

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARRIAGE AMONG
SOME URBAN CHINESE SINGLES

by

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SYNOPSIS

The main theme of this study is on marriage postponement among Chinese singles in Kuala Lumpur. Discussion is focused on the attitudes towards marriage and other related issues, socio-economic backgrounds and lifestyles of the target group. Besides determining the factors that encourage late marriage, some sex differences in attitudes are also examined.

Chapter 1 gives a brief review on literature related to the research problem, research objectives, scope, methodology, problems and limitations.

Chapter 2 deals with the Chinese marriage institution according to the customary and statutory laws, the trend towards late marriage and factors affecting it.

Chapter 3 gives a description of the respondents' personal background, family backgrounds, social mixing and courting experiences.

Chapter 4 discusses the respondents' conception of marriage, functions of marriage and attitudes towards trial marriages, polygyny, mixed marriages and inter-faith marriages. It also deals with some important criteria in mate-selection such as personality, physical appearance, age, education and income.

Chapter 5 deals with issues on singlehood. It examines the reasons for remaining single, sex discrimination, life problems faced by singles and permanent singlehood.

Chapter 6 concludes the findings of this research by giving the main factors that encourage the target group to delay marriage, sex differences in attitudes and results from the hypothesis tests.

SINOPSIS

Tema utama kajian ini adalah tentang penangguhan perkahwinan di kalangan bujang Cina di Kuala Lumpur. Perbincangan tertumpu kepada sikap terhadap perkahwinan dan isu-isu yang berkaitan, latarbelakang, sosio-ekonomi dan gaya hidup kumpulan sasaran. Di samping menentukan faktor-faktor yang menggalakkan perkahwinan lewat, perbezaan-perbezaan seks dalam sikap juga dipertimbangkan.

Bab 1 memberi satu tinjauan karya-karya yang berkaitan dengan masalah penyelidikan, objektif, skop, metodologi, masalah dan limitasi penyelidikan.

Bab 2 berkenaan dengan institusi perkahwinan Cina mengikut undang-undang adat-tradisi dan statutori, tren perkahwinan lewat serta faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhinya.

Bab 3 memberi 1 pemerihalan tentang latarbelakang peribadi, latarbelakang keluarga, pergaulan sosial dan pengalaman berasmara responden.

Bab 4 membincangkan konsepsi responden mengenai perkahwinan, fungsi-fungsi perkahwinan dan sikap responden terhadap "trial marriage", poligini, perkahwinan campur dan perkahwinan intra-ugama. Ia juga berkenaan dengan beberapa kriteria penting dalam pemilihan jodoh seperti peripadi, rupa paras fizikal, umur, pendidikan dan pendapatan.

Bab 5 adalah berkaitan dengan isu-isu dalam hidup bujang. Ia meneliti sebab-sebab membujang, diskriminasi seks, masalah-masalah hidup yang dihadapi oleh golongan bujang dan hidup bujang yang kekal.

Bab 6 menyimpulkan penemuan-penemuan penyelidikan dengan mengemukakan faktor-faktor penting yang menggalakkan kumpulan sasaran menangguhan perkahwinan mereka, perbezaan-perbezaan seks dalam sikap dan hasil dari ujian-ujian hipotesis.

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Bunting and Loh (1990), Bunting (1991), Loh Kok Huat (1991), Tan Foo Cheong (1990), Maitra (1991), 1990ly Lok Yan Survey (1991) and Yang (1991).

Bunting and Edwards (1990) studied the relationship between age and marital status and marital stability. They found that over 40% of women and the probability of divorce are negatively inversely related. Referring to a birth cohort, age increases the chance of marital dissolution. These findings are interesting since most of the earlier studies on marriage, either in Hong Kong or the United States, have shown that the younger the age, the higher the probability of divorce. This finding contradicts the general perception that older people are more stable in their marriages.

General characteristics related to marriage have been examined in Malaysia. In 1980, age, education, ethnicity and gender were examined and the strongest impact on marital dissolution was seen with those education aged 36 to 49 years older than those with 12 years. Using the national census, he chose just the Chinese families and found that the Chinese had 3.2 years older than the Malays. He suggested that

Chapter 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.1 Literature Review

There are numerous sociological studies on marriage and family but few deal with late marriages. The reason is this marital pattern has not been significant (especially in the east) until lately. The strong tendency towards marriage postponement in the modern age has drawn some sociologists and economists to study the changes in attitudes towards marriage, the relations between age at first marriage and marital instability, the impact of nuptiality on fertility and social stigmatization on aging singles. Some of these studies are those by Alan Booth and John N. Edwards (1985), R.G. Bitter (1986), Lee Kok Huat (1981), Tan Poo Chang (1986), Gavin Jones (1981, 1986), Loh Ann Swee (1979/80) and Pang Swee Ching (1986/87).

Booth and Edwards, and Bitter studied the relationship between age at first marriage and marital instability. They found that age at first marriage and the probability of divorce are not simply inversely related. Marrying at a much later age also increases the chance of marital dissolution. Their findings are based on data from a sample of American married people. Bitter's study shows that the instability of late marriages is due more to the couple's heterogeneity (in such respects as age, education, race, social class and religious background).

Several demographic studies on marriage have been conducted in Malaysia. Lee (1981) says education, ethnicity and premarital work duration have the strongest impact on marriage postponement. Women with more education tend to marry later than those with less. Using the national census, he shows that the Chinese females marry 2.5 years later than the Indians and 3.2 years later than the Malays. Lee suggests that

there are 3 main factors in a woman's decision to marry -

- (1) attitudes towards marriage and timing of nuptiality,
- (2) her actual short-run alternatives to marriage,
- (3) the availability of spouse.

Tan carried out a large survey on marriage and marital dissolution. He studied 2 groups of people - married couples and singles. The coverage of his study includes social mixing, choice of a mate and age of marriage. He shows that there is a trend towards late marriage which is more predominant among the Chinese and more so among the urban Chinese. Tan in his earlier writing (1983) suggests that the main factors that affect the timing of marriage are urbanisation, education opportunities, female labour force participation, availability of mates and per capita income.

Jones' study on trends in marriage and divorce shows that there is a clear trend towards late marriage. According to Jones (1981:112), the demographic phenomenon of marriage squeeze -

"was not the main cause of the recent increase in age at marriage. Thus, much will depend on educational and economic changes and other aspects of social change in Malaysia."

The tendency for women to delay marriage is often associated with the higher level of education, occupational achievements and labour participation (Feldman 1973; Havens 1973' Lee 1981; Nor Laily Aziz 1974; Jones 1986; Tan 1983). On the other hand, some writers (Bernard 1972; Houseknecht and Vaughan 1987) suggest that permanent singlehood among males is more likely to occur at the lowest levels of intelligence, education and occupation.

In summary, there have been many studies on marriage but little has been done on late marriages among the Chinese in Malaysia. However,

several researches have discussed briefly this trend towards late marriage and the possible factors affecting it (Caldwell 1963; Jones 1981; Lee 1981; Pang 1987/88; Tan 1983).

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are :

- i. To determine the factors that lead to late marriage by examining the social-profile and attitudes of the target group towards marriage and related issues; and
- ii. To examine some sex differences in attitudes towards marriage.

From literature review and observation, the following hypotheses are derived :

1. Women tend to marry late when their economic independence increases.
2. Some men delay marriage because of economic reasons.
3. Singlehood at old age is involuntary. (Social stigmatization on aging singles with terms like 'leftovers', 'left on the shelf', 'missed the boat', etc. implies that permanent singlehood is involuntary).

1.3 Scope

1.3.1 Location

Research was carried out in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia and a nearby town, Petaling Jaya. This area is urbanised with high population density (3,784 per km² in 1980). The Chinese form the majority group (51.9%) in this area. The area has the characteristics that are likely to lead to late marriages, such as high level of education, freedom to social mixing, urbanisation and career opportunities. Findings are, therefore, in the urban context (25 of 27 respondents were

born and grew up in this area) where the median age at first marriage is relatively older. (see Table 1.1 below)

Table 1.1 Median Age At First Marriage For Selected Birth Cohorts by Sex and Stratum, Malaysia,* 1980

Birth Cohort	MALE		FEMALE	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
1921 - 25	24.5	22.6	19.4	18.3
1926 - 30	24.6	22.6	19.7	18.3
1931 - 35	24.9	22.7	20.2	18.9
1936 - 40	25.3	22.9	20.7	18.6
1941 - 45	25.7	23.7	21.5	18.9
1946 - 50	25.9	24.7	22.2	20.2

* The figures in this table are confined to persons surviving until the 1980 census and who had married by age 30.

