

China's Social Credit Systems: An Analysis of the Mate Selection Process of Chinese Women

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Selbstständigkeitserklärung

Ich erkläre, dass es sich bei der von mir eingereichten schriftlichen Arbeit mit dem Titel 'China's Social Credit Systems: An Analysis of the Mate Selection Process of Chinese Women' um eine von mir selbst und ohne unerlaubte Beihilfe verfasste Originalarbeit handelt.

Abstract

The latest events of establishing Social Credit Systems (SCSs) in China have received much attention, not only locally, but also on the international level. A lot has been written about the SCSs, putting the focus on the construction of big data platforms, surveillance control mechanisms and the reputational system etc. However, its social impact and its functions in the dating market in today's China is an understudied topic. Its operation of selecting people by means of 'value' predicts major changes in the realm of the social fabric, such as the mate selection process of Chinese women. Today, women are still torn between traditional family patterns and their own choice concerning mate selection. From now on, women might have to take a third component into account, namely the integrity of their future life partner in terms of the SCSs. Using qualitative data of surveys and interviews, this dissertation investigates the influences of the SCS pilots in regard to the mate selection process of urban Chinese women to find out to what extent the SCSs have an impact on the partner selection in China.

Keywords: *mate selection, Chinese women, family patterns, marriage patterns, Social Credit Systems, China*

Abstract of the Results

Using quantitative and qualitative approaches in terms of survey and interview settings, this thesis answers the questions about the circumstances how Chinese women choose their partner and how the China's Social Credit Systems (SCSs) are shaping the choices of urban Chinese women in the mate-selection process. Two main research questions are discussed in this thesis.

The first research question (RQ1) discusses the factors which affect the partner selection of Chinese women. The findings show that in contemporary China, the urban women participating in this study choose their partner mainly without external interference. However, many cases exemplify that depending on factors such as tradition, family status, and as of recently the SCSs, some individuals are in a discrepancy with their own individualistic ideas and external influences. Family bonding remains strong within Chinese families, while longing for self-fulfilment such as job achievements rises, leading towards a variety of different approaches of selecting a partner. However, the majority of respondents are in favour of getting married and having their own family. Not only traditional norms and wishes of family members exert certain influences on Chinese women to find their own way of choosing a suitable partner, but also 'newer' approaches such as the 'likes-attract', 'potentials-attract' theories or digital usage such as online dating, are often considered nowadays.

The second research question (RQ2) of this thesis deals with China's Social Credit Systems and how they influence the choices of urban Chinese women in the mate selection process. Results show that less than half of the survey and interview respondents from this study have neither been in contact with a SCS yet, nor care about the regulatory systems. The majority of the participants of this study have heard about the SCSs, while in particular the interview respondents showed a high awareness of SCSs and more understanding about its implications. Furthermore, the findings show in general that SCSs more or less shape the mindset of those Chinese women who took part in the study. The target groups state that they perceive a median value of influence emanating from the systems, which provoke a reconsideration on certain decisions. However, since the majority of the Chinese women previously explained that they have not been confronted with a local SCS personally, it suggests that the implication of the SCSs on the partner selection of Chinese women has to be neglected for this aspect, at present time. Interestingly, the women predict increased effects and strong implications from an all-encompassing SCS on the partner selection in the future, assuming that the SCS is more widely spread throughout society, and that the incentives and punishment systems are cumulatively used. The findings of this thesis broaden the range of existing literature on the SCSs, family and marriage in China by confirming that the concept of community norms continues to persist even in the digital age as women still base their decisions on family expectations, even when a SCS is in state.

These results are important because they help scholars understand the impact of the SCSs on marriage and family building.

Kurzfassung der Ergebnisse

Diese Arbeit untersucht, mit Hilfe von schriftlichen Umfragen und Interviews, die Umstände städtischer, chinesischer Frauen in Bezug auf die Partnerwahl sowie die Auswirkungen der chinesischen sozialen Kreditsysteme auf ihre Entscheidung hinsichtlich des Partnerwahlprozesses.

Die erste Forschungsfrage (RQ1) untersucht die Faktoren, die die Partnerwahl der chinesischen Frauen beeinflussen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass gegenwärtig die an dieser Studie teilnehmenden, städtischen Frauen ihre Partnerwahl weitestgehend ohne äußere Einmischung treffen. Mehrere Fälle lassen jedoch den Schluss zu, dass diese freie Wahl auch abhängig von dem äußeren Umfeld und Faktoren wie Tradition, Familienstand und neuerdings auch den sozialen Kreditsystemen liegt, die oft in Diskrepanz zu den eigenen individualistischen Vorstellungen stehen. Die feste familiäre Bindung innerhalb der chinesischen Familien bleibt zwar erhalten, jedoch nehmen zeitgleich die Rufe nach Selbstverwirklichung, wie z.B. berufliche Erfolge, zu, was zu verschiedensten Überlegungen der Frauen bei der Partnerwahl führt. Die Mehrheit der Befragten befürwortet jedoch die Heirat und die eigene Familiengründung. Unter Berücksichtigung traditioneller Normen und Wünsche ihrer Familienmitglieder, versuchen die Frauen, ihren eigenen Weg zu finden, indem sie die verschiedensten Herangehensweisen wie die „Likes-Attract“-, „Potentials-Attract“-Theorien sowie digitale Dienstleistungen, wie Online-Dating, bei der Partnerwahl mit einbeziehen.

Weiterhin zeigen Ergebnisse auf die Frage (RQ2) wie Chinas soziale Kreditsysteme den Entscheidungsprozess der Partnerwahl chinesischer, städtischer Frauen beeinflussen, dass weniger als die Hälfte der Umfrage- und Interviewteilnehmerinnen dieser Studie weder persönlich mit einem sozialen Kreditsystem in Verbindung gekommen sind, es noch als wichtig erachtet wird. Die Mehrheit der Studienteilnehmerinnen hatte von den sozialen Kreditsystemen gehört; jedoch waren insbesondere interviewte Studienteilnehmerinnen besser informiert und wiesen einen weitreichenden Kenntnisstand über die Auswirkungen auf. Darüber hinaus zeigte sich, dass die Kreditsysteme die Denkweise der chinesischen Frauen, die an der Studie teilgenommen haben, durchaus mehr oder weniger prägen. Die Angaben der Mehrheit der Teilnehmerinnen noch nie persönlich mit solch einem sozialen Kreditsystem in Berührung gekommen zu sein, spricht dafür, dass die Bedeutung der sozialen Kreditsysteme vorrangig eher wenige bis keine Auswirkungen auf die Partnerwahl chinesischer Frauen haben. Interessanterweise prognostizieren die Frauen, dass mit einer Weiterverbreitung der Systeme bzw. der Einrichtung eines einheitlichen, allumfassenden sozialen Kreditsystems in der Gesellschaft auch der Stellenwert und der Einflussbereich des Systems steigt. Mit

zunehmender Anwendung, vor allem auch der Anreiz- und Bestrafungssysteme, erwarten die Frauen einen erhöhten bis starken Anstieg der Auswirkungen und Implikationen in der Gesellschaft, mit Hinblick auf die Partnerwahl.

Die Ergebnisse dieser Arbeit erweitern die Bandbreite der bestehenden Literatur zu den sozialen Kreditsystemen, sowie der Familie und Heirat in China, indem sie bestätigen, dass das Konzept der Gemeinschaftsnormen auch im digitalen Zeitalter fortbesteht. Die Entscheidungen der städtischen, chinesischen Frauen sind teilweise immer noch auf familiären Erwartungen gegründet, selbst im Zeitalter der sozialen Kreditsysteme. Diese Ergebnisse dieser Arbeit sind wichtig, um das Verständnis über die Auswirkungen der sozialen Kreditsystem auf die Ehe und den Familienaufbau zu erweitern, gezielter Forschung zu betreiben und den Wandel in der Gesellschaft zu verstehen.

Contents

- Abstract** i
- Abstract of the Results** ii
- Kurzfassung der Ergebnisse** iii
- Contents** v
- List of Abbreviations** vii
- List of Figures** viii
- List of Tables** ix
- 1 Introduction** 1
 - 1.1 Motivation 1
 - 1.2 Research Questions and Objectives 5
 - 1.3 Research Design and Methodology 8
 - 1.3.1 Mixed Methods 8
 - 1.3.2. Data Source - Surveys 9
 - 1.3.3 Data Source – In Depth Interviews 10
 - 1.3.4 Data Collection: Problems and Solutions 12
 - 1.4 Structure 17
- 2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework** 17
 - 2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems 20
 - 2.1.1 The Meaning of ‘Credit’ and Overview of the SCSs 20
 - 2.1.2 The Commercial SCS Drivers 22
 - 2.1.3 Data Collection & Rating of the Data Points 24
 - 2.1.4 Reward & Punishment System 27
 - 2.1.5 Lack of Awareness and Function of the SCSs 29
 - 2.1.6 Social Credit System and Online Dating in China 31
 - 2.2 Chinese Marriage System 33
 - 2.2.1 The Hukou System & Marriage Migration 34

2.2.2 New Dynamics of the Family System	35
2.2.3 In-Balance in Sex Ratio – The Consequence of the One-Child Policy	37
2.2.5 Family Symbiosis & Mating Preferences	38
3 Family and Marriage Patterns in Contemporary China	41
3.1 The Question of Marriage and Family Building	41
3.2 Family Bonding in China	46
3.3 The Dimension of External Factors concerning Partner Selection	52
3.4 Key Similarities and Differences in a Time-Lapse of Three Years.....	58
4 Implications of China’s Social Credit System on the Partner Selection of Chinese Women	60
4.1 Awareness of the Social Credit Systems.....	61
4.2 The Intensity of Influence of the SCSs with regards to Partner Selection.....	63
4.3 Potential Implications of the SCSs in the Future	66
4.4 Three Individual Case Studies.....	72
4.4.1 Case Study Number One: Teacher from Beijing	72
4.4.2 Case Study Number Two: Teacher from Sichuan	73
4.4.3 Case Study Number Three: Lawyer from Guizhou	75
4.5 The Linkage between the Case Studies and the Interview Results	78
5 Discrepancies and Compliance within the Target Groups.....	80
6 Conclusion	85
6.1 Findings.....	85
6.2 Limitations	92
6.3 Outlook.....	94
7 Acknowledgments	98
8 References.....	98
9 Appendix	106
9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis	106
9.2 Questionnaire - soSci Survey (2020).....	119
9.3 Sample: In-Depth Interviews – Social Credit Systems (2020).....	129

List of Abbreviations

- ADs** Chinese provincial administrative divisions
- AI** Artificial intelligence
- BTBP** Blacklist of Trust-breaking Platform
- CCP** Chinese Communist Party
- cit** citation
- CRC** Credit Reference Center
- e.g.** for example
- etc.** Et cetera
- ID** identity/identification
- IOC** International Olympic Committee
- LBT** lesbian, bisexual, transgender
- N** Sample size
- NCISP** National Credit Information Sharing Platform
- No.** Number
- NRDRC** National Development and Reform Commission
- p.** page
- PBC** The People's Bank of China
- PBoC** People's Bank of China
- ppl** people
- RQ** research question
- SCS** Social Credit System

List of Figures

Figure 1 Steps and Pathways of the Social Credit Data Flow. 25

Figure 2: Total Number of Blacklists/Redlists and Distribution of the Interview and Survey Participants (2020) across 30 Administrative Divisions. 29

Figure 3 Circumstances of Finding a Husband/Partner..... 46

Figure 4 Frequency of Consulting Parents/Family Members in the Decision-Making Process of Chinese Women. 49

Figure 5 Frequency of Consulting Parents/Family Members in the Decision-Making Process of Chinese Women regarding their Relationship. 50

Figure 6 Frequency of Involvement of Parents/Family Members in the Partner Choice of Chinese Women. 51

Figure 7 Intensity of Influence of Parents/Family Members on the Partner Choice of Chinese Women. 53

Figure 8 Perception of Chinese Women concerning External Influence on the matter of the Partner Selection of Chinese Women. 56

Figure 9 Intensity of Involvement of the Parents/Families regarding the Partner Choice of Chinese Women in the match-making process. 57

Figure 10 Intensity of Present Influence of the SCSs on the Partner Selection of Chinese Women. ... 65

Figure 11 Prospective Intensity of Influence of the SCSs on the Partner Selection of Chinese Women in the Future. 68

Figure 12 Importance of a Low Social Credit Score regarding Partner Separation..... 70

Figure 13 Disunion based on Social Credit Scores (2020 survey)..... 71

Figure 14 Disunion based on Social Credit Scores (2020 interview)..... 71

List of Tables

- Table 1** Current Status of Living 47
- Table 2** Perception of individual’s closest communities and their behaviour towards the SCSs. 66
- Table 3** Comparison between the 2020 Survey and the 2020 Interviews- SCSs..... 84
- Table 4** Analysis of the 2017 Survey - Family and Marriage 106
- Table 5** Analysis of the 2020 Survey - Family and Marriage 110
- Table 6** Analysis of the 2020 Survey – SCSs 114
- Table 7** Analysis of the 2020 Interviews – SCSs 116
- Table 8** Analysis of the Interviews & Surveys 2020 - 'Students' V.s. 'Others' 118

1 Introduction

The latest events of establishing Social Credit Systems (SCSs) in China have received much attention, not only locally, but also on the international level. A lot has been written about the SCSs, putting the focus on the construction of big data platforms, surveillance control mechanisms and the reputational system etc. However, its social impact and its function in the dating market in today's China is an understudied topic. With the formation of a credit system, under the rule of an authoritarian single-party regime, several non-Chinese media platforms predict mass surveillance with limitations on personal freedom (Shen, 2019), and shifts of behaviour and thoughts. Thus, particularly the incentive and punishment systems of the SCS pilots have the ability to provoke changes in social behaviour and decision-making of Chinese women in the marital system. Since the partner selection is the basis for the formation of society, the motivation of this thesis is to fill the gap in the literature on marriage choices of Chinese women by providing insights into the impact of the SCSs on family building in China.

1.1 Motivation

There are three aspects motivating this thesis: Firstly, throughout the history of the People's Republic of China, the government developed different mechanisms and innovative technologies to retain their power. Those mechanisms and the shifts they entailed fostered an increased usage of artificial intelligence (AI) that ground the basis of today's governance in China, with different types of SCSs emerging as key players. Extended investigations on the SCS pilots and their influence on the Chinese society provide a better understanding of the political governance, social impacts and the continuous development in the Chinese society, grounding the first motivation. The second motivation is to improve the knowledge of the current family and marriage system in China, in order to shed light on the context of how Chinese women consider a partner, and which factors lead to their final decision-making. The third motivation is the observation of upcoming trends and the potential impact of the SCSs in China. The aim is to identify and determine the different patterns that go along with the partner selection such as online dating and late marriage, and may potentially be regulated through the government surveillance systems of the SCSs. Since the linkage between those three key aspects has not thoroughly been investigated in the literature, the overall motivation is to provide knowledge and insights to this topic, in order to better understand and contextualize the overall development of the Chinese society and beyond.

The motivational basis of this thesis is further specified in the following paragraphs: China is one of the oldest civilizations and is known for its 1949 revolution and post-Mao reforms, followed by rearrangements of marriage, family, the life-system and governmental control (Yang, Neal, 2006: 113).

1.1 Motivation

Each single one of those aspects have been sufficiently discussed by researchers all over the world. However, the connection between marriage patterns and partner selection interlinked to the Chinese controlling apparatus and its significance in the dating market via online dating, represent major lack in knowledge. Particularly, the role of Chinese women in terms of dating as well as the internal and external factors affecting their marriage choices are underestimated, and not considered when investigating the SCSs. Kostka and Antoine (2020) showed that commonly, citizens are fairly receptive to commercial and governmental SCSs, given rise to the argumentation that its operation of selecting people by means of 'value' results in major changes on the social fabric, such as the mate selection process of Chinese women.

The true implications of the SCSs are thus far unknown and the biggest concern regarding the SCSs relate to their development in the future. However, in order to address these uncertainties, primarily, one has to unwrap and understand the SCSs in their nature and division. As of today, the Chinese SCS is not a centralized, nationwide, homogenous system, but rather a heterogeneous assemblage of fragmented and decentralized systems embodying local pilots (Adelmant, 2021). Government-run SCSs and commercial-run SCSs are carried out in China as pilot-projects, following different concepts and initiatives. In general, these SCS pilots are used as control mechanisms for commercial creditworthiness in the economic sector and propaganda systems for educative purposes in the government sector, with their regulation through rewards and punishments (Krause and Fisher, 2020). Both, the government-run SCSs and commercial-run SCSs are contemplated in this thesis.

Throughout the history of the People's Republic of China, other regulatory systems have already led the path to today's governmental controlling tools, and therefore considered in the next paragraph. In the past, one commonly known controlling system was the Chinese Communist Propaganda System. After 1949, its main purpose was a reconfiguration of the Chinese society, and it was used by Mao Zedong and his party to strengthen their power and control the thoughts of the population (Shambaugh, 2007: p. 26), partially similar to today's SCS objectives. This bureaucratic system has declined over time, and thereby is also a key mechanism of authority, legitimacy and power. Nonetheless, censorship and control remain major tools for the party to reach the public (Shambaugh, 2007: p. 55-58). Hence, in order to keep society effectively under its rule, the government uses far-reaching mechanisms and innovative technologies to reconstruct its economic growth and to build up a 'wealthy society', with the help of the SCSs. Forces like commerce, technology, globalization and modernization stimulate the range and spread of information, while facilitating an autonomous mindset of the general population, mainly urban citizens (Shambaugh, 2007: p. 55-58). By using digitalization and informatization, the Chinese government is aiming to expand, integrate and analyse existing data sources, in particular to 'use big data to modernise national governance', until 2025 (Drinhausen, 2021). During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the systems have already proven

1.1 Motivation

advantageous in the prevention of the spread of the virus, while criticisms and concerns increasingly sharpen among policymakers and academics (Knight and Creemers, 2021).

The first motivation is to provide new information to the social impacts of Chinese governance, particularly the SCS pilots with regard to the partner selection of young Chinese women, in order to identify upcoming social trends and hints to the development of the Chinese society. On March 16th 2016, as part of the 13th Five-Year Plan, the Chinese government defined goals and guidelines for China's development of a SCS from 2016 until 2020 (MERICS, 2016). 'With the aim of increasing integrity in all areas of society, we will work faster to develop credibility systems related to key areas such as government administrative integrity, commercial and business integrity, social integrity, and judicial credibility, promote credit information sharing, and improve incentive and penalty mechanisms' (cit. Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2016). This declaration predicts the establishment of a rating system influencing the key areas of everyone's personal life. Nationwide, local SCSs evaluate the Chinese population and provide credit ranked scores in regard to their behaviour and way of life (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2016). The exact procedural method has not been formulated in detail yet (Herrmann, 2017). Up to the year 2020, the basis of the SCS was implemented and the guidelines of the next 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) were set up in form of several reports and planning documents (Drinhausen, 2021). However, it is interesting to mention that also the 'social integrity' is scored (Herrmann, 2017).

This regulation is at odds with the twentieth-century susceptibility of new approaches through morals of individualism, personal freedom and rational choices. Future-orientated values, linked to the constant development of westernized countries, reached China. Those western norms opposed the Chinese traditional Confucian ideologies and questioned the values of relationships and social obligation (Yang and Neal, 2006: p. 114). The SCSs limit this very freedom of thought and choice, imposing an attribution to old norms and controlled stability. Scholars criticise the SCSs primarily for their interference in privacy matters, its extreme way of social surveillance, its use of big data technologies and its handling of economic affairs. Thereby, the social components and the effect on society, especially in regard to family and marriage choices of the younger generation and social affiliation, are highly overseen. For example, those credit rankings used for match-makings such as online dating, have the potential to result in new formations of society. If numbers make demands on the daily life, how will it affect the interaction with family and friends, how will the family behave in case of a low score within their community and how will women select their partners? These questions are part of the motivations grounding this thesis.

Even though the family system has shifted over the years, it still holds a high local value within the Chinese society. Hence, it is important in relation to the marriage system and cannot be ignored, grounding the second motivation of this thesis. Looking at traditional Confucian ideals of a strict

1.1 Motivation

hierarchy, strict order and cohesive force, stability has always played a big part in the Chinese state. Among Chinese ethnic families, stability was guaranteed through the obedience of women to patriarchal authority, social class endogamy and being the ownership of the groom (从一而终) (Yang and Neal, 2006: p. 114). The Marriage Law of 1950 resulted in significant changes in the family policy, for instance the initiation of gender equality and freedom of choice in marriage and divorce. The new slogan 'women hold half the sky' promoted a new egalitarian family unit and weakened the traditional Confucian family patterns. Between 1949 and the 1970s, Chinese women received a limited amount of more political and economic rights. The 1978 economic reforms and the coherent rapid economic growth in China were pioneer of the global economic interdependency and development. Endogenous and exogenous changes, like the progressive globalization and the opening up of national boundaries, stimulated and modified the freedom of thought and behaviour of Chinese women in various aspects. Opening up to the world meant increasing interaction with people from other countries, the involvement of their different ideas and diversity of individual choices, such as changes of decision-making in the marital system. Social changes and economic reforms led to the establishment of the next Marriage Law in 1980. From this time on family stability was based on individual happiness and choice (Yang and Neal, 2006).

Chances are high that with the establishment of all-encompassing SCS, this choice will be compromised. The base of individual happiness is not being supported but the choice of the best score. Furthermore, dating apps are increasingly used, promising far-reaching opportunities to fulfil one's happiness. Hence, the third motivation is to find out how far the SCS pilots shape the social mindset, by contextualizing the ongoing trends in partner selection of Chinese women and their perception of the SCSs. Not only men, without a high score, have to face consequences but also the whole family, most likely implicating a reconsideration of choosing a life partner. Today, members of the older generation in Chinese families, in particular, still value and practise a patriarchal system. They interfere with the decision-making process of their female members. Even though Chinese women developed the strength to assert themselves against their family members, are they able to countervail against the subliminal regulations of the government? This thesis discusses and evaluates these aspects to fill the gaps and enhance the knowledge concerning the influence of the SCSs on the Chinese society, in particular on the choices of young women and their partner selection in China. Since the SCSs are so far understudied with regards to family and mating, the investigations provide a broader understanding of the characteristics of the SCSs and the transformation of the family and marriage system in China.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

In order to analyse the influence of the governmental and commercial SCSs with respect to the three key aspects raised in the introduction, the following research question is defined and investigated by analysing data collected between 2017 and 2020¹.

Research Question (RQ): ‘Under which circumstances do Chinese women choose their partner and how are China’s Social Credit Systems shaping the choices of urban Chinese women in the mate selection process?’

RQ1: *‘Which factors affect the partner selection of Chinese women?’*

Sub-questions:

- 1.1 What are the present considerations of young Chinese women being confronted with the question of family and marriage building?
- 1.2 How strong is the family bonding in contemporary China?
- 1.3 To which extent are external factors, such as the Chinese parents/families taking part in the partner selection process?

RQ2: *‘How are China’s Social Credit Systems influencing the choices of urban Chinese women in the mate selection process?’*

Sub-questions:

- 2.1 How aware are Chinese women of the SCSs?
- 2.2 Do the SCSs shape the choices of Chinese women in regard to their partner selection?
- 2.3 What is the potential of the SCS on the partner selection and family building?

This thesis extends the ongoing discussions and appearing body of literature on the decision-making process of Chinese women and SCS pilots, by bridging the gap between those two research areas. Using quantitative and qualitative approaches in terms of survey and interview settings, this thesis investigates three main potential forces (SCSs, family/marriage system and trends) that drive partner selection. Although the SCSs are known as potential leading factors influencing decision-making processes of the Chinese citizens, one can infer the following from the findings: Firstly, the majority of participants have neither experienced far reaching impacts of the systems nor are they making choices based on SCSs. Secondly, the marriage system has undergone many changes resulting in a system

¹ See chapter 1.3.2: Data Source - Surveys and chapter 1.3.3: Data Source - In Depth Interviews.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

where the survey and interview informants use mixed approaches by combining family recommendations with individualistic choices to their partner selection. Thirdly, the progressive extension of transportation and digitalisation incentivize new trends in the partner selection such as online dating. Although the data evaluation of the interviews shows that the social credit scores are mostly not considered in the partner selection in today's China, the interview participants predict crucial impacts of the SCSs on the marriage system in the future. They estimate that with an expansion and unification of the systems their influence increase, leading to detrimental effects on society and women's decision-making process in terms of partner selection.

Former studies mainly focussed on the SCSs based on various economics theories, such as institutional economics, information economics, and game theory (Yu et al., 2015; Krause and Fisher, 2020). Furthermore, recent research topics investigate implications and increasing legitimization of the SCSs through the pandemic state of emergencies, such as the COVID-19 crisis and its development in the future (Knight and Creemers, 2021), while Kostka and Fisher (2020) observe changes in the behaviours of citizens being confronted with SCS pilots. Moreover, many aspects in Chinese family and marriage studies are considered. These include the dynamics of the danwei system (Liang et al., 2018 and Jiang, 2020), the one-child policies (Fang et al., 2016) up to mating preferences (Han, 2010 and Ji, 2017). In this context, Ji (2017) points out: 'Another question deserves more discussion here. How is one to understand women's 'personal choice' (...)' (citation: Ji, 2017, p. 13: rows 46-47), which is a linkage to this research. The results of this thesis offer insights into potential trends in the partner selection of urban Chinese women, shifts of behaviour and societal transformation within the construct of family, marriage and the ruling apparatus of the SCSs. Since this topic is understudied, it provides valuable information on how the SCSs shape the minds and behaviours of the Chinese society.

This thesis presents a review of the historical and theoretical development of the SCSs, contextualizes the family and marriage systems and connects all three parts with the empirical investigations from the interviews and surveys. Empirically, this thesis offers three contributions: Firstly, by carrying out the surveys and interviews, it provides first-hand information from Chinese participants about the family and marriage system and their perception of the implications of the SCSs in contemporary China, and whether they would act according to this regulatory system. The findings show that the majority of the survey and interview participants of this study are aware of the SCSs and can grasp how the SCSs may have an impact on daily life. However, since they have mainly not been personally confronted with its incentive and punishment systems, the majority neither considers nor acts on behalf of the systems. From the gender perspective, these results offer extensive information about the individualistic choices of females in a pressured society and their awareness of the SCSs. By observing and demonstrating the perceptions of the women in the twentieth/twenty-first century, the results

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

reveal patterns, trends and evidence of the living conditions, and the decision-making process of Chinese women, within the family and governmental systems.

Secondly, considering all gathered data, the empirical study reveals important information about the ongoing trends of Chinese women and their partner selection. Specifically, while the literature only looked at the SCSs based on various economic theories (e.g. Krause and Fisher, 2020), justification of its operation (Knight and Creemers, 2021) or behavioural changes of all citizens in regard to the incentives and punishments systems (Kostka and Fisher, 2020), the results of this thesis indicate that the SCSs have the potential to stimulate the decisions of Chinese women in a way, that community structures are likely to change in the future. However, behavioural change with regard to the mate selection is not shown at the moment. In this context, this study fills the literature gap by providing not only a comprehensive review of literature on the function and regulations of the SCSs, but also connects it to the new governmental ruling mechanisms, set on the Chinese urban women. The empirical research extends the knowledge about the current impact of the SCSs on the family and marriage system with a focus on the individual Chinese women and their preferences.

Thirdly, by discussing the potential of the SCSs within the target groups, the participants provide further information about the prospective development and the potential of a single regulatory SCS in the future. The findings show that even though the majority of survey and interview participants would not change their behaviour or mindset in selecting a partner at the moment, the increasing spread through the country corresponds to increasing amount of power over the people. The women predict the SCSs being more influential in the future, which will likely effect the mate selection process. With a high influential all-encompassing SCS, the incentives and punishments may also be expanded. This may give rise to a quantitative choice of husband, preferably with a high social credit score instead of a partner selection out of love. The responses of Chinese women to surveys (2017/2020) and in-depth interviews (2020) provide evidence on more understanding and awareness of the social changes and limitations of urban Chinese women in contemporary China.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to the wider field of dating in the digital age by examining how urban Chinese women behaviours, in terms of mate selection, change in response to reputational systems. Studies analysing behaviours in reputation systems have gained an increasing amount of attention among academics (Marthews and Tucker, 2017; Mushkat, 2020). In this context, Creemers (2018) highlights the effects of naming and shaming of wrongdoers in public. In contrast, Xu, Kostka and Cao (2021) provide information that citizens in dictatorships may support digital surveillance (e.g. the SCS) as long as they are aware of their social benefits. However, they lack information about potential repression. While social scientists, policy makers and, human rights advocates welcomed the era of internet and digital communication as an important step towards freedom and democracy (Diamond, 2010), scholars like Aho and Duffield (2020) as well as Xu Xu (2021) argue that the digital

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

surveillance empowers dictators to more repression against their opponents and citizens. Keeping this in mind, Kostka and Antoine (2020) found out that citizens change their behaviour in response to the SCSs, showing to have an impact on society. However, only little is known about citizens attitudes and behaviours towards digital surveillance (e.g. the SCSs). Furthermore, knowledge on the mate selection of Chinese women under the influence of SCSs is strongly lacking in today's literature. The findings of this thesis broaden the range of existing literature on the SCS, family and marriage in China by confirming that the concept of community norms continue to persist even in the digital age as women still base their decisions on family expectations, even when using a SCS. These results are important as they help scholars to understand the impact of the SCS on marriage and family building.

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

1.3.1 Mixed Methods

This thesis combines two online surveys with in-depth interviews. By adopting a 'mixed methods research design, which is the type of study in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration' (cit. Johnson et al., 2007: p. 123), the thesis will study SCSs and mate selection processes from different angles. The overall purpose of this method is to strengthen and expanding the study's validity and conclusion in order to answer the research question (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). This method is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for combining closed-ended questions as the quantitative research methods with open-ended questions as the qualitative research methods from the surveys and interviews. By applying closed-ended questions, very distinct responses can be expected, which reduce doubts and increase consistency with more concrete results than it is the case for open-ended questions (QuestionPro, 2021). 'Open-ended questions' are executed in order to receive and reflect the respondent's own ideas and opinions in their own terms rather than those of the researcher (Ballou, 2008). These allow one to probe deep into the respondent's answers and to get valuable information from each individual, which provides a much more detailed and descriptive information of a specific topic (QuestionPro, 2021), thus reasoning the choice of the mixed methods research approach. Since a single regulatory SCS is not fully established in the whole of China and many people do not know about the systems, but it is important to receive concrete results; it is even more important to leave space for individual feedback. That is the reason why not only survey sessions with closed- and open-ended questions were conducted, but also in-depth interviews executed that function as a completion of the mixed methods research.

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

1.3.2. Data Source - Surveys

With regard to the research question, two surveys were conducted: one in 2017 and one in 2020. This type of methodology was chosen prior to the in-depth interviews to gather as much information as possible on the research sub-questions that were introduced in section 1.2. These sub-questions deal with the family-, marriage- and SCSs, while reaching Chinese women residing in as many different provinces as possible and to gain a valued set of data. In order to reach a high number of participants, the surveys were created using the online platform soSci Survey² such that the surveys were accessible via mobile phones or other computational/computing devices. Together with the in-depth interviews, the two survey sessions build the empirical data of this study and serve as the information for concluding statements that are being further developed in chapter three and four. By using a mixed-methods approach, the sampling strategy gives rise to questionnaires featuring partial quantitative and partial qualitative components. Whereas closed-ended questions lead to quantitative conclusions, open-ended questions allow qualitative insights with regard to the research question. Since it can be predicted that the SCS pilots become first apparent in the main cities of mainland China, the target groups consist of urban Chinese women in the potential age range for marriage as well as recently married women (18-40 years old).

The survey session of 2017 was of prototypical type for the sake of carrying out the more refined survey in 2020. It was used as a supplement and indicator in addition to the questionnaire of 2020 to evaluate possible changes or consolidation of the provided answers, and dealt with the marriage system and the influence of the Chinese families in terms of the marriage choices of their female relatives. The results were used to estimate the feasibility of evaluating these kind of questions. Refined questions were then included in the 2020 survey session. The survey in 2017 was conducted between April and July 2017 and was carried out in the same way as in 2020, which enabled a feasible realisation and evaluation. In 2017, whereas 49% of the participants were married, 51% were in the potential age group for marriage. All participants were between 18 and 40 years old. 66 urban Chinese citizens took part in this survey. For the evaluation, the informants were split into two groups of respondents: 'students' and 'others'³. Both groups mainly consisted of Chinese women residing in urban areas in China. Around 54% of the respondents were students, 38% of participants were employed, and 8% were unemployed or housewives. The informants lived in 18 different provinces within China, mainly residing in the cities of Hangzhou, Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai (see table 4). Thus, most of the participants were residential in urban areas.

² SoSci Survey: Platform for online surveys, executed 2017/2020. Project: 'Decision-Making Process of Chinese Women Towards the Marriage System.' By Bathe-Peters, Jessica, generated online (Operational time: March 6th – June 10th, 2020). Online availability before 2020-06-10: https://www.soscisurvey.de/marriage_women_scs/.

³ 'others': mainly employees, workers, freelancer etc. - not students.

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

The questionnaires of the session in 2020 were conducted between March and June 2020. Since the SCSs are launched in the main cities in mainland China, the target groups were urban Chinese women in the potential age of marriage (72%) and recently married women (28%), in the age between 18-40 years old. The author's own contacts functioned as a starting point to gather participants for the research. Friends and acquaintances then passed the survey on to their families and friends, resident in mainland China, who in turn recirculated the survey to their social communities. First to mention is the high number of interviewees who took part in the survey (nearly 800). Questionnaires that implied insufficient statements or did not match the requirements of this analysis with respect to the participant's personal background (citizenship, age, current place of residence etc.) were not considered in this analysis. Out of the remaining 297 qualified surveys, around 160 participants continued to answer the questions regarding the SCSs, which is discussed in chapter 3.2. Around 54% of the 297 respondents continued answering the questionnaire until the last page. In 2020, around 48% of the respondents were students, 40% of participants were employed, 7% were unemployed or housewives and the remaining 5% were freelancers (see table 5). Covering almost all provinces with cities of municipal quantified SCSs, the majority of the respondents resided in the localities where the local governments started government-run SCS measurements (see figure 2, p. 33). The provinces were all listed as current places of residence in the surveys and interviews, though the cities remained mainly unknown.

Since the methodology of this thesis is based on mixed methods with a focus on the qualitative approach, open-ended questions are especially important to analyse. Therefore, the quantity of respondents was not important as long as the thoughts regarding the respondents' perceptions were openly stated, permanently collected and analysed during the research process.⁴ Furthermore, in-depth interviews were executed via WeChat calls, since fieldwork on the ground of mainland China was not possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.3.3 Data Source – In Depth Interviews

The influence of the SCSs on the partner choice of Chinese women becomes more intuitive through in-depth interviews in addition to the surveys. Therefore, from June 17th to July 2nd, 2020, a total of 43 in-depth interviews were conducted via the mobile communication application WeChat. Most of them lasted about 20-30 minutes and were directed mainly in Chinese. In dependence on the language preferences of the participants, some interviews were conducted in English. All in all, the in-depth interviews complement understanding of the shorter answers in the questionnaires (2017-2020). By

⁴ Grounded Theory: Definition Chapter 1.3 Research design and methodology.

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

comparing the outcome of the questionnaires with the answers of the in-depth interviews, a broader understanding of the perceptions and behaviours of the Chinese women who took part in this study could be determined (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, the question as to which level of intensity the SCS pilots are already dominating the decision-making process of Chinese women in regard to the marriage choice could be answered within the target groups.

The sampling strategy, to choose candidates for the in-depth interviews, was adapted to the SCS-distributed areas of urban cities, where citizens are most likely to encounter SCSs over high usage of electronic devices and online activities. Since the SCS pilots are currently not yet spread in all regions of China and first launched in the main cities in mainland China (Drinhausen and Brussee, 2021), it can be expected that citizens in urban areas encounter the system faster than citizens living in rural areas. On the countryside, the spread of technological instruments might be less rapid. Furthermore, data control can be easier applied throughout frequent usage of electronic and online activities, it can be assumed that the SCSs will be first noticeable in the layer of society of the upper classes. Thus, the focus of the thesis is set on urban Chinese women with a high educational level. Moreover, the target participants needed to possess further criteria, such as a certain age between 18 and 40 years, the Chinese citizenship and a medium to high educational/economic background in order to be accounted for the data evaluation. The participants taken into account for this study were all residential in China and have at least finished their first degree. Thereby, the statistical analysis accounts for university graduates making up the layer of society under investigation.

Within the 43 interviews, only urban Chinese women in the potential age of marriage and recently married women were chosen as target group, including respondents from 21 different regions in China. One interview, not fulfilling the requirements was neglected in the evaluation. The average age of the interviewees was around 30. About 19% of them were students (12% of them graduated from the university with a bachelor's or master's degree and 7% were doctoral students, employed at different universities). 72% of the informants were employed and already graduated and received their degrees (BA, MA or higher), while 5% of the interviewed women were currently unemployed or described themselves as 'housewife and mum'. The other 2% have just graduated from university and were currently looking for a job. One person (2%) owns a company and works as a freelancer (see table 7). All participants can be considered as well-educated. 84% of the Chinese women residing in provinces where the SCSs, blacklists and/or redlists are officially launched: 19% of them live in Beijing, 16% in Sichuan, 12% in Zhejiang, 9% in Guangdong, 7% in Shanghai, 5% in Hubei, 2% in Hainan, 2% in Hefei, 2% in Hunan, 2% in Jiangxi, 2% Liaoning, 2% in Shaanxi, 2% in Shandong and 2% in Tianjin (see figure 2: p.35). At the time of the interviews, 50% of the interviewees were married and declared to remain in a stable relationship, together with their husbands. 31% of the non-married women had a partner (either a boyfriend or girlfriend) and 19% were singles.

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

The questions asked during the in-depth interviews were mainly attributed to the second part of the 2020 surveys, with focus on the SCSs and evaluated through the 'Grounded Theory' and 'Conditional/Consequential Matrix'. Similar questions in regard to the women's knowledge about the SCSs were sampled in order to compare and add information to the short-answered questions of the surveys. The 'Grounded Theory' (Strauss and Corbin 1994; Corbin and Strauss 2008) is the intended foundation of the qualitative research method to analyse the in-depth interviews. It enables a flexible and personal interaction with the respondents to inquire about additional background information and to prevent obscurity. Two features ground this method: Firstly, the theory is derived from a continuous data collection during the research process and is not being chosen beforehand. Secondly, data is permanently collected and analysed during the research process. The collected data needs to be multiple-sampled and coded through the 'Ground Theory'.

