interviewees was the young people living in Shanghai who hold university degree and have decent jobs. The young people I selected were aged from 25 to 34 – the one supposedly should be married but actually they are still single. I firstly contacted a few of my friends who are in this age group and remain single and with their introduction and help, I got the opportunities to meet and get to know the other young people. Some of these young people, in turn, introduced me to their friends who work in media field. Accordingly, it was not I myself who personally selected the interviewees; it was so called a purposive selection method (Mikkelsen, 1995:204-205) that helped me to arrange different interview occasions.

I discovered the research work was not so simple soon after the beginning of the research. In truth, people are still regard marriage as private issue; they are shy and unwilling to share

it with others. As a consequence, except several of the people I interviewed who had no problem seeing their names in print while the others only agreed to share their stories with the condition of remaining anonymous. The interviews in the thesis, therefore, are a combination of real names and pseudonyms.

### *3.5 Data Analysis*

The primary data and information from the interviews have been systemized into three main subject matters for the sake of answering the three research questions: the causes for why people remain single, the pains and gains for being as single and both the attitude and behavior for how to make efforts on the issue. These data and information will be analyzed in Chapter 5, 6 and 7, each chapter will discuss for one subject issue. Overall, the thesis is based on the stories of the young people that acknowledge the characteristic of their living experiences and their expectations for marriage. These stories have been woven into a commendatory, pragmatic and methodological context.

## 4. CIRCUMSTANCE BACKGROUND

### *4.1 The movement on marriage in China*

In China, changing circumstances of politics, economics and social community have influenced the conception of marriage as well. China used to be a feudalistic country for about thousands of years, the orthodox marriage in the Chinese traditional system was accordingly complied with “The order from Parents<sup>4</sup>; The suggestion of Matchmaker<sup>5</sup>. (父母之命, 媒约之言 FUMU ZHI MING, MIEYUE ZHI YAN)”. Meanwhile, there was an orthodox persuasion, which regarded marriage as the foreordination of the pre-life. (Cai, 1987; Ge, 1997; Zhang, 1993). Thus, by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, marriage was much more like the negotiation and decision between two families. The boy and girl, however, were assigned to get married without any excuse to say NO even they had never ever met with each other until the wedding day. Nobody was able to resist this type of marriage, as it was turned into a social norm at the feudal times. (Chen, 2000; Cai, 1987; Ge, 1997; Zhang, 1993). In this point of view, marriage in China at that time was not Love marriage, which is based on one’s own willing and choice but rather an Arranged one (包办婚姻BAOBAN HUNYIN). (Shi, 1987; Li, 1991; Li, 1992)

The issue of “New Youth”<sup>6</sup> had driven the May Fourth Movement - an intellectual revolution in modern China, which voiced out the self-affirmation and protest as well as championed the gender equality and female liberation in China. (Chow, 1960; Zhang, 2001). Women not only got free from “footbinding”<sup>7</sup>, which means they had the possibilities of venturing beyond their own doorsteps, such as getting education in public school and earning an income aside from household handcraft; they also gained the position in

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted from “JIANG ZHONG ZI - SHI JING (The first book of Chinese Classic Poetry)”, edited by Confucius, BC. 6c, Shanghai Ancient Books Press, 1990

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from “ESPOSE – BAI HU TONG (Confucian Classics of Han Dynasty)”, edited by Ban, Gu, BC 79, Chen, Li “Demonstrate Bai Hu Tong”, China Press, 1994

<sup>6</sup> “New Youth” (新青年XIN QINGNIAN), a magazine founded by Chen Duxiu (One of the founder member of Chinese Communist Party) in Sep. 15, 1915.

<sup>7</sup> One of the ancient custom in China, was practiced from about the 10th century and ended in 1911 lasted for about 1000 years. A young girl(always 3-7 years old) 's feet were cloth bound to prevent growth-preferably allowing the foot to grow at max three-and-a-half inches.

household. (Chang, 1991; Perry, 2004) Young people in the cities started to resist on the Arranged Marriage by their parents, the feudalistic family system and kept on contending for their own happiness and love. (Lv, 1929; Yang, 1987)

