# The Influence of Individualism on Youth's View of Marriage in China

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## Abstract

With the progression of social modernization, individualism—a value orientation centered on personal autonomy, self-realization, and individual rights—has exerted a growing influence on the marital attitudes of China's younger generation. The traditional family-centered model, which emphasized collective responsibility and institutional stability, is being progressively replaced by a more individual-oriented conception of marriage, one that prioritizes emotional fulfillment, personal compatibility, and mutual reciprocity. This shift has led young individuals to place greater emphasis on self-actualization in partner selection, thereby weakening the normative and functional dimensions of marriage and giving rise to increasingly diverse marital forms, including delayed marriage, non-marriage, and cohabitation. At the same time, individualism has contributed to the emotionalization and egalitarianization of marital relationships, as younger cohorts seek intimate partnerships grounded in mutual respect, emotional resonance, and open communication. Nevertheless, these value transformations have also undermined the institutional stability of marriage, contributed to a persistent decline in fertility rates, and intensified the fragmentation of family structures. These dynamics, in turn, pose growing challenges to the functioning of the social security system and the recalibration of population policy. In light of the ongoing tension between individualistic values and traditional marital norms, it is imperative that the state pursue reforms to the marriage institution and optimize related public policies. Such efforts must balance respect for individual choice with the broader imperative of sustaining societal cohesion and demographic vitality.

**Keywords:** individualism, youth, marital view, marriage system, social stability

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## 1. Introduction

Traditional Chinese perspectives on marriage were grounded in Confucian ethics and patriarchal principles, underscoring the important role of adhering to parental wishes, which reflected the powerful family values and social hierarchy inherent in Chinese society (Tao, 2022). Under traditional conditions, marriage was not merely a private union between two individuals but a strategic alliance between families, charged with essential functions such as ensuring lineage continuity, safeguarding clan integrity, and fulfilling duties of filial piety (Ji, 2023). The primary purpose of marriage in traditional China was to sustain the family lineage. Clear gender roles shaped this arrangement—men were expected to provide for the family, while women were responsible for managing the household. Thus, it is evident that traditional Chinese views on marriage were deeply rooted in a collective mindset, emphasizing moral duty and a highly ritualized social structure. Although modern life has brought significant changes, their influence can still be felt in different aspects of Chinese society today (Wu, 2016).

As China continues to deepen its economic reforms and overhaul its social systems and expanding access to education are driving a fundamental shift in the country's values. Traditional values have slowly been replaced by new ones that prioritize individual rights and equality in relationships. This shift is particularly evident among younger generations, for whom the institution of marriage is no longer seen as a moral obligation or a rite of passage encapsulated in the traditional dictum of "marriage and career establishment." Instead, marriage is conceptualized as a personal choice centered on emotional fulfillment, self-realization, and mutual consent (Wang, 2022). Marriage registration has declined, with the average age of marriage rising as a growing number of young individuals opt to pursue marriage only after achieving stable jobs and financial independence. This evolving tendency indicates that marriage is no longer considered an essential aspect of adulthood but rather as a personal decision, underscoring the rising importance of individual values in private life.

There is a core variable that needs to be analyzed in the above contents, that is, individualism. But how should individualism be properly conceptualized? As a value system, individualism elevates the individual, gives precedence to personal interests, and supports freedom of choice. It stresses personal autonomy and self-reliance, positing that individuals are capable of rational decision-making and serve as the primary units of social organization (Santos, Varnum, & Grossmann, 2017). Unlike the collective-oriented social structure of the past, today's youth are growing up in an era of free information flow and strengthening individual consciousness. Enabled by sustained national economic development, young people are increasingly disengaging from traditional ethical frameworks, instead embracing emotional authenticity and self-determination. The individual-centric value system is subtly transforming their perceptions and attitudes on

marriage, affecting the future trajectory of family structures, social stability, and even national governance models. Therefore, although marriage issues appear to belong to the private sphere, from a political science perspective, the institution of marriage is closely related to national governance, cultural reproduction, and ideological stability.

