Blurring tradition and modernity: Understanding young Chinese diasporas' online dating experiences

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses semi-constructed in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to investigate how cultural-social and economic-political influencers in contemporary China shape young Chinese diasporas' online dating experiences, values, and parental pressure on children's mate choices. Contributing to Users and Gratification theory, this thesis identifies a culturally embedded motivation among Chinese diasporas who use online dating as a gateway to intercultural understanding. By demonstrating how tradition and modernity blur into the Chinese dating culture as the Chinese way of modernization and using cosmopolitanism theory to explain it, this thesis highlights that modernity theory is Eurocentric, as it dominantly positions western romance as the way of modernism. This thesis suggests that young Chinese demonstrate autonomy and rationality, and consider self-interests when confronting parental influences on their mate choices. Thus, Hofstede's cultural dimension of collectivism that individuals subsume their interests to the interests of the whole group could not be applied to the contemporary Chinese context in terms of parental pressure. Instead, a cosmopolitan perspective based on non-western participants' understanding about how meaning of action is constructed, and the acknowledgment of their traditional and modern cultures and economic-political background is recommended.

KEYWORDS: *Online dating; Uses and Gratification theory; Modernity theory, Individualism vs Collectivism; China; Cosmopolitanism*

Table of Contents

Introduction

Since the Chinese economic reform in 1978, there have been dramatic social transformations within forty years in post-communist China, including rapid economic growth, industrialization, urbanization, one-child policy, and globalization. Under this economical-political background, there is the rising of materialism and consumerism, the exposure to the "Western cultures" through media or diasporas moving to western countries, and the increased use of mobile phones and the Internet (Yeung & Hu, 2016). Shaped by these changes, romantic relationships are also changing and becoming more dynamic. Meanwhile, with the development of new technology, the emergence of online dating applications or websites (e.g., Tinder, Hinge, OkCupid, Bumble) has changed the way people approach sexual or romantic dates. Yet little is known about how young Chinese's online romance is influenced by these social shifts. Thus, this transforming social context provides new chances to review the dynamics of online dating culture in contemporary China and how young Chinese respond to these social transformations. This thesis is framed in response to this concern.

To study how romantic experiences are shaped by social transformations, most research adopts the modernity theory to explain how modernity deinstitutionalizes marriage and increases the pursuit of love and self-fulfillment (Giddens, 2013; Yeung & Hu, 2016). However, as Donner and Santos (2016) point out, modernity theory is based on a Eurocentric perspective, as it demonstrates a linear model and dominantly suggests western romance as the way of modernism, and most studies use western samples.

In addition, a body of literature (Dion & Dion, 1996; Buunk, Park & Duncan, 2010; Yeung & Hu, 2016; Fang & Gong, 2019) uses Hofstede's cultural dimension of individualism vs collectivism (Hofstede, 1980) to explain cultural differences on mate choices; people in collectivist cultures would experience more parental pressure when choosing mates and yield to such pressures. However, with the advent of globalization and the rise of transnational diasporas, global media platforms, and transformations of society into hybrids of capitalism, it begs the question of whether Hofstede's theory still holds to explain youth and romance from the Chinese perspective.

Instead, this thesis adopts the cosmopolitanism theory, arguing that people are influenced by a variety of cultures and form a cosmopolitan identity, and we all have

responsibility towards each other, despite the difference in nationality, ethnicity, social class, and gender. It is suggested that we should understand the beliefs, values, and other local contexts that construct meanings of behavior and lives in "strange" cultures, rather than creating division between "us" and "them", and between the West and the Rest (Appiah, 2007).

Furthermore, when studying the motivations and effects of online dating, most research adopts Uses and Gratifications theory (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix & Calvete, 2015; Gudelunas, 2012; Lawson & Leck, 2006; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn, 2011; Sumter, Vandenbosch & Ligtenberg, 2017; Whitty, 2007; Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan & McCabe, 2005). While undoubtedly useful this framework is, the factor of culture is underplayed.

And in terms of privacy, a body of literature focuses on information privacy (Westin, 1967; Westin, 2003; Ziegeldorf, Morton & Wehrle; 2014) and studies about information privacy in China tend to frame Chinese Internet giants and the government as threats based on Western privacy values (Lv & Luo, 2018; Fu, 2019; Solon & Siddiqui, 2017). We know little about how the Chinese perceive privacy and manage it. Thus, cross-cultural privacy values are needed to be investigated.

Therefore, this project chooses the online dating experiences of Chinese young people as the research topic. Through the lens of online dating, this project could bring variations to the model of modernity, potentially critique Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, and contribute to Uses and Gratifications theory from a cultural perspective and to privacy theory. Moreover, this thesis reckons online dating as an appropriate entry point to understanding notions on cosmopolitanism, nationalism, capitalism, modernity, and values in contemporary Chinese society.

This thesis chooses its research question: How do Chinese young people living abroad manage social and parental influence during their online dating experiences?

And the sub-questions are

1.   What are these young people looking for when they use these dating applications?

2.   What are their experiences and why do they behave so?

3. What is the role of the parents in shaping their choices during online dating?

As for the social implication, this thesis could help Chinese society and parents understand young people's struggles and pursuits in dating experiences. In addition, young people may be empowered when facing cultural constraints and social pressure, and may learn to better protect their privacy in terms of intimacy and personhood. Furthermore, most international online dating applications are based on the needs of western users. By investigating non-western users' needs and struggles, this thesis could help application developers build a more inclusive online environment.

Theoretical framework

This chapter reviews the dating culture in contemporary China and theories applied to it. To understand and explain young Chinese's dating motivations and experiences, this chapter first introduces the social-cultural and economical-political background in contemporary China in terms of dating behavior. Because this thesis chooses Chinese young people living abroad as the study population, attention is also given to studies about Chinese diasporas. To investigate how modernization influences Chinese people's dating lives, this chapter then reviews the application of modernity theory on the Chinese context. To understand whether Hofstede's cultural dimension of individualism vs collectivism could still explain the complex and multidimensional contemporary Chinese context, this chapter reviews how this cultural dimension is applied to the parental influence on children's dating choices. Then this chapter introduces cosmopolitanism theory to challenge the Eurocentric perspective in social science studies when studying non-Western contexts. As for online dating, this chapter overviews the digital China, and to investigate Chinese young people's online dating motivations, this thesis also adopts the uses and gratifications approach and reviews studies about online dating motivations. In addition, the theory of privacy as intimacy and personhood is also reviewed, as this thesis intends to investigate what constitutes privacy through the lens of romance.

1 Contemporary China and romance

1.1 The multi-dimensional transformations in contemporary China

Research (Ji, Chen, Cai & Zheng, 2015; Fincher, 2014; Ji & Yeung, 2014; Sun & Chen, 2014) notes that the patriarchal and patrilineal norms still exist in contemporary China, despite the rapid economic growth and modernization. Before the early twentieth century, marriage in China essentially existed to continue the male family line and to expand the family power and wealth (Evans, 1995). Furthermore, when it comes to equal pay and opportunities for promotion, it is suggested that gender equality is not fully achieved in China (Liu, 2016). The gender role of women being responsible to take care of the family members at home and to do most of the unpaid housework has hardly changed (Cook & Dong, 2011). Also, considering the higher social costs of engaging in premarital sex, women are more conservative than men about it (Zheng et al., 2011; Farrer, 2014; Yeung & Hu, 2016). However, little is known about whether young Chinese's online dating experiences would still reflect patriarchal norms, or would they behave differently online.

Moreover, Ong and Wang (2015) reason that the patriarchal norms could get more strong. Jiang, Sánchez-Barricarte, Li, and Feldman (2011) predict that "From 2015 to 2045, China will face a surplus of 34 million males." Thus, the male marriage squeeze would emerge and be intertwined with women's preference for choosing higher-income partners (Zurndorfer, 2018), potentially making men be more competitive in the workplace, which could result in a bigger wage gap between males and females and thus, disadvantage women.

As for the intergenerational relationships, one body of research shows that there is still a strong parental influence on urging adult children to get married (Ji, 2015), mate choices (Harrell & Santos, 2017; Zhang & Sun, 2014; Nehring & Wang, 2016), divorce decisions (Yan, 2013), fertility motivation and family size (Ji, Chen, Cai & Zheng, 2015), associated with the limited social welfare support, traditional values of filial piety and the one-child policy.

In 1980 the one-child policy that one couple can only have one child was announced nationally in China, and it was announced as a basic state policy in 1982

(Feng, Cai & Gu, 2013). This policy was ended in 2016 when all couples in China are allowed to have two children (Feng, Gu & Cai, 2016). This means that the majority of Chinese people born during the 1980s to 2015 could get more economic and emotional support from their parents and have to solely take care of the welfare of their old-aged parents, which could result in a more tight intergenerational relationship (Zhang & Sun, 2014). However, this one-child policy, on the other hand, could empower daughters in urban China, as they could get better educational investment and support on their careers from their parents and inherit parents' property as the only heir (Fong, 2002; Cameron, Erkal, Gangadharan, & Meng, 2013).

On the other hand, research (Liu, 2015; Yan, 2013; Zhao, 2019) suggests that this intergenerational relationship is different from the traditional one dominated by the strong ethic of filial piety that refers to obeying parents' wishes and taking care of them when they are old. Although it is still children's legal responsibilities of taking care of their old parents (Nehring & Wang, 2016), instead of obedience, the intergenerational relationships involve more negotiation and even conflicts in contemporary China. Yan (2013) explains that influenced by the one-child policy, along with the accumulation of family wealth, children become the center of the conjugal relationships. Parents both emotionally and economically invest in them, and in return, children build strong attachments to parents. Therefore, living in a competitive and risky society where consumer culture and materialism are rising, young people in contemporary China tend to seek advice on their private and public lives and financial help from their parents who are willing to give. Some of them report that they do not trust anyone in the world but their parents.

In this field, how parents influence young people's choices when they are dating online, the complexities involved in intergenerational relationships, and how children manage these influences still remain largely unexplored.

Besides the social-cultural background, there is also an economical-political influencer on Chinese people's romantic experiences. Nehring and Wang (2016) notice in the post-Mao age, capitalism has widened social inequality and created the desire for the consumerist lifestyles, which shaped young Chinese people's mate choices that material wealth and good looks become highly valued assets in the dating market. Under this

5

circumstance, the marriage squeeze puts men from the low social-economic strata at a disadvantage, when they try to find partners. Moreover, Hannum, Wang, and Adams (2008) notice that one of the most important social stratifications in contemporary China is the urban-rural divide. The household registration system (Hukou) was in effect since 1958, and it categorizes Chinese people into urban and rural citizens. Urban citizens can access social welfare, like better educational resources, health care, and other government support that rural citizens are not entitled to (Liao & Wei, 2012). Furthermore, under the Hukou system, if Chinese people want to have children, it is more rational to get married, so their children are entitled to public services (Yeung & Hu, 2016). In Ji's interviews (2015) with Chinese single women in Shanghai, informants all state that the compatible family background (门当户对) is important, meaning they would prefer to stay single than marry men from rural areas. Thus, the impact of urbanization on Chinese people's emotional experiences invites further analysis. This begs the question of whether romance is a class privilege in contemporary China? What is the role of online dating in shaping this phenomenon? This thesis is framed to address these questions.

According to the most recent Chinese General Social Surveys 2015, by the age of 30, 95.0% of men are married, while 98.3% of women are married, which reflects that marriage is still the mainstream lifestyle for couples. And those who are not married, especially women, are mocked and stigmatized (Ji, 2015; Gaetano, 2010; Fincher, 2016). All-China Women's Federation and Chinese media both urge educated women to marry in their mid-twenties, so they will not miss their "best" childbearing age or become "leftover" women, while the quality of marriage is hardly publicly discussed on Chinese mainstream media (Zurndorfer, 2018).

