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Mate Preferences Among Young People: US and China.

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Abstract

Mate preferences expressed by college students may reflect both the society's traditional beliefs and the changing nature of cultural values. The current study compared American and Chinese college students' responses on mate preference choices (N=545). Results show both similarities and differences in mate preferences between these two groups. Out of 18 characteristics, the two groups were similar in eight and differed in ten; and out of 13 rank order ratings, the two groups differed significantly on ten items. Overall, these findings suggest that while there is evidence of convergence in American and Chinese college students' mate preference values, reflecting the effect of globalization, there are also significant differences in their choices, reflecting social and cultural values of each individual country.

Keywords: mate preferences, China and USA, college students, gender, similarities and differences

Issues related to mate preferences have been studied by many researchers (e.g., Brumbaugh & Wood, 2013; Buss, 1985; Buss, et al., 1990; Buss & Barns, 1986; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001; Schmitt, 2004). Some research has focused on gender differences (Buss & Shackelford, 2008; Furnham, 2009; Furnham & Tsoi, 2012; Greitemeyer, 2007; Stone, Shackelford, & Buss, 2007) whereas other studies have investigated age or generational differences (e.g., Henry, Helm, & Cruz, 2013; Sepehri & Bagherian, 2013). Overall, sex and age differences were widely reported by worldwide participants (Schwarz & Hassebrauck, 2012). Women usually reported preferring a partner who is financially sound, reliable and pleasant whereas men reported preferring a partner who is physically attractive and domestically skilled. These findings seem consistent with the evolutionary theory of women's desire for economic stability in the man to provide and men's desire for fertility and domesticity in the woman. On the other hand, significant age differences have not been widely reported, indicating that perhaps mate preferences remain quite stable over time (Schwarz & Hassebrauck, 2012).

Another aspect in the literature of mate preferences is personality. Researchers have looked into desired personality type of the ideal romantic partner (Figueredo, Sefcek, & Jones, 2006). Overall, there's evidence to support the similarity idea in personal attraction theory because people do tend to seek mates whose personality is somewhat similar to their own although some people also seek mates who are different in certain aspects of personality (Figueredo et al., 2006).

Many researchers have sought to identify a set of stable mate preference characteristics or areas of importance that people look for in a mate (e.g., Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Goodwin & Tinker, 2002; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005). However, the question remains: what exactly are the kind of essential values, traits, characteristics, or priorities that people place importance on in seeking long-term partners? Shackelford, Schmitt, and Buss (2005) reported that they were able to identify four universal dimensions of mate preferences that are applicable across different cultures in the world. The four clusters are: Love vs. Status/Resources; Dependable/Stable vs. Good Looks/Health; Education/Intelligence vs. Desire for Home/Children; and Sociability vs. Similar Religion. Today perhaps the most widely used list of mate preference characteristics is the Mate Selection Scale that includes 18 mate characteristics and 13 descriptors of traits (Buss et al., 1990). The items in this scale reflect and are consistent with the afore-mentioned four dimensions.

It has been reported that personal values are strongly influenced by the environment and the culture (Oliver & Mooradian, 2003). Psychologists and other social scientists all agree that mate preferences and choices reflect people's values that are inevitably influenced by the culture and environment in which they are raised and live (Lalonde, Cila, Lou, & Giguere, 2013).

While a fair amount of research has investigated cultural differences or similarities among people of the world in terms of their mate preferences, it remains a somewhat under-studied area (Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003).

Traditionally, cross-cultural research compared and contrasted between Western countries vs. non-Western countries in the analyses, sometimes using the Individualism/Collectivism theoretical paradigm. In Buss and his colleagues' 1990 study of 37 cultures, major differences emerged between Western and non-Western cultures. For example, chastity had the largest variations among all the countries, with Western nations gathering on the side of "not important" and traditional countries firmly anchored on the side of "very important" (Buss et al., 1990). Other researchers have also studied aspects of non-Western young people's mate preferences (e.g., Hynie, Lalonde, & Lee, 2006; Li, Valentine, & Patel, 2011; Li et al. 2013; Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003) and some of the findings support the results from Buss et al.'s study.

However, with the rapid globalization taking place in the world, even within the same culture people's values and priorities may have shifted and changed. For example, China is a non-Western country, but it has gone through tremendous economic, social and cultural changes in the past three decades (Chang, Wang, Shackelford, & Buss, 2011). Have Chinese young people's mate preference views changed with the time? If so what kind of areas or aspects have changed? The researchers (Chang et al., 2011) investigated this issue by comparing Chinese college students' mate preference responses from 1983 to those from 2008. They found that indeed many preferences have changed during a quarter of a century. While some characteristics have gained importance, others have lost importance. For example, "pleasing disposition" gained a big increase from the 1980s to the 2000s. Similarly, "dependable character" also increased in its importance during that time period. On the other hand, education and intelligence saw a big decrease in the college students' ratings. Likewise, desire for home and children and chastity also decreased in their importance. Chang et al. (2011) discussed these changes in the context of contemporary Chinese socioeconomic and cultural atmosphere. They attributed these changes to the changing nature of the Chinese society that influenced people's choices and priorities.