After locating all conceptual categories, the 'Straussian coding paradigm', also called 'Conditional/Consequential Matrix' is used in order to define the central phenomenon of the collected data and the study. The matrix shows dynamic qualities of upcoming theoretical positions, which can be interpreted into the ultimate theory by stating the research results (Scott, 2004: p. 113-126). In this particular case, data from surveys and interviews on the perception and behaviour of urban Chinese women before and during the implementation of the SCSs are collected and sampled (To, 2013: p. 3). The Grounded Theory further constitutes the interaction between micro and macro conditions. For this reason, compared analysis of micro-sociological human actions and interactions on the interference of the system are leading towards the evidence of further structural factors in micro-international constraints. Corbin and Strauss state that the Grounded Theory is not restricted to the characteristics of central interest. Other factors like economic conditions, cultural values, political trends and social movements may also be affecting the main case of study (To, 2013: p. 3-4). Under this perspective, the research is able to provide answers to further conditions of the social credit score in additional dimensions. In summary, the aim of employing the Grounded Theory is firstly to examine the marriage patterns in China and the amount of influence the SCSs have on Chinese women's decision-making process regarding mate selection. Secondly, further dimensions of society are determined, such as family symbiosis and the participation of other external factors on the partner selection. Thirdly, forecasts regarding future development in society can be provided.

1.3.4 Data Collection: Problems and Solutions

Numerous challenges emerged during the data collection process. First, conducting data collection in an authoritarian context may lead to self-censorship by the participants with increased risk of ambiguity in the answering pattern. Second, for the two surveys, the main problems occurred in terms

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

of a significant decrease of participating women, who did not complete the surveys up to the end, which led to an unsatisfying number of responses concerning a few questions. Furthermore, some closed-ended questions seem to be randomly answered, choosing the median answer, while open-ended questions have been answered in only one word or short phrase. This made it difficult to determine the real opinion of the informants and/or the value of the answers. Reasons for this may be twofold. Either the informants were frightened to state their real opinion due to the uncertain fundamental right of free speech in China in China, or the SCSs are being viewed as an unknown topic that is insufficiently discussed in China at the moment. Third, concerning the in-depth interviews, the main challenges occurred with respect to miscommunication problems. Such issues may be due to different means of communication practices/habits in Asian and Western cultures. However, interview formats such as the qualitative research approach helped to interpret vague information in order to attain a value set of data. In the following part, the problems and solutions encountered in the study research are enlisted and discussed.

Many researches describe the problem of self-censorship in an authoritarian context when collecting data for survey and interview settings. Yuling Pan et al. (2005) explain that the willingness of Chinese respondents to complete a 'survey or interview is directly influenced by the degree to which they have become acculturated (...)' (cit., Pan et al. 2005: p. 24, row 9-10). It can be estimated that most participants of the target group have a family and are knowledgeable if not experienced with the partner choice in China. In that case, it might be easier responding to those questions that they are familiar and unconcerned with. In contrast, profound questions regarding their family members might interfere with their morals of 'impoliteness'. Another reason for the conservative respondents, pointed out by Robinson (2019), is the self-censorship which provokes certain respondents to answer in a non-biased way out of the fear for being caught stating 'false opinions'. In addition, the study of Robinson (2019) about self-censorship of regime support in authoritarian states displayed information about the response behaviour of Chinese respondents to survey answers. Following Robinson, it can be assumed that the respondents provide truthful answers to surveys, though there is a distinct risk that individuals are less honest out of the fear that their opinions are made known to the public or authorities. This practise of self-censorship is most prevalent among wealthy urban, females and younger Chinese residents (Robinson, 2019).

Being aware these patterns of self-censorship, the decreasing number of participants during the survey session and the vague answers to closed- and open-ended questions may be answered. The surveys (2017/2020) were conducted in English and Mandarin Chinese, with simplified Chinese characters. Since the target group consisted of mainland Chinese women in their mid-twenties/thirties, the language barrier should not be the reason for the extenuated participation halfway through the survey. However, the significant decrease of participating women filling out the questionnaires (2020), from

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

around 245 feedback answers to only 146, cannot be ignored. That means that an average of 60% of the informants remained to answer the questions of the surveys until completion. The first part of the surveys (2020) deals with the overall topic of the family and marriage patterns in China. A maximum number of 297 Chinese women responded to that topic. After changing the topic from general and facile content towards recondite questions and the part of the SCSs, around 40% of respondents stopped to fill out the form. Since the SCS pilots have not yet been established in all parts of China and is still widely unknown within the Chinese population, it can be assumed that the lack of knowledge about this topic provokes a certain group of respondents to quit the survey session. This group of respondents may feel unfamiliar with the topic and may partially not feel acculturated, since they have not experienced the putative influences yet. This change of topic might have interrupted the attempt to finish the questionnaires.

Another phenomena found in survey settings is that Chinese responses are often very limited in length and scope compared to the feedbacks of native English speakers. Open-ended questions are answered rather in one word or one phrase than in a detailed and statement-supporting manner neither are insights into the respondent's posture nor cognitive process provided (Pan, 2008: p. 36/37). Those features can also be found when analysing the questionnaire answers (2020). Most open-ended questions were briefly answered, using one word or one phrase (see table 6⁵). Further investigations of Yuling Pan (2008: p. 40) identified patterns of 'pragmatic ambiguity' in the response behaviour of native Chinese speakers, meaning that the answers can be interpreted in many different ways. The responses are ambiguous and comprise two major features. On the one hand, they function as a reply in order to satisfy the interviewer. On the other hand, it functions as a tool to avoid direct answers like 'yes' or 'no'. The analysis of the 2020 questionnaire, summarized in table 6 shows similar features of uncertainties regarding specific questions. Given responses such as 'hard to say' or 'no easy way to understand' were frequently used in order to answer many questions. The Chinese participants often used terms like 'everyone is different' and 'not right now' to at least give a response, and so this answer does not clarify his/her state of mind. This behaviour may also embody the morals of 'impoliteness'. Moreover, different features of Chinese and English communication styles and social norms may lead to miscommunication during the interview settings. Many researchers describe that in comparison to the western conversation style, the native Chinese conversation patterns differ in terms of lacking directness, linearity and openness (Pan, 2008). Li (1999) confirms with her research about Chinese-Dutch business negotiations that the Chinese discourse organisations are rather inductive and background information remains mostly general information. Overall Asian speakers delay the introduction of the main topic until the end of the overall framework (labelled as an inductive pattern).

⁵ See Appendix: Table 6: Analysis of the 2020 Survey – SCSs.

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

In comparison, English-speaking westerners tend to open a discussion stating the main points of the discourse strategy (deductive pattern). This leads to mutual misunderstanding and confusion (Scollon/Scollon, 1991). There are two significant/characteristic differences of miscommunication. Firstly, Chinese discourse organisations use an indirect-circular style. Secondly, indirect-circular patterns are used, presenting the argumentations and topic introduction (Pan 2008: p. 25-27). Günthner (1993) found out that in social conversation, Chinese speakers are generally not responding to a question straight away or in a clear manner. Often, their first response does not follow a direct line of thought to a question, which easily results in confusion of both Chinese and non-Chinese speakers.

The Chinese written and oral conversation style is characterized by circular-indirect patterns, which causes irritation and difficulties for non-Chinese speakers to identify the main arguments (Pan, 2008). In this context, Kaplan (1966) also demonstrates that Chinese and other Asian languages seem to favour a 'circular' style in writing, while English writings are known for 'linear texts', leaving potential for miscommunication. In taped conversations of Chinese speakers in discourses with themselves or American speakers, Young (1994) found out that Chinese speakers tend to place conclusive summary statements at the end of discourses. In contrast, English speakers set the main argumentation points always in the beginning of a discourse. Günthner (1993) demonstrates the difficulties native German speakers have to understand the response behaviour of native Chinese speakers. From her understanding, the conversational indirectness stems from Chinese traditions and their rhetorical style. Also, the Chinese discourse patterns are organized in a circular approach working towards the main arguments. German native speakers are accustomed to follow a straight line until they reach the key arguments for a discourse. For them, these conversational responses appear to have no direct connection to the questions but rather provide a list of facts, which is not related to the overall topic, leading to conversational irritation (Pan, 2008: p. 36/37).

Another important characteristic in the Chinese communication style is the consideration of Chinese citizens as an utilitarian group. Yuling Pan (2008: p. 52) points out that people in China function as a unity. They prefer collective opinions to individual opinions and consider themselves as part of a larger group. In a collectivist society, people function on a collective level, even defining the singular forms of personal pronouns as impolite (Kadar, 2017). Apparently, Chinese speakers often switch from one singular form to community-based argumentations in the middle of a response. Those characteristics seem common in the Chinese communication style. At the same time, it causes ambiguity to survey questions since it is not clear whose opinion is being stated (Kadar, 2017). For example, the answers to the questions E103: 'How strongly is/was the influence of the SCSs?' and E111: 'How strongly will the social credit score affect the partner choice?' of the questionnaires (2020) give rise to the assumption that many respondents were indecisive to select a satisfying answer (see table 6). Out of

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

six answers, over 50% of the participants chose the median answer. This illustrates the tended approach to please the questioner and at the same time to dissimulate their own indecisiveness. In addition, the set of data from question E127: 'Do you think rather people of a higher credit score or a lower credit score would separate from their partner?' (see table 6) must be reconsidered. Since responses seem to be picked out randomly rather than deliberately, the answers to that question do not seem to match the previous overall answering pattern.

In the Chinese culture, face-to-face interviews are used more frequently than questionnaire-based data collection (Pan et al. 2005: p. 24). Su Xuan (苏璇), a Chinese women living in Berlin, Germany stated during a discussion on interview settings in China that 'depending on the overall topic, Chinese people feel more need and pressure to answer questions during an actual interview session than when completing survey questions'.⁶ According to Su Xuan, surveys in China are rather used to collect information about uncomplicated content, e.g. in terms of product descriptions. She states further that 'most people do not have the time or patience to fill out time-consuming forms. Therefore, the length of those questionnaires is kept brief to hold the time of completion short. If they are not forced to complete the survey questions in a specific period of time without an interview partner monitoring the termination process, most Chinese feel negligent or unwilling to finalize the questionnaire. The same response behaviour applies to exigent topics (Su Xuan, 2020)'. Yuling Pan (2008) explains that in interview settings using survey instruments, these circular patterns provoke even more complications, since the collected data are vague. Only a supplementary re-run of the questions and a conversation can prevent an obscure set of data (Pan, 2008). Su Xuan points out that 'complex content like the SCSs is generally to be discussed via over interview sessions where the interviewer directly questions the participant in a personal conversation. In that case, the Chinese respondents feel the need to reply immediately to the question and would not dare to postpone the answer. Out of their traditional background, they are attempting to at least state an answer. No reply would be a violation of their traditional views of politeness.' Therefore, she assumes that 'data collected from interviews are more significant than those gathered from questionnaires, at least if the response behaviour cannot be retraced (Su Xuan, 2020).'

Due to those facts, in addition to the questionnaires, in-depth interviews were executed (interviews, 2020). The interviewees could prearrange the place and time at their own discretion and without any pressure. Among the conversations and developing discussions, the interviewer had the possibility to repeat and ask further questions. In case of misunderstandings, clarifying explanations on both sides about uncertain content enhanced the collection of an accurate set of data.

⁶ Statements derived during a discussion on interview and survey settings with a Chinese women named Su Xuan (~28 years old), on Oct. 17th, 2020.

1.4 Structure

1.4 Structure

The thesis is structured into seven chapters. This first chapter comprises the research introduction with the motivation, research question and sub-questions, data collection in China with its problems and solutions, the research design and methodology, the data sources and the structure of work. The second chapter deals with the theoretical and conceptual framework of the topic, including a historical outline of the Chinese marriage system and the concepts and developments of the SCSs. The questionnaires from 2017 and 2020 are evaluated in the third chapter, in which the first part of the 2020 survey is compared with the analysis of the 2017 questionnaire, by discussing the family and marriage patterns in contemporary China. Chapter four analyses of the in-depth interviews and the results of the second part of the 2020 surveys, by discussing the current influence of the SCS pilots on the partner selection of Chinese women and its estimated impact in the future. Three individual case studies are selected to point out the different and similar arguments of the participants regarding this matter. In chapter five, the results of the 2020 questionnaire are compared with those of the in-depth interviews to reveal discrepancies and commonalities in order to show the cohesion between the mate selection and the SCSs. Chapter six concludes with the results and limitations, and provides an outlook for further studies.

2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Chapter 2 deals with the theoretical and conceptual framework of this thesis, by providing a comprehensive overview of the prevalent literature on China's SCSs and its family and marriage systems. Up to date, most processes of the SCSs, ranging from the phase of establishment over the aggregation phase of public and private data, to the data evaluation, are still highly non-transparent to the public (Liang et al. 2018). Following up the idea of enhancing moral standards within the society by ensuring 'good' governments in the traditional senses, president Xi Jinping and high-level officials have started using AI. With this technical approach they aim to monitor and control the financial and corporate actions of businesses and citizens, but also the social behaviours of individuals (Roberts et al., 2021). Since 2014, pilot projects have been launched in around 43 pilot cities within mainland China. Amongst them, 28 model cities were selected between 2018 and 2019 as most promising locations for nationwide implementation of SCSs (Drinhausen, 2021). Main information about the SCSs can be gathered from the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016). Hermann (2017) explains that the relevant data for rating the people are extracted from the capacity of payment, statements on social media platforms, acquisition of domestic products etc. A positive score is supposed to enable beneficial treatment, e.g.

credit accommodation, while a negative score can lead to punishments, e.g. the prohibition of travelling. Even though, state-organised scoring is a matter for the future, a range of pilot projects have already been carried out, like the Sesame Credit⁷ (Herrmann, 2017). One of the main goals of China's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016) is the reconstruction of China's economic growth for at least 6,5% (MERICS, 2016). Therefore, Mirjam Meissner (2017) among others, informs about the SCSs as an approach to regulate the market behaviour and participants for doing business in China. She explains that the range of this system exceeds those of Europe or those of the United States, by scoring the domains of social, environmental, and political aspects (Meissner, 2017: p. 4).

Multiple books like 'Zero' by Marc Elsberg (2014), 'The Circle' by David Eggers (2013) or George Orwell's (1994) '1984', describe the phenomena of a fictitious world, monitoring all the people. Considering the huge contemporary technological advantages, these dystopian fictions can become a reality (Herrmann, 2017). David Shambaugh (2007) discusses the continuous battle between the state and society, and which aspects seem to have a positive output for the country. The Chinese politics are continuously struggling to facilitate the rapid modernization of the Chinese economy and to align society in an appropriate manner. In order to remain the absolute political power, the state party has its latitude and methods by using a propaganda system today. The Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), for example, uses the media to rely on market forces (Shambaugh, 2007: p. 25).

Previous studies about the Chinese Communist Propaganda System describe that the Chinese Communists studied and adopted many propaganda methods from the Soviet, Nazi, totalitarian states and from the imperial and nationalist Chinese governments. The outcome was a central Chinese Communist Propaganda System called 'CCP Control System', which turned into a key tool for Mao and his party to transform Chinese society after 1949 (Shambaugh, 2007: p. 26-27). Jie Yang (2011) analysed the so-called *dang'an*⁸ (*chin. dang'an* 档案) and the transformation of China after the Mao era. He determined *dang'an* as another tool of socialist control. Other scholars such as Solomon (1966)⁹, Teiwes (1979) and Schoenhals (1992) point out that the Mao period can mainly be identified by propaganda and indoctrination, using many different techniques of controlling. Shambaugh (2017) declares that the efficacy of the Chinese propaganda system has suffered over the past years

⁷ 'Sesame Credit': is the gamified social credit system in China, created by Ant Financial to strengthen laws and regulatory and political processes through the employment of information technology. It is used by Alibaba (one of the top leading companies in China) to score the validity of clients (Vieira dos Reis and Press, 2019).

⁸ *dang'an*: files kept by the *danwei* working unit; contents record personal information of Chinese individuals from primary school throughout their lives (*renshi dang'an*); such as family background and individual status; criminal and disciplinary activities, labour re-education and public security dossiers (Mühlhahn, 2019: p. 393).

⁹ See for example: Solomon, R. (1966): 'Ideology and Organization in Communist China', by Franz Schurmann; Teiwes, F.C. (1979): 'Politics & Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms 1950-1965'; Schoenhals, M. (1992): 'Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics'.

throughout the information revolution and globalisation. Still, most information reaching the Chinese public is reviewed by the government. Esarey (2005) amongst others identified the spread of commercialization of media as the main trigger for the loss of power. Through explosive economic reforms, established in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping, internal social dynamics on the one hand, and, on the other hand, external forces in coherence with globalization, modernization and westernization, emerged. Outcomes were fundamental changes and development in all domains of the Chinese society (Yang, Neal, 2006: p. 114), including governmental control, family patterns and the institution of marriage. Ulrich Beck (2001) illustrates in this context fundamental changes throughout external factors, like the institutionalized individualism in society and politics. He points out that the contemporary social order of the national state, class, ethnicity and the traditional family is weakened and declining (Beck, 2001: p. 22): 'With the collapse of the traditional social order a glimmer of something like freedom of choice appeared – for most women, of course, still very distant (...) But it also brought a chance that was inconceivable in the traditional social order – the chance of freeing oneself from the clutches of the family' (cit. Beck, 2001 (1): p. 6-7).

Still today, specially Chinese women experience high pressure due to the traditional views of their family members and society. In her article about 'Late Marriage among Chinese Professional Women' (2013) Sandy To points out that Chinese parents still have a strong influence on women's marital choices causing conflicts addressing the more 'modern' views of supporting the women's strong economic achievements. She further explains that over the past few decades the rate of single or unmarried Chinese working women ('leftover women'/*chin. 'sheng nu' 剩女*, see chapter 2.2) experienced a dramatic rise (To, 2013: 1). Considering the governmentally enforced SCSs, the choices of the women will be even more limited.

Family scholars observing China mainly focus on the late marriage, non-marriage, divorce rates and the one-child family policy since the 1970s and expended social change (To, 2013: p. 1-20). Since one single regulatory SCS is not entirely applied in China yet, and the social effects of the system on the population have not been analysed, investigations on women's thoughts and behaviour being confronted with this system open up new perspectives in the research field of social science. As some researchers estimate commercialization as the main reason for the decrease of the propaganda apparatus, some scholars like Brady and Juntao (2009), and Esarey et al. (2017) are convinced that the regime has already developed methods to use the commercialisation for their propaganda and to strengthen their power again. Recent years show a revival of propaganda and its selective enforcement. The party is capable of reaching the people (Shambaugh, 2007: p. 27). It is just a matter of time and attempts to do so - which could now be the case by implementing the SCSs. The responses and choices of the target groups of this thesis, this specific group of the Chinese population will lead to the first reactions of the Chinese society to this new controlling system in the context of marriage.

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

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With the innovation of data technologies, AI and algorithmic classifications are increasingly embedded in the overall society. The main purpose of the integration of credit ratings was the risk prevention of late payments, but they became drivers for algorithmic governance during the development of ‘smart urbanism’¹⁰. Scholars argue that this outcome does not necessarily foster a fair and liberal society. Chances are high that the lack of transparency and accountability, due to the automatization of the algorithmic data, lead to human discretion and unfavourable decisions towards each individual (Curran and Smart, 2020). It allows the government to easily apply rules by changing policy circumstances. This can be seen in the case example of China’s abatement of the Covid-19 epidemic in 2020/2021, when the SCS projects were converted into a tracking device and sanction violation tool (Drinhausen et al., 2021). The following subchapters illustrate and discuss the main structure and function of the SCSs.

2.1.1 The Meaning of ‘Credit’ and Overview of the SCSs

With regards to the following subsection, the term ‘credit’ is defined and provides closer insights into the meaning of the SCSs. The word ‘credit’ in the term ‘Social Credit System’ is not clearly defined and can refer in addition to financial creditworthiness also to moral and ethical integrity or trustworthiness. One possible translation is *chengxing*, which means integrity, indicating moral principles in terms of the ethics of each individual. Other definitions are *xinyong* (credit), *xinyu* (reputation), or *xinren* (credence). In the current century, ‘credit’ can be defined on the basis of social, financial and legal aspects (Liang et al. 2018). Merely, the wide range of policy goals pursued by the SCSs illuminate the difficulty of defining the term ‘Social Credit’, which therefore cannot be defined in a clear and legal manner. The definitions range from financial creditworthiness (*chin. zhengxin* 征信), over law-abiding behaviour, to specified moral values, like honesty (*chin. chengxin* 诚信) and integrity (*chin. zhengzhi* 正值) (Drinhausen, 2021). The first use of the SCSs was seen in the context of financial credit.

Tenuous problems in the commercial and financial sectors led to the first concept of an SCS in 1991, resulting in the Guiding Opinions Concerning the Construction of a Social Credit System issued by the State Council in 2007 (Kostka, 2019). While commercial and financial firms, cohesive of the economic reforms, increasingly borrowed money from each other, the State Council tried to control those debt payments by scoring and analysing the corporate creditworthiness of these companies. Starting in the

¹⁰ Smart urbanism: ‘Building cities sustainably using smart growth principles, compact development planning form, using eco-city concepts, concept of low carbon electricity ecosystem etc. [...] in order to avoid future sources of greenhouse emissions, while developing more liveable and efficient urban centres’ (cit. Bansal and Singh, 2015: p. 551).

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

year 2000, consumer creditworthiness was also scored by some state-owned enterprises. Those activities gained more attention at the 16th Party Congress in 2002, when President Jiang Zemin called for the establishment of an SCS, which could withstand modern market economic conditions. The People's Bank of China (PBoC/*chin.* 中国人民银行) started to initiate the Enterprise and Personal Credit Information Database, incorporating limited data access (Liang et al. 2018). Thereupon, 18 central government departments initiated a SCS. From 2007, drafts were sent out by a few local governments in order to create a nationwide rating system (Kostka, 2019). Amongst them were the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC/*chin.* 国家发展和改革委员会), the PBoC, the Ministry of Commerce, some local governments and market-oriented investigation firms, which started databases on the provincial level in cities like Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. The extension to four areas (government affairs, commercial behaviours, social activities, and judicial affairs) in 2011, and the amplification of the Ministerial-Joint Meeting System in 2012 from 18 to 35 central departments, including the Publicity Department, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Justice, additionally expanded the influence of the SCS projects (Liang et al. 2018). More than 40 SCS pilots had been established by municipal and provincial governments to accomplish the goal to construct an all-encompassing SCS to monitor the Chinese citizens, organisations, companies and government departments (Kostka, 2019). The concept of the SCS is similar to systems of other nations, such as the German Schufa system, which assures that each individual receives a unique social credit number evaluated through their finances. However, the SCSs established in China also take credit information of commercial activities and social behaviour into account (Liang et al. 2018).

Today, 47 central departments and big players of the technology sector e.g. Alibaba¹¹ (*chin. alibaba jituan* 阿里巴巴集团), and Baidu¹² (*chin. baidu* 百度) were consulted by the State Council to face the technical construction and control of the system. These institutions handle different tasks, such as financial regulations, food safety, tracking legal compliance as environmental protection, and lately epidemic prevention (Drinhausen, 2021). They collaborate by sharing information collected from their self-manufactured credit platforms, such as Sesame Credit, Tencent Credit (*chin. tengxun xinyong* 腾讯信用) and Kaola Credit (*chin. kaola zhengxin* 考拉征信) (Liang, 2019). In 2015, only eight private companies were granted permission to create social credit pilots and most of them were conducted by commercial companies (Kostka, 2019). Since 2017, more than 150 companies have been involved in the credit-control, leading the path towards two interconnected social credit ecosystems. The first

¹¹ Alibaba Group Holding Limited: world's biggest online commerce company and fastest growing e-commerce platform with hundreds of million users, hosting millions of merchants and businesses; main sites: Taobao, Tmall and Alibab.com (Lajoie and Shearman, 2014).

¹² Baidu, Inc.: Chinese multinational technology company; specialized in internet-related services, products and AI, headquarter in Beijing (Kvilhaug, 2021).

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

official SCS was conducted by the government and the second SCS by the commercial drivers in China (Liang et al. 2018).

2.1.2 The Commercial SCS Drivers

This part of the thesis illustrates the drivers of the SCSs and their mutual collaboration. The liaison between the regulators (PBOC and NDRC) and technology companies, like Alibaba, Baidu and Tencent¹³, is challenging (Reuters, 2017). The companies work, collaborate and exchange data for the central government by building their own credit rating platforms for the centralized infrastructure. The data gathered from these commercial platforms and social behaviours are engaged in the construction of the official SCSs and therefore a surveillance infrastructure. Vice versa, the government feeds these commercial sectors with information for the credit rating. Apparently, more than 80% of Alibaba's personal credit information arrived straight from government databases. This implicates that both state and private actors work together for a state surveillance infrastructure, leading to the conglomeration of boundaries between the state and private sectors (Liang et al. 2018). The implementation of the Internet Finance Association of China (NIFA) contains eight commercial credit service companies, and was the first step towards a unified national SCS. However, PBoC remains in control of the companies, including their SCS projects, and stays in charge of the administrative components of the NIFA (Kostka, 2019).

The launch of a unified national governmental SCS was predicted for 2020. Until then, eight companies set out trial projects with different systems and algorithms, which were monitored and studied in order to create the most applicable SCS (Kostka, 2019). One of the main drivers for this task is the NDRC with its National Credit Information Sharing Platform (NCISP). This platform was released in 2015, moving data between 42 central agencies, 32 local governments, and 50 market actors. By sharing information between some high-tech firms like Alibaba and Baidu, NCISP has already stored more than 10.7 billion data points from information retrieved from commerce, individuals and government affairs (Liang et al. 2018). NDRC supplies 68 data sets on the commercial background and five focussing on individual citizens. Together with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (34 data sets), the Ministry of Agriculture (28 data sets), the National Health and Family Planning Commission (27 data sets), the Ministry of Transport (24 data sets), and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (24 data sets), NCISP (n=210) provides 50% of the overall data sets, while the Ministry of Culture, the Cyberspace Administration, Securities Regulatory Commission, and the State Administration for

¹³ Tencent Holdings Ltd: Chinese multinational entertainment conglomerate and holdings company, and largest gaming company in the world (TencentGlobal, 2021).

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

Industry and Commerce only provide limited data sets, between one and three each. However, the latter mentioned are still important players for the system (Liang et al. 2018).

The gathered information are also transmitted to the collaborators of NCISP, which collect an enormous amount of information through various agencies in order to cover 'everything' for the establishment of an all-encompassing monitoring system (Liang et al. 2018). At the same time financial and high-tech companies, with actors from the private sector, are already creating their own credit rating services by collecting information from the consumers to serve the SCS pilots (Liang et al. 2018). One of the most known commercial SCSs was implanted by an affiliate company of Alibaba, the Ant Financial Services Group (AFSG) and is called Sesame Credit (*chin. zhima xinyong* 芝麻信用). The AFSG provides small- to medium-sized businesses with loans and sells insurance products. The second most common SCS named Tencent Credit (*chin. tengxun xinyong* 腾讯信用) belongs to Tencent Holdings Ltd. The social network giant Tencent cooperates with China Rapid Finance, which is the developer of the messaging app called WeChat and holds more than 850 million active users. Overall, the most valued member of the Ant Group is AliPay (*chin. zhifubao* 支付宝). This payment tool is used in all domains of daily life, reaching from online payment over payment transfers to restaurants, taxis, for school fees, cinema tickets etc. Furthermore, two other major data-generating platforms named Didi Chuxing (*chin. didi chuxing* 滴滴出行) and Baihe (*chin. baihexian* 白河县) are affiliates of Sesame Credit. Before their merger in 2016, Didi Chuxing ran parallel to Uber¹⁴ in high competition. Baihe on the other hand is China's largest online match-making service and generates data from there. The influence of these pilots is drawn from the large amount of big data gathered from people's lives and other domains (Botsman, 2017).

For example, the Sesame Credit scores are updated and calculated every month. Five criteria are considered and evaluated, namely the credit history, the user behaviour like purchases and donations, the playability of debts and stable personal assets, the personal information by means of the reliability of a person and the social network in terms of quality of the social network. These commercial SCSs are used voluntarily. In recent years, the coupled benefits, which come with the usage of the SCSs, progressively attract attention and application by the public. Not only younger people are targeted by using mobile payment services for daily transactions but also older citizens fall for the induced incentives, such as the qualification for personal credit loans, applications, preferential treatment at hospitals and easier access by sharing economy services and fast-tracked visas (Kostka, 2019). Many national data platforms are conducting, sampling, storing and sharing data of the whole country. These parallel driving projects in the field practise provide necessary information to the government to improve their SCS with feasible and rectified features for the future-run (Liang et al. 2018). However,

¹⁴ Uber Technologies Inc.: World's largest ride-sharing company, founded in the USA (Blystone, 2021).

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

since the algorithms of the composition of each individual score are hardly transparent, users are not able to understand how the scores are created (Kostka, 2019).

2.1.3 Data Collection & Rating of the Data Points

As described in the previous sections, the Chinese government uses new technologies and big data to enhance their overall surveillance by 'collecting everything', including personal and public data (Liang et al., 2018). Out of the gathered information, the SCSs evaluate four different domains: government affairs, including the civil servant performance, judicial affairs with law enforcement, social activities inhibiting internet applications and services and commercial activities comprising e-commerce. Various data is collected, reaching from financial aspects including bank statements, taxes, loans, and transactions, up to personal social non-financial information such as employment, education, criminal history, and social media activities. However, the system cannot function without an appropriate number of formed liaisons between multiple players, i.e. government agencies and the private sectors (Liang et al. 2018). Out of the 47 institutions involved in the SCS dispersion, major drivers in shaping the system are the State Council that function as a cross-ministerial coordinator, the NDRC, and the PBoC in the front position (Drinhausen, 2021). The major focus of the NDRC is to set up the commercial and social sectors by collaborating with 39 central agencies, primarily with the PBoC, the Ministry of Finance, the Cyberspace Administration and the Ministry of Commerce. Through these agencies 154 data sets are collected and mutually shared. The PBoC focusses on commercial and individual social credit by establishing financial credit investigation systems, local information systems, and the credit scores of enterprises and citizens within their 136 projects. 41 partners share their data with PBoC and not many of them hold political controls like the Ministry of Public Security and the Cyber Administration. Their goals are not only the social and political control but also economic, commercial and financial monitoring. Thus, the SCS pilots can be recognized as a comprehensive infrastructure with the ameliorated monitoring of all aspects of society, rather than an exclusive political surveillance and control system. At least five central data platforms, including the NCISP, the Credit China, the Credit Reference Center (CRC), the National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System (NECIPS), and the Blacklists of Trust-breaking Platform (BTBP) store and analyse the credit information and share them among each other, see figure 1 (Liang et al., 2018).

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

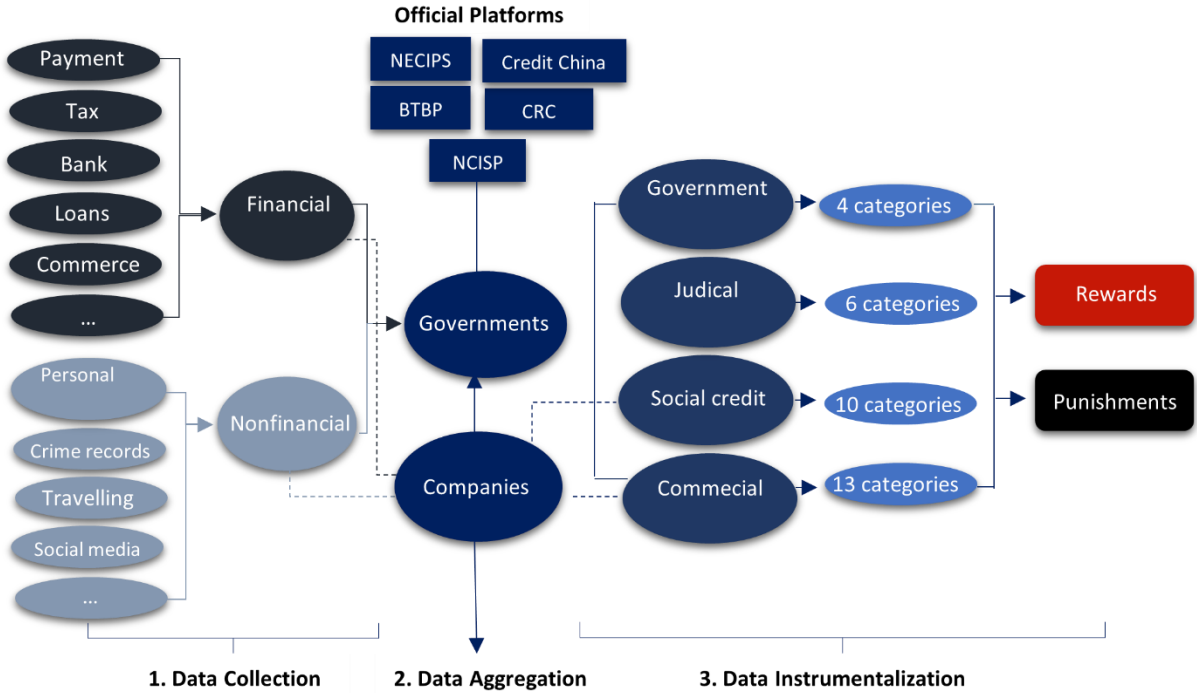


Figure 1 Steps and Pathways of the Social Credit Data Flow.
 Note: NCISP: National Credit Information Sharing Platform; CRC: Credit Reference Center; NECIPS: National Enterprise Information Platform; BTBP: Blacklist of Trust-breaking Platform. Dotted lines: unofficial but estimated participation of private firms with their private credit systems in the construction of the official SCS. Derived from 'Organizational and Process Chart of China's Social Credit System (SCS)', Liang et al. 2018.

Meissner (2017) argues that the NCISP is the data backbone of the SCSs. Therefore, the data collection process is illustrated here taken the national data platform NCISP as an example (Liang et al. 2018): Up to 2018, the platform gathered 400 data sets of which 261 data sets addressed public and private data of firms and commerce. 74 data sets focused on individuals, while 32 sets collected data on social organizations and 33 sets covered information on government affairs. 384 of the 400 data sets are organised in three categorisations: the first classification is called 'public sharing', comprising 284 data sets, which are released to the public. The sharing of the 70 data sets of the category 'limited sharing' is confined, containing mainly data sets comprising information in regard to punishments, like insurance frauds. The 30 data points under 'inter-government sharing' are only shared among governments (Liang et al. 2018). However, it remains uncertain who has access to this information. A total number of 537 variables are collected by the NCISP to evaluate the actors, including governmental agencies, social organizations and individual citizens. 295 variables are applied to gather data respecting commerce and firms, while comprising fundamental information like the firm's name, address, online information, legal representatives, shareholders, product information and phone and social credit card numbers. One fifth (n=110) of the variables focuses on individual data (name, ID numbers, trust-breaking activities, certificates and administrative penalties) in order to apply a system for rewards, honours, punishments and criminal behaviours. In this case not every citizen will be valued

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

through all 110 variables. Rather, they are gathered from certain groups of citizens, including students, teachers and lawyers. Additionally, 79 variables are used to provide information from social organizations (regarding their address, field of service, administration registration and trustworthiness), and 53 variables to evaluate administrative licenses and penalties, gathered by the government affairs (Liang et al. 2018). The SCS pilots focus on commercial and financial sectors and interconnecting financial credit with the social credit variables. However, one should not ignore the power of social control and state surveillance in China, resulting from the connectivity monitoring commercial activities and social behaviours. The purpose of the 400 data sets on the one hand, is to gather public and private data from government agencies, organizations, firms and citizens in China. The 537 variables on the other hand, ascertain the background of each single actor to identify every aspect of them (Liang et al. 2018).

According to Botsman (2017), Sesame Credit is rating their people in numbers from 350 to 950 data points. This complex algorithmic rating system comprises five key factors for the measurement and calculation: the credit history is the first component, including punctual payment of electricity and phone bills. The second factor is the capacity to compensate for one's own living expenses. The third factor 'personal characteristics' is defined as personal information, like mobile phone numbers or addresses etc. In the fourth category, people's behaviours and preferential behaviours are measured. The company Alibaba admits that people get judged by the products they buy. The record of playing videogames in contrast to pay for diapers, for instance, is used to identify a person as lazy or responsible, pushing the citizens in a direction of purchases and behaviours according to the preferences of the government. The fifth category considers interpersonal relationships. The evaluation of online friends of a person matters as much as positive attributed messages about the government. Those categories will be responsible for the score to rise or fall. As so, Alibaba announced that negative posts on social media are currently not affecting the rating; this cannot be verified at this point. Anyhow, speculations occur that with the establishment of a national governmental system, the ongoing pilot platforms will be activated and used to a full extent in order to enforce the totalitarian control over the Chinese citizens (Botsman, 2017). However, the tremendous amount and decentralised storage of information make the operation and monitoring of the system inconsistent and obscure (Drinhausen, 2021). Only the enterprise environmental credit and the reward and punishment mechanism can be accessed to obtain detailed information about the analysing process (Liang et al. 2018).

2.1.4 Reward & Punishment System

This part deals with the reward and punishment systems, in order to demonstrate the actual leverage of the Chinese government for the regulation of the Chinese society. The SCSs can be seen as an instrument for promoting law-abidance and ethical behaviour in the Chinese society and economy. Moreover, they can be powerful but low-cost tools to strengthen the governmental authority, through new technologies and the automatic self-monitoring and adjustment of the citizens themselves (Kostka, 2019). As mentioned before, the current credit systems are linked to various domains of the Chinese society, incorporating reward and punishment mechanisms, with information gathered from citizens, firms, organizations, and government agencies. Applying those reward-punishment systems, the government will be in charge of deciding who has access to public services and commercial activities and who is banned (Liang et al. 2018).

If a SCS pilot decides that an actor is a very 'good citizen', this individual is enlisted on the so-called red list and may receive rewards. In contrast, an actor being marked as a 'bad citizen' is enlisted on the black list and is likely to receive punishments. The SCSs decide in three steps whether an actor receive rewards or punishments. Firstly, the red and black lists need to be established on county level or higher. The information about those rewards and punishments are also being spread to other actors, including the news media and firms. In a second step, the NCISP is filled with basic information of the targets, such as names, ID numbers, and legal representatives, the reasons for 'trust-keeping' or 'trust-breaking' behaviours, applied rewards and punishments as well as credit repair and withdrawal mechanisms. In terms of a serious of 'trust-breaking' behaviour, NDRC shares this data directly with the platform Credit China (developed by NDRC and PBC); otherwise, a so-called Focus Group List is generated automatically, comprising of all actors who are announced of 'trust-breaking' activities. In the third step the subjects are moved from NCISP to a Big Data Warning List, where the cases are further investigated and finally shared with Credit China to make the red lists (*chin. hong ming dan* 红名单) and blacklists (*chin. hei ming dan* 黑名单) public. At the same time, local credit and sectoral websites will make rewards and punishment information accessible. It is to notice that not every subject will be enlisted on the red or black list; it depends on the intensity of 'trust-keeping' and 'trust-breaking' (Liang et al. 2018). In the case of minor offences, some entries are automatically deleted after a certain amount of time, while severe offenders may remain indefinitely listed and blocked from activities in certain sectors to undertake 'credit repair' (Drinhausen, 2021).