In contemporary China, individualism exerts a far-reaching influence on patterns of social behavior and standards of value judgment. This trend is challenging the traditional social structure and political identity that has long been centered on the collective interest. Marriage, as an area where institutional norms and private emotions are highly intertwined, reflects the conflict between individualism and collectivism. Thus, analyzing the impact of individualistic values on young people's attitudes toward marriage not only reveals the underlying value conflicts within current modes of social governance, but also offers a critical analytical foundation for informing and enhancing reforms to the marriage system and related public policies.

## 2. The Emergence of Individualism and New Trends in Young People's Views on Marriage

The rise of individualist ideology has played an important role in reshaping modern youth's attitudes toward marriage. Amid the processes of informatization, urbanization, and expanding access to higher education, young people gradually underscore personal development and self-fulfillment over early entry into matrimony. Rather than passively conforming to traditional social expectations, such as parental arrangements, contemporary individuals now pay more attention to emotional intimacy, mutual compatibility, and personal autonomy in their marital choices.

### 2.1 The Formation of Individualism

The growth of individualism is intricately linked to dramatic shifts in societal organization, political operations, economic functionality, and the comprehension of cultural values. As old patriarchal systems and collectivist ideals lose their hold, more people are breaking free from these constraints and turning toward lives centered on independence and personal fulfillment. Simultaneously, the rights-based governance paradigm of modern states, combined with the expanding demand for self-expression within consumer-oriented societies, has further accelerated the pervasive embedding of individualistic values into everyday social life.

#### *2.1.2 Social structure: from group integration to individual autonomy*

In ancient China, an individual's status, behavior, and value orientation were shaped by collective entities such as the family, clan, and village. Personal legitimacy was predominantly derived from the fulfillment of socially prescribed roles (Wang, 2020; Li, 2025). In this cultural context, family duties were the main force shaping personal conduct, with the community's honor taking precedence over individual goals. A patriarchal system upheld a strict social

hierarchy and enforced clear divisions of labor based on gender. This sociocultural structure not only regulated societal behavior but also constrained individual development. Within this ethical framework, individuals were not seen as independent actors but rather as dependent parts serving the interests of their family and clan, with their life paths often shaped by family decisions. This collective-based social form constitutes an important foundation for the operation of China's traditional society.

As industrialization and urbanization progressed, the traditional community networks based on family ties and local connections have slowly broken down. People have grown more separated from their original social ties and now find themselves in more independent and self-directed social environments. Against this backdrop, they have gained greater decision-making power in making important life decisions related to work, housing, marriage, and education. Their decisions are no longer dictated by parental wishes or group expectations; instead, they focus on asserting their own individuality and pursuing values like “self-responsibility” and “self-actualization.” This transformation has not only reshaped the relationship between individuals and society, but also given rise to new value orientations. Young people are progressively freed from conventional identity roles, with individualism becoming the leading perspective for interpreting the connection between the individual and society. This shift has reinforced individuals’ sense of agency and strengthened the perceived legitimacy of personal choice within contemporary society.

### *2.1.2 Political system: shift from oppression to civic consciousness*

In feudal monarchies or authoritarian regimes, individuals' political identities often did not appear as independent citizens, but were constructed as appendages of the will of the state or ruling authority. They were deprived of fundamental political rights, including freedom of expression, voting, and candidacy, and had limited access to meaningful avenues for political participation. As a result, their political role was largely defined by passive obedience and allegiance. In such a political system, political legitimacy mainly relied on social hierarchy and the sanctification of authority, while individual rights were marginalized or even systematically suppressed.

The progress of modern democratic systems has precipitated a fundamental redefinition of individual rights. The essence of individualism resides in its concentration on personal freedom (Yang, 2002). From the early philosophical notions of “natural rights” and the “social contract” to the constitutional enshrinement of “civil rights,” “political equality,” and the principle that “all individuals are equal before the law,” contemporary political institutions have continuously focused on the protection of personal freedom and dignity. Individuals are recognized as legitimate participants and rights holders within governance frameworks. An open political system empowers individuals to articulate their views, monitor governance, and make choices, so converting

them from "subjects" to "citizens." Changes in political identity not only enhance an individual's political standing but also boost their confidence in making independent decisions and choices within society. Consequently, the individual is no longer regarded merely as a component of social organizations but as a fundamental element in the structural composition of the state and the architecture of public authority.

