

# An International Case Analysis of Chinese TV Dating Programs

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## **Abstract**

*Nationality and distance can't defeat love. Crossing-border dating is not new for people and media in the world. Nowadays, more and more Chinese young people and foreigners begin to choose their spouses freely on Chinese TV dating programs which are very popular in China. The paper mainly focuses on the some stories of foreigners on the Chinese TV dating programs, analysis and discusses about the failure cases of foreigners who wanted to look for their Chinese girl friends for dating from a perspective of intercultural communication. Finally, the paper indicates that culture may be a strong and invisible power and an important component part of successful dating factors in different cultural social backgrounds, so that learning different cultures will be adapted to different social cultural customs and to different social events including dating programs on TV.*

**Key words:** culture, social custom, intercultural communication, dating, Chinese TV dating program, intercultural communication competence

## **1. Introduction**

Love is always the main focus of people discussion, it is enduring a long time. Not only in China, but also in the world, Nationality and distance can't defeat love. Once Chinese young

people mainly focused on the traditional dating where one man found a spouse in realistic way through parents and friends and knew more about her whom he was likely to build the romantic relationship, and then two people were set up and got married. As time goes by, the Chinese young people begin to choose their spouses freely. Nowadays, competition becomes heavier and there are lots of single older people, Since some young people's spouse standards are much higher and their parents always urge them to get married, they seldom find the ideal spouse in realistic life. In order to cater to this social phenomenon, a new type of dating way emerges, that is, dating program on TV (Wang, 2011).

Especially in recent years, in China, there has emerged various kinds of dating programs like: If you are the one, One out of a hundred, Falling in with love, Fight for the love etc. These satellite TV dating programs are very popular among the old and the young, men and women. Meanwhile, more and more young foreigners were attracted and showed up on TV dating programs so often. Most of them really come for looking for a "wife" as a goal, and maybe some of them only looking for a "girl friend". Foreigners are coming to participate in those TV shows for different purposes. However, TV shows are inviting random guys to send them their CVs, so the TV show producer can pick some guy he like and contact him etc. They do that because it can pop up the TV show's rating at least for a little bit, so they can make profit (Shen, 2012).

No doubt, some of the foreigners on these dating programs were seriously looking for a "wife" or "girl friend". On these dating shows, the author found that many young foreigners could speak Chinese well, but knew a little of Chinese cultural knowledge, especially some social customs and traditions including Chinese dating and marriage. Therefore, it's necessary for us to study on the young foreigners' languages and behaviors on these dating shows from an intercultural perspective.

## **2. Two Cases on the Chinese TV Dating Programs**

At present, TV dating programs which more than ten TV stations set up are very popular and hot in China. Different TV dating shows have different features and contents. Many people like to watch the TV dating programs at home for pleasure and entertainment. The author is one of the auditions who really enjoy watching TV dating programs at weekend and found that more and more foreign men from different western countries to participate in the TV dating show. Due to their misunderstanding Chinese culture, the foreign men always made fun for the

Chinese female guests on the stage and viewers and finally said “Good-bye” to the contestant. Therefore, here are two typical cases on Chinese TV dating programs.

## **2.1 Going Dutch**

“Going Dutch” is a term that indicates that each person participating in a group activity pays for himself, rather than any one person paying for anyone else, particularly in a restaurant bill. It is also called Dutch date and Dutch treat or “Doing Dutch”(Wikipedia, 2012). It is very popular for young people to have dating in the western countries.

In the United States, during the advent of second wave feminism, 1960s and 1970s the Women’s Movement encourage women to pay their own way or to pay for men’s meals. It is accepted by some that, on a date between a woman and man, the man takes initiative when it comes to paying the bill, meaning he is the one to pay(Guru, 2000). American young people always make a date with girl friend or boy friend like this. They think that it is reasonable and fair, and becomes one part of social cultural customs.

This year, one American men Mr. Stephen who was strong and stout and could speak Chinese very frequently, showed up on One out of one hundred run by Shanghai Satellite Television Station. At first, the American men talked about his requirements to the female guests on the show according to the TV dating program’s procedure, and then said “I’ll practice “going Dutch” during dating with girl friend. In this way, it will be fair to both girl friend and me.” When Mr. Stephen finished his speech, one of the female guests on the show, Miss Ling who was quite thin and tall, asked the American men a question. Miss Ling: You’re strong and stout. You must be a big eater. Maybe, you’ll eat more on date than I. How could you say it’s fair to men and woman for going Dutch.

Mr. Stephen: I really didn’t think about this. Miss Ling: Do you know that what Chinese social cultural customs of dating is that man wants to date with a girl friend and must pay a bill for the girl friend. If you don’t do so, you won’t date with any girl friend in China. After hearing it, Mr. Stephen surprised about it and shrugged his shoulders. And then he said “ I really don’t know about the Chinese dating customs.” No any more words came from Mr. Stephen. At the show end, the American guy didn’t succeed in finding a girl friend on the show and had to leave unhappily from the stage.

