

A large, stylized red envelope graphic with a white triangular flap pointing downwards, occupying the top third of the page.

LOVE & Red Envelopes

**Sociocultural Reflections on
Hongbao in Digital Dating Practices.**

Based on Research Undertaken by Brandon Wey and Henrik J Klijn. September 2024.

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Hongbao 紅包, or the “red envelope,” is a quintessential element of Chinese culture, imbued with rich symbolism and tradition. Traditionally exchanged during auspicious occasions, *Hongbao* carries connotations of prosperity, luck, and respect.

This paper delves into the evolution of *Hongbao*, examining its contemporary significance and exploring the potential benefits of integrating this cultural artifact into the realm of modern dating.

By analyzing the cultural underpinnings of *Hongbao* and juxtaposing it with the dynamics of contemporary dating, this study seeks to illuminate the potential benefits and challenges of such an innovation, offering a hopeful perspective on cultural evolution.





TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Origins and Early History The Legend of the Monster “Sui”	01
2.	Modern Practice	03
3.	Digital Transformation & Hongbao @ Work	07
4.	Dynamic Of Intentionality: Hongbao & the Modern Dating Ecosystem	11
5.	The Calculus of Connection: Redefining Romance in the Digital Age	19
6.	Potential Benefits. And Challenges.	32
7.	Love DOES Cost a Thing	33
8.	Works Cited	44
9.	Appendix I: Summary—A Shared Dynamic Of Intentionality	45
10.	Appendix II: The Hidden Costs Of Dating	47

ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY

THE LEGEND OF THE MONSTER “SUI”

The origins of Hongbao are inextricably linked to ancient Chinese legend and custom. One popular legend, in particular, associates the source of the red envelope with the myth of a monster, “Sui” (祟).

According to folklore, the fearsome Sui would terrorize children on New Year’s Eve, causing them to become ill with fever and mental anguish when touched. To sufficiently safeguard their children, one set of parents devised a shrewd strategy. They endeavored to keep their child awake all night, hoping to prevent Sui from harming him. The boy was given eight coins to play with as a distraction, wrapping and unwrapping the coins in red paper until eventually falling asleep.

Unbeknownst to the parents, the eight coins were the Eight Immortals—the Ba Xian (八仙)—in disguise, a group of legendary heroes of ancient provenance who fight for justice and vanquish evil, according to Chinese mythology.¹ When Sui attempted to touch the sleeping child, the coins, under the power of the Ba Xian, emitted a blinding light that frightened the demon away. From that day forward, giving money in red envelopes became a prophylactic ritual to ward off evil while blessing children.²

In ancient China, it became customary to offer gifts of money during celebrations and festivals to express benevolent wishes and blessings. The color red, auspicious in Chinese culture, is chosen

for these envelopes because it symbolizes luck, happiness, and its ability to ward off evil.

During the Han dynasty (202 BC – 9 AD,) coins were used to ward off evil spirits. By the Tang dynasty (618–907 AD), the dynasty that succeeded the short-lived Sui dynasty (581–618 AD), the tradition of giving money to children over New Year had become more established. Gradually, the custom shifted from using coins to banknotes, wrapped in red envelopes, as seen in the Ming and Qing dynasties. This evolution reflects broader societal changes while maintaining the core symbolic meanings of the tradition.

The tradition of giving red envelopes became even more widespread during the Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD). Red envelopes were commonly used in various rituals and celebrations during this period as a tangible expression of affection, respect, and well-wishes.

The cultural significance of *Hongbao*, however, extends beyond the monetary. It is a relational artifact, signifying a bond between the giver and the recipient. The act of exchanging *Hongbao* is embedded in a complex network of social norms and expectations, reflecting the hierarchical structure of Chinese society.

1 Popular during the Tang and Shang Dynasties, the Eight Immortals are said to live on a group of five islands in the Bohai Sea.

2 Today, the red envelope, symbolic of the coins, is [sometimes still referred](#) to as the yasui qian, or “suppressing Sui money.”

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

It is worth pausing to consider the core—visible and coded—role of red in *Hongbao* symbolism.³ As noted, Chinese culture associates red with energy, happiness, and good luck. Deeply embedded in the cultural psyche, red is often used in celebrations and rituals, while the envelope itself is more than merely a carrier of money; the coded merger serves as a talisman of good fortune.

Huang writes that “red has a symbol of joyfulness. Most of the Chinese traditional customs in civilians would involve red. For instance, on the Spring Festival or some key days, civilians will hang red lights and wear red clothes. The seniority give some money (*ya sui qian*-money for a new year) to the junior who are not married or the seniority give the newlyweds some money in a red envelope when they meet at the first time, which is called *hong bao* red bag or envelope.”⁴

The amount of money inside *Hongbao* is nevertheless significant. The figure is usually an even number, as odd numbers are traditionally associated with funerals. The most common amount is eight, as the word for eight (八, “bā”) sounds like the word for prosperity (发, “fā”) and perhaps in observance of the protecting force and power of the Ba Xian. Conversely, the number four is generally avoided, as it sounds like the word for death (死, “sǐ”).

Giving *Hongbao* is not merely about monetary value and what that signifies at the moment from a practical or transactional perspective; it's about intentionality. And symbolism. *Hongbao* conveys noble and honorable wishes and blessings on the recipient's future. It is ephemeral as much as it is tangible.

3 <https://studycli.org/chinese-culture/hongbao/>

4 https://www.aijcrnet.com/journals/Vol_1_No_3_November_2011/13.pdf



MODERN PRACTICE

“Most relationships between people can be interpreted as forms of exchange.”

—Georg Simmel (2011, p. 82), *The Philosophy of Money*

In recent decades, the tradition of offering *Hongbao* has undergone a profound digital shift. Mobile payment platforms have revolutionized the exchange of red envelopes, making it accessible to a broader audience. While dilating the spread of digital *Hongbao*, this transformation prompts a reevaluation of *Hongbao*'s cultural potency compared to its traditional form.

Hongbao remains a cornerstone of Chinese culture, even in the face of rapid modernization. Digital *Hongbao*, popularized through platforms like WeChat and Alipay, is a testament to its unremitting cultural essence. With its propensity for good luck, prosperity, and warding off evil, the *Hongbao* tradition remains immutable despite being under constant scrutiny for potential reinvention.

The importance of *Hongbao* as an offering extends beyond its physical iteration, encompassing a process of consideration, exchange, transformation, and evolution. Pyyhtinen (2014) observes, “The gift is tied to social relationships so intimately that it cannot be grasped as gift completely in itself, without paying attention to the ties that accompany it” (p. 7). Consequently, whether virtual or material, red envelope gifting is a model of exploring how intimate relations or social ties are transformed into things and vice versa.

As Yusi Xu points out in “Lucky Money,” the Chinese gift economy highlights the interplay between gifts and favors within exchange systems. Gifting plays a crucial role in Chinese economic and political spheres; however, the Chinese perspective on gifts extends beyond economic rationality, recognizing the spiritual and emotional significance of the gift or offer.⁵

Xu also notes the complex nature of gifting in Chinese culture, resulting from a blend of practical motives and personal sentiments. The Chinese gift economy posits that favors are acquired through ritualized forms of *guanxi* or social connections, and gift-giving is frequently viewed as a social commitment, reinforcing the importance of this practice in establishing and strengthening relationships.⁶

But *Hongbao* has also evolved into an adaptable giving gesture that extends beyond traditional events. It is increasingly given to celebrate achievements or milestones, such as academic success, career advancements, or the birth of a child. This evolution underscores the adaptability of *Hongbao* and, more importantly, its role in promoting deeper relationships in diverse aspects of life.

In certain cultural or religious events, *Hongbao* might be given to figures of authority, such as community leaders or religious figures, as a sign of respect and to seek blessings. Giving *Hongbao* in these contexts goes beyond monetary value—it's a symbolic gesture that communicates respect and recognition of someone's role or status and expresses good wishes for their future.

5 Xu, Y. (Aveva). (2021). The “Lucky Money” That Started It All—The Reinvention of the Ancient Tradition “Red Packet” in Digital Times. *Social Media + Society*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211041643>

6 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354680055_The_Lucky_Money_That_Started_It_All-The_Reinvention_of_the_Ancient_Tradition_Red_Packet_in_Digital_Times

EVOLUTION OVER TIME

The practice of giving *Hongbao* has extended beyond the confines of the family to include corporate environments and social gatherings. This expansion reflects broader societal changes, such as globalization, economic growth, and the increasing importance of corporate culture in China.⁷

In professional environments, employees might receive *Hongbao* from employers as a token of appreciation for hard work, particularly around the Lunar New Year. Similarly, service providers, such as delivery personnel or housekeepers, might receive red envelopes from clients to thank them for their services and loyalty.⁸

Platforms such as WeChat have popularized digital red envelopes and *e-Hongbao*, allowing virtual money exchanges making the tradition more accessible and convenient, especially for those separated by distance, while preserving its cultural essence.⁹

While the core symbolism of prosperity and goodwill remains intact, the digital format has introduced new dynamics, such as the ability to send personalized messages and participate in virtual gifting events. This evolution reflects the adaptability of cultural practices to contemporary lifestyles and technological advancements, making users feel part of a constantly evolving and dynamic culture.

⁷ <https://lchineseschool.com/exploring-the-tradition-of-hong-bao-in-chinese-culture/>

⁸ <https://www.thinkchina.sg/society/rising-hongbao-rates-are-putting-pressure-chinese-youths>

⁹ <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/16458>

BEYOND CHINA

In Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), and Cambodia, the Chinese diaspora and immigrants introduced the tradition of giving red envelopes. In Cambodia, red envelopes are called “ang pav” or “tae ea” (“give ang pav”).¹⁰ They are given with good wishes to younger family members and symbolize good fortune from elders. Typically, these envelopes are presented during Chinese New Year or Saen Chen, when families come together. The envelopes, which can contain money or a cheque, are often placed near a child's bed as a token of luck while they sleep. Recipients are generally younger family members, while the employed are expected to give “ang pav” to their parents and younger siblings or children. The amount is often adjusted at weddings to cover the event's costs and support the newlyweds.

In Vietnamese culture, red envelopes are commonly given during the New Year to symbolize luck and prosperity. Elders and adults present envelopes to children, accompanied by well-wishes for health and longevity. Standard greetings include “Sống

¹⁰ https://www.marefa.org/%D9%85%D8%B8%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%81_%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%B1



lâu trăm tuổi” (live a hundred years), “A khang thịnh vượng” (peace and prosperity), “Vạn sự như ý” (may all things go as you wish), and “Sức khỏe dồi dào” (abundant health). The practice is known as “lì xì” or, less commonly, “mừng tuổi.”¹¹

In South Korea, children receive money from relatives during the New Year, but instead of red envelopes, they use bags called “bokjumeoni.”¹² In Japan, children receive monetary gifts known as “otoshidama” during the New Year. These are given in white or decorated envelopes named “otoshidama-bukuro,” with the recipient's name noted on the front. A similar tradition exists for weddings, where money is presented in a folded envelope called “shūgi-bukuro,” trimmed with an elaborate bow known as “mizuhiki.”¹³

¹¹ <https://saigonfoodtour.com/blog/li-xi-lucky-money-cherished-custom-traditional-tet-holiday/>

¹² <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/HonoraryReporters/view?articleId=201314>

¹³ <https://livejapan.com/en/article-a0000768/>

In the Philippines, Chinese Filipinos heed the giving of red envelopes, known locally as “ang pao,” during the Lunar New Year. The broader Filipino community has adopted the custom as monetary gifts during Christmas and New Year, the envelopes called “ampaw” due to local language phonetics.¹⁴

In Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Singapore, Malay Muslims have adapted the red envelope tradition for Eid al-Fitr celebrations, using green envelopes instead. This adaptation aligns with the Islamic tradition of “sadaqah,” or voluntary charity and less formal than “zakat.” The practice is more about generosity among friends and family than charity per se. Among the Sundanese, boys who have recently been circumcised receive monetary gifts known as “panyecep” or “uang sunatan.”¹⁵

In Singapore and Malaysia, Indian Hindu communities have adopted the red envelope tradition for Deepavali, using purple envelopes, sometimes referred to as Deepavali “ang pow.”¹⁶In the past, yellow envelopes were also used for this occasion.

¹⁴ <https://nolisoli.ph/105384/ang-pao-guide/>

¹⁵ <https://kabarsumedang.pikiran-rakyat.com/kabar-sumedang/pr-3247999155/ratusan-anak-peserta-khitanan-massal-baznas-sumedang-dapat-uang-panyecep-dari-pj-bupati?page=all>

¹⁶ https://www.lifestyleasia.com/kl/culture/art/lai-see-chinese-new-year-etiquette-guide/#google_vignette





DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION & HONGBAO @ WORK

In recent years, the ritual of *Hongbao* has acclimated to the digital age. Platforms like WeChat have popularized digital red envelopes, allowing people to send virtual money offerings. This digital transformation has made the convention more accessible, especially for those disconnected by distance, while preserving prominent cultural significance.¹⁷

The advent of digital technology has transformed the way *Hongbao* is traded. Studies by Liu et al. (2018) indicate that digital *Hongbao*, enabled through platforms like WeChat, has become increasingly popular, especially among younger generations. This digital shift has updated the tradition and extended its reach and accessibility. In their seminal investigation, Chang and Fang comment specifically on the transformative power of *Hongbao* and its potential for innovation.¹⁸ Chang and Fang discuss the consequence of cultural context and traditions in gifting practices,

focusing on the *Hongbao* tradition in China and other East Asian countries and their study finds that the convention of offering *Hongbao* implies reciprocity in relationships, which forms the core mechanism driving the connections identified as part of their research. While recipients may not always reciprocate with another *Hongbao*, they contribute in complementary modes, such as deepening and excelling at assignments.

Chang and Fang show that *e-Hongbao* has not only preserved the social exchange tradition but also introduced new methods of sharing and gifting. Notably, group *e-Hongbao*, a gamified group gift enabled by digital technology, shows the most substantial impact on intra-organizational relationships. As *e-Hongbao* becomes a more visible part of workplace social exchanges, these findings align with existing literature identifying relational reciprocity in corporate settings.

¹⁷ <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuiid=10e64f3e-5cf2-4e78-8511-9fb9dd82e194>

¹⁸ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367667365_Digital_Gifts_at_the_Workplace_An_Exploratory_Study_on_the_Impact_of_E-Hongbao



Notably, group e-Hongbao, a gamified group gift enabled by digital technology, shows the most substantial impact on intra-organizational relationships. As e-Hongbao becomes a more visible part of workplace social exchanges, these findings align with existing literature identifying relational reciprocity in corporate settings.

WeChat's 2014 digital *Hongbao* marked a pivotal juncture in the evolution of the tradition. By digitizing the red envelope, WeChat preserved the cultural significance of *Hongbao* while modifying it to conform to a digital ecosystem, its evolution from physical to digital, mirroring societal shifts and technological advances. In traditional settings, red envelopes are frequently exchanged during festivals, weddings, and other significant events, transferring good wishes and fostering social bonds (Xu, 2021).¹⁹ The digitization of this practice has presented new dynamics, mainly through WeChat's red envelope feature, which allows users to send monetary gifts instantly and interactively. This interactivity enhances social engagement, as users often compete to "snatch" these digital envelopes, fulfilling social, entertainment, and informational needs (Qian et al., 2019).²⁰ However, the emotional resonance of traditional red envelopes remains significant; many individuals express nostalgia for the tactile and personal aspects of physical envelopes, which are seen as more heartfelt and culturally rich (Xu, 2021).

