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Love in China

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in
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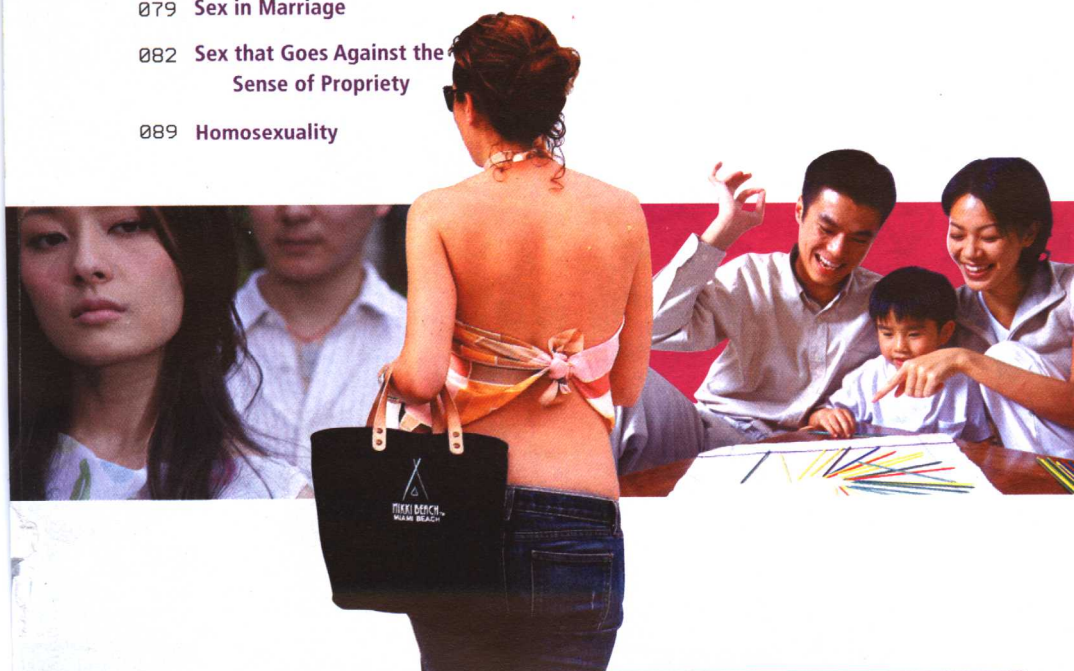
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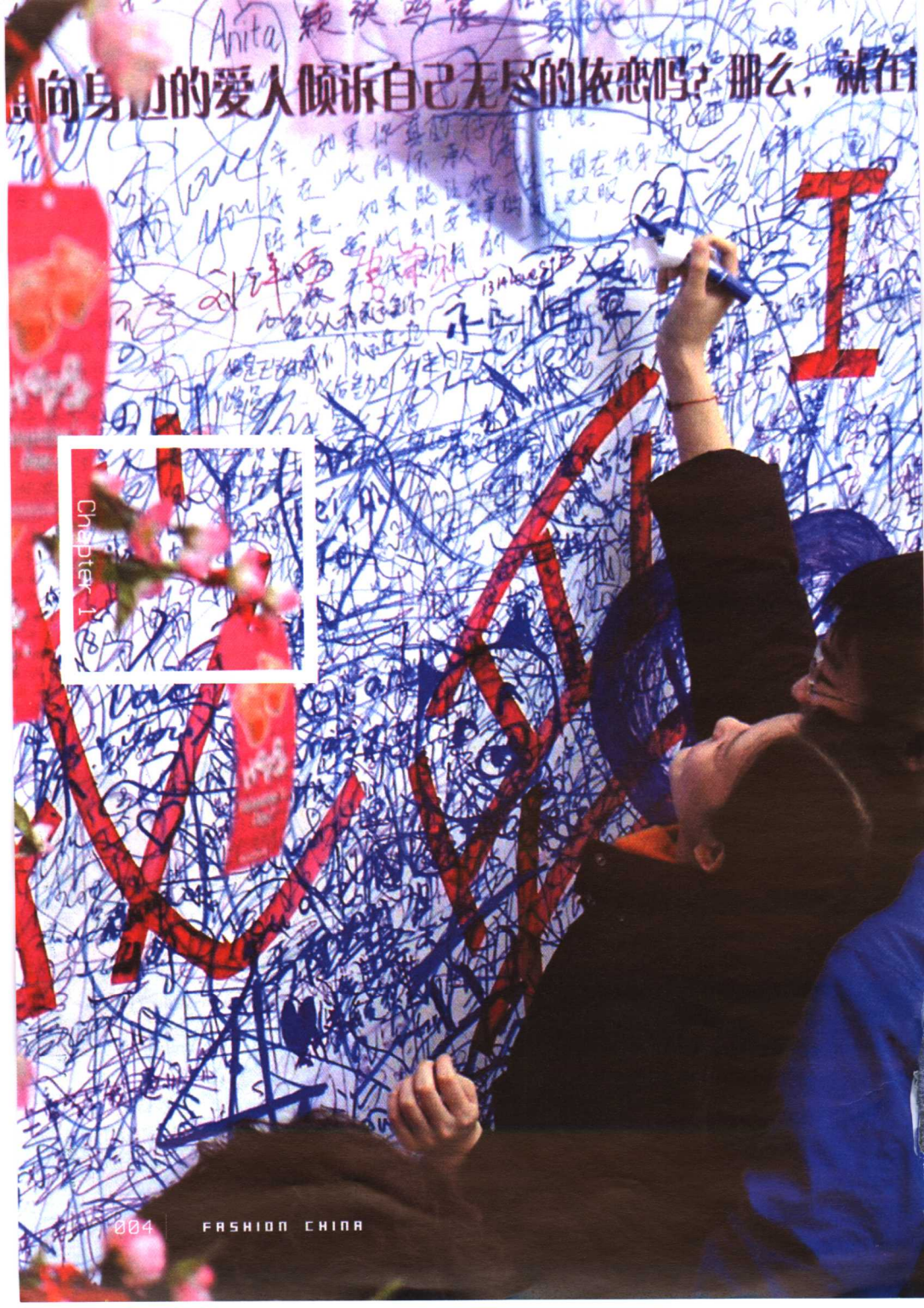
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想向身边的爱人倾诉自己无尽的依恋吗？那么，就在

