

## THE CHANGING COURSE OF COURTSHIP

*The leaders of the Communist Party inherited the attitudes of early twentieth century reformers who saw the old family system as oppressive to youth and women. In 1950 a Marriage Reform Law was enacted which prohibited parents from forcing their children to marry against their will. The government also condemned early marriage on the grounds that it deflected the energies of youth from productive work and led to too high a birth rate. Beginning in the 1950s, girls were enrolled in schools in unprecedented numbers and women were mobilized to work outside the home in large numbers. New patterns of courtship and new attitudes toward love and marriage gradually developed, reflecting both new government policies and the new social situations in which young people found themselves. The four selections below reflect some of these changes. The first comes from a handbook published in 1964 for use of rural cadres who had to advise young people. The second is from a February, 1975 Canton newspaper and is an example of the sorts of exhortation intended to promote new types of thinking that were common during the Cultural Revolution. The third is a letter written in 1978 in response to a radio show on "The Place of Love" and gives a very different view of courtship during the Cultural Revolution. The last selection, on advertising for spouses, appeared in a 1989 women's magazine.*

### WHAT SHOULD ONE PAY ATTENTION TO WHEN ONE FALLS IN LOVE?

We have already said that young men and women must have a correct point of view toward love when they fall in love. Here we shall talk a little about a few concrete problems to which one should attend when falling in love.

First, with regard to the problem of dating between young men and women, may young men and women date each other in public? Of course

they may. So-called friends ought to be comrades in our socialist society. Sentiment between friends is lofty, and the relationship between one and the other is equal and cooperative, full of solidarity and love. Common ideals, common interests, common lives of labor and war have bound us together tightly and have created a brand-new comradesly relationship between us. This sort of comradesly relationship encourages us to progress, and it advances our solidarity. It is beneficial to socialist construction and at the same time makes

our lives happier and more blissful. Under such circumstances, why shouldn't young men and women court each other publicly?

But in real life there are some people who always look askance at any relationship between a man and a woman. As soon as they see a man and a woman together, they are scandalized without looking into the true circumstances. They say this and that and make all kinds of criticisms to make people feel ashamed. There are also some people whose heads are full of ridiculous formulas. As soon as a young man and woman start to see each other often, they brand them for having an "improper style" and claim that "the relationship between the sexes is impure." Because of this, some young men and women become anxious. If they love someone, they don't dare declare their love. When they start courting, they hide here and there, not daring to see people, as if they had done something disgraceful. This is a problem worthy of our attention.

How should young men and women treat others' criticisms when they fall in love?

1. We must clear away the remnants of feudal ideology in our minds and treat the relationship between the sexes correctly. When we see a man and a woman talking together, we should not be greatly surprised. We should, moreover, not gossip or interfere with them. When a man and woman meet, they should be open-minded and not be suspicious of each other. If you love another person, you must give it serious consideration. After due consideration, if you want to propose, then propose. You need not suppress it in your heart and create suffering. If you and the other person build up a proper relationship and fall in love, even if you do encounter ridicule or interference from others, you need not feel troubled by it and may disregard it. You may also explain it to them and, if necessary, make observations on the situation to the party or the League in order to request support.

2. When they fall in love, young men and women must be particularly careful to balance well the relationship between love and work.

They should not forget everything else when they fall in love, but should change love into a kind of motive power to encourage themselves to work, learn, and progress better.

3. In falling in love, one should never have improper sexual relationships as a result of temporary emotional impulses. This is immoral.

In sum, as long as we treat these problems seriously, others will not "gossip." Even if some people talk nonsense, we can still stand up to it. Facts always will prove that their opinions are wrong and our actions are honest.

Second, on the problem of "unrequited love."

"Unrequited love" means that the love relationship is broken. We know that in love itself there exist two possibilities. One possibility is that it continues to develop and leads to marriage. The other possibility is that it breaks up midway, and the love relationship terminates. The process of falling in love is a process of mutual understanding and increasing friendship. After a considerable period of mutual understanding, if one side feels forced and proposes to break off the love relationship, this is normal and means that the love between the two has not matured. A proverb says, "The melon that is gathered by force is not sweet." Love is something that cannot be forced. If love is immature and thus the love relationship is broken off, it is not necessary to create trouble for oneself. But there are some young men and women who cannot treat this problem correctly. According to them, it seems that as soon as you fall in love you must get married. Otherwise you feel cheated. Because it is "unrequited love," it creates "the greatest suffering." One cannot eat or sleep; one feels dispirited at work and even loses interest in living. This is wrong in the extreme. One should have a correct attitude in dealing with "unrequited love." First, one should understand clearly his goals in life. If one has a lofty goal in life, then one's work, learning, and progress will not be affected by setbacks in love. Second, one should be philosophical. Since the other no longer loves you, you should not put something into it that is not there.