Source : General Report of Population, Census, 1980 (Vol. 1 :44)

1.3.2 Target Group

The target group has 4 characteristics :

- i. Single (Never married)
- ii. Live in urban area (Kuala Lumpur or Petaling Jaya)
- iii. Chinese
- iv. Age 30 and above

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Sample Design

a.) Place/location

Kuala Lumpur was chosen because statistics shows steady increase in age at first marriage for its general population. It was also a matter of convenience because researcher lives in Kuala Lumpur.

b.) Race

The Chinese group was selected because the mean age at first marriage for the Chinese is always higher than their Malay and Indian counterparts. In 1947, the Chinese married around the mean age of 19.8 years, 2.5 years and 3.3 years later than the Indians and Malays respectively (Lee 1981:9). The Chinese also indicated the highest proportion who chose their own marriage partner (Tan et.al. 1986:115-116).

c.) Age

Tan (1986:139) shows that the majority of Chinese feel that the maximum age a girl should marry lies between 25 - 29 years. The mean between the maximum and minimum age a man should marry is 29.9 years for the urban Chinese.

Because the preferred age of marriage lies in the range 25 - 30 years, people who are single in their thirties or older constitute a reasonable target group for study.

Sampling_Technique

Due to time constant and limited resources, the researcher used a 'snowball sampling technique'. Acquaintances who were in the target group were interviewed first. The other respondents were later identified through friends and previous respondents.

1.4.2 The_Sample

In this research, 12 single women and 15 bachelors were interviewed. The questionnaire was standardised for both sexes to enable comparison. It was designed to obtain data about respondent's background, social mixing and attitudes towards marriage and related issues. Most of the questions on attitudes and opinions were open-ended.

1.5 Research_Problems_And_Limitations

Like in many other researches, the main problem in this research was getting people to co-operate. Many people refused to be interviewed because they felt that the topic was too personal. (Out of 39 persons approached, only 27 responded). It was also a sensitive issue. There were cases where the potential respondent felt stigmatised. This problem was relatively more serious with single women. The researcher tried to overcome it by giving assurance that whatever information given would be kept confidential and that only collective data would be revealed. In many cases, the term 'late marriage' was not used to avoid resentment from the respondent/potential respondent. Though to many people, the topic is rather sensitive and personal, all those who agreed to be interviewed talked freely during the interviews.

Observation showed that older singles were more sensitive to the issue and were more likely to turn the researcher away. Generally, people who have a lot of social activities are willing to respond.

Due to the nature of the research problem and time constraint, only a small sample was selected. Because it is not a random survey, it cannot be treated as representative of the general Chinese population.

Chapter 2 : TRENDS_IN_MARRIAGE

2.0 Introduction

The first part of this chapter deals with the concept of marriage and the institution of Chinese marriage under the customary and statutory law. The second part discusses the trend towards late marriage and some factors affecting it.

2.1 Definition_of_marriage

The Encyclopedia of Anthropology (1976:257) defines marriage as -

"a publicly recognised and culturally sanctioned union between a male and a female which is intended to be enduring, to give primary (but not necessary exclusive) sexual rights in each other to the couple, and to fulfill further social functions."

Marriage is the established institution for starting a family (Winick 1976:344).

2.2 Traditional_Chinese_Marriage

In the past, under the customary law for Chinese, marriage was arranged by parents and primarily polygynous (Tan 1983:27). Before the beginning of the 20th century, the ideal Chinese family was patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal and extended located within a system of ethics-religious belief centering around ancestor-worship (Tan 1983:28). According to the principle of filial piety, a man's duty was first and foremost to his parents and a married woman's duty was basically towards her parents-in-law (Hsu 1949:126); Tan 1983:28; Winch 1963:43). Marriage was a social arrangement between 2 families and its' main function was for the perpetuation of lineage (Tan 1983:28).

In Peninsular Malaysia, before the enforcement of the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act, 1976, it was not compulsory to register a

marriage. There were statutory laws classified as :

- i. The Registration of Marriages Ordinance 1952;
- ii. The Civil Marriage Ordinance 1952;
- iii. The Christian Marriage Ordinance 1956 .¹

The main objective of The Registration of Marriages Ordinance 1952 was to enable customary marriages to be registered at the option of the parties. Neither the registration nor omission to register any marriage under the Ordinance would affect its' validity in the eyes of the law. The Civil Marriage Ordinance 1952 and Christian Marriage Ordinance 1956 promoted monogamy and set the minimum age of the male party to a marriage to be 16 years and 14 years for the female party. However, there was no provision to prevent a Chinese from opting to contract a polygamous marriage according to the Customary Law (Ahmad Ibrahim 1986:222).

2.3 Modern Chinese Marriage

Today, marriage for the Chinese is no longer pre-arranged by parents. 70% - 75% of the married Chinese choose their own marriage partner (Tan et.al. 1986:116). Increasing freedom in social mixing has been given to children and most parents have very little say in their son's/daughter's choice of lifepartner. Marriage is now perceived as a

Footnote

1. Under the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) (Amendment) Act, 1980, Section 23(2), The Civil Marriage Ordinance, 1952 and The Christian Marriage 1952 have been repealed. The Registration of Marriages Ordinance 1952 has been repealed in so far as it applies to persons whose marriages are resgistrable under the Act.

union between 2 persons rather than 2 families (Pang 1987/88:29). The Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act, 1976 makes registration of all marriages compulsory. Under Section 5, it also rules out polygamy among the Non-Muslims. The minimum age of both parties to a marriage is increased to 18 years. Parents' or guardian's consent is needed for those who are below 21 years.

2.4 Trend_Towards_Late_Marriage

According to Wong (1974:20), romantic love had no place in the traditional marriage system. Boys and girls were matched according to their horoscope and socio-economic background. The Book of Rites which contains the Confucian rules of conduct indicates that men should get married at 30 and women between 20-23, but these were interpreted as maximum ages for marriage. In China boys and girls were betrothed quite young. In some places as early as 8 - 10 and married in their late teens.

In Peninsular Malaysia, past census show that the median age at first marriage has increased in general. Over the last three decades, the age at first marriage for the Chinese has been increasing steadily. In 1947 the median age at first marriage was 18.2 for females and 24.0 for males for the whole population. Among the Chinese, the figures were 20.2 and 25.9 respectively. In 1974, for the Chinese population, the median age at first marriage increased to 22.0 for females and 27.0 for males. (See Table 2.1)

Table 2.1 : Peninsular Malaysia : Median Age at First Marriage, by Race, 1947, 1957, 1970 and 1974

Year	MALE				FEMALE			
	All		All		All		All	
	Malays	Chinese	Indians	races	Malays	Chinese	Indians	races
1947	22.9	25.9	26.8	24.0	16.6	20.2	17.1	18.2
1957	22.1	25.9	24.4	23.1	17.1	21.6	17.2	19.0
1970	24.4	26.6	25.2	25.3	20.5	23.6	21.0	21.4
1974	25.2	27.0	26.1	-	21.4	23.8	22.0	-

Source : Sidhu and Jones 1981, Population Dynamics in Plural Society : Peninsular Malaysia, UMBC Publication, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (pp168).

The censuses (1947;1957; 1970; 1980) also showed that over time the proportion of singles is increasing. At any given age group the Chinese has a bigger proportion of singles compared to the other 2 races. For example, in 1980, the proportion of singles for the Chinese males 25 - 29 was 51% (compared to 44% in 1947) while the Malays singles constituted 34% and the Indian single proportion was 17%. Late marriage is an obvious growing phenomenon and it is expected to continue. Tan's findings show that generally, Malaysians perceive a higher range of age for marriage to be more suitable. (See Table 2.2 and Table 2.3).

Table 2.2 : Minimum and Maximum Age A Girl Should Marry by Sex and Ethnic group.

Ethnic Group	MALE		FEMALE	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Malay	19.7	25.3	20.1	25.6
Chinese	21.6	28.5	21.9	29.2
Indian	19.9	26.0	20.9	26.8

Table 2.3 : Minimum and Maximum Age A Man Should Marry by Sex and Ethnic group.

Ethnic Group	MALE		FEMALE	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Malay	24.2	30.9	24.5	30.9
Chinese	24.8	34.1	25.1	35.2
Indian	23.7	31.1	24.4	32.1

Source : Revised from Table 40 and Table 41 in Tan, 1986,
The Study On Marriage and Marital Dissolution in Peninsular Malaysia : Singles.

2.5 Factors That Encourage Late Marriage:

2.5.1 Imbalance Sex-ratio

One possible reason for late marriage is the demographic phenomenon of 'marriage-squeeze'. In a primarily monogamous society (for non-Muslims), sex-ratio imbalance will exert upward pressure on age at marriage for the larger sex group. Jones, following the footstep of Caldwell, examined the probable effect of the demographic phenomenon of 'marriage-squeeze' between 1957 and 1970 for each race in Peninsular Malaysia. He concluded that "to the extent that the 'marriage squeeze' has contributed to the rise in female age at marriage, it has run its course and in the late 1970s and 1980s will exert no further upward pressure on female age at marriage" (Jones 1981:192). Even if 'marriage-squeeze' can fully explain the rise in age at marriage for females, it can not explain the rise in age at first marriage for males. In fact, over time the sex-ratio in Peninsular Malaysia has improved and it is very close to balance.