If a subject complies with the rules of the government and political goals, presents good credit records and social responsibility, this person will obtain rewards and incentives including prioritization schemes e.g. to access public services, optimize administrative services and decreased transaction costs (so-called 'Green Channels' for 'trust-keeping' subjects). Punishments can be applied through

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

disadvantages in social, political and economic domains. In the social domain, this takes place primarily through social discrimination, such as public supervision, strengthened disclosure or exposure of 'trust-breaking'. Political or administrative restrictions can be applied, for instance, through market supervision, management, public market access, administrative examination and approval, and policy support, and economic or market restrictions through restricted access to market interactions, luxury foods and series, and increase in lending rates (Liang et al. 2018). Individuals and organisations listed on that the blacklists are announced 'untrustworthy' and sanctioned for their illegal behaviour (Engelmann et al., 2021). The red lists and blacklists for individuals and companies overlap, meaning that if an individual fulfils a corporate role and carries out a legal act, not only the person himself, but also the company and the legal representatives of the company will be held responsible for the violation (Drinhausen, 2021). Punishments such as limited access to high-speed trains and financial services follow. On the other hand, the 'praiseworthy/ trustworthy' people are registered on the redlists and rewarded with tax reductions and easier access to governmental services (Engelmann et al., 2021). Enforcements of rewards and punishments for the 'trustworthy' and 'untrustworthy' people are already established in so-called 'model cities', such as Rongcheng, Weihai, Suqian, Hangzhou, Wenzhou and Xiamen. In addition, a credit information sharing platform has already been created providing operations with other national or provincial SCS platforms based on data-exchange (Liang et al. 2018). Today, Engelmann et al. (2021) identified 273 blacklists and 154 redlists implemented and spread across 30 Chinese provincial administrative divisions (ADs). The province Shanxi has implemented most blacklists, while Beijing has the highest number of redlists (see figure 2).

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

A study by Kostka (2019) on China's SCSs in terms of the public opinion shows an astonishingly high number of participants making use of the commercial SCSs. From the 80% of commercial SCS users, only 7% of them had been aware that they were participating in an SCS pilot project. The government started to set out these projects in 42 localities (28 model cities today, see Drinhausen, 2021). 43% of the participants lived in those areas and only 11% knew of their participation. This shows the limited progress of the SCSs until today. From the commercial credit systems, Sesame Credit was represented the most (58%), followed by Tencent Credit (31%). 19% of the participants used both platforms, 16% of the interviewees did not use any SCS platform, while 8% of the test persons did not know whether they were integrated into a system or not (Kostka, 2019). This analysis shows the existing problems in the data collection and observation of the ongoing research about the SCSs. If in a population only around 7% of the citizens are aware of being part of an SCS pilot and the others are not conscious of the regulations of those systems, it will be difficult to receive significant responses to the questions analysed in this thesis. Chances are high that the overall connection of the marriage system in regard to the SCSs is not of fundamental interest to the Chinese citizens at the moment and therefore not being considered. However, as Kostka (2019) has already mentioned, it is interesting to receive information from those who are not directly confronted with this matter in order to estimate the spread, status, and lack of information of the pilots. Since a significant number of Chinese citizens either seem to be unaware of the existence of the pilots or is already taking part in the try-outs, but the SCSs are already discussed in academic circles and are likely to spread faster in the city centres than in the countryside, this thesis focusses on the urban population.

Further research shows that the state's efforts to apply a new surveillance tool have other reasons than just political censorship. The technologies used for creating the SCSs have also been used to improve the business and marketing sectors. Additionally, the Chinese government wants to go further by striving officially for a transactional credit system. This is part of the 'Belt and Road Initiative' and is supposed to secure international trade and economic relations among nations by cooperating with 65 other countries within Asia, Africa and Europe. Starting in September 2017, the founder of the company Alibaba (Jack Ma) promoted their rating system to the Prime Minister of Canada. Together, they encouraged the Canadian government to grant expedited visas for Chinese visitors by using Alibaba's Sesame Credit rating platform. Evidence shows that the Chinese high-tech firms that are interconnected to the SCSs not only provide their state surveillance infrastructure nationwide but also aim to urge other nations to approve and install their service tools (Liang et al. 2018). Dai (2018) sees the SCS projects in its current state as an opportunity to facilitate some of its emerging projects, including the modernization of its data activities and to enhance a more expansive and practical reputation market. In order to achieve changes of market and government institutional efficiency, an implementation of technical but also political solutions have to be obtained. After the successful

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

implementation of a fundamental infrastructure for reputation-based governance in all public, economic and social domains, the SCSs can provide valuable information about the reputation for the state's practical process and impact. The SCSs provide grounds for many different research areas, e.g. on the operational level. Additionally, the actual behavioural and market impacts of the SCS pilots are worth evaluating. Last but not least, comparing the development of China's reputation-based governmental techniques and paradigms with those of western and developing countries can predict trends and outcomes in all domains of other nations (Dai, 2018).

2.1.6 Social Credit System and Online Dating in China

Since online dating spreads fast around all continents and offers a high potential for the implementation of SCSs, the following section is based on the contextualization between both mechanisms of online dating and the SCSs. Particularly the Sesame Credit Score spread fast and became highly influential. It denoted a high community base of users, probably also throughout the establishment of extensive promotion, such as deposit-free public bikes, hotels and renting services. Furthermore, promoted by Ant Financial to increase the impact of its credit score, Sesame Credit took increasingly part in other social contexts, such as with travel visa applications and online dating platforms (Liu, 2019). Since individuals more and more use online dating websites, as special types of social networking sites, to search for potential partners (Su and Hu, 2019), the establishment of a social credit rating system inside those platforms has the ability to shift the formation of society.

Innovations in the transport and communications sector make it easier for brides of today to move physically and connect easier with the potential partners (Davin, 2005). New communication technologies are increasingly used among young people to interconnect with others. They function nowadays as a mediator to enhance various kinds of relationships. Scholars from different fields have studied mate choice and marital decisions in order to derive valuable insights from the formation and evolutionary perspective of society. Some physiologists question the long-term effect of matches found online. Nonetheless, one survey shows that marriages initiated through online dating are more resistant than the traditional match-making resulting from conventional offline channels (Su and Hu, 2019). One reason for the predicted success of online dating is the reach-potential provided by the internet in order to find mates (strangers), who were not in reach before (Chan, 2018). Particularly for those individuals who have problems finding a suitable match, such as homosexuals, middle-aged and elderly heterosexuals, online dating expands the search scope of potential partners than does the offline environment (Su and Hu, 2019).

Additionally, Chan (2018) states that using data applications can be seen as a form of individualism and finding of oneself. He points out that Chinese women use these technologies to escape from socially

2.1 Structure & Function of the Social Credit Systems

imposed pre-fabricated social norms and illustrates three disruptions of patriarchal patterns dating apps can provide: firstly, Chinese women can explore sexual desires and assert sexual agency over platforms like Momo (*chin. momo* 陌陌) and Tantan (*chin. tantan* 探探), where they are able to negotiate and participate in hook-ups. Those activities were and still are mainly exclusive to men. Another platform called Kanqi (*chin. kanqi*) triggers polyamorous relationships, which can be understood as a manifestation of women to alter the traditional sexual patterns that foster sexual exclusivity. Above those progressive advantages of liberation, if not kept secret, dating app users of any kind still receive high criticisms from others. One of Chan's informants, for instance, had to rewrite her Tantan profile after being condemned by a male app user for her sexual preferences (Chan, 2018). This shows that not only the women's sexuality is under surveillance but also their use of technology (Chan, 2018).

A second privilege is granted through the ability to gaze through the pictures of men, while rating and judging their outlook. This is another breaking of the boundaries of the traditional unidirectional gaze of men at women, which still does not solve the discourse about 'leftover women'. In his study, Chan (2018) explains that two of his informants were being confronted and thereby pressured with complaints about their single status. Questions of whether they got married, why they do not have a boyfriend or if something is wrong with them are common questions, including from bystanders asking their parents or families. This status labelled as 'left-over women' has been tackled by some single women who have emphasized on their careers without obeying the traditional stages of female roles in their lives (Gaetano 2014). Some of the women argue that they have not been left behind but that it was their choice of staying single. Others hold on to believe that the household could be equally separated between partners. Those ways of life can only be applied to women being able to afford their own living by depending on their material and financial success. However, data from Liu and Wang (2018) show that China's gender pay gap widens. In 2018, women earned only 78.3% of the average monthly salary that men made.

Some apps set their goal to establish a harassment-free space for women, which can be seen as the third breakthrough from traditional patterns. The users can report violators to the administrators, who are then banished from the apps. This is an important advantage for women to be able to defend themselves against sexual harassment, while the initiative from the state to ban harassment offline on the streets and at workplaces is limited or rather not existing. Many Chinese rights activists like Chen T. and Li W. (2017) point out various cases of violence against women at their workplace etc., while the local governments are not acting against it. Thus, whilst Chinese women can evidently protect themselves against online again harassment, if, on the contrary, that happens in their closer surrounding they cannot protect themselves, which in consequence is a threat to their lives (Chan 2018). Until now, the impact of the SCSs linked to the mate choice and marital decisions of Chinese

2.2 Chinese Marriage System

women has not been investigated. Therefore, this thesis provides important insights in regard to the mating behaviour of young women, and evaluates the potential outcome of the impact of the SCS on societal formation in the future. Although it can be argued that Ant Financial and other companies have already given up on rating systems, and that currently dating platforms commonly do not show credit ratings, the SCSs are still existing and interacts in the social sector (Liu, 2019). This fact has the ability to crucially influence the partner selection and marriage choices in society. Therefore, further investigations about the family and marriage system are necessary in order to evaluate the impact of the SCS with respect to society.

2.2 Chinese Marriage System

This sections deals with the Chinese marriage system by contextualizing the historical outlook on the regulatory systems such as the *hukou* system, marriage migration, new family-dynamics, the consequences of the one-child policies, and family symbiosis. It provides an overview of the main developments and implications on marriage-choices to obtain a better picture on the situation in today's China. The shifts in the gender dynamics in post-reform China are deeply connected to the institution of family and marriage that were ascertained by the *danwei*¹⁵ (*chin. danwei* 单位) work unit system. This *danwei*-based welfare system has increasingly been privatized and marketed, leading towards stronger bonding of family members to a supporting safety network, as it was established in the traditional Confucian ideology. Its main purpose was to overcome uncertainties, which evolved due to the crumbling welfare system in China. Thus, the meaning and status of the Chinese family are increasingly cherished, resulting in increasing care for the younger generation. The marriage of Chinese women underlies those caring characteristics, where anxious parents visit parks in order to match usually educated women in big cities with potential spouses (Ji, 2017). Furthermore, marriage migration in contemporary China is triggered by the uneven development and progressing communication in post-reform China. In some cases, women themselves use marriage as a stepping stone in order to move up the spatial hierarchy ladder and to escape the poorer living standards of their hometown (Davin, 2005).

In other cases, the families behind the women arrange marriages with the aspiration of marrying into a wealthier family and receiving higher bride prices. Marriage mediators are hired to mediate the women to their new marriage homes. Sometimes, travelling distances of over thousands of miles, these women are being isolated from their families and friends with no chance of return. Despite

¹⁵ *danwei*: work unit, which are one of the principal territorial forms used to organize China's urban population (Bjorklund, 1986).

2.2 Chinese Marriage System

preferable conditions for all parties, these arrangements can also lead towards adverse effects and suffering for the women (Davin, 2005). In the times of rapid modernization, in addition to the East Asian and western views of late marriage, the standard opinion favours an early and nearly universal marriage in China, as if finding a husband and starting a family should be the only goal in a woman's life. Women that are 27 years old or older and have not yet got married are called 'left-over women' (Ji, 2017). Additionally, the poorer areas of the country are losing women to richer coastal areas, achieving a misbalance in all sectors (Davin, 2005). Today, the SCS pilots render other aspects worth considering. The following part of this chapter deals with the historical outline and development of the Chinese family and marriage system in order to define the current status of family and the marriage bonding of young Chinese women in correlation with their partner selection and the SCSs.

2.2.1 The Hukou System & Marriage Migration

Particularly parents, having only one daughter as an adult child, worry about their daughter's well-being in the future. They hope that their daughters establish a safety net via marriage and will have a child, which will then take care of her in the future. In Asian countries, child-bearing is still highly linked to marriage, while cohabitation and non-marital fertility is rare. In China, this can be explained by the *hukou* system (*chin. hukou zhidu* 户口制度) in China. The *hukou* certificate for a newborn baby is normally issued with the presentation of the marriage license. Without a *hukou* certificate, the new families encounter difficulties, since various entitlements and life opportunities like schooling, housing, healthcare and social security embedded in the *hukou* regulations are omitted. As a consequence, even in contemporary Chinese society, young couples are pressured into getting married (Ji, 2017).

Until the economic reforms in the early 1980s, population migration within China was restricted by the *hukou* registration system (Davin, 2005). The *hukou* system focused on the control of migration by regulating the residence of citizens (Liang et al. 2018). A registration book was sent out to each household to register the people among their localities. Each individual inside a household is restricted to their place of registration, which helped to keep peasants in the countryside. Additionally, the food ratio of grain-based products in urban areas was limited to only urban citizens, making it extremely difficult for outsiders without an urban *hukou* to remain in the cities. Those regulations supported the goal to maintain education, health, better job opportunities and social security for the urban population. However, at the beginning of the 1980s, the rapid economic growth and free markets demanded labour in urban cities, which eased the regulations of the *hukou*. Through financial compensations, people from rural areas were able to receive a temporary resident's permit. In contemporary China, the *hukou* system is still used to split the labour market into two domains: the peasant migrants and urban citizens. This selection of peasant migrants from urban citizens induces

2.2 Chinese Marriage System

acts of discriminations against the peasants, making a lifetime settlement in cities unattractive. Since they were bound to their land in the time of the collective era, marriage migration was the only opportunity for females to move out of other rural or urban areas. With the expectations of better living conditions, 2.9 million women moved across provincial boundaries to the men's homes in between 1985 and 1990. Since exogamy marriages (marrying outside the village) had advantages for peasant families, this had been general practise in China, even though, after 1949, with the introduction of the consensual marriage, bounding within villages increased. Out-marriage facilitates advantages including the extension of marriage partners, the dilation of the family network with contacts of neighbouring villages, the supply of market information of other villages and the cooperativeness for building houses, harvesting or other emergencies. In theory, exogamy enables risk sharing and offers women a better life (Davin, 2005).

Like labour migration, marriage migration - and therefore the marriage market - have undergone various adaptations through the economic, social and political shifts of the post-Mao reform. Since the economic growth, marriage migration transformed from moving to neighbouring counties to long-distance marriage migration, from the less developed west to the higher developed east. This resulted in favourable movements to richer coastal provinces like Hebei, Anhui and Jiangsu, while poorer central regions including Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan were losing their female marriage candidates. However, municipalities such as Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai show the lowest proportions of marriage migrants in China. This can be explained through their strong positions in the marriage market, which makes peasant brides unfavourable. Davin (2005) concludes that women are using mobility to escape poverty and to make a living in a more prosperous area, indicating the connection between marriage migration and the spatial hierarchy of development in China (Davin, 2005).

2.2.2 New Dynamics of the Family System

The *danwei* system with its dual state apparatus and the socialist gender egalitarian ideology undergoes a revival since the post-1978 economic reform (Ji, 2017). In pre-reform urban China, the work unit (*danwei*) played a major role in defining the life of workers in the social, economic and political domains by creating an 'organized dependency' in an all-encompassing system. With the emergence of non-state economic entities like the privatization of firms and local-foreign joint ventures, the status of the *danwei* has decreased, even by state-owned and state-transformed employers such as public-traded firms, universities and hospitals. However, a research of Xie et al. (2009) shows that the *danwei* is still used as an indicator of earnings and benefits, particularly determining the financial conditions of workers, and therefore influencing their socioeconomic welfare. The work unit officials used the *dang'an* system (permanent dossiers or archival system) to record the

2.2 Chinese Marriage System

'performance and attitudes' of citizens on mainland China to make decisions about the people under their control (Jiang 2020). The information sampled by the *dang'an* system cannot be reviewed by individuals and comprises personal data such as ID numbers, employment records and educational information (Liang et al. 2018).

In post-reform China, the *danwei* system also fostered women's emancipation by taking over the family's economic functions, and therefore provided incentives to engage in the labour market. The women were untied from the traditional values of the feudal society and the integrated perspectives on their economic function in the private families. Under the *danwei*, services such as nurseries, kindergartens, schools, medical care, dining halls, pensions etc. were established to provide safety to each individual. In this sense, the traditional family and kinship system was replaced by a communist official system, creating new laws and institutions, like the women's right to a love marriage, ownership of property, access to education and employment. The patriarchal, stereotypical traditions remained only in the private families, where domestic roles were gendered. Being derived from the Marxist ideology, the 'obligation equality' fostered a new image of equality in China. Nonetheless, it encouraged men's and women's self-sacrifice and obligation to the construction of the socialist state, rather than calling for equal rights. Hence, it often resulted in even more duties and sacrifices for women. The daily household chores for example were considered as tasks naturally completed by women (*chin. te shu kun nan* 特殊困难), while the additional work on the labour market was highly valued. However, gender equality was strengthened in the last sixty years of Chinese society through the dual state apparatus of *danwei* and the Marxist egalitarian gender ideology (Ji, 2017).

Along the way towards marketization, both the *danwei* system and the Marxist gender egalitarian ideology began to fall apart, leading to a division of the public and private sector. As a result, the guarantee for a lifetime employment vanished, making dual-income indispensable to cover the family expenses. Other obstacles, such as the inequivalent income between men and women and the declining employment rates for women (from 89.4 per cent to 62.3 per cent) between 1990 and 2003 appeared. With increased privatization, reproductive facilities and care services like *danwei* run kindergartens (7221 to 2912/2001-2010) were cut back (Ji, 2017). Those extra obligations fell back onto the individual families, mainly to the women who tried to maintain the household and cover the rising living costs in urban areas. The economic security for individuals, once provided through the *danwei* system, lessened, enhancing the pressure of work-family conflicts for women. Since there is neither an appropriate welfare system nor are institutions in charge that provide social security and care services, the individual family became the economic pool and safety net for each individual. Furthermore, the economic growth and urbanization triggered the privatization of housing, marketization of health care and education. Also, extremely high living expenses repulsed young people back to their families because they had been unable to handle their finances. The young people

2.2 Chinese Marriage System

started to depend again on their family members as their protection and sponsors. In particular, urban middle-class families invested a lot of money and time into their children, in order to guarantee them a high education plus scientific and intensified mothering. Additionally, parents started to join parent and teaching groups, invested money and time in extracurricular activities, like piano classes and language coaching in order to improve parent-child bonding, but also to foster control over their children. The lack of welfare support and poorer financial conditions, induced by the rapid modernization in China, quickly provoked the return towards traditional, patriarchal family systems. New family dynamics were formed out of a grid of interwoven modern and traditional elements (Ji, 2017).

2.2.3 In-Balance in Sex Ratio – The Consequence of the One-Child Policy

The following section provides an historical overview of the one-child policies and its implications on family building. The implementation of the one-child policy from 1980 onwards can be seen as another regulation system to control birth rates among the Chinese society. It was established to reduce the population growth rate in China and to support China's economic growth. It was clearly not practised as voluntary family planning, rather as an enforced policy (Fang et al. 2016). Initiatives were granted for families following the rules, punishments imposed for people not obeying the law. This principle is adapted also by the SCSs. The one-child policy seemed to be a 'well-practised' regulation system, providing advantages and disadvantages to each individual in order to guarantee compliance. Under this law, tremendous sterilization and abortion campaigns were organized, leading to 14.4 million abortions, 20.7 million sterilizations, and 17.8 million intrauterine device (IUD) insertions, from 21 million births in China in 1983. These practises were not always voluntary actions. In the end, the reform policies were decisive for China's economic success and not the extreme practises of the one-child policy (Fang et al., 2016).

On the contrary, due to the low fertility rates, China encountered socioeconomic and cultural changes. The 35 years ongoing policy led to tens of millions to 100 million one-child families today. The ratio between the working-age population and the elderly people declines. This aging population fosters social and economic problems, which are burdens on the current working generation. Furthermore, the sex-orientated abortion and female infanticide during those three decades have resulted in an imbalance in the sex ratio with 20-40 million of predicted surplus men (Fang et al., 2016), entailing tremendous consequences. As of today, coming along with the lack of women, men have trouble finding a partner to marry. The most affected individuals are poor and physically or mentally disabled men. These men are often the poorest in town and cannot provide the gifts and bride prices expected in that area. Although, dowry has lessened in status since the 1950s, but it is still common practice. In

2.2 Chinese Marriage System

this case, the described men's only option is often to marry a migrant bride, since they are cheaper. As a result, the physical and mental conditions of men might bring disadvantages to the migrating bride. A woman who has travelled a long distance might be disappointed in the choice and conditions of the bridegroom and tends to run away. The women who are further away from their hometown are easier to control as they are more dependent. Without families, friends or acquaintances on their side, they can easily become victims of ill-treatment, abuse or experience a life under subservient conditions, unable to contact their family to get help. There are many women who have been tricked into a marriage with sick, old or disabled men, or where the broker sold the bride on the way of the travel or abducted her. Despite these risks, long-distance match-making can also provide great advantages for both families. To maximise the success, families tend to limit the geographical proximity by enquiring through a network of friends and acquaintances. In case of a deception, the reputation of the conning family is destroyed, which provides a safer matchmaking. The families try to make the most of the situation to create a better life for their daughters and themselves (Davin, 2005).

With the establishment of a new national health and family planning commission in March 2013, the destruction of the depicted policy was initiated. By November 2013, the policy was partially relaxed, allowing couples to have two children if one parent is an only child, and since 2016 all couples have had the permission to have two children. The far more significant factor is that couples no longer require to announce their family planning to the government, and merely need to register the born child after its birth. Although, the one-child policy is considered as 'misinformed public policymaking'; it induced a reconsideration of the lives of women and children, even in China. The Chinese government started to pay attention to the family planning series in the 1990s, while declaring to provide free and safe access to voluntary family planning and to improve the quality of women's reproductive health (Fang et al. 2016).

Because of the one-child family policy, traditional family patterns increase. The families are dependent on dual-income, while without an appropriate welfare system, elderly people depend on the care of their adult children. In former times, parents' sons were expected to provide old-age support (*chin. yang er fan lao* 养儿防老) but many scholars argue that in contemporary times the daughters increasingly take over the caring roles. Traditionally these daughters were raised to support their parents-in-law but nowadays they have the duty to additionally take care of their own parents. This may be a consequence of the low fertility rate of the one-child policy (Ji, 2017).

2.2.5 Family Symbiosis & Mating Preferences

When the *danwei* turned into a market economy, the state was not able to control the private life of each individual and marriage increasingly became a personal choice. In today's China, factors like

2.2 Chinese Marriage System

educational backgrounds, income and *hukou* are highly valued and it is important to take them into account when choosing a potential spouse. At these times, when the Chinese family and society is integrated in traditions and modernity, on the one hand it is paradoxical to observe that individuals progressively strive for old mating practices such as hypergamy and similar family backgrounds. On the other hand, it is understandable to look at the high expenses of living in the cities in China, which led to new social norms and family symbiosis in China (Ji, 2017).

Regardless of the fact that adult children may earn money or not, the parents provide financial care for buying a house and services, like educational support for their grandchildren. Due to the high investment of their parents and family members, the younger generation feels obligated to provide health and financial care for the older generation. This leads towards new patterns of families, which intercorrelate with the traditional settings but stand against the western characteristics of individualism. Furthermore, those circumstances of family dependence seem to legitimize the parental intrusion in the marriage choices and future lives of their sons and daughters, and may also influence the types of mating. There are two different types of mating represented in contemporary China: The traditional 'mating-matching doors' and the modern individualistic romantic love (Ji, 2017). They lead to another pattern of gendered hypergamy. The observed exercise of hypergamy on the marriage market can be explained through a schematic concept of an 'A man' matching a 'B woman', a 'B man' matching a 'C woman', and a 'C man' matching a 'D woman'. 'A women' and 'D men' are the ones to lose this concept of traditional hypergamy. However, the approval of younger and less successful men by educated women is more frequently observed than men accepting more mature, intelligent and affluent women (Ji, 2017). A research from Han (2010) showed that in the late 1990s senior high school graduates and college graduates in modern China were less likely to get married than in the 1970s. Those different and complex patterns, which depend on the ideas of each individual, can be practised alone or combined, leading towards social discrimination and the phenomena of 'left-over women' (Han, 2010). Depending on each different social status, location and social domain, all scenarios can be represented in contemporary Chinese society but not understood without the gender perspective (Ji, 2017).

Su and Hu (2019) also define two theories of how the different genders choose their partners. The first is the 'potentials-attract' hypothesis, and the second is the 'likes-attract', which is similar to the 'individual criteria' hypothesis of Ji (2017). The 'potentials-attract' goes along with the reproductive potential, and is defined as people seeking mates based on sex-specific traits. For example, men looking for potential partners, choose young, healthy and attractive women, while women rather consider other characteristics of males, such as ambition, social status, financial wealth and the commitment of partners. In other words, men mainly look for young, physically attractive women, and women first look at the socio-economic status of men to build a perfect long-term match (*chin. lang*

2.2 Chinese Marriage System

cai nu mao 郎才女貌: talented man and beautiful women = ideal couple). Then there is the 'likes-attract' hypothesis, proposing that people choose mates that are similar to themselves in a variety of attributes. This goes along with the Chinese saying '门当户对'/'*men dang hu dui*': well-matched in social and economic status (for marriage). Which hypothesis is chosen by both sexes depends on the perspective of evolutionary and social psychology that derives from parental investment. In the case of offline dating, scholars show a higher use of the 'potentials-attract' theory, while investigations of online dating sites illustrate a wider use of the 'likes-attract' strategy (Su and Hu, 2019). With online ratings in regard to a 'trustworthy society', Chinese women probably begin to focus more on the characteristics of 'potentials-attract'. By finding a partner with a high social status, financial wealth and high ambition, the risk of being punished may be lesser than by focussing on the 'likes-attract', where the same attributes and similar status are in focus.

Since those aspects are still understudied, the thesis provides new understanding from the perspectives of Chinese women being embedded in the construct of family symbiosis and their own individualistic points of view. The diverse family generations stand in a sequential symbiosis with each other in order to replace the missing social welfare system. Additionally, the previous traditional patriarchal view of the father being the 'dominate' family member has vanished, while the parent-child relationship appears as an independent bonding. In this security network, the different generations experience major challenges, such as disputes between traditional norms and modern desires, gender differences, love and money. This conglomerate new social modernity gives rise to both an increase and decrease of individualism, easily enhancing traditional practices like the early marriage for women (Ji, 2017). Taking the components of the SCSs into account, the thesis provides a 360° view of all potential interrogations women are confronted with during their partner selection. This analysis not only provides information about current handlings of partner choice but may also predict the trend of mating in the future, with an outlook on the potential impact of the SCSs on society.

In this context, the following chapter number three deals with the family and marriage patterns in contemporary China, by evaluating the surveys (2017/2020). The analysis provides an understanding to the question, which factors affect the partner selection of Chinese women, contextualizing the personal choice of Chinese women in regard to family, marriage and potential influences, such as the SCSs.

3 Family and Marriage Patterns in Contemporary China

This chapter analyses the family and marriage patterns in contemporary China, using the evaluations of the questionnaires from 2017 and 2020. The analysis is divided into three parts: Firstly, the considerations of young Chinese women, confronted with the question of marriage and family building, are defined; secondly, the intensity of the family-bonding represented in contemporary China is determined; and thirdly, the extent of external factors, such as the Chinese parents/families, taking part in the partner selection process are investigated and evaluated. Both questionnaires (2017/2020) are evaluated and compared in order to prevent trial and error, by identifying changes and similarities in the answering patterns with regard to the key question: RQ1: *'Which factors affect the partner selection of Chinese women?'*. This chapter shows that the majority of Chinese women who were surveyed are still in favour of getting married and having their own family in the future, rather than staying single or unmarried. Even though, being embedded tightly in a close traditional family constellation, with parents, family members and other external factors interfering in their personal choices, they established a defensive stance towards the intrusion when it comes to their partner selection.

3.1 The Question of Marriage and Family Building

Chapter 3.1 deals with the perceptions and behaviours of urban Chinese women, being torn between their families and marriage choices. The findings provide information on the present considerations and status of the females on partner selection. Today, the young generation lives among uncertain, and fractionally risky environmental conditions, in which some women criticise the men's conservative gender ideologies such as patriarchal ideas of control over marriage. On the other hand, they are making compromises between role expectations, in which they have to combine private family life with their personal success in the public sector (Ji, 2017). Others try to break out of the suppression by using technologies, such as dating apps, or withdraw marriage in the future. In this context, Ji (2017) points out: *'Another question deserves more discussion here. How is one to understand women's 'personal choice' (...)'* (citation: Ji, 2017, p. 13: 46-47). Hence, the following analysis deals with the matter of *'personal choice'* of Chinese women, by answering the sub-question: *'What are the present considerations of young Chinese women being confronted with the question of family and marriage building?'*. The data analysis illustrates that the Chinese women are undergoing far-reaching structural changes in regard to their own way of thinking and personal choices that are driven by traditional family norms and suppression on the one hand, and their individualistic and liberal ideas on the other hand.

3.1 The Question of Marriage and Family Building

In fact, the average age of Chinese urban women to get married does not seem to deviate much from women's ages of urban cities in other countries. In 2020, German women were getting married at a mean age of 32.4 years (Destatis, 2021). While in China the survey participants (2017/2020) estimate the age to vary between 26 and 27 years (questionnaires 2017/2020, see tables 4/5), the interview participants (2020) come closer to the approximation of the Germany statistic, by predicting the age of marriage in big cities between 28 and 30 years (interviews 2020). Since additionally also newspapers increasingly report about single unmarried Chinese women of ages above 30 (Xinhua, 2018), the *first finding* is that the trend of later marriage constantly rises. This illustrates the renunciation from the traditionally early marriages from the past and the alignment to other countries. However, even though many Chinese women surveyed in this study put focus on career building, most of them are still in favour of having their own family in the future. Analysing the shifts helps to understand the contemporary situation in China and to answer the main question under which circumstances the Chinese women choose their partner.

The gender assemblage varies and the younger generation seems to be more outspoken in regard to their status and sexual orientation than in the past. On the contrary, there is still a small number of women who do not make their relationship official. 72% of non-married participants conducting the surveys in 2020 state that they have a boyfriend, 9% have a girlfriend, 8% are engaged and 11% are currently in a relationship that is not official (see table 5: 1.3). Taking a look at the survey session of 2017, it is shown that even 11% of participants have a girlfriend and 5% are in an unofficial relationship (see table 4: 1.3). It is interesting that 11% of women already in 2017, and 9% of the young women in 2020 reveal their relationship with a partner of the same sex, since lesbian, bisexual, transgender (LBT), gay and intersex people in China are still not treated equally e.g. at the workplace (Suen, 2020). Additionally, a full acceptance is also not achieved among society. LBT women, exposing their sexual orientation, are often facing severe violence within their families (China LBT Rights Initiative, 2009). The fact that the women come out can be seen as another statement against traditional family practises and a more liberal way of thinking. On the other hand, 5% in 2017, and 11% of participants in 2020 state that they have not revealed their relationship in an official manner, partially because they have not been together for a long time and partially because they fear the reactions of their family members. This illustrates the discrepancy that the women are being confronted with.

The satisfaction of being happy in a relationship, with a partner, remains stable. The analysis shows that 63% of informants from the 2017 survey are being happy in their current relationship, where about 61% of participants from the 2020 survey state the same (see tables 4/5). The data of 2017 show that 35% of the Chinese women who participated in the surveys have a neutral feeling and 2% are unhappy (see table 4: 1.4). In comparison, 32% of the informants of 2020 have a neutral feeling, and 7% are unhappy (see table 5: 1.4). Some of the participants are still pressured by remaining traditional

3.1 The Question of Marriage and Family Building

family patterns to choose the optimal spouse, although the options are limited by family interference (see sub-chapter 3.2).

Over three years of time, the comparison shows a slight decrease in happiness. 7% of the 2020 survey informants are unhappy in their relationship, while 2% of the 2017 survey participants declare that they are unhappy. This may be explained through the increasing external pressures laid on the women over the past years. At the same time, this increase up to 7% seems quite small for such an interpretation. Simple reasons such as the different group assemblage in both survey settings may have led to these differences. Thus, this explanation may be neglected at this point, but should be kept in mind as factors for changing values. In this context, further evaluations show that the reasons why 47-49% of the Chinese participants are not being in a relationship at the moment are manifold (see tables 4/5: 2). The main reason mentioned is that most women have not found the right partner yet, partly due to individual choices but also due to the often-idiosyncratic constraints of the family members (questionnaires 2017/2020). Nonetheless, society is changing and social interactions are increasingly offered, replacing the previous demand of early marriage with various opportunities in self-fulfilling aspects, such as striving for high-positioned careers. Around 18/19% of the informants are focussing on other aspects, like career building. They support their stand by saying that 'there is nobody I like', there is 'no reason' to rush finding a partner at the moment or that they are 'too busy' (see tables 4/5: 2). Other participants do not feel the need to get into a relationship since 'social interactions are increasing' (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 2). These are some of the reasons why 16% of the 2017 survey participants and 22% of the 2020 survey informants do not see the need to rush into a partnership, but rather enjoy their lives before starting a family life. Other 12% of the 2017 survey-, and 7% of the 2020 survey respondents are merely not interested in finding a partner, and again another 5% have other reasons that they do not mention (see tables 4/5: 2).

From the historical point of view, one could speculate that the governmental control in China has something to do with the current selection of suitable partners. Since 1982, the government has encouraged later marriage as an attempt to limit the population growth in China (Hare-Mustin, 1982). In the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, passed at 21st *Session of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress* on April 28, 2001, it is implemented that 'no marriage may be contracted before the man has reached 22 years of age and the women 20 years of age. Late marriage and late childbirth shall be encouraged.' (cit. National People's Congress Standing Committee, 2002: Chapter II Marriage Contract, *Article 6*). This practice seems to go along with the practices of childbearing of contemporary urban Chinese women. According to the data from the questionnaires, the analysis reveals that the average Chinese woman starts to have children rather after finishing up her academic careers and after getting married, at a later age than in the past. The survey from 2017 identified that 42% of the participants have children and 58% currently do not, while the evaluation of

3.1 The Question of Marriage and Family Building

the 2020 questionnaire shows a lower number of participants with children, corresponding with the higher number of students and unmarried participants (see tables 4/5: 9).

There are different explanations given why the women currently do not have children. In accordance with the 2020 evaluation, most participants, also from the 2017 session, stated that they did not find the right person to start a family with, and 26% declare that they put their focus on other things. 24% of women in 2017 enjoy their freedom and 15% are currently not interested in having children. Other reasons for not having children is money or that the women are afraid of the pain while giving birth (questionnaire 2017, see table 4: 9.2). The minority of participants from the 2020 survey session has children, merely comprising an average percentage of 21 (see table 5: 9). However, reasons for this low number cannot be attributed to the governmental regulations, but rather to the above-mentioned liberal ways of thinking. Some women state that they are still young and in school and rather do not relate this declaration to the law but to their individual perceptions. The participants mention that they mainly focus on other things, or that they have not found the right person they want to start a family with. 12% of the respondents remarked that they are enjoying their freedom, 7% of women are simply not interested in starting a family, 5% are limited by money and another 5% have reasons that they do not mention. Some of them simply do not want to get married and do not want to have children (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 9.2). However, generally speaking, the average woman wants to have a husband and her own children in the future. The data deriving from the questionnaires of 2017 and 2020 confirm the above- stated arguments by 67% and 69% of the votes (see tables 4/5: 10). The informants explain that 'it's part of life' to have children or they say that they simply like children or want to have children because they find them cute/'小孩子很可爱' (questionnaire 2017, table 4: 10.1). Furthermore, some women argue that one person without a family is pretty lonely/'一个人的话太孤独' and another one states that children bring the family happiness when one gets old/'等老了享受天伦之乐' (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 10.1).

Nonetheless, for a woman to achieve high valued positions on the job market seems to be more and more desired under the group of the participants, reflecting the transformation from the past, when women were mainly delegated to the household and family duties, to the current engagement in high job positions. Today, as the income of men and women in China is still not equal; the number of women in high-ranked positions is increasing. Many informants would even choose a successful career over their own family. Nonetheless, the findings show that on average, the participants value the importance of both aspects in life equally, illustrating the highly increased significance and status of the profession for Chinese women in China. The data evaluation of the questionnaire 2020 shows that 73% of the participants evaluate family and career-building as equally important. 16% of the women would rather focus on family building and 11% on career building (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 10.3). Compared to the statements conducted in 2017, when 58% of informants value family and

3.1 The Question of Marriage and Family Building

career building as equally important, 31% of women put family building before career building (questionnaire 2017, see table 4: 10.3). This shows that in 2020 the importance of career building has increased, which may be seen as a stand against the traditional pathways, where Chinese women can fulfil both task of managing their own family and careers.

Here, another aspect is worthy to mention: While traditionally it was quite common that the parents and family chose a beneficial spouse for their female members, over the last decades this has changed and the women are increasingly encouraged (also by law) to select a partner on their own free will. This finding demonstrates that couples get to know each other in university, at social events or at work. However, the classical pathways, such as introductions through family or friends are still present, and new pathways, e.g. via online platforms or video games, open new perspectives in regard to the love life. The data of figure 3 indicate different aspects and possibilities of how the Chinese women taking part in the surveys get to know their partners. The pathway via online games, travelling/vacation, in sports clubs and other facilities is reflected through the highest bar, named 'other' and contains 25% of the votes of how Chinese young people get to know one another (see figure 3: survey 2020). In 2017, the highest bar was represented through 'university', resembling the second position with 22% of votes in 2020. 15% of the overall participants in 2017 list different facilities, e.g. travelling and vacation or school/community events as contact pools, where they got to know their partners (see figure 3: survey 2017).

However, friends and work also play a big part in the interaction of social relations. 13% of participants got introduced to their current partners through a friend, and 11% at work (see figure 3: survey 2017). It is visible that social interactions of other people can have a major impact on other people's life and behaviour, which is more widely evaluated in the second part of chapter three. Furthermore, even though online dating appears to be a rather secretive topic among the Chinese society, it seems to be increasingly practised and accepted among young people within China. While 7-8% of informants confirmed to have found their soulmate via online platforms, which does not seem to be a significant number within this evaluation, it shows the astonishing fact that some Chinese women surveyed in this study stand by their actions, revealing this matter so that it may cause them a bad reputation within society. Since video games can also sometimes function as dating-platforms, are integrated within the 15% of votes from the category 'others' in 2017, and increased to 25% in 2020, it can be assumed that this number may be even higher today. This aspect shows a higher rate of individualism within the young generation. On the other hand, a low number of 6% and 8% of participants got introduced to their partners through their parents and families, showing the remaining but rather low relevance of patriarchal family practices and family interactions in contemporary China (see figure 3: surveys 2017/2020).

