

Otome Games and the Transformation of Marital Expectations among Young Chinese Women



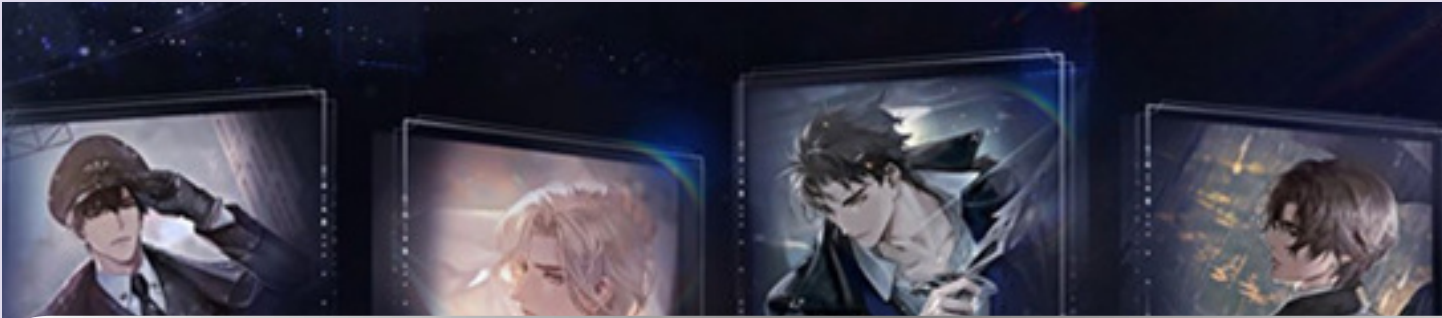
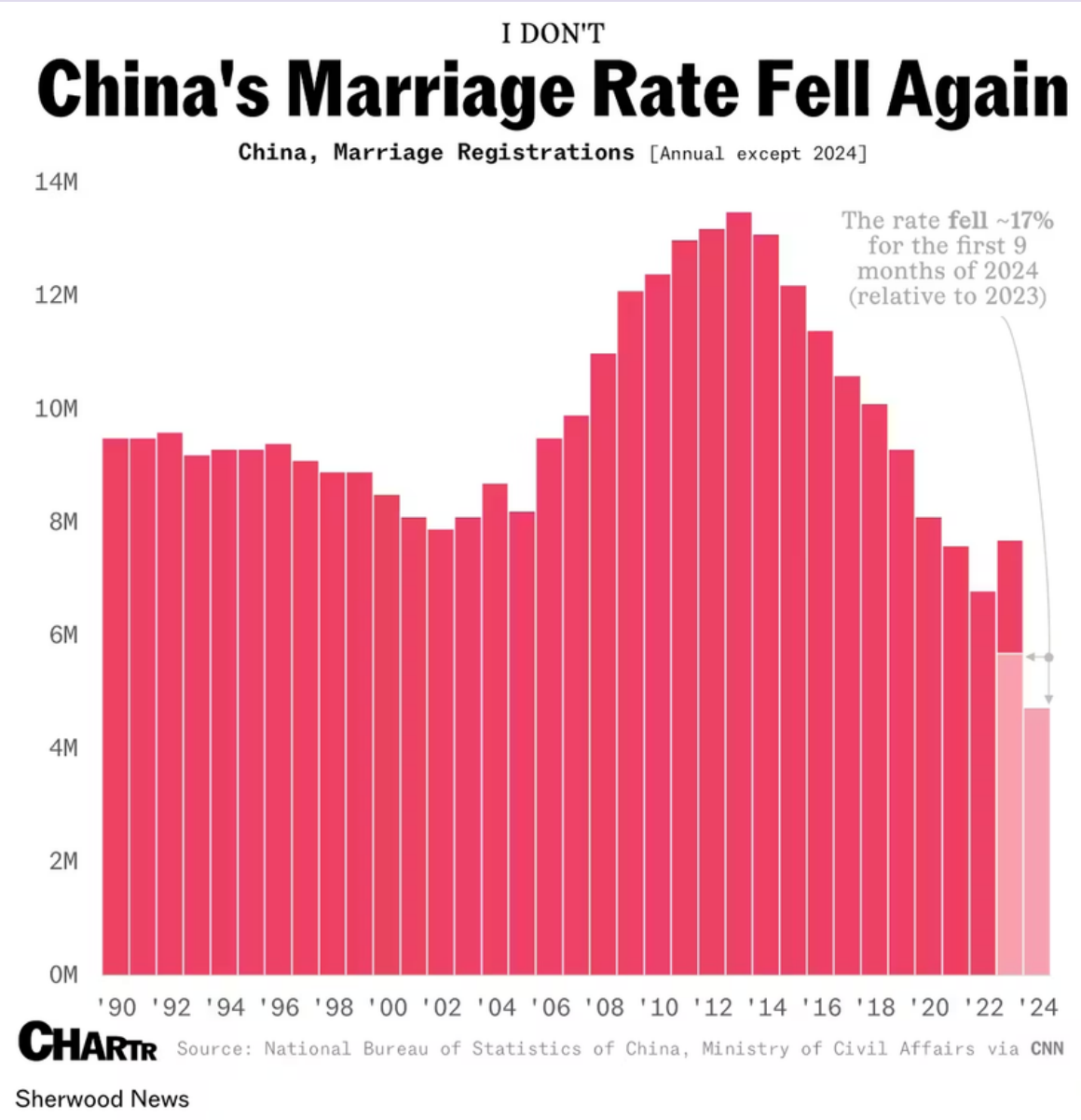
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RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Changing Marriage Attitudes among Young Chinese Women

- Rising education and economic independence
- Declining marriage registrations
- Reconsideration of traditional marriage norms



Otome Games

as Female-Oriented Digital Romance Media

Otome games have become an important popular culture phenomenon.