## **2.2 Listen to my parents' words**

Westerners pay more attention to fostering children's independence, vigorously develop the children's creative thinking when they grow up. Most westerners are of value independence and feel insulted if others think they can't take care of themselves. Especially, they want to date with someone or marry someone, they may make up his own minds, not depending on their parents. Of course, they may consult or listen to their parents' opinions or suggestion, but they can't date with someone or marry someone according to their parents' words. However, in Chinese people's eyes, a date or a marriage can be successful, but it needs support from the parents or families even involved and in the society in which they live. Meanwhile, in some of the old Chinese persons' minds, crossing border marriages between Chinese girls and western men are difficult to be successful. In one show of "If you are the one," one Germany man who has studies Chinese and lived in China for many years, could speak Chinese quite frequently. At the same time, this Germany man was very handsome, strong and tall. Perhaps, he was the dreamful lover in many Chinese young woman hearts. In this evening, the Germany guy came to the show only for one of female guests on TV dating show whose name is Wu Zhenzhen, college teacher, 28 years old and studied oversea ( in Australia) for six years. The Germany guy kned down and poured out his words from his heart like this: "I have watched this TV dating show for many times. I'm really attracted by you. I have known some personal information about you. I really love you, I hope you'll give me a chance and be my girl friend."

Nevertheless, Wu Zhenzhen gave her answer to him like that: "I have learned relative courses of intercultural communication and known some cultural differences between China and foreign countries. In my opinion, it's not easy thing for me to make friends with foreigners. Especially, I'm a good girl in the family. I always listen to my parents' words. My parents are not willing to let me marry foreigner. So, I must refuse your requirement of being your girlfriend because I must listen to my parents' words, and don't marry any foreigner."

Later, the Germany men lowed his head and left the stage without any good feeling.

## **3. Case Analysis and Suggestions**

The ways people greet each other, position themselves where they talk and even eat and sleep are all influenced by culture. Culture can be defined as a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the numbers of a society use to cope with one another and with their world ( Pearson, 2003). Marshall R. Singer (1982), an intercultural communication researcher, maintains that what people see, hear, taste, touch, and smell are

conditioned by their culture. He says that people's perceptions are largely learned, the greater the experiential differences among people, the greater the disparity in their perceptions. Conversely, the more similar their backgrounds the more similarly they perceive the world.

Thus, culture determines dating practices. Dating practices are not neutral or value free. Neither are dating communication practices on TV show. Anyone, especially foreigner need to understand the cultural values he or she transmits when he or she interact with someone from another culture, as well as understand the other person's cultural values.

Understanding another culture is an ongoing experience that can last a lifetime. However, sometimes foreigners have only a short time to prepare to participate in the TV dating show in China. How can a brief amount of time best be spent to yield the greatest understanding?

### **3.1 Understanding Differences of Dating Customs between China and the West**

From the first case, it lets us know how important understanding differences of dating customs between China and the western countries are. Maybe, anyone in China should know the basic knowledge and dating customs, it is that man should pay bill when dating with a girl friend in China. If he doesn't do thing like this, the man will be looked down upon by other people. People will think that man is stingy, not generous and doesn't finish his own duty for dating with girl friend. "For American English speakers particularly, the word duty has a negative meaning. For them, performing a duty usually means doing some unpleasant task performing a duty usually means doing some unpleasant task they do not want to do for someone else. A duty is an obligation and obligations are burdens (Davis,2010)."

Nevertheless, the Chinese people always think that duty is a male responsibility. That is saying, if a man doesn't pay a bill for dating with a girl friend. It goes with out saying that he will lose his face in his friends' eyes or in family members' eyes.

The difference in the idea of face between the Chinese and American is that face simply has greater social significance for the Chinese. In the United States, concern for face exists but remains largely out most people's awareness. In the People's Republic, everyone is conscious of face all the time. An oft-repeated Chinese proverb puts it thus: A person needs face as a tree needs bark." (Hu and Grove, 2010)

To some extent, Westerners interacting with Chinese people refer to Chinese communicators' high regard for human feelings and their need to protect the dignity of others as face or face-saving. Thus, the Chinese man would probably try to protect the dignity of his social role as

well as his personal dignity when he pay a bill for his dating with a girl friend. In fact, concern about dignity ( what Westerners call face) is universal. What is different from culture to culture are the personal characteristics on which one's dignity depends and the social priority given to preserving one's own dignity, the dignity of others, and the dignity of important groups to which the person belongs. ( Davis, 2010 )

### **3.2 Features of Chinese family and its culture**

“The Chinese family is unique in the world, as we have a one-child policy,” says Take Me Out producer Liu Lei, “but parents attach great importance to carrying on the family name, so marriage is a big issue (MacLeod, 2010). Therefore, in China, it is important to obey to the parents' wishes on who to date and when to date. In America, the parents may have a say but it does not mean the child will listen. Also, in America, kids start dating at a very younger age. Also, people usually do not marry their first boy friend/ girl friend like in China. The attitude towards sex is also a lot different here than in China. Also, pregnancy out of marriage is also not as big of a deal as it is in China.