Transformation has been acknowledged and become a regular marriage system since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, with the China's first marriage law came out and effected in 1950, which emphasized the free choice of seeking partners, monogamy, equal rights of both sexes and so on, it turned into a great shock as the feudal system of marriage and family was revolutionized. (Diamant, 2000; Chen, 2000; Yang, 1997; Zhang, 2001). With the Open Policy executed since 1978, people got to open their mind and start to seek more democracy and to strive for more freedom. Not only is sexual activity outside marriage now viewed as normal rather than morally questionable, but also childbirth outside marriage is somewhat acceptable. (Chen, 2000; Ye, 1992 & 1998) The ideas of individuality and freedom of love has become widespread, marriage is recognized as one's own responsibility. Consequently, the benefits from marriage moved from the family level to the individual's level, though which, there has been a further decrease in percentage of arranged and forced marriage as individuals had more say as to who, when, and how to get married. (Guo & Deng, 2000) Marriage is not the proper way to organize sexual and other domestic commitment, people have quite a few rights to other life-style choices. (Gu, 1990)

#### *4.2 Marital age in China*

Up to Qing Dynasty, people were allowed and heartened to marry around teenage. As prescribed by Qing ruling class for example, girls and boys could marry once they achieved 14 and 16 years old respectively. (Feng, 2005) The only purpose of marriage at that time was carrying on the ancestral line (传宗接代CHUANZHONG JIEDAI). (Feng, 2005) During the period of Republic of China<sup>8</sup>, Chinese people had more opportunities on education and employment; in this case, they were more likely to marry at mature age.<sup>9</sup> Until 1950, China

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<sup>8</sup> Republic of China (ZHONGHUA MIN GUO), one period of China Modern History, was from 1911 to 1949.

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from "The Marital Movement In Cities During The Period of Republic Of China (LUN MINGUO SHIQI CHENGSHI HUNYIN DE BIANQIAN), written by Chen Yunqian & Ye Qing, <http://www.cc.org.cn/newcc/browwenzhang.php?articleid=4178>

had promulgated her first Law after liberation - The China Marriage Law, which not only stipulated the freedom for marriage, monogyny, gender equality but defined the legally minimum marital age that for men was 20 years old and for women, it was 18.<sup>10</sup> Thirty years later, The China Marriage Law of 1980 revised the minimum marital age both for men and women, which were 22 and 20 respectively, 2 years old than before.<sup>11</sup> To ensure people would have mature and quality marriage, also to protect women's mental and physical health as well as to encourage people do more on personal development, it was also distinctly pointed out "Late Marriage and Late Childbirth should be cheered on"<sup>12</sup> The Late Marriage, as the cognizance by people, is 25 years old for men and 23 years old for women. By the year of 2001, the average marital age for Chinese women has reached 24.12 years old.<sup>13</sup>

### *4.3 The trend of Delayed Marriage in Shanghai*

In Shanghai, a pronounced trend toward delayed marriage emerged during the past fifty years. In the 1950s, the average first-marriage age of women was approximately 20.79, which closed to the legally minimum marital age. However, Figure 1 shows that the average age at which women's first marriage has evidently increased in the following 30 years, peaked to 25.8 years old in 1980s. Though in 1990s, the age declined slightly to 24.64, from the year of 2000, the first-marriage average age for women was back to over 25 years old. The age at first marriage of women in Shanghai has risen about 5 years in the second half of twenties century. The age group towards delayed marriage can be found in Figure 2, which describes less and less Shanghai women get marry after age 25 and so as the trend to men in Shanghai but the extent for men, which is not as such visible as that of women. While after 29 years old, Shanghai men are more likely to have their first marriage. In other words, Age 25 and above is the major age group of people in Shanghai who delay their marriage. Nevertheless, the length of education has observably influenced the delay of marriage, which is presented by Figure 3. The percentage of never-married people in Shanghai who have high school education background is accounted 32.15%, the proportion of the one who graduated from

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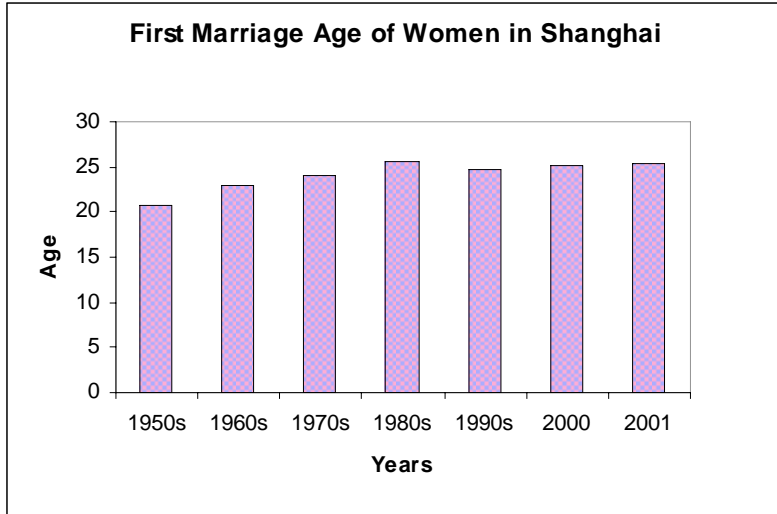
<sup>10</sup> See China Marriage Law taken effect on May 1, 1950, Chapter Two, the 4<sup>th</sup> Item

