

# *How Traditional Gender Role Norms on Marriage Relate to Gender Ideology in Young Chinese Adult*

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**Abstract:** The gender conflict in China grew quickly in the recent years on internet. Some antifeminist criticize young female for discarding their traditional gender roles in marriage while enabling the economic inequality. The government policy which aim at improving the the social harmony and low birth rate can only be well conducted with a deeper understanding how both gender view each other in marriage and what kind of ideology related to gender conflict. This research focus on how traditional gender role norms on marriage which last for over thousands of years relate to the mindset of young adult in modern China. All the participants are males and females undergraduate students from Huazhong university of Science and Technology. Self-report was applied to measures the endorsement of traditional gender role norms on marriage, attitude towards sexism, sexual double standard and acceptance of betrothal gifts. Pearson correlation method is used in the inter-correlation analysis of each variables above. The descriptive analysis and t-test are used to evaluate gender ideology differences between male and female participants. A correlation between the endorsement of male privilege in traditional gender norms and hostile sexism in both gender is expected. The endorsement of male obligation is assumed to be positively related to benevolent sexism in both gender. The result of this research gain more insight into the growing gender conflict in China and lay a foundation for the future research.

**Keywords:** gender conflict, gender role norms, sexism, betrothal gift

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Traditional Gender Role Norms in Ancient China**

In traditional Chinese culture, female were subordinate to male in every aspect. Zhouyi[1], one of the most ancient and prominent classics in the history, claim that father is the sky and mother is the ground. Because the sky is above and the ground is below, Zhouyi comes to the conclusion from ontology that men are superior to women. The ideology of male superiority strongly suppresses the social participation of Chinese women. Their daily activity are limited to housework and they need to obey their father before marriage, obey their husband after marriage and obey their son when they become widow[2]. When woman was required to show absolute obedience to their husband, man was allowed to have multiple companions which is called Qie[3]. The sexual double standard was so extreme in ancient China that there is a word ‘Zhencao’ specifically for woman. It means the virginity of a girl before marriage and the only sexual experience with her husband even after the his death[4]. However, there are also obligation for man which mainly focus on the material aspect. Man is

expected to be the breadwinner because woman can only stay in the family. Aside from that, before marriage, Man and his family need to offer certain amount of money called betrothal gift which is a lot more than the dowry brought by the female and her family in most of the time. According to the Marriage payment theory by Friedmann, the betrothal gift is a way to compensate the lose of labour force in the female's original family[5].

## 1.2. The Development of Feminism in China

In the early 20th centry, the traditional gender role norm was challenged by the western ideology especially feminism. It became part of the civil rights movement after the May Fourth Movement in 1919. However, it was constructed and modified by Chinese intellectual to serve the purpose of solving the nation crisis. It emphasize the obligation of female in the anti-feudalism and anti-imperialism battle but weaken the part of gender equality especially in the field of politics[6]. After the founding of People Republic of China in 1949, Woman's Liberation became one of the most important policy conducted by Communist Party. The slogan 'Women hold up half the sky' was created to emphasize the importance of female power in the socialist construction. Female can have same chance of education and working as their male counterpart. However, the main purpose of the policy is to 'emancipate the productive forces', which means women are still restricted by the traditional family norm including the obligation of maternity, repression of sexuality and a rigorous puritanism[7]. Even in today, female was required to selectively carry on the 'positive part' of national tradition gender norm on marriage including filial piety, hard-working and thrifty as part of the Family Civilization Construction[8].

After the reform and opening up in 1979, self-perceptions and individualism which used to be condemned by official discourse as "bourgeois liberalism" in Mao's era started to emerge. Female independence now has a much wider definition than the notion of economic independence emphasised during the Cultural Revolution, but still limit to appearance and adornment[9]. Feminism and its related research was introduced to the academia in mainland China for the second time[10]. However, due to the political environment, the discussion of feminism among public is restricted both in reality and internet.

## 1.3. Gender Related Issues in Modern China

According to the data from Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs, after the temporarily increased in 2016 due to Two-child policy, birth rate in China dropped from 13.67‰ to 8.52‰ in the last five years. The marriage rate showed the similar trend, decreasing from 8.3‰ to 5.8‰. The decreasing economic growth might contribute to this worrying trend but the gender conflict also be regarded as one of the main reason. Some people believe this conflict is intensified by the infiltration of western ideology. Feminism, as one of the most well-known political agenda, became popular in an misinterpret way on the internet and be criticized by male internet users.

There is only one post-graduate thesis focusing on this newly emerging discussion[11]. In the research, Ma collected data from the largest answer platform Zhihu to conduct a text analysis. There are more than 4400 answers related to feminism and 75% came from male users. The words appeared at the highest frequency included male, right, obligation, equality, independence, marriage, freedom and offspring. Male users refer female who discards their traditional gender roles in marriage while enables the economic inequality as 'Chinese local feminist'. Some users view 'Chinese local feminism' identically to feminism, and the other think that 'Chinese local feminist' tend to avoid obligation but seek for privilege and real feminism should only be focus on gender equality which has already been fulfill in China during the Mao's regime. The voice of female seem to be insignificant and nearly none of the male users have more insight into feminism than the superficial

meaning of gender equality. The motive behind this anti-feminism ideology might also involve misogyny which reject the female subjectivity. The male users tend to believe feminists are old, lazy and incapacity which make them lack of competitiveness in the perspective of male compared to other female.