In light of these types of shifts in young people's attitudes and views on mate selection preferences, it seems reasonable not to frame the cross-cultural comparison in a Western vs. non-Western structure; but rather to adopt a more globalized view expecting similarities as well as differences among different cultural groups. After all, certain mate selection preferences have shown universal appeals regardless of cultural backgrounds whereas others are more rooted in the specific cultural circumstances.

Toro-Morn and Sprecher (2003) compared American and Chinese university students' mate preferences. They found both similarities and differences between these two cultural groups. For example, for both American and Chinese college students, certain traits or characteristics were valued positively in mate selection (e.g., honest and trustworthy, warm and kind, healthy) which supports previous research on certain universality of mate preferences. On the other hand, significant differences were also found between the two groups. Specifically, among all the other differences, the American participants expressed a very positive desire for "wants children" but a negative desire for "good housekeeper" whereas the Chinese participants indicated exactly the opposite. Overall, the authors concluded that while some ratings reflected a changing world of globalization others showed the influence of traditional beliefs and values (Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003).

Kline and Zhang (2009) also investigated mate preferences of American and Chinese college students. Their qualitative study showed that both groups shared same values on commitment as a desirable trait in mate selection. Consistent with previous findings, both groups also endorsed characteristics such as trustworthiness, honesty, kindness, and caring among others. One of the interesting findings that perhaps reflects cultural traditions was that the Chinese participants rated items related to filial piety (e.g., "respect my parents," "help me take care of my parents") significantly more highly than their American counterparts. In turn, the American students rated items such as intelligent and physically attractive more highly than the Chinese students, reflecting traditional American values.

To continue the effort of examining cross-cultural similarities and differences between young people in the United States and China in their mate preferences, the current study specifically sought to achieve five goals: 1) examine college students' mate preferences as expressed by all the participants in this study; 2) examine American and Chinese college students' responses separately, and to compare them with previous findings to gauge any changes over time within each cultural group; 3) examine gender differences by comparing men and women's responses within each cultural group; 4) examine cross-cultural similarities and differences by comparing American and Chinese participants' responses; and 5) examine within-gender cross-cultural differences by comparing American and Chinese men's responses and American women and Chinese women's responses.

Though there are quite a few studies done in the past on this topic, the field remains overall under-studied and under-represented (Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003). It is hoped that the findings from the current research will shed further light on American and Chinese young people's views on mate preferences, their choices, priorities and values, their desires and wishes in a mate, and their likes and dislikes in a mate. In the age of globalization, the findings will help us better understand each culture as reflected by its young people's views on mate preferences, enabling us to become more informed and more educated citizens of the 21st Century. The results will also contribute to the literature by adding information of non-Western participants.

Method

Participants

A total of 545 college students from the US (326) and China (219) participated in this study. Of the total group, 25% were male and 75% were female. The average age of the total group is 20.98 (*sd*=2.36). Separately, the American group has a higher mean of age (*M*=22.7, *sd*=3.62) than the Chinese group (*M*=19.26, *sd*=1.09).

The US participants were students mainly from humanities and social sciences at a regional university in the Southeast part of the country whereas the Chinese participants were students mainly from educational sciences at a comprehensive university in Shanghai.

Materials and Procedure

Buss et al.'s (1990) Mate Selection Scale was used as the instrument in this study. The inventory has two parts: the first part lists 18 characteristics (e.g., pleasing disposition, good looks, favorable social status) and asks the participants to indicate on a Likert scale of 0 to 3 the importance of the particular trait in mate selection. For example, 0 suggests not important at all and 3 indicates very important. The second part of the inventory lists 13 descriptors (e.g., intelligent, wants children, religious) and asks the participants to rank order these descriptors according to the participants' personal preferences in mate selection. For example, 1 would mean this trait is extremely desirable for the participant but 13 would mean not desirable at all.

This instrument has been used extensively by Buss and other researchers in the United States and many other countries including China. In the current study, the survey questionnaire was translated into Chinese using the back translation method for the participants in China. Participants' age and gender was also asked in the survey.

The student participants in both universities were recruited through similar venues: the researcher visited classes, student centers and other student-gathering places on both campuses. A paper and pencil format was used. An IRB approved cover letter explaining the purpose and the procedure of the study was attached as the first page of the survey questionnaire. In both countries, it took participants on average no more than 15 minutes to complete the survey. The bilingual researcher was present to answer any questions or provide any clarification if needed. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. No monetary or any other incentives were given.