Table 2.4 : Sex-ratio For Selected Age Group, Peninsular Malaysia, 1970, 1980-1985.

Year	Age Group	15 - 29	30 - 44	45 - 49
1970	All races	98	104	113
1980	All races	96	98	98
1980	Chinese	97	106	92
1981	All races	97	103	97
1982	All races	97	102	97
1983	All races	98	101	98
1984	All races	98	101	99
1985	All races	99	100	99

Sources : Census 1980 and Current Population Estimates 1985

2.5.2 Education

Several researches have provided evidence to show that female mean age at first marriage tend to increase with education (Lee 1981; Nor Laily Aziz 1974; Pang 1987/88; Tan et.al 1986).

Table 2.5 : Mean Age At First Marriage By Educational level For Ever-married Women Aged 25 years and above who were married before age 25.

Educational level	All ages	25 - 29	45 and over
No education	16.7	17.5	16.2
Formal Education:			
< 7 years	17.9	18.4	17.3
7 - 12 years	20.8	21.3	18.3
> 12 years	22.4	22.5	*

* Less than 20 cases.

Source : Malaysian Fertility And Family Survey, 1974

According to Lukas (1980:81),

"education certainly affects age at marriage since the typical school/college student is unmarried."

Higher level of education can increase age at marriage because many people feel that the minimum age a girl should get marry is after she has completed her studies (Pang 1987/88:112). Education gives a woman a sense of worth, independence and ability to acquire knowledge on her own. It also provides a different source of norm for individuals and promotes a career apart from the family. This seems to reduce the importance of marriage as a source of security and protection. In the words of Benjamin (1968:68),

"marriage is no longer regarded as the only 'safe' career for a girl."

High level of education can exert upward pressure on the female age at marriage because it is difficult to find qualified grooms for educated women in less developed countries (like Malaysia) (Nag 1984:136). This is due to the prevailing concept that women should not be more superior than the husbands. Feldman's findings showed that female undergraduates who are married are much more likely to have a spouse with graduate education than male undergraduates (Feldman 1975:222). Women tend to marry upward but men can marry downward (the less educated). This implies that the problem of unavailability of qualified spouse only occur among educated women.

In fact, very little has been done to see the effect of education on the timing of marriage among men. Permanent singlehood among males is found to be more likely to occur at the lowest levels of intelligence, education and occupation (Bernard 1972). In United States, the male

percentage of never-married does not differ by educational level (Houseknecht, Vaughan and Statham 1987:353). However, a recent survey in Peninsular Malaysia (Tan et.al. 1986:204) showed that there is a slight increase in male age at first marriage by educational level. Perhaps, higher level of education delays marriage because men generally do not marry until they have economic independence.

Increasing emphasis is being given to paper qualifications. In these days, it is essential to have certain level of formal education to get a good job. From a societal viewpoint, education provides an upward ladder for an individual. Due to the importance of education, most parents want their children to be educated and discourage them from marrying early (Nag 1984:136).

2.5.3 Economic Achievements And Career

Increased female labour participation and income tend to increase female age at first marriage (Lee 1981:16; Havens 1975:215). Economic independence gives a woman a sense of self-confidence and career offers an actual short-run alternative to marriage.

Having economic independence may not cause a man to delay marriage but establishing a career in the face of great competition can encourage marriage postponement. Because of his future role as the main breadwinner in the family, a man tends to put career before marriage.

2.5.4 Urbanisation

Urbanisation can provide a suitable environment for late marriages. Urban lifestyle is often characterised as individualistic and impersonal (Wirth 1938; Cousins and Nagpaul 1979:397). In the city environment where everyone is busy with his/her own business, the norm of marriage is not strict (Pang 1987/88:113-114). Therefore, it can be said that urbanisation decreases the pressure to marry early. It has also

minimized the social stigma on singles.

Increasing freedom in social mixing (with members of the opposite sex) and recreational centres resulted from urbanisation and modernisation, may in the short-run reduce the importance of marriage in providing companionship.

2.5.5 Changes_In_The_Institution_Of_Marriage_And_Family

As a result of modernisation, some changes have taken place in the institution of marriage and family. A shift to the

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"open market situation (in mate selection) which depended more on chance rather than formal arrangements has affected the marriage age" (Zainal Kling 1981:16).

In the traditional Chinese Marriage system, parents were eager to arrange marriages for their children quite early for reasons which include :

- i.) Economic reasons
- ii.) Early marriage minimizes social stigma
- iii.) Loss of virginity or pre-marital pregnancy may bring disgrace to the kin-group.
- iv.) Perpetuation of family line (lineage).

Given the freedom to select a mate one may have more criteria rather than just based on horoscope and socio-economic background (as in the traditional system). Individuals may become more choosy and have higher expectations about their future spouse because marriage is now an

Footnote

2. "Open market situation" refers to a situation where everyone is free to choose his/her own lifepartner.

individual matter rather than a familial matter. Because both parties have the right to choose, it takes a longer time for mate-selection.

The ideal traditional Chinese family which was patrilineal, patriarchal and extended had in a way, minimized the necessity of economic self-sufficiency prior to marriage. This was because a newly married couple could depend on the husband's family for support. Transition from extended to nuclear family makes economic self-sufficiency prior to marriage very important. Therefore, economic factors are important in the decision to marry, especially for a man who is expected to be the main breadwinner. For this reason, men tend to delay marriage until they earn enough to support a family.

All the above socio-economic changes and changes in the institution of marriage and family have influenced the attitudes towards marriage in terms of its' functions, mate-selection and timing of nuptiality. These changes have contributed to and supported the trend towards late marriage.

Chapter 3 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

3.0 Introduction

This chapter gives a description of the respondents' socio-economic profile. It is important to examine the respondents' personal backgrounds, family backgrounds and social mixing because socialisation plays an important role in shaping attitudes and opinions. It will affect an individual's expectations of his/her future spouse, timing and decision of marriage.

3.1 Personal Background

3.1.1 Age

Table 3.1 shows that most of the respondents were in their early thirties with mean age of 33.8 years.

Table 3.1 : Percentage Distribution of Respondents By Age

Age	MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
30	5	33.3	2	16.7	7	25.9
31	1	6.7	1	8.3	2	7.4
32	2	13.3	4	33.3	6	22.2
33	2	13.3	2	16.7	4	14.8
34	2	13.3	-	-	2	7.4
35	-	-	1	8.3	1	3.7
38	1	6.7	-	-	1	3.7
39	-	-	1	8.3	1	3.7
40	1	6.7	-	-	1	3.7
43	-	-	1	8.3	1	3.7
53	1	6.7	-	-	1	3.7
	15	100.0	12	99.9	27	99.9

The age factor is important for analysis because there is a distinct relationship between age and the importance of lifepartnership. This research shows that women at age 30 and above have given much thought to marriage and mate-selection. In contrast, a significant percentage of men in their early thirties have not considered marriage as greater emphasis is placed on career, self-development and self-fulfillment.

While all the female respondents in their 30s indicated readiness for marriage (as soon as the right man comes along), 3 of the male respondents indicated no intention or desire for marriage within the next 5 years. These men were between 30 - 32 years old and never had any serious relationship with a member of the opposite sex. Conversations with them revealed that they were not satisfied with what they were and their minds were preoccupied with self-development and self-fulfillment (eg. further studies; explore the world further; learn more). This reveals that women desire and are prepared for lifepartnership at an earlier age.

The importance of marriage decreases after a certain age. Both the oldest man (53 years) and the oldest woman (43 years) interviewed said that they no longer have any intention to get married. There is evidence to show that the question of marriage fades from one's mind after a certain age (usually older for men). At the very least, the desire is suppressed due to the values of society concerning the "acceptable" age of marriage.

3.1.2 Religion

The sample is made up of 55.6% Christians, 18.5 Chinese ancestor worshippers, 5% "freethinkers" (no religion) and 7.4 Buddhists. This non-random sample composition is not representative of the general

Chinese population. In any case, the influence of religion is predominant only in the attitudes towards inter-faith marriage and celibacy (this will be discussed further in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

Table 3.2 : Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Religion

Religion	MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Chinese Religion (eg. Taoism, Confucious)	2	13.3	3	25.0	5	18.5
Buddhism	2	13.3	-	-	2	7.4
Christianity	7	46.7	8	66.7	15	55.6
No religion	4	26.9	1	8.3	5	18.5
	15	100.0	12	100.0	27	100.0

3.1.3 Education

2 aspects of education were examined :

- i.) Medium of instruction;
- ii.) Highest academic achievement.

22.2% of the respondents received primary education in Mandarin and continued their studies in English. The rest of the sample were strictly English educated and found to be more likely to abandon their traditional Chinese values and rites (Chua 1988).

The respondents received at least secondary education (L.C.E.) with 55.5% of them holding Bachelor's Degree, Professional Courses certificate (like CPA; ACCA; Management Studies, Banking) or diploma (in

Computer Science; Theology; PIAM).