Third, on the problem of "fickleness in love." "Fickleness in love" is a bourgeois conception of love. Its characteristic is: "Love the new and detest the old." "The other hill seems higher than this one."\* It manifests itself in changeability and untrustworthiness. One loves X today and Y tomorrow. It is a very flippant attitude. This is completely different from normal love. When a young couple feels lovingly toward each other and builds up a love relationship, they should respect each other and make their love develop and strengthen without cease. If in the process of falling in love one party feels that the love is strained and that the love relationship cannot indeed be maintained, then, based on a serious and cautious attitude and after conscious consideration, it is also quite normal that the love relationship be broken off. This is beneficial to oneself, to the other person, to one's future life, and to society. But "fickleness in love" is different. Its purpose is hedonistic enjoyment. When you enjoy each other, you are "in love." When you have had enough, then "take off." When you have the money, it is "love"; when the money is all used up, "take off." Responsible to no one, enjoyment is supreme and the individual comes first. These are dutiful acts of love and ought to be vigorously opposed.

Fourth, on the problem of matchmaking by family and relatives.

Some young people are introduced to their partners by family and relatives. Is this way of doing things good? This should be analyzed concretely, for one cannot say whether it is good or bad in general. Generally speaking, it is best for young men and women to find their beloveds by themselves and to build up a love relationship through common labor and common struggle. Some people, due to limitations of various sorts, cannot help but ask others to introduce them to a partner. It is all right to do so. But if there is no mutual understanding or love toward the partner one is introduced to, then there should be a process of mutual understanding and building up of

love. This process is absolutely essential. Some young people rely on the one-sided opinion of a matchmaker; they meet a few times and agree to get married right away. This way of doing things is too rash. We should say that one ought to have more contact with the person he is introduced to so as to learn to understand one another, but not rely on "love at first sight." If you hand over your "heart" after only one meeting, then it is not serious enough. "Love at first sight" often means you only see the superficial phenomena of the other's looks, clothes, manners, etc., but cannot see the other's "real heart." Some young people often give away their hearts before they see the other's. How can this be reliable? Therefore, when you ask others to introduce a partner, if you yourself are not yet familiar with the other person, then, in addition to listening to the opinions of the person who makes the introduction, you should also listen to the opinions of people familiar with that person. More important, there must be a process of mutual understanding. This, too, is the process of falling in love.

We may see from the above problems that in the question of love and marriage there exists a struggle between new and old thinking. In order to deal correctly with the problems of love and marriage, we must oppose the remnant of feudal ideology and the ideology of the bourgeoisie. We must draw a clear boundary line with these two kinds of ideology and carry out a vigorous struggle. These, then, are the problems young men and women must pay attention to in the process of falling in love.

#### DARE TO DO AWAY WITH OLD CUSTOMS

It was a day in the middle of October last year. The masses of people in Sixin Brigade (Niwan Commune, Doumen county) joyously ran about passing the words: "Uncle Jinxi is taking a son-in-law today."

Let's hear the story about Uncle Jinxi taking a son-in-law.

Old poor peasant Huang Jinxi's daughter

\* The "grass is always greener on the other side."

Bingcai fell in love with He Huashen of Weiguo Brigade, Baiqiao Commune, and they planned to get married. This event made Jinxi rejoice on the one hand and grieve on the other. He was happy because thanks to the good leadership of Chairman Mao and the Communist party, his whole family was free and his children had all grown up; he grieved because he had no son and his four daughters one after the other had all gotten married and left the family. He thought to himself, "How wonderful it would be if my son-in-law could come to live with me and take care of me when I get old." His daughter understood how he felt and suggested that He come to settle in her family. He consented.

When news of this spread, a small number of people still influenced by feudal ideas began to criticize. Some said, "A fine young man like him can find a wife without difficulty. Why should he have to join the family of his wife? What a shame!" When He's father heard these erroneous views, he also thought that as it had been a practice for women to marry into their husband's family since ancient times, his son would be looked down upon and meet "bad luck" if he did as planned.