Results

All participants

To examine how the college students as a group scored on the inventory, means and standard deviations of the 18 characteristics and 13 rank order items were calculated. The results are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1
*Means & Standard Deviations on Mate Characteristics for All Participants (n=545)

Mutual attraction-love	2.85(.42)
Dependable character	2.76(.52)
Emotional stability & maturity	2.74(.47)
Education & intelligence	2.63(.53)
Pleasing disposition	2.6(.6)
Ambitious & industrious	2.47(.67)
Good health	2.46(.61)
Sociability	2.3(.67)
Desire for home & children	2.19(.92)
Refinement, neatness	2.16(.7)
Good financial prospect	2.07(.8)
Similar education	1.94(.88)
Good looks	1.69(.78)
Good cook & housekeeper	1.67(.87)
Favorable social status	1.51(.82)
Similar religious background	1.22(1.17)
Similar political background	.98(.94)
Chastity	.79(.97)

**Higher means denote more importance.*

Table 2
*Means & Standard Deviations on Desirability Rankings for All Participants (n=545)

Kind & understanding	2.94(2.58)
Intelligent	4.61(2.63)
Exciting personality	4.83(3.22)
Easy going	4.87(2.85)
Healthy	5.86(2.94)
Physically attractive	7(3.13)
Good earning capacity	7.76(2.92)
Creative & artistic	8.12(3.46)
College graduate	8.35(2.96)
Wants children	8.58(3.63)
Religious	8.88(4.3)
Good housekeeper	9.02(2.86)
Good heredity	10.03(2.74)

**Lower means denote higher ranks.*

As shown in Table 1, "mutual attraction – love" has the highest mean for the group, followed by personality traits such as "dependable character" and "emotional stability and maturity," indicating the college student participants in both countries viewed these three traits as the most important to them overall. The least important trait indicated by the lowest mean is "chastity," followed by "similar political background" and "similar religious background," suggesting these three characteristics were not deemed important at all by our participants overall.

The results on rank order ratings in Table 2 show that our participants overall viewed personality items such as "kind and understanding," "intelligent," and "exciting personality" as the most desirable traits in selecting a mate. "Good heredity," "good housekeeper," and "religious" were ranked the lowest, suggesting that these three characteristics were deemed least desirable by our participants as a group.

American participants

Responses from American participants on the mate selection inventory were examined by calculating the means and standard deviations. To gauge any possible gender differences between American men and women in the sample, t-tests were performed on both scales. Table 3 and Table 4 present these results.

Table 3
Means & Standard Deviations on Mate Characteristics for American Participants (n=326)

Mutual attraction-love	2.92(.36)
Dependable character	2.79(.55)
Emotional stability & maturity***	2.76(.47)
Education & intelligence	2.6(.57)
Pleasing disposition	2.48(.62)
Good health*	2.39(.64)
Ambitious & industrious***	2.35(.7)
Desire for home & children****	2.28(.87)
Sociability	2.26(.7)
Good financial prospect***	2.13(.77)
Good looks**	2.01(.65)
Refinement, neatness	2.02(.74)
Similar education***	2(.9)
Good cook & housekeeper	1.62(.81)
Similar religious background***	1.62(1.14)
Favorable social status	1.42(.82)
Similar political background	1.09(1)
Chastity	.76(.94)

**Men higher means than women at p value < .01*
*** Men higher means than women at p value < .05*
**** Women higher means than men at p value < .01*
***** Women higher means than men at p value < .05*

Table 4
Means & Standard Deviations on Desirability Rankings for American participants (n=326)

Kind & understanding	2.86(2.4)
Intelligent	4(2.6)
Exciting personality	5.23(3.44)
Easy going	5.32(2.74)
Physically attractive*	6.06(3.07)
Healthy**	6.44(2.62)
Wants children**	7.75(3.53)
College graduate	7.97(3.01)
Good earning capacity*	8.27(3.01)
Creative & artistic***	8.46(3.53)
Religious**	8.66(4.55)
Good housekeeper	9.87(2.31)
Good heredity	10.13(2.46)

**Men higher rankings than women at p value < .01*
*** Men higher rankings than women at p value < .05*
**** Women higher rankings than men at p value < .01*

Overall, both men and women in the American group selected “mutual attraction-love,” “dependable character,” and “emotional stability and maturity” as their three top preferences, and “chastity,” “similar political background,” and “favorable social status” as the three least important factors. However, men and women also showed some significant differences in how important they viewed some items. For example, men rated “good health” and “good looks” significantly more important than women did, whereas women rated items such as “ambitious and industrious” and “financial prospect” significantly more important than men did. On the desirability ranking scale, there were also some gender differences. While both rated “kind and understanding” and “intelligent” high and “good heredity” and “good housekeeper” low, men gave higher rankings to “physically attractive” and “healthy” than women did whereas women rated items such as “creative and artistic” higher than men did.