With the convenience of the internet, some of these women engage in interracial dating and choose to "escape" from China which they perceive as a patriarchal society, becoming diasporas (Liu & Liu, 2008; Zurndorfer, 2018).

1.2 Diasporas and the difficulties they encounter abroad
Diasporas refer to "migrant groups dispersed across socio-cultural-geopolitical boundaries, with a collective memory of an identity associated with the 'homeland', the

6

idea of return and a hybrid consciousness and cosmopolitan disposition" (Brinkerhoff, 2009).

Nehring and Wang (2016) discover that Chinese parents have important influences on how their diasporas children raise their grandchildren, and the diasporas have to take the role of mediator between their parents and partners in interracial marriages. As for women mentioned above who "escaped" from China, some of their western partners perceive them as "domestic helpers" or "erotic bed-partners" (Lehmann, 2014; Hu, 2016; Zurndorfer, 2018). Moreover, Wang and Collins (2016) notice unfamiliarity of the local culture, language barrier, and limited social zones like Asian supermarkets, Chinese friends' homes, and Chinese festivals have hindered first-generation Chinese diasporas' ability to fit in the local society and brought loneliness to them. Therefore, they tend to seek comfort and security by sticking with their Chinese social media ecosystem and their parents. However, the dating experiences of young Chinese diasporas and the parental influence in it still remain to be fully explored.

On the other hand, not all first-generation diasporas encountered negative experiences. Stones, Botterill, Lee, and O'Reilly (2019) state that those who fitted-in are diasporas who adopt cosmopolitan identities, as they use this shared identity, humanity, and some similar lifestyles such as experiencing youth culture to find connection with the local people. From the economic aspect, Leblang (2010) suggests that diasporas could be valuable assets in the global economy, as they could use their diasporas networks and cross-cultural skills and act as mediators to deepen the economic connections between countries.

1.3 The coexistence of tradition and modernity

Tradition and modernity have long been framed as a dichotomy, but as Harkness and Khaled (2014) suggest, they should not be seen as purely oppositional. Modern societies are commonly framed to advocate freedom, equality, individualism, and rationality, while dictatorship, patriarchy, and collectivism are commonly shown as hallmarks of traditional societies. Thus, in modernity theory, Giddens (1992) argues that with the economic growth and industrialization, in modern societies, there would be the

rise of romantic love and individual autonomy and the weakening of influences from extended kinship in mate choices.

Since the economic reform in 1980s, China has risen as an economic superpower in the world, along with political, social, and cultural factors reviewed above that keep shaping values, meanings, and experiences of individual people, which makes contemporary China a unique case study to assess modernity theory and parental influences on intimate relationships. Thus, through the lens of online dating, this thesis intends to understand how tradition and modernity co-exist in the contemporary Chinese context.

One body of the literature suggests that modernity theory could be applied to the contemporary Chinese context. Yeung and Hu (2016) suggest that after the economic reform, with better education and globalization, there is more approval of individual autonomy in life choices like premarital sex, homosexuality, and cohabitation in China. Moreover, they suggest that the marriage institution in China is weakening, as demonstrated by the rising infidelity and divorce rate. In addition, scholars argue that there is a rising trend of individualization, self-expression among Chinese young people, contrary to the collectivist culture norms their parents endorse (Fang & Gong, 2019; Yeung & Hu, 2016). For example, Fang & Gong (2019) find that Chinese young people tend to resist to the mainstream success that material property is the main criteria to judge the quality of the life, when their parents are trying to promote this materialism ideology to them, which demonstrates self-autonomy, rationality, and self-expression among Chinese young people. As for the independence of women, Gaetano (2010) interviews single women in urban China and suggests that these women do not identify with a linear life based solely on marriage and children. They also drive their identities and self-fulfillment from their careers, economic independence, consumerism, and relationships with friends and family. Though, voices from rural women are lacking in this area.

On the other hand, critical scholarships have challenged these assumptions, suggesting that transformations in modernity theory only demonstrate a linear model based on western contexts. Donner and Santos (2016) criticize that the modernity theory could not explain the universal phenomenon of marriage and the still strong parental influences in contemporary China, and this theory shows a Eurocentric perspective. They

further argue that the majority of research, based on western contexts, adopts a homogeneous model of social transformations and thus, fails to identify the variations of modernization, especially the discursive narrative of intimate relationships in non-western contexts. As Thornton (2013) suggests, within this Eurocentric approach, non-western countries are assessed based on the criteria and values of western societies, while the constructed meanings that explain the "strange" behavior and values in non-western societies are neglected. Therefore, the non-western civilizations are implied as "primitive" and are supposed to catch up with the "civilized" ones. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to understand the modernization process in China outside of this stereotypical perspective, through viewing experiences and explanations of online dating among young Chinese diasporas.

In this area, during online dating, how Chinese people weave traditions into modern lives in the transforming China, based on the underlying dynamics of culture, class, social regulations, and intergenerational relationships still calls for further study. Echoing this call, this study could potentially critique the dominant Eurocentric approach on dating, love, and marriage life in social science research.

Besides modernity theory, most social science literature also uses the dichotomy of individualism and collectivism to explain the romantic relationships in China.

1.4 Beyond the dichotomy of individualism and collectivism

Introduced by Hofstede (1980), individualism and collectivism are mainly about the relationships between individuals and their groups. It is stated that collectivism endorses the values of subordinating one's interests to the interests of the group, and emphasizing fitting-in, harmony, and interdependence; while in individualistic cultures, it is individuals' interests and goals that are promoted. And China is described as a collectivist country (Hofstede, 2001).

Giddens (1992) describes pure relationships as pursuing self-fulfillment and individual autonomy, even if they are against wishes from family. This kind of relationship is entered for its own sake and could be maintained only when both parties could derive satisfaction from it. Thus, Dion and Dion (1996) note this kind of relationship is more likely to be advocated in individualistic societies over collectivist

9

ones. Research suggests (Bunk, Park & Duncan, 2010; Dion & Dion, 1996) that there is more parental influence on mate selection in collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures. On the other hand, scholars (Fang & Gong, 2019; Yeung & Hu, 2016) argue that many Chinese young people endorse individualist values just as those in Western countries, which serves as powerful counter-evidence in response to the influential notion of Hofstede's individualism vs collectivism.

However, scholars note that the analytical scope of individualism vs collectivism is limited. Jackson, Ho, and Na (2013) suggest we could not explain behaviors only in matters of cultures since they are also shaped by socio-economic and political contexts. Donner and Santos (2016) further argue that individuals' experiences are not only historical and cultural but also personal and political. And thus, the index on the model of individualism vs collectivism can hardly explain the complicated dating, marriage, and intergenerational relationships in the rapidly changing and multidimensional context of contemporary China, and a less homogenous and more complex narrative should be developed.

Therefore, beyond the dichotomy of tradition and modernity, individualism and collectivism, this thesis adopts the cosmopolitanism theory, and embeds Chinese young diasporas' online dating experiences into the intertwined dimensions and tensions of cultural norms, politics, gender, ethnic, and rural-urban social class.

2 *Cosmopolitanism theory: our responsibilities towards people we do not know*

Cosmopolitanism theory refers to every human being having responsibilities towards each other including those that one does not know, despite the difference of nationality, ethnicity, social class, or gender. Cosmopolitanism suggests that there are many values worth living by, but we cannot live all of them, and different people in different societies should embrace different values of others, instead of forcing them into agreements. (Appiah, 2007; Beck & Sznaider, 2006; Learmount, 2002; Guo, 2018).

2.1 *The aspect of cosmopolitan identity*

However, along with globalization and the notion of cosmopolitanism, Xu and Wu (2019) argue that in China, nationalism is also rising, with the government promoting

traditional Chinese culture as superior and building citizens' confidence in it. And Lozada (2006) argues that the tension between Chinese traditional culture and western culture could also mirror the hidden conflict between cosmopolitanism and nationalism in China.

But one has to ask: how to define a national identity? People are influenced by not only their local culture, but also a variety of cultures, and thus, form the identity of global citizens. And cosmopolitanism theory argues that being a citizen in only one particular community is not sufficient for one to flourish in the world. However, when first forming a cosmopolitan identity and encountering cultural clashes, people could experience the feeling of betweenness and a hybrid identity (Marotta, 2010).

In this aspect of cosmopolitan identity, this thesis addresses the gap in this area by asking what the impacts of globalization on Chinese dating culture are, and how cosmopolitanism affects Chinese young people's online dating experiences. Accordingly, this project chooses Chinese young people living abroad as research analytical units. Could exposure to different cultures increase their cosmopolitanism? Would they show different dating values or behavior compared to when they are in China and dating offline? And how would they use their cosmopolitan values and experiences to manage social and parental influences on online dating experiences?

Moreover, Beck and Camiller (2004) suggest that scholars tend to focus on the relationships between western people and Jewish or Muslim people when using the concept of cosmopolitism, and seldom discuss how it could shape people's values and interactions in non-Western societies. Thus, Xu and Wu (2019) ask: "when considering contexts beyond Western societies, what kind of 'openness' should one discuss, and who are the 'others' to which one should be open?" Echoing this question, this thesis adopts a vernacular perspective and investigates how young Chinese diasporas are open to the difference in gender, race, class, generation, and culture in their online dating experiences. Meanwhile, how could new technology increase young people's cosmopolitanism, and thus, help them negotiate the tension from social pressure and intergenerational relationships?

2.1 The aspect of responsibilities

11

Furthermore, in terms of the responsibility aspect, cosmopolitanism theory encourages us to study lives in a variety of cultures, and more importantly understand the beliefs and practices that create meanings for lives, rather than using values in the West to differentiate behaviors in non-western cultures. If we do not try to understand the beliefs that give actions meanings in other contexts, it is likely we would judge those actions are wrong or inferior according to our own criteria. Cosmopolitanism denies that we should converge to one single way of living. Rather, other people also have the right to develop a variety of modes of life (Appiah, 2007).

Moreover, from a cosmopolitan point, it suggests that intellectuals exaggerate the significance of differences and neglect the ever changing contexts when highlighting the division between individualism and collectivism, between the West and the Rest, between "us" and "them". Instead, interpreting cultures requires the understanding of their historical and social contexts (Appiah, 2007).

Therefore, taking a cosmopolitan perspective and challenging the Eurocentric perspective, this thesis is framed to understand the beliefs, values, and economic-political factors that give meanings to young Chinese diasporas' online dating lives.

3 Digital China

In 2019, there are 854 million Internet users in China. On average, they spend 43.4 hours per week on acquiring information, shopping, socializing, and entertaining (China Internet Network Information Center, 2019). And dominated by the Chinese digital giants, Alibaba, Baidu, and Tencent, along with other competitors like digital news broadcast Toutiao, video platforms Douyin, iQiyi, and shopping apps Jindong, Meituan, Chinese social media landscape is diverse and influential on Chinese people's everyday lives. Moreover, this powerful market has spread overseas, with Chinese tourists and diasporas going all over the world (Yu, H., & Sun, W. (2019).