<sup>11</sup> See China Marriage Law taken effect on Sept.10, 1980, Chapter Two, The 5<sup>th</sup> Item

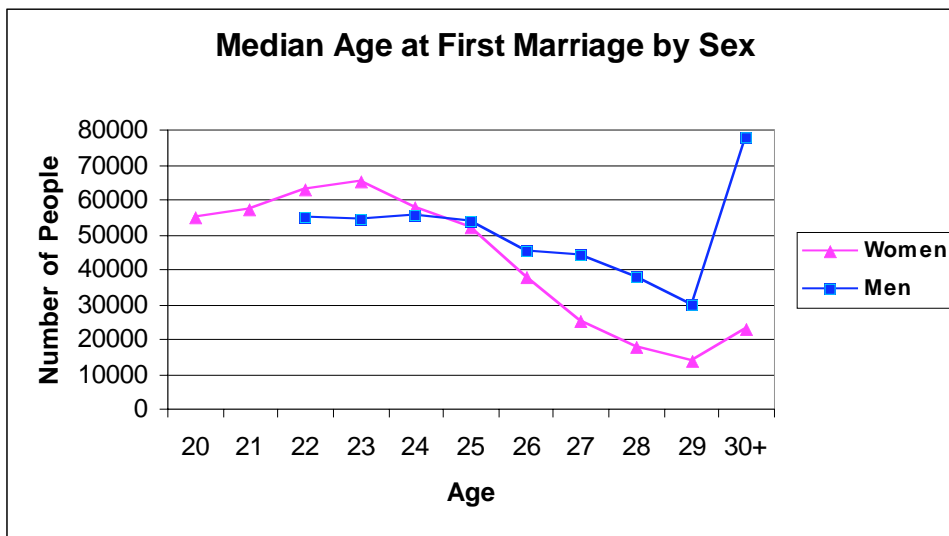
<sup>12</sup> See China Marriage Law taken effect on Sept.10, 1980, Chapter Two, The 5<sup>th</sup> Item

<sup>13</sup> Data from website of Chinese Sociology, [http://203.93.24.66/shxw/xstl/2004ycyfx/t20040115\\_1874.htm](http://203.93.24.66/shxw/xstl/2004ycyfx/t20040115_1874.htm), The Changes On the Population Quantity In China (ZHONGGUO RENKOU ZENGZHANG DE BIANHUA)

university or above is yet higher as 40.82%. It seems that the higher education people have, the more probabilities of them to be as single. Now question raised, why those smart, able-minded young people delay their marriage?