When compared to previous findings on the ratings of 18 characteristics (Buss, et al., 2001), the current top five items remain similar to those from the 1980s and the 1990s though the order of the items varies slightly. "Mutual attraction-love" takes the number one spot steadily from the 1980s to the present. Likewise, the current bottom five items also remain similar to those from Buss et al.'s study with order of the items varying slightly.

Chinese participants

Responses from Chinese participants on the mate selection inventory were examined by calculating the means and standard deviations. To gauge any possible gender differences between Chinese men and women in the sample, t-tests were also performed on both scales. Table 5 and Table 6 present the results.

Table 5
Means & Standard Deviations on Mate Characteristics for Chinese Participants (n=219)

Pleasing disposition*	2.75(.55)
Mutual attraction-love***	2.74(.48)
Dependent character	2.73(.49)
Emotional stability & maturity	2.71(.48)
Education & intelligence	2.66(.48)
Ambition & industrious	2.63(.59)
Good health	2.58(.55)
Refinement, neatness	2.35(.6)
Sociability**	2.35(.61)
Desire for home & children*	2.05(.99)
Good financial prospect****	2(.83)
Similar education	1.86(.85)
Good cook & housekeeper**	1.74(.94)
Favorable social status	1.63(.8)
Good looks	1.25(.74)
Chastity*	.84(1)
Similar political background	.82(.84)
Similar religious background	.65(.96)

**Men higher means than women at p value < .01*
*** Men higher means than women at p value < .05*
**** Women higher means than men at p value < .01*
***** Women higher means than men at p value < .05*

Table 6
Means & Standard Deviations on Desirability Rankings for Chinese participants (n=219)

Kind & understanding **	3.05(2.81)
Easy going	4.22(2.88)
Exciting personality	4.26(2.78)
Healthy	5.03(3.17)
Intelligent	5.48(2.44)
Good earning capacity*	7.02(2.61)
Creative & artistic	7.63(3.29)
Good housekeeper*	7.79(3.12)
Physically attractive	8.34(2.7)
College graduate	8.88(2.8)
Religious	9.2(3.9)
Wants children*	9.76(3.45)
Good heredity	9.9(3.1)

**Men higher rankings than women at p value < .01*
*** Women higher rankings than men at p value < .01*

Overall, both men and women in the Chinese group selected "pleasing disposition," "mutual attraction-love," and "dependable character" as their three top preferences, and "similar religious background, "similar political background," and "chastity" as the three least important factors. However, men and women also showed significant differences in how important they viewed certain items. For example, men rated items such as "sociability," "desire for home and children," and "good cook and housekeeper" significantly more important than women did whereas women rated "mutual attraction-love" and "financial prospect" significantly more important than men did.

On the desirability ranking scale, both men and women rated "kindness and understanding" and "easy going" the highest and "good heredity" and "wants children" the lowest. However significant gender differences were also observed in several rankings. For example, men ranked "good housekeeper" as a higher priority than women did whereas women gave higher ranking to "kind and understanding" than men did.

When compared to previous findings (Chang, et al., 2011), there are some significant changes over the decades in certain choices. The current Chinese participants rated "pleasing disposition" the highest, continuing the increase observed by Chang et al. (2011) over the last three decades. In the 1980, this item was rated fairly low followed by a big increase in the 2000s. A similar pattern was reported with the item "dependable character" (Chang et al. 2011) which is rated as the third highest characteristics among the 18 items in the current study, continuing its increase from the 1980s. Chinese college students in the current study rated "mutual attraction-love" as the second highest among 18 characteristics, increasing its value placed by the participants from the 1980s to the 2000s.

There are a few items that show decrease in value placed by the participants. One of them is "desire for home and children." Past findings by Chang, et al. (2011) show in the 1980s it was valued quite highly but the 2000s saw a decrease, and the current findings show a further decrease in its value. A similar pattern emerges with another domestic item, "good cook and housekeeper." In the 1980s it was still somewhat valued but by the 2000s it was down, and the current findings continue the trend from the 2000s. Another item, "good health," also shows a steady decrease from the 1980s to the 2000s and to the current study. Last, a sharp decrease is observed in the value of "chastity" from the 1980s to the 2000s to the current findings.