And inside this digital China, with 1.15 billion active monthly users (Tencent Annual Report 2019), WeChat has become the most popular social media application in China and has linked 82.2% of Chinese people. Inevitably, WeChat is also the most important platform for intergenerational communication in China (Chen, Mao & Qiu, 2018; Lam, 2013; Yu et al., 2017). Fang and Gong (2019) conduct focus-group

12

interviews with Chinese university students. And these students feel that parents always expect them to behave properly and post their positive lives on social media. And intergenerational conflicts would happen when young people show their "negative" sides: parties at night, intimate relationship troubles, and bad moods on social media. Parents would preach against these practices, which highlights the conformity orientation of parenting through social media. Moreover, scholars (Sun, 2018; Yu & Sun, 2019) notice that diasporas would bring their Chinese social media ecosystem with them when living abroad, and WeChat is the most popular application when they socialize with their existing networks in China. Zhao's interviews (2019) with Chinese overseas students demonstrate how young people tactically negotiate family intimacy and personal autonomy. Young people report that they would disclose their experiences and feelings that they suspect would not evoke conflicts to their parents on social media, while block parents when they post "negative" sides of lives and communicate about these things only with their friends and partners. This research highlights the changing intergenerational dynamics in the transforming China.

As for research about online dating in China, Chen and Liu (2019) conduct in-depth interviews with Chinese diasporas in Australia about their usage of global English-language online dating applications like Tinder. And they find that these diasporas tend to use stereotypes and a self-Orientalist lens to view other people's profiles online, meaning that Chinese women perceive white men as caring and Chinese men as conservative, and report Chinese women are highly popular in online dating, while Chinese men demonstrate low self-esteem and complain about their low popularity. Moreover, a vast literature argues that when dating online, Chinese still mirror the patriarchy norms and the class stratification offline and feel a strong ethical responsibility to their parents, as women measure men's appeal by their income, occupation, Hukou statue, and their possession of houses and automobiles, while men measure women by their beauty, body, and age (Farrer, 2014; Jankowiak, 2013; Ong, 2016; Ong & Wang, 2015; Zavoretti, 2016).

In terms of sexuality, governmental surveillance is put on the Internet in the name of morality and social stability. For example, content that is defined as "vulgar" and "pornographic" is banned on the Internet, although the criteria to judge what constitutes

13

vulgar and pornographic are not clear, which mirrors the paternalistic and authoritarian governmental control on sexuality in China (Ho, Jackson, Cao & Kwok, 2018). Moreover, Liang, Tan, and O'Halloran (2017) conduct a social semiotic analysis on pre-school sexual educational books and suggest that sexuality discourse in contemporary China highlights the discourse of sexuality as morality more than sexuality as physical desire. They identify ideologies that familial values are promoted and pre-marital sex should be self-restricted in Chinese sexual educational books.

On the other hand, not all online dating experiences of Chinese are negative. Zhang (2011) suggests that in the digital age, the Chinese have more access to pornography and erotic images, as the neoliberal market economy caters consumers' needs and tries to dodge governmental surveillance, and the Chinese are more willing to confront their sexual desires and discuss sex openly. Chen and Liu 's interviews (2019) reveal that online dating gives participants more agency to negotiate their preferences. Furthermore, Xu and Wu (2019) investigate young Chinese people's experiences on using one of the most widely used online dating platforms in China, Momo, and they find that these youngsters show high cosmopolitanism, opening to the difference and new values of others and regarding it as part of the modern lifestyles.

Therefore, the lens of dating culture and family dynamics have been proven to be fruitful in investigating the transforming social context in contemporary China. Continuing in this vein, this thesis intends to further the discussion of how online dating and intergenerational relationships in China are situationally shaped by multiple influencers.

4 Other online dating theories

4.1 Uses and Gratifications theory

Uses and gratifications (U&G) approach has been developed to study media effects, and it is commonly adopted to study the motivations to use a particular mass medium and users' social and psychological gratifications during the past half century (McQuail, 1994). Moreover, the theory has been applied to social media within the two recent decades (Ryan et al., 2014; Shao, 2009; Urista et al., 2009). Furthermore, the U&G approach is concerned with how motivations to use media are shaped by social and

psychological needs (Katz et al., 1973), and how individuals use media to negotiate their social identities and emotional lives (Blumler, 1985; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Therefore, this thesis chooses to adopt this approach to understand Chinese young people's motivations to use online dating applications, and the gratifications they receive from them. Moreover, through this approach, this study investigates the social-cultural, and economical-political factors that influence the motivations of Chinese young diasporas, and how they negotiate their social identities in this digital age.

From the U&G approach, the first question is what are the motivations to use online dating applications? Based on early media studies, Rubin and Rubin (1985) categorize media uses into two major motivations: instrumental orientation that is goal-directed, and ritualized motivation that is for entertainment purposes. In the digital age, Sumter, Vandenbosch, and Ligtenberg (2017) survey Dutch emerging adults to find their motivations to use the popular online dating application, Tinder. Factor analysis identifies six motivations (i.e., Love, Casual Sex, Ease of Communication, Self-Worth Validation, Thrill of Excitement, and Trendiness.). Gudelunas's study (2012) suggests that sexual pleasure is the main motivation. Also, study shows that the novelty of this kind of application is also an identified motivation (Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn, 2011). However, most studies on this area are quantitative ones and, to some extent, are superficial. The tensions, complex influencers, and life history behind motivations are barely discussed. Thus, what is lacking here is an explorative study of how social-cultural and economical-political factors affect the motivations of Chinese young diasporas to use online dating platforms.

As for the gratifications that users receive from online dating platforms, the main academic debate is whether online dating could empower individuals or bring negative effects on them. From the positive side, Lawson and Leck 's in-depth interviews with online daters (2006) reveal that online dating provides a platform for users to pursue companionship, psychological comforts, and to get rid of stereotypic roles. Moreover, studies show that online dating also gives users an anonymous environment to re-create their identities and validate their self-worth (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan & McCabe, 2005). Furthermore, users use computer-mediated communication for the freedom from social or spatial constraints, and for self-protection.

15

For example, Couch and Liamputtong's study (2008) reveal that participants report that online dating gives them more preparation for sexual interactions offline, and thus, gives them more health protection. Subrahmanyam, Smahel, and Greenfield's study (2006) show that in unmonitored online chat rooms, users would initiate more explicit sexual conversations. However, what is lacking is the study to investigate how online dating platforms could be used to manage social and parental influence on dating.

On the other hand, after rejection, online dating users could lose their face and experience emotional upset (Lawson & Leck, 2006). Moreover, the deception in online dating could lead to disappointment in offline meetings (Whitty, 2007), and online dating also brings out the problem of emotional infidelity (Whitty, 2005). Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, and Calvete (2015) study the phenomenon of online dating abuse, demonstrating the risks and negative side of online dating. It is worth noticing, however, the media effects stated above are all self-reported, which is one of the main critiques of the U&G theory. Moreover, the role of culture is underplayed in the U&G theory, and this thesis is framed for this concern.

In sum, this thesis adopts the U&G approach to understand the motivations of Chinese youngsters in using online dating platforms and the effects of this new media. This thesis assumes that among Chinese youngsters living abroad, using online dating applications could help them socialize with people out of their inner circle, make dating choices on their own, and meanwhile manage the parental pressure on their decisions. Thus, online dating could serve as a platform for these youngsters to tackle down the social constraints and pursue their personhood.

4.2 Privacy as personhood and intimacy

It is still debatable what privacy is and does (Margulis, 2003), and the vast literature on privacy focuses on information privacy (Westin, 1967; Westin, 2003; Ziegeldorf, Morton & Wehrle, 2014), which is conceptualized as individuals having ownership of the circulation of information that is about them (Nissenbaum, 2009). Also, studies about information privacy in China tend to frame Chinese Internet giants and the government as threats, especially critiquing the Social Credit System (SCS) in China (Lv & Luo, 2018; Fu, 2019; Solon & Siddiqui, 2017). But this project suggests that these

16

research uses western privacy values to judge the non-western contexts. Information privacy may be highly valued in western societies, but may not have a significant or urgent influence on Chinese people's daily life, while personhood and intimacy could have. For example, Kostka (2019) studies Chinese people's public opinions toward SCS and finds that they do not perceive it as violating individual privacy, but as an instrument to improve the quality of life and boost the economy, since they believe it could lead to more law-abiding behavior.

The theory of privacy as personhood promotes respect for individuals as choosers, and accordingly, personhood here refers to individuals' ability to choose (Reiman, 1976; Solove, 2002). Meanwhile, the theory of privacy as intimacy perceives individuals as agents who can control their decisions on love, caring, and relationship development (Gerstein, 1978; Rosen, 2011). And it seems that this form of privacy is a more urgent area requiring attention in the Chinese context.

Before the Chinese economic reform in 1978, in urban areas, the Chinese Communist Party used the work unit system, danwei, to oversee every aspect of people's lives, including their private relationships. The leaderships in the work unit would find politically suitable partners for workers and pressure them to get married, allocate marital property, and intervene in family disputes or difficulties. Thus, privacy as personhood and intimacy was constantly violated. After the economic reform, this work unit system gradually declined, and individuals gained much more freedom from direct government intervention in their private lives (Ho, Jackson, Cao & Kwok, 2018). However, parents in contemporary China still have influences on adult children's mate choices as reviewed above.

Thus, this thesis is trying to contribute to the theory of privacy as intimacy and personhood. Through the lens of romance, it may be revealed about what constitutes privacy. How does Chinese young adult imagine a personhood that is independent of social pressure and parental influence during mate selection, which could be defined as privacy? How do they perceive privacy? And could new technology help them acquire this kind of privacy? Fang and Gong (2019) state that social media has changed family privacy boundaries since now parents could easily check children's social circles, experiences, opinions, and emotions on social media. Meanwhile, Chinese young people

17

have labeled their parent's behavior of inquiring about their sensitive posts on WeChat as privacy intrusion and have used privacy protection strategies against this intrusion. However, we know little about how Chinese young people's perceptions of parents intervening in their mate choices. Do they perceive it as the invasion of privacy or their parents' rights according to the norm of filial piety, or as care and love from their parents?

In sum, this thesis intends to investigate the social and parental influence on mate choices of Chinese young diasporas, and through the lens of online dating, to contribute more variation to modernity theory, adopts the cosmopolitanism theory and intends to understand the deeper cultural-social and economical-political tensions in contemporary China, potentially critique Hofstede's cultural dimension model, and to investigate what constitutes as privacy. Moreover, using the U&G approach, this thesis is trying to identify these youngster's motivations to date online, and understand how online dating could potentially empower individuals to develop their personhood, increase their cosmopolitanism and validate their identities.

Methods

This project intends to understand how Chinese young people living abroad manage the social and parental influence during their online dating experiences and focuses on participants' motivations to date online, their online dating experiences, and the role of their parents in shaping their online dating values and choices.

Thus, this thesis uses the qualitative research method, specifically semi-constructed in-depth interviews to collect data. Because the qualitative method is more appropriate and fruitful in understanding how people perceive, understand, and make sense from their experiences and the environment around them (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). And compared to quantitative research methods, qualitative research methods focus less on numbers, but on people's perceptions. It explores how implicit and explicit meanings are constructed. Moreover, it sheds more light on the social construction of reality (Boeije, 2010). Therefore, using the qualitative method, this project could better explore the social construction in Chinese young people's mate selections, and how they perceive these experiences. And through this lens, their world and life values could

18

contribute to the study of cosmopolitanism theory, modernity theory and the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism.

As for the semi-constructed in-depth interview, it allows researchers to probe important information from interviewees and acquire detailed clarification from them. Thus, the in-depth interviews could better help this project to answer the research question that is about the pattern of thinking and the way of understanding the social and parental influences during Chinese young people's online dating experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). Moreover, it also allows participants to tell their experiences in their own unique ways, and together with the researchers conduct two-way conversations about understanding their experiences. In this way, the knowledge would be created during the interaction between the interviewees and the interviewers, and the researchers are also involved participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1997).