Enterprises have capitalized on the vogue of digital *Hongbao* by incorporating them into marketing approaches and promotional movements. Businesses use digital red envelopes to engage consumers, enhance brand loyalty, and drive user interaction during festive seasons. This commercial use of *Hongbao* highlights its versatility as a tool for both cultural articulation and economic activity.²¹

While digital *Hongbao* offers numerous advantages, there are apprehensions about its potential cultural significance dilution. The ease and frequency of digital exchanges may lead to a perception of *Hongbao* as mere transactions rather than influential cultural gestures. Ensuring the symbolic meanings of *Hongbao* are preserved amidst digital proliferation is a challenge that demands consideration.²²

19 Xu, Y. (2021). The "lucky money" that started it all—the reinvention of the ancient tradition "red envelope" in digital times. *Social Media + Society*, 7(3), 205630512110416. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211041643>

20 Qian, Z., Li, J., Wang, S., & Yu, Z. (2019). Understanding the user's economical and psychological intentions to snatch electronic red envelopes: an experimental study. *Ieee Access*, 7, 5749-5759. <https://doi.org/10.1109/access.2018.2888576>

21 <https://www.ptengine.com/blog/business-strategy/red-envelopes-to-digital-carts-the-global-impact-of-chinese-new-year-on-e-commerce/>

22 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379759492_Digitalising_Chinese_New_Year_Red_envelopes_Changing_Practices_and_Meanings

RED ENVELOPES AND WECHAT: A CLOSER LOOK

In 2014, tech giant Tencent introduced digital *Hongbao* red packets through messaging app WeChat.²³ This innovation sparked a shift in how Chinese users celebrate the New Year. By 2016, the practice had detonated in popularity, with an unexpected 409,000 digital red packets sent and received every second via smartphones over the holiday period.

The convenience—and originality—of digital *Hongbao* quickly enticed other significant players in China's tech industry. Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent—often called BAT—are now in intense competition for market share in the digital gifting arena. As Pippa Lamb notes for Harvard MBA Student Perspectives, “the issue here, however is that the fundamental characteristics of the environments they are operating in are just still very different (be it

regulatory, economic, social) necessitating different biases in their development. Like I mentioned on Alibaba, e-commerce in emerging markets is a very different game to e-commerce in developed markets, which tend to have a very mature offline infrastructure already in place.”²⁴ Each company developed distinctive features to entice users, turning the tradition into a virtual online gifting festival.

WeChat's system allows users to send specified amounts to recipients or opt for a “lucky draw” format where the app randomly assigns different sums to chosen recipients. This gamification of *Hongbao* has added an addictive layer, contributing to its rapid viral spread. At its peak, 1.7 million digital envelopes were opened every minute on the platform.

The phenomenon has even captured the engagement of the Chinese government. In a savvy move combining tradition with political messaging, the government partnered with Alibaba to create the “reddest” of red packets—a promotion that offered cash prizes to participants who could recite socialist catchphrases from President Xi Jinping's New Year speech.

While these digital platforms don't directly profit from transaction fees, the actual value lies in user expansion and data collection. Users have to download the apps, link bank accounts, and share private details—a goldmine of data for tech companies.

The competition has spurred innovation across the industry. Weibo, in partnership with Alipay, offered \$80 million worth of prizes during a New Year's television gala, requiring viewers to shake their smartphones at specific times to participate.²⁵ Other features include sending gifts to celebrities and offering credits for various services.²⁶

23 <https://wechatcourse.com/wechat-hongbao/>



24 <https://d3.harvard.edu/platform-rctom/submission/making-it-rainchinese-red-packets>

25 <https://sekkeidigitalgroup.com/digital-hongbao-war-china/>

26 Xie Yue. The Change on Traditional Social Relationship by Discussing the Red envelopes on Wechat[J]. Tangshan: Journal of Tangshan Teachers College, 2015, 37(04), 78-81

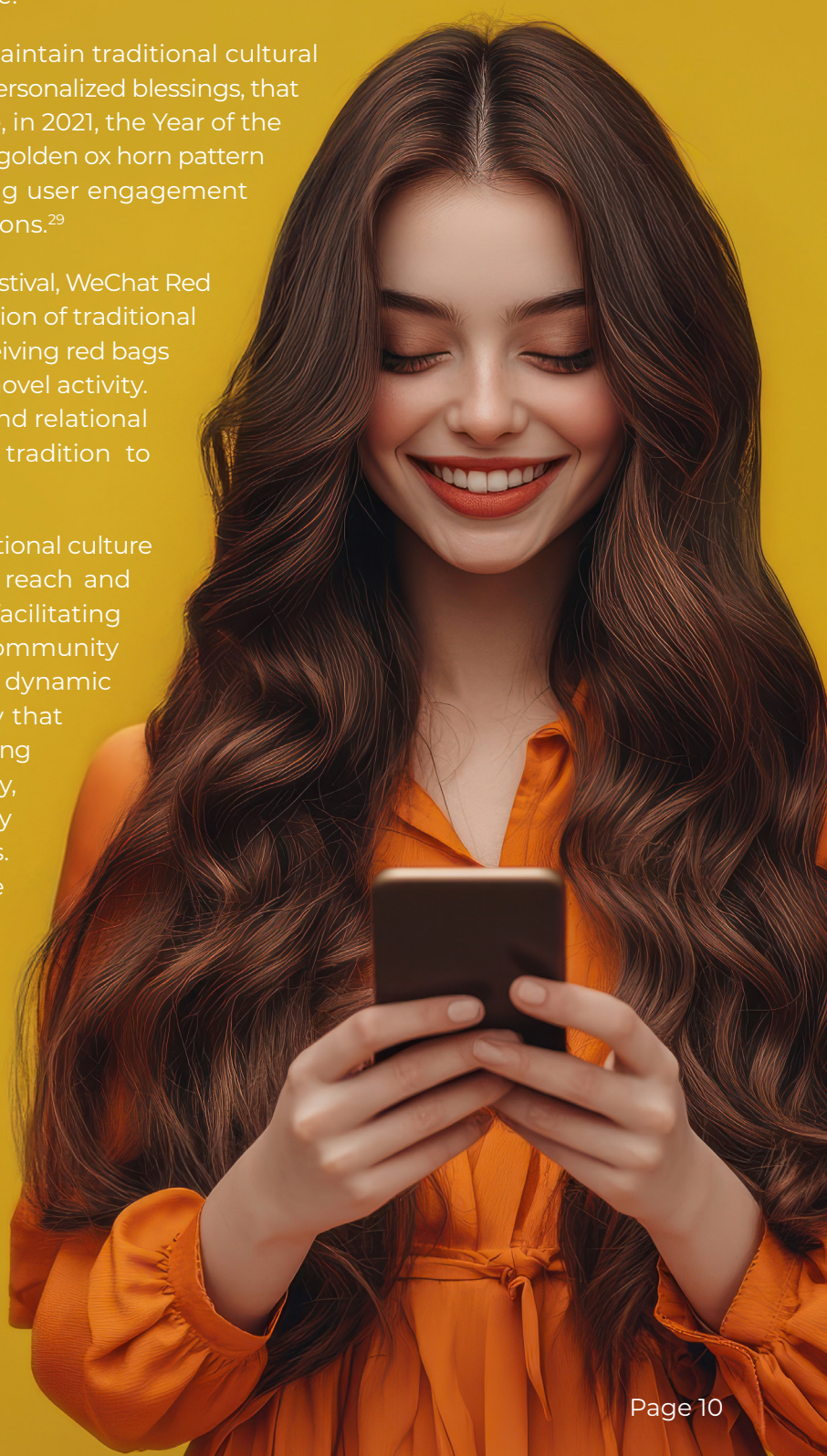
In “The Extension of Chinese Tradition in Digital Age” (2023)²⁷, Yuqiao Ji notes that “WeChat Red envelopes practice is set on the diverse types of virtual communities and belongs to online collective behaviors compared with traditional festival red bags, a person-to person model. It influences social relationship especially family hierarchy order because of its multi-directional interaction property, inclusion of every member and finally extension to mass participants” (p68).

WeChat has altered the *Hongbao* practice into a digital social activity, allowing users to send and receive red envelopes online, breaking traditional time/space constraints. This digital iteration has democratized the process, enabling anyone within a WeChat group to give and receive red envelopes, thereby modifying a traditional hierarchical structure into something more egalitarian and interactive.²⁸

The digital WeChat Hongbao envelopes maintain traditional cultural elements, such as auspicious symbols and personalized blessings, that mimic the physical envelopes. For instance, in 2021, the Year of the Ox, WeChat envelopes were adorned with a golden ox horn pattern reflecting the zodiac theme and enhancing user engagement by aligning with existing cultural expectations.²⁹

Yuqiao Ji writes, “in special days like Spring Festival, WeChat Red envelope is considered as the digital extension of traditional value and ritual to change sending and receiving red bags process from physical ritual to virtual and novel activity. Moreover, it is the miniature of structural and relational transformation of Chinese society from tradition to modern times.”³⁰

WeChat envelopes embody a blend of traditional culture and technology. This hybrid expands the reach and appeal of a longstanding custom while facilitating a unique form of social exchange and community engagement. It shows *Hongbao* to be dynamic and adaptable. It also raises the possibility that *Hongbao*, a mechanism capable of transmitting textured messaging while retaining integrity, may be equally competent at positively influencing diverse relationship outcomes. Especially at the outset, as part of the intention-setting phase of the connection.



27 https://www.clausiuspress.com/assets/default/article/2023/11/12/article_1699790473.pdf

28 Liang Guangcheng, Cheng Lei, Hou Kaiyuan. The Popularity of Social Media in Interpersonal Communication — Taking ‘WeChat Red envelope’ as Example[J]. China Prefecture and Town Newspaperman, 2022(S2):11-13

29 Park L. WeChat Red Bags: How International Students from China Use Social Media While Attending a Public University in California [D]. 2016

30 Tian Jieyu. Brief Analysis of the Spring Festival Red envelope Custom in WeChat Red Bags [J]. Journal of News Research, 2016, 7(19):88-89

DYNAMIC OF INTENTIONALITY

HONGBAO IN THE MODERN DATING ECOSYSTEM

Within the ever-evolving environment that constitutes and codifies the construct, we consider dating or courtship, where first impressions calculated by mutual respect metrics are not guaranteed or easily anticipated; it is not arbitrary nor unreasonable to consider the introduction of a distinctive tradition such as presenting an iteration of Hongbao as a prelude to a first date.

By modulating this tradition to align within the context of contemporary dating, it is possible to promote positive emotions, mutual respect and cultivate meaningful connections. Additionally, the practice addresses the modern dating challenge of superficial interactions and the uncertainty surrounding the seriousness of intentions, particularly in an era where time is an increasingly valuable commodity. At the same time, demonstrable financial stability represents crucial consideration for some.

Contemporary dating practices are distinguished by rapid technological advancement, shifting gender roles, and an increasing emphasis on individualism and self-expression. Online dating platforms have revolutionized how people meet and connect, offering unprecedented access to potential partners.

However, this abundance of choice has also led to a culture of date-aholic superswipers and the rise of terminology that includes concepts such as catfishing, ghosting, breadcrumbing, and more. Superficiality and micro-relationships have become more prevalent, while dating misconduct erodes trust, creating uncertainty—even dread.

Compounding this challenge is the pressure to construct and curate an online persona, giving rise to toxic positivity and exacerbated feelings of inadequacy due to constant comparison. There is a growing desire for more meaningful and authentic connections in this context. We propose incorporating *Hongbao* into dating culture, specifically as a gesture exchanged during first dates. Offering *Hongbao* can serve multiple purposes in the context of dating.



THE POTENTIAL OF HONGBAO IN MODERN DATING

Integrating *Hongbao* into modern dating practices offers a transformative recourse for addressing challenges inherent in contemporary relationships.

By introducing a tangible symbol of respect, gratitude, and sincerity, Hongbao has the potential to elevate the dating experience and foster deeper connections significantly.

As Yusi Xu writes in “Lucky Money,” there are consistent aspects of gift-giving that may not be fully clarified in terms of conventional or economic

rationality. Consequently, she explains, any gift embodies a blend of instrumental intentions with personal feelings (Chang, 2011). The Chinese gift economy suggests that favors could only be obtained through the “enactment of ritualized forms of *guanxi*” (M. M. Yang, 1994, p. 8).³¹

Hongbao serves as a potent counterbalance to the often superficial nature of modern dating, reintroducing traditional values of generosity and appreciation. By offering *Hongbao*, individuals signal appreciation for the other person’s time and company, demonstrating a willingness to invest in the relationship. *Hongbao* in dating is fundamentally about intentionality. Simply put, *Hongbao* acknowledges that time is a currency. It conveys respect.

³¹ Guanxi (pronounced gwan’ CHē) is a Chinese term referring to relationships. The term points not just to the existence of relationships but to their nature: to having personal trust within a strong relationship. It can also create moral obligations and require the exchanging of favors. A person who has a great deal of *guanxi* will be better positioned to generate goodwill than someone who lacks it.

In an era of otherwise hyper-casual dating, including *Hongbao* adds an aura of occasion and an air of formality to a first date. It signals a departure from the vacuous—mechanical—quality of online interaction, thereby drawing an intentional line about being sincere and serious in creating a meaningful and memorable experience.

While some argue for the intentional aspect of *Hongbao*, some studies, primarily within Western contexts, indicate that money is traditionally not considered an appropriate gift (Mortelmans & Sinardet, 2004). Waldfogel's initial seminal study, "The deadweight loss of Christmas," published in *The American Economic Review*, however, determines that in-kind gifts are inefficient, and recipients frequently value them less than the actual cost incurred by the giver (1993). Further work by Waldfogel, "Gifts, cash, and stigma. Economic Inquiry," considers myriad theoretical economic models and suggests altruistic givers opt for monetary gifts, as recipients may not appreciate in-kind gifts (2002).

The popularity of the *Hongbao* custom can be attributed to a complex interplay of tradition and ritual surrounding the exchange. Indeed, gifting cash in red envelopes is a widely accepted practice in Chinese cultures (Siu, 2001), paving the way for digital iterations to emerge that range from the crypto to a more homespun DIY version by printing one yourself.³² In short, *Hongbao* is here.

In the context of dating, the integration of *Hongbao* presents a novel mechanism for expressing interest and affection. Sending a red packet is intriguing to be perceived as a gesture of goodwill and generosity, potentially enhancing romantic interactions. Research indicates that monetary gifts like *Hongbao* often act as social currency, facilitating and announcing correlation dynamics while signaling earnest intentions within diverse social contexts, including dating.³³

Hongbao is a symbolic gesture of commitment and a declaration of financial stability, both frequent factors in relationship debate and development. By offering *Hongbao*, individuals demonstrate a gravitas regarding the relationship and their ability to provide for a partner.

32 https://lansugarden.org/content/CI_assets/Create_Your_Own_Hong_Bao_Red_Envelope.pdf

33 Wu, Z. and Ma, X. (2017). Money as a social currency to manage group dynamics. *b* <https://doi.org/10.1145/3027063.3053153>



Hongbao is a bridge for individuals from different cultural backgrounds, a proxy for intercultural understanding and deep appreciation. It represents a starting point for conversations about cultural differences and similarities, enriching and augmenting the dating experience. Integrating *Hongbao* into dating practices serves as a means of cultural expression and identity affirmation. Even for individuals who do not identify with Chinese culture per se, utilizing *Hongbao* in dating may reinforce a newly constructed sense of cultural expression and provide a sense of mutual inclusion and belonging within the dynamic.

