

# Change in Chinese mating preferences sparked by expanding economy

February 15 2011

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As China's economy continues to grow, more young adults desire potential mates with good financial prospects, according to new psychology research from The University of Texas at Austin.

In a paper published in the February issue of [Personality and Individual Differences](#), David Buss, an evolutionary psychologist at the university, and a team of researchers found the preference for financial security reflects the extraordinary economic changes in China over the past 25 years.

The findings stem from a 1983 International Mate Selection Project led by Buss, in which 500 men and women in China ranked a set of qualities they seek in a sexual partner (for example, chastity, attractiveness, good health). To measure the shift in cultural mate preferences over the span of 25 years, the researchers compared this to new data they collected in 2008 in which 1,060 Chinese men and women ranked categories of characteristics they seek in a partner.

The researchers theorize the elevated importance on the "good earning capacity" trait signals a cultural shift in values that corresponds to the country's higher standard of living, and in particular, the greater variability in economic income. Although both genders rated this category higher on the 3-point scale of importance since 1983, more women than men placed greater value on qualities linked with resource acquisition, such as "social status," "ambition and industriousness." Over the span of 25 years, the magnitude of the gender difference on "good

earning capacity" rose from 33 to 89 percent.

"If there is little variability on a trait, it makes no sense to value it," said Buss. "In China 25 years ago, wages were not only low, they were also very flat. With increasing economic prosperity and privately owned businesses, the differences among individuals in income have become much more pronounced. So the increase in importance attached to mates with a good income reflects both the overall increase in economic prosperity, as well as the greater variability among potential mates in resources."

Despite the significant cultural shift in values, the researchers found two gender differences in mate selection remain the same. According to the findings, more men continue to prefer young, attractive mates, while more women seek partners with financial security and good social standing. Both findings support the evolutionary hypothesis that men and women across cultures have evolved adaptations to choose mates with characteristics associated with fertility and resource acquisition potential, Buss said.

"My co-authors and I found it fascinating that some psychological elements of mate selection, such as gender differences in mate preferences predicted by evolutionary theories, remained invariant over time, despite the profound cultural changes that have occurred," Buss said.

Compared to results from the 1983 study, the researchers found:

- The preferred age difference men seek in potential mates increased from 2.15 to 3.41 years.
- Both genders seek partners with religious ties, which may be linked to greater tolerance of religious expression in modern China, Buss said.
- Virginity and good heredity significantly decreased in value between

both genders. Buss said this finding shows an increased openness to premarital sex in [China](#).

According to Buss, this study provides further insight into the complexities of evolutionary human mating strategies.

"These findings reveal both important trends in the cultural evolution of values surrounding [mating](#), as well as the robustness of sex differences in mate preferences across time," Buss says.

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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