And more specifically, the interviews are planned to be conducted in a face-to-face manner, every weekend during March and April 2020, in an indoor, quiet, clean, and tidy room that only the interviewer and interviewee are present, so the participants could feel more relaxed and safe, and be confident to tell their personal values and experiences. However, due to the outbreak of Coronavirus, it is inconvenient to conduct face-to-face interviews and the participants state that they prefer to be interviewed online. Thus, this project adopts the way of online interviews in April 2020. During the interviews, the researcher conducts video chats with the participants on WeChat. The participants and the researcher could see each other through the screens of their apparatus, and both parties made sure that they are alone in their rooms. Each interview lasts around one hour, is recorded, and is conducted in participants' native language, Chinese. Later on, the author transcribes each interview in its original language.

From a cosmopolitan point, it is also worth mentioning that researchers have responsibilities towards participants who are strangers or acquaintances. Any purpose of research could not justify any form of privacy violation or bringing discomfort or harm to the participants. Therefore, throughout the whole process of this thesis, participants' confidentiality is confirmed and protected. It is also worth mentioning that participants reckon dating lives and family dynamics as sensitive topics, so they prefer to use other people's stories as examples rather than telling theirs and are more willing to state

attitudes and beliefs, but hesitate to tell their behavior and actions in terms of these topics. From the participants' point of view, could talking about these topics bring discomfort such as embarrassment to them? And should researchers push further, ignoring participants' embarrassment, in the name of scientific inquiry? One has to ask, are those interview techniques we learnt, mainly for the purpose of inquiring, ethical when we understand the feelings of our stranger participants? When confronting the dilemma between scientific inquiry and our responsibilities towards stranger participants, more concern should be given to the latter. It is suggested that in future studies, interviewers should spend more time bonding with participants before interviews, or ask other people to endorse for the interviewers. Interviewers could also tell their own dating stories and family dynamics to win the trust of interviewees.

The interviewer, who is the author of this thesis, asks questions prepared, and also some spontaneous probe questions and other related ones. Questions are organized around three themes. The first concerns participants' online dating experiences: Why did you choose dating online? What application(s) have you used? How did you know about it? Why did you choose i t(them)? What are you looking for? How did you select a match during online dating? Do you think you being Chinese has any influence on your online dating experience? Please explain if so. Have you ever interacted with people from different cultures on this platform and if so, can you share your experiences? What are the differences between dating online and offline? The second theme encourages participants to reflect on the dating culture in contemporary China. These questions include: Have you dated in China? How does that compare to your experiences abroad? What are your expectations from dating and has that changed since you went abroad? In your opinion, what is the role of social class, like the hukou system, in dating choices? And the last one was about intergenerational relationships. Questions are like: How do you understand the role of your parents in shaping your online dating choices? How would you describe your relationship with your parents? What are your parents' expectations of you in terms of dating and future life? What are your own expectations? Any conflicts and how do you react to it? How do you understand parental influences on mate choices?

1. Participants

This thesis studies Chinese young people living abroad as units of analysis and also the population. As stated above, most research about online dating uses people from the West as samples, and a more diverse sample is needed. Young Chinese were born after the Chinese economic reform. Thus, studying them could better understand how surface-shifts in contemporary China affect personal lives. And the reason to choose Chinese youngsters living abroad is that this project intends to investigate whether they would show different dating behaviors living abroad and how they use their cosmopolitan values to manage social and parental pressure.

To be included in this study, the participants should have a Chinese nationality and lived in China for at least fifteen years, be eighteen to thirty years old, currently live in the Netherlands, and have used online dating platforms (i.e., websites, applications). To operationalize using online dating platforms, potential participants should have registered on at least one online dating platform, and have used it for at least ten hours. The reason why short-time usage is included is that experiences of discomfort after shortly using online dating platforms are worth investigating, as online harassment or cultural clashes may be involved in this situation.

As for the sampling method, this thesis uses snowball sampling from contacts the author of the thesis could make to recruit participants. Specifically, the author of the thesis contacts people from a WeChat group called "Netherlands 2019 New Students Group", who are all current students enrolled in higher-education programs in the Netherlands. Then they are asked about their nationality and age, whether they have online dating experiences, and whether they are willing to participate in this interview. The author also asks participants who already finished the interviews, the author's personal acquaintances and friends to do a favor and try to find suitable participants in the way similar to what stated above. Through snowball sampling, participants that are hard to get access to may be reached through networking (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). However, the limitation of snowball sampling should also be mentioned. For example, the initial sample may affect the structure of the rest of the participants, which could lead to a homogenous sample (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

In the end, 11 interviewees participated (7 females and 4 males). Participants are around 20 to 30 years old (Mean=23.91, SD=2.51). One of them is currently enrolled in a Bachelor's program. Ten of them have a Master's degree or are currently enrolled in a Master's program. One of them has a full-time job as a data analyst, and the others are college students. All participates self-identified as heterosexual, Han ethnic, and coming from middle-class families. Two participants self-reported as having rural Hukou, and the others having urban Hukou. Two participants have siblings, and the others are the only child in their families.

2. Data analysis

This project uses thematic analysis to analyze the data collected. Thematic analysis is appropriate for inductive interpretation of the data, and meanwhile it allows researchers to consider existing theories (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005), which could help ground theories in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way, thematic analysis allows this project to search through the transcripts of the interviews to identify the repeated patterns of meaning.

The author transfers the transcriptions into MaxQDA and analyzes them. Following Boeije's guidelines (2010), at the open coding stage, the author first reads through all of the interview transcripts and breaks down the data set into fragments. Then each fragment is summarized and synthesized while some original terms of the interviewees are kept. After it, the author assigns codes to each of the fragments. Meanwhile, data are repeatedly compared, conceptualized, and categorized during this procedure. When codes cover the data, and all pertinent fragments are coded, the author moves to the axial coding stage. After carefully comparing each code, and considering relationships between codes, the author merges codes into key themes. Finally at the selective coding phase, after selecting the relationships between each theme, the author defines four repeating themes that also have strong relationships with other key themes, as core themes.

Findings and analysis

      After conducting thematic analysis, four core themes emerge including materialist China, parental influences as making comments, capital-dominated dating market, and the feeling of betweenness. The theme of materialist China is surrounded by the rise of materialism and consumerism in contemporary China and how it influences young Chinese's life history. This theme is highly related to the second and third themes. Parental influences as making comments demonstrate Chinese parents' implicit influences on adult children's mate choices, as they have the legitimacy in making comments on adult children's dating lives. And their comments refer to their expectations in terms of children's dating life that children should accumulate material property and have stable marriage in suitable age, which mirrors the first theme of material China. The third theme capital-dominated dating market shows young Chinese consciously value economic, social, and cultural capital as main criteria in mate choices both online and offline, and this dating value is suggested being influenced by the material society and parental pressure, which shows the relationship between theme three and theme one and two. Then the last theme, betweenness captures the confusion and insecurity that young Chinese expressed when confronting the cultural clashes between tradition and modernity, and between local and global cultures. These themes will be analyzed in detail below.

1. **Distinctive features of online dating**

      Embedding cultural factors, this thesis identifies three distinctive features of Chinese young diasporas' online dating experiences.

1.1 Online dating as a gateway to intercultural understanding

      Participants mainly describe seven motivations to date online: to find serious relationships, to find friends, to fit in or learn local cultures, to seek easy chats, to find casual sex, curiosity, and trendiness.

      Studying abroad as diasporas is suggested to be relevant to their motivations dating online. Participants describe it is hard to fit in local cultures, they hardly know anyone in a foreign country and it is hard to find new friends. They say even before the lockdown due to the outbreak of coronavirus their daily lives are already fixed and boring, and they continue to use their social media application WeChat, on which there are

23

mainly people they already knew in China while Dutch people usually use social media that are banned in China, so these diasporas are not familiar with the social media ecosystem abroad. They describe:

> It is nice to make friends using online dating apps, and if it is possible, to find a boyfriend.

> I feel lonely, and want to chat with people. It is best if I can find love. Also, I want to get to know the local culture. It's easy to know new people in China and I have many interesting friends. But here (the Netherlands) I feel the distance. I live in a studio, and don't get to communicate with local people except attending classes. Online dating is an ice breaker to fit in the local culture and to know about more cultures.

> I would use Tinder when I am traveling. It's like a window for me to know local people and cultures.

Therefore, it is suggested that online dating applications are an important approach to socialize and fit in the local culture for diasporas. It seems that online dating offers these diasporas more opportunities to enlarge their network during mate selections. And this culturally embedded motivation is distinctive from a body of former research that highlights online dating motivation of casual sex, based on western samples (Abramova, Baumann, Krasnova & Buxmann, 2016; Gatter & Hodkinson, 2016; Sevi, Aral & Eskenazi, 2018). Some research mentions the motivation of romantic relationships, but does not embed it in the socio-cultural context in detail (Aretz, Demuth, Schmidt & Vierlein, 2010; Sumter, Vandenbosch & Ligtenberg, 2017).

Moreover, peer recommendations become a major factor in the reason why participants choose to use online dating, as they depict the pattern that they feel distant and lonely living abroad, which motivates them to find friendships or romantic relationships, then they hear their friends find romantic relationships during online dating, and thus they start online dating themselves. The social distance these diasporas feel

living abroad is in line with Wang and Collins's study (2016), and it could be explained that they lack the information about the local social activities and the networks introducing them into the local social circles. Under this circumstance, online dating seems like a gateway for them to socialize with local people that they could not reach through their original networks.

1.2 Online dating as "fast-moving consumer goods"

With these motivations, these diasporas conduct cross-culture communication during online dating. None of the participants report racist experiences. One participant mentions one uncomfortable conversation that her online date says some technological projects caused environmental pollution and gives Africa and China as negative examples. And most of the participants report that they perceive their identity as foreigners when they encounter language difficulties or receive messages involving local cultures, and it is hard to maintain conversations. They share:

> They used the Dutch language at the beginning of the conversation. Some cultures I can't relate to, like festivals, like King's Day. I felt I was a foreigner.

> Many people I met during online dating just wanted hookups. After two or three sentences, they started talking about sex, like "your house or my place?" And that is the deal-breaker for me. I don't want to chat anymore.

The difficulty of young Chinese diasporas' using online dating as a gateway for intercultural understanding may be explained by the asymmetry of motivations and their highlighting the cultural differences. The motivation of learning the local culture, to some extent, is unique for diasporas while their online dates, the local people, are using it for casual sex and are not willing to invest much time in online conversations (Sumter, Vandenbosch & Ligtenberg, 2017). It is suggested that online dating usage is related to open-mindedness (Castro, Barrada, Ramos-Villagrasa & Fernández-del-Río, 2020). The Netherlands is more tolerant for casual sex that physical desire is highlighted and

commitment could not be involved. Thus, it is suggested that because of the low barriers of entry and open-mindedness, online dating enables more casual hookups which can be perhaps a deterrent to some coming from a culture where the discourse of sexuality as only physical desire has lower acceptance. The issue of sexuality will be discussed in detail below.

Moreover, participants self-perceive themselves as foreigners, which implies that they mainly focus on their differences with Dutch people, and thus, feel they could not fit in the local culture, even with the help of online dating. From the cosmopolitan point, it is suggested that when diasporas find it difficult to build connections through a local identity, they could find connections through humanity and their global identity (Appiah, 2007; Stones, Botterill, Lee & O'Reilly, 2019). In other words, instead of focusing on their differences in languages, and cultural heritage, they could try to understand the local social contexts that construct meanings for different actions and highlight the same cosmopolitan identity that people are all influenced by a variety of cultures and share some similar lifestyles.