Digital *Hongbao* is a catalyst for discussions around cultural values and relationship expectations. By introducing a culturally significant practice into dating, individuals are prompted to reflect on their values and beliefs regarding relationships and, possibly, marriage.³⁴ In this way, the integration of *Hongbao* into dating practices ignites a broader cultural discourse on love, relationships, and identity.

34 Arroyo, K. (2017). Creative policymaking: taking the lessons of creative placemaking to scale. *Artivate a Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts*, 6(2), 58-72. <https://doi.org/10.1353/artv.2017.0000>

THE PROPOSAL: HONGBAO IN MODERN DATING

Time has become a valuable commodity, and Hongbao symbolizes appreciation for the time and effort the other person has invested in the date.

One person (typically male, though the gesture is adaptable to any couple dynamic) expresses respect for the other person by offering a *Hongbao* on a first date. The gesture conveys a willingness to invest in the relationship, emotionally and symbolically, thereby setting a tone of generosity and care. Viewed holistically, the *Hongbao* in dating is a coded gesture, motivated and contextualized by a longer-term goal. The exchange of *Hongbao* fosters positive emotions right from the onset of the relationship. It infuses the first date with a measure of tradition, gravitas, and mutual respect, helping to construct a foundation of trust and goodwill.

The introduction of *Hongbao* into the dating process indicates intention and resultant consequence. Through the offering, the giver signals that they value the interaction as meaningful and symbolic. The gesture helps filter out insincere intentions, elevating the quality of the dating interaction.

In addition to its symbolic meanings, *Hongbao* serves as a muted indicator of financial stability. In dating, financial capability is often considered essential when assessing a partner's potential as a provider and responsible partner. By giving a *Hongbao* on a first date, the giver demonstrates that they are in a stable financial state, which can reassure the recipient and signify a readiness to invest in a future relationship.

The integration of *Hongbao* into the dating process aligns smoothly with the core principles of the ancient tradition. Just as *Hongbao* has been used to convey good wishes, protect against misfortune, and express respect in various aspects of life, it serves a similar function when applied to dating.

Hongbao acts as a counterbalance, promoting respect and thoughtfulness, and it encourages individuals to approach dating with sincerity and seriousness, reflecting values traditionally associated with *Hongbao*.

Presenting *Hongbao* on a first date encourages generosity, setting a precedent for giving, caring, and investing in the other person, all essential qualities for successful relationships. *Hongbao* adds a unique and memorable element to the first date. It elevates the experience, adding another layer of meaningful and cultural significance and enhancing the connection between the individuals involved.

By adapting the tradition of *Hongbao* for use in modern dating, particularly on first dates, we can infuse the dating process with the positive values of gratitude, respect, generosity, and appreciation. This practice addresses modern dating challenges by signaling seriousness, ensuring time is valued, and indicating financial stability. It has the potential to transform the dating experience, fostering deeper connections and promoting the development of meaningful, respectful relationships.





SYMBOLISM OF GENEROSITY AND GOODWILL

Theodore Caplow's 1984 study, "Rule Enforcement Without Visible Means: Christmas Gift Giving in Middletown," was a significant sociological examination of gift-giving practices during Christmas in Middletown (Muncie, Indiana). Caplow conducted interviews with a random sample of 110 Middletown adults in early 1979, asking about their Christmas celebrations from the previous year. The study collected data on 4,347 individual gifts, averaging 39.5 per respondent. While ostensible about Christmas gifting, Caplow's study revealed that unwritten and largely undefined emotional rules governed the act of giving. These rules were effectively enforced without visible means, suggesting a complex social norms and expectations system. Caplow's study highlighted gift-giving as a form of social communication and a means of constructing cultural reality, and he views the exchange as "expressive statements or movements in the management of meaning."³⁵

Hongbao is not merely a monetary gift; it is a gesture of goodwill and a wish for prosperity and happiness for the recipient. This aligns with modern

dating norms, where gestures of kindness and thoughtfulness are valued. In dating, small acts of generosity, whether through gifts or shared experiences, are often seen as expressions of affection and interest. *Hongbao's* symbolism of sharing blessings and good fortune resonates with the desire in modern dating to build connections based on mutual care and respect. The red color of the envelope, believed to ward off evil spirits and bring positive energy, makes it an ideal choice for celebrations that mark new beginnings.³⁶

Small gestures of kindness and thoughtfulness in modern dating are crucial in building strong emotional connections. Acts of generosity, such as giving gifts or sharing experiences, are seen as expressions of affection and interest. With its symbolism of sharing blessings and good fortune, *Hongbao* aligns with these values, offering a culturally rich way to express care and consideration for a partner.

The exchange of *Hongbao* in a dating context symbolizes mutual respect and the sharing of

³⁵ <https://gwern.net/doc/sociology/1984-caplow.pdf>

³⁶ <https://www.allcolourenvelopes.co.uk/blogs/news/the-role-envelopes-play-in-chinese-new-year-celebrations>



good fortune, potentially strengthening relational bonds. This gesture can enhance the emotional connection between partners, creating a shared experience that deepens intimacy and trust. By incorporating *Hongbao* into dating practices, couples can celebrate cultural diversity and engage in meaningful exchange, fostering a deeper appreciation for each other.

Integrating *Hongbao* into dating enriches relationships by adding a layer of intentional significance and a new shared tradition. It served as a unique interpersonal touchpoint, especially in complex relationships, promoting dialogue and exploring differences and similarities.

As a symbol of good luck and prosperity, *Hongbao* serves as a meaningful gesture of commitment and hope for a shared future, aligning with the values of kindness and thoughtfulness in modern dating.³⁷

While some may argue that there is a risk of cultural misunderstandings, mainly if one partner is unfamiliar with the tradition or significance of

Hongbao, open communication about the meaning and intentions behind the exchange is encouraged to avoid misinterpretations. At the very least, it opens a most intriguing conversation point: value and intention.

Some may perceive the material aspect of the *Hongbao* as transactional, which may not align with prevailing values of non-materialistic expressions of affection often emphasized in contemporary relationships. It is essential to approach the exchange sensitively to each partner's comfort level and cultural perspective. Indeed, for some, the temptation to precisely interpret *Hongbao* as transactional is strong, but to do so would be to miss the point—the intention—of the exchange.

Hongbao's integration into modern dating offers a unique opportunity to blend a traditional cultural practice with contemporary relationship dynamics. By symbolizing mutual respect and shared prosperity, *Hongbao* provides a culturally rich way to strengthen relational bonds and enhance cross-cultural understanding.

³⁷ <https://socialmentalwellness.com/couples-counseling/showing-love-with-daily-small-gestures/>

TRADITIONAL RITUALS VS. MODERN FLEXIBILITY

Hongbao is steeped in tradition, with specific customs regarding how it is given and received. For example, *Hongbao* is traditionally given with both hands as a sign of respect and sincerity. This gesture is crucial in Chinese culture, symbolizing the giver's goodwill and the importance of the occasion. When receiving a *Hongbao*, it is also customary to use both hands, demonstrating gratitude and appreciation. This practice is not limited to *Hongbao* but extends to other forms of gift-giving in Chinese culture, emphasizing the importance of respect and etiquette.

By contrast, modern dating norms emphasize flexibility and personal autonomy, with fewer rigid rules governing interactions. Nowadays, dating involves spontaneous and informal exchanges, which may collide with the more structured rituals of *Hongbao*.

Additionally, it is considered impolite to open the *Hongbao* in front of the giver. This custom is rooted in preserving the giver's privacy and avoiding any embarrassment that might arise from the amount of money enclosed. The recipient is expected to express gratitude and wait until they are in a private setting before opening the envelope.

In contrast to the structured rituals of the *Hongbao* tradition, modern dating norms emphasize flexibility and personal autonomy. Dating today often involves spontaneous and informal exchanges, with fewer rigid rules governing interactions. This shift reflects broader societal changes, where individual preferences and mutual consent are more significant in shaping relationship dynamics.

While modern dating is less formal, gestures of kindness and thoughtfulness remain central to building connections. Whether through gifts or shared experiences, small acts of generosity are valued as expressions of affection and interest. These gestures align with the symbolic meanings of the *Hongbao*, where the act of giving is more about the sentiment and intention than the material value.

As a tradition, *Hongbao* is deeply rooted in cultural significance, with specific customs that convey

respect and goodwill. In contrast, modern dating allows more personal expression, where gestures are tailored to individual preferences and the unique dynamics of each relationship. This flexibility can sometimes clash with the structured rituals of *Hongbao*, particularly in blended relationships where partners may have different expectations and understandings of these customs.

The structured nature of *Hongbao* exchanges, emphasizing etiquette and symbolism, contrasts with the informal interactions typical of modern dating. While the *Hongbao* tradition reinforces social hierarchies and familial bonds, modern dating often prioritizes equality and mutual respect, allowing for a more fluid and dynamic interaction between partners.

With its rich symbolism and specific customs, *Hongbao* offers a fascinating contrast to modern dating norms. While both practices emphasize gestures of goodwill and respect, they differ in their approach and execution. Understanding these differences can enhance cross-cultural relationships, allowing individuals to navigate the complexities of tradition and modernity with sensitivity and appreciation.



MONETARY IMPLICATIONS

Hongbao involves a monetary gift, which may be viewed as a tangible expression of well-wishes. However, in modern dating, monetary gifts are often perceived as transactional or carry implications of obligation; *Hongbao* aligns with the evolving norms of equality and non-materialistic expressions of affection because it is not transactional in spirit or intention, while it carries no obligation of any kind. Modern dating often values experiences and emotional connections over material exchanges, which aligns well with the traditional aspect of *Hongbao*.

Modern dating norms prioritize flexibility, personal autonomy, and emotional connections over material exchanges. Gestures of kindness and thoughtfulness, such as shared experiences and meaningful interactions, are valued as expressions of affection and interest. In this sense, *Hongbao*

forms an extension of this gestural journey. It reflects broader societal changes, where individual preferences and mutual consent are more significant in shaping relationship dynamics.

Hongbao's monetary aspect expresses goodwill and supports the evolving norms of equality and voluntary expressions of connection, where experiences and emotional bonds are often prioritized in new and inventive ways.

Research suggests appreciative experiential gifts such as *Hongbao* evoke strong emotions, create lasting memories and are more likely to strengthen relationships than conventional material expressions. In modern dating, where emotional connections are paramount, this emphasis on experiences—and being valued on a fundamental level—resonates more strongly with partners seeking to build meaningful relationships.

THE CALCULUS OF CONNECTION

REDEFINING ROMANCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Within the ever-evolving environment that constitutes and codifies the construct, we consider dating or courtship, where first impressions calculated by mutual respect metrics are not guaranteed or easily anticipated; it is not arbitrary nor unreasonable to consider the introduction of a distinctive tradition such as presenting an iteration of Hongbao as a prelude to a first date.

In our hyperconnected yet paradoxically increasingly isolated modern world, the quest for meaningful romantic relationships remains as urgent and elusive as ever. While the fundamental human desire for love and partnership endures, the act of courtship has been radically transformed by technology, shifting cultural norms, and evolving expectations. It's not a reach to suggest that a tri-pathway model exists in romantic relationships that hinge on three core criteria forming the foundation of successful romantic associations in the 21st century: mutual respect, reciprocal connection, and financial compatibility. Furthermore, it's worth considering how emerging digital platforms such as WhatsYourPrice and traditions such as gifting red envelopes may reshape how the three core criteria manifest in contemporary dating and relationships.

The acceleration of technological change and globalization has disrupted traditional courtship rituals and matchmaking practices across cultures. Mobile dating apps have largely supplanted serendipitous meetings and introductions through social networks as the primary means of finding potential partners. The gamification of dating through swiping interfaces has increased choice and commodified human connection. Meanwhile, shifting gender roles, later marriage ages, and changing economic realities have altered relationship expectations and dynamics.

In this context, it is worth reexamining the core elements that allow romantic love to flourish. While the three critical criteria—respect, connection, and financial compatibility—have always been essential, their relative emphasis and manifestation have evolved in the digital age.

I. RESPECT: THE FOUNDATION OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Respect forms the bedrock of any healthy romantic partnership. It encompasses recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of one's partner, honoring their autonomy and boundaries, and treating them with consideration and esteem. Respect allows partners to feel safe, valued, and empowered within a relationship.

In practice, respect manifests in myriad ways—from how partners communicate and resolve conflicts to supporting each other's goals and individuality. It requires seeing one's partner as a whole person rather than as a means to an end or an extension of oneself. Respectful partners uplift rather than diminish each other.

Relationship experts and researchers have emphasized the importance of respect in romantic relationships for decades. [John Gottman](#), renowned for his work on marital stability, identified contempt - the opposite of respect - as the single most significant predictor of divorce. Gottman's research found that relationships marked by criticism, defensiveness, and lack of consideration were far more likely to fail.

Similarly, Sue Johnson's [emotionally focused therapy approach](#) emphasizes creating a secure attachment bond between partners built on mutual trust and respect. Johnson argues that feeling respected and valued by one's partner is essential for emotional intimacy and relationship satisfaction.

In the digital age, respect takes on new dimensions as couples navigate privacy issues, digital boundaries, and online behavior. Respecting a partner's digital autonomy and online persona has become critical. Additionally, the public nature of many relationships on social media has made displays of respect (or disrespect) more visible.

Respect is also closely tied to consent and personal agency issues that have gained prominence recently. The #MeToo movement highlighted the importance of respecting boundaries and enthusiastic consent in romantic and sexual interactions. This awareness has

also increased the emphasis on clear communication and respecting partners' comfort levels.

For many young people who have grown up with dating apps, cultivating genuine respect can be challenging in a "swipe culture" that encourages rapid judgments and disposable connections. The gamification of dating can sometimes lead to treating potential partners as interchangeable or viewing relationships as transactional. In his systematic literature review, Kexin Yang writes that "as algorithms mediate online dating's social affordance, these technologies may directly exert power over users and cultures. For instance, algorithms' problematic classification criteria may limit users' self-presentation and cause identity crises."³⁸

However, emerging dating platforms are also finding ways to encourage increasingly respectful interactions. Many apps now have features that allow users to report inappropriate behavior or block disrespectful users. Some give women more control over initiating conversations to avoid harassment.

WhatsYourPrice takes an even more evolved approach to fostering respect between potential partners. By allowing users to make offers for first dates, the platform ensures both parties enter interactions with clear intentions and mutual consideration.

Proponents argue that the monetary element encourages users to value each other's time and company from the outset. Critics contend that it commodifies human connection and reinforces unhealthy power dynamics. However, the site's emphasis on clearly defined expectations and follow-through aligns with respect in relationships.

Ultimately, while the manifestation of respect in relationships continues to evolve, its fundamental importance remains constant. Partners who treat each other with genuine esteem, consideration and regard are far more likely to build lasting, fulfilling romantic bonds.

38 <https://ruor.uottawa.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/d0dffc51-f16e-4e9e-a004-dff5b4787076/content>

II. CONNECTION: THE SPARK THAT SUSTAINS ROMANCE

While respect forms the foundation, connection provides a vital spark in romantic relationships. Connection encompasses the emotional, intellectual and physical chemistry that draws people together and sustains their bond over time. It allows partners to know and understand each other honestly and sincerely.

Connection manifests in various forms - from stimulating conversations and shared interests to physical intimacy and nonverbal attunement. Partners with solid connections feel energized in each other's presence and experience comfort and belonging. They can be vulnerable, playful, and authentically interact with each other.

The importance of connection in romantic love has been explored extensively in psychology and relationship science. Attachment theory, pioneered by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth³⁹, emphasizes how the bonds we form in early life shape our ability to connect intimately as adults. Secure attachment allows for deep emotional connection in romantic partnerships.