US-China comparison

To examine similarities and differences between American and Chinese participants' responses, means and standard deviations on the mate selection inventory of the two groups were compared. Items with significant differences between the two cultural groups on the 18- characteristic scale and the 13-item desirability ratings are shown in Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 7
Cultural Comparison: Significant Mean Differences between American and Chinese Participants on Mate Characteristics ($p<.01$)

Characteristics	**Mean (sd)**		**t**	***d***
	China	**USA**		
Desire for home & children*	2.05(.99)	2.28(.87)	-2.7	.26
Good looks*	1.25(.74)	2.01(.65)	-12.2	1.18
Similar religious background*	.65(.96)	1.62(1.1)	-10.55	.94
Similar political background*	.82(.84)	1.09(.99)	-3.37	.3
Mutual attraction – love*	2.74(.48)	2.92(.36)	-4.56	.47
Pleasing disposition**	2.75(.55)	2.48(.62)	5.27	.47
Refinement, Neatness**	2.35(.6)	2.02(.74)	5.4	.47
Favorable social status**	1.63(.8)	1.42(.82)	2.85	.25
Ambition & industriousness**	2.63(.59)	2.35(.7)	4.98	.44
Good health**	2.58(.64)	2.39(.64)	3.65	.32

**Higher American means than Chinese means*
***Higher Chinese means than American means*

Table 8
Cultural Comparison: Significant Ranking Differences between American and Chinese Participants on Desirability Rankings (p<.01)

Rank Order Items	Means(sd) China	USA	t	d
Intelligent*	5.48(2.44)	4(2.6)	-6.48	.58
Wants children*	9.76(3.45)	7.75(3.53)	-6.37	.57
College graduate*	8.88(2.8)	7.97(3)	-3.49	.32
Physically attractive*	8.34(2.7)	6.06(3.07)	-8.85	.81
Exciting personality**	4.26(2.78)	5.23(3.44)	3.51	.32
Creative and artistic**	7.63(3.29)	8.46(3.53)	2.67	.24
Good housekeeper**	7.79(3.12)	9.87(2.3)	8.19	.86
Good earning capacity**	7.02(2.6)	8.27(3)	4.96	.45
Easy going**	4.22(2.88)	5.32(2.74)	4.35	.39
Healthy**	5.03(3.17)	6.44(2.62)	5.29	.54

**Higher American rankings than Chinese rankings*
***Higher Chinese rankings than American rankings*

As Table 7 shows, there are ten out of 18 characteristics with significant differences between the American and Chinese participants. American students rated five items higher than the Chinese students: "desire for home and children," "good looks," "mutual attraction-love," "similar religious background," and "similar political background" whereas the Chinese students rated the other five items higher: "refinement, neatness," "ambitious and industrious," "pleasing disposition," "good health," and "favorable social status." As shown in Table 8, ten out of 13 desirability items indicated significant differences between the American and Chinese students. Americans ranked four items higher than the Chinese: "intelligent," "wants children," "physically attractive," and "college graduate" whereas the Chinese students ranked six items higher: "creative and artistic," "good earning capacity," "easy going," "good housekeeper," "healthy," and "exciting personality."

Next possible differences between American men and Chinese men as well as between American women and Chinese women on both scales were examined. Results are presented in Table 9, Table 10, Table 11 and Table 12.

Table 9
Cultural and Gender Comparison: Significant Mean Differences between American and Chinese Men on Mate Characteristics (p<.01)

Characteristics	Mean (sd)		t	*d*
	China	USA		
Good looks*	1.42(.64)	2.17(.51)	-5.0	1.67
Desire for home & children**	2.58(.65)	2.02(.84)	2.93	.67
Pleasing disposition**	2.92(.28)	2.47(.61)	4.39	1.01
Refinement, Neatness**	2.50(.69)	1.94(.69)	3.35	.77

**Higher American means than Chinese means*
***Higher Chinese means than American means*

Table 10
Cultural and Gender Comparison: Significant Differences between American and Chinese Men on Desirability Rankings (p<.01)

Rank Order Items	Means(sd) China	USA	t	d
Physically attractive*	8.57(2.82)	4.63(2.01)	-4.9	2.4
Kind and understanding**	1.14(.36)	3.25(2.49)	5.88	1.54
Good housekeeper**	4.71(2.64)	9.77(2.15)	6.59	3.12

**Higher American rankings than Chinese rankings*
***Higher Chinese rankings than American rankings*

Table 11
Cultural and Gender Comparison: Significant Mean Differences between American and Chinese women on Mate Characteristics (p<.01)

Characteristics	**Mean (sd)**		**t**	***d***
	China	**USA**		
Desire for home & children*	1.99(1)	2.36(.83)	-3.67	.42
Good looks*	1.23(.75)	1.96(.61)	-9.71	1.1
Similar religious background*	.64(.93)	1.81(1.09)	-9.96	1.26
Similar political background*	.81(.84)	1.11(1)	-2.91	.37
Pleasing disposition**	2.73(.57)	2.47(.64)	3.8	.47
Refinement, Neatness**	2.33(.59)	2.07(.61)	3.8	.46
Ambition & industriousness**	2.66(.57)	2.46(.63)	2.96	.36
Good health**	2.58(.55)	2.25(.58)	5.34	.59

**Higher American means than Chinese means*
***Higher Chinese means than American means*

Table 12
Cultural and Gender Comparison: Significant Differences between American and Chinese Women on Desirability Rankings (p<.01)

Rank Order Items	**Means(sd)**		**t**	**d**
	China	**USA**		
Creative and artistic**	7.61(3.3)	8.98(3.57)	3.53	.39
Good housekeeper**	8.02(3.04)	10.08(2.34)	6.88	.77

***Higher Chinese rankings than American rankings*

As shown in Tables 9 and 10, American men rated one item higher than Chinese men: physical looks. Chinese men rated a few personality traits and home and family more highly than the Americans. On the other hand, as shown in Tables 11 and 12, compared to Chinese women, American women rated both home and children as well as physical looks more highly. Chinese women rated certain personality traits and health more highly than the Americans.