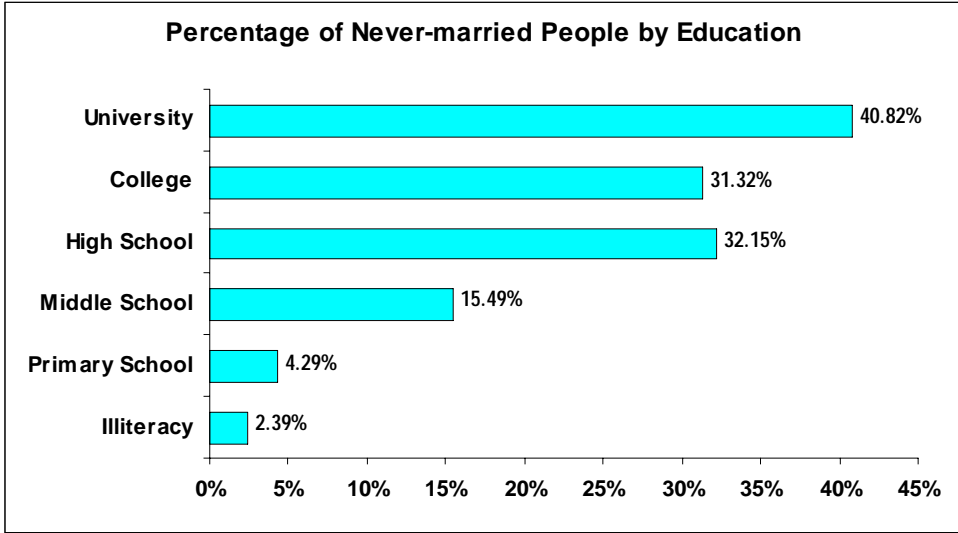


**Figure 1** The Average First Marriage Age of Women in Shanghai. Sources: Figures from 1950s to 1990s are adapted from “*The Analysis On the Movements of Marriage in Shanghai*”, Electronic Magazine “Population Information”. Figures for years of 2000 & 2001 are based on the survey data from The 5<sup>th</sup> Population Census (2000)



**Figure 2** Median Age at First Marriage by Sex. Sources: Data adapted from Peng, Xizhe & Xu Jia “*The Movements and Current Status of Marriage and Family Structure in Shanghai*”, which are based on the 10% Sample survey of The 5<sup>th</sup> Population Census (2000)





**Figure 3** Percentage of Never-Married People by Education. Sources: Data from Li, Dongmei & Xie Yi "The Current State of Population and Marriage in Shanghai and Its Impacts on Fertility", pp45, which are based on the 10% Sample survey of The 5<sup>th</sup> Population Census (2000)

## 5. WHY BEING SINGLE?

Data mentioned in this thesis consist of a survey of young men and women of age group 25-34 living in Shanghai whose marital status are single. Interviews were conducted in 18 respondents, 10 women and 8 men. The data collected from these 18 single young people are drawn on in this chapter and the following Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. Among them, 3 were living with a partner at the time of interview, 3 were in the relationships with the others while 12 persons were absolutely single. In terms of the delayed marriage, as the findings of these interviews, people remain single because of the reasons as Get Establish in Career; Enjoy Freedoms; Fear of Marriage; and “Wait For the Right One”.

### *5.1 Get Establish in Career*

A number of young men and women in my survey talked about how their busy work left them very little time for a relationship. “Career is the first priority, then family.” Most of them would transcend once on top of the job or established in their career before settling down for marriage. Being single, however, is seen as a temporary phase for them before they have enough resources for “a good life”. Jerry and Susie, who have been cohabited for more than one year but they mentioned that they wouldn’t consider marriage in 5 years, “We both have been worked in Shanghai for only 3 years after graduation, we must make efforts on our career first to make more money until we have the abilities to gain enough resources for our settlement here in Shanghai, including our marriage. Like apartment, we must buy our own, we don’t want to live in a rented house any more when we get married. You know how expensive it is, right? We have no choice but work hard.” Yin Gang, a 32-year-old guy who now a Project Manager in a Software Design Company works long hours and so does Felix, an IT engineer, both saw themselves as becoming established in their work so that they can relax and have more time in the future. Yin Gang described his job as tailored to some of the single men “The job I do tends to leave little of my spare time. Travel and overtime work are almost like that the prerequisite for the job. See, I just came back from Shenzhen but I will be on a plane to Chengdu tomorrow for the next one or two weeks.” Lucy, a single woman in her 28 also noted that how time-consuming the early years of developing working skills

were and how little time was left for a social life. When asked about her future plans, she said, “I would like to get married, of course, but I know it won’t be happened in my 20s. I suppose in the long term I’d like to start my own cosmetic salon. If I got married and have had kid I’m afraid nothing would happen. At this moment, the main thing is getting my career started as I am proving myself along the road. The marriage I think, it would probably be a late one, whether it will be in my early 30s or even later, I don’t know.”

## *5.2 Enjoy Freedoms*

The interviews emphasized the constraints of partnership among young men and young women. Jian Wei, a 31-year-old guy who had lived with his girlfriend for 2 years, depicted the break-up of the relationship with his girlfriend as a lucky escape from loss of freedom: “I ever thought of marriage seriously, but once I realized I may force to change my life after marriage, I was scared. Just assume that everything I do everyone I meet I shall report to her, how can I survive? I would not have had my own life. I am glad not decide to marry at that time, I want to just live such single free life as longer as I can, enjoy myself.” Sam, also made a reference to the importance of freedoms when he talked about the time and opportunities lost on steady girlfriends. “I had a good chance to work abroad for 3 years but my ex-girlfriend refused to go with me and she did not agree with me to sign the offer, she cried and intimidated my parents and I with breaking up our relationship if I insisted on my ‘silly decision’. I found she has not yet being fully mature and she just thought more about herself, I could not see there was a future between us. Result turned out that I accepted the offer and started my new career in that country. Now I have been there for 1 year and I get my first 15 days’ of Home Leave back to China to see my parents and my friends. I am enjoying my life so much, though there are girls around, I don’t wanna seek serious and stable relations.” Another example is from Adele, a young composer who’s in her late 20s, the reason why she avoids marriage is not to follow the conventional partnership sequence: “I don’t want to just fall into a routine, leaving school, find job, fall in love, get married and then bear baby, I never want like that.” “I would like to better myself, have more experiences as a person, be more able to know myself and do things for me.” She mentioned she was explicitly open and had relationship with a nice guy, but she preferred cohabitation, “It seems good for both of