He studied conscientiously the relevant writings of Chairman Mao and the ten new things of Xiaojinchuang, and came to realize that "times have changed, and men and women are equal." If women could go settle in their husbands' families, then men could also go settle in their wives' families. Revolutionary young people must take the lead to break with traditional concepts like "men are superior and women inferior." Therefore, he patiently tried to enlighten his father, saying, "As long as we act in accordance with Chairman Mao's instructions, the cadres and masses will give us support." He also said, "If it's 'unlucky' for a man to join his wife's family, what kind of 'luck' did you have when you followed the old practice and took a wife into your family before liberation?" This refreshed his father's memory of the miserable past. He's grandparents had both died of poverty and illness under the merciless oppression of the landlords. His father worked for

the landlords from early childhood, and was beaten and scolded all the time. By the time he took a wife, he had neither house nor land to his name and borrowed some money to buy a ruined boat for a house. The family led a desperate existence. After Liberation, under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Communist party, they became masters of their own and led an ever happier life. After recalling this bit of family history, He Huashen's father repudiated the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius, like "three cardinal guidelines and five constant virtues" and "men are superior and women inferior," and raised his consciousness. In the end, he even supported his son's decision to settle in his bride's house.

He and Bingcai then went ahead with their wedding preparations. They both agreed to have their wedding the new way, not accepting betrothal money or presents or giving a feast. Huang Jinxi felt it was a bit niggardly not to spend a little money treating his relatives to a few drinks on this happy occasion of taking a son-in-law. Therefore, he intended to invite a few relatives and friends for a small wedding party. When Bingcai learned what her father felt, she said to him, "You said that when you got married, you didn't give any betrothal money or presents and didn't give a wedding feast. Why didn't you feel niggardly then?"

"That was before Liberation," he answered. "Then I was so poor that there wasn't a single grain of rice in my pot. How could I afford to buy presents and give a wedding feast? It's different today; we're now well-off. A wedding is a great event which justifies spending a little money."

In order to help her father raise his level of understanding, Bingcai patiently explained, "Even though we're better off today doesn't mean we can spend money at will. Indulging in extravagance and waste is an old habit of the exploiting classes, while industry and thrift are the good virtues of us poor and lower-middle peasants. We must do away with the existing habits and customs and old conventions of the exploiting classes, and erect the new style of the proletariat. If there are to be standards for weddings, then

make them the standards of the proletariat." Her father agreed with this and raised his consciousness. He even gave his consent to their preparing the wedding in an economical way. On the day of the wedding, they insistently refused gifts, did not give a feast, and did not follow any of the feudal superstitious customs. After the wedding, they immediately plunged into the battle of grasping revolution and promoting production.

FROM "BEATING THE MANDARIN DUCKS"  
TO THE SEARCH FOR LOVE

Comrade Editors:

I am a twenty-five-year-old member of the Communist youth league, and a member of its organizational committee. In the past, because of my own ignorance and immaturity, compounded by the poisonous influence of the "Gang of Four," I developed an erroneous understanding of the place that love should take in the life of a revolutionary. I remember the time during the Cultural Revolution (I had just turned thirteen) when I went with a large group to Shanghai, where to get a taste of "revolutionary revolt" under the leadership of some high school students, we put on red armbands, and with sticks and clubs, with leather belts and portable megaphones, we went along Zhaojiabang Road "destroying the four olds." Using our sticks and clubs and belts, we chased away all the young couples who were courting beneath the light of the moon among the flowers, shouting over and over again: "Get out of here! Stinking hoodlums! Stinking perverts!" Later, as I gradually got older, I still thought that those days when I was young and "destroying the four olds" in Shanghai had been glorious, even to the point that I actually regarded love as a detestable sentimental petty-bourgeois emotion, a degenerate activity that must be strictly banished from any revolutionary enterprise. I even thought that the very word "love" was in itself the vocabulary of hoodlums, that it was a polite euphemism for sex, for lewd, degenerate, corrupt, evil behav-

ior, a word that a revolutionary would never use.