More recently, Sue Johnson's work on adult attachment and emotionally focused couples therapy⁴⁰ has highlighted how a secure emotional bond between partners is a buffer against life's stresses. She argues that romantic love is an attachment bond similar to that between parent and child and that couples need to be emotionally accessible and responsive to each other to maintain their connection.

Neuroscience research has also shed light on the biology of romantic connections. Studies have found that feelings of romantic love activate regions in the brain associated with reward, motivation and euphoria. Physical touch and intimacy trigger the release of oxytocin, the so-called "cuddle hormone" that promotes bonding.

In our digital age, connection has taken on new dimensions as couples navigate long-distance relationships, online dating, and technology-mediated communication. Video calls, messaging apps and social media have created new avenues for maintaining connections across distances. However, they have also introduced new challenges in fostering deep intimacy and presence.

The rise of dating apps has dramatically expanded the pool of potential partners and made it more challenging to forge meaningful connections. The abundance of choice can lead to a "paradox of choice"⁴¹ effect where people struggle to commit to one person. Additionally, the emphasis on surface-level attributes in many apps can make assessing deeper compatibility and connection potential challenging.

WhatsYourPrice takes an unconventional approach to facilitating connection. By allowing users to make an offer on first dates, the platform aims to ensure that both parties are invested in making a genuine effort to connect. Proponents argue that the monetary element motivates users to be more present and engaged on dates rather than treating them casually.

Critics contend that monetizing dates commodifies human connection and could attract people with ulterior motives. However, the site's emphasis on clearly defined date activities and expectations does align with certain aspects of building initial rapport and connection.

Ultimately, while the avenues for forming and maintaining romantic connections continue to evolve, the fundamental human need for deep intimacy and understanding remains constant. Partners who forge and sustain multifaceted emotional, intellectual and physical connections are far more likely to experience lasting romantic fulfillment.

39 Attachment theory focuses on relationships and bonds (particularly long-term) between people, including those between a parent and child and between romantic partners. It is a psychological explanation for the emotional bonds and relationships between people. The theory suggests that people are born with a need to forge bonds with caregivers as children. These early bonds may continue to have an influence on attachments throughout life.

40 <https://drsuejohnson.com/>

41 The paradox of choice is a concept introduced by psychologist Barry Schwartz which suggests that the more options we have, the less satisfied we feel with our decision. The phenomenon occurs because having too many choices requires more cognitive effort, leading to decision fatigue and increased regret over the choices we make.

III. FINANCIAL COMPATIBILITY: THE PRAGMATIC PILLAR OF PARTNERSHIP

While respect and connection form the emotional core of romantic relationships, the ability to provide represents a more pragmatic yet equally crucial criterion. Provision encompasses a partner's capacity to contribute practically and materially to building a life together. It goes beyond financial provision to emotional support, domestic labor, and shared responsibility for the couple's wellbeing.

The importance of provision in romantic partnerships has deep evolutionary roots. Anthropologists have long noted how indicators of resource acquisition and caregiving abilities influence mate selection across cultures.⁴² However, the nature of what constitutes "providing" has

evolved significantly, especially as gender roles and economic realities have shifted.

In contemporary Western societies, the ability to provide is increasingly viewed through overall life competence rather than strict breadwinning. Partners seek mates who can contribute holistically to building a stable, comfortable life together. Contributions might include financial stability, emotional intelligence, domestic skills, or the capacity for personal growth.

Research has consistently shown links between relationship satisfaction and partners' ability to meet each other's needs. A 2021 *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin (PSPB)* study⁴³ found that perceived partner responsiveness - the belief that one's partner understands, validates and cares for one's needs - was strongly associated with relationship and sexual satisfaction.

The ability to provide also intersects with attachment theory and the "secure base" concept in relationships. Partners who can reliably meet each other's needs for safety, comfort and support create a secure foundation from which individuals can confidently pursue their goals and weather life's challenges.

The ability to provide has taken on new dimensions in our current era as couples navigate evolving economic realities, later marriage ages, and changing gender norms. The rise of dual-income households has shifted expectations around financial provision. Meanwhile, the gig economy and economic instability have made traditional notions of career stability less relevant for many.

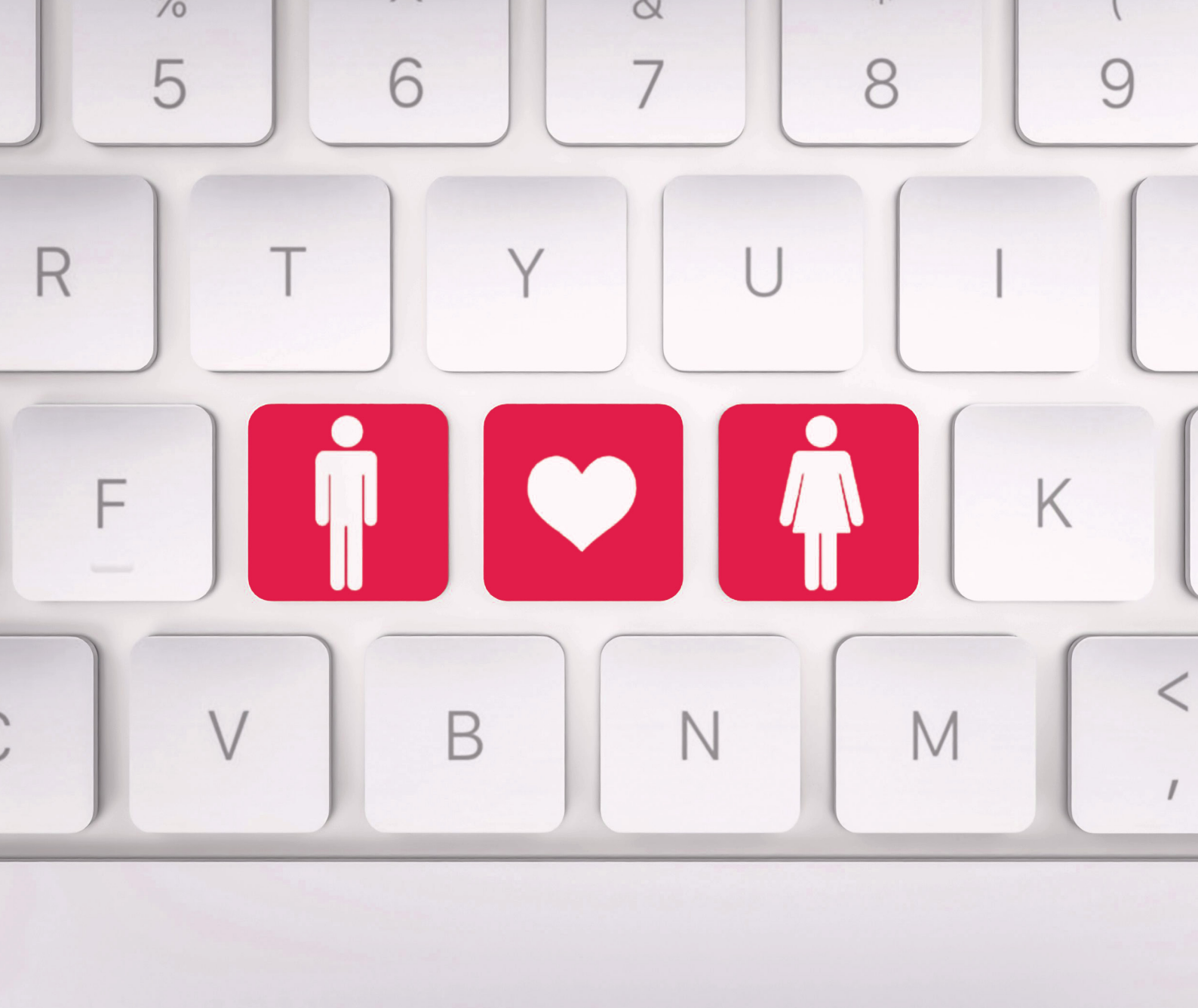
The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of adaptability and resilience as critical aspects of relationship provision. Couples who could pivot professionally, manage remote work challenges, and support each other through uncertainty generally fared better.

In online dating, assessing a potential partner's ability to provide can be challenging. Many dating

42 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7542307/>



43 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0146167221993349>



apps focus primarily on surface-level attributes rather than life competence or relationship skills indicators, which may lead to mismatched expectations and disappointment from digital interactions and real-world dating.

However, some emerging platforms are attempting to foreground provision-related compatibility. For instance, certain dating apps now allow users to indicate their financial goals, career ambitions, and views on shared finances. Others incorporate personality assessments that gauge traits like conscientiousness and emotional intelligence.

The dating site WhatsYourPrice takes a unique approach to highlighting provision in early dating stages. By allowing users to make offers on first dates, the platform makes financial generosity and investment explicit from the outset. Critics

contend that reducing the provision of monetary transactions oversimplifies the complexity of relationship dynamics and could attract people with unhealthy motivations. However, the site's emphasis on clearly defined expectations aligns with aspects of assessing provision compatibility early on.

Ultimately, while the specific markers of provision in relationships continue to evolve, the fundamental importance of partners being able to reliably meet each other's needs remains constant. Couples who can mutually contribute to building a stable, fulfilling life together - emotionally, practically and materially - are far more likely to achieve lasting romantic satisfaction.

IV. THE INTERSECTION OF RESPECT, CONNECTION AND PROVISION

While respect, connection and provision play vital roles in romantic relationships, their interplay and balance ultimately determine a partnership's strength and longevity. These three criteria do not exist in isolation but instead form an interdependent system that shapes how couples relate, grow together, and navigate life's challenges.

Respect forms the essential foundation upon which deep connection and mutual provision can be built. With a baseline of consideration and esteem for one's partner, attempts at intimacy or practical support will likely continue. Conversely, genuine respect naturally fosters a desire for closer connection and motivation to provide for one's partner.

The connection provides the emotional fuel that sustains respect and inspires generous provision over time. The spark of chemistry and understanding between partners reinforces their esteem for each other and motivates them to contribute to the relationship. Meanwhile, a strong connection allows couples to weather conflicts or practical challenges that might otherwise erode respect or provision.

The ability to provide creates a stable platform that allows respect and connection to flourish. When partners can rely on each other to meet practical and emotional needs, it reinforces their bond and esteem for one another. Conversely, chronic inability to provide financially, emotionally or domestically can strain even the most vital connections and erode mutual respect over time.

The relative importance of each criterion may also shift throughout a relationship as circumstances change. Early stages may emphasize connection and chemistry, while later stages prioritize reliable provision and mutual support. Significant life transitions like parenthood, career changes or health issues may temporarily strain one area while strengthening others.

The interplay of these criteria has taken on new dimensions in the digital age. Online dating platforms attempt to facilitate initial connection but may need help to convey indicators of respect or provision. Long-distance couples may maintain solid emotional bonds through technology, but they need help with practical support. Social media can showcase provision and connection but may strain respect if partners overshare or compare themselves to idealized portrayals of other relationships.

WhatsYourPrice attempts to integrate all three criteria from the outset of dating. The offer process foregrounds provision while emphasizing follow-through and clear expectations, ostensibly promoting mutual respect. Meanwhile, the platform encourages users to create genuine connections during dates rather than treating them casually.

Ultimately, the most successful relationships find ways to nurture all three criteria in balance. Partners who consistently demonstrate respect, maintain deep connection and reliably provide for each other's needs are best positioned for lasting fulfillment. As the landscape of modern romance continues to evolve, individuals and couples must find new ways to cultivate this essential triad.

V. THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN MODERN DATING

The role of technology in modern dating has become increasingly significant, reshaping how people meet, connect, and maintain relationships. The digital revolution has brought both opportunities and challenges to the landscape of love and partnership.

Online dating platforms and apps have dramatically expanded the pool of potential partners available to singles. These digital matchmaking services use algorithms to suggest compatible matches based on user profiles, preferences, and behaviors. It has been particularly impactful for individuals who may have limited dating options in their immediate communities, such as those living in rural areas, members of minority groups, or LGBTQ+ individuals. The ability to connect with a diverse range of potential partners from different backgrounds and locations has opened up new possibilities for finding compatible matches.

However, the abundance of choice can also lead to the “paradox of choice” effect, where the sheer number of options makes it challenging to commit to any single person. Users may constantly wonder if there’s someone “better” just a swipe away, leading to a reluctance to invest entirely in any one relationship. The emphasis on rapid swiping and surface-level attributes on many apps can also promote a consumerist mindset toward potential partners, potentially devaluing the depth and complexity of human connections.

Social media and instant messaging have also transformed how couples communicate and

maintain relationships. These technologies allow for constant connection, enabling partners to share moments, thoughts, and feelings throughout the day, even when physically apart. Online interaction may foster a sense of closeness and intimacy. However, it can also create pressure for constant availability and immediate responses, potentially leading to feelings of anxiety or neglect if a partner doesn’t respond promptly.

The public nature of many social media platforms has also introduced new dynamics to relationships. Couples must navigate how much of their relationship to share online, balancing the desire for privacy with social expectations of digital displays of affection. The visibility of past relationships and interactions on social media can also introduce jealousy and trust issues into current partnerships.

As we continue to navigate our new-found digital landscape of love, it’s clear that technology will play an increasingly central role in how we form, maintain, and experience romantic relationships. The key for individuals and couples will be learning to harness the benefits of these technologies while mitigating their potential drawbacks, finding a balance that enhances rather than detracts from the depth and quality of their connections.

VI. THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF COURTSHIP

Dating apps have made it easier than ever to discover potential partners outside one's immediate social circle. Increased access has been particularly beneficial for individuals in smaller communities, those with niche interests, or members of marginalized groups who may have limited options in their immediate surroundings. The ability to filter matches based on specific criteria can also help users find partners who align with their values and lifestyle preferences.

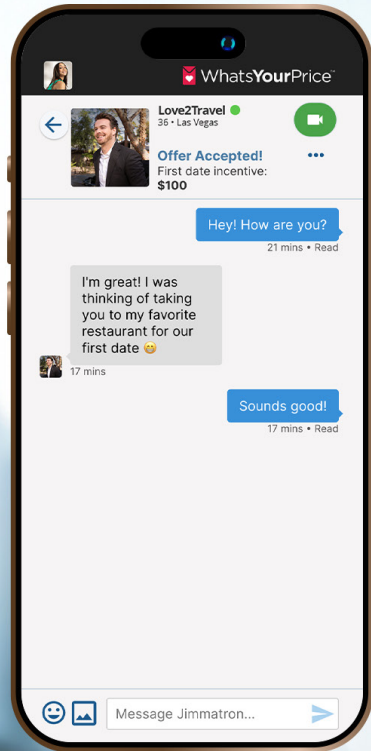
When faced with too many options, people may struggle to commit to any single partner, always wondering if someone might be “better” just a swipe away. The phenomenon can undermine the development of deep connections and respect, as users may view potential partners as disposable or interchangeable.

The gamification of dating through swiping interfaces and matching algorithms has also introduced new challenges. The emphasis on quick judgments based on photos and brief bios can promote superficiality and reduce complex individuals to mere commodities. The approach may hinder the development of genuine respect and connection, as users may need to understand and appreciate potential partners beyond surface-level attributes. Thus, some dating platforms attempt to address these issues by incorporating more substantive elements into their interfaces. For example, apps include detailed questionnaires and prompts to encourage users to share more about their personalities, values, and interests and aim to facilitate deeper connections and more meaningful matches based on compatibility rather than just physical attraction.