3.2 Family Bonding in China

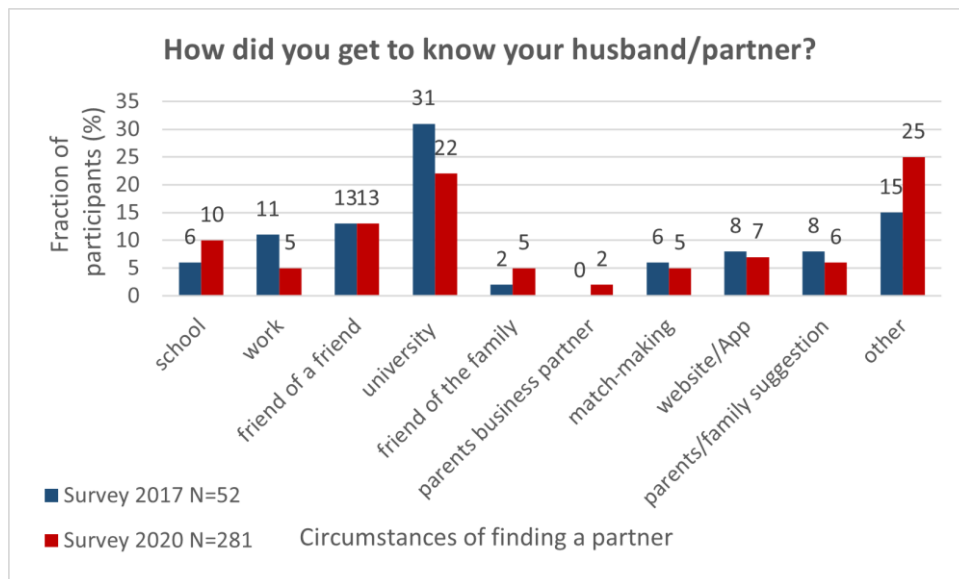


Figure 3 Circumstances of Finding a Husband/Partner.
Note: Distribution of the participants, 2017 survey (N=52) and 2020 survey (N= 281).

In order to clarify if this participation of the parents/families is wanted by the women or rather forced onto them, the following section will provide evidence about the family-bonding in contemporary China.

3.2 Family Bonding in China

Since the living expenses in Chinese cities are quite high, so that most young adults cannot cover them on their own, parents and other family members often provide financial aid to their family members. In exchange, the young generation are used to return the favour of health and financial care, when being able to do so. This creates a family symbiosis between the different generations but also leads to major challenges, such as disputes between traditional norms and modern ideas, particularly when it comes to integrate a person from the outside into the family (Ji, 2017). With regard to the key question of chapter three, under which circumstances Chinese women choose their partner, the second part of this chapter will answer the following sub-question: *'How strong is the family bonding in contemporary China?'*. The data provided from the questionnaires illustrates that the family bonding of the Chinese women surveyed and the older generation remains strong. Most of the participants have a good and stable relationship with their parents and family members, even involving them in their decision-making process and asking them for advice concerning specific problems. However, when it comes to their love life and partner selection, most women refuse the involvement of their relatives.

3.2 Family Bonding in China

Generally speaking, the findings show that urban Chinese women who took part in the surveys of this thesis have a good relationship and strong mutual bonding with their parents and family members. Nonetheless, most of them do not actively seek advice from their parents/families when it comes to the decision of selecting a partner. According to the analysis of the questionnaire from 2017, it is shown that 75% of the overall participants define their relationship with their family members as good, and 24% of survey interviewees declare that they have an inconsistent relationship with their parents (see table 4: 3). In comparison to the statements gathered from the questionnaires of 2020, not one of the interviewees feels that they have a bad relationship (questionnaires 2017, see table 4: 3). From the data evaluated in the questionnaires of 2020, it can be estimated that 64% of Chinese women surveyed in this study remain in a good relationship with their parents, 32% of survey interviewees describe their relationship as ‘on and off’, and 2% of participants feel that their relationship with their family members is not good. Additionally, some women added that they pursue a mostly good relationship, despite not discussing marriage problems (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 3). Mentioning this fact, this illustrates that marriage seems to be a critical and important factor within Chinese families and in case of disagreements it may lead to family conflicts. Nonetheless, generally the family bonding seems to be tight. This investigation is also supported through the table below. Accordingly, the Chinese women surveyed in this study are more likely to live together with their parents than it would be the case in Germany, when reaching the age of marriage. The women seem to keep a close relationship with their closer families and communities (see table 1).

Table 1 Current Status of Living

Category	Affirmation		Negation	
	2020	2017	2020	2017
3: Do you currently live together with...?				
Close family members (N=259/ N=66)	41%	33%	59%	67%
Boyfriend/husband (N=190/ N=64)	6%	52%	94%	48%
Bf/husbands close family (N=255/ N=64)	16%	23%	84%	77%
3.4: How do you live? (N=147/ N=30)				
Alone	49%	33%	-	-
Shared apartment	30%	27%	-	-
Shared room	8%	37%	-	-
other	13%	3%	-	-

Note: Distribution of the participants, 2017 survey (N=30-66): blue and 2020 survey (N=147-259): red.

Table 1 further indicates that the majority of Chinese women who participated in this study either live at their parents’ place, close by, or alone. The data derived from the surveys show that the living conditions of the participants are divided into different aspects. The different status and living conditions play a significant role within this evaluation. In 2017, around 49% of the interviewees were

3.2 Family Bonding in China

already married, while during the survey session of 2020 only 28% had a husband (see tables 4/5: 1.1). Hence, it is not surprising that already 52% of the women that conducted surveys in 2017, live together with their boyfriend or husband, 33% live together with their closest family members and 23% live together with their boyfriend's/husband's family (see table 1). Although, 54% of them are students, it is still astonishing how many Chinese women who took part in this study live together with their close family members or their boyfriend's/husband's families. Taking a look at the living conditions in detail, it becomes visible that 33% of the women live alone, and 27% of the participants live in shared apartments. 37% of the women share a room and 3% have other living standards (survey 2017, see table 1). In regard to the survey session of 2020 that comprises 40% of the participants that are already employed and therefore presumably able to afford a living on their own, at least 48% of informants are students (questionnaire 2020, see table 5). Thus, it is not surprising that they are more likely to live at home (together with close family members), since they cannot afford the high living expenses (survey 2020, see table 1: 3).

The women seem to keep a closer distance to their families than it would be expected from young women in Germany. Not only the women who live together with their relatives, report daily contact to their families, but also the women living in other cities or in the same city but on their own, keep in contact regularly. The data provided in both cases (questionnaire 2017/2020) reveal that 25% of participants see their parents every day, and the majority of informants see/visit their parents once in six months (see tables 4/5: 4). While 11% of the participants from 2017 visit their parents at least once a year, the data of 2020 claim twice as many informants see their parents on yearly basis. 5-11% visit them once/twice a month, and all of them argue that it depends on whether the families live nearby or in another city or province (see tables 4/5: 4). Some women state that they would see their parents every day if they had not moved to another place or abroad. In addition, when giving birth, the parents, in particular the mothers, often move to their daughters' place, take care of the baby and support the new mother (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 4). They may even stay for a couple of months to help the fresh family with their new duties (questionnaire 2017, see table 4: 4). The informants from the 2020 session explain further that even if they do not live in the same city like their parents, their parents will take a vacation to visit them for a whole month over the winter and summer season. Others mention that they communicate over video chat two to three times a week, if a short visit is not easily possible (questionnaires 2020, see table 5: 4).

Stating those facts, it is not surprising that the integration of the parents or family members in the lives of their daughters and female relatives results in a rather medial to high implication by the women seeking advice. The demand to consider external opinions decreases when it comes to partnership-related decisions. Figure 4 reveals how often Chinese women surveyed in this study in general approach their parents and/or family members and ask for advice (questionnaires 2017/2020). On

3.2 Family Bonding in China

average, 35% to 39% of the participants include their parents/family sometimes in their decision-making process. However, in 2017, 30% of the informants were often demanding the advice of their family members, in contrast 21% of the 2020th group. 26% of respondents from the 2017 survey group and 32% of participants from the 2020 survey consider the involvement of their parents, and the minority of women will always seek advice, or will not even consider to let their families participate in their decision-making process (see figure 4: surveys 2017/2020). It seems like the trend is going rather towards a state where the women can and want to solve their problems without the integration of their relatives. Nonetheless, it is impressive that some women always consider the advice from their elders, and that, on a common basis, still a high number of informants will strive for advice in case of indecisiveness (see figure 4). The data illustrate that the trust between the family generations is in a median to high range.

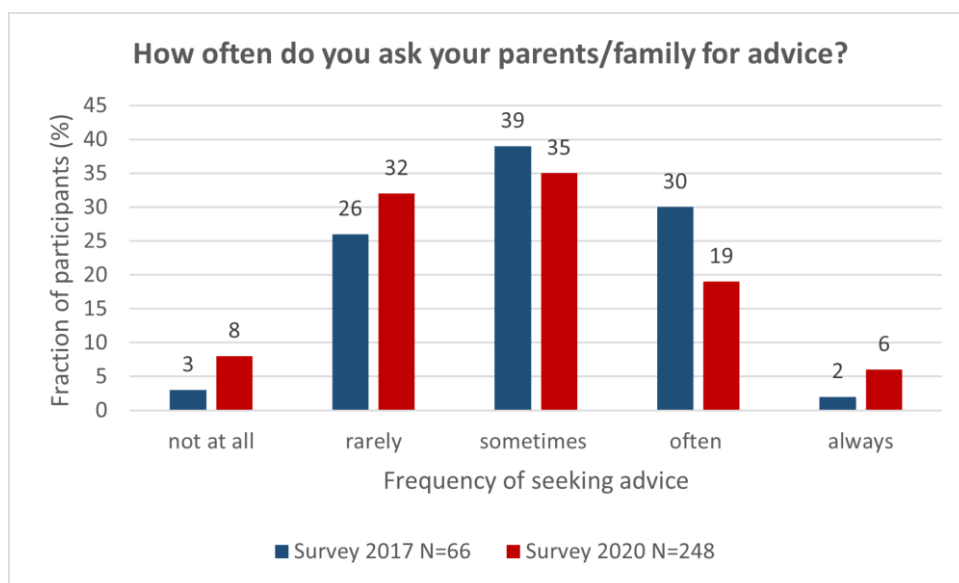


Figure 4 Frequency of Consulting Parents/Family Members in the Decision-Making Process of Chinese Women. Note: Distribution of the participants, 2017 survey (N=66) and 2020 survey (N= 248).

On the contrary, in regard to partnership-related questions, the figure 5 reflects the opposite situation. Depending on the topic of the dispute, the Chinese women surveyed in this study will rather not consider the recommendations of their family members. The data show that most informants will not ask their parents for advice when deciding on partners or partnership-related topics. The bars ‘not at all’ and ‘rarely’ are by far higher than those advocating the implication of family members (see figure 5: survey 2020). The evaluation in 2017 illustrates a similar distribution of votes for the bar graphs ‘not at all’ and ‘more or less’, indicating that in 2017, the women more often sought advice from their families compared to those in 2020 (see figure 5: survey 2017). While 35% of the women will address their parents and/or family members on a common basis for suggestions in regard to other topics (see

3.2 Family Bonding in China

figure 4: survey 2020), merely 22% will ask for their opinions being confronted with relationship matters (see figure 5: survey 2020). This decrease is likely being attributed to the content of the matter and the personal choice of the women. The substance of the matter and the personal choice seem to play an essential role to decide whether or not to involve other people in a decision-making process.

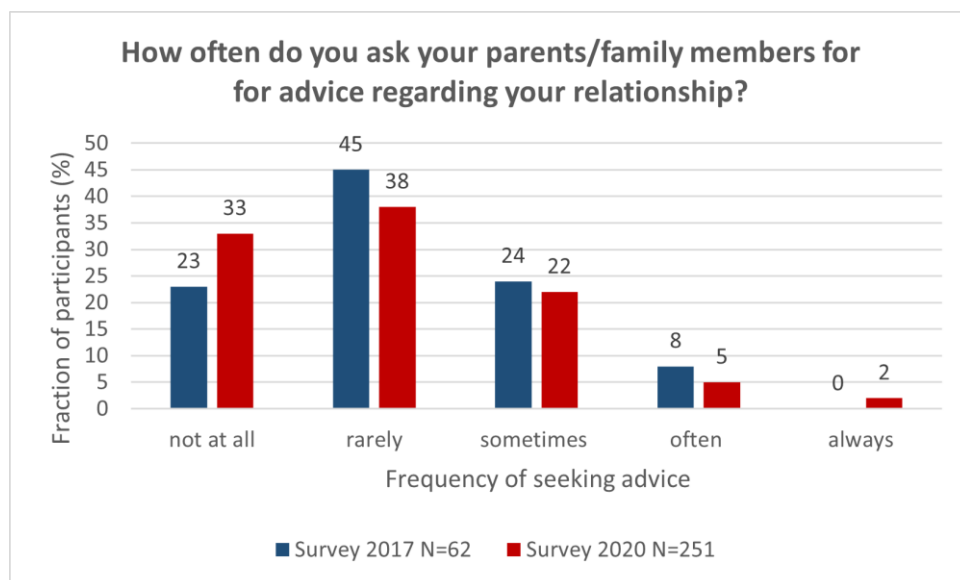


Figure 5 Frequency of Consulting Parents/Family Members in the Decision-Making Process of Chinese Women regarding their Relationship. *Note: Distribution of the participants, 2017 survey (N=62) and 2020 survey (N=251).*

In the past, Chinese parents and family members had a significant influence on the partner selection of Chinese women. Over decades, due to the improvements of the Marriage Law and educational thinking, the women increasingly earned the privilege of making their own choices. The data illustrated in the second finding underlines this development, by showing that the majority of participants could choose their partner/husband without intrusion from their parents. However, influence from parents and families on the partner selection still remains in contemporary China, so that it is not as obviously present anymore. Illustrated in figure 6, the graphs show that most parents were not involved in the partner choice of the participants. From the data of 2017, it can be seen that in most cases (56%) the integration of the parents/family members of the females was rare or rather not existing (see figure 6: survey 2017). On the other hand, around 27% of the parents/family members took part in the decision-making process of the women, and 12% of women were exposed to a lot of influence from their family members. 5% of women argue that they did not know who to choose/‘自己没想法’ and therefore included their family members into their partner choice (questionnaire 2017, table 4: 4.3-4.4). In contrast, less informants of the 2020 surveys point out that the involvement of their parents was of a minor degree, while 24% state that the influence they were exposed to was ‘more or less’ noticeable. 7% of the interviewees declare that their parents had a major influence on their decisions, and 4% of them had no decisive power at all concerning their partner selection (see figure 6: survey 2020). From

3.2 Family Bonding in China

this data, it can be estimated that not every woman can select her partner freely. While 14% of the women point out that they integrated their parents/family members unconfined, 35% argue that their parents/family members tried to influence their choice on their own (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 4.4-4.5).

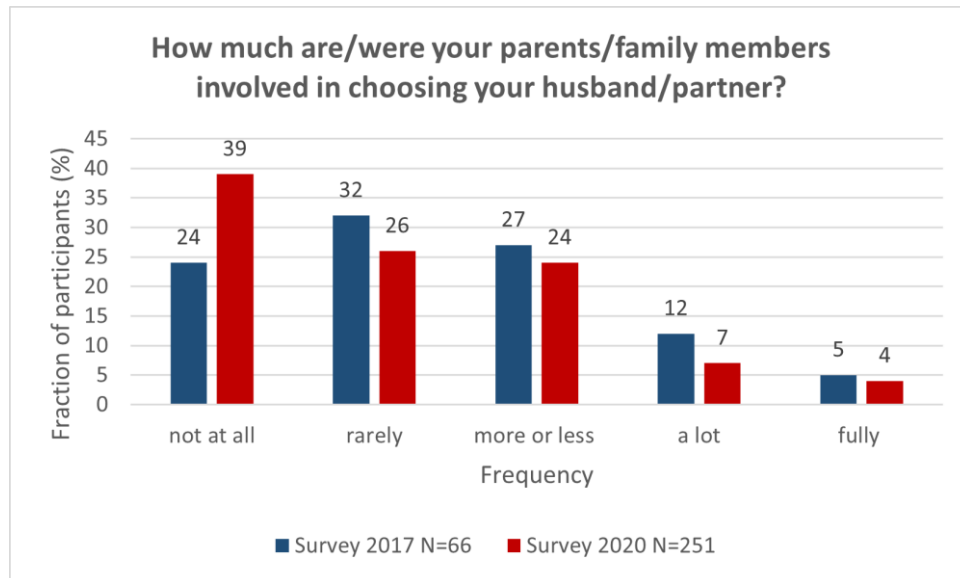


Figure 6 Frequency of Involvement of Parents/Family Members in the Partner Choice of Chinese Women.
Note: Distribution of the participants, 2017 survey (N=66) and 2020 survey (N= 251).

Reasons for this involvement can be extracted from the open-ended questions comprised in the surveys. The participants explain that their parents hope that they get married soon/‘希望我可以早点结婚’. They mainly justify the involvement by saying that the parents/family members believe that their daughter’s choice was ‘unsuitable’ and that they wanted their girls to be financially safe (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 4.5). In this context, one participant mentions three points why her parents wanted to get involved in her choice of marriage: Firstly, ‘I was too young (in high school)’; secondly, ‘we were not a good fit’, and thirdly, ‘my partner at the time was not very into me’ (questionnaire 2020: 4.5). She, among others, trusts that the ‘old need to help the young because they are not confident and experienced’ enough to make the right choices. Furthermore, their parents wanted/want to get involved since the chosen person does not fulfil their requirements and that they only want the best for the girls and see them happy/‘因为不符合他们的条件’/‘认为对我好’/‘希望我幸福’. Others think that ‘marriage is supposed to be a family decision’/‘结婚是家庭的事’ (questionnaire 2017: 4.5). Emanated from the surveys (2017), one of the informants explains: ‘I’m not interested in marriage at all, but if I had to do so someday because of the pressure from my parents and the society, I hope the one I might marry could at least satisfy my parents.’ Others did not integrate their parents into their partner selection before, ‘but when it came to marriage’/‘结婚的时候会’ (questionnaire 2017: 4.4). Overall, the majority of women are self-independent and do not include the

3.3 The Dimension of External Factors concerning Partner Selection

advice and requirements of bystanders in their partner choice. However, others seek advice and would follow the regulations and selectivity process of their parents and closest family members.

In the third part of this chapter, the extent of the intrusion from parents and family members will be further discussed, giving rise to a broader understanding of which external factors taking part in the partner selection process of Chinese women.

3.3 The Dimension of External Factors concerning Partner Selection

Throughout the close symbiosis between the families, family bonding is often being understood as a legitimization for parents or the older generation to interfere in the partner selection of the younger generation (Ji, 2017). This often results in conflicts, in which women are in discrepancy with either committing to the requirements of the family or trying to find compromises to enforce their own opinions. The third part of chapter three will put the discussion of the key question further by answering the third sub-question: *'To which extent are external factors, such as the Chinese parents/families taking part in the partner selection process?'*. The findings of the questionnaires provide evidence that the majority of women were not consciously influenced while choosing a partner. They either did not experience any or merely minor influence, and would not accept an intrusion of their parents and/or family members in regard to their partnership. However, a few percentages of women are in favour of the involvement of their family members. Despite their own personal situation, one group of the participants argues that Chinese parents are not involved in the partner selection today, while the other group assures that Chinese parents remain highly interfering in the partner choice.

The results show that the majority of the Chinese women who participated in this study were/are 'not at all' or only 'rarely' influenced concerning their partner selection. Most of the participants neither comply with requirements imposed by their parents/families nor take pieces of advice in regard to their partner selection. However, there is still a concealed interference emanating from Chinese parents/families, pressuring the women surveyed in this thesis with respect to their marriage choice. According to the data of the survey session (2017), it is illustrated that 21% of the participants experienced an influence of median intensity and 10% of rather high influence. 2% of the women were even exposed to a lot of pressure and declared that their parents fully decided over their choices when selecting a partner (questionnaire 2017, see table 4: 4.6). There are two different perceptions about the involvement: 21% of the Chinese women who took part in this study were happy about the integration and advice of their family members, stating: 'Their judgement is right' and 'that they just provide suggestions which are good'/'多个建议也好的' (questionnaire 2017: 4.6/4.7). Others declare that it is their own choice and that they do not want to be told what to do: 'It is personal, not a big fan

3.3 The Dimension of External Factors concerning Partner Selection

of being told what to do, it makes me feel like I'm controlled' (questionnaire 2017: 4.7). As shown in figure 7 illustrating the intensity of influence on partner choice, the bar graph enlisting 'not at all', thus predicting a free choice without interference by parents or other external factors, contains a percentage of 40 (see figure 7: survey 2020). This shows that the data of the surveys of 2020 show a higher value for the bar graph 'not at all' than in 2017. This leads to the assumption that over the years the families decreased their involvement within the partner selection process. In 2020, 34% of the participants experienced a slight influence, and 14% defined the influence as moderate ('more or less'). On the other hand, 8% of informants were pressured and argue that they perceived a lot of influence from their parents, while even 4% state that their parents took over their choice (see figure 7: survey 2020). Evaluating this data, it is obvious that most informants could/can choose their partner freely, but some women are/were pressured.

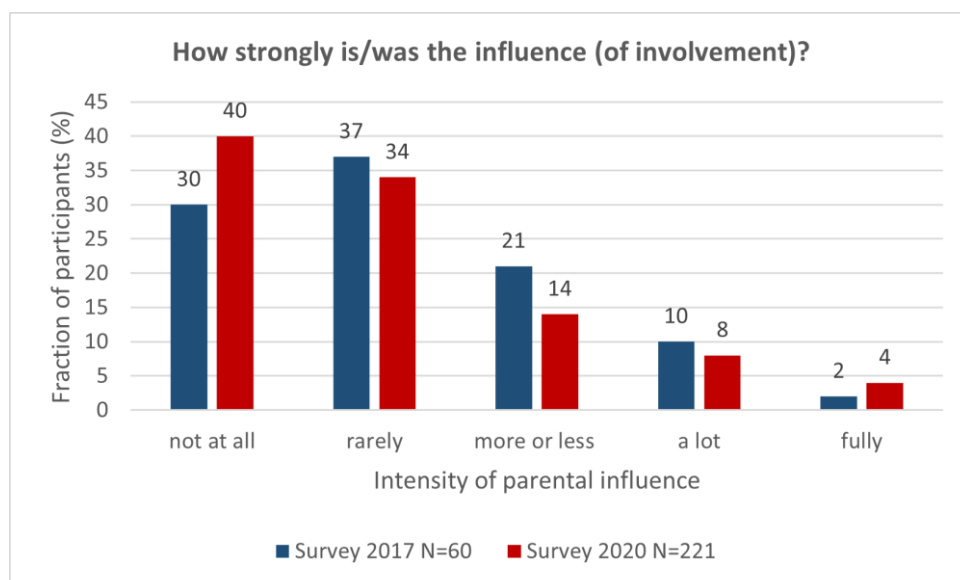


Figure 7 Intensity of Influence of Parents/Family Members on the Partner Choice of Chinese Women.
Note: Distribution of the participants, 2017 survey (N=60) and 2020 survey (N= 221).

Interestingly, also other people besides the parents or family members were getting involved into the partner choice of the participants. 31% of the participants from 2017 and 22% of the participants from 2020 declare that not only did their closer communities try to influence their choices, but also classmates, roommates, teachers and friends (questionnaires 2017/2020, see tables 4/5: 5). Even the colleagues of their parents, and friends of the family were giving advice in regard to their relationship; respectively they were getting involved into the decision-making process of the Chinese women surveyed in this study (questionnaires 2017/2020). Not all of the Chinese women tolerate the intrusion of parents and family members. While the overall opinion neglects the participants in their personal choices, less than half of the women do not care or prefer the advice given by their relatives (see tables 4/5: 4.7). The perception of the women from the 2017 survey is divided: Some of the women do not

3.3 The Dimension of External Factors concerning Partner Selection

care or think about the advice from bystanders at all; others 'listen to their utterances while deciding later if they follow their suggestions'/'听取别人的意见,自己做出决定'. Again, others feel annoyed, even 'strange and embarrassed'/'很糟糕'/'不开心'. One of the participants confronted her parents by asking them why they interfere in her decision. Sometimes she 'seeks advice but, in the end, it is her own choice and she decides what suits her requirements best' (questionnaire 2017: 4.7).

The data of the surveys of 2020, show a similar separation of the fronts. A total of 30% of the participants share the view that parents should have a say in the selection of the partner of their children, whereas 63% do not agree with this opinion and 7% are neutrally based (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 4.7). They support their choice by declaring that they are able to judge by themselves who is a suitable partner or not, and that they would be very unhappy if their family would be involved in their choices. 'As an adult I can distinguish right from wrong, whether a person is suitable for me and with whom I start a life together' (questionnaires 2020, see table 5: 4.7). Some women explain that their parents: 'will participate but will not force me, they respect my choice even if they do not like it'. Other informants indicate that they can understand their family members and appreciate their advice; however, they will not take them. They justify the intrusion by declaring that 'the elderly merely wants their beloved ones to have a good future' (questionnaires 2020: 4.7). 30% of the participants are happy with the participation of their parents/family members in their partner choice, since by doing so they felt cared for. However, it is clear that the majority of them do follow their own feelings, no matter their engagement with their parents and relatives and select their partner in a non-biased way.

The intrusion exerted by the parents mainly depends on whether the families approve the partner or disapprove their potential son-in-law. In general, the data evaluated in the surveys reveal that 39% of the 2020 survey-, and 47% of the 2017 survey female participants believe that their partner is approved by their families (questionnaires 2017/2020, see tables 4/5: 5.2). Only the minority declares that their families dislike their choices. 27-28% of the participants from the 2017/2020 surveys state that their partner is approved by and integrated into their family, while pointing out that their families like their potential sons-in-law (questionnaires 2017/2020, see tables 4/5: 5.2). On the other hand, a minor percentage of 3-4% of the interviewees are sure that their family members neither like nor approve their choice (questionnaire 2020: 5.2). However, even though 7% of the participants from 2017 believe that their parents do not agree with their choice, there is no woman who thinks that her families do not approve of it. The other 18% of the survey session of 2017 and 27% of the participants of 2020 do not have a partner at the moment or have not officially introduced him/her to their family, yet (questionnaires 2017/2020, see tables 4/5: 5.2).

There are different reasons why the families/parents like or dislike, approve or disapprove of the chosen partners of their daughters. One participant explains: 'Due to his nationality, my parents, especially my father, do not fully support me, but they respect my choice, so it's not like or dislike, just

3.3 The Dimension of External Factors concerning Partner Selection

approve or not.’ (questionnaire 2017: 5.3). Another woman states that her parents approved of her partner due to the fact that her boyfriend lived close to her parents’ place and they wanted her to stay nearby, so she could accompany them when they are old. Other ‘reasons are that the parents are happy if their daughters are, so they approve the partners’/‘因为是我选择的，他们尊重我的意见’. Reasons against the partners are mostly that the parents do ‘not like the character of the chosen one’/‘不喜欢他的性格’ and that the parents think their girls ‘can find a better partner’/‘不够好对我’ (questionnaire 2017: 5.3). The participants gave examples of the characteristics that are highly valued and necessary requirements to become integrated into the family: Most often the families cherish ‘suitability’, ‘responsibility’, people who are ‘hard-working’ and get along easily with other people. In addition, they should be ‘caring’. Others underline that their family members only want to see them being in a happy relationship and mutually in love (questionnaire 2020: 5.3). Nonetheless, the informants generally represent the opinion that the interference from parents and family members is not acceptable (see tables 4/5).

However, recommendations or requirements from bystanders and others, who are not related to them, are even less tolerated. According to the graphs in figure 8, which show the perception of Chinese women concerning the external influence, e.g. from neighbours, teachers or colleagues, on the matter of their partner choice’, the acceptance only reached a percentage of 27 in 2020 (see figure 8: survey 2020). While the majority takes an unambiguous stand by saying that they would be very upset about an intrusion from other people than their parents, some individuals even state that they would be glad to receive some sort of advice (questionnaires 2017/2020, see table 4/5: 5.1). According to the graphs (in figure 8), the acceptance of the external influences reaches a percentage of 27 in 2020. In 2017, it was even lower with only 12%, while 70% of the women stand against an intervention from other people (see figure 8: survey 2017). The data additionally show that 47% of the participants ‘do not like others to interrupt’ (see figure 8: survey 2020). Some women point out that ‘only family can interfere’ (questionnaire 2020: 5.1).

On the one hand, many of them feel annoyed if outsiders try to take over their decisions, since they are able to make their own choices. On the other hand, 18% of the women in 2017, and even 26% of the informants in 2020, obtain a neutral position by saying that they do not care about the advice from bystanders and just ignore them, or only consider it in case they agree with it (questionnaire 2017/2020: 5.1): ‘I remain neutral.’/‘Basically, parents should allow their kids to choose their partners with few influence. But interference is necessary under the circumstance that their kids are dating “bad guys”, like a guy who has the propensity for violence.’ (questionnaire 2017: 5.1). Moreover, they state that: ‘They can give a suggestion but should not interfere too much’/‘可以建议，但是最好不要干涉’ (questionnaire 2017: 5.1). In 2020, participants state: ‘Bystanders are clear, I am willing to listen to their opinions and then decide for myself’/‘they can give advice, but I am the person deciding

3.3 The Dimension of External Factors concerning Partner Selection

on my partner’/‘Listen and accept selectively’. ‘Friends give rather advice than interference, so I can accept.’ Some informants accept the advice from their parents, since they believe it is for their own good: ‘Other people's opinions can be a reference’ (questionnaire 2020: 5.1).

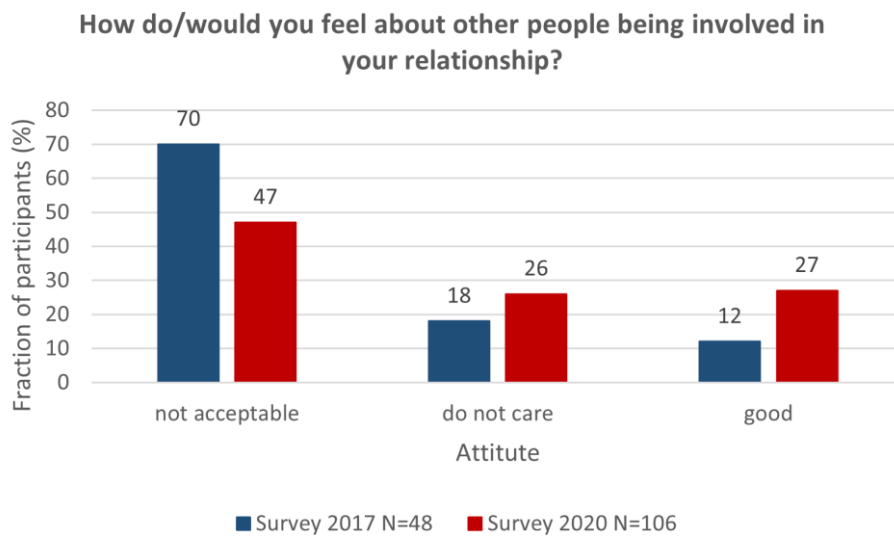


Figure 8 Perception of Chinese Women concerning External Influence on the matter of the Partner Selection of Chinese Women. *Note: Distribution of the participants, 2017 survey (N=48) and 2020 survey (N= 106).*

Even though the majority of the women surveyed agree that they have/had the chance to select their partner in a non-biased way, the second finding also reflects that half of the informants still experience a certain influence emanating from the parents/family members. The graphs of figure 9 show that the Chinese women surveyed in this study perceive influences of their parents/families in regard to the match-making process of different intensity (see figure 9). The majority says that the intrusion of the older generation exists to some extent, depending on the situation and families. A lesser percentage of 27 argues that parents and family members only rarely interfere in the partner selection (see figure 9: survey 2020), while in 2017 it was only a percentage of 14 that state that fact (see figure 9: survey 2017). 16% of both survey informants argue that there is no influence at all. On the contrary, around 33% of the participants in 2017 and 22% of informants in 2020 assure that families, in particular parents, remain to have a great influence on the partner selection. A small percentage even argues that some Chinese women do not have a say in choosing a potential spouse and that parents and family members take over their decisions (see figure 9).

3.3 The Dimension of External Factors concerning Partner Selection

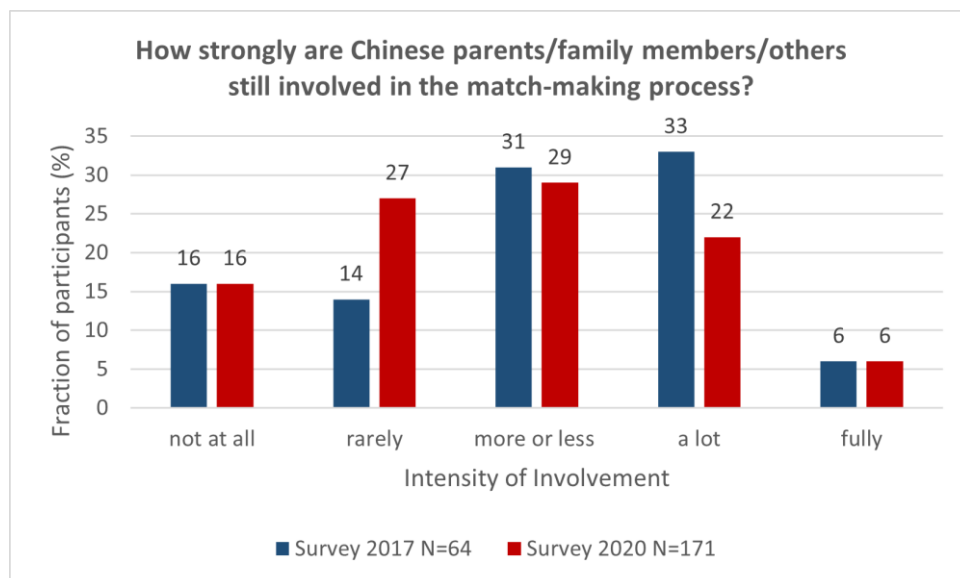


Figure 9 Intensity of Involvement of the Parents/Families regarding the Partner Choice of Chinese Women in the match-making process. *Note: Distribution of the participants, 2017 survey (N=64) and 2020 survey (N= 171).*

Reasons for the involvement are given by the participants, with some saying that their parents: 'love me very much and are afraid of me getting hurt' (questionnaire 2020, see table 5: 7.1). Others state 'It's a Chinese tradition' and 'Marriage is not just a combination of two people, but a 'family union'.' Another participant confirms this statement by explaining: 'I was told that dating might be our own business, but marriage is the business of the entire family. There's this concept of named 'a door when household pairs' in China, which basically means the two people have to match in terms of social class and background. [...] For example, girls should 'marry up' their social ladder, whereas men can 'marry down'.' (questionnaire 2020: 7.1). Other informants illustrate that 'there is a tradition of arranged marriages, and some older generations have not fully converted their consciousness' or explain that families interfere 'because they feel that the family is the destination, the family can support each other through life, they hope their daughter can find happiness and live a stable life as soon as possible' (questionnaires 2020: 7.1). Thus, on the one hand, the Chinese women participating in this study argue that there is a lot of aspiration of the families to participate in the family building process of their children but on the other hand, the interest seems to vary between families, localities and circumstances.

Based on the above analysis, covering the status, family patterns and external influences affecting Chinese women, it is illustrated that most Chinese participants are able to choose their partners by themselves. Three main key findings can be observed: (1) Although 51% of participants in 2017 and 72% in 2020 were not married, most informants declare that they are happy in their relationship. The importance of marriage compared to career building shows that the women value family over career-building; however, a lot of the participants find them more and more equally important. (2) Most Chinese women who took part in the data collection of this thesis are self-independent and therefore

3.4 Key Similarities and Differences in a Time-Lapse of Three Years

do not consider the advice from other people in regard to their relationship. Furthermore, they do not approve of an interference from relatives or other people, while some women consider certain pieces of advice if they have the same opinion. Only a small percentage obeys their family requirements to a full extent. (3) However, even though the involvement of the families appears to be relatively low, the influence on the decision-making process is still perceivable. That holds true for the parents and closer family members but also for other external people and factors. The evaluation of both questionnaires (2017/2020) provides knowledge about key similarities and key differences, which are summarised in the following part of chapter three.

3.4 Key Similarities and Differences in a Time-Lapse of Three Years

A comparative analysis of both surveys (2017/2020) shows similar perceptions of the Chinese women who participated in this study in regard to the partner selection (see Chapter 3.3). However, three main key differences can be observed: *Firstly*, the way Chinese women get in contact with potential partners is shifting from a rather conventional pathway towards an 'unorthodox' selection. While in 2017 most women got to know their partners in university, just three years later the majority met them via social activities, such as group travels and online gaming. *Secondly*, the women in 2020 seek less advice from their parents or family members than in 2017, neither concerning their relationship nor in regard to other matters. They seem to be a little bit freer in making their choices than the women questioned in 2017. The *third* main difference shows that the involvement of relatives and bystanders also decreased over time. This seems to correlate with the willingness of the women to either accept the advice of others or to find compromises. However, most women state that they are self-dependent and will not accept an interference of other people in regard to their partner selection. Today, increasingly more women can choose freely without being pressured, albeit influence remains to a certain extent.

The data investigating the status of the Chinese women who took part in this thesis (see Chapter 3.1) shows key similarities and key differences. The assemblage of women being interviewed slightly varied between 2017 and 2020. The *first key difference* illustrates that in 2017, the majority of informants met their partners in university. Three years later, next to the egalitarian and more traditional way of getting to know a suitable partner, leisure activities seem to have a similar if not even a higher value and effect on young adults to establish a social network. It is interesting to see that the participants of 2020 got to know their partners mostly via online games, travelling/vacation, in sports clubs and other facilities. Even online games can establish a relationship which is strong enough to foster a partnership. The analysis of the questionnaires from 2017 shows that 42% of the women already have children. In

3.4 Key Similarities and Differences in a Time-Lapse of Three Years

comparison to that, only 21% of the participants surveyed in 2020 have children. This can be explained by the fact that 72% of the interviewees of the later questionnaires are not married yet, while more than half of the informants from 2017 had already chosen their husbands and started their family lives (see tables 4/5). However, key similarities predominate the key differences: The *first predominating similarities* are (1) the average age of marriage, which was in both years between 26 and 27 years; (2) in both cases, the majority of the Chinese women who took part in this study, who are not in a relationship, explain this condition with the fact that they have not found the right person for a partnership yet; (3) over 67% of the total of informants want to have children in the future; and (4) the majority explains that family and career-building are equally important, but if they would need to choose, they would rank family building as a higher priority (see tables 4/5).