### *2.1.3 Economic models: from status-based economy to market economy*

In traditional agricultural societies, a person's social role and career trajectory were largely set by inherited factors such as gender and family background, which made it difficult for individuals to achieve class leap through their own actions. Economic production was chiefly organized around families or clans, emphasizing cooperation and adherence to established norms. The power structure was explicitly hierarchical, resulting in a highly regimented and orderly social system. This system, while effective in preserving social stability, concurrently restricted individual initiative and collective creativity. As a result, traditional society remained insular and conservative with limited social mobility, thereby impeding substantial social change and structural transformation over time.

The development of the capitalist market economy has not only changed the mechanisms of social resource allocation but has also challenged traditional patterns of social stratification. By facilitating merit-based competition and free exchange, it has driven a shift from a hierarchical social order toward a market logic based on equal competition. Individuals engage in economic activities through multiple roles, as workers, consumers, and investors. Labor contracts have supplanted feudal dependency relations, granting individuals greater autonomy over the means of production and income distribution, thereby establishing a more explicit causal link between economic outcomes and individual effort. This economic model reinforces notions of individual responsibility and self-interest, enabling people to progressively emancipate themselves from economic dependence on family and community, and making the goal of "independent living" attainable. Concurrently, consumer culture—an indispensable complement to the market economy—shapes lifestyles centered on "self-expression" and "individuality," further entrenching the individual's central role in economic life.

### *2.1.4 Cultural values: from ethical norms to individual identity*

The restructuring of cultural values has served as a fundamental catalyst for the social acceptance of individualism. In the feudal society dominated by Confucian culture, individual was conceptualized as an integral part of an "ethical network," wherein the meaning of life was fulfilling responsibilities to family, state, and society. Core behavioral norms were shaped by principles such as filial piety, loyalty, and collective honor, with personal interests must give way to the interests of the whole, and individual freedom often perceived as a potentially hazardous

form of self-indulgence. In contrast, modern cultural currents, especially those influenced by Western Enlightenment thought and humanism, have elevated the individual from a subordinate position to that of an autonomous subject. Individuals are recognized as possessing inherent dignity and decision-making capacity, with personal free will constituting the foundation for value judgment.

The internet has become the predominant platform for disseminating contemporary cultural values. Ideals, such as “be yourself” and “refuse to be defined”, have widely permeated youth culture through film, television, social media, and a diverse range of cultural products, gradually replacing traditional uniform norms (Zhang & Chen, 2025). With the advancement and widespread adoption of digital technologies, individuals now have access to more varied channels of expression and enhanced opportunities for constructing social identities, thereby further reinforcing individual subjectivity.

In summary, the rise of individualism can be attributed to the loosening and transformation of social structures, the redefinition of political identities, the transformation of economic logics, and the emergence of new cultural consciousness. These four dimensions are interconnected and operate as mutually reinforcing forces. Social structures provide the foundational framework for individual agency; political institutions confer legitimacy; economic processes shape behavioral incentives; and cultural beliefs facilitate the internalization and embodiment of these values.

In fact, China’s unique national context is characterized by a dual value system. On one hand, the institutional framework and cultural heritage of collectivism remain deeply entrenched; on the other, the development of market economy, the popularization of higher education, the prosperity of digital culture and the changes of intergenerational relations continue to promote the expansion and infiltration of individualistic values. The tension between collectivism and individualism constitutes the unique structural characteristics of China, which provides support for understanding the changes of contemporary youth in marriage attitude, social participation mode and political identity transformation.

## 2.2 New trends in attitudes toward marriage

In China, young people's attitudes toward marriage are exhibiting new trends, including late marriage, voluntary singlehood, emotional communication, and individual choice. With the awareness of gender equality, marriage is viewed not a mandatory life milestone but as a personal decision.