The rise of video dating, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has introduced yet another dimension to digital courtship. Platforms like Zoom and FaceTime have allowed potential partners to engage in face-to-face conversations and virtual dates without meeting in person. The trend has both advantages and drawbacks. On the one hand, it allows for more authentic interactions and the ability to gauge chemistry and connection before investing time and energy in physical meetings. On the other hand, the mediated nature of these interactions may create a false sense of intimacy or fail to capture the nuances of in-person chemistry.



VII. THE WHATSYOURPRICE MODEL: MONETIZING FIRST IMPRESSIONS



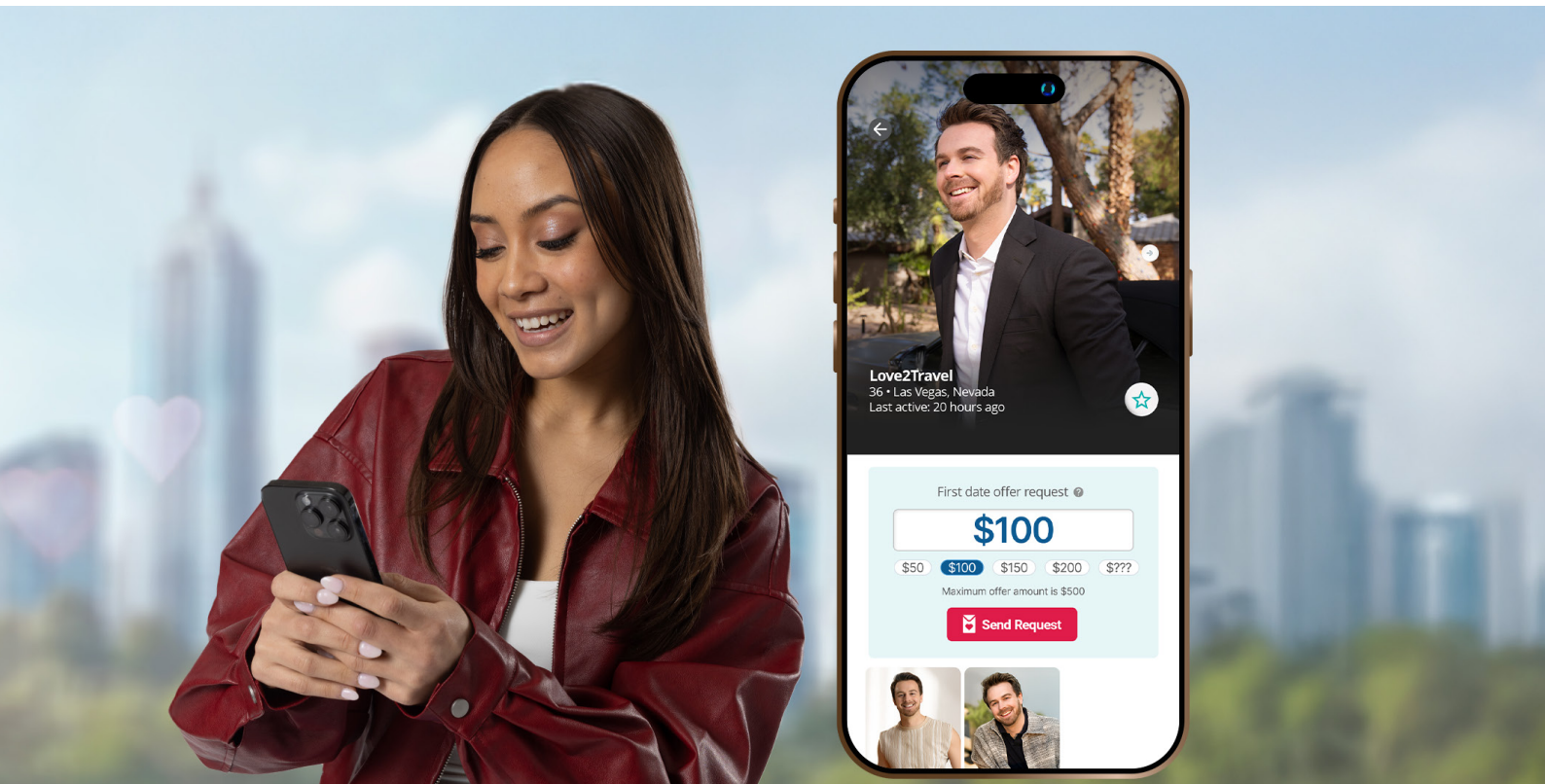
The dating platform WhatsYourPrice represents a bold attempt to address some of the shortcomings of traditional dating apps by introducing a monetary element to the process. The site allows users to place offers on first dates with potential partners, creating an “offer system” for romantic encounters. The approach raises intriguing questions about how the core criteria of respect, connection, and provision manifest in the early stages of courtship.

Proponents of WhatsYourPrice argue that the system encourages users to value each other’s time and company from the outset. By attaching a monetary value to the first date, the platform ostensibly weeds out individuals who need to be more serious about meeting or forming connections. It could foster more excellent tremendous aspects between users, as both parties enter the interaction with clear expectations and tangible investment.

The impact on the connection itself is the most ambitious aspect of the WhatsYourPrice model. On one hand, the platform’s emphasis on in-person meetings rather than prolonged online interactions could facilitate more authentic connections. The monetary investment motivates both parties to be more present and engaged during the date, potentially leading to more meaningful exchanges.

The WhatsYourPrice model sidesteps the possibilities of purely transactional arrangements that create pressure or expectations that hinder the natural development of chemistry and connection. Indeed, the WhatsYourPrice model highlights critical issues in modern dating. Making the economic aspect of courtship explicit forces users to confront expectations and values regarding financial provision in relationships. It also addresses the problem of “ghosting” and casual treatment of potential partners that plagues many traditional dating apps, as the monetary investment encourages follow-through and respect for each other’s time.

VIII. CULTURAL PRACTICES AND MODERN ROMANCE: THE CASE FOR RED ENVELOPES



While digital platforms are reshaping courtship in many parts of the world, traditional cultural practices continue to play a significant role in how people navigate romantic relationships. The Chinese custom of gifting red envelopes (hong bao) offers an intriguing role model to the WhatsYourPrice model, demonstrating how monetary exchanges may be integrated into courtship and relationship-building in culturally specific ways.

Red envelopes, traditionally containing money, are given during holidays and special occasions as symbols of good luck and prosperity. In romantic relationships, gifting red envelopes can serve multiple functions that align with respect, connection, and provision criteria.

Respect is demonstrated through giving itself, which shows consideration for the recipient and acknowledgment of the relationship's importance. The amount given is often carefully considered to show appropriate esteem without being ostentatious, reflecting a nuanced understanding of social dynamics and mutual respect.

Connection is fostered through the shared cultural understanding of the practice. The exchange of red envelopes creates joy and reinforces bonds between individuals and families. The ritual aspect of the gifting process – from preparing the envelope to presenting it – can create intimate moments of connection between partners.

Giving red envelopes in romantic relationships also illustrates how financial exchanges can be integrated into courtship in organic and culturally appropriate ways. Unlike the potentially jarring nature of bidding on dates, gifting red envelopes is a familiar and accepted part of social interactions in Chinese culture. Cultural embeddedness mitigates some of the discomfort or ethical concerns that arise from more overt monetization of romantic interactions.

IX. BALANCING TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN MODERN ROMANCE

Balancing possibilities with norms and expectations presents challenges and opportunities for fostering respect, connection, and provision in romantic relationships. On the one hand, traditional practices can provide a sense of continuity and cultural grounding that helps partners feel connected to their heritage and shared values. These customs often come with established norms and expectations that can provide a framework for demonstrating respect and provision appropriately.

Digital platforms and innovative dating models offer new ways to meet potential partners and explore connections. They can allow individuals to expand their dating pool beyond traditional social circles and be more explicit about their expectations and desires. However, these technologies also introduce new ethical considerations and potential pitfalls in the quest for meaningful relationships.

The key for many individuals and couples lies in finding a middle ground that honors cultural heritage while embracing the possibilities of the modern world. The process might involve reinterpreting “traditional” practices to align with contemporary values or selectively adopting new technologies and approaches that complement existing cultural norms.

For example, a couple might initially use a dating app to connect but then incorporate traditional courtship rituals as their relationship progresses. Or they might adapt the practice of red envelope gifting to a more egalitarian model where both partners exchange gifts, regardless of gender. The goal is to create a relationship dynamic that feels authentic and meaningful to both individuals while respecting cultural contexts and personal values.

X. FOSTERING DEEP CONNECTION IN A SUPERFICIAL SWIPE CULTURE

“Swipe culture” presents unique challenges for those seeking genuine, lasting relationships in the digital age. The abundance of choice offered by dating apps can be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, individuals have access to a vastly expanded pool of potential partners, increasing the likelihood of finding someone truly compatible. On the other hand, abundance may lead to a paradox of choice, where the constant possibility of a “better” match just a swipe away makes it difficult for people to commit to getting to know anyone deeply.

The emphasis on visual appeal and brief bios in many dating apps can encourage a superficial approach to partner selection. Users often make split-second decisions based on a single photo or a witty one-liner, potentially overlooking compatible matches that might not immediately catch their eye. Focus on instant attraction can make it challenging to foster deep, multifaceted connections that form the basis of lasting relationships.



Moreover, gamification of dating through swiping interfaces and matching algorithms can create a mindset where people are treated more like commodities than complex individuals. Gamification may lead to a disposable attitude towards potential partners, where meaningful connections are discarded at the first sign of imperfection or difficulty.

Despite these challenges, fostering deep connections in the digital age is still possible. One key strategy is to approach online dating with intention and mindfulness. Rather than mindlessly swiping, users can take the time to carefully read profiles and consider potential compatibility beyond just physical attraction. Rather than relying on superficial small talk, engaging in meaningful conversations early on can help establish a more profound connection.

Another important aspect is being authentic and vulnerable in online interactions. While it's natural to want to present one's best self, being honest about one's values, interests, and even flaws can help attract partners who appreciate the natural person behind the profile. Authenticity can lay the groundwork for more genuine connections.

Taking the time to move from online interactions to in-person meetings can also be crucial. While digital communication can be a great starting point, face-to-face interactions allow a more nuanced understanding of a potential partner. They provide opportunities to gauge chemistry, body language, and other subtle cues often lost in online exchanges.

Remembering that meaningful connections often develop slowly over time is essential. In a culture that often expects instant gratification, having patience and allowing relationships to unfold naturally can be revolutionary. It might mean resisting the urge to check for new matches constantly and instead focusing energy on getting to know a smaller number of people more deeply.

Within the context of dating gamification, the WhatsYourPrice model is underpinned by a pervasive determination to "get real." Ultimately, fostering deep connections in the age of swipe culture requires conscious effort to prioritize quality over quantity in romantic interactions. By approaching online dating with intention, authenticity, and generosity, the WhatsYourPrice model underlines finding genuine, meaningful relationships, rather than getting lost in the superficiality of endless swipes.

The exchange of Hongbao in a dating context can symbolize mutual respect and the sharing of good fortune, potentially strengthening relational bonds.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS. AND CHALLENGES.

Introducing Hongbao into dating may enrich relationships by adding a layer of cultural significance and shared traditions. Small gestures of kindness and thoughtfulness in modern dating are crucial in building strong emotional connections. Acts of generosity, such as giving gifts or sharing experiences, are seen as expressions of affection and interest. Hongbao, with its symbolism of sharing blessings and good fortune, aligns with these values, offering a culturally rich way to express care and consideration for a partner.

The exchange of Hongbao in a dating context can symbolize mutual respect and the sharing of good fortune, potentially strengthening relational bonds. This gesture can enhance the emotional connection between partners, creating a shared experience that deepens intimacy and trust.

A key motivation for individuals to engage in gift-giving is to initiate or strengthen cooperative relationships (Johnson et al., 2001). Gift exchanges frequently act as indicators differentiating cooperative individuals from those who are not (e.g., Prendergast and Stole, 2001). The underlying principle is that those interested in long-term relationships are willing to bear the short-term costs of gift-giving. For instance, Yamaguchi et al. (2015) provided evidence supporting the signaling model of gift-giving in friendships and romantic relationships. Additionally, gift exchanges may be seen as a means to build and sustain social capital (Dolfsma et al., 2009), broadly referring to the network of relationships that can be leveraged to achieve specific goals (Suseno and Pinnington, 2018). The practices of gift-giving and social capital in the context of “guanxi,” the intricate network of relationships in Chinese society, have also been extensively researched (Qi, 2013).

Integrating any new structure or conventions into dating contexts is fraught with potential misunderstandings, particularly when one partner is unfamiliar with the conventions or significance of the new structure. Open communication about the meaning and intention behind an exchange that resembles or references the spirit of Hongbao is crucial to avoid misinterpretation or misdirected expectations. It is also important to note that while the spirit of the exchange is rooted in Hongbao and deeply indebted to it for meaning, the iteration proposed within the dating convention would be largely derivative and ameliorated to convey aspects of Hongbao intention while eschewing cultural appropriation.

Indeed, circuitous cultural sensitivity is essential when navigating tradition, and Hongbao no less so. While Hongbao traditionally expresses goodwill and prosperity, it would be critically cantilevered on personal autonomy and equality. This balance would involve recognizing Hongbao's cultural values and core tenets while underpinning its messaging with an added coding layer: this iteration does not comprise a hidden or implied obligation or expectation. It is a symbol of goodwill and appreciation.



LOVE “DOES” COST A THING.

THE ECONOMICS OF MODERN DATING.

In the modern dating ecosystem, the interplay between social norms, economic factors, and personal expectations creates a multifaceted environment that both participants must navigate. Calculations as seen in Appendix II of this paper shed light on the significant financial and emotional investments made by individuals in pursuit of romantic relationships.

HOW FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS IMPACT DATING BEHAVIORS AND CHOICES

Traditional gender roles continue to exert a powerful influence on dating dynamics, often placing higher expectations on women to invest in their appearance and the maintenance of relationships. These societal norms can translate to higher personal expenses related to dating for women, exacerbating the financial pressures they face in the dating market.

The concept of the “double burden” is particularly relevant in this context. This term refers to the expectation that women manage both professional responsibilities and significant personal investment in relationships. In dating, this manifests as pressure to maintain an attractive appearance, engage in emotional labor, and prioritize relationship-building activities, all while balancing career and personal goals. The financial implications of this double burden can be substantial, as women may feel compelled to allocate resources to dating-related expenses even when facing economic constraints.

The “cost of femininity” or Pink Tax is another important consideration when examining the economic aspects of dating for women. This concept encompasses the various financial and social costs associated with maintaining traditional feminine roles in dating contexts. These costs can include expenses for clothing, cosmetics, hair care, and other appearance-related items that are often seen as necessary for women to be considered attractive in the dating market. While these expectations are gradually shifting in some circles, they remain deeply ingrained in many societies and continue to influence dating behaviors and choices.

Socioeconomic status (SES) plays a significant role in shaping dating experiences and opportunities. Individuals with higher SES often have more resources to invest in dating activities, potentially giving them an advantage in the dating market. Conversely, those with lower SES may find it challenging to meet societal expectations and participate fully in conventional dating activities. This disparity can disproportionately affect women, particularly those from lower SES backgrounds, as they may face both gender-based expectations and financial limitations.



The impact of SES on dating behaviors extends beyond mere financial considerations. Research has shown that SES can influence mate preferences, relationship stability, and long-term relationship outcomes. For women from lower SES backgrounds, the financial constraints associated with dating may limit their ability to participate in activities that could lead to meeting potential partners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This can potentially reinforce existing socioeconomic stratification and limit social mobility through romantic partnerships.