Table 3.3 Highest Academic Achievement

Highest Academic Achievement	MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
L.C.E.	2	13.3	1	8.3	3	11.1
M.C.E./G.C.E.	3	20.0	5	41.7	8	29.6
H.S.C.	1	6.7	-	-	1	3.7
Professional Courses/ diploma	6	40.0	5	41.7	11	40.7
B.A	3	20.0	1	8.3	4	14.8
	15	100.0	12	100.0	27	99.9

3.1.4 Occupation And Income

Table 3.4 summarises the occupation of the respondents. All with the exception of one, the respondents, are in the formal economic sector. Their monthly income ranges from less than \$400 to \$3,000. A majority of the sample (59.3%) earned more than \$1,000 per month during the research period.

Table 3.4 Respondents' Occupation

Occupation/ Occupational Field	Male	Female	Total
Insurance (District Manager/ Agent)	5	1	6
Banking (Officer)	2	1	3
Management/Administration (Assistant General Manager/ Executive/Officer/Conf. Secretary)	3	2	5
General Administration (Secretary/Clerk)	-	2	2
Own Business	3	1	4
Finance (Assistant Financial Controller)	-	1	1
Education (Principal & Director of Studies)	1	-	1
Non-profit Organisation (Church Worker, Youth Organisation fulltimer)	-	2	2
Factory (Supervisor)	1	-	1
Laboratory Assistant	-	1	1
*Tailoring	-	1	1

* Informal Sector

Table 3.5 Distribution of Respondents by Income Level

Monthly Income	MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
< \$400	-	-	1	8.3	1	3.7
\$400 - \$599	-	-	3	25.0	3	11.1
\$600 - \$799	2	13.3	3	25.0	5	18.5
\$800 - \$999	2	13.3	-	-	2	7.4
\$1000-\$2000	9	60.0	5	41.7	14	51.9
> \$2000	2	13.3	-	-	2	7.4
	15	99.9	12	100.0	27	100.0

3.2 Family Background

Most of the respondents' parents have either primary education or no education (65.7%). Nevertheless, 100% of the sample has total freedom in mate-selection. No attempt on arranged marriage was made for a son/daughter.

Table 3.6 Respondents' Parents' Educational level

Educational level	Father		Mother	
	No.	%	No.	%
Nil	6	22.2	8	29.6
Primary (in Chinese)	10	37.0	10	37.0
Secondary	4	14.8	2	7.4
Tertiary	1	3.7	-	-
Do not know	6	22.2	7	25.9
	27	99.9	27	99.9

Most of the female respondents were certain of their parents' opinion in that a girl should get married in order that the husband may look after her welfare. 25% also confirmed their parents' anxiety and eagerness to see them married. However, only 33.3% of the females received parental pressure to marry early. Parental pressures, primarily exerted by mothers, were in the form of nagging, constant reminders, questioning and subtle suggestions. This was especially true for the only-unmarried-in-the-family with widowed mothers. 3 female respondent fall into this category. Of these 3, 2 were under parental pressure at the time of research while the mother of the third (aged 39) had tried to be her match-maker.

For the only-bachelor-of-the-family, they were likely to have anxious parents. The only 2 male respondents whose parents were anxious about their marriages were either the only child in the family or the youngest child (with married elder brothers and sisters). The remaining

male respondents were certain of their parents' desire of marriage for every child, but of their unmarried status, their parents had made no indication one way or another.

Widows are more likely to show their concern and more desire of marriage for their sons. The fathers of all the 13.3% of male respondents receiving pressure are deceased. 10 years ago, the widowed mother of a 40 years old male respondent used to pressure him to marry.

Table 3.7 Parental Pressure ("PP") On Male and Female Respondents

Parents	MALE		FEMALE	
	PP	No PP	PP	No PP
Both parents alive	-	7	2	3
Father Deceased	2	2	2	4
Mother Deceased	-	2	-	-
Both deceased	-	2	-	1
	2	13	4	8

3.3 Residential And Working Environment

Table 3.8 shows that the majority of the sample reside in middle-class residential areas (located away from the town-centre).

Table 3.8 : Distribution of Respondents by Place of Residence

Place of Residence	No. of Respondants	Percentage
Flat	6	22.2
Low cost housing estate	1	3.7
Middle class residential area	17	63.0
High class residential area	2	7.4
House attached to a Church	1	3.7
Total	27	100.0

85.2% of the respondents live with their family. 2 respondents are staying alone, 1 male respondent stays with relatives (cousins) and 1 female respondent staying with a group of single women.

Social environment can influence and apply social pressure on respondents to marry early or remain single. As expressed by some of the respondents, "if an individual coexist mainly with unmarried people, s/he will not feel 'out of place' and can enjoy singlehood with many other friends." Working with colleagues who are mostly married may exert pressure on singles to 'join the crowd'. On the contrary, a single may feel more fortunate being single if many of his/her colleagues have miserable married lives. A female who works with a majority of married people said that she had never been stigmatized and most of her colleagues envy her lifestyle because they are not happily married.

In terms of interaction at work, 51.9% of the respondents indicated that they frequently have opportunities to interact with members of the opposite sex. Opportunities to interact are determined by the nature of work. Respondents with greater opportunities to interact with members of the opposite sex are in Insurance, Banking, Management, Business and Educational lines (See Table 3.9).

Table 3.9 : Interaction with Members of the Opposite Sex at Work

Occupation/Occupational Field	Number of Respondents			
	Always	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Insurance	5	1	-	-
Banking	2	1	-	-
Management	3	1	-	-
Clerical/Gen Administration	-	2	-	-
Finance	-	-	-	1
Education	1	-	-	-
Non-profit Organisation	-	1	1	-
Supervisor	1	-	1	-
Laboratory Assistant	-	-	1	-
Tailor	-	-	-	1

3.4 Social Mixing

20% of the male respondents and 16.7% of the female respondents usually spend their weekends and holidays at home. For those who do not, the common places they meet are at holiday resorts; social clubs; friend's house and sports centres. Table 3.10 lists the places (other than their houses) where the respondents usually spend their weekends and holidays (descending order of importance).

Table 3.10 : Places Visited By Respondents During Weekends and Holidays

Places Visited by Male Respondents	Places Visited by Female Respondents
1. Social Clubs	1. Holiday Resorts
2. Holiday Resorts	2. Friend(s)' House
3. Sports Centres	3. Church
4. Friend(s)' house	4. Sports Centres
5. Church	5. Shopping Complex
6. Shopping Complex	6. Social Clubs, organisations
7. Fishing Areas	7. Recreational parks

Only 33.3% of the sample are members of either social clubs, youth organisations or interest groups. The organisations favoured and joined by the male respondents are purely recreational, social or political (Golden Wing Club; Sungai Mas Club; Caeser's Club; Rally Snooker Club; Rally Gold Club and Malaysia Chinese Youth Movement). Organisations joined by the female respondents varies from youth organisations (Girls' Brigade; Young Men's Christian Movement; Malaysian Youth Council), so-

cial club (Mirama Club House), interest groups (Library Association; Malaysian Nature Society) to social movement (Women's Aid Organisation).¹

92.6% of the sample frequent the cinemas less than once a month and none at all for the rest of the sample (all men) - movies is losing its' popularity and in all probability to videos. Of the male respondents who do go to movies, most usually go to movies with a mixed group of friends while 20% usually go with a specific woman. 83.3% of the female respondents usually go to movies with a mixed group of friends, 8.3% go alone while the remaining go with family members.

74.1% of the sample go on group dates (during the research period) but only 45.5% of this group have group dates as often as once or more than once a month.

3.5 Previous Relationships

44.5% of the sample never had any serious relationship with a member of the opposite sex. Among those with courting experience, majority only had 1-2 serious relationships.

Table 3.11 shows that single men in their early 30s are more likely not to have any serious relationships compared to their older counterparts. In contrast, older single women (late 30s and 40s) are more likely to have no serious relationship. Majority of the women

Footnote:

1. Surveys showed that "men tend to be more interested in scientific, mechanical, political, computational and physically strenuous or adventuresome activities while women seem to prefer literary, musical, artistic, social and sedentary activities," (Forisha 1978 : 28).

(77.8%) in their early 30s have courting experience. 75% of the female respondents who have had serious relationship(s) had their previous single date within the 2 months prior to the interview.

Table 3.11 Serious Relationship With a Member of the Opposite Sex

Number of Relationships	Never	1-2 X	3-4 X	5X or more	Total
No. of Male Respondents	8	3	1	3	15
No of Female Respondents	4	5	2	1	12
Total Number	12	9	2	4	27
Percentage	44.5	33.3	7.4	14.8	100

Table 3.12 Serious Relationship(s) of Respondents by Age Group

Age Group	Never	1-2 X	3-4 X	5X or more	Total
Male : 30 - 33	7	3	-	-	10
34 - 36	1	-	-	-	2
37 - 40	-	-	1	1	2
41 - 44	-	-	-	-	0
44 +	-	-	-	-	1
Female : 30 - 33	2	5	2	-	9
34 - 36	-	-	-	1	1
37 - 40	1	-	-	-	1
41 - 44	1	-	-	-	1

Chapter 4 : ATTITUDES_TOWARDS_MARRIAGE_AND_MATE-SELECTION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the respondents' attitudes towards marriage and other related issues. It also highlights some of the important criteria in mate-selection. In this chapter the writer will examine some differences in attitudes of the 2 sexes and the influence of education, career and religion on attitudes towards marriage.