In addition, some participants refer to online dating as "fast-moving consumer goods". They mention that it is visual-based, so people are quickly judged by their photo presentation, and a mere swipe does not require much effort. Picone and his colleagues (2019) developed the concept of small acts of engagement to describe this kind of user behavior on social media. They suggest that in the online environment, people are unwilling to be troubled, and only willing to invest small effort of engagement, such as sharing, likings, and commenting. This is in line with participants' online dating experiences. They mention that it often occurs that two people are matched online, but that is the end because no one would take the initiative to start conversations. Therefore, it is hard to conduct deep self-exposure or get equal engagement. For example, one participant feels that he exposes his deep feelings and thoughts during online conversations while his online date expresses it is too much trouble and does not reply to him anymore. This participant feels disappointed and feels it is a waste of his time and energy. And one participant reckons people who invest much effort on online dating do not have a life in real life, and thus, is a "loser" in real life. She mentions she would not

match with this kind of people that have long descriptions in their profile or update frequently.

Moreover, in line with Chen and Liu's (2019) study, some participants use self-Orientalist lens during their online dating experiences. One male participant says that being Chinese highly affects his online dating experience:

> We are not the same ethnicity. They may not give priority to date Asians. Men here (the Netherlands) are athletic and consciously making themselves look good. Meanwhile, Chinese men around me and myself wear sloppy clothes and don't know how to dress ourselves.

Another male participant also reports that:

> It is hard to have a date with foreign girls due to many reasons. For example, our genes and race are different. And Dutch girls are tall, like 1.8 meters, which I don't know how to handle.

And one female participant mentions that:

> Chinese men are not popular, because compared to western men, they are less good-looking, shorter, and don't know how to dress. However, Chinese women are popular in online dating, in my opinion. When I said I was Chinese, my online dates seemed happy and excited.

This self-Orientalist lens could be explained that the online dating platform is visual-based and people are mainly judged by their appearance. As participants mentioned, in their early twenties, Chinese youngsters put their focus mainly on their academy and seldom pay attention to present their appearance. And the gender difference could be explained by the still-existing patriarchal value that women's values are mainly judged by their appearance, so even though Chinese women also focus on their studies, they pay more attention to how to present themselves by clothes, makeups, and filtered

selfies, and thus, gain more popularity than Chinese men during online dating. Moreover, it is suggested that a cosmopolitan perspective that trying to understand the social contexts lead to the surface-differences between civilizations and focusing on the shared humanity and global identity of people may help male Chinese increase their self-confidence in cross-culture online dating. Moreover, highlighting our responsibilities for strangers could also improve the inclusiveness of global online dating applications that are dominated by white users.

1.3 Negotiating a new identity when invisible from existing social networks

Participants also describe that, to some extent, they would behave differently in their online identities. One participant says that she is shy offline, so it is hard for her to socialize with people and have a relationship. But she says online conversations are easy and nice. One participant reports that there is little restriction dating online. On offline dates, he would have much more practical considerations, such as the socioeconomic status or the family background of the date, when seeking a relationship, while here (online) the quality of conversations becomes his main criteria to judge whether to initiate a romantic relationship. One says that he does not need to be that responsible during online dating. He mentions that many people come abroad for one or two years, meanwhile find a boyfriend or girlfriend, and break up when they go back to China. He knows some women who are okay with this. But back in China and offline, he says relationships are serious involving more responsibilities, like marriage. The different behavior between dating online abroad and offline dating in China could be explained that the dating culture in contemporary China is shaped by the ideology of social stability that the state-party promoted, so it is marriage-oriented as the government reckons other forms of intimate relationships, such as homosexual, premarital, and polyamony, as factors of social instability (Ho, Jackson Cao & Kwok, 2018).

Moreover, online dating infidelity is also worth mentioning. One participant says that she knows people studying abroad using Tinder to have casual sex while they are engaged in China. They are having a good time here and no one in China knows about it. This may be explained that in a new country and the online platform, the old fixed identities are left behind, no longer a perfect child pursuing the middle-class decent life.

They imagine fewer cultural values, norms, and beliefs, and thus, less social constraints in this online environment, so they could deliberately and more freely present themselves and negotiate a new online identity (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan & McCabe, 2005). However, this "freedom" could also lead to discomfort. One participant reports that there are people sending irresponsible comments and hurting others because they could not see each other. For example, he meets a woman through online dating who asks him to send her a picture of him. After receiving the picture, she says he is ugly and immediately deletes him. He feels his self-esteem is highly hurt and reckons that she would not behave like this offline.

Barney (2004, 152) suggests that the feature of dislocation and separation from the former networks gives the online environment a certain degree of fluidity and anonymity in the process of re-constructing self-identity. Thus, the Internet gives people the ability to negotiate identities they choose, instead of passively accepting identities assigned to them based on social norms. It is suggested that online dating provides a visual-anonymous environment that enables people to try a new identity and they refer to it as "possible selves", and meanwhile online deception and online cheating could also emerge with this new identity (Arnold, 2017; Duguay, 2017; Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan, & Brown McCabe, 2005). Therefore, this thesis suggests that during online dating, the distance and invisibility from people's existing social networks provide the opportunity to negotiate new aspects of identity, and social norms could be broken as users imagine less accountability in the online environment.

2. Betweenness: as tradition and modernity blur together

Through the lens of dating values and features participants find attractive during online dating experiences, this thesis demonstrates how modernization influences Chinese young people's online dating life. One theme participants keep mentioning is the feeling of being torn apart and confused, as Marotta (2010) describes that the clashes between traditional culture and modern culture leave people with the feeling of betweenness and hybrid identity.

2.1 Pure relationship

In modernity theory, Giddens (1992) describes pure relationships as pursuing self-exposure, self-fulfillment, and individual autonomy. This kind of relationship is entered for its own sake and could be maintained only when both parties could derive satisfaction from it. This is reflected in the participants' online dating experiences. They mention that on this platform, they could take time to organize their words, better express themselves, and thus, bond with others deeply. Meanwhile, they are constantly seeking the excitement of love and are willing to give up a problematic relationship since they feel it is not hard to find another one and this behavior is acceptable. They mention:

> If you have common habits and could find topics to talk about, strengthen self-exposure, and deeply know each other, it would work for an intimate relationship.

> It's not like the old generations who believe two people are meant for each other and should live together, no matter what. Contemporary people are seeking comfort, love, and soul-mates. And there are so many people who could be your soul-mates. If this one doesn't work, then leave and change to another one.

> Everyone lives for happiness, enthusiasm, and excitement, and wants to live with loved-ones. They may be unwilling to take responsibility to tackle down difficulties. Relationships are not stable. In their subconscious, they know that it is acceptable and brave to leave if it doesn't work and go get a new partner you love. And they are prone to do so.

> A relationship should bring you happiness. If it makes you feel painful, then it is not necessary to stick to it. It is not necessary to ruin other aspects of your life because of your relationship.

However, they also mention it is confused and insecure in this kind of pure relationship. Especially online dating could enhance this insecurity, as online dates could

suddenly never reply and ghost each other, delete the date without any explanation, quickly switch their focus to the new matches, and conduct conversations with multiple persons at the same time.

Moreover, modernity theory is based on western contexts, highlighting self-fulfillment and individual autonomy, and implies how western romance is the way for modernism, while fails to identify the discursive narrative of intimate relationships in non-western contexts. Thus, scholars (Donner & Santos, 2016; Jackson, 2015; Thornton, 2013) argue that modernity theory is Eurocentric. Therefore, studies contextualizing romance in contemporary non-western contexts are needed. Echoing this call, this thesis demonstrates how traditional values on sexuality and the marriage institution are refigured into contemporary Chinese dating culture and are situationally shaped by sociocultural, class, and political factors. Thus, using the cosmopolitan theory, this part is going to argue that the non-western romance in which tradition and modernity are blurring together is also the way for modernism, which challenges the dichotomy of tradition and modernity.

2.2 Sexuality: the dilemma between individual desire and social constraints

Only one participant among eleven, with whom and whose lifestyle the interviewer is familiar, mentions she uses online dating for casual sex. One male participant wants to mention the word of casual sex, but could not say the word out in front of the female interviewer and mumbles:

Interviewee: "Some people use online dating as a mean for……a mean for……for……you know……"
Interviewer: "Do you mean hookups?"
Interviewee: "Yes, for that."

Participants say in their perception, online dating is for young people to find hookups, but they just downloaded it for curiosity and emphasizes that they do not use it for casual sex. And some participants choose negative framing to describe casual sex in online dating:

Interviewee: "Someone's motivation is disgusting."

Interviewer: "Do you mean hookups?"

Interviewee: "Yes."

The atmosphere is not good, and people's comments towards it (online dating) are negative. It is used for casual sex.

I am shocked someone put their almost naked photo on it, looking for threesome.

Participants also share their worries about their online dating profiles being viewed by people they knew. They explain that they are afraid that their friends would have negative opinions that they are "lonely" and "horny", and use online dating for hookups all day.

Given the behaviors and opinions above, it is suggested that sex is still a sensitive topic in contemporary China and also a taboo to openly talk about, which mirrors the historical sexual discourse in China. In traditional Confucianism ideology, sexual desire is reckoned as a disturbing factor against social stability and thus, is repressed. During the Cultural Revolution era (1966-1976), sex is reckoned as the "forbidden territory" and is erased from all public discourse. And after the economic reform (1978), the discourse of sexuality as morality is promoted. It is suggested that the mainstream values attached to sexuality in contemporary China are familial values, premarital abstinence, romantic love and commitments between couples (Liang, Tan & O'Halloran, 2017).

One participant mentions that in China, except for a one-night stand, basically if two people have sex with each other, they automatically step into a serious relationship the next day, which she reckons is different from the Netherlands. As for opinions about premarital sex, both male and female participants say it is acceptable, but it should be based on emotional attachments, and they still need time to accept casual sex. Moreover, participants also express feelings of confusion during their offline sexual lives initiated by online dating. One female participant puts it as:

32

Two people had sex, but they were not in a serious relationship, they were nothing. There are too many constraints in traditional values, while you want to have fun and think that kind of dating is good. However, when you really date someone, you feel something towards that person, but that person just wants to date. And there is no and. When you date, there is a sense of uncertainty and insecurity. I don't know which way is better.

This kind of discomfort could be explained by value clashes in sexuality. Research (Wang, 2017; Wang & Ho, 2011) suggest that the patriarchal value of defending female virginity before marriage still existed in contemporary China. Thus, premarital sex brings more cost to females in marriage marketing in China (Farrer, 2014; Yeung & Hu, 2016; Zheng et al., 2011). It seems that if young Chinese females conduct premarital sex, but do not step into a stable relationship that working towards marriage, they would reckon this could hinder their path to find the next match and get married, which leads to their feelings of insecurity. It is suggested even though premarital sex is accepted as participants stated, every time after it, young Chinese females would rethink her identity, value, and strategy in the marriage market in contemporary China, which reflects their dilemma between individual desire and social constraints.

Moreover, in contemporary China among young people, moral responsibility (marriage-oriented relationships) and emotional meanings are attached to sexual behaviors. Liang, Tan, and O'Halloran's research (2017) reveals that the sexual discourse in post-reform China is sex as morality instead of sex as only physical desire. Besides traditional Confucianism culture that represses sexual desire, Ho and his colleagues (2018) argue that this is also shaped by political factors. They suggest that one of the imperative agendas of the communist government is promoting social stability, but the government concerns sexuality as one of the sources of social instability. Therefore, legitimate sexuality in contemporary China is monogamous, heterosexual, and marital (Liang, Tan & O'Halloran, 2017).

In summary, this thesis argues that the sexual cultures in contemporary China are shaped by multiple intertwined and competing factors including the communist party's

ideology of social stability, patriarchal culture of female chastity, traditional beliefs of sexual repression, and the notion of sexuality as physical desire.