us, we are chummy but we are free to the other. I disgust with the constraints and negative possibilities that marriage may bring us.”

### *5.3 Fear of Marriage*

Some people, in particular those from the one-child family, they have been used to the dependency from parents, they were terrified of possible difficulties and responsibilities that they could not conceive of the marriage. Michelle, the only one child in her family, expressed that, “I am fear of marriage, I know nothing about housework and I don’t like to do it at all. My boyfriend is better than I but he is too lazy. We love each other but we both are afraid of the liability and stress from marriage. It doesn’t mean that we won’t get married forever, we are just not mature enough to have our own family, we are not ready for marriage.” Cloud, a lady in her 31 years old, has had several boyfriends before but there were no result till today. “Once my boyfriend propose marriage to me, I feel scared and just want to escape right away.” She said she was brought up in an unhappy family in which her parents fought all the time and finally got divorced. “My mother always warns me that: Don’t be impetuous for marriage like her, otherwise, her story will be kept repeating as a copy on me. ” “Marriage to me, is a kind of risk,” She added, “How can I suppose to know the guy I am going to marry is a nicest one and will love me forever?” Some people have been disappointed in love and are fearful of trying again. “I’ve been with someone quite seriously and I really loves that guy and wanna marry with him, however, once he extended his business to another city, he got totally changed. I supported him with all my savings but he become less and less cares on me. You know why?” Blue, a Lawyer in her 32 continued, “I am the latest one in the world to get to know that he has another girl friend who’s pregnant and they have been in relationship for almost one year! I cannot believe that, the guy I have been with for 8 years, he cheated me!” “I won’t trust guys any more, I think. They are fraudulent. Marriage? What’s that? Been fooled in the next tens of years? Oh, no, I prefer to stay alone.” Similar story were remarked by Mac, the girl he loves for 6 years chose to marry with a French guy with only one word left him “I don’t love you”. “Who I was in the past 6 years? A bodyguard? A financial provider? Or I am a fool to her at all?” “I have had some new opportunities afterwards, but I didn’t not ever put any efforts on maintaining our relationships even there was a pretty girl who said she wanted to marry me. I was suspicious of whether she really loves me or not

and I feared to hear the word ‘marriage’, so I refused her. I think I still need time for recovery.” People who fear of marriage have a profound sense of insecurity about the consequences of marriage; for them, as acknowledged by the interviews, marriage is a deception, a risk and an unknown future.

#### *5.4 Waiting For the Right One*

The notion of “Right One” is the ideal person that people desire to find as partner. Some of female respondents emphasized that they had become quite fussy and there were not many suitable candidates. They presented themselves as constantly open to a relationship, whereas the ideal men were nowhere to be found. “I think in all honesty to be with somebody. I’d need somebody on an even level intelligence-wise” Joanne, a 32-year-old woman focused her concern about her ideal man, “no disrespect to anybody else but I feel I need to be able to talk with somebody who understands what I’m talking about.” The rising status of women in the working place and social life left women having more expectations on finding their mates. “I want the companionship, a soul-mate, the cooperator, and a handy guy around the house. If I can’t have it all, why bother?” Maggie replied when she was asked why she stayed single in her 31. A lot of women have such package as the requirements on their ideal men, however, as pointed out by Susan, “All the high-qualified gentle guys I met are married men, that’s probably why I’m still single.” While women found difficulties in looking for their mates, men were more emphatic about remaining single because they had other priorities like career, but this position might be abandoned if they “can meet somebody”. The idea that it might be possible suddenly to meet a person without any detailed sense of what this person would be like, the person, therefore, would make them change a planned period of remaining single. For example, when Michael, an Operations Manager in his 34, was asked about the possibility of “the Right One”, he said, “ I don’t have any idea by now and I don’t know when I can meet her”, “as long as she is young, good-looking and tender,” added by Michael, “It helps for falling in love, but for marriage, I’m not looking for it. If it happens it happens.”