4.1 What is Marriage?

Common words used by respondents to define marriage include commitment, partnership, union, family and norm. The word 'commitment' was mentioned by 44.4% of the sample. Commitment is defined as "undertaking or pledge that restricts freedom of action; dedication to or involvement with a particular doctrine, course of action" (The Little Oxford Dictionary 1980:111). The frequent appearance of the word 'commitment' in the respondents' answers implies that the target group recognises that marriage requires dedication and restricts freedom. Some respondents even stressed that marriage is a lifetime commitment.

Marriage is also perceived as a lifepartnership, a union or a life-time bond between a man and a woman. Some respondents elaborated that "marriage is a lifepartnership/union between 2 different persons who can communicate, live together and adapt to one another".

A minority of the sample (7.4%) treat marriage as a norm. Yet some respondents have a broader vision to see that marriage "starts a family".

It can be concluded that marriage is now perceived as an individual matter involving 2 persons and not a familial matter. This can be seen from the respondents' definitions of marriage which focused on the

couple with no mention of their families and little mention about their future family.

It is interesting to note that only 3 female respondents mentioned love (eg. "a love relationship"; "2 persons in love"). None of the male respondents mentioned love. This does not mean that the component of love is not considered as important, but it does show that there are other more significant components (commitments, responsibilities, etc.) in the men's conception of marriage.

In short, marriage in the conception of the target group, has the following elements :-

1. Commitment with responsibilities
2. Enduring (the word 'lifetime' was often uttered)
3. Partnership (sharing each other's life)

4.2 Is_Marriage_A_Stage_of_Life_That_Every_Normal_Person_Must_Go_Through_?

Majority of the sample felt that marriage is a stage of life that every normal person must/should go through. Reasons given are that marriage is a norm and it makes a person more complete. Women seem to have deviated from this norm more than the men. Out of 7 respondents who gave a negative answer, 4 are women. This makes the percentage of female respondents (33.3%) who do not agree that marriage should be universal higher than their male counterparts by 13.3%.

4.3 Functions_of_Marriage

i.) Companionship

All the 12 female respondents were in consensus that providing companionship is one of the most important functions of marriage. 2 male respondents disagreed on the necessity of marriage for providing compa-

nionship. Of the 2, one of them did not expect his future wife to share in many of his activity, merely to give him moral support. The other man felt strongly that one need not marry for companionship as there are so many other means to achieve it.

ii.) Security

Only 50% of the sample agreed that marriage can provide financial, emotional or old age security. Majority felt that marriage can only provide emotional/psychological security (ie. moral support, a sense of belonging, love, care and ability to love). Only 2 male respondents and 2 female respondents felt that marriage can be a source of both emotional and financial security while 2 female respondents felt that marriage provides security in old age (hopefully, having children to look after them).

For the male respondents who disagreed that marriage can be a source of financial security, the argument is that a couple's income is the aggregate income of the 2 individuals. Some even said that marriage will create more insecurities instead. However, most of the men were of the consensus that marriage can be a source of both financial and emotional security to a woman. On the contrary, 38.5% of the female respondents were uncertain that marriage can ever provide security to them as they were either skeptical of long-lasting marriage (for there are a lot of broken marriages) or they were independent and secure as singles.

There is no evidence to show the influence of educational and economic attainments on the respondents' attitude concerning this function of marriage. Respondents who gave a negative answer are proportionately distributed by educational and income levels. A more significant pattern may perhaps be detected amongst those with either primary or no

education and those in the extreme income groups.

iii.) Procreation

This main function of marriage and family is still viewed as important. All the respondents agreed that marriage should continue the generation line. Some noted that children are the natural outcome of marriage while a male respondent said that it is not a good function¹ because "it creates more suffering."

iv.) Perpetuation_of_Lineage

This previously primary function of the traditional Chinese marriage institution is almost totally rejected. Only one female respondent regarded it as one of the functions of marriage but added that it only "concerns the men". All the male respondents (including those who are the only son of their families) believed that continuation of lineage and passing on the family name was only important to their ancestors. They either do not care whether their lineage will continue; or they do not worry because there are so many others who bear the same surname.

v.) Other_Functions

Other functions suggested are that marriage gives a sense of fulfillment; it is a sign of adulthood and it eliminates social pressures/stigma (because it has been a tradition/norm).

4.4 Living-arrangement_After_Marriage

Majority of the sample indicated preference for living alone with spouse (if they get married). This shows a tendency toward the establishment of nuclear families among the younger generation. The older respondents are more likely to maintain the traditional extended family pattern (See Table 4.1).

Footnote

1. This is in accordance with his Buddhism belief that birth is 'dukkha'. See Khantipalo 1965:21.

Table 4.1 : Preferred Living Arrangement After Marriage by Sex and Age
(Male = "M"; Female = "F")

Age Group	30 - 33		34 - 37		38 - 41		42 - 45		46 - 53	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Live alone with spouse	10	10	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Live with own parents	1*	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	1	-
No preference	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* He is the only child in the family

4.5 Trial Marriage

Women are more likely to hold more negative attitudes towards trial marriages compared to men. 69.2% of the female respondents and 60% of the male respondents were against trial marriages. This group of respondents viewed trial marriage as immoral, unnecessary, artificial or an irresponsible act.

22.2% of the total sample felt that trial marriage is good because it provides a trial basis of in-depth knowing and adapting to each other. Some also believed that broken marriages can be avoided through having trial marriages.

The remaining 7.4% of the sample (constituted by females) held neutral attitudes towards trial marriages but would not consider it for themselves.

4.6 Polygamy

Polygamous marriage occurs when either spouse also has another spouse(s) simultaneously (Encyclopedia of Anthropology 1976:257). In

Chinese society (and in many other societies), the type of polygamy practised is polygyny which is a marriage of a man to 2/more women.

In the traditional Chinese marriage institution, polygyny was generally accepted and widely practised. Today, with the enactment of The Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce), 1976 and women emancipation, this practice has become unacceptable. While no one indicated support for polygyny, 33.3% of the male respondents and 8.3% of the female respondents had neutral attitudes towards it. (A male respondent reminded me that though no man would voice support for polygyny, polygyny and extra-marital affairs are common in our society).

4.7 Mixed-Marriage

Only an insignificant 3.7% objected to mixed marriage and held the conservative thought "one should marry someone of the same race". The remainder of the sample felt that race/ethnicity should not be a hindrance as long as the couple is willing to compromise and adapt to each other's culture. All agreed that mixed-married couples are likely to face more problems due to cultural differences, pressure and possibly ridicule and objections from relatives. However, a female respondent felt that this 'problem' is insignificant in the Malaysian context as acculturation has already taken place.

Though most of the respondents were not against mixed-marriages, only 70.4% were willing to marry someone outside the Chinese community.

4.8 Inter-faith Marriage

Majority of the Christians and Buddhists indicated their unwillingness to marry someone of a different religion. The remaining 6.7% Christian and 50% Buddhist said "depends".

The other 2 groups - the Chinese Gods Worshippers and 'free-

thinkers' (with no religion) were of the opinion that "religion does not matter . The possible reason is that religion does not play an important role in their lives (as expressed by some of them) or they are still open to new doctrines/philosophies.

4.9 Choice_of_A_Mate

4.9.1 Qualities_A_Man_looks_For_In_A_Woman

Table 4.2 summarises the qualities that most men would look for in a woman according to the opinions of the male respondents and female respondents.

Table 4.2 : Qualities Most Men Would Look For In A Woman

Male Respondents	Female Respondents
1. Good physical appearance (Outward Beauty)	1. Good physical appearance (Outward beauty)
2. Understanding and supportive	2. Compatibility (in height, intelligence, education)
3. Good housewife qualities eg. able to manage a house	3. Submissive
4. Loving and caring	4. Sincere
5. Simple	5. Intelligent
6. Compatibility (in height, intelligence, education, knowledge)	6. Ladylike
7. Common Interests	7. Able to manage the house
8. Mental maturity	
9. Kind and unselfish	
10. Self-independent	
11. Teachable	
12. Unassuming	

Physical appearance appears to be the most important criterion in a man's choice of a mate. Both male and female respondents agreed that most men would rank this highly. Compatibility depends on the qualities of the

person who is making the choice. Compatible qualities (in respects of education, intelligence and height) ranked second by the female respondents were not as important to the men. In fact, some male respondents specified their preference for someone with lower qualifications than themselves. Perhaps, as expressed by some male respondents, the only important compatible qualities are in communication (determined by knowledge and interests) and height. Most male respondents confirmed a man would likely look for someone who understands him (the pressure and stress at work) and gives him moral support. Though the word 'submissiveness' was not verbalised, other qualities mentioned such as "understanding", "supportive", "good housewife", "simple", indicate the man's desire to be the head of the family.