Chapter 1



Love in the New Century

Some people fall in love at first sight, and others spend a lifetime searching for eternal love. From the split second, to a lifetime of love, Chinese show their love in various ways.

Ancient China was a feudal, agricultural society centered on old traditions. Based on the rigid patriarchal clan system, young people had to get married in compliance with their "parents' will and matchmakers' ideas." In other words, the marriage was arranged by the parents of the couple, with the help of a traditional matchmaker. Only marriages arranged in this way were considered right and moral and could be accepted by the clan and society. Other ways of meeting a spouse were regarded as unfilial and immoral. Moreover, affection out of marriage was strictly banned.

At that time, it was almost impossible for unmarried youth to have any contact whatsoever with the opposite sex. When they reached the marrying age, a couple—who had not even met before, let alone got to know each other—would get married under the arrangement of their parents.

Marriages were not arranged for love, but rather in order to have a son to continue the family line. It was also an arrangement to ensure the care of the parents in old age.


Although some brave youths longed for free love, they rarely realized their dream, like in the story of "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai" (Butterfly Lovers). This love tragedy is widely known in China: It tells of a young couple who fell deeply in love. However, without "parents' will and matchmakers' ideas," they were forced to separate. Finally, both of them died for love and turned into two butterflies, which could enjoy free love.

From generation to generation, Chinese went on living under the shadow of the rigid marriage system. Several thousands of years passed.

Not until the 20th century did Chinese see the dawn of liberalization. The storm of revolution, armed with thoughts of democracy and freedom, overthrew the decaying feudal reign. It also shook off the thousands-of-years-long restriction on marrying for love. The Central Government issued the first Marriage Law a year after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The law opposed forced marriage and advocated freedom of choosing spouse. After that, Chinese, even in more traditional rural areas, could legally enjoy a marriage for love.

In the 1980s China became more open to the outside world. At the same time, Chinese people's view of love became more liberated. In the past, most Chinese felt shy when talking about "ai qing"—love in Chinese. Young couples usually dated privately, and in secret. However, the opening-up and reform caused dramatic changes to society and people's thoughts. Love was no longer something mysterious that needed to be hidden. On the contrary, affection was shown freely whenever and wherever. Just like eating, sleeping and working, people deemed it a normal part of life. Most young people took the initiative to choose love and marriage on their own. They continued to seek the approval of their family, but consent was no longer absolutely necessary.