MATE SELECTION THEORIES AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

To fully understand the impact of financial constraints on dating behaviors, it's valuable to examine economic theories of mate selection. Economist Gary Becker's seminal work on the economics of marriage provides a framework for understanding how financial considerations influence partner choice and relationship formation. Becker's theory suggests that individuals approach mate selection as a market, seeking to maximize their utility based on preferences and available resources.

Becker, a Nobel laureate from the University of Chicago, has contributed to the economics of marriage and matching. In his 1973 paper, *Marriage and Marriage Markets*, published in the *Journal of Political Economy*, Becker emphasizes marriage as an important but understudied issue that should

be subject to economic analysis. He writes, "Yet, one type of behavior has been almost completely ignored by economists, although scarce resources are used and it has been followed in some form by practically all adults in every recorded society. I refer to marriage."

Becker's economic approach to the family is based on two foundational assumptions: maximizing behavior and equilibrium. He also uses the phrase "marriage market" metaphorically to describe the systematic and structured nature of human population mating. Becker models the marriage market as a matching and sorting mechanism, and considers its implications for divorce, marriage, and child development. He also argues that people marry for the same reason that nations trade, which is comparative advantage

In the context of dating, Becker's theory can be extended to explain how financial constraints may shape individuals' choices and strategies in the dating market. For women facing economic limitations, the theory suggests that they may prioritize partners with greater financial resources or earning potential as a means of maximizing their overall utility.

This economic approach to mate selection doesn't negate the importance of emotional connection or compatibility but recognizes the practical considerations that often factor into relationship decisions.

Bargaining models in relationship economics offer another valuable perspective on how financial resources influence dating dynamics. These models analyze how resources are distributed within relationships and how financial power dynamics affect relationship stability and mate selection. For women with fewer financial resources, these models suggest that they may have less bargaining power in relationships, potentially influencing their choices and opportunities in the dating market.

The implications of these economic theories extend beyond initial mate selection to shape the trajectory of relationships. Financial considerations can influence decisions about relationship progression, cohabitation, and long-term commitment. For women facing economic constraints, these factors may lead to more cautious approaches to dating and relationship formation, as they navigate the complex interplay between emotional connection and financial stability.

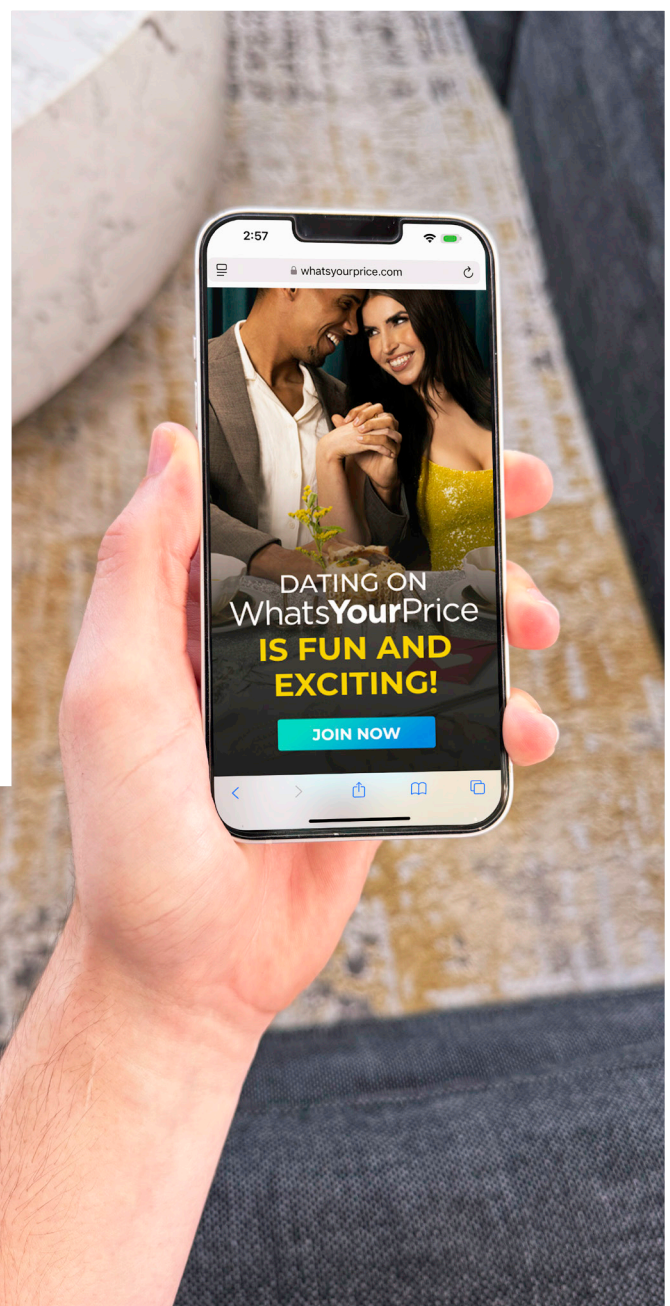
IMPACT OF DATING COSTS ON SINGLE WOMEN AND MATE SELECTION OPPORTUNITIES

The financial aspects of dating can have profound effects on single women's participation in the dating market and their opportunities for mate selection. High costs associated with dating can lead to reduced frequency of dating activities, limiting opportunities to meet potential partners. This effect may be more pronounced for women who bear a disproportionate share of dating expenses or face higher societal expectations regarding appearance and behavior.

When faced with financial constraints, women may adopt various strategies to navigate the dating landscape. Some may choose to prioritize quality over quantity, opting for fewer but more meaningful dating experiences. Others may seek out low-cost or free dating activities, such as walks in the park, coffee dates, or attendance at community events. While these strategies can help mitigate the financial burden of dating, they may also limit the range of experiences and potential connections available.

The advent of online dating has transformed the dating landscape, offering new opportunities for connection but also introducing new cost structures. While online dating platforms can increase access to potential partners, they often come with their own set of expenses, including subscription fees and the costs associated with maintaining an online presence. For women balancing multiple financial responsibilities, these additional costs can create new barriers to participation in the dating market.

Moreover, the digital dating landscape may exacerbate existing financial disparities in the dating market. Premium features on dating apps, which often provide increased visibility or more advanced matching algorithms, come at an additional cost. Women with limited financial resources may find themselves at a disadvantage in this digital marketplace, potentially reducing their visibility and opportunities for connection.



FINANCIAL HEALTH AND GENDER DISPARITIES



Research by the Financial Health Network shows a sizable gap in the financial health of men and women. Recent data found that while financial health improved overall for the country during the pandemic, the gap between men and women actually widened. According to data drawn from a nationally representative survey of individuals ages 18-64, conducted November-December 2021, only 20% of women were found to be considered financially healthy, compared to 29% of men. Furthermore, women are more likely to be financially vulnerable (24%) than men (17%). Even after controlling for income and other demographic factors, women are 5 percentage points less likely to be financially healthy than men.

These financial health disparities have far-reaching implications for dating dynamics. Women who are financially vulnerable may feel additional pressure in dating situations, potentially leading to compromised decision-making or increased stress. The financial disparity between genders can also influence power dynamics within relationships, potentially affecting the quality and longevity of romantic partnerships.

For single women navigating the dating market, financial vulnerability can create additional challenges. The stress of managing limited resources while trying to meet societal expectations for dating can be overwhelming. This financial strain may lead some women to prioritize financial stability in potential partners, potentially limiting their dating pool or influencing their approach to relationship formation.

Financial health disparities can impact women's confidence and self-esteem in the dating context. Women who feel financially insecure may be less likely to initiate dates or may feel pressure to accept financial support from potential partners, even if it makes them uncomfortable. This dynamic may create imbalances in relationships from the outset and may influence the trajectory of romantic connections.

CHANGING NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS

Despite the persistence of traditional gender norms in dating economics, there are signs of changing expectations regarding financial responsibilities in dating.

Recent surveys indicate a shift towards more equitable arrangements, with nearly half of female respondents reporting that they typically split the bill on dates. This trend reflects broader societal changes in gender roles and expectations, as women continue to make strides in professional and economic spheres.

However, it's important to note that these changes are not uniform across all demographics or cultural contexts. In many settings, traditional expectations for men to bear the majority of dating expenses remain strong. A survey found that 83% of men report always paying for dates, while only 5% of women report always paying. This disparity highlights the complex and often contradictory nature of evolving dating norms.

The shift towards more balanced financial responsibilities in dating has the potential to alleviate some of the financial pressures faced by women in the dating market. As expectations for shared expenses become more commonplace, women may feel less burdened by the costs associated with dating. This could potentially lead to increased participation in dating activities and more diverse dating experiences for women across different socioeconomic backgrounds.

However, it's crucial to recognize that these changing norms may also create new challenges. As financial considerations become more openly discussed in dating contexts, there may be increased pressure on both men and women to demonstrate financial stability or success. For women already facing financial constraints, this shift could potentially create new barriers or sources of stress in the dating landscape.



PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS ON DATING

The financial aspects of dating can have significant psychological impacts, particularly for women. The stress and anxiety related to meeting societal expectations and managing dating expenses can take a toll on mental well-being. Women may experience reduced self-esteem or confidence due to perceived inability to participate fully in dating activities or meet societal standards of attractiveness.

The psychological burden of financial constraints in dating can manifest in various ways. The 2018 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) of the adult population revealed that higher financial worries were significantly associated with higher psychological distress. Additionally, the association between financial worries and psychological distress was more pronounced among the unmarried, the unemployed, lower-income households, and renters than their counterparts.

Women may feel pressure to present an image that aligns with societal expectations, even if it stretches their financial resources. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy or anxiety about maintaining

appearances. Furthermore, the stress of managing dating expenses while balancing other financial responsibilities can create cognitive load, potentially impacting decision-making and overall enjoyment of dating experiences.

Financial constraints can also influence women's sense of agency and empowerment in dating situations. Women who feel financially vulnerable may be less likely to assert their preferences or boundaries in dating contexts, potentially leading to imbalanced relationship dynamics. The fear of being judged for their financial situation may also lead some women to avoid dating altogether, further limiting their opportunities for connection and companionship.

Moreover, the potential for financial dependency or imbalanced power dynamics in relationships can create psychological strain and impact overall relationship satisfaction. Women who enter relationships from a position of financial vulnerability may struggle with feelings of indebtedness or lack of autonomy, which can undermine the foundation of healthy partnerships.



LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF DATING COSTS ON RELATIONSHIP FORMATION

The financial barriers to dating can have long-term implications for relationship formation and broader social structures. Research by Benjamin Karney, funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has highlighted how a couples' socioeconomic context facilitates some choices and constrains others, resulting in different capacities for relationship maintenance.

When individuals, particularly women, are inhibited from fully participating in the dating market due to financial constraints, it can impact their ability to form long-term partnerships.



This, in turn, can affect broader social patterns such as marriage rates, family formation, and social support networks.

The cumulative effect of financial barriers in dating may contribute to delayed relationship milestones, such as cohabitation or marriage. For women who face greater financial pressures in dating, the path to long-term partnership may be more challenging, potentially leading to increased rates of singlehood or alternative relationship structures. These shifts in relationship patterns can have broader societal implications, influencing everything from housing markets to social support systems for aging populations.

Financial constraints in dating can potentially reinforce existing socioeconomic disparities.

If individuals are limited to dating within their own socioeconomic bracket due to financial barriers, it may reduce opportunities for social mobility through romantic partnerships. This can have intergenerational effects, impacting the socioeconomic prospects of future generations.

The long-term psychological impact of navigating financial constraints in dating should also not be underestimated. Prolonged exposure to the stress and anxiety associated with managing dating expenses can potentially lead to burnout or disillusionment with the dating process. This may cause some individuals, particularly women facing ongoing financial pressures, to withdraw from the dating market, further limiting their opportunities for companionship and long-term partnership.

CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN DATING ECONOMICS

It's important to acknowledge that the economic aspects of dating and their impact on women can vary significantly across cultures. In some societies, traditional gender roles may be more entrenched, placing a higher financial burden on women in terms of appearance and dating expectations. In contrast, other cultures may have more egalitarian approaches to dating economics, with costs more evenly distributed between partners.

Cross-cultural studies on dating economics reveal diverse patterns in how financial responsibilities are negotiated in romantic contexts. For example, in some East Asian countries, the concept of “couple culture” has led to more equitable sharing of dating expenses. Dr Shuang Qiu writes that, “under the individualisation thesis, people are seen to place less emphasis on lifelong marriage and have more freedom to extricate themselves from fixed social roles and contractual familial obligations, arguably leading to a transformation of intimacy.” In these contexts, couples often pool resources and share costs for dates and relationship-related expenses, potentially reducing the financial burden on individual partners.

By contrast, in certain Middle Eastern cultures, men are still largely expected to bear the financial burden of courtship. This expectation can create significant pressure on men to demonstrate financial stability and generosity, while potentially limiting women's agency in dating decisions. Understanding cultural variation is crucial for developing a comprehensive view of how dating costs impact women globally and for crafting culturally sensitive interventions to address financial barriers in dating.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN MITIGATING FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO DATING

Education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' financial capabilities and, by extension, their ability to navigate the economic aspects of dating. Higher levels of education are often correlated with increased earning potential and financial literacy, which can help mitigate some of the financial barriers to dating. For women, education can be particularly empowering, providing the tools and resources to achieve greater financial independence and potentially reducing the impact of traditional gender expectations in dating economics.

However, the relationship between education and dating economics is complex. While higher education can lead to increased financial resources, it can also delay entry into the dating market due to the time and focus required for academic pursuits. Additionally, the burden of student debt can create new financial pressures that impact dating behaviors and choices. Understanding the nuanced role of education in shaping dating economics is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies to address financial barriers in the dating landscape.

Educational institutions and programs have the potential to play a significant role in preparing individuals, particularly women, to navigate the financial aspects of dating and relationships. Financial literacy courses that address budgeting for social activities, understanding the long-term financial implications of relationships, and strategies for balancing personal financial goals with dating expenses could be valuable additions to educational curricula.

THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE ON DATING EXPECTATIONS

Media and popular culture play a significant role in shaping societal expectations around dating, including its financial aspects. Romantic comedies, reality dating shows, and social media influencers often portray idealized versions of dating that may not reflect realistic financial situations for many individuals, particularly women. These portrayals can create unrealistic expectations about the level of financial investment required for successful dating, potentially exacerbating the financial pressures faced by women in the dating market.

The pervasive influence of media on dating expectations can lead to a disconnect between aspirational dating experiences and financial realities. This disconnect may contribute to feelings of inadequacy or frustration among individuals who cannot meet these idealized standards. Critically examining and challenging these media portrayals is essential for developing more realistic and inclusive narratives around dating economics.

Social media platforms have introduced new dimensions to the economics of dating. The pressure to present a curated image of one's life online can lead to increased spending on experiences and appearances specifically for social media content. This "Instagram effect" can create additional financial strain, particularly for women who may feel pressure to maintain a certain lifestyle or appearance to be considered attractive in the dating market.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND POTENTIAL INTERVENTIONS

Addressing the financial barriers to dating, particularly for women, requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses both individual and societal level interventions. At the policy level, initiatives that promote gender equality in the workplace and reduce the gender pay gap can help alleviate some of the financial pressures faced by women in the dating market. Policies that support affordable housing, transportation, and healthcare can reduce overall financial strain, potentially freeing up resources for dating activities.

On a societal level, challenging traditional gender norms and expectations around dating economics is crucial. This can involve promoting more equitable sharing of dating expenses and challenging stereotypes about who should bear the financial burden in romantic pursuits. Educational programs that focus on financial literacy and healthy relationship dynamics can empower individuals to navigate the economic aspects of dating more effectively.