4.9.2 Qualities A Woman Looks For In A Man

4.3 Qualities Most Woman Would Look For In A Man

Female Respondents	Male Respondents
1. Financial security/a stable job	1. Financial security
2. Compatibility (in height, intelligence, education,	2. Caring
3. Reliable/dependable	3. Responsible
4. Understanding, caring caring and loving	4. Reliable
5. Good physical appearance (includes height)	5. Faithful
6. Faithful and sincere	6. Maturity
7. Sense of humour	7. Compatibility
	8. Leadership qualities
	9. Good family background
	10. Sense of humour
	11. Sensitive
	12. Same religion

Though not all would agree that marriage provides financial

security for a woman, respondents (male and female) were in consensus that most women would rank financial security first in their criteria of mate-selection (see Table 4.3). This shows that men are still expected to be the breadwinner.

Compatibility seems a very important criterion to the women. Majority of the female respondents mentioned compatibility when asked about their criteria in mate-selection. They want their future spouse to be compatible with them in respect of intelligence, knowledge, education, income, looks and height. This partly explains why the educated women with successful careers tend to delay marriage while permanent singlehood is more likely to be found among men at lowest educational, intelligence and income levels.

4.9.3 The_Age_Criterion--Age_Heterogamy

Though reasons and motivations behind this are not examined empirically, age heterogamy, where the husband is older than the wife, has been a trend in marriage (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 : Difference Between Median Ages at Marriage of Men and Women by Ethnic Group, Peninsular Malaysia

Year	Malays	Chinese	Indians
1957	5.0	3.7	7.2
1970	3.9	3.0	4.2
1974	3.8	3.2	4.1

Source : Sidhu and Jones 1981, Population Dynamics in Plural Society : Peninsular Malaysia, UMBC Publications, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Table 4, pg. 191

40.1% of the sample did not think it is important that the male

partner be older than the female partner. However, when asked about the best age for both girl and man to be married, all except 2 respondents (1 male and 1 female) gave an older age (or age range) for the latter.

The best age for a girl to be married lies in the range between 25 - 30 years while the suitable age for a man to marry ranges from mid 20s to 40 years. Yet there are some respondents who believed that men are eligible at any age and factors like career establishment and wealth are more important than age.

Reasons for respondents to support age heterogamy, where the male partner is older, are that "girls mature faster"; and "the man can look after his wife better". This group of sample felt that the age difference can be just 2/3 years or as much as 10 - 15 years.

4.9.4 Level_of_Education_And_Income_of_Spouse

In the aspect of academic qualifications and income, 7 out of 12 women interviewed thought that the male partner should have higher academic qualifications and income levels. This is for security reasons and for the stability of marriage as the husband is expected to be both the breadwinner and the head of the family. Underlying the reasons given by the female respondents who gave a negative answer (eg. "opportunities must be taken into consideration"; "as long as the wife is submissive"), is the same prevailing concept that man being the head of the family and the breadwinner should therefore be more intelligent than his partner.

Majority of the male respondents (66.7%) thought that a man should earn more than his wife. Only 53.3% felt that it is important for the male partner to be academically more qualified. Those against this line of thought see marriage as an equal partnership where the question of main contributor does not exist. Some are of the opinion that because both men and women are competing on equal terms, men do not always have

to outdo their female counterparts.

4.10 Career And Marriage

All the male respondents are of the opinion that a man's career should be established before entering marriage. It stands to reason that to be the breadwinner, a man should be holding a secure job prior to marriage as financial problems will reduce marital satisfaction. 93.3% of the male respondents did not consider marriage before establishing their careers. Much emphasis was given to career advancement. 66.7% of the male respondents mentioned job/career advancement as a goal they plan to accomplish within the next 5 years.

Many of the men interviewed agreed that career is less important to the women as the financial burdens and responsibilities are shouldered more often by the husbands.

50% of the female respondents said that they have considered marriage before establishing a career. Their reasons being that career is less important to a woman as she is not expected to support the family and one can still be a career woman after marriage.

For the other group of women, career was felt to be of great importance not only to the men but also to the women. They believed that in the process of establishing a career, a woman is able to explore and know her talents and abilities better. As a result, she will gain self-confidence, self-esteem and financial independence. These women have reached a higher position on the career ladder, with monthly income of \$1,000 - \$2,000. They said they chose to concentrate on their careers and placed marriage second. However, due to the small sample size, the cause-effect relationship between economic independence and marriage postponement is not clear. Women who have achieved economic independence

may be motivated to pursue higher achievement. In the process, they may delay marriage for fear of obstacles to career advancement (as expressed by some respondents). Both economic and occupational attainments place them on a higher position in the social stratification system and this in turn makes it more difficult to find a compatible spouse.

Perhaps, this is partly why most female respondents said they had not met their Mr. Right. Marriage may also have been less appealing to women with increasing financial independence, self-confidence and self-esteem. Arguably, single women may have concentrated more on their careers as a temporary replacement to marriage until they find their Mr. Right.

Chapter 5 ISSUES_ON_SINGLEHOOD

5.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the reasons for remaining single, the social pressures, stigmas and problems faced by singles and their reactions. It deals with the values of singles of both sexes and different age groups. It also discusses the role of religion in singlehood.

5.1 Reasons_For_Remaining_Single

Table 5.1 summarises the reasons given by male and female respondents for remaining singles.

Table 5.1 : Reasons for remaining single

Reasons	No. of Male Respondents	No. of Female Respondents
1. Enjoy the lifestyle of the singles	2	1
2. Fear the complications & responsibilities that follow after marriage		
3. Happy and satisfied without a life partner		
4. Economically cannot support a family	3	-
5. Very choosy	1	-
Reasons 1 & 2	1	-
Reasons 1, 2 & 3	-	1
Reasons 2 & 4	1	-
Reasons 1, 2, 3 & 4	1	-
Reasons 1, 2 & 5	1	-
6. Past relationships not successful	2	1
7. Have not met the right person or the other person has not responded	2	6
8. Religion	1	-
9. Boyfriend has not proposed	-	1

The most important reason for the men remaining single is either their inability to support a family or they enjoy the lifestyle of singles. 3 male respondents named economic reasons while 2 others offered it in a combination of reasons. These men earn between \$600 - \$2,000 a month. This serves as evidence that some men delay marriage because of economic factors. Certainly, there are other reasons for marriage postponement and many of these reasons are related to attitudes towards marriage and expectations of future spouse. For example, reasons like "enjoy the lifestyle of the singles" and "fear the complications and responsibilities that follow after marriage" show the respondents' belief that marriage will give them additional responsibilities and take away some enjoyments that they have as singles. Admitting to being choosy is confirmation of their high expectations about their future spouse.

Reasons for the female respondents remaining single are unanimous : they "have not met the right man". This has probably to do with their expectations about their future husband and related to their opportunities to interact with members of the opposite sex. Some of these women have very little opportunities to interact with members of the opposite sex both at work and during weekends and holidays. They spent most of the free time at home.

The women with established careers (earning between \$1,000 - \$2,000) indicated that they have many opportunities for interaction with members of the opposite sex at work. A study (on their social mixing) also revealed an active social life and many dating engagements. They are economically independent and hold high expectations about their future spouse. Some indicated their preference to remain single until they meet a man who fits their criteria. Again this is probably the

tendency of women desiring to marry upward.

5.2 Social_Acceptance_of_Singles

Relatively, little social pressure and social stigmatization are placed on singles. Many people are beginning to accept the fact that nowadays men and women marry later and being unmarried is not viewed negatively (Tan et.al. 1986:204).

Only 22.2% of the sample were pressured by their parents to marry. The rest of the sample, with parents still alive, are given total freedom in making decisions and in choosing their individual lifestyles. Women are more likely to be pressured by their parents, compared to men. 33.3% of the female respondents were pressured by their parents compared to 13.3% for the male respondents. Parental pressure is very mild, mainly in forms of subtle suggestions, reminders and nagging. Most parents stop making suggestions when their sons/daughters have gone beyond the 'acceptable' age range for marriage. Some older respondents (late 30s and 40s) who used to be subjected to reminders and match-making attempts, are no longer harrassed by their parents.

When queried about their reactions to constant reminders from family members/colleagues/friends about their age and marital status, one female respondent said she had never been in this situation while many others said they are rarely faced with this problem. Most of them do not bother when faced with such problems.