Discussion

Overall, the results shed light on contemporary mate preferences among college students in the United States and China. Regardless of culture, both groups endorse certain characteristics and traits while downplaying the others, indicating certain similarities in their preferences and choices. However, significant differences are also observed in the participants' responses that may reflect the two groups' different cultural backgrounds and value systems. In addition, results also show that while men and women do share some mate preferences, they differ on others significantly.

As stated earlier, there are five goals in this study. The first one was to examine college students' mate preferences as expressed by all the participants in this study. It seems that above all else, college students in the United States and China, both men and women, highly value mutual attraction and love in their pursuit of a future mate as evidenced by their top choices and rankings. It suggests that young people view romantic love as the basis for choosing a mate over other factors, which is consistent with the prevailing ideology of love based marriage in most of the modern world. The preference results on both the rating scale and ranking form also indicate that today's college students place high importance on desirable personality characteristics and low importance on certain traditional factors. Specifically, the college students prefer their mates possessing a personality that is characterized by being kind and understanding, intelligent, dependable, stable and mature, and pleasing and exciting. It's interesting to note that all these personality factors are viewed as more important than the desire to have home and children. On the other hand, these college students do not view sharing similar religious or political background as important, nor do they care much about the social status of their mate; they also do not put much value on cooking and housekeeping skills.

The lowest rating for the whole group goes to chastity, suggesting that both American and Chinese college students place little to no value on their mate's purity, i.e., lack of sexual experiences which traditionally was considered rather important and even today is viewed highly by many cultures in the world. The fact that good heredity is rated the lowest rank indicates that these college students focus their attention on the individual him/herself rather than their family and genetic background.

Taken together, the results present an idealistic, optimistic, and promising picture of what is considered desirable in young people's mind in choosing a mate. The participants' focus is on the individuals themselves, their personality and internal characteristics rather than external or familial factors. It may be that college students are still at the young adulthood stage and they are more focused on finding the potential mate, someone they love who has certain desirable personality traits than thinking about practical factors down the road such as a home and children.

The second objective of the study was to examine American and Chinese college students' responses separately, and to compare them with previous findings to gauge changes over time within each cultural group. As the findings indicate, American participants' responses on the rating scale are very similar to the overall results, placing higher importance on certain personality traits and lower importance on certain traditional factors. When compared to previous findings on the ratings of 18 characteristics (Buss, et al., 2001), the top five remain steadily similar from the 1980s to the current study with "mutual attraction-love" taking the number one spot (though there are some slight variations of the orders among the other four). It appears that these traits enjoy continuity in American young people's mate preferences over the decades: dependable, emotional stable and mature, pleasing disposition, and education and intelligence although the value on the last item increased somewhat in the current study compared to Buss et al.'s findings.

Overall, these results suggest that American college students' mate preferences remain fairly stable over time and certain desirable characteristics show an enduring nature.

Next we examine Chinese college students' responses. They are also similar to the overall results with slight variations in the order among the top five items. When compared to previous findings however (Chang, et al., 2011), there are some significant changes over the decades. For example, there are two personality traits (e.g., pleasing disposition and dependable character) that have continued their steady increase in perceived importance observed by Chang et al. (2011) over the last three decades. The increased ratings from the 1980 to the 2000's and to the current study may indicate that today's Chinese young people tend to focus more on the individual him/herself, their personality traits, rather than more practical factors such as earning capacities or external factors such as physical looks. Similar to their American counterparts, the Chinese college students also value mutual attraction and love in an intimate relationship. The item is rated as the second highest among 18 characteristics showing it is a top priority for the students. Compared to past findings, this item has also increased in its value placed by the participants from the 1980s to the 2000s. A plausible explanation for these upward shifts may lie in the current social and economic situations. China has gone through a tremendous economic transformation in the last decades that has resulted a much larger middle-class than ever before. Chinese people overall are a lot more prosperous than their parents and grandparents generations. These societal and economic changes may have rendered certain external factors less important and certain internal traits much more desirable. This explanation is consistent with Maslow's Self-Actualization theory (Maslow, 1970) that posits people must have their basic physical needs met before reaching for more advanced psychological needs.