2.3 Cosmopolitanism coexists with nationalism

During their online dating cross-culture communication and experiences of living abroad, participants mainly mention that they notice different forms of intergenerational relationships, as they say parents will not comment on adult children's lives and personal boundaries are respected. Participants also mention their online dating experiences help them become more inclusive in mate choices, as some participants mention they will not set many restrictions about one's age, height, and ethnicity in mate choices. Joinson's study (2001) suggests that higher levels of self-disclosure are shown in computer-mediated communication than face-to-face ones. In an online dating environment, due to the feature of visual-anonymous, it is likely that users could gain more opportunity to bond with each other through self-closure, while offline prejudice and stereotypes may become the obstacle to two people initiating a conversation to know each other across national boundaries (Lawson and Leck, 2006). Thus, it is suggested that online dating has the potential to make users more open-minded and fulfill their cosmopolitan responsibilities towards strangers through self-closure in visual-anonymous communication.

Meanwhile, it is suggested that some participants still use their values and perceptions from China to understand their current Dutch context. Some participants notice that most of their European classmates' parents do not pay for adult children's college tuition and living fees, and they believe that European adult children would hire caregivers for their elder parents instead of taking care of parents themselves, so they conclude that Western intergenerational relationships are not close. It could be explained that these participants do not understand why European parents and adult children behave so, and the value of economic independence of adult children and the developed social-welfare system in western societies, which give meanings to the behaviors they notice in western countries, are neglected. Instead, they just use their own values and practices to judge other "strange" behaviors and imply that they are "wrong". Under this

circumstance, cosmopolitanism is also suggested to be applied when people from non-western cultures view western cultures.

In addition, most participants mention that their parents are against them to date foreigners. They share their parents' reasons that it is hard to understand foreign cultures, so it is hard to connect with foreigners, and there are too many uncontrollable factors in dating a foreigner when living abroad and alone.

This could mirror the co-existence of cosmopolitanism and nationalism in contemporary China, as different values and forms of relationships are perceived by young people through media or personal experiences, and meanwhile, Chinese culture still plays a major part when they are judging behaviors in other cultures, as Callahan (2003) and Hua (2008) suggests that the seemingly opposite forces of cosmopolitanism and nationalism are both constructed and deconstructed by diasporas.

Moreover, the contemporary dating culture that mixes tradition and modernity could be explained that cultures go through both changes and continuities. According to cosmopolitanism theory, people not only share some basic values but also much more. They form identities through encountering different cultures online and offline including media products from other cultures, international traveling, and global trade, and thus, they get used to various ways of living, behaviors, and beliefs, which brings changes to their local cultures. And together with the continuing traditional cultures, the contemporary culture that blurs tradition and modernity is constantly forming and changing. Specifically speaking, hundreds and thousands of foreigners are attracted to China after it joined the global economy (Zurndorfer, 2018). Along with globalization, traveling abroad and access to the internet also expose people to new values towards dating, intimacy, and marriage (Zheng, Zhou, Zhou, Liu, Li & Hesketh, 2011). Meanwhile, young Chinese on one hand are influenced by outside values, mainly from the Western world, and on the other hand, they are raised as supporters for the Chinese Communist Party and socialism and also influenced by traditional culture. Culturally, we already live cosmopolitan lives shaped by media, conversations, and experiences from a variety of cultures, which leaves us an image of contemporary culture that blurs tradition and modernity, rather than the simple mode of living depicted in modernity theory.

2.4 Marriage institution: factors both strengthening and weakening it

The feeling of betweenness is also mentioned in participants' beliefs towards the marriage institution (none of the participants were married before). Participants understand traditional marriage as to continue the male line of the family, reflecting a patriarchy value, while they believe modern marriage as a personal choice and the sublimation of love. One participant expresses her confusion between traditional and modern marriage values:

> Obviously, there is a sense of being torn apart, as a modern female in China. You are expected to be both virtuous and kind at home, and good at making money in your job. In my mother's generation, expectations towards women are being gentle and virtuous and no one is expecting you to be strong. But now women have their own personality. The whole society is asking you to be strong and independent, but meanwhile traditions are holding you back, asking you to do all the works of housewives, and you are supposed to value the older generation's opinions. So you don't yearn for marriage that much.

Based on participants' understanding, it is suggested that marriage institution in China are both strengthened and weakened by multiple factors. In terms of factors strengthening the marriage institution, young female Chinese sense social stigma towards divorce and "leftover women". It is believed that in the marriage market, one's value would decrease with the increase of one's times of marriage, and this decrease rate is higher for women. One participant believes that if parents divorce, the children may receive despises, mocking, and social pressure. So for the sake of children, parents would be more cautious towards the decision of divorce. One participant reports that he has heard the word "leftover women" for more than ten years, and he remembers entertainment TV shows explaining what this word means. One female participant understands the concept of "leftover women" as deliberately creating anxiety among women, so they could get married and have children, and thus, tackle the social problem

of the aging population. And this kind of anxiety is mentioned by another female participant:

> I saw opinions online that women are worthless and old after 30 years old. Objectifying women is serious. Many elite women find it difficult to get married. And when men get older, they tend to seek young women. I think this could affect me. For example, if I am twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old and still unmarried, I may be a little bit anxious.

The connotations towards single men and single women and their situations are gendered. In China, starting from around twenty years old to thirty years old, women only have an around ten-year window of chance to find a partner and after that are labeled as "leftover women"; while with a decent income, urban men are marriageable for much longer, could still be reckoned as a "catch" in their forties, and are called as "Diamond King Five" (Ho, Jackson Cao & Kwok, 2018). Moreover, gendered terms are also showed in Western cultures, as linguistic discrimination is not rare in western languages either. Grad (2010) gives the example of "bachelor vs spinster" and analyzes how gender discrimination is socially constructed through gendered language. This brings both Chinese and western women together in this sense, where sexism pervades across cultures and even the modern ones.

Participants also mention that having children is attached to marriage, and in order to have children, getting married is the normal way of living:

> It should not be if you want to have children, you must get married. But this is the reality. Marriage is the mainstream of intimate relationships. It can get a family to conduct social activities under legal and social security systems.

Participants also mention parental pressure of urging them to get married:

Parents would ask you this kind of thing: Are you in a serious relationship?
With whom? Are you intended to get married? When?

It's like their (parents') business, some mission they have to focus on, that
you get married.

In addition, feeling lonely, and career considerations that married people are more
reliable are also mentioned as factors strengthening the marriage institution. And under
this circumstance, it seems like there is a default blueprint for the life stage that having
fun is for the early twenties, and serious relationships and marriage are expected as
"normal" life in the late twenties. One participant says:

What you are looking for depends on your age. In different ages, your
expectations towards relationships and mindset are different.

Therefore, considering these factors, online dating infidelity mentioned above
could be seen as a small detour that young Chinese diasporas take as a temporary break
from social expectations and responsibilities in their life blueprint for their "real" life in
China, with small cost and a low risk to be discovered by their family and friends in
China.

Moreover, as mentioned above, casual sex is hard to be accepted for participants
and could bring insecurity and confusion. This may be explained that marriage is still a
mainstream lifestyle, so after sex, they are expecting the definition of the relationship
where commitments and responsibilities are involved and to work together towards the
goal of marriage.

As for factors weakening the marriage institution, besides pursuing pure
relationships mentioned above that relationships become unstable, another major one is
that most young people give more priority to pursue career success and postpone their
plans for serious relationships and marriage.

And this brings to another main theme: the role of capital in the romantic market
in China.

38

3. Capitalist China

With a rapidly increasing economy, and meanwhile the increasing wealth gap, the influences of capitalism have reached multiple aspects of Chinese people's daily lives, including their dating lives, both online and offline.

3.1 The fierce competition to secure a decent middle-class life

Participants mention that it seems there is a fierce competition to become a middle-class among Chinese young people who feel they should do their best to win against their peers and remain on the "right" track leading to the commonly accepted success, high amounts of wealth accumulated. They are highly focused on their study during school time, and having a romantic relationship before college is framed as a negative thing that could distract their focus, and parents and teachers are supposed to intervene and stop it. One participant shares how this fierce competition affects his dating life history:

> In high school, parents and teachers told us we shouldn't date at this age. And students also think for the sake of their future prospect, they shouldn't date. Dating in high school could bring you serious consequences. There was a girl in my class who dated and when the teacher found out she asked her to the office. When the girl came back, her eyes were red and swollen with tears. Dating is not shameful. But when my classmates and I saw how she was humiliated because of dating, maybe no one dares to date. And I am a very obedient child. I focused on my study when I was supposed to do so, and never dated before. From junior high school, my mother started to tell me that I should do what I am supposed to do at particular time stages because there were students starting dating since that time. My mother's thought was that you should do what your peers are doing. Otherwise, when they are studying, you date, and when they are successful and building their families, what can you do? You are not properly trained for any business.

After arriving in the Netherlands to attend college when this participant intends to date someone, he hears people around him found romantic love during online dating. Thus, he also starts online dating. Participants also mention that with fierce competition, young people and parents agree that they should only focus on their studies and side jobs could distract their focus, so young people are financially dependent on their parents, which gives their parents more power to intervene in their personal lives.

Economic pursuit also affects their dating lives after education. In participants' perception, to pursue economic success, many young people go to big cities like Beijing and Shanghai. To build lives in these big cities, practical considerations like capital and getting a Hukou in Beijing or Shanghai through marriage become their priorities in mate choices. And online dating conveniently fits in their busy schedule. One participant mentions how she manages her dating time:

> It would take two hours on a round commute to see a stranger offline who may not be worth my time. But with online dating, you could use little time to judge whether this person is worth meeting. If so, then you commute for two hours to see a person offline.

It seems that their lifestyles are dominantly shaped by pursuing career success, which has hindered young people's chance of finding romantic relationships, as participants describe that their lives are fixed, they use their little time besides working or studying on watching entertainment shows and socializing with old friends, so there are few ways to meet new people. Thus, they welcome online dating in their lives:

> It could enrich your life, and get you to find your partner in your free time. It couldn't be better.

What is the middle-class life that has been defined as the mainstream success in China, according to participants' perceptions? And why do many people pursue it? The rising of materialism and consumerism may be a major factor.

40

3.2 The embeddedness of materialism in dating culture

It is suggested that there is a rising of materialism in contemporary China, and is influencing people's dating lives (Farrer, 2014; Jankowiak, 2013; Ong & Wang, 2015; Ong, 2016; Zavoretti, 2016). Participants feel in China, owning a house is a necessity to feel secured. The material property becomes the main criteria to measure the quality of life and the suitability of a mate and becomes a major factor in the power dynamic between parents and children. Parents provide financial support for children, and thus, acquire the legitimacy of influencing children's mate choices. Participants mention that:

> It is agreed that one needs to own a house. It must be this way. A house is
> a home. Without a house, there is no home.

> My friend's parents want him to live a good life than a happy life. I asked
> him where the differences were. He said that the difference was that to live
> a happy life, he could be a farmer and live in the countryside, but his
> parents wish him to live in the city center and to own a house and a car,
> they thought that was a good life.

> Certainly, parents could intervene in your mate choices because you are
> dependent on them economically. If you have the ability to buy a house
> and a car and don't need parents' economic support, then their voices in
> your life would decrease.

The dilemma about "good life vs happy life" participants mentioned mirrors young Chinese as rethinking agency in terms of what contributes to happiness even though confronting materialism and parental pressure.