- companionship systems
- These games provide emotionally responsive and idealized romantic experiences.

RESEARCH PROBLEM & GAPS

Existing research has examined:

- Emotional attachment
- Parasocial interaction
- Gender norms in otome games
- Commodification

However, we still know little about:

- **How women interpret these relationships**
- **How virtual intimacy connects to marriage expectations**



Therefore, this study
Explores ...

HOW young Chinese women connect emotional experiences in otome games to real-life romance and marriage.



RESEARCH QUESTION

How do young Chinese women interpret the emotional connections they develop with male characters in otome games?



RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To investigate young Chinese women's interpretations of their emotional engagement with male characters in otome games.



RESEARCH DESIGN

Approach

Qualitative and interpretive study

- **Focus:**

young Chinese women interpret
emotional connections with otome
game characters

Data Collection

- **Semi-structured online interviews**
- **Recruited via Chinese social media platforms**
- **Snowball sampling**

Participants

- **16 Chinese women**
- **Aged 18–29**
- **Otome game players (≥ 3 months experience)**

Interview Topics

- **Gaming experiences**
- **Emotional engagement with game characters**
- **Connections to real-life relationships and marriage**

Theoretical Framework



**Emotional
Engagement**
(Parasocial
Interaction)

**Relationship
Reflection**
(Mediated
Intimacy)

**Marriage
Attitudes**
(Gendered
Romantic Scripts)

Key Findings

Theme 1: Emotional Attachment and Conscious Investment

Emotional Attachment

- Emotional support
- Companionship
- Feeling seen and validated
- Daily interaction
- Perceived responsiveness

*"Through my interactions with him, I felt that my experiences, my thoughts, and every facet of who I am were truly **seen and validated**." (P6)*

Bounded Investment

Know it is fictional

+

Choose to care

"I don't confuse fantasy with reality... Even if it's virtual, I'm still willing to spend money on it." (P15)

Theme 2: Negotiating Virtual and Real-Life Relationships

Real-world Dissatisfaction

Participants express structural disappointment with real-world heterosexual options:

- **Unequal Power:** Men are perceived as seeking dominant, instrumental, or possessive dynamics rather than mutual, equal partnerships.
- **Structural Problems:** Systemic patriarchal socialization.

Virtual as a Critical Mirror

Otome characters act as alternative partners and critical tools:

- **The Benchmark:** Unconditional respect, active loyalty, and emotional safety show players that unequal treatment in reality is not "normal".
- **Alternative Space:** Safe, low-risk spaces allow players to explore emotional desires without real-world vulnerability.

Theme 3: Transformation of Relationship Expectations

Otome games influenced participants in four ways:

- **Higher standards for intimacy**

respect, empathy, communication, emotional equality

- **More cautious attitudes toward real-life romance**

lower dependence on dating or marriage

- **Greater self-awareness**

valuing one's own feelings and needs

- **Female community support**

emotional sharing, mutual encouragement, recognition of women's feelings, collective support, a sense of belonging

The influence is not only about romance.

It also involves self-worth and emotional agency.

“Now, I have much more nuanced criteria for an ideal partner, such as respecting my wishes and possessing empathy.” (P16)

“Sustaining a relationship absolutely requires mutual contribution and respect.” (P10)

“The characters constantly provide affirmation, trust, and support. This makes me believe more firmly that I am worthy of being loved.” (P9)

“The power among women is incredibly strong... everyone will step in to encourage her.” (P6)

Discussion

Players' **emotional attachment** to virtual characters reflects a form of digitally constructed intimacy rather than **simple one-sided imagination**



Traditional parasocial interaction refers **a sense of intimacy, familiarity, and companionship with media figures.**

- Supported by **Giles (2002)**



Otome games extend parasocial interaction through **interactive features and perceived responsiveness.**

- Supported by **Zhao and Bowman (2026)**



Parasocial interaction describes a **one-sided** emotional connection and **not truly recognized or responded to.**

- Aligned with **Horton and Wohl (1956)**

Discussion

Otome game players use the idealized qualities of virtual characters as a **benchmark** to **critically** assess the power imbalances they encounter in **real-world gender relationships**.



Parasocial romantic relationships in otome games can **influence players' perceptions of real-life intimacy**, and become **benchmarks for evaluating real-life relationships**.

- Supported by **Gao et al. (2025)**.



Character identification and attachment can shape players' **mate selection criteria**.

- Supported by **Pei et al. (2025)**.

Discussion

Engagement with otome games contributes to players' **understanding of intimacy and their emotional experiences of the self.**



Otome games support emotional needs, self-identity, and intimacy development.

- Supported by **Gao et al. (2025)**



Otome games can function as **spaces of digital intimacy literacy**, where **women learn to interpret care, trust, respect, affection, and emotional expression.**

- Supported by **Ge et al. (2025)**

Conclusion

- *Participants formed meaningful emotional attachments to virtual characters while maintaining clear boundaries between fiction and reality.*
- *Emotional engagement with otome games encouraged reflection on real-life relationships and intimacy.*
- *These experiences contributed to higher relationship expectations, greater self-awareness, and stronger emotional agency.*





THANK YOU!

PLEASE REACH OUT IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.