#### 1.4. Research Context

This research aim to gain more insight into gender conflict by measuring gender related ideology including Chinese traditional gender norm on marriage, sexism and sexual double standard. Chinese traditional gender norm is chosen as predictor variable on marriage (CTGNOM) due to its long last impact for thousands of years. As mentioned above, the official female role model also contains some dimensions of the traditional feature including the obligation in offspring nourish, thrift and filial piety[8]. It is important to know how young people perceive different aspects of traditional gender norm and how it affect the other aspect of gender ideology. As for sexism, compared to their American counterpart in the previous research[12], Chinese female tend to endorse benevolent sexism which views women stereotypically and restricting their roles. It is subjectively positive in feeling tone and also tend to elicit behavior typically categorized as prosocial or intimacy seeking. This type of sexism might contribute to the ‘ideal female image’ constructed by the official and anti-feminist [11] and lead to less tolerance in female diversity. The sexual double standard refers to different evaluation of sexual behavior depending on whether a man or a woman engages in it [13]. It is one of the main indicator in the aspect of sexual gender equality. Many male users in Zhihu claim that every man wish their wife to be a virgin and it is a regular request for female. As for their own virginity, there is no much discussion about it[11]. Due to the lack of systematic sexual revolution and the constant suppression of western sexual liberation in China, It is interesting to gain more information on how both gender perceive sex and how it related to other gender ideologies. Except for the three aspect of gender related ideology mentioned above, betrothal gift is added into the survey due to its significance in Chinese marriage. It is certain amount of money offered by the male and his family before marriage and it is also one of the main complaint about marriage from man in the Chinese internet. They believe that the high amount of the betrothal gift, which raise over 20 times in the last 10 years in some districts, preventing people from marriage[14]. They also believe it is part of the feminism oppression and lead to the widespread misogyny in man. The understanding of correlation between traditional gender norm on marriage and attitude towards betrothal gift in both male and female might gain more insight into gender conflict and low marriage rate in the modern China.

#### 1.5. Hypotheses

The gender role norm is divided into two categories. One is the male obligation which focus on the economic obligations, the other one is male privilege which include the superiority of all aspect of life in traditional male role. Both of them are considered to be the predictor variables. As for sexism, there are two separate types, one is hostile sexism and the other is benevolent sexism[12].

Hypothesis 1: Endorsing beliefs about male privilege would positively relate to hostile sexism and sexual double standard in both gender.

Hypothesis 2: Endorsing beliefs about male obligation would positively relate to the acceptance of betrothal gift.

Hypothesis 3: Endorsing beliefs about male obligation would positively relate to benevolent sexism.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Intercorrelation analysis was conducted with two sets in predictor variable and three other variables (one with two sets) in both genders. A power analysis using the software package G\*Power 3.1 [15] indicates that  $N=64$  for each gender, our experiment could detect an effect size of  $\rho$  of 0.3, using a point biserial correlation  $A$  at a 5% alpha level (two-tailed) threshold with 80% statistical power. 500 undergraduate and graduate students (250 male, 250 female; mean age = 21 years; all unmarried; 50% participants had been involved in a serious or casual relationship. 50% participants came from city, 30% town or 20% rural area. The majority (95%) identified as heterosexual. Analyses excluding those who identified as bisexual ( $n = 17$ ) or homosexual ( $n = 8$ ) were recruited. All of them were students at the Huazhong University of Science and Technology but originally from different places throughout China. Respondents were either natural or social science majors, and completed the survey in their classroom.

### 2.2. Measure

All participants completed a survey entitled “survey on Marriage norm” that included the Traditional Gender Role Norms on Marriage (21 items), ASI (22 items), SDS (26 items) and Betrothal Gift Acceptance (2 items).

#### 2.2.1. Traditional Gender Role Norms on Marriage

Unlike the previous research, survey in this research is based on two main factors: male obligation and male privilege. The former one contains 3 items (e.g. A responsible man should be main provider for the family). The latter one contains 6 subdimensions (1. Personal career development 2. Decision-making mechanism 3. Housework 4. filial piety towards parent-in-law 5. Child birth and raise 6. Family violence, each of them contain 3 items). All the marriage-norms items are rated on a six-point scale ranging from disagree strongly to agree strongly.

#### 2.2.2. Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)

Glick and Fiske’s Ambivalent Sexism Inventory [16] includes 22 items in two subscales: Hostile Sexism (HS, e.g., “Women exaggerate problems they have at work”; “When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against”) and Benevolent Sexism (BS, e.g., “Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility”; “Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives”).