### *2.2.1 Enhanced individual autonomy in marriage choices*

Firstly, within traditional social structures, marriage was not merely a matter of personal emotional affiliation but a crucial institutional arrangement. Its fundamental functions included ensuring the continuation of family lineage, reinforcing clan cohesion, and maintaining the operation of the established

social order (Zhou, 2021; Sun, 2021). Consequently, in premodern societies, marriage was often recognized as a "necessary stage of life," with its legality and legitimacy mainly in familial arrangements rather than individual emotions or personal desires. Marriage thus represented not only a pivotal milestone in an individual's life but also fulfilled multiple social functions. Within this cultural framework, marriage functioned as a tool to reinforce familial and societal control over individuals' private spheres.

Against the backdrop of modernization, marriage gradually shifting from an institutional mechanism fulfilling social obligations to an autonomous choice shaped by personal emotions, self-identity, and preferred lifestyle. Particularly influenced by modern education and individualist values, young people have adopted a more cautious attitude to marriage, no longer viewing it as a compulsory life task (Wang, 2022). Individuals now prioritize personal will, emotional foundation, and compatibility over external traditions when determining the timing, choice, and conditions of marriage (Li, Cheng, & Teng, 2025).

Secondly, young people's standards for choosing a mate. Contrasting with traditional society's stress on material criteria such as "prominent family heritage, reliable employment, and financial base," the younger generation places growing importance on spiritual compatibility such as "emotional harmony, shared values, complementary personalities, and potential for mutual growth" (He, 2025). This transition does not imply a disregard for practical factors; rather, it signifies a balance between emotional and cognitive judgment, favoring emotional and psychological compatibility in partner selection. This shows that individuals are focusing on the quality of marriage rather than its form, reflecting contemporary people's desire for equality and mutual respect in intimate relationships.

### *2.2.2 The Growing prevalence of late marriage and non-marriage*

Recently, the phenomena of "late marriage" and "non-marriage" have become prominent indicators of marital attitudes among China's younger generation. Staying single at 30 is no longer considered atypical, but rather a widely accepted and common way of life. According to data from China's Seventh National Population Census, the average age at first marriage among Chinese residents rose markedly from 22.9 years in 1990 to 28.7 years in 2020. Specifically, the average age at first marriage for men increased from 23.6 to 29.4 years, while for women it rose from 22.2 to 28.0 years (Lu & Sun, 2025). Since 2010, the average age at first marriage has increased at an accelerated pace, while the disparity between urban and rural areas has progressively diminished. (Zhang & Sheng, 2023).

There are many reasons for young people's low willingness to get married. On the one hand, economic pressure is an important factor that cannot be ignored. Rising urban living costs, particularly escalating housing prices, expensive education, and the substantial financial burden of childrearing, have become

major obstacles (He, 2025). For many young people, marriage is perceived as an "unaffordable burden" until they complete their education, enter the workforce, and establish a stable career. Especially for men, prevailing social expectations regarding the role of the "breadwinner" have heightened anxieties about their financial capacity. Meanwhile, women face workplace discrimination, childbirth-related pressures, and the risk of their work being affected after getting married. Because of this, they tend to be more careful about marriage and often prefer to become financially independent before entering into a marital relationship.

On the other hand, more young individuals are choosing to marry later or remain unmarried. Traditionally, the dominant belief was that one should "marry first and pursue a career later". However, among contemporary youth, this logic is being reversed. Notions like "building a career before starting a family" and "learning to love oneself before loving others" illustrate a reordering of personal focus. Personal growth is taking precedence over romantic relationships, as a growing number of young people opt to finish their education, gain work experience, and pursue individual aspirations before entering into marriage with greater maturity and rationality.

With the development of individualism, the rationale for living unmarried is being reconstructed. Non-marriage, once labeled a "deviation," is now becoming more widely accepted by society. In public discourse, positive portrayals of single life have become common, introducing new identity labels like "independent women," "free men," and "spiritual partners." These labels provide unmarried individuals with a sense of validation and cultural affirmation. Meanwhile, the diversification of family forms has weakened marriage's status as the sole socially recognized intimate relationship. Choices such as single living, cohabitation, and open partnerships have gained greater social acceptance.