In 1975, after I was transferred from a farming village to work in a seedling nursery, our leader gave our local youth league team the important duty of preventing the boys and girls from making friends, from seeking partners, from talking about love and affection. As soon as I discovered that a young couple, while working, studying, and playing together, had fallen in love, I set about scheming in every way possible to prevent this relationship from developing further. At meetings, they would be called by name and criticized, and after the meetings they would be threatened and "cajoled," and if these methods did not work, they would then be separated like the shepherd boy and the weaving maid of Chinese legend, one to the south fields, the other to the north fields, which were some eight *li* [four kilometers] apart. Our nursery had separated as many as eight or nine couples in this way. As a cadre of the Communist youth league, with a totally incorrect understanding about love and having received no correct guidance, I not only did not realize that such actions on the part of our leader were wrong and harmful, on the contrary, I thought that he was truly revolutionary and high-minded, that he was a progressive leader who had transcended lower-class tastes and interests. For this reason, I spared no effort to follow his lead closely, to fight energetically to stamp out the sparks of "love." I arranged for "staunch elements" of the youth league to "spy on" the young boys and girls to see whether or not any had formed couples, sent "positive elements" to "investigate" whether or not any of the young people were seeing each other or having dates, to see whether or not any of their letters contained photographs or love notes . . . and then, I went immediately to the leader to report those "secrets" that most people would have difficulty discovering. I also helped the leader open the "anti-heart battle" to tear apart these "couples" and "lovers." At a conference for youth league members, in accordance with the wishes of the leader, in concert with several committee members, I falsely stated that the call of the party for late marriages and planned parenthood in-

ferred that "late marriage means the later the better, and not to marry at all is by far the best, in perfect accord with the interests of the nation." I even suggested that "it is entirely improper for young people in their twenties to think now about individual problems. For the present, we shall not look for mates, shall not talk of love. These are demands of the present situation, demands of the times, demands of the revolution." It was as if questions of love and marriage were incompatible with, were totally irreconcilable with, revolution. Later, I also had each comrade in turn state his resolution to "refrain absolutely from seeking a mate or talking of love for \_\_\_\_\_ years." I also stressed again that this was what distinguished those who were wholeheartedly for the revolution from those who were only halfheartedly for the revolution, that this was the touchstone that distinguished the thorough revolutionary from the "half-baked" revolutionary. Under the explicit, conscious directions of our leader, and with the active encouragement and pressure from our branch committee, the great majority of the youth league comrades expressed their resolution to refrain absolutely from talking about love for five years. There were several fanatics who took the stage to swear that they would never marry, that they would be "revolutionary" monks and nuns. Neither I nor our leader made any attempt to restrain such an unrealistic attitude. On the contrary, we were delighted and were fully content to give these ignorant "foolish young people" our enthusiastic applause and encouragement. ...

#### A PIONEER

One day Ding Naijun, a forty-year-old arithmetic teacher in Sichuan, had a great idea while he watched a TV advertisement. "Why can't I write an ad that will help me meet more people and have a better chance of finding a spouse?"

In January of 1981 Ding sent a letter, along with his personal advertisement, to *The Market*, a newspaper with a large circulation. The editors of the paper hesitated, but felt sympathetic to Ding's

problem and published the seventy-five word notice advertising his desire for a spouse. Ding was in luck. Within a month he received more than three hundred replies from all over China. He began correspondence with a girl from Jilin Province and they fell in love.

Since 1981 advertising for a spouse has become more and more popular. Only a week before Ding's ad, on January 1, 1981, the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China adopted by the Fifth National People's Congress at its third session was put into effect. This revised law stipulated that men could marry at age twenty-two and women at age twenty. It was like the opening of a sluice gate. Large numbers of young people just at the legal age came to register their marriages and those who were over thirty suddenly became "elder unmarried youths."

Most of the people in this category experienced the ten-year turmoil [the Cultural Revolution]. They left school too early. After the turmoil ended, they plunged themselves into study, trying to make up for the time and education they had lost. When they realized that they should also spend some time on finding a spouse, they found meeting suitable people was more difficult than it was for the young.