However, there are some traits that show decreased values placed by Chinese college students. For example, desire for home and children has witnessed a steady decline in its perceived importance from the 1980s to the 2000s (Chang, et al. 2011) to the current study. This result is somewhat puzzling at first because given the one-child policy that dominated the family planning program in China from 1979 to 2015, it would be reasonable to expect that people would value and cherish children. However, upon further reflection of the contemporary Chinese society where job market is ruled by fierce competition, college students may be more focused on pursuing successful careers rather than on family. This speculation is not unreasonable because it has been reported that Chinese young people are under a great amount of pressure to succeed as they are working hard to find their footing in society. Furthermore, Chinese educated young people, both men and women, are marrying at a later age than before ("Sub-Anchor," 2016) and therefore they may not engage in serious thoughts or plans about having children.

Taken together, these results suggest that contemporary Chinese college students show a person-centered approach to mate preferences. They highly value mutual attraction and love between the partners and they want their mates to possess desirable personality characteristics such as kindness and dependability. On the other hand, they do not consider factors such as social status, background, genetics, domestic skills or children as important in selecting a mate. These views reflect more of a modern individualistic inclination rather than the traditional collectivistic orientation, perhaps mirroring and reacting to an ever changing society towards market economy and free competition.

The third stated goal was to gauge gender differences within each culture by comparing men and women's responses in the United States and China separately. Although in general men and women have been reported to show increasing convergence in their mating values (Buss, et al. 2001) the current findings show some significant differences. For example, as indicated in Tables 3 and 4, American women put more value than American men on their mate's emotional stability and maturity, ambition as well as good financial prospect, which is largely consistent with previous findings (Furnham & Tsoi, 2012). On the other hand, men rate physical attractiveness and health higher than women, consistent with evolutionary psychological theory that looks and health are associated with fertility in women (Schwarz & Hassebrauck, 2012).

An interesting finding is that although women's rating on desire for home and children is higher than men's, men's ranking of wants children is higher than women's. This result seems inconsistent at first glance; however upon further reflection one possible explanation is that although women do want home and children, they are currently pursuing education and career and may not be planning on starting a family yet. Men on the other hand may have included home and children in their broad future plans but timing may not have been as salient to them as to a woman who actually bears children.

Another interesting finding is American men rank good earning capacity higher than American women. This may suggest American male college students have a realistic view of today's competitive society where dual-income is generally necessary for a middle-class lifestyle. It indicates that men wish for their future wives to be employed and to contribute to the household finances whereas women perhaps plan to do so all along and that is why they are pursuing higher education in the first place. It may be a fact of life that they take for granted.

The Chinese participants' responses also reveal both convergence and divergence between men and women. As indicated in Tables 5 and 6, many factors are rated similarly by men and women. However, differences also exist. For example, Chinese male college students seem to value certain personality traits such as pleasing disposition and sociability more than women whereas female college students value mutual attraction/love and kindness more. Whereas women seem to focus more on a broader version of love men seem to focus on more specific traits.

Results on resources and home/children are very interesting. Men rather than women put more value on home and children and cooking and housekeeping skills, which traditionally were the opposite (Chang, et al. 2011). Further, similar to the American male students, Chinese men also rank good earning capacity higher. It suggests that expectations for young women, both American and Chinese, are that they achieve success in domestic as well as professional life, a departure from the traditional men-women divide. Another explanation is as women outnumber men in Chinese higher education, there may be a concern among men that they are no longer interested in home and children as they are in careers, which is not entirely unfounded.

Overall, both American and Chinese male and female college students share many values on mate preferences. However they also diverge in some areas. Overall men seem to hold a more traditional view than women regarding women's roles and expectations except for financial item. Both groups of male students rank good earning capacity in their mates higher than their female counterparts, suggesting they expect their wives to be equal partners in household finances. Women on the other hand, seem confident in their ability to support themselves financially and therefore may not view their mates' earning capacity as necessarily more important than other factors.

The fourth stated goal was to compare American and Chinese college students' responses on the Mate Selection Scale. Overall, while there are some similarities, significant differences emerge reflecting cross-cultural diversity between the American and Chinese college students in their mate selection views.

As indicated in Tables 7 and 8, ten out of 18 characteristics and ten out of 13 ranking items see significant differences between the two groups.

American students value mutual love, physical looks, certain personality traits, home and children, similar religious and political background, and college graduate more than Chinese students. Most of these seem to be consistent with traditional views except for home and children as Chinese society is generally believed to put a much higher value than western cultures on family. It is possible the American students have a more balanced view of work and family than their Chinese counterparts. There is ongoing discussion on work and family balance in the media and in legislature so American college students may be more cognizant of this challenge. The current Chinese young people on the other hand, grew up in a newly competitive society and are so preoccupied with being successful in their careers that family and children are no longer a top priority, seemingly eroding the traditional view of family importance. It could also be that the current cohort of college students are mostly singletons and they do not have any memory or experience with siblings in large families. Indeed recent survey suggests many young couples may opt not to have a second child even though it's allowed and even encouraged by the new family planning policy (Buckley, 2015). Another speculation is simply that as Chinese young people are getting married later (Sub-anchor, 2016), home and children are put on the back burner for the time being as the college students pursue their education and career.