## **6. Perceptions of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Being Single**

In exploring further the status of delayed marriage, those single respondents offered a list of advantages they saw, and similarly with disadvantages.

### ***6.1 Advantages of Being Single***

In terms of advantages of being single, almost all the respondents indicated “Freedom”. The advantages people found are including as follow:

#### ***6.1.1 Freedom to control own life***

Singles are free to do what they want without having to consider a spouse’s desires; they enjoy more autonomy of their own life. “I can either sleep or watch DVDs the whole day and whole night during weekend; do whatever I want to do in my own apartment, music, chips, beer, dreams... , which make me feel so good.” As an IT Engineer, Felix is busy for contacting his customers during working days, but while back home, a small apartment, he is totally relaxed. “Nobody urge me again and again the Dos and Not Dos. I am the king of my own life!” The interviews confirmed the emphasis on freedom of being single. Adele, emphasized the effects of marriage on the activities of her friends, “I have a lot of friends who haven been married, they just got extra work to do off duty – the housework; their chatting topics are only related to household: husband, children, running expenses and ...Totally different people they are. Whenever they need to make some decision, they have to consider their spouse’s desires. No choice, they must give up something.” “But as for me, I am free to do whatever I want to do.”

#### ***6.1.2 More opportunities for career change and development***

Another advantage of being single pointed by interviewers was more opportunities for career change and development. Singles are not locked into family responsibilities and obligations; they consequently can be more mobile and flexible in the climb up the career ladder. “Working abroad is a worthy experience to my career. I have learnt a lot, the technical skills

but also the language, the communication ability. I can get promotion to another level when I terminate my contract here and return China, which may take 5 years or longer to be at such level if I stay in my primary position.” Sam said he was lucky to be single when the opportunities came, “Some of my colleagues gave up the chance as their spouse opposed against their decision, like what my ex-girlfriend did. I chose to break up the relationship but they could not divorce as they have more considerations about their families.” Yin Gang also figured that travel and even relocation afford him rich experiences, “Once a project launches in a new place, I will go there and work with the local people for a couple of weeks. It is really interesting to travel from this place to another, I am enjoying in doing so. I got make friends in different locations on one hand and have extended my career on the other. Well, if I am a married man or I have a steady girlfriend, I won’t be able to be such a ‘flying man’ and do such an excellent job.”

### *6.1.3 Economic independence and self-sufficiency*

It should be noted that some of the female interviewees have bought apartments by themselves. These young professional females have professional jobs and gain disposable incomes with which to consume. Blue, the lawyer, sitting on the sofa in her beautiful living room, said “I don’t need to depend on a man for money. I just regretted to waste my time and money on such ignominious guy I met, see, I have much better life without him.” Also Joanne, “I love shopping and I love the pubs and clubs as my leisure activities, besides I will choose nice destinations abroad for my vocation twice a year. I earn money myself and I can spend it as I want. Because I am a single women! I just need to take care of myself, no others.” Comparing with single women, single men have more plans on controlling money. Like Jerry, who plans to buy a big house, leaves 30% of his income every month for a half as savings and another half as investments on stocks, bonds or others. “As a single man, I don’t need to pay money to please wife for girlfriend, I just spend money to delight myself, ” stressed by Jian Wei, who used to expend 60% of his income for paying the bills or buying stuffs to his ex-girlfriend.

## *6.2 Disadvantages of Being Single*

In terms of disadvantages of being single, the major item identified by both men and women who are not in favor of being single was “loneliness”, and the minor one was “feeling embarrassed in some social gatherings”.

### *6.2.1 Loneliness*

Most of interviewees expressed that they had ever felt lonely as being alone. “I fear of weekend, in particular the Friday night. Unlike the ones who have boyfriends and who are anxious for the dating after work-off; I prefer there is too much work left for overtime as I don’t want to go home alone so early at such night, but no dating, no appointment, no party invitation, that makes me abashed.” Maggie sighed. It was also remarked by Sam, “I am not lonely though I am living and working in another country alone. Only when I have something to share, or want to do something with someone. The rest of the time I’m perfectly content.” “Sometimes I will need someone to talk with, not my parents, not my brothers, I need a soul-mate to listen to me and advise me, but you know” Michael said, “It’s definitely difficult to find such a person to talk with. I have to go pubs and buy drinks. At that moment, I wish I had a girlfriend.” “I hate some holidays like Valentine’s Day, Christmas Eve., they come from western world but here in China, people do celebrate such holidays with girlfriends or boyfriends. I always feel jealous when people talking about where to go, how to celebrate, what kind of present they have received, I am sad that I am alone,” griped by Lucy. The companionship, therefore, becomes much more important to these single persons. “Fortunately, I have a few close friend to share with my ups and downs,” as pointed by some of the respondents.