Community-based interventions can also play a role in addressing financial barriers to dating. Local organizations could organize low-cost social events or dating activities that provide opportunities for connection without significant financial investment. These initiatives could help create more inclusive dating environments.

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SUMMARY

Hongbao in Modern Dating: A Transformative Approach

CONCEPT AND PURPOSE

- Hongbao, traditionally, is a Chinese custom of giving red envelopes containing money
- Hongbao is proposed as a novel addition to contemporary dating practice, particularly for first dates
- This integration aims to address challenges in contemporary associations and foster deeper connections

KEY BENEFITS

- Promotes intentionality and respect in dating
- Counterbalances superficial aspects of modern dating culture
- Signals seriousness and willingness to invest in the connections
- Serves as a tangible symbol of appreciation for time and company
- Introduces an element of tradition and cultural significance to dating

ADDRESSING CONTEMPORARY DATING CHALLENGES

- Combats issues like superficiality, uncertainty, and lack of commitment
- Specifically, Hongbao has significant potential for addressing occurrences such as ghosting
- Resolves and addresses a growing crisis of trust in the online dating ecosystem
- It provides a unique way to express interest and affection
- Offers a muted indicator of financial stability

SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE

- Represents generosity, goodwill, and wishes for prosperity
- Aligns with modern dating norms valuing kindness and thoughtfulness
- Serves as a gesture of commitment and hope for a shared future
- Adds a layer of intentional significance to the dating experience
- It adds an access point to Guanxi pointing not just to the existence of relationships but to their nature: to having personal trust within a strong relationship.

INTERPERSONAL INTEGRATION

- Bridges different personal backgrounds and reference points, establishing an equalizing factor
- Promotes opening dialogue about values
- Promotes conversation around connective expectations
- Offers a means of expression of appreciation and identity affirmation
- Presents a mechanism for identity assertion
- Encourages reflection on intentionality as it relates to personal values and beliefs within connections

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

- Typically given prior to a first date
- Adaptable to manifold/diverse couple dynamics
- Emphasizes the gesture's symbolic value aligned with its monetary aspect
- Ease of use e-format
- Facilitates clear, upfront communication around expectation vs intention
- Opportunity to brand and own the core mechanism of the “offer,” ie, literally the ‘wow’ effect

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION

- Risk of misunderstandings—or triggers—if matches are unfamiliar with the tradition
- Possibility of perception as transactional or materialistic
- An opportunity to connect precisely—unambiguously—where the two parties are on a continuum
- Hongbao implies a need for sensitivity to mutual comfort levels and cultural perspective

CONTRAST WITH TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

- Hongbao involves distinctive customs and etiquette
- Modern dating emphasizes flexibility and personal autonomy
- Integration requires balancing traditional rituals with contemporary norms

BROADER BRAND IMPLICATIONS

- Self-inoculation—the mechanism refocuses, reevaluates, and refines the connotations attached to WYP nomenclature, recoding it.
- Aligns with evolving benchmarks and interpretations of equality, personal investment, and recompense
- Emphasizes and quantifies a value attached to a time/effort/expense metric

This integration of Hongbao into contemporary dating offers a unique blend of traditional and contemporary interpersonal and dating dynamics, transforming the dating experience by fostering deeper connections, mutual respect, and establishing a shared dynamic of intentionality.

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF DATING

The pursuit of romantic relationships in modern society often comes with substantial hidden costs, both financial and non-financial. A study by Novuna Personal Finance revealed “that, the average single adult in the UK spends a considerable £1,652 and goes on 15 dates before meeting that special someone. When it comes to the cost of an individual date, the most people spend is around £60, with men and women tending to splash out at almost the same rate – men spending at most, on average, £68.” This figure, while significant on its own, does not fully capture the breadth of investments made by individuals in the dating process.

Financial Investments

The most apparent expenses in dating are indeed financial. It includes dining out and entertainment, including restaurant bills, movie tickets, concert passes, and other activity fees. Consider transportation costs for gas, public transit fares, or rideshare services to meet the intended date. Then there are gifts and tokens of affection such as expenses for flowers, chocolates, or other presents to show appreciation.

New clothing and accessories that may be needed and may include purchasing clothing or accessory items specifically for dates. Personal grooming that include haircuts, manicures, or other beauty treatments to look your best, are another added cost.

Additional financial costs may include dating app subscriptions as popular dating platforms offer premium features for a fee. Broader travel expense are associated with long-distance relationships or romantic getaways while contraception and sexual health expenses for protection and regular health check-ups figure prominently for those who are dating.

Dating also requires a significant investment of time that would include planning and preparation as well as time spent on actual dates. Commuting to and from date locations takes time as does the time invested in getting to know someone through conversations, texting, or calls.

However, the disparity in direct date expenses does not tell the full story of the economic burden of dating.

The Disproportionate Burden on Women

While both men and women make substantial investments in the dating process, evidence suggests that women often bear a disproportionate burden, particularly in terms of non-financial investments and hidden costs.

Women typically invest more time and resources in preparation for dates. The Novuna Personal Finance study found that 41% of women reported purchasing new clothes or accessories for a first date, compared to 35% of men. Additionally, women often incur higher costs for personal grooming, including hair styling and treatments, makeup and skincare products, as well as manicures and other beauty services. These expenses, while not directly related to the date itself, represent significant investments made by women in the dating process.

Women also tend to invest more emotional labor in dating interactions, including managing expectations and boundaries. Women navigate potentially uncomfortable or unsafe situations while dealing with unwanted attention or harassment. Furthermore, women often face additional safety considerations when dating, which can lead to increased costs for transportation or choice of venue.

For particularly attractive individuals, especially women who may receive frequent date invitations, the cumulative costs of dating can be substantial. These individuals may face higher opportunity costs as they navigate multiple dating prospects, potentially sacrificing time and resources that could be directed towards other personal or professional pursuits.

Balancing Investments Through Red Envelopes

Given the imbalances and hidden costs inherent in modern dating, Hongbao offers a solution that could help balance investments and reduce friction in the dating process. In the context of modern dating, the red envelope concept may be reimagined as a way to acknowledge and offset investments made by one or both parties, particularly the often-overlooked costs incurred by women.

Acknowledgment of Hidden Costs

The act of giving Hongbao serves as a tangible recognition of the often overlooked investments made by both parties, particularly women, in preparation for a date. These hidden costs may include:

- Time spent on physical preparation (hair, makeup, apparel selection)
- Expenses for new clothing, accessories, or beauty treatments
- Emotional labor in anticipation of the date
- Opportunity costs of forgoing other activities or work

By acknowledging these investments through Hongbao, it fosters mutual respect and understanding between partners. It demonstrates an awareness of the effort involved in dating and shows appreciation for the other person's time and energy. This acknowledgment can set a positive tone for the relationship, emphasizing consideration and empathy from the outset.

Offsetting Financial Burdens

For women who may incur higher preparation costs, receiving Hongbao may help offset expenses, making the overall investment in dating more equitable, addresses equality issues.

Women frequently spend more on appearance-related expenses for dates. Hongbao helps equalize this disparity. Knowing that some costs will be offset can alleviate anxiety about dating expenses.

Women who hesitate to date due to financial constraints may feel more comfortable accepting invitations. Hongbao recognizes that both parties contribute to the date, even if in different ways.

Reducing Hesitation

By alleviating some of the financial pressure associated with dating, the Hongbao concept could make individuals, particularly women, more willing to commit and engage in first dates. This increased openness could lead to more opportunities for meaningful connections. Specifically, Hongbao reduces financial obstacles that might prevent or inhibit someone from dating. It encourages more frequent dating since, given reduced financial stress, many may be open to going on more dates.

Those who might limit themselves to certain socioeconomic groups due to cost concerns may feel more comfortable dating more widely. With financial pressures reduced, individuals are able to focus more on personal connection rather than external economic factors.

Signaling Intentionality

The act of presenting Hongbao demonstrates a level of seriousness and intentionality in pursuing a relationship. This may help filter out less committed individuals and reduce the likelihood of casual or insincere dating attempts. Benefits include a clear communication of intent as it shows the giver is serious about exploring a potential relationship.

Presenting Hongbao is a mechanism to help weed out those looking for overtly casual encounters. It establishes a tone of mutual respect and consideration from the start. It may even prompt the recipient to approach the date with a greater awareness and increased seriousness. And effort.

Social Justification and Potential Outcomes

The integration of Hongbao into modern dating practices can be socially justified on several grounds. The concept of red envelopes in dating addresses a significant imbalance in the traditional dating dynamic, particularly in heterosexual relationships. Historically, women have often borne disproportionate costs in terms of time, effort, and financial investment in preparation for dates.

By introducing red envelopes, this imbalance is acknowledged and partially offset. The practice recognizes that both parties are making investments in the dating process, even if these investments take different forms. This approach aligns with modern values of gender equality and fairness in relationships, potentially leading to more balanced and respectful interactions from the outset.

Respect for Time (and Effort)

In today's often fast-paced society, time is increasingly viewed as a valuable commodity. The Hongbao practice in dating explicitly acknowledges the value of time and effort invested by both parties. This acknowledgment demonstrates appreciation for the other person's commitment to the date. It recognizes the opportunity cost of choosing to spend time on a date and sets a tone of mutual respect and consideration from the beginning.

By tangibly recognizing these investments, the practice fosters a culture of appreciation and respect in dating. This leads to more meaningful interaction and a greater sense of mutual valuation between potential partners.

Reduction of Economic Barriers

Economic considerations can be a significant barrier to dating for many individuals, particularly in challenging financial times. The red envelope concept may help alleviate some of these pressures by offsetting the costs associated with dating for the recipient and reducing financial anxiety that might prevent someone from accepting a date invitation. It allows individuals to focus on personal connection rather than financial concerns.

This aspect of the practice is particularly relevant in addressing socioeconomic disparities in dating. It can enable a more diverse range of individuals to participate in dating activities, potentially leading to more inclusive and varied romantic connections.

Promotion of Meaningful Connections

The red envelope practice has the potential to increase willingness to engage in first dates, which could lead to more opportunities for genuine romantic connections. This is achieved through reducing financial friction that might otherwise deter potential dates and signaling seriousness and intentionality in pursuing a relationship. Hongbao creates a unique shared experience that can foster deeper initial connections.

By removing some of the hesitation associated with first dates, this practice could encourage more people to take chances on potential relationships. This increased openness could lead to a greater number of meaningful connections forming, which might not have occurred in more traditional dating scenarios.

Adaptation of Traditional Practices

The red envelope concept represents a thoughtful adaptation of traditional gift-giving practices to address contemporary social challenges. Hongbao preserves cultural elements while making them relevant to modern dating and introduces a unique ritual that can add depth and meaning to the dating process. Hongbao provides a bridge between traditional values and contemporary relationship dynamics.

By reimagining this traditional practice in a modern context, Hongbao offers a way to honor cultural heritage while addressing current social needs. This adaptation demonstrates how traditional practices can evolve to remain relevant and beneficial in changing social landscapes.

The integration of Hongbao into modern dating practices offers a multifaceted approach to addressing several challenges in contemporary dating. It promotes equity, respect, and intentionality while potentially reducing economic barriers and fostering more meaningful connections.

A. FIRST DATE COST BREAKDOWN

The cost of a first date may vary significantly depending on several factors, such as location, lifestyle, and the date type.

\$45-\$110

Makeup & Grooming:

Makeup Products
cost: \$15-\$30

Hair styling
cost: \$30-\$80

\$50-\$150

Apparel:

New Outfit: \$50-\$150
For Dress, Shoes
and Accessories

No New Outfit: \$0.

\$10-\$40

Transportation:

Taxi or rideshare: \$10-\$40

Public transport: \$2-\$10

Personal automobile
(gas and parking): \$10-\$20

\$45-\$100

Babysitting:

(if applicable):

By the hour cost:
\$15-\$25 per hour,

3-4 hours date cost:
\$45-\$100

ESTIMATED TOTAL COSTS:

\$30-\$60

Low Estimate

No new clothes, home makeup,
and public transportation

\$150-\$300+

High Estimate

New clothes, professional hair
styling, babysitter, rideshare

B. FIRST DATE LOSS OF INCOME BREAKDOWN

Considering average cost factors incurred due to time or income loss, how many hours may otherwise have been spent working and earning money? Here, we consider the average earning potential, assuming she is a recent college graduate. To estimate the opportunity costs for going on a first date, we account for the potential earnings they forgo while preparing for and attending the date. This involves combining the direct costs of the date with the indirect costs of lost income, representing the opportunity cost.

1. Direct Costs:

\$100

Estimated the direct costs of makeup, apparel, transportation, and babysitting.
(it may vary, we'll assume a mid-range figure)

2. Opportunity Costs:

\$25/h

Average hourly earnings: \$20 and \$30 per hour, depending on their industry, location, and career path.

3-4h

Time Spent on a First Date:

Preparation time:
1-2 hours

Date duration:
3-4 hours

1h

Travel Time:

30 minutes to
1 hour round trip.

\$125

Lost Income Date Time Spent:

5 hours x \$25/hour = \$125

6 hours x \$25/hour = \$150

3. Total Costs:

Add up both the direct and opportunity costs:

Direct costs: \$100
Opportunity cost: \$125-\$150.

\$250

TOTAL ESTIMATED COST OF THE FIRST DATE:

\$225 to \$250

C. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—USA

Cost of living, earning potential, and other factors vary significantly by location. Next, we break down the total cost of a first date for a recent college graduate in three different locations: a major city (e.g., New York City), a mid-sized city (e.g., Austin, Texas), and a smaller town (e.g., a suburban/rural area in the Midwest). This provides a more impartial picture of how environmental factors impact direct and opportunity costs.

BREAKDOWN	NEW YORK	AUSTIN	MIDWEST SUBURBAN TOWN
EARNING POTENTIAL	\$30-\$35 /hr	\$25-\$30 /hr	\$20-\$25 /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	\$20-\$40	\$15-\$30	\$10-\$20
Apparel	\$100-\$200	\$75-\$150	\$50-\$100
Transportation	\$15 - \$40	\$10 - \$25	\$5 - \$15
Babysitting	\$60 - \$120	\$45 - \$100	\$30 - \$80
Total Direct Cost	\$135 - \$360	\$100 - \$305	\$95 - \$215
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30min -1 Hour	30 mins
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	\$30 x 5h= \$150	\$25 x 5h= \$125	\$20 x 4.5h= \$90
	\$35 x 7h= \$245	\$30 x 6h= \$180	\$25 x 6h= \$150
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	\$135 + \$150 = \$285	\$100 + \$125 = \$225	\$95 + \$90 = \$185
High End	\$360 + \$245 = \$605	\$305 + \$180 = \$485	\$215 + \$150 = \$365

Key Factors Affecting Costs USA:

- Earnings potential is significantly higher in major cities, leading to higher opportunity costs.
- Direct costs, such as makeup, Apparel, and babysitting, are higher in larger cities due to higher living costs and price premiums on goods and services.
- Transportation costs vary based on the availability of public transport or the need for rideshare services.

D. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—CANADA

When looking at locations in Canada, costs vary depending on whether calculations are based on major cities (Toronto); mid-sized cities such as Calgary, or smaller towns and rural areas.