The *second key difference* concerns family-bonding and shows that a higher number of informants in 2017 lived together with their partners than in 2020, when most of them lived alone. This can be explained through the higher percentage of married women participating in the survey session of 2017. In 2020, the majority of participants were non-married women and therefore naturally do not live together with a partner. When it comes to the decision-making process of the Chinese women surveyed, it is illustrated that compared to 2020, more women would seek advice from their parents or relatives, of their own volition in 2017. This fact can be interpreted to mean that family-bonding was still slightly higher in 2017 than in 2020, and that the families had a stronger say and a hold onto the decision-making process of the women. However, all in all, the key findings reveal similar trends and levels of votes.

The *second key similarities* are that the majority of the informants consider asking their parents/family members at a common basis for advice. In total, adding up all three categories ('sometimes', 'often' and 'always', see tables 4/5: 4.1), 60-71% seek advice, while 29-40% of the women rarely share or do not even consider talking to their families about certain topics, and only 30-32% of the participants approach their families concerning topics regarding their partners and their relationships (see tables 4/5: 4.1). Nonetheless, 35-44% of the informants argue that their parents/families participated at least to a certain degree in their partner selection (categories 'more or less', 'a lot', 'fully', see tables 4/5: 4.3). A minor percentage of 4-5% of participants even state that their parents/family members were fully involved and that the intensity of the influence was high. Additionally, stating the fact that 33-41% of the informants from both surveys stay together or live close by their parents'/families' place, it can be estimated that family bonding and social interactions are still common practice in China (see tables 4/5: 3.1). Both questionnaires show a stable connectivity between the Chinese women of the survey sessions and their parents/family, while approximately 2% declare that their relationship is 'not good' (see tables 4/5: 3). This can be supported by the fact that 25% of the informants in both questionnaires see, visit or talk to their parents every day (see tables 4/5: 4). It seems more common to keep and

3.4 Key Similarities and Differences in a Time-Lapse of Three Years

maintain a stronger bonding within the family in China than it is the case in other countries, e.g. in Germany.

The *third key difference*, derived from the evaluation of sub-chapter 3.3. about the interference of parents/family members, indicates a continuous change of the family patterns and acceptance of choices in China. While the majority of informants in 2017 state that parents and family members interfere 'a lot' in the decision-making process of Chinese women, most of participants from the 2020 survey estimate a moderate integration of these external influences (see tables 4/5: 7). 31% of the participants of the 2017 survey session received a moderate influence and even 6% rank the influence as very high. In 2020, the participants still perceived an intrusion of 22% of high influence and also 6% of very high involvement, however in summary the interference can be evaluated less than in 2017 (see tables 4/5: 7). In contrast, the *third similar key finding* shows that some of the informants not only feel pressure from their closer communities but also from classmates, roommates, teachers and friends etc. The majority of the participants did neither approve of nor accept the intrusion from their families and felt elided since they are self-independent and think that they can make their own decisions (see tables 4/5: 5/5.1).

Overall, the above stated analysis of both survey groups (2017/2020) shows similar results, despite some liberal development in the choices of women and lesser integration of the families in regard to the partner selection. It seems like the involvement of the families/parents might have become lesser within the time-lapse of the three years between both surveys, albeit the integration is still present. Even though traditional structures such as family bonding remain tight, it seems like they loosen up over the years, and might continue to offer more free choices for the future generations. However, new structures, especially online services, such as video games or match-making apps seem to increasingly play a part in the social lives and in the partner selection process of Chinese women. Rankings can deliver indications on how to choose the best potential spouse. These rankings from online platforms are informative not only about the financial background but also offer insights about personal behaviours and ranking in society. Those rankings are currently made through data analysis of the SCSs and have a high potential of being involved in the partner selection process of young Chinese women in the future.

4 Implications of China's Social Credit System on the Partner Selection of Chinese Women

In chapter 4, the analysis of the surveys and interviews from 2020 comprise information about the implications of the SCSs in regard to the partner selection of Chinese women. Overall, the in-depth

4.1 Awareness of the Social Credit Systems

interviews provide a better understanding and complement to the less answered questions of the surveys from 2017/2020. In order to estimate the current situation on the partner selection and influence of the SCSs, the interviews from 2020 obtain updated information and are therefore of particular interest to this thesis. This part is divided into three subsections: Firstly, it will be illustrated whether the Chinese women who took part in this study are aware of the SCSs; secondly, the intensity of the SCSs in regard to the partner choice will be evaluated; and thirdly, on the basis of the perception of the participants it will be estimated which potential the SCSs might have on partner selection in the future. In order to reflect the individual opinions of each participant, the interviews were multiple-sampled and compared in regard to answer the key question RQ2: *'How are China's Social Credit Systems influencing the choices of urban Chinese women in the mate selection process?'*

As a result, this chapter proposes that the majority of the Chinese women who participated in this study were aware of the SCSs, even though they have not been personally confronted with the system. They did not consider a local SCS while choosing their partner. However, they estimate the contemporary influence of the SCSs on the partner choice in a moderate range. Furthermore, the majority of informants predict a rise of significance of the SCSs in regard to the partner selection in the future, by estimating their potential as highly influential. Even though these predictions are only hypothetical and may not reflect reality, it was estimated that the partner with the lower SCS score is more likely to separate from their partner than the one with the higher social credit ranking.

4.1 Awareness of the Social Credit Systems

Since the rating system is still only an unsophisticated scoring tool and the evaluation of the tremendous data sets is unclear (Liang et al. 2018), the question of the awareness of the SCSs within the Chinese society is debatable. Hence, the first sub-question of chapter four provides evidence about the information release of the SCSs by answering the question: *'How aware are Chinese women of the SCSs?'* The data analysis shows that most of the Chinese women who took part in this study, even though they have not been personally confronted with the SCSs, are aware of the system and have endured a number of palpable effects. By providing examples from friends and relatives, they exemplified the contemporary implications of the SCSs within the overall Chinese society.

Even though a few individuals of the Chinese participants have never heard of the SCSs, others have a lot to say about the implications of the systems, and the responses are manifold. The data analysis from the empirical work shows that more than 80% of informants are aware of the SCSs and can provide examples from daily life where implications of the SCSs are apparent (interviews 2020). 43-46% of the respondents from the survey and interview settings (2020) state that from to their understanding, the SCSs are 'really important' and have already been considered by their closer

4.1 Awareness of the Social Credit Systems

communities (see tables 6/7: E104/2.4). They act on behalf of the system by mainly using credit card payments and Alipay (chin. *zhifubao* 支付宝). Apparently, the credit score from the bank is directly related to the score received through Alipay, meaning that the scores are mutually conditioning each other (interview 26/40). One married informant from Shanghai who participated in the interview session states that the 'SCSs have been established everywhere in China and that everybody has their individual social credit score, which they can see and check' over Alipay: '[...] 每个人在中国有信用体系 [...] 每个人都可以看到自己的评分 [...] 现在叫做支付宝, 从里面每一个人都可以看到自己的信用是多少' (cit. interview 2020: 5). In these two main financial systems, the Chinese citizens can see their social credit scores, which can also affect other aspects of life. Most women, for example, state that in order to receive a valuable loan from the bank to buy an apartment, house or similar they must present a high worthiness of credibility. They also explain that if one forgets to pay monthly fees or does not pay back loans on time, the score will drop and affect one's liability. One teacher from Jiangxi renders the example that 'if you want to buy a place and need to get a loan, your credit score will be mandatory and that it is important that you have it checked. If you use your credit card, it is very important that you do not overrun the time. If you do that, the person will have a problem: '比如说, 买房的话可能需要贷款, 然后应该查你的个人申请。这个很重要的。还有, 平时用信用卡的话, 最好的话不要逾期。不然的话, 个人申请会有问题' (cit. interview 2020: 14).

Furthermore, the social credit scores can exert high influence in regard to the work environment and in daily life. A very low score complies with reported disadvantages, such as punishments like restrictions in mobility or problems to find an appropriate school for their children. This shows the importance of acquiring a high social credit score (interviews 2020: 26/40). A Chinese biology teacher explains that her friends and relatives 'worry about the score, since holding a bad score would prevent them from buying a flat/house, taking the train or using the airplane': '非常关心, 因为一个人信用如果不太好的话, 是买不了房子, 坐不了火车, 也坐不了飞机的' (cit. interview 2020: 34). In contrast, everyone who has an Alipay account with a high score gets a bonus, such as the opportunity of renting bicycles without paying a deposit fee. One interviewee from Chongqing explains that 'Alipay has a financial banking service integrated': '支付宝里面有一个蚂蚁金融', which 'tracks your payment and gives you points [...]; one or two years ago you could use those points to rent bicycles' (cit. interview 2020: 29). The difference is that no one can simply see their score from the credit card, if it is not being checked through their bank, but the score on Alipay is visible to everyone with an account (interviews 2020: 34/40). Apparently, some companies even have the right to check the scores of their employees and applicants in order to see if they are 'reliable workers' and therefore worth recruiting. From a social perspective, they do not just associate the SCSs to financial issues but also to the character of a person. Therefore, a low score may correspond to 'social distancing and ostracism in

4.2 The Intensity of Influence of the SCSs with regards to Partner Selection

society' (interview 2020: 6). As a few interviewees declare: 'People are only affected through the system if they break the law; otherwise there will not be any consequences' (interviews 2020: 8/10). The fact that the entire ranking of the SCSs is not visible makes it difficult for Chinese citizens to sense the impact of the score. Moreover, there is not a global system implemented throughout China. Therefore, many Chinese have not knowingly been in contact with the system yet. As one PhD student from Hebei explains: 'Since we have never had any problems or aspects related to that, we have not discussed that yet. I got it from the Chinese news, but I also [...] discussed it with my friends [...] I think most of the Chinese people now, have not realised how this will influence their own life [...]' (interview 2020: 19). 50% of the interviewees state that their friends, relatives and/or co-workers currently do not care about the SCSs (see table 7: 2.4). They estimate the influence of the SCS score as not noticeable at the moment since only people who will not obey the law or have credit card/bank issues get into trouble. Also, some of the informants, especially students, state 'that they and their friends are currently not in the position of buying their own place to live and therefore the SCSs are not the first thing to consider in life. Maybe later, when they are getting older, they may be more important but now it does not have an influence on their lives.' Until now, most participants have not experienced any negative influence by the SCSs (interviews 2020: 27/28/34).

The results regarding the first sub-question clarify that the awareness of the SCSs and the argumentations concerning its implications are manifold. Overall, the empirical work points out that the majority of the interview participants are aware of the SCSs, even though most of them did not choose their partner based on the SCSs.

4.2 The Intensity of Influence of the SCSs with regards to Partner Selection

The evaluation of the second part of chapter four will provide more insights into the perception of the Chinese women who participated in this study in regard to the influence of the SCSs, by answering the following sub-question: '*Do the SCSs shape the choices of Chinese women in regard to their partner selection?*' The data analysis shows that the majority of Chinese women surveyed and interviewed previously chose their partners without the consideration of the SCSs. The majority argue that many citizens are unaware of the system, and that in case of their partner selection, they value other factors, such as 'love' as more important than a credit ranking. However, the women estimate a moderate intensity of present influence of the SCSs with regards to the partner selection, by clarifying that today's SCSs already have an increased impact on society, that shapes the mindsets of Chinese women.

Most women believe that the SCS pilots already have implications among society and influence decisions to a certain extent. However, the overall findings show that concerning the partner choice,

4.2 The Intensity of Influence of the SCSs with regards to Partner Selection

the SCSs do not play a significant role in contemporary China. Other factors, such as recommendations from friends and family, education as well as the economic and material status, are mentioned as key influences when choosing a potential spouse. Only a minority of informants refer to the SCSs as potential influence for the partner selection process (questionnaires 2020: E102). Out of the 167 participants, 28% of the young women affirmed that, in addition to their own considerations, factors such as opinions from parents, family and friends, but also the SCSs took part in their decision-making process. In contrast, 72% of the survey informants negated that other factors influenced their choices (see table 6: E101). In today's China, where the Chinese women are restrained by traditions and modernity, particularly indicators like educational backgrounds, income and *hukou* are criteria for the partner selection (Ji, 2017). The development of transportation and technologies makes it easier for them to connect with potential spouses (Davin, 2005) and to receive the essential information before physically meeting them in person. Dating platforms work as communication networks and provide the first steps to connect with each other. But still before this step, the SCSs, as governmental networks for social information, have the potential to provide essential tools to sort out 'matching' partners from the rest. Throughout the data collection of privacy information such as the driver's license, work location up to the shopping list, the 'good citizens' are preselected from the 'bad citizens'. This selection may also shape the mindsets of Chinese women on their partner choice.

Figure 10 illustrates the intensity of influence of the SCSs on the decision-making process of Chinese women with regards to partner selection. The bar graphs show that the votes from the participants are distributed among the whole range of answers (see figure 10). However, most of the 2020 survey participants estimate a moderate intensity of influence ('more or less'), while 30% of the informants distribute their answers around the graphs 'rarely' and 'a lot'. The least votes were received by the extremes 'not at all' and 'fully' (see figure 10: survey participants).

The data analysed from the interviews of 2020 show a similar outcome. Most Chinese women surveyed in this study provide information that the SCS pilots have not entirely spread in China and that many Chinese citizens have not heard about the SCSs yet. In addition, their scores from the governmental SCSs cannot be searched in person (interviews 2020). That is the reason why many participants, choosing from a third-person perspective, predict a lower effect of the SCSs than they consider the actual intensity of the SCSs. The majority agrees on the fact that surely nobody would like to have a boyfriend/husband with a low score. However, a lot of participants argue that today, the score is not important and that in their generation other factors are more prioritised (interviews 2020: 28/29). In addition, some of them mention that for the younger generation, the SCSs may be more relevant in the future. They also believe that their acquaintances (friends, colleagues etc.) would be consonant with their own estimations and viewpoints in regard to their specifications because they are in the same situation: '我觉得应该是差不多的, 因为都是在那个相同的环境里.' (cit. interview

4.2 The Intensity of Influence of the SCSs with regards to Partner Selection

2020: 22). According to the evaluation of the interviews, figure 10 shows that, with an intensity scale ranging from one (low) to six (high), most informants sense a low to moderate influence and selected number two or three (see figure 10: Interview participants). However, on behalf of other people, such as acquaintances, the interviewees choose a more higher estimation, ranging between three and five (see figure 10: Acquaintances interviews).

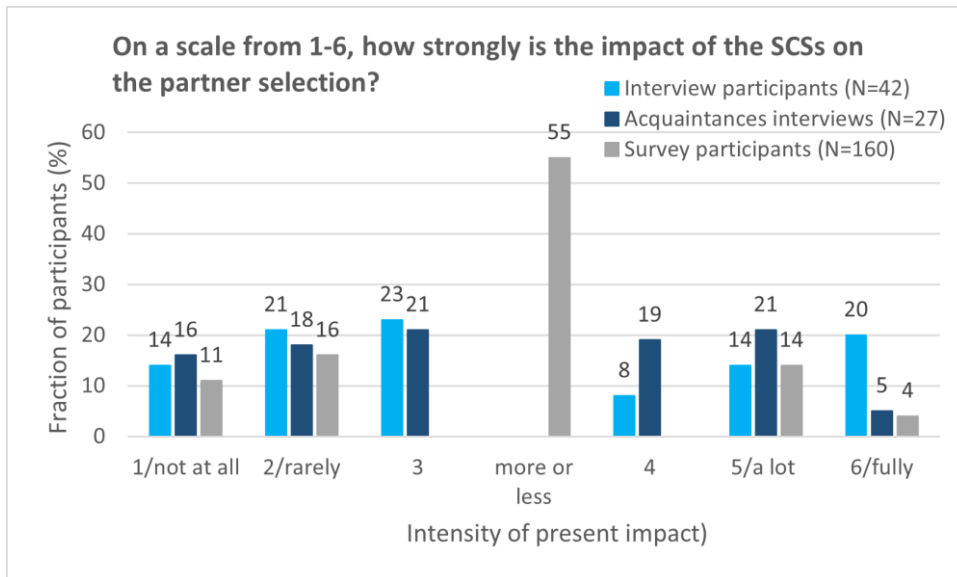


Figure 10 Intensity of Present Influence of the SCSs on the Partner Selection of Chinese Women.

Note: Distribution of the participants, 2020 interview participants (N=42), 2020 acquaintances of the interview participants (N=27) and 2020 survey (N=160).

As illustrated in table 6, about 46% of the informants are in agreement that the SCSs have an impact on the decision-making in society and 54% of the participants deny this (see table 6: E104). In order to draw a more detailed picture, the participants were divided into the two categories ‘students’ and ‘others’¹⁶ (see table 8). From this analysis of the 2020 survey and interviews, it is noticeable that women who already have finished their educational studies seem to take the SCSs slightly higher into consideration than the students (see chapter 5). Furthermore, about 49% of the participants (‘other’) affirm that people make choices according to the social credit scores, while students estimate a slightly lower number of 45% (see table 8: 3.3). The other informants, not providing an answer to this question stress their indecisiveness by leaving comments like ‘hard to say’ (questionnaire 2020). Other informants standardize the meaning of SCSs with ‘integrity’ and the ‘character’ of each individual person. They predict that people in their closer surroundings would neither interact nor communicate with people who have a low credit score. Some other participants argue that people may not make choices according the SCSs on daily basis, but consider the scores in the financial context, e.g. lending

¹⁶ ‘others’ are defined as mainly employees, housewives and freelancer -not students.

money firstly to those with a high credit score, since they appear more reliable (questionnaire 2020: E106).

Table 2 Perception of individual’s closest communities and their behaviour towards the SCSs.

Category	Students	Others ¹⁷
E104: Do your friends, relatives, colleagues...care about the SCSs?		
Affirmation	37%	54%
Negation	63%	46%
Total	100% (N=75)	100% (N=87)
E105: Are they making choices based on the SCSs?		
Affirmation	30%	51%
Negation	70%	49%
Total	100% (N=74)	100% (N=88)

Note: Data collected from the 2020 survey (N=162), questions E104/E105. Division of informants into students and others (including employees, freelancer and housewives).

4.3 Potential Implications of the SCSs in the Future

Since the SCSs are legitimized with the denotation of creating a ‘good citizen’, the women also seem to increasingly compare the values of the SCS pilots with the characteristics of each individual person and adjust their standards in order to find a good partner who fulfils those criteria. In this part of chapter four, the analysis will reflect the estimation of the Chinese women who took part in the data collection of this thesis to which extent the SCSs will be implicated in the mate selection process of Chinese women in the future by answering the following question: ‘*What is the potential of the SCSs on the partner selection and family building?*’ The investigations show that the informants predict an increase of the influence of the SCSs on the partner selection in the future. Furthermore, implications like a higher discrepancy in regard to the partner selection may lead to more rational choices, irrespective of their own feelings, and in extreme cases towards a separation or divorce.

The data evaluation represents that based on the expected spread of the SCSs in the future, also its implications in regard to the partner selection will increase. Even though some respondents are uncertain how to evaluate the predicted implication of an all-encompassing SCS, many of the women worry about a high risk of unpaid debts or problems, which may arise through the choices they make (questionnaires 2020: E110). On average, the majority of informants from the survey session predict a moderate level of influence and chose a value of intensity between number three and four out of six (‘more or less’), while the interviewees quantify the significance of the SCSs as high, mainly choosing

¹⁷ ‘others’ are defined as mainly employees, housewives and freelancer.

4.3 Potential Implications of the SCSs in the Future

number five (questionnaire 2020/interviews 2020, see tables 6/7: E111/3.1). Compared to figure 10, in which the intensity is estimated as low to moderate, the interviewees who participated in this study predict an exponential growth of influence from the contemporary situation until the future. They argue that if everyone can see the score, the SCS becomes more important and will be considered more strongly in the selection of a potential partner (see interviews 2020).

The evaluation of the current influence only resembles the ongoing status. However, since the SCS pilots have been established, it has been argued that a lot of Chinese people have not been in contact with it yet, and therefore do not even know about the system. Moreover, one does not get in touch with the SCSs unless the score is checked by the bank in order to provide a loan. That is the reason why most citizens do not even know the value of their own score. It may be difficult and rather not possible for bystanders besides big companies to check the scores of other people (interview 2020: 40). Most arguments claim that in the future, when the system is better integrated into society, the SCSs will act strongly on a daily life basis. Hence, people may change their perspective and will rather look for a boyfriend or husband with a good social credit score to start a life with.

In addition, some participants consider the SCSs as good and practical tools for a pre-selection. According to the participants, 'it makes it easier to analyse a person', since 'the SCS evaluates a person's financial situation, but also reflects the character' (interview 2020: 6). They affirm that 'no one wants anybody with a low score. It would make life harder' (interviews 2020: 11/26). Therefore, 88% of the respondents from the interview sessions estimate that the more the SCSs become established and an all-encompassing, single SCS becomes integrated into society, the stronger will be their influence on the decision-making process of the Chinese women on partner choice (interviews 2020: 5/12/29/42). On average, the informants of the interviews predict a high implication, choosing number five on the intensity scale (interviews 2020: 3.1). One interviewee from Guangdong says that if everyone was able to access the social credit scores from each other, they would search for it: 'If it is possible to see the scores, she predicts that the people will search for their scores, and she considers that during the partner selection the influence will reach a value of four on the intensity scale, which equals a median to high influence': '如果能看得到，每个人都能查得到，那么对每个人的信用体系，我觉得每个人都会想去查一下。如果能看得到的话，我觉得最终选择伴侣的那种程度可能会达到4。这是因为我没有接触或者查不到' (cit. interview 2020: 22). As shown in the figure below, 33 women of the interviewees predict the influence of the SCS on behalf of their acquaintances. The most chosen score from the interviews was number five, meaning 'a lot' of influence (see figure 11: Acquaintances interviews).

In contrast, the middle-ranged bar was selected the most by the survey participants (see figure 11: Survey participants). It can be argued whether the women from the survey session (2020) selected the middle on purpose or if it merely shows their indecisiveness. People's arguments differ in wide ranges.

4.3 Potential Implications of the SCSs in the Future

Some interviewees say that ‘ordinary people will not have this problem’ (with the SCSs), while others state: ‘if the credit information is low, it will become an indicator for choosing a partner’: ‘现在没有特意去查征信，如果知道征信低，会成为选择伴侣的一个指标’ etc. (cit. questionnaire 2020: E120). Again, others assure that at present, they have no intention to check the credit information of their partners (questionnaire 2020). Most participants predict a median impact of the SCSs in the future (55% chose the answer ‘more or less’). The other participants mainly agreed with the given answers ‘rarely’ and ‘a lot’. The provided answers ‘not at all’ and ‘fully’ were chosen less frequently (see figure 11: Survey participants).

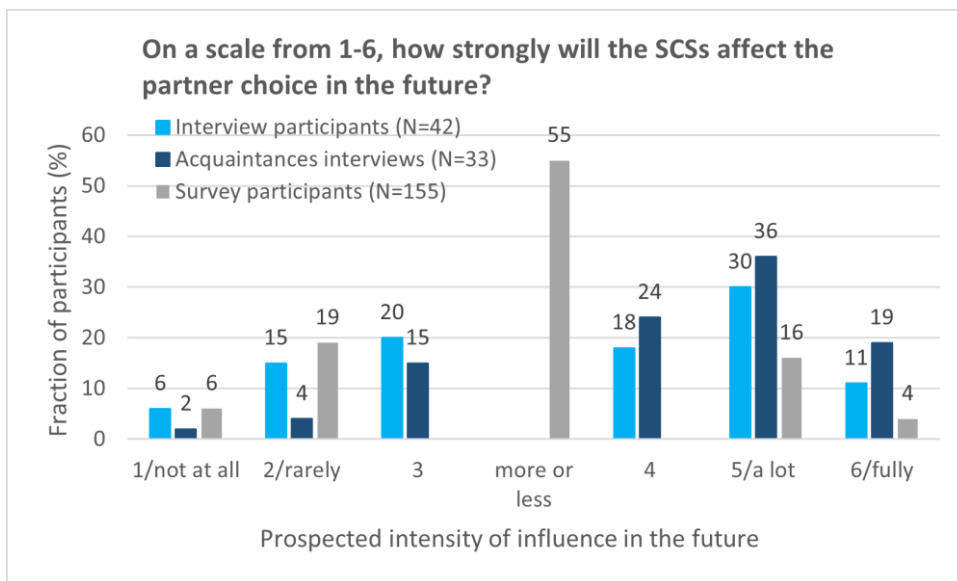


Figure 11 Prospective Intensity of Influence of the SCSs on the Partner Selection of Chinese Women in the Future. Note: Distribution of the participants, 2020 interview participants (N=42); 2020 acquaintances of interview participants (N=33) and 2020 survey participants (N=155).

The following arguments are of a purely hypothetical nature and refer to the presupposition that each Chinese citizen has the ability to mutually check everyone’s credit score. Assuming this condition is set in place and the social credit scores of an imaginary couple differ, in the upcoming paragraph the interviewees’ answers on how they would potentially act and decide will be evaluated. Additionally, the question will be answered whether they would separate or divorce from their partner if he/she holds a low social credit score. Analysing this theoretical construct of interaction inside a partnership may not resemble the reality and how the future may look like but it can provide a trend of how a single-regulatory SCS may implicate the decision-making process of Chinese women in the future. At least, it illustrates how strongly and far-reaching the women estimate the importance of the SCS within society in the upcoming years.

Given the fact that the partner presumably possesses a relatively low social credit score, the majority of women may not consider a separation from their partner. Furthermore, in case of a retroactive notice after marriage, most women would not consider a divorce. However, they state that if the

4.3 Potential Implications of the SCSs in the Future

partnership was not established for a long time and/or it was previously known that the person of interest does not hold a 'good' credit score, the majority would not continue to date that person. According to the outcomes concluded from the 2020 questionnaire, it is shown that more than half of the participants (52%) have the same view as the interviewee participants and would not disunite (questionnaire 2020, see table 6: E123). If the gap between the couple's scores differs significantly, chances increase that the women (here 56%) may separate or get a divorce from their partner (questionnaire 2020, see table 6: E125).

The observations from the interview sessions show clearer results: 74% of the participants declare that 'most Chinese women would not abandon their relationship just because of a credit score' (see figure 12). The interviewees argue that 'to know the character of a beloved person is enough to help them and improve the score together' (interviews 2020: 5/12). Furthermore, a few participants state that 'the SCSs do not matter and that it would not influence their choice of staying together with a beloved person' (interview 2020: 10). Others believe that the impact of SCSs is overrated by arguing that the social credit can be used for reference, but trust between two people is more important: '社会信用可以参考，但是两个人的信任更重要' and that 'husband and wife should face everything together' (questionnaire 2020: E124). Further statements are based on the opinions that most Chinese people do not really care about the SCSs at the moment: '大多数中国人目前还不太在意吧' and that nobody should be manipulated by the SCSs (questionnaire 2020: E124). Hence, they would not necessarily separate from their partner. If the score does not increase after a certain time range, they may consider a breakup. 26% of the interviewees state directly that they would most likely break up with their partner if his/her social credit score gets too low (see figure 12). Another statement refers to the strong influence of the traditional Chinese household and the influence of parents, which is still potentially 'high when it comes to choose a potential spouse and marriage: '[...] 但是在父母包办婚姻现象中可能性还是非常大的' (cit. questionnaire 2020: E126). Some survey respondents explain that their parents/families will not accept a partner with a low social credit score, which may be part of their considerations when deciding on a husband (cit. questionnaire 2020: E126).

The main arguments for a separation or divorce are linked to the belief that the SCSs reflect the character of a person and that a low score represents contrasting values that may result in many problems. They justify their statements by arguing that 'if the credit difference is too large, it may reflect that the two people are incompatible in some aspects': '信用分差距太大可能反映出两人在某些方面不合' (cit. questionnaire 2020: E124). Low social credit means high risk tolerance: '社会信用低，说明承受风险高' (cit. questionnaires 2020: E124). They also fear that problems may arise: 'in terms of financial management, loans will be limited, there are many hidden troubles': '理财方面，

4.3 Potential Implications of the SCSs in the Future

贷款方面会受限，有很多隐藏的麻烦’ and that ‘credit affects the communication, common values, external debts between two people’ (cit. questionnaire 2020: E124).

Moreover, some Chinese women from the interviews declare that they would break up. They defend their position by saying: ‘I’d definitely choose to break up; I believe that most people desire a better life, a better partner’ (interviews 2020). If, already being married, the situation differs. Married women who consider a separation state it as being unthinkable. According to figure 12, 86% of the women from the interview session (2020) believe that a ‘divorce would not be an option because of the SCS’ (interviews, 2020). ‘There are too many factors that are to be considered in a marriage: family, house, finances and children etc. If the bond has not been tied yet, a breakup seems slightly easier’ (interviews 2020: 2/32). Given a low partner’s score, 14% of the interviewed women would contemplate a divorce if their conditions and way of life suffer a lot (see figure 12). They defend their decision by pointing out the disadvantages a low score entails for the couple and the whole family, assuming that there is no improvement. Nonetheless, they also mention that ‘in China, marriage is a traditional norm and cannot be easily broken. It is an important matter in social life and linked with a lot of trouble and costs, especially for the women’ (interview 2020: 27).

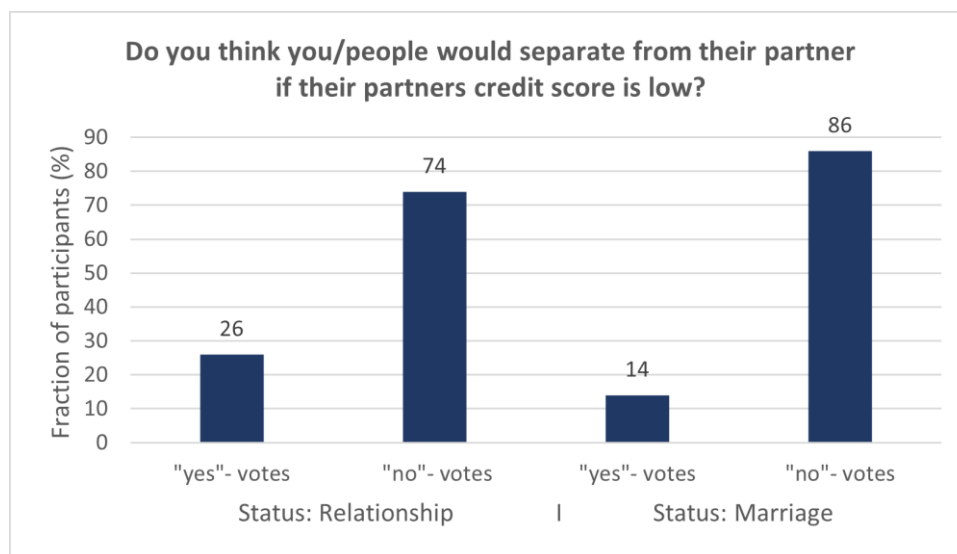


Figure 12 Importance of a Low Social Credit Score regarding Partner Separation.

Note: Distribution of the participants in two different scenarios: 1. Separation, due to a partners’ low credit score, when being in a relationship (not married) and 2. Divorce, due to a partners’ low credit score, 2020 interview (N=42).

Stating the hypothetical condition that one person would end a partnership due to a lower score of the partner, the Chinese women taking part in this study answered in a diverse manner, indecisive about who they believe would separate first. The prediction of most of the women (45%) surveyed in 2020 is that mainly the person with the lower social credit score would separate first, while 12% of the interviewees agree with this choice (see figures 13/14). They support their statements by mentioning that the person with the higher score may be more loyal and may have a better sense of conciseness.

4.3 Potential Implications of the SCSs in the Future

This leads to a separation rather from the partner with the low score (interviews 2020: 5/43). Another argument mentioned is that people with a low score 'have less loyalty to marriage, and that life is unsatisfactory for them'. Thus, these people may split up first: '信用低的人对婚姻忠诚度也高不到哪去, 生活也更容易不如意' (cit. questionnaire 2020: E128).

On the contrary, most Chinese women from the interview session of 2020 estimate that the partner with the higher score would separate first (59%), while only 21% from the survey session agree with this argument (see figures 13/14). The reasons for that are manifold. However, one reason often considered is that this person does 'not want his/her life to be dragged down by a partner with a low score' (e.g. interview 2020: 6). It is also mentioned that 'a similar level of credit is commonly equalized with a similar estimation of value'. The higher ranked people may fear that the disparity provokes mismatched values and therefore the couple's scores do not resemble an adequate fit (interviews 2020: 16/27). Some women define people with higher scores as more rational and more considered. Hence, if they find their reputation to be threatened, they would split up more easily: 'When the partner's low scores start to cause inconvenience for their family, a divorce might happen' (cit. questionnaire 2020: E128). Nonetheless, still a high percentage of 34% of the participants from the survey session and 24% from the interviews predict that no disunion due to the SCS would ever occur (see figure 13/14). For them, only imagining that people may divorce or break up because of a score is surreal. They emphasize that 'there must have been other and more meaningful reasons than just a score to separate from people and families' (interviews 2020: 5/43). 'However, people's personality is diverse; most people do not pay much attention to a social credit score': '人的性格是多种多样的, 一般人对社会信用评分关注不是很高' (cit. questionnaire 2020: E128). Other women argue that 'due to the low impact of a negative social score, the people do not take it into consideration': '社会信用评分目前还没有被广泛使用'. 'Most people just do not know the credit score of their partner when they get to know each other' (cit. questionnaire 2020: E128).

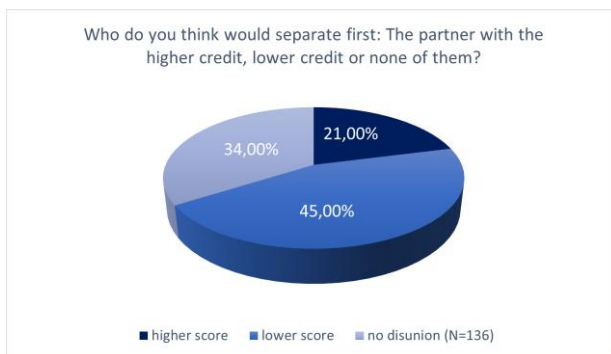


Figure 13 Disunion based on Social Credit Scores (2020 survey). Note: Distribution of the participants (N=136).

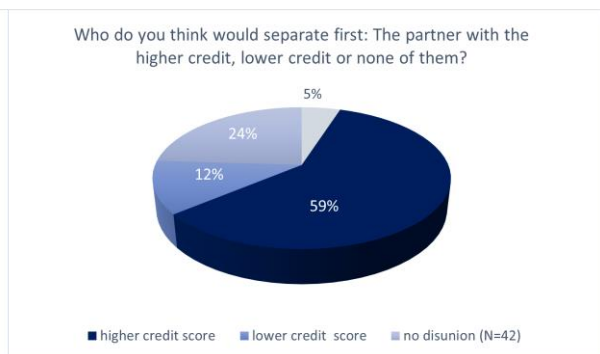


Figure 14 Disunion based on Social Credit Scores (2020 interview). Note: Distribution of the participants (N=42).

4.4 Three Individual Case Studies

4.4 Three Individual Case Studies

This chapter contains three individual case studies selected from the in-depth interviews (2020), which are analysed in detail and illustrated in the following sub-chapters. All three cases reflect the compliant and oppositional views from three different participants to the matter of partner selection, family, marriage and the SCSs. They were conducted in June 2020 via WeChat and lasted around 20-30 minutes. The three Chinese women interviewed in this study of the ages 26, 29 and 32, from different academic and social backgrounds, stated their opinions concerning the influence of the SCSs with respect to their individual lives. They were examined more precisely to illustrate and evaluate the argumentations of the interviews in a more detailed way. The main discussion can be split into three major parts: The first part contains the answers to questions about the current situation of the partner selection in China, reflecting the viewpoints of these three Chinese women; the second part deals with the current influence of the SCSs in regard to the partner choice of Chinese women and its influence estimated on the future; and in the third part, the three interviewees answer specific questions of whether a separation due to the SCSs is conceivable and under which circumstances this procedure may be applied. The different case studies reveal extensive detailed information, thus contributing to a better understanding of the issues young females have to face in regard to their choices and constraints of social and political norms in contemporary China and beyond.

4.4.1 Case Study Number One: Teacher from Beijing

The 26- year-old Chinese teacher from the interview session was born in Beijing and is currently residing there. She is not in a relationship, and neither intends to find a partner at the moment nor does she want a family in the future. The question of whether she experienced pressure from external factors while choosing a partner, was denied. However, she added that she might have been influenced subconsciously in her decision-making process. Her parents are divorced and have individual families but they have never rushed her into a relationship and have had no fear that she would not be able to find a partner on her own. In general, she states that from the past until now, marriage for young Chinese women has increasingly become less common. She argues that the circumstances and demands for early marriage and early childbearing have changed over time and many of her friends discuss getting married at ages around 33/34 years: ‘我觉得现在相对以前，时间中国女性对婚姻应该越来越没有那么大的兴趣[...]以前大家说的女孩子总该早结婚早生孩。这个限制到现在有好很多，我朋友很多的 33/34 才谈论结婚’ (cit. interview 2020: 8). She adds that parents do not have so much influence anymore. The women are self-independent and can have a life that does not merely

4.4 Three Individual Case Studies

include falling in love, marriage etc. Parents may be worried about their daughters' future but do not rush them (see interview 2020: 8).

According to her statements, she is familiar with the matter of the SCSs but did not experience it herself. She said that she does not have or at least does not know that she has a social credit score. She explains that only people with law problems have to deal with the SCSs, other people are not involved in it. That is why the current influence of the SCSs on the partner choice can be predicted as weak. On a scale from one (low) to six (high), she estimated a relatively low influence of two. She explains that this prediction reflects her own point of view, but can be treated as equal with the overall public opinion within the Chinese society. She justifies this statement according to the low amount of knowledge about the SCSs at the moment, and that common people are not able to see the score of others. She predicts that in the future, the importance of the SCSs will gain a lot of attention and importance, provided that everyone's score will be visible to the public. Furthermore, she declares that also her friends will care about the credit rating if the scores become transparent within the society. That is why she chose number four (higher than the median range) on the intensity scale (one to six), estimating a higher value of importance and influence of the SCSs on the partner choice of Chinese women in the future (see interview 2020: 8).