### *6.2.2 Feeling embarrassed in some social gatherings*

The social gatherings, as the interviews indicated are fastened on official Annual Parties and Family Get-Together. “We are required to bring spouse or boy/girl friend on company Annual Party. I felt so embarrassed as it was the second year that I went there alone,” said Maggie, “That was really an awful night, I pretended to ignore people’s gossips but I knew



myself I did care. I am thinking that probably I should find a guy to act as my 'boyfriend' in such occasion next time if I could not find my Mr. Right then." The biggest problem for Yin Gang and Felix is the same. Neither of them is local Shanghaiese, according to Chinese traditional custom, they must go back hometown to pay a formal visit to their parents and relatives during Chinese New Year no matter how busy they are. However, every year their parents have but one requests – bring the to-be daughter-in-law home. "I felt so sorry that I made my parents disappointed for the past a few years. They are getting older and older, the only wish of them now is to see I would have been married and they would have their grandson or granddaughter afterwards." Yin Gang described, and added by Felix, "I promised my parents to bring a girl with me next year, if I cannot find my dreaming girl by next January, I will have no choice but beg one of my colleague or friend to pretend as my girl friend. That's an awful idea but I just do not want to see their letdown once again. They will reach 66 next year, I could not forgive myself to be a impious son to my parents."

In general, the advantages of being single related to have freedom from taking care of spouses; freedom to do what they want, when they want and how they want; and freedom from having to consider the others in terms of decisions and behaviors. Whereas the most frequently cited drawbacks to not being married were the absence of being special to a man/woman, the lack of with whom to share interests, happiness and sadness, and the worm of consciences to parents for not meeting their expectation. Nevertheless, over half of the interviewers showed their desires of finding the right mate, they said single was just a temporary phase, they wished to be married some time in future.

## 7. Conclusion Discussion

The changing social, economic and educational activities of young people make them contribute more time on workforce and on the other hand, they have more desirability and higher expectation on their personal growth and fulfillment. Being single is a phase of the whole life course, although some of the single people in this thesis showed their preference of singleness, like Blue who may still need more time to be recovered from her ex-boyfriend, most of these young people account for variety of being temporarily single, they share the same ambition to become partnered some time in the future. In this sense, these young people are not voluntary to be single; efforts anyhow are made by them in a way on the marriage.

### *7.1 The hardships in finding mate*

In my survey, none of people was likely to choose economic benefits as an advantage of being partnered, since all of them have well-paid decent jobs. They just want to look for the kind of person they could be really happy with and wait until they find the proper partner. However, for some reasons, looking for love becomes a hard work to them. As complained by Joanne, “I am intelligent, have a professional job in management position, but this makes me inappropriate for most of the men I meet.” And the critical voice from Susan, “Guys don’t like women who are smarter than they, it scares them.” Maggie found herself like an idealist, “Maybe I have too high expectation on guys, I don’t know, seems no one I met were accorded to my requirements.” Women all felt that the older they are the more difficulties they would confront to find the right mate. The majority reasons for men in problem to find partner were identified as “too busy” and “poor in communication”. For instance, Felix said he himself had no problem in writing whatever the complex program files, while facing to girls, “I always feel perplexed, all my confidences were missing suddenly.” Men like Yin Gang described him as “Working Machine” and consequently, “The surplus time of my 24 hours expect working is all but the sleeping only”. Both men and women emphasized that they were somewhat lack of opportunities to meet more persons for companionship and further relationship. “Most of my friends in my age are married and some have kids already.”

“I have less contacts than before as they are busy with their family members”, as that indicated by Maggie and Michael, who called themselves “loner”.

## *7.2 Be active to find partner*

Marriage is hard enough when people have the right mate. “Right here waiting” is such a passive way in seeking partnership, as the real-life is the real life, not a scene of novel or movie. Be active and be competitive should be considered as the right way. Finding the relationship is supposed not to look but build up people’s social life. Both the attitudinal and behavioral actions are suggested to adopt for both young men and young women.