Human beings have been reflecting questions about what contributes to a good life and what happiness is for thousands of years. In the West, classic Greek philosophers reckon the grounds of a good and happy life resides in virtue, while in modern times, consumerism and the pursuit of making money become the dominant ideology (Diener &

Suh, 2003). And it seems that materialist ideology is also embedded in post-communist China (Lu, 2010). Kho (2019) suggests that the popular vision of the good life in contemporary China involves individuals achieving their materialistic aims, and this is in line with the capitalist modernization worldwide. Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (2006, 200) explain that within capitalist societies, almost every aspect of our lives is embedded with consumerism, thus it is natural that people are motivated to make more money and own more stuff, and believe that "the goods life" is the path to "the good life". Moreover, Ho and his colleagues (2018) investigate the political context of the Chinese dating culture where the post-Mao communist party has based its legitimacy on economic growth, which could explain the dominant ideology of consumerism and materialism in China.

However, a body of research suggests that the more people reckoning materialist aims as their life pursuit, the less likely they would feel happy and are more likely to cause environmental and personal damage such as pollution, stress, and depression (Alexander, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; King & Napa, 1998; Lane, 1994; Soper, 2007). Under this circumstance, young Chinese are suggested to embrace cosmopolitanism that there are a variety of values worth living by, and they should find their own way towards a good, happy and sustainable life, using their creativity, autonomy, and self-reflection, instead of submitting to materialism and parental pressure.

3.3 Gender bias in both labor and dating market

Male participants acknowledge the inequality of income in the Chinese labor market but also highlight that Chinese women have a higher position in the family than other countries, like South Korea, while female participants depict a male-dominated job market where the glass ceiling and traditional gender role still exist. One female participant argues that men are given the role as bread-winners, while women as having children and caregivers, because of the inequality of income. And on marriage marketing, both male and female participants believe that women would look for high-income people, while men automatically take the responsibility of making money, and this could

strengthen traditional gender roles. One female participant explains why women tend to choose men with a high professional status:

> Because of the gender inequality of income in the job market, if you find a
> man with the same salary as yours, then this man must have equal or lower
> professional status than yours, which could say he has lower education
> level or abilities than you, and it's likely you two have different values. So
> if you want to find someone who has similar values and educational
> background with yours, you have to aim at men who earn more than you.

Thus, equality in the job market could give women more power to negotiate domestic responsibilities and to some extent, also ease the burden of men in the dating market. Moreover, one female participant mentions the glass ceiling in her working experience:

> At workplaces, men's situations are better than women. For example, I
> worked at a construction engineering company before. This company has
> a rule that women can't stay at the construction site at night. But going to
> the construction site, you could learn more than not going. This is
> inevitable, is the continuing of tradition. You can't change it in one day.

This gender bias is reflected in participants' mate choices. Although participants mainly judged online candidates based on their photos, so most participants ranked good-looking as their priority, there are also other gender differences on mate choices. Besides photos, male participants mentioned the personality of understanding as a trait they are looking for. Meanwhile, female participants guess males would judge women's attractiveness mainly based on women's looks, figure, and age. Female participants also mention reliable, athletic, strong, and outgoing personalities in males as attractive. One female participant demonstrates how she filtered "losers" in real life based on presentations of her online dates' photos.

Huang (2017) notices that in offline Chinese dating culture, social factors play a more important role than physical appearance and sexual desire in mate choices, which

reflects the patriarchal culture that women are looking for security from men in mate choices, rather than physical enjoyment. However, as they mention that during online dating, both female and male participants value physical appearance more than offline dating and some even put physical attraction or the quality of conversation as their first consideration since the platform is visual-based. Thus, online dating has the potential to shift the dating culture in China that both female and male young people would pursue desire and physical enjoyment rather than social security.

However, participants mention that they would reckon a compatible family background as an important factor in mate choices both online and offline, which could reflect a capital-dominated dating market.

3.4 capital-dominated dating market

All participants mention a compatible family background (门当户对) as one of the expectations their parents have towards children's mate choices. And the participants agree. They explain that people tend to choose the easy way when it comes to intimate relationships, and they look for comfort. Two people could feel more comfortable, if they have similar values, hobbies, and could have nice chats. And these kinds of things are shaped by one's economic and social status, experiences, and education, which are, to some extent, determined by the social class of their family. Thus, they argue compatible family background is a major consideration when they choose mates. Participants share:

> I would get to know the family background of a person, and then I would put people into two clear categories based on it. Some people are in the categories that at the top we could only be friends, while some are in the categories that could be a potential boyfriend. But I won't give people false expectations. If one is assigned to the first category, I would specifically tell him that we can only be a friend.

As for online dating, the educational background particularly becomes one of the priorities participants would consider choosing dates. They believe that only when two people have a similar educational background, could they deeply connect with each other.

44

Only one participant reckons that neither compatible family background nor educational background is important, and conversations online are the foundation to initiate a relationship. However, according to other participants' perceptions, in China, to some extent, one's hobbies, habits, and how one could talk are influenced by one's social and cultural capital, which are eventually influenced by one's economic capital inherited from their families. Thus, this participant's online mate choices may still be shaped by capital. This reflects Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (1986) that refers to education, thoughts, symbols, choices, and taste that could be used in social actions to gain power. It is suggested that one's cultural capital could be inherited from parents' cultural capital, is convertible with economic and social capital, and is imperative in achieving success.

And in the online dating context, it is suggested that one's romantic capital, to some extent, is also influenced by one's family background and economic capital in the Chinese dating market. Thus, it is questionable when romantic love is framed as chances on mass media that everyone has an equal chance to acquire it, and people would say " Bad luck" when one has troubles in finding a partner. Underneath, love seems to become a privilege that the more powerful and richer one is, the more attractive one is and the more choices one has. And people may bring their offline values and beliefs to online dating experiences. Moreover, the capital-dominated dating market, in return, could strengthen the materialism mentioned above, as people try to increase their material property to gain more romantic capital. And this inequality in romantic love is in line with studies (Eads & Tach, 2016; Eads, Griffin & Tach, 2018) that show less wealth or the heterogeneity of wealth between couples is related to less stability in romantic relationships. Thus, this article suggests that romantic capital is shaped by one's economic, social and cultural capital, and is likely a privilege shared by middle and upper classes in the Chinese dating market.

On the other hand, facing this economically oriented social pressure, participants also express that they have read many blogs on WeChat or comments on Weibo, two of Chinese most influencing social media, that it is acceptable to choose their own lifestyles, for example, not pursuing a "successful" life, or not getting married if you do not want to even if you are "old". However, participants state that they can only manage their own situation, but feel powerless to change the whole environment and culture. For example:

45

You can only put a shield around yourself to avoid these voices, because you can't change these things. If today you hear someone talking about "leftover women", you think it is wrong, but you can't change these people's thoughts. You just can't change.

It's the continuing of the traditions, it's inevitable, and you can't change it.

This could be explained that on one hand, social media provides a platform for people to express different voices about dating values and lifestyles in China. On the other hand, the paternalistic and authoritarian political system still makes the Chinese feel they could not control or change the social norms around them (Ho, Jackson, Cao, & Kwok, 2018).

4. Parental influences

So what is the role of parents in young Chinese's online dating experiences? At first, participants state that there is no influence, as these two things are parallel because parents seldom know about their online dating lives at all. It seems online dating provides a platform where they could put on new identities, push out other people's voices out of their minds, and choose whatever they want. However, with the interviews going further, participants realize that even far away from their parents at another continent, on an online platform, their parents still have implicit influences (潜移默化) on their dating lives. Participants share:

Before my first offline date, I sent the picture of my online date to my mother. My mother commented, "This guy doesn't look academically achieved. I guess he is not as smart as you." I didn't think about it too much at that time. But after this guy became my boyfriend, this comment kept popping up in my head. When he didn't cook well, or do this or that well, I always remembered my mother's comment and hesitated whether he was clumsy.

46

In a Dutch guy's family, who I met from online dating, it looks like his

parents are more like supporters, and it is rare that they would judge your

life.

4.1 The role of parents

It seems like in the contemporary Chinese context, parents have the legitimacy to

constantly make comments on their adult children's dating lives. However, from a

cosmopolitan point, the expression of parenting is suggested to be situationally embedded

in the local traditions, parental expectations, and economic-political factors. Under this

circumstance, it is suggested that Chinese parents take it as their responsibility to be good

parents that they make comments on their adult children's dating lives, as participants say:

Their (parents) start point is to care about you (children), and they do so

for the sake of you.

Chinese parents set the bar higher for themselves as parents. They have

more responsibilities and a sense of parental morality. For example, my

parents keep earning money for me and have been planning everything for

me since I was young.

What is the role of being Chinese parents? Based on participants' description, it

seems that parents sense the stigma of unmarried people and also want their children to

find a substitute caretaker (Zheng, Ho & Sik, 2017), so they would urge their children to

get married at suitable age; because they value the quality of life on material property and

wish their children to have good lives, they would supervise children to focus on

academy rather than dating at school time so they would have a better prospect, and later

on, expect children's mates to support their career, to have a compatible family

background, and economic status; to ease the burden of children, they would expect

children's future parents-in-law to be healthy and independent, as children are supposed

to take care of the elderly; to avoid the stigma of divorce, they would expect children to

47

find someone reliable; to filter a perfect match for children, they would constantly make comments about children's mates' and children themselves' lifestyles. In other words, parents reckon this is their mission to make comments and pull children back to the "right" track that is pursuing material success and getting into a stable marriage at a suitable age.

Why do parents bother to influence adult children at all? It could be explained that parents sense the social pressure in capitalist China analyzed above, and are trying to help children manage this pressure in parents' own way. In addition, as most Chinese young people are the only child, they are the center of the family, and their business is listed at the top of their parents' agenda. It is also suggested that in Chinese parental morality, parents reckon taking care of their children as their lifelong duty, and in the eyes of Chinese parents, those who are not married are seen as immature enough to look after themselves, no matter how old they are (Zheng, Ho & Sik, 2017).

Where do parents get the legitimacy of commenting on adult children's lives? It is suggested that the traditional value that elderly family members have rights to comment on young generations' lives and it is a way to show their caring and love is refigured into contemporary lives. In addition, as mentioned above, many Chinese youngsters are economically dependent on their parents when it comes to owning houses, which gives parents the legitimacy to judge children's mate choices. Moreover, it is noted that children feel grateful for their parents' emotional and economic investment in them, so they accept their parents' influence on their mate choices as their repayment to parents (Zheng, Ho & Sik, 2017).

In front of parental pressure, what are children's reactions?

4.2 The role of children

How do children reckon parents' legitimacy in commenting on their adult lives? Participants give examples:

My mother puts my marriage and dating on her agenda and focuses on it. I told her this was my business and she shouldn't step in. She told me: "If I don't step in, who else would step in?" I can't argue with that.

It seems that this mother thought someone should step in her adult daughter's dating life, rather than leaving it to the daughter alone, which implies that making comments on one's personal life is perceived as caring about this person, instead of violating one's personal boundaries in Chinese culture. In other words, what this mother was saying was "Someone should care about you, and as your mother, of course, I should." And the participant could not argue with that implies she acknowledges her mother's legitimacy of commenting on her dating lives, despite she is bothered by it. One participant says similarly:

> Because as Chinese parents, no matter what you say, in the end, they
> would say "I'm your father or mother, how could this not be my business?"
> You can hardly argue with that.