Entering the 21st century, Chinese people's emotional world has become richer and more colorful. Along with the rapid development of computers, Internet and modern communication technologies, people's love stories have become more vivid and wonderful. The traditional view of marriage has gradually broken down and "Love is everything" has become people's new love declaration. It's no longer unusual to see couples ignoring the traditional principle of being well matched in social and economic status for marriage. Marrying a foreigner is not uncommon now. There is no geographical boundary for love. Similarly, there is no time boundary either, and age is not a limitation. Both "sister-brother love"



(love between couples that have a big age difference) and "dusk love" (love between the aged) are easily understood and accepted. Few people are shocked to hear of an 80 year old man marrying a young woman, or a woman in her 70s wanting to marry a young man. Nowadays, differences of family background, education level, profession and income don't matter for many young Chinese. In their view, people should pursue true love in spite of everything—love has no boundaries.

Over thousands of years, Chinese people's view of love has gradually developed from the traditional "parents' will and matchmakers' ideas" to a partnership based on love. It has also overcome the limitations of "being well-matched in social and economic status." Due to this transformation, people can enjoy the freedom and happiness of pursuing true love; but at the same time, they become bewildered facing trendier and trendier views of love, and various styles of love, such as on-line affection.

What should people pursue, a short-lived passionate affair or the steady security of everlasting love and companionship?

Through the ages, this question remains unanswered, however, there is no doubt that we all look for true love.



Modern Dating Methods

Love is amazing. But before falling in love, you must first meet that special person—and that often depends on a chance encounter. In the 21st century, ways of finding love are becoming more varied and wonderful.



On-line Affection

Since the 1990s the Internet has developed rapidly, and it has changed many traditional customs. Distance between sweethearts is no longer a problem. No matter where people live, and no matter whether they know each other or not, they can now chat freely through the Internet. And then, on-line affection appears...

Xiao Mai, a 29 year old clerk in an advertising company, has had more than 20 on-line affairs. It all started four years ago, when she tried on-line chatting for

the first time and soon became hooked on it. Eight days later, she started her first on-line affair with a net friend nicknamed Night Angel. She believed it was love.

The man was good at entertaining Xiao Mai, and often made her laugh out loud beside her computer. At that time, Xiao Mai was in Beijing while Night Angel lived in Fuzhou, the capital city of Southeast China's Fujian Province. More than 2,000 kilometers separated them. After chatting for one and half months, Xiao Mai decided to meet Night Angel. She believed that she had fallen in love with the man and couldn't even breathe without him. Soon, the man flew to Beijing.

At first sight, Xiao Mai was excited to find that Night Angel was a handsome young man, which she had not expected. What's more, the man was so generous—he chose an exclusive restaurant for their first meeting and gave her a diamond bracelet as a gift. At that moment, Xiao Mai believed that Night Angel was her “knight in shining armor,” whom she had been waiting for all her life.

After that, Night Angel often flew to Beijing to see Xiao Mai. The two lovers also went on several holidays together. One day, Xiao Mai said, “Let's get married.” Her lover was shocked by this suggestion and said: “Xiao Mai, I love you so much. But I can't marry you. I'm married and my wife is much older than me. I don't love her at all, but I can't leave her.”



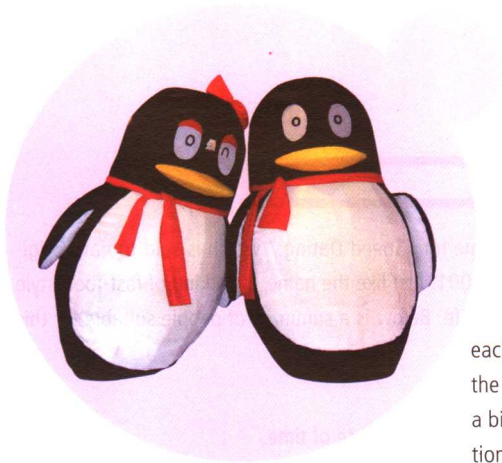
It was an unexpected end to their relationship, for Xiao Mai had been sure that Night Angel would marry her because they loved each other so much. She felt depressed and considered her meeting with Night Angle an untouchable dream.