As many other interview participants, she would separate from her partner if his/her credit score was too low, but only if the influence of the low SCS is affecting their lives in a negative way. In her opinion, if she and her partner had a life and a family together, they should have a connection and overcome their obstacles without primarily thinking about a divorce. Nevertheless, if her parents would interfere and tell her to break up with her partner, she would listen to their advice. In addition, she finds a separation from a person holding a lower social credit score more reasonable than the action of breaking up or divorce with an individual holding a higher score. She argues that people with higher credit scores will be worried and apprehensive once they are in a relationship with somebody who cannot be trusted or is not that responsible: '应该是分数高的人想离婚吧，应该觉得可能跟一个不太能够信任，或者不太能够承担责任的这样一个人在一起可能会有一定的担心和顾虑' (cit. interview, 2020: 8). She adds that the person with the higher ranking may have to endure more troubles, received through penalties imposed by the low credit score of his/her partner, than the person holding the low rating himself/herself. Thus, the people having the higher score would rather separate from their partner than those owning a low credit score (see interview 2020: 8).

4.4.2 Case Study Number Two: Teacher from Sichuan

The 29-year-old Chinese college teacher from the interview session was born in Chengdu and currently lives in Songshu/Sichuan. She is married and has one child. The question of whether she experienced

4.4 Three Individual Case Studies

pressure from external factors while choosing a partner was denied by stating that it was mostly her own choice and that her parents accepted it. In general, she argues that, as of today, young Chinese people choose their partner mainly on their own and that the parents do not influence their choices much: ‘现在中国的年轻人结婚一般看自个人的意愿，一般来说父母都不那么干涉年轻人的选择’ (cit. interview, 2020: 34). She gave examples supporting her arguments, while pointing out that when she decided to get married, her parents accepted her choice but other people in her closer surrounding may have not been so lucky. Emphasizing her observations, she declares that generally friends do not interfere in the partner selection process of their friends either: ‘然后一般来说任何朋友就更不会干涉个人的婚姻问题了。这是你选择男朋友，你的朋友是更不会干涉的。’ (cit. interview 2020: 34). Since in bigger cities many Chinese women follow the path of an academic career, such as pursuing bachelors, masters and/or doctoral degrees, she estimates that most urban Chinese women marry at ages between 28 and 30 years. She predicts that in rural areas, the average age of getting married is 22 to 24, since many Chinese women start a family right after their college graduation. The overall estimated age of marriage is between 25 and 30, since most women just get a bachelor degree and then start a family life (see interview 2020: 34).

According to her statements, she is familiar with the matter of the SCS. She points out that in China, the SCS pilots are established and that everyone has an individual score that they can see: ‘在全中国都铺开了，在全中国每个人都有信用体系吧。’ (cit. interview, 2020: 34). She connects the SCSs with the score she has received on Alipay and declares that everyone can see their own score and the amount of points they have: ‘[...] 每个人可以看到自己的信用分是多少。’ (cit. interview 2020: 34). The interviewee answers the question of how intense the current influence of the SCSs on the partner choice is, by saying that women mainly choose a spouse on account of his/her character. The SCSs are broadly not taken into consideration. After a certain amount of time of being together, the credit score must only be revealed when applying for a loan and buying a place or a house: ‘中国女性选择和谁结婚可能先重点先是看这个人，不太特别关心他的信用体系。这个等到两个人要共同买房子的時候，估计这个时候才会去关心他的信用体系’ (cit. interview 2020: 34). Hence, even though a low social credit score has an influence on people’s happiness and income, it is not so important in terms of choosing a partner. Thus, she estimates that the SCSs have a little bit of influence right now and chose number two to three out of six on the value scale (see interview 2020: 34).

Furthermore, she argues that the ‘SCSs are insignificant in rural areas since they do not need to buy a place and do not consume so many goods etc. Since particularly for people from the rural areas it is more difficult to find a partner, they are most likely not so selective choosing a partner. Moreover, most of them already owe a piece of land from their relatives, which they need to take care of, and therefore they do not need to buy a house, or consider to travel abroad etc.’ As a result, the influence

4.4 Three Individual Case Studies

of the SCSs are not so noticeable: ‘我想影响不大，像 2 或者 3 [...] 不是特别的大，因为中国农村地区他们很难选择伴侣的时候，不会关心信用是多少 [...] 不买房子，也不需要去国外等等’ (cit. interview 2020: 34). On the one hand, considering the situation of the whole country, she predicts that in the future the influence of the SCSs is not so high (two to three) either; on the other hand, she says that in general her friends, relatives, colleagues and other people in her life do generally care a lot about the SCSs, since they have reached the age of buying their own homes and therefore need a high credit score. In addition, a low credit score would affect their movability by imposing restrictions regarding public transportation (trains and planes etc.): ‘朋友非常关心，因为一个人信用如果不太好的话是买不了房子的，也坐不了火车，也坐不了飞机’ (cit. interview 2020: 34).

She was unsure about how to answer the question of whether people would break up with or divorce from their partner, assuming their partner’s credit score is very low. To her mind, she would neither break up nor get a divorce. However, she argues that for other people it probably depends on the situation. If the score is really low and the functioning of the family is at stake because of restrictions, people may consider a separation. In general, she estimates that Chinese women choose a partner they have many feelings for and that a SCS is not considered when getting to know each other. They choose the spouse out of love and not because of a credit score. She points out that Chinese families are more traditional and women would not get divorced just because of a rating. Additionally, she believes that rather a person with a low social score would separate first, since the character of the person might not be as truthful and good. Thus, the person is not that interested in a proper relationship and might break up faster with his/her partner (see interview 34: 2020).

4.4.3 Case Study Number Three: Lawyer from Guizhou

The 32-year-old Chinese resident from the interview session was born in Guizhou and currently lives in Hefei (Anhui). She is married, has one child and is employed at a law firm. The question whether she experienced pressure from external factors while choosing a partner was denied by stating that it was her own choice and that her family agreed with it. ‘In general, she thinks that around 80% of parents try to influence the marriage of their children on account of two major reasons: Firstly, when their daughters have not found the person to marry at a certain age, the parents search for a person who can fulfil the numerous required criteria that are indispensable in order to join their family. Secondly, parents try to influence their daughters’ partner choice when their daughters have found a partner they like, but the parents do not agree with their choice and the marriage. This circumstance can be generated due to various reasons, such as negative opinions related to the boyfriend’s family, his educational level, or money related aspects’: ‘我感觉有 80%的父母会干涉子女婚姻问题。有两

4.4 Three Individual Case Studies

种情况: 一种情况是女孩还没有找到男朋友, 这时父母会提很多的要求和标准。然后这样的要求可能让他们在选择男朋友的过程中遇到的很多阻碍。第二类女生: 他们找到了适合的对象, 找到男朋友了。可是父母有其它的意见, 反对他们两个结婚, 可能是因为男方家庭的问题, 可能因为男方的学历, 也可能因为男孩子的经济条件[...]' (cit. interview 2020: 36).

She declares further that it is common practice in Chinese families to select a different spouse for their daughters and to interfere with their choices. She continues explaining that her closest friends were able to choose their partners without major interference, but the sisters of her aunt (father's side) had some difficulty self-selecting a spouse. Her grandfather did not accept the boyfriend of the older sister. Hence, a more fitting partner was required and then introduced to her. Her younger sister was also not able to find a 'fitting' partner who was accepted by her family due to the plentiful requirements the family had. Her mother only accepts men as partner for her daughter exhibiting professions such as doctors or officers who have not been married before. Since the sisters wanted to respect their family's wishes, they had difficulty finding suitable partners. She argues that half of the Chinese women obey rules and demands set by their family members, disregarding their own feelings and desires. She estimates that in big cities most Chinese women get married after college and university, being at the ages of 25 to 30. In rural areas, Chinese women get married at the ages 22 to 23. According to her, it depends on the educational level when to get married (see interview 36: 20).

She says that she is familiar with the SCSs, and argues that SCS pilots have been established in Anhui but are still of minor importance. Generally, they are not widely spread yet. However, the SCSs may be important when applying for loans and bigger investments, such as buying a house. Then the social credit score becomes important: '基本上, 但是没有那么全面。就是可能你在买房要申请银行贷款的时候, 他就会怕你的这个信用体系的问题。' (cit. interview 2020: 36). If the credit card is overdrawn and not paid back in time, a negative score is applied, leading to detrimental reactions against the owner of that credit card. For example, penalties like restricted access to public transportation or disadvantages due to a non-lawful curriculum vitae may exert negative impacts on the daily life. The interviewee states that currently nobody could see his/her individual score. Only the bankers could review the individual scores of each client by typing in the bank account numbers into their computer-based system. There is a distinction of different SCSs in dependence of the domain the score relates to. She distinguishes a social credit score related to bank accounts from the credit rating of Alipay (支付宝). She further mentions that Alipay has its own SCS. It integrates the Sesame credit (芝麻信用分) (see interview 36: 20).

This credit score reflects each individual protocol and credit situation. The financial credit score calculated by Alipay does not carry out the influence on society alone, rather it is highly relevant in certain situations. For example, if the score of the customer renting a car is high, the person may not

4.4 Three Individual Case Studies

need to pay a guarantee deposit or may be able to receive a higher solvency accounted to his/her credit card: '[...] 那个支付宝里面的，它有一个叫芝麻信用分的，这个分数是跟你一起的信用贷款，它会给你评估一个分数。这个分不是所有方面都，应该也没有这么全面，但是这个分数可以体现大致的情况。比如你要去租一个车，如果你的分数高的话你不需要用押金 [...]' (cit. interview 2020: 36). The participant herself has a score at Alipay of around 800 credits, which seems to be high enough so that she has no need to worry about restrictions. She claims that the SCSs are currently not considered in the partner choice, at least for people her age. For younger people it may have a higher significance. Due to the enhanced use of technological social media platforms such as WeChat by the younger generation, data can be easier collected by the SCS in the future. Furthermore, she continues explaining that individuals already have the opportunity to go to the bank and check their scores, which may become increasingly important for the partner selection (see interview 36: 20). The SCS pilots are just at the beginning of being considered by and integrated into society. Therefore, the interviewee estimates its prevailing effects as low to medium (two to three). Since she is already 'happily' engaged within a proper family life, the SCSs do not influence her partner choice anymore. Nevertheless, she believes that the upcoming ratings, in particular low credit scores, are going to have an impact on people's choices, especially for younger people in regard to the partner selection. The more the SCSs will be included in people's daily life, the more aspects of a person's life will be affected by it. The effects of the SCSs may be split into several categories, such as having enough credit for buying a place, renting a car etc. Thus, she is sure of the increasing significance and great impact an all-encompassing SCS is going to have in the future. On the scale from one (low) to six (high), she predicts a value of five, representing a high importance. She explains that the relationship between family members is comparable to the one in a community. The choice of a husband/partner will have a big influence on the life of the whole family: 'If the husband does not have a proper social credit score, he may not be reliable and may not use the train, plane or does not get a loan. This will have a big influences on life and may eventually lead to a divorce.' As of today, she says that her closest friends and relatives do not seem to care much for the SCSs. However, she predicts that the SCS is going to regulate the social life of the future generations (see interview 2020: 36).

The question of whether she would separate from her partner if his credit score would be very low was not affirmed. She would not divorce from her husband because of a bad score, since they have a strong connection; instead she would help him to improve his score. Nevertheless, she argues that other people may act differently. She went on by saying that some people think that love is most important in a relationship and other people just want to find a person to live with. In that case, the SCSs might be playing a bigger role. From her prediction, despite her own view, 80% of people would decide to divorce from their spouse if the credit score would be very low. If they are not married yet, chances will be high that the Chinese women break up. In case of a separation, she estimates that

4.5 The Linkage between the Case Studies and the Interview Results

people with a higher SCS would break up first. For people with a low score, the situation does not make a difference; but for people with a higher score, the partner holding a low score is a disadvantage (see interview 2020: 36).

The interview partner states that certain match-making apps are well-known in China, such as the online portal called 'shijijiyuan' (世纪佳缘). To her understanding, this matchmaking app already integrates a social credit ranking in order to find suitable matches for the users. The intention of the app is for people to have the chance to meet, know and date other users. However, she is not convinced that this matchmaking app can be taken seriously. Besides 'shijijiyuan', she does not know other apps that integrate similar rankings such as value or credit evaluations (see interview 2020: 36).

4.5 The Linkage between the Case Studies and the Interview Results

In this part of the thesis, the main findings are compared and evaluated with the statements and argumentations of the three exemplified case studies, in order to provide better understanding of the accordant and conflictive perceptions of the urban females on family-, marriage-, and the social credit systems. The three in-depth interviews above largely support the results of the analysis of chapter 4.1-4.4. Their content is summarised in the following manner: The first case study can be evaluated as an exception in terms of family building and partner choice. 93% of Chinese women taking part in the interviews state that they have already started or aim to start a family. The first interview partner from Beijing (see section 4.4.1) declares that she is neither looking for a partner nor a family in the future. The other two women from Sichuan and Anhui are already married and have one child, like 37% of the overall interview participants (interviews 2020).

All three of them state that they were not influenced by external factors while choosing a partner, at least not consciously. Like 67% of all interview participants, the youngest of the three participants from Beijing (26 years old) argues that, today, most women can choose their partner by themselves without any influence from their parents. On the contrary, the 29-year-old college teacher from Sichuan province states that some Chinese parents do not agree with the choice of their children in regard to the partner. This point of view is underlined by the prediction of the 32-year-old participant from Anhui. She thinks that around 80% of parents try to influence the choice of their daughters and age differences could be one reason for those different perceptions (see interviews 2020: 8/34/36).

All three participants agree that most Chinese women in big cities get married later than in smaller cities or rural areas and that this phenomenon is connected to the educational level. Furthermore, all three participants declare that they are familiar with the SCSs, although its current influence on the partner choice is relatively low. The interviewee from Beijing connects the SCSs only to people who do not obey the law. She thinks that the score reflects the character of a person, emphasizing the

relevance of the all-encompassing SCS in the future, when it will increasingly be spread throughout the country (see interview 2020: 8). The other two participants agree on the fact that the influence of the SCSs, regarding the partner choice of Chinese women, is relatively low (two to three), at the moment (see interviews 2020: 34/36). However, a great influence can already be sensed when applying for a loan. Other people feel threatened throughout their daily life by the negative outcome interlinked to a low credit score. The current influence of the SCS pilots in regard to the partner choice might be negligible. Nevertheless, the interview partner from Anhui predicts a higher implication, connected to an increased spread of the SCSs for the younger generation (see interview 2020: 36).

All three participants are of the same opinion in their interview sessions that the influence of the SCSs are going to increase in the future and be of great importance, when the consequences of 'bad' behaviour are made visible and the score can be checked from each individual person (see interviews 2020: 8/34/36). This prediction goes along with the overall perception of 60% of participants, who estimate a high increase of importance of the SCS (up to number five on the scale), see tables 6/7. Only the participant from Chengdu argues that people in the countryside do not need to consider the scores so much since they are not as dependent on expensive homes found in the city and other consumer goods. Considering the whole country, she estimates that the influence reaches a value of moderate importance (two to three out of six) (see interview 2020: 34). None of the participants would get divorced if their partner had a low score, instead they would try to work together to improve their partners' social credit score for their partners. Only the teacher from Beijing would break up (in a relationship) if her boyfriend's rating was very low or her parents told her to do so (see interview 2020: 8). 86% of the overall interviewees agree that a divorce cannot be reasoned with a social credit ranking alone. A separation from a partner in a relationship, on the other hand, is more likely and imaginable than divorcing from a spouse. However, Chinese women are generally rather traditionally orientated and the whole family interacts in the construction of marriage, impeding the practice of a divorce (interviews 2020).

59% of the overall interview partners including the interviewees from Beijing and Anhui agree that rather the person with a higher social credit score would end the relationship first because of resulting disadvantages (see table 7: 3.5). In contrast, the college teacher from Chengdu thinks that the person with the low social credit score would break up faster, due to a subjective perception of the negative characteristics of such a person (see interview 2020: 34). Although the responses among the different case examples differ on certain questions, the three case studies still exemplify the overall perception and content of the majority of interviewed participants.

5 Discrepancies and Compliance within the Target Groups

Chapter 5 deals with the discrepancies and compliance within the target groups on certain questions within the topic of the SCSs. This chapter shows two major results: Firstly, by splitting the target groups of the survey and interview groups (2020) into ‘students’ and ‘others’, the results show that the Chinese women in the working environment seem to be more aware of the SCSs than students. However, in general, the majority of participants state similar perceptions about the SCSs. Secondly, by comparing the answers of the targets of the 2020 survey with those of the 2020 interviews, the analysis reveals discrepancies relating to the questions of whether the SCSs are able to shape women’s mindsets regarding partner selection, and which individual may separate from their partner because of the SCSs.

The analysis of the split groups shows that the percentage of students taking part in the 2020 survey setting outnumbers those of the 2020 interview setting. 48% of the participants from the surveys were students, while the in-depth interviews registered only 19% of students (see table 3: E101/1). However, the responses provided to nearly all the questions of the survey and the interview sessions (2020) demonstrate that the Chinese who had not finished their academic career (‘students’) and women who engage in the job market (‘others’), seem to perceive similar impressions and implications of the SCSs. Their answers are mainly supporting each other. Therefore, the categorization in ‘students’ and ‘others’/‘workers’ was mostly neglected during the investigations, and the women rather analysed as one target group without the separation. A further analysis shows that the majority of women being surveyed answer in accordance with the majority of the interviewees. Merely the questions with regard to impact and future estimations provide discrepancies (see table 3: E111/3.1, E125/3.3, E127/3.5). Table 3 provides an overview of the agreements and differences on the response behaviour of Chinese women regarding the 2020 survey and the 2020 interviews.

The results from the interview settings (2020) show that all of the respondents choose/chose their partners on their own, without major external influences (see table 7: 1). The data evaluation of the questionnaires (2020) specified that 72% of the Chinese women surveyed in this thesis chose their partners without interference (see table 6: E101). The intensity of perceived influence of both the survey and interview participants can be valued as almost equal: Around 33% of Chinese women declare in the interviews (2020) that they noticed some influence from their family, friends or social surrounding. In comparison, around 28% of the respondents of the surveys (2020) mention that family, friends and other people in their closer community took part in their decision-making process when choosing their partner (see table 3: E101/1 - E102/1.1).

The evaluation of the question whether the friends, relatives and colleagues of the participants care about the SCS pilots and its pertinence offers similar conclusions. About 46% of the survey participants

and 43% of the interview respondents believe that their closer communities care about the local SCSs and take them into consideration in daily life (see table 3: E104/2.4). However, it cannot be estimated how much the people in their social communities have been in contact with a SCS pilot. In order to gain more information which group of people may be more affected by the SCSs in regard to their decision-making process, the responses were split into different groups, namely 'students and 'others'¹⁸. By investigating the responses of both settings, dividing the target into those two categories, the following results show the differences in their answering patterns. Speaking on behalf of their friends, relatives, co-workers etc., approximately 31% of the students from both settings (survey 2020 and interview 2020 settings) estimate the relevance of the SCSs as significant and the remaining 69% of the students argue that the SCSs have no relevance for their closer communities (see table 8: 2.4). On the contrary, around 44% of the Chinese women who finished their academic career and are now engaged in the working environment ('others'), explain that their friends, relatives, co-workers etc. are aware of the SCS pilots and care about the social rating (see table 8: 2.4). They believe that their closer communities generally take the SCSs into consideration (interview 2020 and questionnaire 2020: 'others'). It seems that students are less aware or care less about the SCSs than the group 'others'; thus consider the systems less in daily life. However, also more than half of the working group does not consider the regulatory system. Hence, it can be estimated that the SCSs do not exert strong influence on society yet in both groups, with or without the separation.

One explanation for that could be that, as many Chinese informants argue, 'ordinary people will not have a problem' with the SCSs (questionnaire 2020: E120). They connect the SCSs rather to financial domains, such as credit card ratings and bank issues, than to social aspects: 'For example, housing loans and car loans all require social credit impact' (questionnaire 2020: E120): 'People would take it into consideration when it really brings advantages or inconvenience to daily life, like applying for a loan' (questionnaire 2020: E110). Considering the fact that most students live in dormitories or at home, and get financial support from their families, they most likely do not have to deal with credit card and bank issues, nor worry about housing or debts. This may explain the low number of students that came across the SCS pilots. It can be assumed that students interact rather with people of the same age. Generally, it can be estimated that their closest communities do not have to consider the matters of housing and finances at this stage. Chinese women, who have already started a career and/or started a family on the other hand, have to deal with money, loans for housing, bank issues and other arrangements on a daily basis. Those interviewees have either experienced themselves or were informed through acquaintances how the SCSs work and therefore take it into consideration (interviews 2020).

¹⁸ 'others': Chinese women: employed, freelancer, workers etc. - not students

Inspective of the categorisation in 'students' and 'others', the analysis of the question '*On a scale from 1-6, how much influence do the SCSs have on the partner choice right now?*' illustrates similar results. The majority of respondents chose the median answer 'more or less' (see table 6: 3). During the in-depth interviews (2020), the Chinese women were asked to firstly state their own opinion. In the following round, they were asked to speak on behalf of other people, by putting themselves in the position of other Chinese women from their closer surroundings (third-person perspective). In summary, 50% of them agree with a median answer (rank three), representing a moderate intensity of influence (see table 3: 3). In contrast, the responses to the question how strongly the SCSs will affect the partner choice in the future/how much influence will the SCSs have on the partner choice in the future, show different speculations (questionnaire 2020: E111 and interviews 2020: 3.1).

Since this questions can only be estimated and may not reflect reality (since the future is hardly predictable), the responses merely reflect the perception of the participants (see chapter 6.2: Limitations). It is still rewarding to look into this question in order to better understand gender, social structures and to gather some individual insights on the community (see chapter 6: Conclusion). The data shows that the opinion about the impacts of the SCSs in the future is divided within the following two research settings. About 55% of the participants of the 2020 survey answered with 'more or less'/rank three to four on the value scale (see table 3: E111). Since this answer was stated in the previous question for the present estimation, this implies that most of them believe that the influence of the SCSs will stay the same and will not increase in the future (questionnaire 2020, see table 3: E103/E111). However, 88% of the 2020 interviewees believe that 'the more the SCSs spread throughout the country, the more it raises attention and importance in the future' (interviews 2020, see table 7: 3.2). They chose the rank five, indicating a high impact value of the SCSs in regard to the partner choice (interviews 2020, see table 3: 3.1). Most of the interview participants assume that people in their closer communities would also select number five. Arguing on behalf of a third person, the majority of Chinese women who took part in the study estimates that the 'significance and influence of the SCS to be just a matter of time and spread' (interviews 2020).

The question '*Do you think you/people would separate from their partner if their partner's social credit score is low?*' allows to estimate future trends with regard to the influence of the SCSs. The answers to these questions of both, the 2020 questionnaire and the 2020 interviews setting resemble striking differences (see table 3: E125/3.3). Around 26% of Chinese women who responded to the interviews (2020) believe that they and 'others' would separate from their partner if the score was low. In contrast, 74% would not consider breaking up, but would try to solve the conflict in two steps: Firstly, they would confront their partner in a discourse trying to analyse the reason for the low score. Additionally, they would point out the consequences of their low scores. Secondly, they would try to provide damage rehabilitation by helping their beloved ones to increase their score in order to get back to a normal life

(interviews 2020: 3.3). The analysis of the questionnaires from 2020 identifies that around 44% of Chinese women surveyed in this study would consider separating from their partner and only 56% would try to stay in the relationship (questionnaire 2020, see table 3: E125).

In order to further analyse those different outcomes in detail, the target groups of both research settings were evaluated, following the previous categorization in 'students' and 'others'¹⁹. The results illustrate a tendency of approval and disapproval among those two groups (see table 8: 3.3): Chinese women who have already finished their academic careers, tentatively comprising work and family building (def. others), consider separation from their partners on average slightly more often than students (see table 6: 3.3). A possible explanation for this behaviour can be given by reviewing the replies of the questionnaires 2020. The following example points out the recurrent opinion of the category 'others' by arguing: 'If the credit difference is too large, it may reflect that the two people are incompatible' (questionnaire 2020: E126). It can be assumed that the Chinese women who have already finished their academic degrees and started to work, are older than students. Due to this conclusion, they may be more experienced with relationships and have different expectations in life, which lead to other perceptions concerning this matter. However, since the values merely differ within the range of 10%, this explanation can only be speculated.

The evaluation of answers to the question '*Do you rather expect people with a higher credit score to separate from their partner or do you rather expect this from people with a lower credit score?*' shows no mutual accordance regarding the response behaviour between the responses stated in the questionnaires of 2020 and the interviews from 2020 (see table 3): In the survey session, around 45% of the participants estimate that people with a lower social credit score would separate first, while 34% of the women do not consider that people end the relationship at all and 21% believe that people of a higher credit score would separate first (questionnaire 2020, see table 3: E127). On the contrary, the evaluation of the interviews (2020) illustrates that 59% of Chinese women who participated in this study expect a breakup from the partner holding a higher social score. 24% of the respondents do not think that an actual separation would be the consequence of a low credit score, and 12% believe that the person with the lower rating will separate first (interviews 2020, see table 3: 3.5). Considering the contrary replies to the same question asked in two different interview settings, a concluding answer cannot be given (see chapter 6.2: Limitations). The reasons for these contrary perceptions can only be speculated. One presumption could be that, at the end of the surveys, the respondents randomly marked the first box out of impatience or social influence, or that they were merely unaware of the situation of the SCSs and did not know what to tick. Since the in-depth interviews reflect a rather detailed point of view, in the case of repugnancy, the responses from the interviews (2020) are taken

¹⁹'others': Chinese women: employed, freelancer, workers etc. - not students

more into account. However, from the results it can be expected that at least half of the Chinese society is either unaware of the SCS pilots or has not been confronted with it yet.

Table 3 Comparison between the 2020 Survey and the 2020 Interviews- SCSs²⁰.

Question	Survey (N= 47-160/297)			Interviews (N=42)				
	'Yes-Votes' (%)		'No-Votes' (%)	'Yes-Votes' (%)		'No-Votes' (%)		
Students	48		52	19		81		
Others	52		48	81		19		
E101/1. Did you choose your partner/husband on your own or did other factors such as parents, family and/or friends have/have had an influence on your partner-selection?								
	28		72	0		100		
E102/1.1 How strongly is/was the influence of the SCSs (regarding your own choice)?								
Bit of pressure	28		72	33		67		
E104/2.4 Do your friends, relatives, colleagues...care about the SCSs?								
	46		54	43	maybe: 7	50		
E103/3. On a scale from 1-6, how much impact do the SCSs have on the partner choice in today's China?								
φmost chosen:	'more or less' (No. 3-4): moderate intensity value (~55%)			No. 2-3: low to moderate intensity value (~44%)				
E111/3.1 On a scale from 1-6, how much impact will the SCSs have on the partner choice if everyone could see the scores of others (in the future)?								
φmost chosen:	'more or less' (No. 3-4): moderate intensity value (~55%)			No. 5: high intensity value (~30%)				
E125/3.3 Do you think you/people would separate from a partner having a low social credit score?								
	44		56	26		74		
E127/3.5 Do you think people of higher or lower credit scores would separate from their partner?								
	higher	lower	none		higher	lower	none	dk
	21%	45%	34%		59%	12%	24%	5%

Note: Data collected from the 2020 survey - SCSs (questions E101-E127) and from the 2020 interviews (questions 1 – 3.5). Distribution of the participants, 2020 survey (N=47-160) and 2020 interviews (N=42)). Data shows similar and difference results of the of both settings on selected questions, in comparison.

²⁰ Supplementation of table 3, see appendix.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Findings

This thesis investigates under which circumstances Chinese women choose their partner and how China's SCSs shape the choices of urban Chinese women in the mate selection process, by precisely examining each sub-question, listed in chapter 1.2. The findings show that in contemporary China, urban women choose their partner mainly without external interference such as pressure from their parents or family members, traditional norms, family status and the SCSs. However, many cases from the survey and interview settings exemplify that some individuals are in a discrepancy with their own individualistic ideas and such external interferences. The majority of the study participants are aware of the existence of the SCSs, even though a fraction of them have neither been in contact with a SCS pilot yet, nor care about the regulatory systems. In particular, the interview participants show a high awareness of SCSs and also more understanding about its implications than the survey informants did. They gave detailed descriptions from their understanding how the SCSs function and where they are apparent, while the majority of survey respondents rarely added further input. Moreover, the findings show that SCSs have a low to moderate impact on the mindset of those Chinese women who took part in the study with regards to their partner selection. The target groups state that they perceive a low but not significant value of influence emanating from the systems, which leads to reconsidering certain decisions. However, the majority of the Chinese women who participated in this study explained that they have not been confronted with a local SCS personally. This lack of being directly influenced by the SCSs shows that the implication of these systems on the partner selection of Chinese women has to be neglected. Thus, the key finding of this thesis is that the SCSs do not matter much in the partner selection of Chinese women at present time. Interestingly, the women predict increased effects and strong implications from an all-encompassing SCS on the partner selection in the future, assuming that the SCSs are more widely spread throughout society, and that the incentives and punishment systems are cumulatively used.

With regards to research question 1 (RQ1), which factors and circumstances are Chinese women confronted with when choosing their partner, the results reveal that the majority of the research participants were free to choose their partner on their own without being pressured by their families or other external factors. Their behaviours are manifold and may appear in accordance with the 'likes-attract' and 'potential-attract' theories. Furthermore, some women fully withdraw marriage, prefer same sex partnership or focus on self-fulfilment, while at the same time consider the norms and traditions of their families. The analysis of sub-question 1.1, asking about the present considerations of Chinese women, shows that currently around 86% of the young urban Chinese female participants

6.1 Findings

are able to choose their partner/husband without major internal or external interferences. At a first glance, from the western point of view, it seems normal that Chinese women are able to choose their partners without interference. However, looking at the history of the People's Republic of China and match-making procedures from traditional norms, it does not seem self-evident that "merely" around 14% of women feel pressured in their decision-making process. Nonetheless, even though the overall conflict between match-making within the families seem to have slightly decreased over the years, around 30% of the participants estimate that Chinese women are still exposed to at least some pressure in their decision-making process. These women believe that external factors do not only have to be taken into account with respect to individual cases, but rather must be considered nationwide. Depending on different circumstances such as families of strong traditional background and/or the discrepancy between urban and rural living conditions for Chinese families, the level of influence from internal and external factors varies.

With regard to sub-question 1.2 that deals with the family bonding in contemporary China, the results reveal that the family relationships are still very strong, and that marriage may be seen as a family business. Today, the mixture of socialist heritage, the patriarchal Confucian tradition, market logic, and heightened neoliberalism has shaped the gender (in-)equality and family situation in China. With the collapse of the dual state system and the unregulated gender equality throughout the families, the gender dynamics and the status of the women show different structures in regard to the public and private sector. In contemporary China, gender inequality increased while the family was reorganised. Reasons are regime shifts from a socialist regime to a market system, its institutional and ideological drivers and the division of the dual state apparatus (Ji, 2017).

Both the survey and interview results illustrate that the family bonding remains relatively strong within Chinese families (see chapter 3.2). Many participants live together or close by their parents/families, with communication as a distinct driver. About 25% of the women provide information that they see to their parents every day. Furthermore, around 60-71% of informants would consider asking their parents/family members on a common basis for advice, indicating a strong family bonding, maybe even more than in western households. However, when it comes to questions concerning their relationship, only around 30% of the individuals would confront their families with ongoing problems. Nonetheless, around 42% of informants state that their parents and family members tried to influence their partner choice. Because of a strong family-symbiosis in China, many parents get involved in the decision-making process of their daughters, even without their approval (Ji, 2017). In addition, the outcome of the one-child family policy triggered the legitimization of involvement by fostering the ideological view of a strong economic and secure family towards a more conservative direction, in which women are suppressed into the roles as wives and mothers. By elongating their time spent on duties and sacrifices for the family, those dual tasks often led women to encounter discrimination at

6.1 Findings

their workplace, even receiving penalties in the period of marketization. The resultant tremendous gender imbalance, low fertility rates, and the increased ageing of the population due to the one-child policy, led to a selective two-child policy in 2013, and the two-child policy in 2015 (Fang et al., 2016). Consequently, the lack of childcare centres, institutional support, and insufficient labour market for women do not support a second child in Chinese families, and put even more weight on the women. Within this societal context, Chinese non-married women in their late twenties or thirties are defined as 'left-over women', pushing early marriage forward (Ji, 2017).

This leads to sub-question 1.3, asking to which extent external factors, such as the Chinese parents/families are taking part in the partner selection process. The findings show that not only families are engaged in the match-making process but also, other parts of an individual's social network such as friends, teachers and neighbours. Even though the traditional mechanisms and values of how to choose a partner remain anchored in the life's of Chinese women, the ongoing changes and mixes of old and new patterns of the family building cannot be overseen. The women increasingly develop individualistic ideas and follow their own wishes, such as job achievements and a partner selection in line with the 'likes-attract' theory. One crucial factor to mention is the changing environment that the women are being confronted with. The freedom of choice for women is increasingly fostered by desires for high achievements on the job market, shifts in the gender assemblage, technological developments in communication and transportation, as well as new emerging individualistic ideas of separating from old traditional norms. As of today, there seems to be a change in thinking. However, this may come with disadvantages, such as suppression through non-societal acceptance (Chan, 2018).

The analysis of both surveys (2017/2020) shows that, on average, urban Chinese women who participated in this thesis get married between the ages of 26 and 27. However, the interview participants estimate that the average age of getting married within Chinese cities is between 28 and 30, while in the countryside early marriage is supposed to start at 22 years. These values are similar to the marriage ages of several industrialized countries. Since 1982, the government has encouraged later marriage as a preventative measure to limit the population growth in China (Hare-Mustin, 1982). In 2017, around half of the participants who took part in the surveys were married and had children, while merely about one third of the 2020's participant group had their own family. The decreasing number of married participants within three years of time can either be explained through the randomly selected respondents, marriage at later age or the increasingly changing social environment. When looking at the current changes in the family and marriage patterns, in addition to the ongoing political and sociological developments (see Ji, 2017), the latter explanation seems reasonable. Even though technological innovations make the communication and physical connection between potential partners easier (Davin, 2005), particularly women have to face increasing challenges. Due to the lack of governmental family support, they are trapped between the duty of taking care of their

6.1 Findings

elders, providing for their own family, and they are in discrepancy with following their individual lives and career planning. The evaluation shows that the majority of women still equalize the value of career and family building, and that 68% of single survey participants still want to have children and their own family in the future. However, more and more Chinese women seem to seclude themselves from the traditional views and dedicate their lives not solely to family building. Enduring societal, family and self-made pressure, some women - particularly educated urban citizens – start to counteract and postpone, or withdraw marriage completely (Ji, 2017). Following this trend, two of the interview respondents declare that they do not want to get married at all and 32% of the survey informants declare that they do not want to have children in the future.

Stuck between the discrepancy of the family and their own individualistic ideas, the women create new patterns of partner selection with regard to marriage. Ji (2017) noticed, that it is common among Chinese women to seek a groom of compatible family backgrounds or ‘matching doors’ (*chin. men dang hu dui* 门当户对). Living this slogan, even well-educated women living in Chinese cities, like Shanghai, are searching for husbands of equal or matching family backgrounds and social economic status (‘potentials-attracts theory’). This accords with the statements from the participants of the interview sessions (2020). The majority of women argue that they choose/chose their partner firstly on matching behaviour (‘likes-attract theory’), but then also consider the comparability in the socio-economic status, in order to satisfy their families and live a ‘good’ life (‘potentials-attracts theory’). This idea arrived from the feudal society of traditionally arranged marriages. Today, the idea of the young people goes well beyond the belief to find a match for their families (Ji, 2017). The evaluations of the interviews show that choosing a partner respecting those patterns is important, but finding a suitable partner out of ‘love’ is fundamental in order to experience happiness. The results of the first main question contribute to the extension of the prevalent literature, by providing first-hand information about the contemporary status of Chinese women on marriage, family bonding and external factors shaping their partner selection. This thesis updates and contextualizes the knowledge of gender studies and formations of family building to fill in the missing gap of considerations and behaviour of individual Chinese female citizens. By revealing that even though contemporary, urban Chinese women seem to be free in their mate selection, family bonding remains strong and sometimes remains in contrast to their individualistic ideas that have developed through innovative technologies, and social and governmental regulations within society.

With regard to the second main question (RQ2), which deals with the question of how the SCSs shape the choices of urban Chinese women in their mate selection process, the collected data reveals the following results: Even though the majority of respondents assure that they are aware of the system (since it has been implemented in their residential area), they argue that the SCSs have a moderate effect on the partner selection process. However, with a cumulative effect via the incentive and

6.1 Findings

punishment systems, the implication of the SCS pilots have the potential to exert more force on the marriage system and thereby the partner selection. The findings of the sub-question 2.1, analysing the awareness of the Chinese women of the SCSs, illustrate that around 86% of the participants are aware of the systems. Students seem to be less aware of the SCSs, or not as much in contact with it as people in the working environment. An overall percentage of 71 of the students declare that the SCSs have no relevance for their friends, closer family members etc. (see table 8: 3.3). A small part of the participants even connects the SCS pilots only with people of bad' character and legal problems. On the contrary, as illustrated before, some working women stated that their friends, relatives, co-workers etc. have already come in contact with the SCSs and take it into consideration in daily life.

Enlarged discussions, contextualizing the implications of the SCSs, particularly in regard to financial questions such as 'creditworthiness' for buying a house, car, and other bigger investments, arose during the interviews (2020). Furthermore, the punishment policies were thoroughly discussed. The target groups often mentioned that disobedience of laws and low credit scores resulted in inevitable problems, such as struggling to find good jobs or a school for the children, being abandoned from public transportation and travelling, and being discredited from the overall social community (interviews/surveys 2020). The increased use of match-making apps, with an integrated rank-based system to find the 'most suitable partner', is the beginning of the subliminal integration and evaluation of partner ratings based on financial, economic and social aspects. Women all over the world have already selected partners through rankings based on evaluations of data applications. The SCSs with its strong incentives and punishment system cannot be excluded from this process of partner selection. The investigations through the survey and interview sessions offer information about the perception of the Chinese participants in regard to the influence and implications of the SCSs on the Chinese society. Those ramifications have been highly overseen in previous literature reviews.