Table 5.2 : Respondents' Reaction To Constant Reminders From Family Members/Colleagues/Friends About Their Age and Marital Status

Reaction	No. of Male Respondents	No. of Female Respondents
Irritated	2	2
Do not bother about it	8	6
Try to avoid them	-	-
Others - indifferent; take it as a joke; explain the situation to them	5	3
Never in the position	-	1

While most Chinese have a lot of freedom in socialising with members of the opposite sex, with a majority actually chose their own lifepartner (Tan 1986:52; Tan et.al. 1986:100, 116), the idea of match-making is not viewed negatively. At least, half the sample (48.1%) are open-minded about it. They would not mind attending appointments arranged by voluntary match-makers. Those against match-making agreed that they would feel embarrassed and inferior (at being unable to find their own mate). Some would react with resentment to such attempts. However, the majority of this group are not adverse to subtle match-making.

Sex discrimination is evident in the social unacceptance of single women. Out of 27 interviewed, 17 believed that our society accepts bachelors more readily than single women. 5 others thought that sex discrimination was absent in this aspect while 2 male respondents were unaware of the actual condition. Reasons for discrimination against single women, as suggested by the respondents, may be firstly, due to the traditional roles of women and their subordinate position. Daughters

are ultimately expected to leave the parental home and take up their domestic roles as wives and mothers. Women are considered the weaker sex who need to be married to be protected. On the other hand, men are independent and can choose to remain single if they so desire. Secondly, the "accepted" tradition of men being the 'hunters' and women being the 'prey' could be a cause. As the mate-selection privilege is invested in the men, women who remain single after a certain age are considered as unwanted. Perhaps, this explains why the label, "left on the shelf" is used to refer to single women.

An older man is also believed to have better chances of finding a lifepartner compared to a woman of similiar age. The reasons are as above and also due to the fact that men generally do marry at an older age. Most of the respondents thought that an older man is permitted to marry a younger wife but the reverse is quite unacceptable.

5.3 Problems Faced By Singles

When asked about the life problems commonly faced by singles, most respondents named loneliness and lack of companionship. Despite having a lot of friends, they do not have an intimate friend to share the secrets of their hearts. To cope with loneliness, some take positive steps to fill the emptiness by participating in lots of activities and having friends of both sexes to share at different levels. Others try to suppress the feeling of loneliness by forgetting about it or sleeping it off! There is yet another group who realises that one will not always be surrounded by friends and as such, endeavours to do things alone by developing hobbies like reading and fishing.

Another problem faced of singles is the lack of a sense of belonging, moral support and love which lead to insecurity. To solve

this problem some respondents proposed religion. They felt that God can be a source of security.

Some female respondents said that without a man in their lives meant having to cope with some tough jobs like learning to change car tyre. The male respondents, on the other hand, admitted that bachelors living on their own have no one to take of their domestic needs unless they can afford a maid.

Besides the common problem of loneliness, older singles (late 30s and older) also have other problems which are not shared by younger singles. Some respondents acknowledged that being single has some disadvantages. At work, employers assumed that singles are able to stay on after office hours to complete more work as singles do not have family responsibilities. In the community, their marital status sometimes causes their views and opinions to be placed second to that of the married ones who are considered as more mature, regardless of age. The feeling of lack of companionship is more intense for aging singles. They admitted to feeling that something is missing in their lives when compared to their married brothers, sisters and friends. Some felt that aging singles are not only stigmatized but also discriminated against. This is especially true for those without good socio-economic status (eg. those with low income). The older singles also faced the problem of fitting into society as they seem to be the 'odd' ones - being neither youths nor parents.

5.4 Permanent Singlehood

Only 2 respondents indicated no desire for a boy/girlfriend and no intention of getting married. Both of them have chosen singlehood as a lifestyle. They implied that they had had opportunities to get married (either had a lot of relationships with members of the opposite sex or

received marriage proposals). These 2 cases showed that permanent singlehood may not be involuntary.

The findings of this research are not sufficient to identify the reasons for permanent singlehood, but religion appears to be an important factor. The 2 respondents rejecting marriage have one characteristic in common, that is, religious. One is a staunch Buddhist while the other is a fulltime church worker.

The Buddhist said that he has remained single because of his faith as according to his religion, marriage and sexual-relationships are 'attachments' to this world. To achieve 'enlightenment' one has to free oneself from all such 'attachments'¹!

Christianity though not forbidding marriage, does encourage some devoted missionaries to remain single². The Parish worker interviewed has no intention of getting married because she does not want to be distracted from her work. Moreover, she enjoys the lifestyle of the singles.

Footnotes

1. The first perfection to achieve enlightenment (The Wisdom-being) is the "perfection of renunciation".

"..... renunciation of the household may be accompanied as it so obviously was in the case of Gotama, by renunciation of attachments" - Khantipalo 1965:115.

2. I Corinthians 7:8-9 says,

"Now to the unmarried and the widows I say : It is good for them to stay unmarried as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry for it is better to marry than to burn with passion". (The Holy Bible 1982:1161)

Chapter 6 : CONCLUSION

The findings of this research show 3 main factors that encourage/cause the target group to delay marriage :

- i. Attitudes towards marriage, its functions and mate-selection
- ii. Career drive
- iii. Social mixing

i. Attitudes Towards Marriage, Its Functions And Mate-selection

Marriage is now perceived as a union strictly between 2 individuals. Because it is an individual matter, individuals have strong beliefs that one has the right to choose his/her own lifestyle, timing of marriage and lifepartner. 26% of the sample do not consider marriage as a phase of life that every normal person must go through. Some are even opting for permanent singlehood.

The functions of marriage have also changed. The main function of traditional Chinese marriage which was for the perpetuation of a lineage is no longer considered as important. The concept of marriage is centered around the couple and its main function is to provide companionship to each other. Procreation is still important and a majority felt that children make a family more complete though this should not be the main reason to get married.

Marriage is also not primarily for security. To most men, it only serves to provide emotional security by creating a sense of belonging, moral support, being loved and ability to love. Some expect it to create more insecurities instead because of the heavy responsibilities of being the breadwinner and head of the family.

Marriage could have been a safe career for women in the past but today many women have lost their confidence in marriage. Many of them

feel that marriage does not guarantee security as it may not last. Those working feel that marriage should not become their source of financial security as they are financially independent.

Apart from providing a life companion and having children, it would seem that marriage really has very little to offer to induce one to marry early.

Interviews with the men revealed that they seriously recognise the involvement of much commitment and responsibilities in marriage. They also acknowledge and accept their future role as the breadwinner and the head of the family.

Pleck and Sawyer (1974:30) argue that,

"the masculine role leads us (men) to expect to find a woman to relate to, and to experience certain satisfactions from the relationships. As a man, we should provide strength in the relationship and take ultimate responsibility for it. At the same time we should maintain our independence and other activities we may question whether we are providing the expected strength in the relationship, and still maintaining our independence in the rest of our lives".

Probably, this ambivalent thought has caused some men to remain single as reasons like "enjoy the lifestyle of the singles"; "happy and satisfied without a lifepartner"; and "fear of complications and responsibilities that follow after a marriage" were the most common reasons given by male respondents, besides economic reasons. They were often given as a combination of reasons. (See Table 5.1).

Marriage is comprehended as a lifepartnership or union between a man and a woman who are prepared to live together and adapt to one another. This implies that personal criteria in mate-selection are very important. The group studied indicated having total freedom to select a mate and a majority are prepared to go against their parents' objection

and marry someone of their own choice. Mate-selection in a relatively wide and 'open-market' is definitely more complicated and competitive. It takes a longer time to reach mutual agreement and acceptance since everyone has his/her own criteria. Those who have remained single because they have not the right person are evidence of this.

Factors such as education, occupational attainments, urbanisation and modernisation could have influenced the above mentioned attitudes. However, this study has not investigated them in depth. It only serves to examine the attitudes in relation to marriage postponement.

ii. Career Drive

According to Henry and Piotrow (1979:112),

"the age at marriage for men is affected by social or economic definitions of maturity - when men are thought capable of supporting a wife and children".

93.3% of the men interviewed did/would not consider marriage before establishing their career. Those who indicated readiness for marriage are established in their careers (according to their own definitions).

Career-minded women too tend to delay marriage for the purpose of proving themselves by accomplishing their goals. As some respondents put it, "it is important to explore ourselves, to know our strength and abilities before making such important decisions (such as marriage). It is also a process of acquiring self-independence, self-confidence and self-esteem.

Career advancement and increasing economic independence can further delay marriage as it is difficult for women on higher occupational level to find a compatible spouse. Women who are career minded naturally have higher expectations of their future spouse. The findings of this

research showed the reluctance of women in this category to compromise on their high expectations of their future spouse socio-economic status. As emphatically expressed by some of them, they would rather remain single than to be married to the wrong man and live a miserable life.

iii. Social Mixing

The Chinese in general appears to have more freedom than other ethnic groups in Malaysia to mix with members of the opposite sex (Tan 1986:52). However, this does not imply that all of them engage in frequent interactions with members of the opposite sex. Some of the men and women interviewed indicated that they have very little opportunities for such interactions both at work and in their social lives (as they spent most of their weekends and holidays at home). Obviously, this group of singles have very little chance to meet their prospective spouse in this mate-selection system which is based so much on 'chance'. Majority of the sample do have a lot of social activities and opportunities to interact with members of the opposite sex. Having a lot of friends, especially, unmarried ones, and a carefree lifestyle is satisfying to many singles. Many people interviewed, particularly men, confirmed their enjoyment of the singles' lifestyle and are happy being singles. Certainly, this can cause unwillingness to be married.