By 1984, the party Central Committee was paying great attention to this issue, which had become a "social problem" by then. It called for the whole society to show concern for the marriage prospects of these people. Therefore, matchmaking services sprang up and parties were held to help people meet each other. Many newspapers and magazines published public notices written by people hoping to marry. Since people had to pay for the ads, these publications generated more income and profit, and increased their circulation as well. This is the reason that many publishing houses are eager to continue supplying this service. To attract readers, every newspaper and magazine had to make special arrangements to handle the personal advertisements of those seeking spouses. After the Wuhan *Youth News* started a special column, "Phoenix Searching for a Spouse," more and more people came to their of-

fices. Finally, the editorial office had to set up a new reception room. A special column in *Guangdong's Family* magazine is called "Bridge of Love" and has attracted the interest of Chinese here and overseas who are seeking a spouse. The *China Marriage and Family Research Society* started a column named "Call of Love." though it is two pages long and contains forty to fifty ads in each issue it can hardly meet the large demand. *Spring Breeze*, a magazine specially for the handicapped, also opened a column of marriage ads for handicapped people. In May 1984, *Liberation Army Daily* started the column "Green Bridge of Magpies" and opened the door to personal advertising to those Chinese soldiers who wished to marry. The nationally distributed *Chinese Women Magazine* with its circulation of one million attracted many people seeking a spouse. In one issue alone there were 101 ads.

It has turned out that public matchmaking services have not been effective or successful. However, ads in magazines and newspapers keep increasing....

In July 1984, *Chinese Women Magazine* received a letter from Daling township, Ganyu county, Jiangsu province signed by "a hundred rural young men," including Sun Kenan. The letter read, "Guided by our party's policy of letting people become rich, carried out after the Third Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Party, every family in our township has built a new house, has a deposit in the bank, and moreover has rice and white flour as food. We have high quality clothes and can watch TV or go to the cinema. We all enjoy our life very much. Our only regret is that we lack virtuous wives, to cherish our ideals and follow the same path with us. We welcome all city girls who have courage and insight to come to our rural area."

After this ad was published, many women answered. A girl from Shanghai said, "The Third Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Party has brought about great changes to your town. I hope to go there to choose a spouse and contribute to the building of our countryside." A young woman from Ganzhou, Jiangxi province

said, "I'm a university graduate and a government employee. I'd like to make friends with a young man in your area who can share my goals in life and explore the way to wealth with me." A girl waiting for her job assignment in Sichuan said, "Having failed the college admissions examination, I've been feeling low. Maybe going to the countryside where I can strive with these ambitious young people will be a turning point in my life. Marriage to an industrious and honest rural young man may provide me with a chance to live a meaningful life."

The story of one woman is a successful example of advertising for a spouse. A thirty-one-year-old woman had been one of the urban youngsters who went to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. She returned to the city and studied at a university. As she was already a bit older than the other students, her social circle was small and it was difficult for her to find a suitable spouse. After placing a personal advertisement she received letters from two hundred men and sixty-three of these met many of her standards. Then she eliminated thirty who were too old or paid too much attention to physical appearance and another seven who were divorced and had children. One by one she met the twenty-three men who were left, but none of them could arouse her passion. Upon reflection she realized that her hope of meeting a man who was perfect in every way was unrealistic. She took another look at the letters and decided to meet a man who was a worker. Unexpectedly he was not ignorant, but an honest and humorous person with experiences similar to hers. When she was with him, she felt happy. Many warm-hearted friends came to attend their wedding....

In 1984 the women's federation attached to the Committee of Youth League in Xiong'erzhai township in the mountainous area of Pinggu county, a suburb of Beijing, placed a single ad for two hundred young men. The letter explained the economic position and spiritual state of the young people. There were 1,900 replies from twenty-eight provinces, cities, and autonomous regions. Already thirty-five of these young men are mar-

ried, twenty more are planning their weddings, and the others are still corresponding with their new friends....

Recently a TV station in Shanxi started showing personal ads which have proved popular. Viewers have an opportunity to appreciate the spouse-seeker's size, looks, and manner and hear the voice. Also, people can start to get responses even more quickly after a TV ad than an ad in publications.

Last year the cost of paper increased, directly influencing the price of newspapers and magazines. The force for publications including the cost for advertisers was raised, but even the additional expense has not discouraged those seeking a spouse through a personal ad. They do not complain because the ads are successful.

In the early 1980s those using ads to find a

spouse generally fell into two categories: urban youths who returned to cities from the countryside where they lived during the Cultural Revolution, and urban citizens who had been sent to the countryside and were then allowed to return to cities after various policies of the party had been implemented. Over the past few years many people in these two groups found spouses, and a new group is making use of personal ads, divorcees. It is predicted that this group will have the most interest in seeking a new spouse through personal ads.

People all long for a congenial spouse and a happy marriage. It is no surprise that they now use the technology of the modern communication system to achieve their goal.

*Translated by Lin Guanxing*