Are children influenced by parental pressure? Participants understand that to some extent, their expectations and values about dating are implicitly shaped by their parents' values; it has become a habit to follow their parents' instructions, so they sometimes would naturally behave according to parents' comments; when there are conflicts, they say they are not one hundred percent certain and would doubt themselves, and it is normal that children would give in; and participants explain that parents are more experienced in dating, so they trust their parents' opinions. In addition, it is also worth mentioning it seems that the parental influences are implicit, and only limited to parents making comments on adults children's dating lives and children acknowledging parents' legitimacy to do so, not that parents would force children to do things like arranged marriages, as participants elaborate:

> I think most parents would respect children's choices. After all, this
> relationship is not for them, but for us. They can't force us. At most, they
> just give us some advice, talk about their thoughts, and make comments on
> whether this person is suitable.

49

Could the parental influences be explained by the collectivist culture that Hofstede depicted? The traditional value of filial piety may be in line with the description of a collectivist culture, as children are supposed to give in their individual interests to their parents' wishes and the interests of the whole clan. But according to participants' understanding, in contemporary intergenerational relationships, parents would put children's best interests first when they give comments on adult children's lives. And meanwhile, children have their autonomy, take rational strategies to manage their situations, and also benefit themselves. They accept parental influences, not because they put family interests or family honor in front of their individual interests but other multiple reasons stated above. Therefore, this thesis argues that Hofstede's simple dichotomy of individualism vs collectivism could not explain the parental influences in young Chinese's dating life, and this parental pressure should be elaborated in the Chinese context. Parental influences are demonstrated as they having legitimacy to comment on adult Chinese youngsters' dating experiences, and are prone to do so. Moreover, what their comments are mirrors capitalist China analyzed above.

Furthermore, from a cosmopolitan point, it is suggested that we should understand the social contexts and historical factors that construct meaning of behavior that seems "strange", rather than setting divisions between individualism and collectivism, between "us" and "them", and between the West and the Rest, as the latter could lead to misunderstanding, while understanding encouraged by cosmopolitanism is the key that leads to a better co-existence among people (Appiah, 2007).

Participants put: "Parents all over the world are similar. Children all over the world are similar." They understand that Chinese parents are just trying to protect children from social pressure and care about them, while children are crafting an image that makes parents proud of them, grateful, and trying not to hurt parents' feelings. Through these similarities in humanity, people may cross the barriers of the overemphasized differences between cultures, and find connection with each other (Appiah, 2007).

As for how children manage parental pressure on their dating lives, two intergenerational relationship models emerged.

In the first model, if parents only put on the role of making comments on children's dating lives but do not try to understand children's arguments and the context of the situation, then parents could lose the trust of children. And children would take strategies like pretending they are listening to parents but not following the advice, avoiding parents, hiding their dating lives from parents, or lying about it. For example:

> I'm very terrified that after I shared these things with my parents, they would judge me. They would tell me how this thing is wrong, or how this is right, and they would criticize me or my dates. I think it is unacceptable. Thus, anything about dating, I would not like to share with my parents.

> You can choose to not come home, not communicate with parents, or lie to your parents that you already have a boyfriend or girlfriend.

In the second model, parents still make comments on children's dating life, but they are willing to listen to how children thought and why behaved so, then they would win the trust of children. Under this circumstance, children and parents would explain their reasoning to each other, and they would optimize the situation together. For example:

> My mother would carefully listen to me, and then give me instructions based on her experiences. She would also listen to my objections towards her instructions, she would really listen to it. She allows different values between us. And we could understand each other. This is why I like to communicate with my mother.

> My parents are very open. They would first read many books to understand my generations, and then come and communicate with me. It's not like I'm your parents, so what I am saying is right.

51

Therefore, it is suggested that parents should also embrace cosmopolitanism that there are a variety of ways worth living, and try to understand the "whys" of children's choices, rather than using their own values to "correct" children and force into agreement.

Conclusion

Using online dating as a lens, this thesis contributes to the ongoing exploration of how young Chinese's online dating experiences, dating values, and intergenerational relationships are situationally shaped by cosmopolitanism, nationalism, capitalism, modernity and other social factors.

This thesis explores the U&G approach from a transnational, non-Western perspective by discovering a distinctive culturally embedded motivation of online dating among young Chinese diasporas that they use online romance as a gateway to intercultural understanding. It could be explained that these diasporas have limited social circles, in cross-cultural communication, to some extent, they have language barriers, and they keep using their Chinese social media ecosystem. Thus, many diasporas report they feel lonely and could not fit in the local culture during their living abroad experiences. At this time, they hear their Chinese friends having found romantic relationships through online dating, which inspires them to start using online dating, looking for romantic relationships, friends, in curiosity, or for casual sex. During this process, these young diasporas could be seen as positive agents who creatively use online dating to improve their well-being living abroad, and it is suggested that new media technologies here serve as a source of intimacy and connection.

As for the potential of online dating, it is suggested that the written-based conversations could facilitate users to better express and expose themselves, and thus, have the potential to achieve pure relationships. When conversations rather than capital or social status become the major criteria for mate choices, it seems that online dating also could promote inclusiveness and equality that boundaries between social classes in offline romantic marketing could be broken. In addition, online dating matches are also photo-oriented, so online dating has the potential to shift the dating culture in contemporary China from pursuing security to physical attraction, as users may put physical appearance as priority rather than socioeconomic considerations in mate choices

online. However, as visual-based social media, people tend to engage small efforts, and some may continue using their offline mate choices criteria, like compatible family background in their online mate choices considerations, which could challenge the potentials of the online dating environment.

Moreover, this thesis demonstrates how globalization and new technology shape the process of identity forming, as young Chinese diasporas imagine this online platform as an environment that is away from their parents' knowledge and comments, away from China and thus, to some extent, away from social pressure, which gives them a chance to negotiate a new online identity. This could explain that they are looking for easy conversations, or online dating cheating, compared to offline dating behaviors in China that they describe as more serious, responsibilities involved, and marriage and capital oriented.

This thesis also highlights that modernity theory is Eurocentric, as it dominantly acknowledges western romance as the way of modernism. By investigating Chinese young diasporas' online dating experiences, this thesis argues that the non-western romance influenced by multiple factors is also another way of modernism. Using the marriage institution as an example, this thesis demonstrates how tradition blurs with modern in contemporary Chinese dating culture, as factors that both strengthen and weaken the marriage institution co-exist in contemporary China. In addition, this thesis notes the sexual experiences initiated by online dating among Chinese young diasporas are shaped by traditional values and political ideology of maintaining social stability, as young female Chinese are caught in the dilemmas between their physical desire and the discourse of sex as morality. Moreover, with the process of capitalization in post-communist China, materialism and consumerism are embedded in the contemporary Chinese dating culture. This could explain that if the motivation to use online dating is for serious relationships, participants tend to continue using their offline mate choices criteria during online mate selection, as they state that economic, social, and cultural capital are major considerations for them.

Moreover, this thesis critiques Hofstede's cultural dimension of individualism vs collectivism. In terms of parental influences on children's mate choices, the traditional value that older generations have the right in commenting on youngsters' lives has

53

refigured in the contemporary context as parents make comments on their adult children's dating lives, with the purpose to pull them back to the "normal" track leading to the material success and get into a stable marriage at a suitable age. In addition, children acknowledge parents' legitimacy to do so, because they perceive such behaviors as caring and love towards them, and to some extent, they are economically dependent on parents. During this process, parents put what they think would be the children's best interests first, while children rationally negotiate their situation and benefit themselves. Therefore, Hofstede's cultural dimension of collectivism that individuals give in their interests to the interests of the whole group could not be applied to the contemporary Chinese context in terms of parental pressure. Moreover, this thesis demonstrates how young Chinese autonomously reason and negotiate social and parental pressure during their online dating experiences. Their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are woven into the complex cultural-social and economical-political contexts. Thus, it is suggested that the dichotomy of individualism and collectivism could no longer explain the multidimensional contemporary Chinese context, rather, a cosmopolitan perspective that based on non-western participants' understanding, and the acknowledgment of their traditional, modern cultures and economic-political background is recommended.

Furthermore, this thesis uses cosmopolitan theory to explain the contemporary Chinese dating culture inside which tradition and modernity are blurring, and cosmopolitanism and nationalism are both constructing and deconstructing, as people form identities through encountering different cultures and also inheriting the local traditional cultures. Moreover, this thesis discusses how cosmopolitan narrative challenges dichotomous imaginings of tradition and modernity, and individualism and collectivism in the West and the Rest relationship.

In terms of privacy in intergenerational relationships, participants' own definitions are limited to information privacy, as they understand privacy as the right of deciding what to tell and not to tell their parents. Although one participant states that her dating lives should be her own, rather than her parents' business, she does not recognize her intimate relationship choices as her privacy. Thus, it is suggested that through defining privacy as personhood and intimacy, parents could better respect children as choosers in their dating lives, and children could gain discourse power to challenge

54

parents' legitimacy in making comments on their mate choices under the name of privacy, if children do not welcome parents' comments.

As for limitations in this thesis, the sample is homogeneous, as all participants self-report as from middle-class families, and most of them have urban Hukou. Therefore, it is suggested they could be people with vested interests in the Chinese economic reform, and would naturally intend to maintain or increase their economic, social, and cultural capital, so they would expect their mate to have a compatible family background with theirs. This thesis does not know stories of Chinese youngsters from disadvantaged social class. Do they also reckon capital as major considerations on mate choices? Would they seek mates from the compatible family backgrounds? How are they portrayed in media and dating culture if they intend to seek mates from social class higher than theirs? What difficulties would they encounter if they try to break the boundary of social class during online and offline dating experiences? Further studies could elaborate on it, and investigate, to what extent, social class is fixed and rigid in contemporary China, what its influence on mate choices is, and what the role of online dating in it is.

Despites the homogeneous sample, this thesis also asks, what is the impact of the interviewer of this thesis being a young woman and student instead of a male professional researcher? Would the male participants elaborate on the topic of sexuality in front of a male interviewer? And to what extent, could we believe the stories told by participants when they reckon the topics are sensitive? Would they consciously filter some aspects of the stories or add some imagination to manage their images in front of the interviewer? Cosmopolitanism reminds us that our knowledge is imperfect, situational, and requires new evidence for further revision.

In addition, this thesis weaves online dating infidelity among Chinese diasporas into the contemporary Chinese context. Future research could investigate more on this topic, as it is suggested that it could be fruitful to use it as a lens to understand multiple dimensions in contemporary China

As for intergenerational relationships, only voices from the children's side are heard in this thesis. Future studies could investigate the parents' point of view. Moreover, further studies could conduct cross-culture comparison about parental influences on children's mate choices, and investigate how culture-social and economic-political

influencers could lead to different or similar intergenerational relationships, which could have more potential to criticize Hofstede's cultural dimension of individualism vs collectivism and contribute to cosmopolitanism theory.

For social suggestions, as demonstrated above that Chinese diasporas may have different sexual values with people from different cultures, it is suggested that Chinese diasporas should talk with their online dates about each other's understanding towards sex to avoid insecurity and confusion. And the liberation of sexuality still has a long way to go in China, as individuals' personal needs are socially constrained by moral discourse and political ideology that claim to increase social security.

As for female participants' feeling of powerlessness towards social pressure and the statement that they could not change the environment, this thesis suggests that more media and political freedom are needed in contemporary China. Women could organize public debates, assembly and association to express their voices and shift the gender culture in China.

Moreover, this thesis argues that photo-oriented online dating apps could disadvantage the male Chinese as they use self-Oriental lens during online dating, and the capital-driven dating market could make love become a privilege. Online dating apps like the self-claimed feminist one, Bumble have filter functions to filter people's height and educational background, which could encourage women to seek protection and capital in mate choices. Thus, patriarchal values and class division may be embedded. Therefore, to insert the idea of independence and inclusiveness that what makes a person appeal lies inside rather than their appearance and capital, this thesis suggests online dating applications could ask users to only put words description in their profiles and not set filter functions.

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