BREAKDOWN	TORONTO	CALGARY, ALBERTA	SMALL TOWN IN ONTARIO
EARNING POTENTIAL	\$25-\$35 CAD /hr	\$23-\$30 CAD /hr	\$18-\$25 CAD /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	\$20-\$40 CAD	\$15-\$30 CAD	\$10-\$20 CAD
Apparel	\$100-\$200 CAD	\$75-\$150 CAD	\$50-\$100 CAD
Transportation	\$10-\$40 CAD	\$10 - \$25 CAD	\$5-\$15 CAD
Babysitting	\$54-\$100 CAD	\$45 - \$80 CAD	\$36-\$72 CAD
Total Direct Cost	\$130-\$380 CAD	\$100-\$285 CAD	\$90-\$207 CAD
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30 min-1 Hour	30 min
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	\$25 x 5h= \$125 CAD	\$23 x 5h= \$115 CAD	\$18 x 4.5h= \$81 CAD
	\$35 x 7h= \$245 CAD	\$30 x 6h= \$180 CAD	\$25 x 6h= \$150 CAD
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	\$135 + \$125 = \$255 CAD	\$100 + \$115 = \$215 CAD	\$90 + \$81 = \$171 CAD
High End	\$380 + \$245 = \$625 CAD	\$280 + \$180 = \$465 CAD	\$207 + \$150 = \$357 CAD

Key Factors Affecting Costs in Canada:

- Earnings potential tends to be higher in cities like Toronto.
- Direct costs for things like transportation and babysitting are higher in cities.
- Apparel and makeup prices can be relatively similar across different regions, but luxury choices are more accessible in larger cities.

E. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—UK

In the United Kingdom, the costs associated with a first date will vary between a major city like London, a mid-sized city like Manchester, or a smaller town or rural area.

BREAKDOWN	LONDON	MANCHESTER	SMALL TOWN IN ENGLAND
EARNING POTENTIAL	£15-£20 /hr	£12-£16 /hr	£10-£12 /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	£15-£30	£10-£25	£8-£20
Apparel	£50-£150	£40-£100	£30-£80
Transportation	£5-£40	£5-£25	£5-£15
Babysitting	£30-£60	£24-£48	£21-£40
Total Direct Cost	£100-£280	£79-£198	£64-£155
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30min -1 Hour	30 mins
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	£15 x 5h= £75	£12 x 5h= £60	£10 x 4.5h= £45
	£20 x 7h= £140	£16 x 6h= £96	£12 x 6h= £72
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	£100 +£75= £175	£79 + £60 = £139	£64 + £45 = £109
High End	£280 + £140 = £420	£198 + £96 = £294	£155 + £72 = £227

Key Factors Affecting Costs in the UK:

- Earnings potential is higher in cities like London, leading to greater opportunity costs compared to smaller towns.
- Direct costs, including transportation, babysitting, and Apparel, are higher in cities like London, where the cost of living is substantially higher than in mid-sized cities or rural areas.
- Transportation in a major city like London can be a significant expense, especially if relying on taxis or rideshares instead of public transportation.
- Apparel and makeup costs are relatively stable across the country but can rise in areas with more luxury shopping options.

F. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—AUSTRALIA

Here is a breakdown of costs for a first date in these three locations:
Sydney, Brisbane, and a small town in regional Australia.

BREAKDOWN	SYDNEY	BRISBANE	SMALL TOWN IN AUSTRALIA
EARNING POTENTIAL	AUD \$28-\$35 /hr	AUD \$25-\$30 /hr	AUD \$20-\$25 /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	AUD \$20-\$40	AUD \$15-\$30	AUD \$10-\$20
Apparel	AUD \$80-\$200	AUD \$60-\$150	AUD \$50-\$100
Transportation	AUD \$10-\$40	AUD \$10-\$25	AUD \$5-\$15
Babysitting	AUD \$60-\$100	AUD \$45-\$80	AUD \$36-\$72
Total Direct Cost	AUD \$170-\$380	AUD \$130-\$285	AUD \$101-\$207
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30 min-1 Hour	30 min
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	\$28 x 5h= AUD \$140	\$25 x 5h= AUD \$125	\$20 x 4.5h= AUD \$90
	\$35 x 7h= AUD \$245	\$30 x 6h= AUD \$180	\$25 x 6h= AUD \$150
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	\$170 + \$140 = AUD \$310	\$130 + \$125 = AUD \$255	\$101 + \$90 = AUD \$191
High End	\$380 + \$245 = AUD \$625	\$285 + \$180 = AUD \$465	\$207 + \$150 = AUD \$357

Key Factors Affecting Costs in Australia:

- Earnings potential is higher in cities like Sydney, leading to higher opportunity costs compared to rural areas or smaller towns.
- Direct costs such as Apparel, transportation, and babysitting are more expensive in major cities.
- Transportation costs in a large city like Sydney or Brisbane will vary greatly depending on the distance and whether rideshare or public transport is used, while rural areas typically have lower costs due to shorter distances.
- Makeup and grooming expenses are relatively consistent across locations but may increase slightly in major cities due to the availability of higher-end brands.

G. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—FRANCE

A break down the costs for a first date in these three locations:
Paris, Lyon, and a small town or rural area in France.

BREAKDOWN	PARIS	LYON	SMALL TOWN IN FRANCE
EARNING POTENTIAL	€15-€20 /hr	€12-€16 /hr	€10-€12 /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	€20-€40	€15-€30	€10-€20
Apparel	€70-€200	€50-€150	€30-€80
Transportation	€5-€20	€5-€15	€5-€10
Babysitting	€30-€60	€24-€48	€21-€40
Total Direct Cost	€125-€320	€94-€243	€66-€150
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30min -1 Hour	30 mins
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	€15 x 5h= €75	€12 x 5h= €60	€10 x 4.5h= €45
	€20 x 7h= €140	€16 x 6h= €96	€12 x 6h= €72
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	€125 + €75= €200	€94 + €60 = €154	€66 + €45 = €111
High End	€320 + €140 = €460	€243 + €96 = €339	€150 + €72 = €222

Key Factors Affecting Costs in France:

- Earnings potential is higher in major cities like Paris, leading to higher opportunity costs compared to smaller towns or rural areas.
- Direct costs, such as Apparel, transportation, and babysitting, are generally higher in Paris due to its status as a global city.
- Transportation costs in Paris are higher than in smaller cities or towns, especially if using rideshare services like Uber or taxis. However, public transport is more affordable.
- Makeup and grooming products in rural areas tend to be more affordable and accessible through pharmacies, while in cities like Paris, there are many luxury brand options.

H. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—SPAIN

A breakdown of the costs in three typical locations: Madrid, Seville, and a small town or rural area in Spain:

BREAKDOWN	MADRID	SEVILLE	SMALL TOWN IN SPAIN
EARNING POTENTIAL	€12-€18 /hr	€10-€14 /hr	€8-€10 /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	€15-€30	€12-€25	€10-€20
Apparel	€50-€150	€40-€100	€30-€70
Transportation	€5-€25	€5-€15	€5-€10
Babysitting	€24-€48	€21-€40	€18-€32
Total Direct Cost	€94-€253	€78-€180	€63-€132
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30 min-1 Hour	30 min
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	€12 x 5h= €60	€10 x 5h= €50	€8 x 4.5h= €36
	€18 x 7h= €126	€14 x 6h= €84	€10 x 6h= €60
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	€94 + €60 = €154	€78 + €50 = €128	€63 + €36 = €99
High End	€253 + €126 = €379	€180 + €84 = €264	€132 + €60 = €192

Key Factors Affecting Costs in Spain:

- Earnings potential is higher in major cities like Madrid.
- Direct costs, such as Apparel, transportation, and babysitting, tend to be more expensive in cities like Madrid compared to smaller towns.
- Transportation costs in Madrid are generally higher.
- Makeup and grooming prices are fairly consistent across Spain, but luxury options are more readily available in larger cities.

I. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—CHINA

Here's a breakdown of the typical costs associated with a first date in three locations: Beijing, Chengdu, and a smaller town or rural area in China.

BREAKDOWN	BEIJING	CHENGDU	SMALL TOWN IN CHINA
EARNING POTENTIAL	¥40-¥60 /hr	¥30-¥50 /hr	¥20-¥30 /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	¥100-¥300	¥80-¥200	¥50-¥100
Apparel	¥300-¥800	¥200-¥600	¥100-¥300
Transportation	¥10-¥50	¥5-¥30	¥5-¥10
Babysitting	¥120-¥320	¥90-¥200	¥60-¥120
Total Direct Cost	¥530-¥1,470	¥375-¥1,030	¥215-¥530
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30min -1 Hour	30 mins
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	¥40 x 5h= ¥200	¥30 x 5h= ¥150	¥20 x 4.5h= ¥90
	¥60 x 7h= ¥420	¥50 x 6h= ¥300	¥30 x 6h= ¥180
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	¥530 + ¥200= ¥730	¥375 + ¥150 = ¥525	¥215 + ¥90 = ¥305
High End	¥1,470 + ¥420 = ¥1,890	¥1,030 + ¥300 = ¥1,330	¥530 + ¥180 = ¥710

Key Factors Affecting Costs in China:

- Earnings potential is highest in large cities like Beijing, which results in higher opportunity costs compared to smaller towns and rural areas.
- Direct costs, including Apparel, transportation, and babysitting, are higher in major cities due to the higher cost of living and demand for luxury goods and services.
- Transportation costs in cities like Beijing can vary widely depending on whether public transportation or rideshare services like DiDi are used.
- Makeup and grooming products in rural areas are generally more affordable, while luxury brands are more accessible in major cities.

J. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—INDIA

Below is a detailed breakdown of the costs for a first date in these three locations: Mumbai, Pune, and a smaller town or rural area in India.

BREAKDOWN	MUMBAI	PUNE	RURAL AREA IN INDIA
EARNING POTENTIAL	₹300-₹500 /hr	₹200-₹400 /hr	₹150-₹200 /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	₹500-₹1,500	₹300-₹1,000	₹200-₹500
Apparel	₹1,000-₹3,000	₹800-₹2,000	₹500-₹1,200
Transportation	₹100-₹500	₹50-₹300	₹50-₹100
Babysitting	₹600-₹1,200	₹450-₹1,000	₹300-₹800
Total Direct Cost	₹2,200-₹6,200	₹1,600-₹4,300	₹1,050-₹2,600
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30 min-1 Hour	30 min
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	₹300 x 5h= ₹1,500	₹200 x 5h= ₹1,000	₹150 x 4.5h= ₹675
	₹500 x 7h= ₹3,500	₹400 x 6h= ₹2,400	₹200 x 6h= ₹1,200
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	₹2,200 + ₹1,500 = ₹3,700	₹1,600 + ₹1,000 = ₹2,600	₹1,050 + ₹675 = ₹1,725
High End	₹6,200 + ₹3,500	₹4,300 + ₹2,400 = ₹6,700	₹2,600 + ₹1,200 = ₹3,800

Key Factors Affecting Costs in India:

- Earnings potential is highest in larger cities like Mumbai, which results in higher opportunity costs compared to smaller towns or rural areas.
- Direct costs, including Apparel, transportation, and babysitting, are generally more expensive in major cities.
- Transportation costs in cities like Mumbai can vary significantly depending on whether public transportation (trains or buses) or private transport (Uber, taxis, or auto-rickshaws) is used.
- Makeup and grooming prices vary from budget-friendly options in local shops to premium brands in larger cities.

K. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—JAPAN

Below is a detailed breakdown of the costs for a first date in these three locations: Tokyo, Osaka, and a smaller town or rural area in Japan.

BREAKDOWN	TOKYO	OSAKA	SMALL TOWN IN JAPAN
EARNING POTENTIAL	¥1,500-¥2,500 /hr	¥1,200-¥2,000 /hr	¥1,000-¥1,500 /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	¥2,000-¥5,000	¥1,500-¥4,000	¥1,000-¥3,000
Apparel	¥5,000-¥15,000	¥4,000-¥10,000	¥3,000-¥7,000
Transportation	¥500-¥2,000	¥300-¥1,000	¥300-¥500
Babysitting	¥4,500-¥10,000	¥3,000-¥6,000	¥2,400-¥4,000
Total Direct Cost	¥12,000-¥32,000	¥8,800-¥21,000	¥6,700-¥14,500
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30min -1 Hour	30 mins
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	¥1,500 x 5h= ¥7,500	¥1,200 x 5h= ¥6,000	¥1,000 x 4.5h= ¥4,500
	¥2,500 x 7h= ¥17,500	¥2,000 x 6h= ¥12,000	¥1,500 x 6h= ¥9,000
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	¥12,000 + ¥7,500= ¥19,500	¥8,800 + ¥6,000 = ¥14,800	¥6,700 + ¥4,500 = ¥11,200
High End	¥32,000 + ¥17,500 = ¥49,500	¥21,000 + ¥12,000 = ¥33,000	¥14,500 + ¥9,000 = ¥23,500

Key Factors Affecting Costs in Japan:

- Earnings potential is highest in major cities like Tokyo, which results in higher opportunity costs compared to smaller towns and rural areas.
- Direct costs like Apparel, transportation, and babysitting are more expensive in Tokyo than in other cities or rural areas.
- Transportation costs in cities like Tokyo and Osaka are affordable if public transportation is used, but can increase significantly with taxi or Uber rides.
- Makeup and grooming prices can vary widely, with luxury brands more accessible in major cities.

L. FIRST DATE DETAILED BREAKDOWN BASED ON LOCATION—SOUTH KOREA

In South Korea, the cost of a first date for a recent university graduate will vary depending on whether you're in a major city like Seoul, a mid-sized city like Busan, or a smaller town or rural area. Here's a detailed breakdown of the costs for a first date in these three locations: Seoul, Busan, and a smaller town or rural area in South Korea.

BREAKDOWN	SEOUL	BUSAN	RURAL AREA IN SOUTH KOREA
EARNING POTENTIAL	₩12,000-₩18,000 /hr	₩10,000-₩15,000 /hr	₩8,000-₩10,000 /hr
DIRECT COST:			
Makeup	₩30,000-₩70,000	₩25,000-₩60,000	₩20,000-₩40,000
Apparel	₩70,000-₩150,000	₩50,000-₩120,000	₩40,000-₩80,000
Transportation	₩5,000-₩30,000	₩4,000-₩15,000	₩3,000-₩10,000
Babysitting	₩30,000-₩60,000	₩24,000-₩40,000	₩15,000-₩32,000
Total Direct Cost	₩135,000-₩310,000	₩103,000-₩235,000	₩78,000-₩162,000
OPPORTUNITY COSTS:			
Preparation time	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours	1-2 Hours
Date duration	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours	3-4 Hours
Travel time	1 Hour	30 min-1 Hour	30 min
Total Time Spent	5-7 hours	5-6 hours	4.5-6 hours
Lost Income	₩12,000 x 5h= ₩60,000	₩10,000 x 5h= ₩50,000	₩8,000 x 4.5h= ₩36,000
	₩18,000 x 7h= ₩126,000	₩15,000 x 6h= ₩90,000	₩10,000 x 6h= ₩60,000
TOTAL COSTS:			
Low End	₩135,000 + ₩60,000 = ₩195,000	₩103,000 + ₩50,000 = ₩153,000	₩78,000 + ₩36,000 = ₩114,000
High End	₩310,000 + ₩126,000 = ₩436,000	₩235,000 + ₩90,000 = ₩325,000	₩162,000 + ₩60,000 = ₩222,000

Key Factors Affecting Costs in South Korea:

- Earnings potential is higher in large cities like Seoul, resulting in higher opportunity costs compared to smaller towns and rural areas.
- Direct costs, including Apparel, transportation, and babysitting, tend to be more expensive in Seoul due to higher demand for premium goods and services.
- Transportation costs in major cities like Seoul and Busan are relatively low if using public transportation but can increase significantly when using taxis or ride-sharing services.
- Makeup and grooming costs vary based on the use of local or luxury brands, which are more accessible in larger cities.