Hence, most Chinese parents think foreigners even those living in China, can fluently speak or understand Chinese, they still keep foreign dating or marriage customs and have not serious attitude toward their dating. In Chinese culture, it seems, that dating often leads to marriage. Most people do not date in China without the intent to marry their partner. I think this is true for Americans to some extent. During middle and high school, and even the beginnings of college for some, dating is purely fun and does not often lead to marriage. As we progress through college and life, dating becomes similar to that in China because we tend to date with more serious intentions.

In China, the views of one's family members on whom they are dating play a large role in the relationship. In America, I have found this to be completely opposite. Although it is ideal that family members have a good impression of one's partner, it is not essential in a relationship, regardless of how long the relationship will last. ( Davidson, 2012 ).

Meanwhile, Chinese parents may prefer their children to date people who are already known to the family, or whose backgrounds the parents have explored. Traditional Chinese family connections include an extended network of aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on. Parents may feel more secure if someone in that network can vouch for the person their child is dating. Because family is very important in Chinese culture, it can be incredibly difficult for a Chinese person to go against the family's wishes. A person may be an independent adult in every other wabut

still feel obligated to accept their parents' decision about whom to marry. Parents may even threaten to disown a child who defies their wishes. (Beths, 2012)

Although China is carrying on Open-door policy to the world, the people are more and more open-minded. However, most Chinese parents still hope their kids will not date with or marry foreigner and don't accept intercultural date or marriage. Maybe, it is why the most Chinese young women will usually not get involved with foreigner who they don't see as a potential marriage partner, so they put forward a lot of questions to the foreign men on the TV dating show.

### **3.3 Some suggestions**

Culture is embedded deep in our minds. As Edward Hall pointed out in *Beyond Culture*, the closer something is to seeming true, the less aware we probably are of its cultural origin. (Hall, 1976) People's own culture seems normal to them, seems just the way things are. One way of asking questions is to notice that another culture goes about something differently from the way you expect.

A. Understanding another culture is an ongoing experience that can last a lifetime. However, sometimes, young foreigners have a short time to prepare to participate in TV dating programs in China. How can a brief amount of time best be spent to yield the greatest understanding and acceptance?

B. Any foreigner who wants to date with Chinese girl on the TV dating programs should know that communication might be difficult if there is a language barrier. Don't expect your partner to learn foreign languages, especially his native language. Culture and language are interconnected and are shaping each other. It is impossible to separate the two. Language is not neutral codes and grammatical rules (Varner, Beamer, 1995).

C. Chinese culture can be defined as a cultural system rich in distinct national style which took shape within the terrain of China. The culture includes the spiritual culture and behavioral culture as well as their materialized presentations. It is these cultural forms that signify the fundamental features of the Chinese culture. It belongs to the historical category, having undergone 5000-year's development before it turns into today's splendid sight, both extensive and profound. To some extent, the Chinese culture indicates the Chinese tradition (Fang, 2008). Therefore, any foreign man who wants to date with or marry Chinese girl, should know that he

doesn't only learn Chinese language, but also Chinese culture. In this way, foreigner may be successful to find a Chinese girl friend on the TV dating show.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Love is unconditional. Loving each other was the most important factor in a marriage. While another factor attached more importance to appearance in choosing a spouse, women preferred men who were successful in their careers. In the traditional Chinese culture of love and marriage, the man pursues the woman. But in modern times, there's been a growing number of women pursuing men (Tan, 2012).

Following the trend, popular Chinese TV dating programs such as *If you are the one*, *One out of a hundred* has hosted many special performances to serve bachelors and single women. The flood of applicants came from various Chinese occupational backgrounds, including IT engineers, university teachers, musicians and et al. And then many foreigners have appeared on the stage of the Chinese TV dating programs. It's true that nationality and distance can't defeat love. However, helping foreigners living in our country or in other countries find love and reveal what they think about marriage.

Meanwhile, cultural differences don't prevent the foreign young people from finding love. Culture is learned, it is also learnable. In the present world, nobody has to remain locked for a lifetime inside only one culture. If young foreigner wants to learn and understand Chinese culture, they can learn it and not just learn about it, but actually get inside it and act according to what is expected in it. In this way, foreign young people should be successful in participating in the Chinese TV dating programs and find their true love. Thus, it's the important event both for foreigners and Chinese young people to have an opportunity to know or to understand each other, so as to learn some basic knowledge about intercultural communication and improve the friendship between China and foreign countries. Culture is everywhere in our daily lives. Learning different cultures will be adapted to different society and to different social events in the different countries. Culture may be a strong and invisible power and an important component part of successful factors in different cultural social backgrounds.



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