On the other hand, Chinese college students put higher values on some personality traits than American students and health and social status. Given the competitive nature of contemporary Chinese society, young people realize one's health is essential in dealing with the challenges facing them as they work hard to achieve their goals. Another possibility is that due to the one-child policy implemented in 1979, the health of their singleton children is extremely important to families and therefore the college students value health of their mates significantly higher than the American students (although there's no difference between the two groups on heredity). The social status preference by the Chinese students is consistent with traditional view because Asian societies are believed to be more conscious of one's social status with regard to one's family origin than western societies. In the United States, people in general hold a more egalitarian view and self-made individuals are highly respected and valued. Although even in Chinese society, the importance of social status may be evolving due to increasing freedom in mobility which allows young people to migrate from poorer areas to big cities and achieve upward social mobility through education, hard work, or entrepreneurship. In some well publicized self-made cases, the traditional sense of social status seems less relevant. But it may be a slow change in people's perceptions and views as indicated by our respondents who still value social status more highly than their American counterparts.

Taken together, these cross-cultural differences between American and Chinese college students suggest that overall American students in the study hold a more balanced view of their mates regarding individuals' personality traits and their work and family life. They also put more emphasis on physical looks, supporting Kline and Zhang's (2009) findings. The Chinese students in the study focus more on internal attributes of their mates and less on external factors and home life. These differences may reflect the different social milieus of the two countries, their economies opportunities and social changes.

The fifth stated goal was to examine possible cross-cultural differences within the same gender by comparing American and Chinese men's responses and American and Chinese women's. As shown in Tables 9 and 10, American men value physical attractiveness/good looks more than Chinese men. It's telling that this is the only item that the American men rate higher than Chinese men, reflecting different levels of importance of this factor in mate preferences and a point of divergence between men of these two cultural groups. The Chinese men value certain personality traits and home/children and housekeeping skills more than American men. These cross-cultural differences are consistent with previous findings on modern vs. traditional society (Buss, 1990) which indicate that Western people view physical attractiveness as more important in mate selection than non-western societies which place higher value on home and family. However this is only partially true with women. As shown in Tables 11 and 12, American women value both physical attractiveness and home and children more importantly than Chinese women. The Chinese women in the study value desirable personality traits more highly than American women, indicating they place more value on internal qualities rather than external looks.

The cultural differences reflected in within-gender comparisons indicate an interesting finding: whereas Chinese men are more likely than American men to value family life Chinese women are less likely than American women to do so. It is reasonable to ask the question of whether Chinese men are more traditional than American men and Chinese women are less traditional than American women. However more studies are needed to address this question.

Conclusions

Overall the current results show convergence and divergence between mate preference views of a group of American college students and a group of Chinese college students. It is interesting to see how similar some of the responses are regarding their future mates. Both groups highly value mutual attraction/love and certain desirable personality characteristics in their mates whereas putting little value on others, reflecting one of the effects of globalization.

Differences shown in the two groups' responses also reflect societal and cultural influences. Overall, the American college students' answers show more continuity from previous studies of mate preferences than the Chinese students, perhaps reflecting the enduring nature of certain core values associated with a stable society. The Chinese society on the other hand, has gone through transformative political, economic and social changes in recent decades and these changes have no doubt influenced young people's mate preference choices.

The current study sheds some interesting light on the cross-cultural topic of college students' mate preferences between the United States and China, adding to the existing literature in the field. It highlights both the stable and changing nature of young people's views on mate choices and offers insights into this interesting topic. The information will allow us to become more educated about each culture. However, more empirical research is needed to further examine this area as globalization's effects on young people's values and preferences regarding mate selection become better known.

There are several limitations in the current study. First, the participants from both countries consisted more women than men, resulting in gender unbalanced samples. In future studies, more efforts should be taken to make sure more gender balanced samples be obtained. Second, it would be interesting to include some personal background questions such as dating experiences and family SES. An individual's past intimate relationships would no doubt influence their mate preference views. Similarly, SES may also affect the respondents' take on financial and earning capacity items. Third, the two colleges are somewhat different in their rankings and scopes. The US school is a regional/suburban university in the Southeast that is mainly focused on undergraduate education whereas the Chinese school is a comprehensive and highly competitive university in Shanghai, China's largest metropolis and economic center. In future studies, efforts should be made to recruit participants from more compatible colleges.

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