#### 2.2.3. Sexual Double Standard Scale (SDS)

SDS [17] was used to measure acceptance of the traditional sexual double standard. The instrument consists of 26 items, with each rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (disagree strongly) to 3 (agree strongly). It contains 6 individual items (e.g. “Women are naturally more monogamous than are men”) and 20 items occur in pairs (e.g. “I kind of admire a girl who has had sex with a lot of guys” and “I kind of admire a guy who has had sex with a lot of girls”) Scores can range from -30 to 48. The endorsement of traditional sexual double standard can result in a higher score while acceptance of sexual equality result in a lower score. Evidence of the internal consistency of the SDS has been reported [17].

### 2.2.4. Betrothal Gift Acceptance

There is no previous survey related to Betrothal Gift Acceptance. Two questions are designed, focusing on different aspects of betrothal gift acceptance. One is attitude towards betrothal gift(1 item, The existence of Betrothal Gift is reasonable in modern China), the other one is the Amount of betrothal gift(1 item, What is the proper amount of betrothal gift in your opinion). The first one is rated on a six-point scale ranging from disagree strongly to agree strongly. The second one is rated on a six-point scale ranging from less than one time of to more than six times of your annual income.

### 2.3. Data Analytic Approach

Each two of the factors in predictor variable(Traditional Gender Role Norms on Marriage) and three other variables are analyzed using Pearson correlation method. The score of each variable in male are compared to their female counterpart using independent two-sample t-test.

The significance of positive correlation between Male privilege with both hostile sexism and sexual double standard in both gender prove H1. The significance of positive correlation between Male obligation and betrothal gift acceptance prove H2. The significance of positive correlation between Male obligation and benevolent sexism prove H3. Mean, Standard Deviations, internal consistency reliabilities and the result of t-test are presented in Table 2.

### 3. Expected Results

Table1: Correlation matrix of study variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Male obligation		.56**	-.15	.32*	-.22*	.81***
2.Male privilege	.66*		.56**	.45**	.64**	.71**
3.Hostile sexism	.21*	.83***		.44**	.77***	.65**
4.Benevolent sexism	.72**	.42*	.55**		.66***	.67**
5.Sexual double standard	.43*	.61**	.40**	.25*		-.34**
6.betrothal gift	.81***	.20	.12*	.77***	.34*	

Correlations for the female sample are presented above the diagonal; correlations for the male sample are below the diagonal \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ , \*\*\* $p < .0001$

The inter-correlation of variables are presented in Table 1. Male privilege positively correlate to both hostile sexism(male,  $r=0.83$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ; female,  $r=0.56$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and sexual double standard(male,  $r=0.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; female,  $r=0.64$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) in both gender (H1). Male obligation positively relate to benevolent sexism(male,  $r=0.72$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; female,  $r=0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) in both gender(H2). Male obligation also positively correlate to betrothal gift(male,  $r=0.81$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; female,  $r=0.81$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) in both gender(H3).

Table2: Mean,Standard Deviations and internal consistency reliabilities.

Variables	Male (n=250)			Female (n=250)			t-test result
	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$	
1.Male obligation	4.22	.53		4.89	.47		$t(498)=2.621$ , $p < 0.01$
2.Male privilege	4.56	.45	.56	3.56	.56	.66	$t(498)=2.656$ , $p < 0.01$
3.HS	4.03	.67	.53	3.32	.43	.52	$t(498)=2.601$ , $p < 0.01$

4.BS	3.66	.65	.48	4.57	.41	.57	t(498)=2.665,p<0.01
5.SDS	25	.55	.59	20	.42	.53	t(498)=2.623,p<0.01
6.betrothal gift	2.66	.34	.88	3.89	.44	.89	t(498)=2.661,p<0.01

HS stand for hostile sexism, BS stand for benevolent sexism and SDS stand for sexual double standard.

The mean score, standard deviation and internal consistency each variables in both gender and t-test result of each variables are presented in Table 2. Male score higher in hostile sexism compared to female(male, M=4.03, SD=0.67;female, M=3.32, SD=0.43;t(498)=2.621, p<0.01).Male score lower in betrothal gift compared to female(male, M=2.66, SD=0.34; female, M=3.89, SD=0.44; t(498)=2.661, p<0.01).

#### 4. Conclusion

This research aim to gain more insight into the gender ideology in Chinese young adult. The result indicate that the traditional gender norm on marriage still affect young generation. People who endorse traditional gender norm tend to reject gender equality which is aligned with previous research. The stereotype of modern female has its factual basis but the same double standard in obligation and privilege also be found in male participants. It might be the combination of requirement from traditional gender norm and economic pressures in market economy environment.

In the further research, more details about the sexual attitude of both gender in China is expected to be explored. The present result indicate a modest level of acceptance of sexual double standard in both gender. However, the sexual ideology behind it (sexual liberation and sexual conservation) has not been identified in the research. Using a formal  $(P+N)/2-|P-N|$  to the data from sexual double standard survey[18], the acceptance of these ideologies and how it related to traditional marriage norm can be analyzed .

More specific investigation of how betrothal gift affect young adult marriage is also part of the future research due to its complicity in Chinese social life. It serve more than just economic but also moral function[19]. It is necessary to learn more about how betrothal gift play its part in different class and region in modern China.

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