This research has also revealed some sex differences in attitudes towards marriage and other related issues. Sex differences are found in the following aspects :

1. Is marriage a stage of life that every normal person must go through?

Women are found to be more likely to deviate from the norm of marriage in their thinking. 13.3% of the female respondents gave a

negative answer to the above question compared to 20% for the male respondents.

2. Functions of Marriage

As explained and to be expected, marriage is more important to women than to men as a source of security, particularly financial security. This is the impact of the stereotype sex roles in a marriage relationship (Forisha 1978:202-223).

For the other functions, there are no clear sex differences.

3. Trial Marriage

Women are more likely to be against trial marriages.

4. Polygyny

While both sexes are not in favour of it, women are more likely to be against it.

5. Career establishment prior to marriage

While all the men are definite that they should establish their career before getting married, only 50% of the women thought likewise. Again, this is the effect of the expected role of men as the main breadwinners.

6. Mate-selection

In selecting a mate, most men look for a helper who is understanding and supportive, and attractive. On the other hand, most women are looking for a provider to meet their physical and psychological needs, and a leader who is reliable and dependable.

Compared to men, women tend to emphasize romantic sentiments. This is seen in their conception of marriage and their personal criteria in

choosing a lifepartner. While none of men mentioned love, some women said their mate-selection would depend on love (eg. "the man must have likability when I first see him"; "Someone who makes me behave strangely").

Besides the above sex differences, there is also sex discrimination against the single women. The group studied believed that our society accepts bachelors more readily than single women. Older men are also believed to have better chances of finding a lifepartner compared to women of the same age.

Findings of this research seem to support the following hypothesis :-

1. Women tend to delay marriage as their economic independence increases.

Women with great economic independence place much emphasis on career development and admitted that they chose to concentrate on career before considering marriage.

However, due to the small sample size, the pattern of the correlation cannot be determined. In other words, the extent to which economic independence influences the female age of marriage cannot be determined in precise terms. The causal relationship between the two is also not clear.

2. Some men delay their marriages because of economic reasons.

The importance of career establishment prior to marriage and reasons for remaining single are evidence of this. There are also other reasons for marriage postponement among the men. Some delay marriage to maintain their carefree lifestyle. Marriage postponement can also be due to high expectations of their future spouse.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Title : ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE AMONG URBAN CHINESE SINGLES

Section I : PERSONAL BACKGROUND

1. Sex : Male Female

--	--

2. Age : _____

3. Religion :

Islam	Christianity	Buddhism	Chinese Religion eg Taoism, Confucious	No Religion	Others [please state]

4. Spoken language/dialect : i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

5. Written language : i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

6. Education :

Medium of instruction	B.M'sia	English	Mandarin	Others [please state]
Primary school				
Secondary school				
Diploma				
University				

7. Highest academic achievement :

- Primary
 L.C.E./S.R.P.
 M.C.E./S.P.M.
 H.S.C./S.T.P.M.
 Diploma (specify) _____

- Bachelor's degree
 Master's degree
 Doctoral degree
 Others _____

8. After completing your studies, what are the jobs that you have worked

No.	Type of job	No. of working years
	1. Own or self-employed	
	2. Employees	
	3. Not in white collar level	
	4. Others	
	5. Students	
	6. Others	

9. What is your present job ?

10. What is your present monthly income?

- Below \$400
 \$400 - \$599
 \$600 - \$799
 \$800 - \$999
 \$1,000 - \$2,000
 Above \$2,000

11. What is your rough estimate of expenses ?

Section II : FAMILY BACKGROUND

1. Parent

Age

Highest level of education

Medium of instruction

Occupation (if retired, the last job)

Father	Mother

2. How many brothers and sisters do you have ?

Brother _____ Sister _____

3. You are the ___ child of the family .

4. How many of your elder brothers and sisters are married ?

Brother _____ Sister _____

5. How many of your younger brothers and sisters are married ?

Brother _____ Sister _____

6. What are your parents' attitude toward marriage, particularly in your case ?

N
Section III : ENVIRONMENT

a) 1. Place of residence

- Flat
 Low cost housing estate
 Middle class residential area
 High class residential area
 Others (please state) _____

2. With whom are you living ?

- Your family
 Relatives
 Friends who are not married
 Others (please state) _____

b) Place of work

1. Which group is the majority in your office ?

- i. Married people
ii. Single women
iii. Bachelor men
iv. ii & iii

If ii. , iii. or iv. , are most of them Chinese ?

Yes No

2. At work, do you have opportunities to interact with people of the opposite sex ?

Yes No



How often ? Always Sometimes Seldom

Section IV : SOCIAL MIXING

1. Where do you usually spend your weekends and holidays ?

- At home
 Friend (s)' house
 Sports centre
 Social clubs, youth organisation
 Holiday resorts (go for trips)
 Shopping complexes
 Others (please state) _____

2. How often do you go to movies ?

- Once or more a week
 1 - 3 times a month
 Seldom
 Never

3. If you do, who go with you ?

- Go alone
 Family members
 A specific man/woman
 A group of boys
 A group of girls
 A mixed group of friends
 Others (specify) _____

4. If you have joined any voluntary groups/ social associations,
please state them down .

Name of association/club Your participation in its' activities

	Once or more a week	Once a month	Occasionally
i.			
ii.			
iii.			
iv.			

5. Have you ever had any serious relationship with a member of the opposite sex ?

Yes No



No.	Your age	Duration

6. Do you go on group dates ?

Yes

No



How often ? _____

7. When was the last time you went on a single date ?

Section V : MARRIAGE AND CHOICE OF A MATE

1. What is a marriage to you ?

2. In your opinion, what are the functions of marriage ?

Companionship : _____

Security (Emotional, financial, in old age) : _____

To have children : _____

Continuation of lineage : _____

Others : _____

3. Do you think marriage is a stage of life that every normal person must go through ?

Yes No

4. What do you think of trial marriage ?

5. What is your attitude towards polygamy ?

6. Mixed marriage is quite acceptable in various multi-racial countries, what is your opinion concerning it ?

7. Are you willing to marry someone of a different ethnic group/race ?

Yes No

8. Are you willing to marry someone of another religion who has all other characteristics that you are looking for ?

Yes No

9. If you get married, do you prefer to :

- Live alone with spouse
- Live with parents
- Live with spouse's parents
- Others _____

10. After marriage, do you want yourself/wife to continue working ?

Yes No

11. What is the best age for a girl to get married ?

12. What is the best age for a man to get married ?

13. Do you think it is important for the male partner to be older than the female partner ?

Yes No Why ? _____

How many years of difference ? _____

14. How about academic qualifications and income ? - must a male partner also be on a higher level ?

Yes No Why ? _____

15. What are the qualities most girls would look for in choosing a life partner ?

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____

16. What are the qualities most men would look for ?

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____

17. What about your own criteria ?

18. Do you have total freedom to select a mate ?

Yes No

If No, who will intervenes ? _____

19. Will you marry someone of your own choice without your parents' approval ?

Yes No Why ? _____

20. Did/will you consider marriage before establishing your career

Yes No Why? _____

Section VI : ISSUES ON SINGLEHOOD

1. Why have you remained single (not married) ?

- Enjoy the life style of the singles
 Fear the complications & responsibilities that follow after a marriage
 Happy & satisfied without a life partner
 Economically you/your boyfriend cannot support a family
 Very choosy
 Others _____

2. At the moment, do you have a boy/girlfriend ?

Yes No

↓
Casual Steady Do you wish to have one ? Yes No

3. Do you want/intend to get married one day ?

Yes No



At what age ? _____ Why ? _____

4. Are you trying to find fellowship of the opposite sex through :

- Friends/family members
 Youth organisations/social clubs
 Advertisement in newspaper
 Match-making agencies
 Tours/trips (in Group)
 Others _____

5. In years to come will you consider the above means ?

Yes No

6. Do your parents pressure you to find a life partner ?

Yes No



In what ways ? _____

7. What is your reaction to constant reminders about your age and marital status from family members/colleagues/friends ?

- Angry
Don't bother about it
Try to avoid them
Others _____

8. What is/will be your reaction when they try to match-make you

9. Do you think our society accept bachelor men more than single women ?

Yes No Don't know

10. In your opinion, does an older man (eg. 35+) have a better chance to find a life partner compared to a woman of the same age ?

Yes No

Why ? _____

11. Are you satisfied with what you have now ? (please elaborate)

12. What are the common life problems faced by singles ?

13. How do you cope with them ?

14. What are the things that you wish/plan to accomplish in the next 5 years ?