The analysis second sub-question 2.2, dealing with the potential of the SCSs to shape the mindsets of Chinese women with regards to their partner selection, cannot be clearly answered. On the one hand, the participants stated that they did not consider the SCSs in their partner selection. On the other hand, they estimated a moderate potential influence emanating out of the SCS pilots towards the partner selection. While other studies estimate that already 80% of their respondents use the commercial SCSs (Kostka, 2019), only 45% of the urban Chinese women participating in the research study suppose that their closest friends, relatives, colleagues etc. use and consider the SCSs (interviews/surveys 2020). Today, less than half of the respondents from the two research settings state that neither they nor their closer social surroundings have been personally confronted with the SCS pilots. Since the extension of big data and algorithmic governance in the realm of urbanism make its operation unclear to understand, the citizens may not fully understand the implications of the system. Nonetheless, the automatically driven transformations have the potential to foster inequalities in the society (Curran

6.1 Findings

and Smart, 2020). The cumulative control over security, mobility and people within China legitimizes more and more governmental actions under judicial order. Under these circumstances, the power of the government, providing adjudication to regulations of socially dominant values or the 'risky' categories, increases. Within this context, the intensification of power for one group leads to increased pressures for the already disadvantaged group ('risk-class'), which can be transferred to everyday practices of urban life for the individual (Curran and Smart, 2020). Previous studies state that the implementation of the SCSs in the Chinese society follow the idea of enhancing moral standards within the society by not only monitoring and controlling financial and corporate actions of business and citizens, but also social behaviours of individuals (Roberts et al., 2021). In this context, also the individual citizen, such as the Chinese women who have already faced pressure from their parents and families regarding their marriage choice (Ji, 2018) are going to be confronted with this issue. The respondents argue that the disadvantages in case of a low credit score are too big so that nobody wants to bear them. Eventually, this may lead to a division of society, making this topic indispensable for further investigation.

Sub-question 2.3 estimates the potential of the SCSs on the partner selection. Since nobody can predict the future, the following results merely present the perceptions of the Chinese participants according to possible implications of the SCSs in the future. Even though they may not represent reality, it is still interesting to analyse how the women would behave and act according to the regulatory systems of the SCSs and consider them in daily life, when the systems are more established within society. The findings show that the majority of the respondents predict strong implications of an all-encompassing SCS in the future, such as partner selection on the basis of high scores (see chapter 4). They defend this opinion by arguing that a low score will neither be accepted by the government nor by society. In addition, some participants mention that their parents and family members would probably not accept a son-in-law who brings a low score into the family. The more the SCSs become integrated into society and are made public in daily life, the more the individual person is going to be confronted with the regulations, integrated into the concept of these monitoring systems. In order to avoid penalties, the women will increasingly adopt and behave according to the systems. They point out that if there was the possibility to see the score of other individuals, a partner with a high social credit score will be favoured. Ji (2018) argues that even though China's rapid economic development provides more financial security and resources than before, and the family supports their elders after retirement, the future generations may not be able to provide long-term care for the elderly. This accommodation of the elder generation can easily be lost if the younger people fail to provide financial support or decide not to do so. Since there is no welfare support for the individual family, or kinship system, the pressure on the young people increases (Ji, 2017). From the data of the survey and interview sessions of 2020, it is illustrated that some of the interviewees believe that more women than men will end a

6.1 Findings

relationship if their partner has a low score. They argue that females have to consider their financial status more than men, since it is still common that men earn more money than women. Furthermore, women engaged in the working environment consider a separation from a low-rated boyfriend earlier than students. This may relate to the age differences. The 'workers' may have different expectations in life, which lead to fast results. Nevertheless, there are also many contra-argumentations from other participants, who declared that the SCSs neither have and will have an implication on their partner selection/behaviour, nor would a low score result in break-ups. The overall majority of participants argue that they would instead support their partner to increase the scores. From a low to high score perspective, the majority of interviewees estimate that higher-scored people rather break up from lower-scored people. Reasons may be the governmentally imposed punishments associated with a low score and transmitted not just to the one holding it, but also to the whole family and closer surroundings. Additionally, many women equate a low score with negative modes of behaviour and character problems. They fear that as a couple they become incompatible, the connection is broken and the partnership is not suitable anymore. In the case of a marriage, the majority would not consider a divorce 'just' because of a low credit score, mainly out of traditional norms, and the strong bonding between the couple. The women mention explicit problematic factors, such as financial issues, distribution of the house, family, children and other important matters that accompany a divorce, which all leave no space for this consideration. In their point of view, a couple should function as a unit and can improve the score together if the values and beliefs are still matching. For them, equal backgrounds mean comparable education, values, lifestyles and personal characteristics. However, both the traditional ideas (finding a partner with a high educational background and similar family status) and the romantic love (just falling in love without demands) are practised in China, in particular when being an urban, middle-class citizen (Ji, 2017).

Taking those observed trends into account, the SCSs predicts additional pressure for the women, primarily in the future. The outcome may be a partner selection, reinforced through financial and reputational settings rather than reasons of love, which may prove right for a lifetime. On the flipside, it might result in a cumulative dissatisfaction in love and society, an increase of the divorce rates, a decrease in the birth rates or even an increase in single mothers or fathers. In particular, Chinese men with a low social credit score will suffer trying to find a potential partner, since Chinese women fear sanctions for themselves and their families if they marry somebody with a low score. However, also the Chinese women will have additional trouble finding the right partner who might be able to satisfy the requirements of their families. It can be estimated that the gap between married and unmarried individuals widens and that more people are going to be left behind.

The results of the second main question contribute to the understudied topic of urban Chinese females and their perception of the SCSs, related to marriage choices. With its empirical work, the thesis

6.2 Limitations

provides missing knowledge about the awareness, disobedience and compliance of the Chinese women when it comes to the SCSs. By contemplating issues and restraints deriving from such a scoring system, the analysis of the potential of the SCSs goes beyond previous estimations for the future. Even though the trend-estimations may not reflect the reality, they are interesting for the mate selection process. Since the all-encompassing SCS is not entirely developed yet, and knowledge is lacking, investigations of the perception of citizens are important for the predictions of future developments on the SCSs and societal formations within China and beyond.

6.2 Limitations

The thesis is subject to numerous limitations. The results rely on the consistent and different answers given by the participants in regard to the survey and interview questions concerning the SCSs. Even though most ambiguity could be eliminated by the verification through the in-depth interviews (2020), some responses merely reflect trends that can only be estimated but not proven in reality. The majority of respondents filling out the questionnaires from 2017/2020 gave similar answers in relation to the family and marriage system. In contrast, the second part contextualizing the SCSs (questionnaires 2020) was answered in a vague and incomplete manner. Hence, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect additional information in order to prevent ambiguity and uncertainty of certain responses.

In general, Chinese people seem to be more motivated to participate in personal interviews than questionnaires. Since open-ended questions are rather answered in short phrases or words, they sometimes do not obtain the required results, depending on the main topic. Familiar topics, which are related to daily life, seem to be preferably answered (questionnaires 2017/2020: family and marriage system). Topics contextualizing governmental and social problems may still be perceived as a critical topic, causing some discomfort for the respondents when answering. Sometimes, it is unclear if the participants stated their own opinion or answered in a collective way. Furthermore, the traditional characteristics of 'impoliteness' need to be considered when evaluating the response behaviour of interview settings in China. In this context, exemplifying the survey questions that deal with the current influence of the SCSs on partner choice and its potential in the future (questionnaire, 2020: E:103/E111), it is shown that they bear discrepancies, which are needed to be further discussed. Here to mention is that the results of the responses on the implications of the potential of the SCSs in the future cannot be answered academically, since they may not reflect the reality. However, the SCSs are still in tryouts, and the one all-encompassing system has not been developed yet. Hence, the analysis of the perceptions of women on the potential and the implications of the SCSs contribute to interesting and important discussions on the gender perspective and estimations for the future development of the SCSs in society.

6.2 Limitations

In order to receive clearer statements within the analysis, the overall target group was divided into two different categorizations: 'students' and 'others'/'workers'. In the following evaluation, the two different groups were mutual compared and analysed. Nonetheless, the evaluated data of the questionnaires from 2020 alone did not provide a full understanding to the less answered questions of the surveys (2017). Supplementary conversations within the interview settings supported the speculation that the respondents of the 2020 questionnaires simply marked the median answer, based on the intention to satisfy the interviewer rather than stating their own opinion. This behaviour could also partially be observed during the interview sessions. While some women predicted that the implications of the SCS's in contemporary China and in the future is going to be the same, at the same time they pointed out that if the SCS's spread more among society, also its influence will increase, resulting in a greater impact. This conflicts with the equal ranking of the impact in contemporary China and its future prediction. Not until clarifying that their own perception is particularly indispensable for the prosperity of this study, a few Chinese respondents withdrew their answers and redefined their proposition. Since the response behaviour towards the questionnaires cannot be retraced, it leaves the question unanswered whether the information given reflects the respondents' own opinions or mirror a collective perception, with patterns of 'impoliteness' to satisfy the interviewer

Thus, the investigations via in-depth interviews were crucial for the clarification of vague answers, arising from the questionnaires of 2020. The interviewer needs to pay attention to each answer provided in order to identify unreasonable responsiveness. The characteristic patterns of the circular style in discourses could also be determined during the conduction process of the interviews. For speakers of western countries, it is expected, within a structured interview setting, that the respondents provide answers to a question in the first conversation round, within a structured interview setting. Generally, no interviewer would repeat the same question in a discourse over and over again, and would continue a conversation if an answer has already been given (Pan, 2008 p.52). During the interview sessions of the conducted field research, it frequently occurred that the interviewees talked about their own relationships, a long time before answering the main question. The interviewer had to repeat the question, sometimes redefining the problem, in order to obtain an assertive answer to the actual question. In regard to some particular questions, the respondents of the interviews were firstly asked to state their own opinion²¹, and secondly to give objective responses (third-person view²²). In case of ambiguity, the question was repeated in order to prevent misunderstanding. However, many Chinese interview partner did not want to speak on behalf of their closer communities by declaring that they 'cannot answer for others'.

²¹ E.g. see Appendix: Table 6: Analysis of the 2020 Interviews – SCSs: 1. Did you choose your partner/husband on your own or did other factors e.g. parents, family, friends have/had influences on your partner choice?

²² E.g. see Appendix: Table 6: 1.3 Did your friends were influenced choosing their partner?

6.3 Outlook

Throughout the interview sessions, it could be identified that the Chinese women had difficulties defining the term 'Social Credit Systems' (chin. 社会信用体系). This term is apparently neither commonly used nor has it been integrated in the Chinese language yet. This may have been another reason for the lack of participation until completion of the surveys. The women may have ceased the survey sessions because of a discouragement and uncertainty about the topic and its meaning. They did not have the chance to clarify questions about the definition, unlike the participants of the interviews. During the interview sessions, those ambiguous answers could be surmounted in conversational discussions between the interviewer and the respondents. Overall, the various complete answers within the questionnaires, together with the in-depth interviews, made the statistical analysis applicable. The additive information, derived from the in-depth interviews, helped to complete the missing information from the opaque responses of the questionnaires with regard to the SCSs. Eventually, evaluating the facts from both the questionnaires and in-depth interviews, an overall sufficient set of answers in regard to the research questions was provided.

6.3 Outlook

The data evaluation of this research reveals that the Chinese respondents from the survey and interview sessions have good reasons for family building but also have many different approaches and struggles to face when deciding on a partner. Today's rapidly-changing environment as well as external factors, such as the families, SCSs and their own desires will surely not decrease in the future; quite the contrary can be forecasted. For instance, the government's expectations on the SCSs have high potential for more changes in the social sector for the entire Chinese population. This leads to more criteria for the women to consider in regard to partner selection and marriage. Depending on the internal and external factors assigning their social settings, the women develop different family and marriage patterns, which will definitely continue to change in the future. Some women even separate from the traditional norms and try to find their path through online communication tools like match-making apps.

According to the interview participants, these match-making apps are still highly disreputable. While most participants state that they do not use dating apps, since they seem shady, are not reliable for seeking a serious relationship, and are not accepted in the Chinese society, some women argue that their friends used it, sometimes leading to successful marriages. It can be predicted that with the increasing application and innovation of technologies and artificial intelligence, also match-making apps will be more frequently used for building up relationships and finding the right partner. Those online dating apps may enhance the ability to experience more freedom in sexuality and increase the potential to find a suitable partner. However, the users are still under surveillance and have little

6.3 Outlook

protection outside the platform (Chan 2018). Nonetheless, dating apps are increasingly accepted such as the famous internet dating website *shijijiyuan* (chin.世纪佳缘). This dating platform has its own television show and apparently incorporates algorithmic patterns in order to match individuals based on their credit scores. However, this could not be proven by the author; it is obvious that with the new regulatory system of the SCSs, with its incentives and punishment system, is likely of being taken into consideration when choosing a partner, with or without the help of match-making devices. In order to avoid complications of credit scores, premature decisions on behalf of the rankings may lead to hasty rejections or confirmations of partners, which may end up in unsuitable matches, break ups or divorce. Furthermore, by trying to pursue the overall satisfaction and approval from their families, in addition to societal and governmental pressures, the convention with their own moral concepts may become unbearable, resulting in a refusal of marriage. The trend goes in the direction (in particular for urban Chinese women) that marriage may not be the only achievement for women to strive for in life. Some single women focus on their careers, without paying attention to the traditional stages of female roles, and thereby tackle the status of 'left-over women' (Gaetano 2014). Hence, even though marriage may be desired, it can be postponed or negligent (Chan, 2018). These developments predict trends towards later marriage and even decreasing numbers of weddings in the upcoming years.

In order to provide more evidence and to be able to sufficiently predict the impact of the big data gathering of the SCSs in the future, further research must be done. Additional field studies, incorporating other target groups such as young Chinese women from the countryside, would offer additional information and could consequently complete the view from another perspective. It would be interesting to evaluate the perceptions from different target groups in order to get the full outlook. Furthermore, based on the fact that the SCSs are currently not widely spread and rather unknown throughout the Chinese society, it would be sufficient to wait a couple of years until the pilot projects are replaced by one, single, all-encompassing SCS infrastructure in order to receive more detailed data. Since the focus of the scoring seems to currently emphasize mainly on financial aspects, the social aspects will most likely to be taken into account in prospective years. Thus, even though estimations can be made at this point, the changes and development of the system in the closer future is crucial for providing actual evidence of the outcome and potential restrictions on the marriage choices. Supporting studies will indicate if the predictions stated by the women become reality or remain estimations.

Chinese women, likewise women all over the world more frequently use the new innovative technologies, such as online dating websites, to maximize their chances of finding a suitable partner. Within those platforms, artificial intelligence (AI) plays a crucial role for the evaluation of suitable matches. AI has the potential to understand group cognition and psychology, which triggers the SCSs potential usage not just for financial and corporate actions of businesses and citizens, but also for

6.3 Outlook

monitoring social behaviour of individuals. The technologies, such as facial recognition and cloud computing are used to strengthen their ability of internal surveillance and policy making (Roberts et al. 2021). Sheng Zou (2021) explains that it is misleading to believe that trust can be rationalised with technology rather than traditionally moral education. He argues that the technological efficiency undermines the very cause of trust-building, and that the return to pre-modern norms alone is not sufficient either. Technologies need to be incorporated into today's society, which then should contribute to human freedom and possibilities rather than controlling a society.

The determination of outcomes of the smart urbanism and data-driven governance through the SCSs can just be predicted at this point. However, the trend of the distribution of risks is more identifiable. While a specific class is already in favour of security and social credit advantages, the marginal, poor, informal at-risk classes have to expect crucial interventions in terms of surveillance and control in their lives (Current and Smart, 2021). For example, based on AI, the government has implemented counterterrorist surveillance programs to identify dissidents or terrorists in western China, which have gone beyond privacy rights. But also other cases are known, where especially western media highlight the dangerous nature of the SCSs due to its authoritarian undertone and pervasive control, as well as their reward and punishment systems (Roberts et al. 2021). For example, the Olympic winter games in Beijing 2022 were clouded by the extensive surveillance of the Chinese citizens and its visitors, by camera monitoring and a SCS. In order to show a successful handling and containment over the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese government instructed the Beijing Financial Holdings Group to implement a program, amongst an 'Olympia-app' called 'My2022', which had to be downloaded by all tourists and athletes visiting and participating the games. The Financial holding group admit that the data gathered are transferred to third party groups such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Chinese safety and health organisations. However there are lacks of safety, so that sensitive data can easily be accessed from other parties, which are independent from the covid abatement groups. This, even by Chinese law typifies a violation of privacy rights (Heeger, 2022). Additionally, the main drivers are big data giants, who increasingly improve their algorithms, and consequently their power (Current and Smart, 2020). More than 30 central government agencies and IT firms, like Alibaba and Baidu (Chen & Cheung, 2017), form liaisons by gathering social and financial behaviours of actors and share them on national data platforms where local governments also share their information (Meissner 2017). Since the SCSs inhibit political goals within its algorithms, the actual function is hidden, more cunning than the previous surveillance methods (Liang et al., 2018), and therefore even more dangerous.

Discussions about the SCSs and its emerging ratings and algorithmic governance in China can trigger a critical rethinking of ethical issues concerning activities such as credit/reputation rating, user profiling and algorithm governance also in western countries. In the age of the technological boom, rating systems in several shapes can be found everywhere throughout everyday life (Zou, 2021). We should

6.3 Outlook

be aware of the power entailed in these systems and in which context the application is appropriate or rather misleading. Keeping this in mind, the SCSs offer a variety of areas for further research within the following years. Those investigations would not only foster knowledge about the ongoing social and governmental trends in China. Since China's global players aim to operate on a national and international level, they have already started to offer digital services to other countries (Liang et al. 2018). In accordance, it can be estimated that soon the question of advantages and disadvantages of the high technological usage, artificial intelligence, and implementation of an all-encompassing SCS from China reaches the global continents and demands appropriate handling. Further research must be provided in order to reduce potential risks of privacy and control violations, and to guarantee the integrity of each individual by taking full advantage of the benefits from the very advanced technological solutions.

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9 Appendix

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

Table 4 Analysis of the 2017 Survey - Family and Marriage

Section IN: Introduction	No. of Participants	ϕ		Explanation	
Current Age	66	~27		Age of participants: 18-40 years	
Current place of residence	66	~18 (different places)		Numbers of participants resident in: Zhejiang: 24; Beijing: 11; Nanjing: 9	
Occupation		'Yes-Votes'		Percentage of 'Yes votes'	
Student	65	35		54	-
Employed	65	25		38	-
Unemployed	65	5		8	-
Questions A0: Status	No. of Participants	'Yes'	'No'	'Yes votes' (%)	'No votes' (%)
A001: 1.1 Are you married					
	66	32	34	49	51
A002: 1.2 How old were you when you got married?					
	31	-	-	-	~25
A003: 1.3 If no, do you have a...					
Explanation:					
boyfriend	19	12	-	63	-
Girlfriend	19	2	-	11	-
Fiancé	19	4	-	21	-
Unofficial relationship	19	1	-	5	Still fresh; not sure
A004: 1.4 How do you feel in your relationship?					
Happy	54	34	-	63	-
Unhappy	54	1	-	2	-
Neutral	54	19	-	35	-
Section A2: Relationship					
A201: 2. If you are currently not in a relationship, what is the reason for that?					
Explanation:					
Have not found the right partner yet	43	21	-	49	-
Not interested in building a family	43	5	-	12	-
Enjoying my freedom	43	7	-	16	-
Focus on other things	43	8	-	18	e.g. work, study...
Other reason	43	2	-	5	-
Explanation 'other reason': not interested in building a relationship with other people; busy etc.					
A202: 2.1 How/where did you get to know your husband/partner?					
School	52	3	-	6	-
Work	52	6	-	11	-
Friend friends	52	7	-	13	-
University	52	16	-	31	-
Family friends	52	1	-	2	-
Parents business partner	52	0	-	0	-
Match-making	52	6	-	6	-

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

Website/app	52	8	-	8	-
Parents/family	52	8	-	8	-
Other	52	15	-	15	-
Explanation 'other': board games, travelling/vacation, community events, randomly.					
Questions B0: Family	No. Participants	'Yes'	'No'	'Yes votes' (%)	'No votes' (%)
B001: 3. How is your relationship with your parents/close family members?					
Good relationship	67	50	-	75	-
Not so good	67	0	-	0	-
On and off	67	16	-	24	-
Other	67	1	-	1	-
Explanation 'other': parents past away; good relationship, except when discussing marriage topics etc.					
3.1 Do you currently live with your parents/close family members or nearby?					
	66	22	44	33	67
3.2 Do you currently live together with your boyfriend/husband?					
	64	33	31	52	48
3.3 Do you currently live together with your boyfriends/husband's parents/family or nearby?					
	64	15	49	23	77
3.4 How do you live?					
Alone	30	10	-	33	-
Shared apartment	30	8	-	27	-
Shared room	30	11	-	37	-
Other	30	1	-	3	-
Section B1: Parents					
4. How often do you see your parents/close family members?					
Every day	64	16	-	25	-
4-5 times a week	64	5	-	8	-
Once/twice a month	64	3	-	5	-
Every 3-4 month	64	5	-	9	-
Once half year	64	26	-	40	-
Once a year	64	7	-	11	-
Other	64	2	-	3	-
4.1 How often do you ask your parents/family for advice?					
Not at all	66	2	-	3	-
Rarely	66	17	-	26	-
Sometimes	66	26	-	39	-
Often	66	20	-	30	-
Always	66	1	-	2	-
4.2 How often do you ask your parents/family members for advice regarding your relationship?					
Not at all	62	14	-	23	-
Rarely	62	28	-	45	-
Sometimes	62	15	-	24	-
Often	62	5	-	8	-
Always	62	0	-	0	-
4.3 How much are/where your parents involved in choosing your husband/partner?					
Not at all	66	16	-	24	-

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

Rarely	66	21	-	32	-
More or less	66	18	-	27	-
A lot	66	8	-	12	-
Fully	66	3	-	5	-
Questions	No. Participants	'Yes'	'No'	'Yes votes' (%)	'No votes' (%)
4.4 Did you involve your parents/family members into the choice of partner on free will?					
	64	14	50	22	78
4.5 Do/Did your parents/family members try/tried to influence your choice of partner?					
	66	32	34	48	52
If yes, please specify why?					
Examples: Because of his nationality; Out of kindness; The want me to find a better/wealthier partner; My ex has a poor family; My parents wish me a cosy life.					
4.6 How strongly is/was the influence?					
Not at all	60	18	-	30	-
Rarely	60	22	-	37	-
More or less	60	13	-	21	-
A lot	60	6	-	10	-
Fully	60	1	-	2	-
4.7 If yes, are you happy with their participations in your choice of partner?					
	57	12	45	21	79
Why, why not?					
Examples: 'Yes' , because: First I did not feel respected, later I was thankful. 'No' , because: It is my own choice; I do not want to be told what to do; It makes me feel like I am controlled. Depends: According to the situation.					
Section C0: Partner Choice					
5. Did other factors such as the SCSs have/had an influence on your partner choice?					
	48	15	33	31	69
5.1 How do you feel about other people being involved in your relationship?					
Examples: It's none of anyone's business; Strange and embarrassed; Does not matter; Angry.					
5.2 What do your parents/family think about your husband/boyfriend?					
Like him	57	16	-	28	-
Do not like him	57	4	-	7	-
Approve him	57	27	-	47	-
Do not approve him	57	0	-	0	-
Other	57	10	-	18	-
5.3 Please explain, why/why not?					
Examples: Why? He is a good man; Approve him; Boyfriend lives close to my parents. They want me to stay near. So I can accompany them when they are old. Why not? Due to his nationality; Poor family background.					
6. In the end, was it your own nonbiased choice choosing your husband/partner?					
	61	30	31	49	51
Section D0: Present					
7. How much do you think are Chinese parents/family members still involved in the match-making process?					
Not at all	64	10	-	16	-
Rarely	64	9	-	14	-
More or less	64	20	-	31	-
A lot	64	21	-	33	-
Fully	64	4	-	6	-

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

Questions:	No. Participants	'Yes'	'No'	'Yes votes' (%)	'No votes' (%)
7.1 Please explain, why?					
Examples: Tradition; They think they are more experienced; They think it is their "duty" to "help" the young females to choose partners; Family background; Parents always try to prepare everything for their kids.					
7.2 How strongly is/was the influence?					
Not at all	66	7	-	11	-
Rarely	66	3	-	5	-
More or less	66	18	-	27	-
A lot	66	33	-	50	-
Fully	66	5	-	8	-
7.3 Do you think parents should have a saying in the partner selection of their children?					
	66	8	46	12	70
Maybe:		12	-	18	-
Please explain, Why, why not?					
Examples: Why? Interference is necessary under circumstances when children are dating "bad guys", e.g. violent guys; Why not? They can give a suggestion but should not interfere too much, in their choices. Maybe: It depends on the situation.					
8. Out of your experience, at which age are Chinese couples getting married?					Answer in years: ϕ
Between 25 and 30 years					~27
Section E0: Family Planning					
9. Do you have children?	66	28	38	42	58
9.2 If no, why not?					
Have not found the right partner yet	62	16	-	26	-
Not interested in building a family	62	9	-	15	-
Enjoying my freedom	62	15	-	24	-
Focus on other things	62	16	-	26	(study, work etc.)
money	62	4	-	6	-
other	62	2	-	3	-
10. Do you want to have children in the future?					
	52	36	16	69	31
10.1 If yes, why?	Examples: It is part of life; I like kids, They are fun etc.				
10.2 If no, why not?					
Have not found the right partner yet	40	6	-	15	-
Not interested in building a family	40	7	-	17,5	-
Enjoying my freedom	40	11	-	27,5	-
Focus on other things	40	5	-	12,5	(study, work etc.)
money	40	7	-	17,5	-
other	40	4	-	10	-
Section F0: 10.3 In your opinion, what is more important, career or family building?					
Career	65	7	-	11	-
Family	65	20	-	31	-
Equally important	65	38	-	58	-

Note: Evaluation of the Questionnaire – soSci Survey (2017), derived from SoSci Survey: Platform for online surveys. Distribution of the participants regarding questions on family and marriage, 2020 survey (N=31-66).

Table 5 Analysis of the 2020 Survey - Family and Marriage

Section IN: Introduction	No. of Participants	ϕ		Explanation	
Current Age	297	~26		Age of participants: 18-40 years old	
Current place of residence	268	~32 (different places)		Numbers of participants resident in: Sichuan:26, Chongqing:18, Guangdong: 17, Beijing:14, Hubei:22, Shanghai:12...	
Occupation		'Yes-Votes'		Percentage of 'Yes votes'	
student	297	157		48	Explanation: Total votes: 327 from 297 participants
Employed	297	130		40	
Unemployed	297	22		7	
freelancer	297	18		5	
Questions A0: Status	No. of Participants	'Yes'	'No'	'Yes votes' (%)	'No votes' (%)
A001: Are you married					
	283	79	204	28	72
A002: 1.2 How old where you when you got married?				Answered in %:	Answer in years:
	79	61		77	~26-27
A003: 1.3 If no, do you have a...					Explanation:
boyfriend	115	83		72	
girlfriend	115	10		9	
fiancé	115	9		8	
Unofficial relationship	115	13		11	Still fresh; not sure
A004: 1.4 How do you feel in your relationship?					
happy	191	117		61	
unhappy	191	13		7	
neutral	191	61		32	
Section A2: Relationship					
A201: 2. If you are currently not in a relationship, what is the reason for that?					Explanation:
Have not found the right partner yet	212	99		47	
not interested in building a family	212	15		7	
enjoying my freedom	212	46		22	
focus on other things	212	41		19	e.g. work, study...
Other reason	212	11		5	
Explanation 'other reason': busy; increasingly social interactions compensate for a relationship, no need to deepen a relationship.					
A202: 2.1 How/where did you get to know your husband/partner?					
school	281	29		10	
work	281	14		5	
Friend friends	281	38		13	
university	281	62		22	
Family friends	281	13		5	
business partner of the parents	281	5		2	
match-making	281	13		5	
website/app	281	21		7	

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

parents/family	281	16		6	
other	281	70		25	
Explanation 'other': online games, travelling/vacation, sports club etc.					
Questions	No. Participants	'Yes'	'No'	'Yes votes' (%)	'No votes' (%)
Section B0: Family					
B001: 3. How is your relationship with your parents/close family members?					
good relationship	264	170		64	
not so good	264	6		2	
on and off	264	83		32	
other	264	5		2	
Explanation 'other': parents past away; good relationship, except when discussing marriage topics					
3.1 Do you currently live with your parents/close family members or nearby?					
	259	106	153	41	59
3.2 Do you currently live together with your boyfriend/husband?					
	190	12	178	6	94
3.3 Do you currently live together with your boyfriends/husbands parents/family or nearby?					
	255	40	215	16	84
3.4 How do you live?					
alone	147	72		49	
shared apartment	147	44		30	
shared room	147	12		8	
other	147	19		13	
Section B1: Parents					
4. How often do you see your parents/close family members?					
every day	243	61		25	
4-5 times a week	243	1		1	
once/twice a month	243	27		11	
every 3-4 month	243	18		7	
once half year	243	70		29	
once a year	243	52		21	
Other	243	14		6	
Explanation 'other': Parents come to visit for one whole month in summer or winter; no personal meetings but video-chat (2-3 times/week); every 2-3 times/year; once every one/two month, once every three month.					
4.1 How often do you ask your parents/family for advice?					
not at all	248	19		8	
rarely	248	79		32	
sometimes	248	88		35	
often	248	48		19	
always	248	14		6	
4.2 How often do you ask your parents/family members for advice regarding your relationship?					
not at all	251	82		33	
rarely	251	96		38	
sometimes	251	55		22	
often	251	14		5	
always	251	4		2	

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

Questions	No. Participants	'Yes'	'No'	'Yes votes' (%)	'No votes' (%)
4.3 How much are/where your parents involved in choosing your husband/partner?					
not at all	251	97		39	
rarely	251	64		26	
more or less	251	61		24	
a lot	251	18		7	
fully	251	11		4	
4.4 Did you involve your parents/family members into the choice of partner on free will?					
	235	34	201	14	86
If yes, why?					
Examples: consider their opinion, because I am afraid of being betrayed; elderly people have more experience and might consider more aspects than me; it's like with a friend, you listen to other people's words when you are unsure what to do; If you are not sure and feelings are uncertain, especially when it comes to love and marriage; reference.					
4.5 Do/Did your parents/family members try/tried to influence your choice of partner?					
	234	83	151	35	65
If yes, please specify why?					
Examples: Yes, since they considered my decision as unsuitable; The family backgrounds did not match in their opinion; They think that the right partner is of high importance; They want to make sure that I am financially safe; They were not ready for a foreign-son in law; Partner has only one parent; Family status of my partners' family was lower than theirs; They want me to find a partner who makes me happy; They hope I will get married soon; Old people help the young because they are experienced; They want me to have a better life; I asked for advice; My partner's home is too far away from theirs; They are afraid that I am too old and will find a matching partner anymore; They do not trust me; They do not like my partner; They think it should be a family decision.					
4.6 How strongly is/was the influence?					
not at all	221	88		40	
rarely	221	76		34	
more or less	221	32		14	
a lot	221	17		8	
fully	221	8		4	
4.7 If yes, are you happy with their participations in your choice of partner?					
	178	55	123	31	69
Why, why not?					
Examples: 'Yes' , because: They will participate but will not force me, they respect my choice; I just want them to make suggestions, but I want to choose the person I like by myself; it is an advice; Old people care about their children; I feel cared for and that they want me to have a good future. 'No' , because: I hope to have my own space; I can judge by myself; As an adult I can distinguish right from wrong, whether a person is suitable or not; Choosing a partner is my very freedom; I believe in my own judgment; Too many unnecessary suggestions. Depends: According to the situation, those who care about me are welcome to state opinions, I just do not want to be urged; They can express their opinion and we can discuss it in a good atmosphere.					
Section C0: Partner Choice					
5. Did other factors such as the SCSs have/had an influence on your partner choice?					
	166	36	130	22	78
5.1 How do you feel about other people being involved in your relationship?					
Examples: Do not like others to interfere; Only family can interfere; Annoyed; I do my own choices; Offended; Not happy; Not acceptable; I will filter selectively.					
5.2 What do your parents/family think about your husband/boyfriend?					
Like him	180	48		27	
Do not like him	180	8		4	

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

Approve him	180	70		39	
Do not approve him	180	6		3	
Other	180	48		27	
Questions	No. Participants	'Yes'	'No'	'Yes votes' (%)	'No votes' (%)
Please explain, why/why not?					
Examples: Suitable; Because I love him; Responsible; They get along well; They respect my choice.					
6. In the end, was it your own nonbiased choice choosing your husband/partner?					
	91	94	49	51	
Section D0: Present					
7. How much do you think are Chinese parents/family members still involved in the match-making process?					
Not at all	171	27		16	
Rarely	171	46		27	
More or less	171	49		29	
A lot	171	38		22	
Fully	171	11		6	
7.1 Please explain, why?					
Examples: They love me very much and want to protect me; Old ideas; It is a Chinese tradition; I was told that dating might be our own business, but marriage the business of the entire family; There is this concept of "door when household pairs" in China, which basically means the two people have to match in terms of social class and backgrounds. For examples, girls should marry "up" of their social ladder, whereas guys can marry "down".; They want their children to be happy and make choices that are beneficial to themselves; There is a tradition of arranged marriages, and some older generations have not fully converted their consciousness; Some Chinese families believe that marriage is also a relationship between two families etc.					
7.2 How strongly is/was the influence?					
Not at all	171	24		14	
Rarely	171	28		16	
More or less	171	39		23	
A lot	171	54		32	
Fully	171	26		15	
7.3 Do you think parents should have a saying in the partner selection of their children?					
	166	65	89	39	54
Maybe:		12		7	
Please explain, Why, why not?					
8. Out of your experience, at which age are Chinese couples getting married?					Answer in years: ϕ
Between 23 and 30 years					~27
E0: Family Planning					
9. Do you have children?					
	131	27	104	21	79
9.2 If no, why not?					
Have not found the right partner yet	144	50		35	
Not interested in building a family	144	10		7	
Enjoying my freedom	144	18		12	
Focus on other things	144	52		36	(study, work etc.)
money	144	7		5	
other	144	7		5	

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

Questions:	No. Participants	'Yes'	'No'	'Yes votes' (%)	'No votes' (%)
10. Do you want to have children in the future?					
	116	78	38	67	33
10.1 If yes, why?					
Examples: Cute; Bring happiness; Life experience; I love kids etc.					
Have not found the right partner yet	75	17		23	
Not interested in building a family	75	14		18	
Enjoying my freedom	75	22		29	
Focus on other things	75	8		11	(study, work etc.)
money	75	8		11	
other	75	6		8	
Section F0: In your opinion, what is more important, career or family building?					
Career	132	14		11	
Family	132	21		16	
Equally important	132	97		73	

Note: Evaluation of the Questionnaire – soSci Survey (2020) Sample, derived from SoSci Survey: Platform for online surveys. Distribution of the participants with regards to the questions on family and marriage, 2020 survey (N=79-297).

Table 6 Analysis of the 2020 Survey – SCSs

Questions: E 1 SCS	No. of Participants	Number of 'Yes-Votes'	Number of 'No-Votes'	Percentage of 'Yes-Votes' (%)	Percentage of 'No-Votes' (%)
E101 SCS: Did other factors such as the SCSs have/had an influence on your partner choice?					
	167	47	120	28	72
E102: If yes, which ones?					
	48	Given examples stated in the surveys (2020): Friends; Family + education + personality; Economic situation; Society; Occupation; Money; SCS (since it reflects one's character); Low credit etc.			
E103: How strongly is/was the influence of the SCSs?					
not at all	160	18	-	11	-
rarely	160	26	-	16	-
more or less	160	87	-	55	-
a lot	160	22	-	14	-
fully	160	7	-	4	-
E104: Do your friends, relatives, colleagues...care about the SCSs?					
	162	75	87	46	54
E 105: Are they making choices based on the SCSs?					
	162	67	95	41	59
E107: In your opinion, do you think people will look for a partner with an equal social credit score...?					
	159	75	84	47	53
E109: Does the social credit score matter in the partner choice?					
	160	99	61	62	38
E110: If yes, why?					
	~70	Given examples stated in the surveys (2020): Worries about payments of outstanding debts from the partner; No one wants to live with someone having a low credit; A low credit score proves that this person is not reliable; If the score provides direct reference, it will			

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

Questions	No. participants	'Yes-Votes'	'No-Votes'	'Yes-Votes' (%)	'No-Votes' (%)
		affect the partner choice; SCSs may be taken into consideration since the score is necessary to apply for a loan to buy real-estate.			
E111: How strongly will the social credit score affect the partner choice?					
not at all	155	10	-	6	-
rarely	155	30	-	19	-
more or less	155	85	-	55	-
a lot	155	24	-	16	-
fully	155	6	-	4	-
E120: Why? Why not?		Given examples stated in the surveys (2020):			
	~68	'Yes', because: SCSs reflect a person's sense of responsibility; Consider it when advantages or disadvantages effect daily life; Impact on loans e.g. for housing, cars etc.; People already made choices based on the SCSs for matching their backgrounds. 'No', because: Ordinary people will not have a problem; Until now it is an imperfect system; Similar values matter more.			
E121: Are there already match-making apps including the ranking system of the SCSs?					
	138	8	13	6	9
Do not know	138	117	-	85	-
E122: If yes, which ones do you know?			shijijiyuan		
E123: Would you separate from your partner if his/her credit score is low?					
	136	65	71	48	52
E124: why? Why not?		Given examples stated in the surveys (2020):			
	~83	'Yes', because: In terms of financial management, loans will be limited; Many hidden troubles; Shows his personality; A low credit score will bear relatively high risks. 'No', because: Social credit score can be used for reference, but trust between two people is more important; Husband and wife should face everything together. Depends: On the circumstances; Consider marital status, emotional status, children and other aspects.			
E125: Do you think people would separate from their partners if their credit scores differ in a high amount?					
	137	60	77	44	56
E126: If yes, why?		Given examples stated in the surveys (2020):			
	~49	'Yes': Credit affects communication, common values, external debts; Big difference may reflect incompatibility; Too big difference easily cause conflicts; Low credit means high risk tolerance. 'No': Most Chinese people do not really care; Because it would be stupid if you leave somebody you love just because of a low credit; One should not be manipulated by SCSs.			
E127: Do you think rather people of a higher credit score or a lower credit score would separate from their partner?					
People with		High scores	Low scores	None of them	-
	136	29/21%	61/45%	46/34%	-
E128: why? Why not?		Given examples stated in the surveys (2020):			
	~67	'Ppl with high scores': Are normally more rational and evaluate more aspects; Are more concerned about the score; When the partner's low scores start to cause inconvenience for their family, a divorce might happen. 'Ppl with low scores': Are less loyal in marriage, and life is more likely to be unsatisfactory. 'None of them': People's personality is diverse, and most people do not pay much attention to social credit score; They do not know the other party's credit score when they get to know each other.			

Note: Evaluation of the Questionnaire – soSci Survey (2020) Sample, derived from SoSci Survey: Platform for online surveys. Distribution of the participants with regards to the questions on SCSs, 2020 survey (N=48-167).