This was Xiao Mai's first experience of on-line dating. It was true, but seemed to be a game. Following that first affair, she fell in love again and again with net friends such as Net Pole, Huang Feihong, Chess King and Monkey King (all nicknames). In some cases, they even

met with each other's parents and talked about marriage. However, she didn't marry any of them. According to Xiao Mai, at the beginning the on-line affection seems to be real, but it can't equal love in reality. She falls in love with men in the chat room, but after meeting and dating, their affection soon dies.

"I never treat love like a game. I'm serious every time. However, the Internet is an illusion. You can only be sure of your own sincerity, never anyone else's."





Both on-line chatting and on-line dating has become a part of people's modern life style. Gradually, with the spread of the Internet, all sections of society started to have roles in chat rooms and on-line dating. From the urban youths to the migrant workers, the 10-year old lads and 60-year old grandparents—everyone was going on-line.

Some socialists believe that the traditional medium of marriage is human behavior, while on-line affection is based on an electronic medium. In other words, couples make use of the medium—the Internet—to get to know

each other. The new medium's basic function is the same as the traditional one. However, it has a big advantage, extending greatly the association scope and the frame of reference, which is called the Marriage Circle in Sociology. If the circle is too small, it restricts the evolution of human society. Therefore, the on-line affection has a huge positive effect.

However, on-line affection is a double-edged sword. On the one side, it extends the space to make friends and gives people more opportunities of falling in love; on the other side, the affection expressed through the virtual space can be false or insincere. Therefore, some people believe, compared with the on-line affection, the traditional matchmakers are more trustworthy and affection in real life is more stable.

The Internet is a virtual space but love can never be an illusion. Meeting and falling in love with a person through the Internet is a way of human communication in modern society. It deserves to be treated with respect.



Speed Dating

"Eight-minute Dating" is the Chinese name for "Speed Dating," which is said to have originated in Houston, the United States in 2001. Just like the name, it's a kind of fast-food-style of making friends, a side kick of the busy city life. Below is a summary of people suitable for this style of dating:

1. Well-educated single people living in big cities;
2. People who are busy with work and value effective use of time.
3. People who want to know more friends and business partners, and extend their social and contact circle;
4. People who are psychologically healthy. People who are excessively alert to strangers or lack a sense of security are not suitable for Speed Dating;
5. People who are mild, extrovert and good speakers; and
6. People who don't want to find a partner under the pressure of parents, but who don't trust on-line dating.



Xiao Min's Personal Story

I tried "Eight-Minute Dating" for its novelty-value.

In all there were 16 members, eight men and eight women. The men were handsome and the women were pretty. It seemed OK. After the emcee's prologue, the dating began.

The first man sat down opposite me. Judging from his appearance under the hazy light, he was about 30 years old and seemed to be clever. I didn't start the conversation, and the man was obviously nervous. He stammered that the coffee tasted good. Three minutes passed and we had little dialogue. Then I told the man I was a journalist. He opened his eyes widely, but said nothing. Soon, the emcee mentioned that time was up. The man stood up and gave me a name card. He said that he could introduce some ads for my newspaper. I took the card with a smile.

The second man was about 40 years old. I guessed he was divorced. From his

clothing and manners, I guessed he was rich, but uncultured. Before sitting down, he said the dating should be held in a higher-grade and more elegant site. He constantly complained that he was too busy to pay attention to the marriage issue. Then he told me which villa he lived in, and where he often went to play golf. In eight minutes, I said little. Actually, I wasn't willing to open my mouth.

Later, I talked with other men for eight minutes per person and we also exchanged name cards. However, none of them gave me a lasting impression.

Afterwards, three of them contacted with me and asked for further association. But I refused them. Even now I don't know if such kind of dating can really work.



According to many people who have experienced "Eight-minute Dating," there is no fundamental difference from the traditional parties for unmarried men and women. It's just a way for people to get to know each other. The only difference is it's a novel and fresh way of doing it. As for the probability of successfully matching a couple, most people are not affirmative.



Someone summarizes the advantages of "Eight-minute Dating" into three points: 1. It is highly efficient. You can date with many men/women in a short time. The chance of meeting someone you like is increased and time is saved; 2. It will prevent embarrassment. If you meet an unsuitable person, you needn't stand him/her for long time. After eight minutes, he/she will

move on to the next participant; 3. It is economical. Usually, dating a single person in the traditional way costs you at least 100 yuan (US \$12.50). On the contrary, during "Eight-minute Dating," you spend little money and meet several men/women. If the speed-dating doesn't result in romance, you needn't regret wasting lots of money.