### *7.2.1 Lower down the set of criteria on partner*

In Chinese conventional concept, a Perfect Match is consisted with “man’s wisdom and his girl’s pretty”(郎才女貌 LANG CAI NV MAO). That means man, as the main resources provider in household, must be the older one in family and more mature with high qualifications than woman so he is capable of gaining enough income for household; whereas the woman, whose duties are mainly cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing, is required to be good-looking and good at housework only. In other words, when talking about finding partners, women have more and higher expectations on men. For instance, if a woman holds a university Degree, she will require the guy with at least the same level Degree. Women in China, now a day, have gain greater educational successes; they become to account for higher professional jobs and are able to get more income. There seems little chance left if women still hold on the conventional criteria to look for love, in particular those who have university degree, high position/income but in their late 20s or in 30s. The guys in the same age or even elder who are high qualified and have gained successes in their career normally have already been married, though there exists the “Diamond” singles like Yin Gang or Michael, they are either engaged with their jobs or they prefer young beautiful girls in early 20s. Men, on the other hand, with the androcentrism in mind, they don’t like women they come along with higher education degree, higher position or higher income than them, in one word, they feel uncomfortable with “more powerful” women as they don’t want to be threaten as futile and as the one who are relying on women. It seems necessary to

change people's mind, both man and woman are valued with their financial independence, there must be gender equality among family. Regardless the age, the stature, the background and the wealth they have, for men and women, ought just to find out the person who is attractive and then let it go and see if there is the "chemistry" exists.

### *7.2.2 Extend social networks*

When were asked how they intend to meet new friends (the potential mates), most of them chose being recommended by friends or relatives and some others said they would like to make new friends at social gatherings, like parties, trips. However, they all mentioned the limited social networks they have, which make them lack of opportunities to have more people to meet and get further relationship. "We have to let the more people known who and how we are, right? Then there could be more possibilities to find out who is my Mr. Right." Cynthia, a 30-year-old lady shared her plan about how to be actively looking for love, "I was heard some very good matchmaking websites and I am going to put my personal advertisement on them and see what will happen." Li Jia who has already been the registered member of one famous matchmaker web ([www.51friend.com](http://www.51friend.com)) for 3 months, "I used to being busy with my job from Monday to Friday but was too bored and got nothing to do during weekends." "51friend arranges different events every week, like movie show, gym, outing, parties, speed-dating, 6-people dinner and so on. I had lots of fun joining them and so far I have made some good friends." He also mentioned that he would upload his photo on the website, "to show myself genuinely." The contrivance of Internet, has started to change the way people socialized in the pretty profound ways, in my survey, 10 to 14 of the absolute single men and women have ever registered or visited such dating websites intended to meet more people. As indicated by La Jiao, the Web Master of Wonderful Match ([www.love21cn.com](http://www.love21cn.com)) "To give opportunities to yourself get to know the others, and meanwhile, to provide the opportunities to let the other people know you. On-line dating, therefore, has become the mainstream for people communication." Bin Bin, the CEO of one of the online Making-Friends Club ([www.w-8m.com](http://www.w-8m.com)) said, "The registered members we have, as we merrily to find that there have been thirty couples who successfully got married in the past three years, and by present, numerous men and women are in serious relationship of love." Besides online dating, there are other types of activities fit for those who want to

find their right mates in a direct and effective way, like service of Dating Company, Personal Advertisement on Newspaper, TV-show and so on. “Just adjust attitude, be braver and more active,” advised by Yang Feirong, the TV Director of one famous matchmaking programme in Shanghai (Meet on Saturday), “The right one is standing by. To be successful requires taking risks, so here goes.”

### *7.3 To be single but fabulous*

All of the respondents in this thesis emphasized that they would never imagine rushing into a marriage just because it has been overtime or they need someone to talk and do things with. Jenny, one of my best friends in her 32 suggested that self-confidence would help people to negotiate a good relationship once he or she found the right person. “I won’t just go out with the only desire to meet somebody and of course I won’t get married only because I must find somebody to marry with. I’m quite positive that I will meet my Mr. Right, it’s gonna happen it will happen.” In truth, most of them still believe in the value of marriage as a romantic bond and aspire to achieve a happy marriage. (Chen, 2000; Yan, 2003) Anyhow, being single is a life style, an attitude people choose for making a life for oneself, no one can determine whether good or not to be remaining as a single. If people did meet somebody, it could be supposed a bonus of lifetime, the valuable anamnesis and experience in life. No matter happiness or loneliness it brings as a single, just enjoy the very present life, to be single but fabulous.

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