Table 7 Analysis of the 2020 Interviews – SCSs

Status	No. of participants	ϕ	Explanation		
Current Age	42	~30	Age of participants: 21-40 years old		
Current place of residence	42	~20 (different places)	Numbers of participants resident in: Sichuan: 9; Beijing: 8; Zhejiang: 5...		
Occupation		'Yes-Votes'	Percentage of 'Yes votes'		
student	42	8	19		
Employed	42	32	72		
Unemployed	42	1	7		
freelancer	42	1	2		
Questions:	Number of Participants	Number of 'Yes-Votes'	Number of 'No-Votes'	Percentage of 'Yes-Votes' (%)	Percentage of 'No-Votes' (%)
Are you married?					
	42	21	21	50	50
1. Did you choose your partner/husband on your own or did other factors such as parents, family and/or friends have/had an influence on your partner-selection?					
Own choice:	42	42	0	100	0
1.1 Did you receive any pressure from external factors during your partner selection?					
Bit of pressure:	42	14	28	33	67
1.2 Which external factors, such as the Chinese parents/families are taking part in the partner selection?					
Parents/family	42	30	-	71	-
Friends	42	5	-	12	-
Society	42	1	-	3	-
None	42	6	-	14	-
1.3 Did your friends were influenced choosing their partner?					
	42	13	27	31	64
Maybe	42	2	-	5	-
2. Have you heard about the social credit scores before?					
	42	36	6	86	14
2.1 Is it established in your residential area?					
Yes	42	19	-	45	-
Heard about it/maybe	42	20	-	48	-
No/unknown	42	3	-	7	-
2.3 Did you get into contact with a SCS? Are you personally confronted with the SCSs?					
	42	15	27	36	64
2.4 Do your friends, relatives, co-workers etc. care about the SCS?					
	42	18	21	43	50
Maybe		3		7	
3. On a scale from 1-6, how much influence do the SCSs have on the partner choice right now?					
ϕ own opinion	42	No. 2-3 (low to moderate intensity value), by ~44%			
ϕ ppl in closer surrounding	27	tendency to No. 3 (moderate intensity value), by ~21%			
3.1 On a scale from 1-6, how much influence will the SCSs have on the partner choice in the future?					
ϕ own opinion	42	No. 5 (high impact value), by ~30%			

9.1 Tables: Empirical Research - Data Collection and Analysis

φ ppl in closer surrounding	33	No. 5 (high impact value), by ,~36%			
Questions	No. participants	'Yes-Votes'	'No-Votes'	'Yes-Votes' (%)	'No-Votes' (%)
3.2 Do you think the influence of the SCSs regarding partner choice will increase or stay the same?					
Increase	42	37	5	88	12
3.3 Do you think you/other people would separate from a partner having a low social credit score?					
	42	11	31	26	74
Maybe ²³	42	2	-	5	-
3.4 Do you think you/other people would divorce from a partner having a low credit score?					
	42	6	36	14	86
Maybe ²⁴	42	8	-	19	-
3.5 Do you think rather people of a higher or lower credit score would separate first, or none of them?					
High score	42	25	-	59	-
Low score	42	5	-	12	-
None of them	42	10	-	24	-
Cannot decide	42	2	-	5	-
Maybe break up; but no divorce	42	14	-	33	-
4. Are there already match-making Apps including the ranking of the SCSs?					
Do not know	42	35	-	83	-
Maybe	42	1	-	2	('feichang wurong')
Not yet	42	4	-	10	-
Yes	42	2	-	5	(e.g. 'zankou')
4.1 Do you know the match-making App "shijijiyuan"?					
	19	17	2	89	11
5. What is the average age of marriage among Chinese women?					
Average in big cities:	27	~28 years	-	Age range: 28-30 years	-
Average in small cities:	19	~25 years	-	Age range: 23-25 years	-
Average in rural areas:	19	~22 years	-	Age range: 20-23 years	-

Note: Evaluation of the in-depth Interviews (2020). Questions derived from the Sample: In-Depth Interviews - Social Credit Systems 2020. By Bathe-Peters, Jessica, executed over WeChat (June 17th-July 2nd, 2020), Distribution of the participants, 2020 interview (N=42).

²³ Def. Maybe: The participants chose either 'yes' or 'no', while adding that it depends/maybe to this question.

²⁴ Def. Maybe: The participants chose either 'yes' or 'no', while adding that it depends/maybe to this question.

Table 8 Analysis of the Interviews & Surveys 2020 - 'Students' V.s. 'Others'

Questions	Students				Others			
	Interviews		Surveys		Interviews		Surveys	
	'Yes' in %	'No' in %	'Yes' in %	'No' In %	'Yes' in %	'No' In %	'Yes' in %	'No' in %
	N=8		N=62-74		N=34		N=74-88	
2.4 Do your friends, relatives, co-workers etc. care about the SCS?								
	25	75	37	63 (N=74)	44	56	54	46 (N=88)
3.3 Do you think you/ppl would separate from their partner (bf) if their partner's SCS is low?								
	13	87	45	55 (N=62)	29	71	49	51 (N=74)
3.4 Do you think you/ ppl would divorce from their husband if their husbands' credit is low? (would separate if differs in high amount- Surveys)								
	0	88	40 dk=12%	60 (N=62)	15	85	47	53 (N=74)
3.5 Do you think rather ppl of a higher credit score, lower credit score or none of them would separate from their partner first?								
high score	50		21	(N=62)	59		22	(N=74)
low score	25		41		13		49	
none of them	25		39		31		30	

Note: Evaluation of selected questions from the Questionnaire – soSci Survey (2020) and the in-depth interviews (2020). Both target groups were divided into two different categories ('students' and 'other') and mutually compared in order to clarify if people in the 'working environment' are differently affected by the SCSs than students (see chapter 5). Distribution of the participants with regards to the questions on the SCSs.

9.2 Questionnaire - soSci Survey (2020)

Sosci Survey (06.03.2020 -10.06.2020)

Project: 'Decision-Making Process of Chinese Women towards the Marriage System'

中国女性对于婚姻的选择

IN: Introduction

This survey is being executed within the framework of a doctoral study of the Freie- Universität Berlin, to investigate the Chinese family system under the inspection of Chinese women and their choice of marriage in the realm of the Social Credibility System. The survey will only be taking 15 min. In case of interest of the evaluation, please feel free to leave your E-Mail address and you will receive the analysis after the examination. Your personal data is being kept in confidence and not handed to third party. The analysis on this topic is depended on your assistance. It would be a great help if you take some minutes to answer the following questions! Thank you for your participation!

这项调查关于研究中国女性对于婚姻的选择以及家庭成员对其选择的干涉，并作为柏林自由大学的一个博士论题。您仅需 15 分钟时间来作答。若对结果有兴趣，可留下您的邮件地址，您将会在评估结束后收到您的分析结果。您的个人信息将被保密，而且不会被透露给第三方。我们真挚的希望您能在百忙之中抽出一点时间来参与这项调查，这对我们非常重要。非常感谢您对我们的支持与帮助!

IN01: Please check and fill out the box applicable to your own person and specify!

请仔细阅读以下内容并选择适当的选项。

IN02: Personal Information

Current Age/年龄： Place of Birth/出生地点： Current place of residence/居住地（目前）：

Place of registration/户籍：

IN03: Personal Information 2

Occupation/职业：

Student/学生

employed/就业

unemployed/失业

freelancer/自由撰稿人

IN04: Personal Information 3

University/在读学校：

Type of Company/公司：

Position/职位:

other/其它:

A0: Status

A001: Are you married?/是否已婚?

A002: 1.1 How long have you been married?
已婚多久?

1.2 How old were you when you got married?
结婚时多大?

A003: 1.3 If no, do you have a
如果未婚, 你现在的状态是:

boyfriend/有男朋友:

girlfriend/有女朋友:

fiancé (planning on getting married)/准备结婚:

in a relationship, but not official, please specify/有一个不方便公开交往的人。请详细说明:

none of them above/没有

A004: 1.4 How do you feel in your relationship?
你如何评价你的感情生活?

happy/—开心

unhappy/—不开心

neutral/—保持中立

no relationship/没有伴侣

A2: Relationship

A201: 2. If you are currently not in a relationship, what is the reason for that?
如果你目前还没有谈恋爱, 是什么原因呢?

haven't found the 'right one' yet/我还没有找到合适的对象

not interested in building a family/并不想建立家庭

enjoying my freedom/想过自由的生活

focus on other things/其它原因 (学业, 工作等)

other, please specify/其它:

A202: 2.1 How did you get to know your husband/partner?
你是怎么认识你现在的丈夫/男女朋友的?

school/中学

work/工作

friend of a friend/朋友的朋友

university/大学

friend of the family/家人的朋友

mum's, dad's business partner/父母的合作伙伴

match-making/相亲

website/App/网站/软件

parents/family suggestion /父母 / 亲戚介绍

other, please specify / 其它 (详细):

B0: Family

B001: 3. How is your relationship with your parents/close family members?

你跟父母的关系如何?

good relationship/很好

not so good/不好

on and off/一般

other, please specify/其它:

B002: 3.1 Do you currently live together with your parents / close family members or nearby?

你现在是否跟父母住在一起或住在附近?

yes/是

no/否

B003: 3.2 Do you currently live together with your boyfriend / husband?

你现在是否跟男友或丈夫住在一起?

yes/是

no/否

B004: 3.3 Do you currently live together with your partners parents / family or nearby?

你是否跟男友或丈夫的父母或家人住在一起, 或是住在附近?

yes/是

no/否

B005: 3.4 If not, how do you live?

如果没有, 那你?

alone/独居

shared apartment/合租

shared room/与他人同住一间房间

other, please specify/其它:

B1: Parents

B101: 4. How often do you see your parents/close family members?

你多久见一次父母或家庭成员?

every day/每天

4-5 times a week/每周 4-5 次

once/twice a month/每周 1-2 次

every 3-4 month/每月 3-4 次

once half year/半年一次

once a year/一年一次

other/其它:

B102: 4.1 How often do you ask your parents/family for advice?

是否会向父母或家庭成员征求意见?

not at all/从不

rarely/偶尔

at times/有时

often/经常

always/总是

B103: 4.2 How often do you ask your parents/family members for advice regarding your relationship? 是否会向父母或家庭成员咨询有关感情的事情?

not at all/从不

rarely/偶尔

at times/有时

often/经常

always/总是

B104: 4.3 How much are/were your parents/family members involved in choosing your husband/partner? 父母/家人会干涉你选择伴侣吗?

not at all/从不

rarely/偶尔

more or less/有时

a lot/ 经常

fully/总是

B105: 4.4 Did you involve your parents/family members into the choice of your partner on free will?

你是否会让家人来帮你选择伴侣?

yes/是

no/否

If yes, please specify why?/如果是, 为什么?

B106: 4.5 Do/Did your parents/family members try/tried to influence your choice of partner?

你的家人或家庭成员是否尝试过干涉你对伴侣的选择?

yes/是

no/否

If yes, please specify why?

如果是, 为什么他们要干涉你的选择?

B107: 4.6 How strongly is/was the influence?

这样的情况常见吗?

not at all/从不

rarely/偶尔

more or less/有时

a lot/ 经常

fully/总是

B108: 4.7 If yes, are you happy with their participation in your choice of partner?

如果是, 你对他们的参与是否感到高兴?

yes/是

no/否

Why?/why not, please specify?

为什么? 请详细说明:

C: Opinion

C001: Partner Choice

5. Did other people were getting involved in your partner choice? (Neighbours, Danwei of parents, your danwei/University/work place, teachers/professors, other?)

是否有其他人干涉过你对伴侣的选择? (邻居,同事, 同学, 老师等)

C002: 5.1 How do/would you feel about other people being involved in your relationship?

在这种情况下，你是什么感觉？

C003: 5.2 What do your parents/family think about your husband/partner?

你的父母或家庭成员怎么看待你的丈夫或男友？

like him/喜欢他

doesn't like him/不喜欢他

approve him/接纳他

doesn't approve him/不接纳他

other/其它：

C004: 5.3 Please explain, why/why not?

为什么？请给出原因。

C005: 6. In the end of your partner selection, was it your own nonbiased choice choosing your husband/partner? 最后，你选择伴侣的过程中，并没有收到父母亲戚的影响？

yes/是

no/否

D: Present

D001: Present

7. How strongly are Chinese parents/family members/others still involved in the match-making process? 中国父母或家庭成员是否对其它女性成员的婚姻进行干涉？

not at all/并不

rarely/偶尔

more or less/正常

a lot/经常

fully/总是

D002: 7.1 Why/why not? Please specify your answer:

为什么？请给出原因：

D003: 7.2 How much influence do you think Chinese parents/family members are demanding family building for their children? 中国父母或家庭成员是否认为婚姻是为了下一代？

not at all/并不

rarely/偶尔

more or less/一般

a lot/经常

fully/一直

D004: Why, why not? Please specify!

为什么? 请给出原因!

7.3 Do you think parents should have a saying in the selection of the partner of their children?

你是否认为, 父母或者身边的人应该干涉女性的择偶?

D005: 8. Out of your experience, when do most Chinese couples are getting married? (age etc.?)

据您所知, 绝大部分中国夫妻是在什么时候结婚的? (年龄等...)

E1/E101: Social Credit System

E101: SCS

9. Did other factors such as the Social Credit Systems have/had an influence on your partner choice?

是否有其他因素比如社会信用体系影响过你对伴侣的选择?

Yes/有

No/没有

E102: 9.1 If yes, which ones?

如果是有, 什么样的?

E103: 9.2 How strongly is/was the influence of the Social Credit Systems?

社会征信体系对伴侣的选择有多大程度的影响?

not at all/完全没影响

rarely/偶尔影响

more or less/有一定影响

a lot/较多影响

fully/完全影响

E104: 9.3 Do your friends, relatives, colleagues... care about the Social Credit Systems?

您朋友, 亲眷, 同事等等对社会信用体系关心吗?

Yes/关心

No/不关心

E105: 9.4 Are they making choices based on the Social Credit Systems?

他们会根据社会征信系统做出个人选择吗?

Yes/是

No/不是

E106: 9.5 If yes, what kind of choices? Please explain.

如果会, 请解释说明具体是什么样的选择.

E107: 10. In your opinion, do you think people will look for a partner with an equal social credit score as a partner from now on?

你是否认为现在人们找对象时会倾向于找和自己社会信用评分相等的伴侣?

Yes/是

No/不是

E108: 10.1 If yes, why?

如果是，为什么?

E109: 10.2 Does the social credit score matter in the partner choice?

社会信用评分会不会影响到对伴侣的选择?

Yes/会

No/不会

E110: 10.3 If yes, why?

如果会，你的理由是什么?

E111: 10.4 How strongly will the social credit score affect the partner choice?

社会征信体系对择偶有多大影响?

not at all/完全没影响

rarely/偶尔影响

more or less/有一定影响

a lot/较多影响

fully/完全影响

E121: 11.2 Are there already match-making apps including the ranking system of the Social Credit Systems? 是否已经有一些相亲网站/应用包含了会员社会信用评分排名?

Yes/会

No/不会

Don't know / 不知道

E122: 11.3 If yes, which ones do you know?

如果是，你知道的有哪些?

E123: 11.4 Would you separate from your partner if his/her credit score is low?

如果你的伴侣社会信用评分太低，你会考虑和他/她分手/离婚吗?

Yes/会

No/不会

E124: 11.5 Why? Why not?

为什么，为什么不?

E125: 11.6 Do you think people would separate from their partners if their credit scores differ in a high amount? 你是否认为人们会因为双方社会信用评分差异太大和他们的伴侣分手/离婚?

Yes/是

No/不是

E126: 11.7 If yes, why?

如果是, 你的理由是什么?

E127: 11.8 Do you think rather people of a higher credit score or a lower credit score would separate from their partner?

你认为哪一类人更容易和他们的伴侣分手/离婚, 社会信用评分高的还是社会信用评分低的?

higher/高的

lower/低的

none of them/无差别

E128: 11.9 Why? Why not?

为什么, 为什么不? 你的理由是什么?

E0: Children

E001: children

12. Do you have children?

你有孩子吗?

yes/有

no/没有

If yes, how many?

如果有, 有几个?

E002: 12.1 When were they born?

他们什么时候出生的?

E003: 12.2 If no, why not? Please specify:

如果没有, 为什么?

haven't found the 'right one' yet/我还没有找到合适的对象

not interested in building a family/并不想建立家庭

enjoying my freedom/想过自由的生活

focus on other things (study, career etc.)/其它原因 (学业, 工作等)

money/钱

other/其它:

E004: 12.3 Do you want to have children in the future?

你未来想要孩子吗?

yes/想

no /不想

If yes, why? Please specify

如果想, 为什么?

E005: 12.4 If no, why? Please specify:

如果不想, 为什么?

haven't found the 'right one' yet/我还没有找到合适的对象

not interested in building a family/并不想建立家庭

enjoying my freedom/想过自由的生活

focus on other things (study, career etc.)/其它原因 (学业, 工作等)

money/钱

other/其它:

F0: Importance

F001: 13. In your opinion, what is more important, career or family building?

对你来说, 哪个更重要? 工作还是家庭?

career/工作

family/家庭

equally important/同样重要

other/其它:

H0: Bild

G0: end

G001: Thank you very much for your support!

非常感谢您对我们的支持与帮助!

9.3 Sample: In-Depth Interviews – Social Credit Systems (2020)

Sample: Interviews - SCSs

中国女性对于婚姻的选择和社会信用体系

Date: Start: pm (Central European Summer Time, CEST/China UTC +6)

Duration: min.

Name/姓名:

Current Age/年龄:

Place of Birth/出生地:

Current Place of Residence/居住地 (目前) :

Married/结婚:

Not married/没结婚:

Boyfriend/Girlfriend: 男/女朋友:

Children/孩子

Occupation/职业:

Student/学生:

Employed/就业:

Unemployed/失业

University/在读学校:

Type of Company/公司:

Other/其它:

Position/职位:

'Yes'	'No'	
		1. Did you choose your partner/husband on your own or did other factors such as parents, family and/or friends have/had an influence on your partner-selection? 中国目前情况怎么样? 妇女们在选择伴侣时能不能不受外界因素, 如父母的干涉?
		1.1 Did you receive any pressure from external factors during your partner selection?
		2. How is the situation in China: Are Chinese women able to choose their partner without interference from external factors, such as the parents? 妇女们在选择伴侣时受不受外界因素, 如父母的影响?
		1.2 Which external factors, such as the Chinese parents/families are taking part in the partner selection?
		1.3 Did your friends were influenced choosing their partner?
		3. Do you know what the SCS is about? 你知道不知道中国介绍的社会信用体系/评分制是什么?
		2. Have you heard about the social credit scores before?
		2.1 Is it established in your residential area?
		4. Did you get into contact with a SCS? 你接触了中国介绍的社会信用体系/评分制吗?
		2.3 Are you personally confronted with the SCSs?
		5. How intense is/was the impact of the SCSs on the partner selection? 社会征信体系对伴侣的选择有多大程度的影响?
		3. On a scale from 1-6, how much influence do the SCSs have on the partner choice right now?
		6. Do your friends, relatives, colleagues...care about the SCSs?

2.4 您朋友，亲眷，同事等等对社会信用体系关心吗？
7. Are they making choices based on the SCSs? 他们会根据社会征信系统做出个人选择吗？
8. In your opinion, do you think ppl will look for a partner with an equal SCS as a partner? 你是否认为现在人们找对象时会倾向于找和自己社会信用评分相等的伴侣？
9. How much will the SCS effect the partner choice? 社会征信体系对择偶有多大影响？
3.1 On a scale from 1-6, how much influence will the SCSs have on the partner choice in the future?
3.2 Do you think the influence of the SCSs regarding partner choice will increase or stay the same?
10. Are there already match-making Apps including the ranking system of the SCS? 是否已经有一些相亲网站/应用包含了会员社会信用评分排名？ If yes, which ones do you know? 如果是，你知道的有哪些？
4. Are there already match-making Apps including the ranking of the SCSs?
4.1 Do you know the match-making App "shijijiayuan"?
11. Would you separate from your partner if his/her credit score is low? 如果你的伴侣社会信用评分太低，你会考虑和他/她分手/离婚吗？
12. Do you think ppl would separate from their partner if their credit score would differ in a high amount?/Why, why not? 你是否认为人们会因为双方社会信用评分差异太大和他们的伴侣分手/离婚？ 为什么，为什么不？你的理由是什么？
3.3 Do you think you/other people would separate from a partner having a low social credit score?
3.4 Do you think you/other people would divorce from a partner having a low credit score?
13. Do you think rather ppl of a higher credit score or lower credit score would separate from their partner?/Why, Why not? 你认为哪一类人更容易和他们的伴侣分手/离婚，社会信用评分高的还是社会信用评分低的/为什么，为什么不？你的理由是什么？
3.5 Do you think rather people of a higher or lower credit score would separate first, or none of them?
5. What is the average age of marriage among Chinese women?

Note: Question in the blue columns were the main questions asked in the interviews, 2020 (N=42). During the evaluation process, the answers were divided according the questions in the white columns. Find results in table 7: Analysis of the analysis of the 2020 Interviews – SCS.

9.4 Samples: Case Studies One – Three (Interviews 8/34/36)

Sample: Interview 8, 2020

中国女性对于婚姻的选择和社会性用体系

Date: 22.06.2020 Start: 01:30 pm (Central European Summer Time, CEST/China UTC +6)
Duration: 22:37 min.

Name: -

Current Age/年龄: 26 Place of Birth/出生地: Beijing

Current place of residence/居住地（目前）: Beijing

Married/结婚: - not married/没结婚: X boyfriend / girlfriend: no boyfriend

children: 0 (does not want to have a husband, children, family)

Occupation/职业: -

student/学生: - employed/就业: X unemployed / 失业 :-

University/在读学校: - Type of Company/公司: self-employed /freelancer

other/其它: _____ Position/职位: teacher

"Yes"	"No"	
		<p>1. Did you choose your partner/husband on your own or did other factors such as parents, family and/or friends have/had an influence on your partner-selection? 中国目前情况怎么样？妇女们在选择伴侣时能不能不受外界因素，如父母的干涉？</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not want to find a partner at the moment; does not want to have a family in the future - Parents are divorced and have individual families - But they do not rush me and have fear that I would not get a family - Have a bit influence on her choice; maybe subconsciously been influenced
		<p>2. How is the situation in China: Are Chinese women able to choose their partner without interference from external factors, such as the parents? 妇女们在选择伴侣时受不受外界因素，如父母的影响？</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nowadays Chinese women do not have the pressure of getting married early etc. ➔ Better situation now/got better - A lot of friends of hers got married in the ages of 33/34 years etc. '我觉得现在相对以前，时间中国女性对婚姻应该越来越没有那么大的兴趣[...]以前大家说的女孩子总该早结婚早生孩。这个限制到现在有好很多，我朋友很多的 33/34 才谈论结婚' (cit.). - Parents do not influence so much; Chinese women are self-dependent and can have life which does not include falling in love, marriage etc. - Parents might be worried but do not rush them
		<p>3. Do you know what the SCS is about? 你知道不知道中国介绍的社会信用体系/评分制是什么？</p>
X		- Knows it

4. Did you get in contact with the SCSs? 你接触了中国介绍的社会信用体系/评分制吗?			
	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No impact yet; do not have or know her score - 法律问题: ppl with law problems have to deal with it, other ppl are not so involved with SCSs 	
5. How intense is/was the impact of the SCSs on the partner selection? 社会征信体系对伴侣的选择有多大程度的影响?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Right now, the influence on partner choice is not a lot: Own opinion: ~2; others: ~2 - because right now we do not know the social credit score of other ppl.; and there is a low amount of knowledge about the SCSs - right now, friends do not consider it for their partner choice - in the future, if it develops -> for sure more influence: Own opinion and others: 4 - right now, in China do not know the scores -> not so important - but if you can see the scores of everyone than it will be quite important 			
6. Do your friends, relatives, colleagues...care about the SCSs? 您朋友, 亲眷, 同事等等对社会信用体系关心吗?			
	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - friends will care about the credit rating if the scores become transparent within the society 	
7. Are they making choices based on the SCSs? 他们会根据社会征信系统做出个人选择吗?			
	X	-	
8. In your opinion, do you think ppl will look for a partner with an equal SCS as a partner? 你是否认为现在人们找对象时会倾向于找和自己社会信用评分相等的伴侣?			
-			
9. How much will the SCS effect the partner choice? 社会征信体系对择偶有多大影响?			
- See question 5			
10. Are there already match-making Apps including the ranking system of the SCS? 是否已经有一些相亲网站/应用包含了会员社会信用评分排名? If yes, which ones do you know? 如果是, 你知道的有哪些?			
- Do not know any			
11. Would you separate from your partner if his/her credit score is low? 如果你的伴侣社会信用评分太低, 你会考虑和他/她分手/离婚吗?			
X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If they have disadvantages because of a low social credit score-> separation - If they have a life together and have a family they should have a connection and work together to fix the score - 'If parents would interfere and tell me to break up, I would' (citation) 	
12. Do you think ppl would separate from their partner if their credit score would differ in a high amount?/Why, why not? 你是否认为人们会因为双方社会信用评分差异太大和他们的伴侣分手/离婚? 为什么, 为什么不? 你的理由是什么?			
X		- See question 11	
13. Do you think rather ppl of a higher credit score or lower credit score would separate from their partner? /你认为哪一类人更容易和他们的伴侣分手/离婚, 社会信用评分高的还是社会信用评分低的?			
		Higher / 高的	Lower / 低的
	X		
Why? Why not? 为什么, 为什么不? 你的理由是什么?			Examples

- people with higher credit scores will be worried and apprehensive once they are in a relationship with somebody who cannot be trusted or is not that responsible
应该是分数高的人想离婚吧，应该觉得可能跟一个不太能够信任，或者不太能够承担责任的这样一个人在一起可能会有一定的担心和顾虑’ (cit.)
- higher ranked person has to endure more troubles through penalties imposed by the low credit score of his/her partner
- No more trouble after separation -> way out

Note: Sample No. 8, generated in course of the in-depth Interviews (2020), executed over WeChat (June 22nd, 2020) by Jessica Bathe-Peters. Questions derived from the Sample: In-Depth Interviews - Social Credit Systems 2020.

Interview 34, 2020

中国女性对于婚姻的选择和社会信用体系

Date: 26.06.2020 Start: 03:03 pm (Central European Summer Time, CEST/China UTC +6)
Duration: 21:03 min.

Name: -

Current Age/年龄: 29 Place of Birth / 出生地: Chengdu

Current place of residence/居住地（目前）: Songshu/Sichuan

Married/结婚: X not married/没结婚: - boyfriend/girlfriend: -

children: 1 child (2 years)

Occupation/职业: -

student/学生: - employed/就业: - unemployed/失业: -

University/在读学校: - Type of Company/公司: college

other/其它: _____ Position/职位: Biology teacher

“Yes”	“No”	
		1. Did you choose your partner/husband on your own or did other factors such as parents, family and/or friends have/had an influence on your partner-selection? 中国目前情况怎么样？妇女们在选择伴侣时能不能不受外界因素，如父母的干涉？
		- Own choice mostly - Parents agreed
		2. How is the situation in China: Are Chinese women able to choose their partner without interference from external factors, such as the parents? 妇女们在选择伴侣时受不受外界因素，如父母的影响？
		- As of today, young Chinese people choose their partner mainly on their own and that the parents do not influence their choices much ‘现在中国的年轻人结婚一般看自个人的意愿，一般来说父母都不那么干涉年轻人的选择’
		- Generally friends do not interfere in the partner selection either ‘然后一般来说任何朋友就更不会干涉个人的婚姻问题了。这是你选择男朋友，你的朋友是更不会干涉的。’
		- ‘E.g. ‘When I wanted to get married, my parents accepted my choice, others did not [...].’

		- Friends: half of them are influenced by others
		3. Do you know what the SCS is about? 你知道不知道中国介绍的社会信用体系/评分制是什么?
X		- Knows it - It is established in China; everyone has a score - ‘在全中国都铺开了，在全中国每个人都有信用体系吧.’
		4. Did you get in contact with the SCS? 你接触了中国介绍的社会信用体系/评分制吗?
X		- Has a score; everyone can see their own score at zhifubao (Alipay) - ‘[...] 每个人可以看到自己的信用分是多少。’ -> Everyone can see their own score and how much it is.
		5. How intense is/was the impact of the SCSs on the partner selection? 社会征信体系对伴侣的选择有多大程度的影响?
		- ‘When women choose a partner for marriage its important first to see what kind of person he is. They do not think so much about the SCs; wait and see and if they want to buy a place then they might consider the SCSs.’ ‘中国女性选择和谁结婚可能先重点先是在看这个人，不太特别关心他的信用体系。这个等到两个人要共同买房子的时候，估计这个时候才会去关心他的信用体系.’ - If there is a low score -> influence on ppl’s happiness and income but not so important for partner choice ‘我想影响不大，像 2 或者 3 [...] 不是特别的大，因为中国农村地区他们很难选择伴侣的时候，不会关心信用是多少 [...] 不买房子，也不需要去国外等等’ - Now, own opinion: 2/3; others: 2/3 -> a little bit of influence, but right now not so much - Later: own opinion and others: 2/3 - ‘On rural areas e.g. SCS does not matter because they do not need to buy a place; do not need to consume so many goods etc.’
		6. Do your friends, relatives, colleagues...care about the SCSs? 您朋友，亲眷，同事等等对社会信用体系关心吗?
X		- ‘They care a lot about it because if your SCS is low, you cannot buy a home, cannot go by train or plane etc.’ ‘朋友非常关心，因为一个人信用如果不太好的话是买不了房子的，也坐不了火车，也坐不了飞机’
		7. Are they making choices based on the SCSs? 他们会根据社会征信系统做出个人选择吗?
		-
		8. In your opinion, do you think ppl will look for a partner with an equal SCS as a partner? 你是否认为现在人们找对象时会倾向于找和自己社会信用评分相等的伴侣?
		-
		9. How much will the SCS effect the partner choice? 社会征信体系对择偶有多大影响?
		- See question 5
		10. Are there already match-making Apps including the ranking system of the SCS? 是否已经有一些相亲网站/应用包含了会员社会信用评分排名? If yes, which ones do you know? 如果是，你知道的有哪些?
		- Most people cannot see a score <u>Has heard about Shijijianyuan:</u> - ‘well-known because it’s a Russian new Tv programme show and has a lot of viewers/ audience’; ‘it is an online based programme but it might not reflect reality, it’s more like a play/performance’ - ‘The goal for the show is not achieved, afterwards they break up.’

11. Would you separate from your partner if his/her credit score is low? 如果你的伴侣社会信用评分太低，你会考虑和他/她分手/离婚吗？			
	X	- depends	
Why? Why not? /为什么，为什么不？			Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People with low scores need to think: - 'If the score is really really low -> odious circumstances – I would need to think about it' - 'If Chinese women choose a partner, they have lot of feelings for that person and chose him because of love (no matter if SCS is low)' - Herself: would neither break up nor divorce - 'Chinese families are more traditional. They would not just break up because of a score.' - needs more to it 			
12. Do you think ppl would separate from their partner if their credit score would differ in a high amount?/Why, why not? 你是否认为人们会因为双方社会信用评分差异太大和他们的伴侣分手/离婚？ 为什么，为什么不？你的理由是什么？			
		- See question 11	
13. Do you think rather ppl of a higher credit score or lower credit score would separate from their partner? /你认为哪一类人更容易和他们的伴侣分手/离婚，社会信用评分高的还是社会信用评分低的？			
	Higher / 高的	Lower / 低的	None of them / 无差别
		X	X
Why? Why not? 为什么，为什么不？你的理由是什么？			Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'People with a low score might break up faster because if their score is low, his character is not good' (-> might easily break up) 			
14. What is the average age of marriage among Chinese women?			
<u>Age of marriage:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big cities: 28-30 years (after finishing their Bachelor, Master and Doctorate) - Rural areas: ~22-24 years - Most women just do their Bachelors -> 22 years -> marriage - Most women are 25-30 years 			

Note: Sample No. 34, generated in course of the in-depth Interviews (2020), executed over WeChat (June 22nd, 2020) by Jessica Bathe-Peters. Questions derived from the Sample: In-Depth Interviews - Social Credit Systems 2020.

Interview 36, 2020

中国女性对于婚姻的选择和社会信用体系

Date: 30.06.2020

Start: 09:00 am (Central European Summer Time, CEST / China UTC +6)

Duration: 28:01 min.

Name: -

Current Age/年龄: 32 Place of Birth/出生地: Guizhou

Current place of residence/居住地（目前）: Anhui/Hefei

Married/结婚: X not married/没结婚: - boyfriend/girlfriend: -

children: 1 + pregnant

Occupation/职业: -

student/学生: - employed/就业: - unemployed / 失业: -

University/在读学校: Type of Company/公司: worked in a lawsuit firm

other / 其它: _____ Position/职位: lawyer

"Yes"	"No"	
14. Did you choose your partner/husband on your own or did other factors such as parents, family and/or friends have/had an influence on your partner-selection? 中国目前情况怎么样? 妇女们在选择伴侣时能不能不受外界因素, 如父母的干涉?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Own choice - Family agreed on her choice 		
15. How is the situation in China: Are Chinese women able to choose their partner without interference from external factors, such as the parents? 妇女们在选择伴侣时受不受外界因素, 如父母的影响?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Around 80% of parents try to influence the marriage of their children on account of two major reasons: - 1st: Daughters have not found the person to marry at a certain age, the parents search for a person who can fulfil the numerous required criteria - 2nd: parents try to influence their daughters' partner choice when their daughters have found a partner they like, but the parents do not agree with their choice and the marriage <p>Various reasons: negative opinions related to the boyfriend's family, his educational level, or money related aspects...</p> <p>‘我感觉有 80%的父母会干涉子女婚姻问题。有两种情况: 一种情况是女孩还没有找到男朋友, 这时父母会提很多的要求和标准。然后这样的要求可能让他们在选择男朋友的过程中遇到的很多阻碍。第二类女生: 他们找到了适合的对象, 找到男朋友了。可是父母有其它的意见, 反对他们两个结婚, 可能是因为男方家庭的问题, 可能因为男方的学历, 也可能因为男孩子的经济条件[...]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friends could choose by themselves - But small and big sister of my aunt (fathers side) they had some trouble: Sister found a boyfriend but father of aunt did not like him (where he was from) -> did not agree with the choice and tried to find somebody else - Young sister did not find a partner, due to the numerous requirements the guy had to fulfil (being a doctor or officer; no previous marriage etc.) - When she found somebody, he was not accepted etc. - Sisters always listened to their family - Half of Chinese women listen to their family 		
16. Do you know what the SCS is about? 你知道不知道中国介绍的社会信用体系/评分制是什么?		
X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knows it - It is established in Anhui but is not really important - Not widely spread yet - May be important when applying for loans and bigger investments, such as buying a house <p>‘基本上, 但是没有那么全面。就是可能你在买房要申请银行贷款的时候, 他就会怕你的这个信用体系的问题。’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can help you buy a place and get a loan from the bank - Afraid of having a bad score because if you do not pay back the fee of the credit card or cannot go by vehicles -> can have disadvantages - restricted access to public transportation; disadvantages due to a non-lawful curriculum vitae; many negative impacts on the daily life

17. Did you get in contact with the SCSs? 你接触了中国介绍的社会信用体系/评分制吗?		
X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you go to bank they just want to know your bank number; do not have a score yourself - they have the score for you - But at <i>zhifubao</i> (Alibaba) has its own credit; this credit score reflects your own protocol/credit situation and integrates Sesame credit - This credit has an influence e.g. if your score is high and you want to rent a car, you may not give a guarantee deposit or may be able to receive a higher solvency; get a higher credit... <p>[...] 那个支付宝里面的，它有一个叫芝麻信用分的，这个分数是跟你一起的信用贷款，它会给你评估一个分数。这个分不是所有方面都，应该也没有这么全面，但是这个分数可以体现大致的情况。比如你要去租一个车，如果你的分数高的话你不需要用押金 [...]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She has a score (around 800): which is high enough to not worry
18. How intense is/was the impact of the SCSs on the partner selection? 社会征信体系对伴侣的选择有多大程度的影响?		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Now, the SCSs are not considered in the partner choice (for her age) - But for younger people they may be considered because on Wechat etc. you can see the score, or go to bank and search for the score; it may influence the choice - Now: 2-3 (for her choice it did not matter but for younger people and people with low scores; They might have problems with buying a place, renting a car and other aspects in life; it is important) - Later when everyone can see the scores it is more important: 5 - China is a community: If you choose your husband, it will have a big influence in your life - If you want to buy a place after marriage you need a loan etc. - If your husband has a low score, he may not be reliable, and may not use the train, plane or does not get a loan. (big influences on life and may eventually lead to a divorce/break up (it is getting more and more important)
19. Do your friends, relatives, colleagues...care about the SCSs? 您朋友，亲眷，同事等等对社会信用体系关心吗?		
	X	- Not much because it is not so important right now
20. Are they making choices based on the SCSs? 他们会根据社会征信系统做出个人选择吗?		
		-
21. In your opinion, do you think ppl will look for a partner with an equal SCS as a partner? 你是否认为现在人们找对象时会倾向于找和自己社会信用评分相等的伴侣?		
		-
22. How much will the SCS effect the partner choice? 社会征信体系对择偶有多大影响?		
		- See question 5
23. Are there already match-making Apps including the ranking system of the SCS? 是否已经有一些相亲网站/应用包含了会员社会信用评分排名? If yes, which ones do you know? 如果是，你知道的有哪些?		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not know any; I have never used those apps - Shijijiayuan: heard about it; in China well-known - People can get to know each other and meet each other, but not sure if it is serious
24. Would you separate from your partner if his/her credit score is low? 如果你的伴侣社会信用评分太低，你会考虑和他/她分手/离婚吗?		
	X	- Depends, because everyone is different

9.4 Samples: Case Studies One – Three (Interviews 8/34/36)

		- Herself would not divorce because they know one another and have their connection; she would help him improve	
25. Do you think ppl would separate from their partner if their credit score would differ in a high amount?/Why, why not? 你是否认为人们会因为双方社会信用评分差异太大和他们的伴侣分手/离婚? 为什么, 为什么不? 你的理由是什么?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some people think love is most important, some just want to find somebody to live (in this case, the score may be more important) - 80% would divorce - If the relationship is fresh, they couple might break up they just 			
26. Do you think rather ppl of a higher credit score or lower credit score would separate from their partner? /你认为哪一类人更容易和他们的伴侣分手/离婚, 社会信用评分高的还是社会信用评分低的?			
	Higher / 高的	Lower / 低的	None of them / 无差别
	X		
Why? Why not? /为什么, 为什么不? 你的理由是什么?			Examples
- For low score it does not make a difference, but for higher score it is a disadvantage			
27. What is the average age of marriage among Chinese women?			
<u>Age of marriage:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mostly: 25-30 years - Big cities: after college (around 25 years old) - Rural areas may be earlier: 20-25 - In China a lot of women are going to university until they are 22/23 years old and then look for a job, afterwards marriage - Women, who do not go to university are getting married earlier - It is related to their educational level 			

Note: Sample No. 36, generated in course of the in-depth Interviews (2020), executed over WeChat (June 22nd, 2020) by Jessica Bathe-Peters. Questions derived from the Sample: In-Depth Interviews - Social Credit Systems 2020.