However, it is important to note that late marriage and non-marriage do not reflect a rejection of emotional connection or family formation among young people, but rather embody a deeper sense of responsibility toward marriage and higher expectations for ideal relationships. Young individuals often demonstrate rationality and prudence, carefully considering the development of their emotional foundation, economic capacity, and psychological readiness. This illustrates the dynamic interplay between personal autonomy and the social environment in contemporary society.

## 3. How Individualism Influences Contemporary Youth Perspectives on Marriage

Firstly, individualism has strengthened young people's autonomy in marriage, transforming it from a traditional social obligation into a personal choice. They no longer passively accept familial arrangements; instead, they place personal development at the forefront and actively shape their marital and life

trajectories. Young people's pursuit of life guided by free will also indicates the impact of diverse social values on traditional views of marriage.

Secondly, individualism has promoted greater equality and emotional intimacy within marital relationships. In traditional marriage systems, gender roles were distinctly divided, where men mainly took on the role of economic providers while women were responsible for household and reproductive tasks, creating an imbalance of power between the genders. Before marriage, couples often knew little about each other or had never even met,. However, the younger generation draws attention to mutual interaction within marriage and tends to cultivate a close relationship centered on mutual respect and equal communication (Liu, 2008).

In summary, individualism endows young people with a stronger sense of self-definition at the ideological level and, at the level of behavioral practice, prompts them to construct marital relationships from a more rational, equal, and diverse perspective. The views of young individuals toward marriage serve as an essential indicator of shifts in social structure and values, hence possessing substantial theoretical and practical significance.

## 4. The Impact of Individualism and Youth Marital Norms on State Policies and Stability

The interaction between individualism and the younger generation's perceptions of marriage not only forms personal choices regarding marriage and romantic relationships at the micro level, but also exerts a far-reaching influence on the nation at the macro level.

First, the alteration in young people's attitudes toward marriage has considerably undermined the stability of the population reproduction mechanism. Historically, childbearing was often contingent upon marriage.; however, contemporary trends indicate that young individuals are opting for late marriage or avoiding it entirely (Han, Wu, & Yang, 2025). This could lead to a demographic structural imbalance over time. From 2016 to 2023, China experienced a continuous decline in birth rates, with the number of births recorded at 18.832 million, 14.65 million, and 9.02 million, respectively, indicating a marked reduction in the country's reproductive capacity (Li, 2025). As of 2023, China has experienced two consecutive years of population decline, with its total fertility rate remaining at a low level of approximately 1.0—ranking second to last among major global countries (Li, 2025). Despite the implementation of initiatives like the "three-child policy" and various childbirth subsidies, these measures have shown limited effectiveness. This is largely due to a shift in youth values, in which marriage is no longer viewed as essential and childbearing is not considered a necessary life choice. The consequences include a shrinking labor force and a persistently imbalanced population structure, which may undermine the nation's economic vitality and intensify the burden on the social security system.

Secondly, the diversification of marriage and childbirth concepts has substantially affected

current population policy. Traditional policies are generally built upon the notion of "marriage and childbirth as an inseparable unit," with institutional frameworks failing to adequately accommodate situations such as non-marital childbearing and single-parent families (Gao, 2024). As lifestyles such as "two people's world" and "DINK" (Double Income, No Kids) families gradually become more prevalent, a lack of timely adaptation in policymaking to evolving social realities may result in a disconnect between policy objectives and public needs. This, in turn, could undermine policy legitimacy, including diminished policy legitimacy, declining public support, and ineffective policy implementation.

Thirdly, alterations in youth attitudes toward marriage may precipitate a range of challenges to societal stability over the medium to long term. Conventional marriage and family structures have historically served multiple functions, including providing old-age security and fostering socio-psychological stability. Declining marriage and fertility rates have driven a marked expansion of the single individuals, contraction of household size, and the steady weakening of the family's status as society's basic unit. A considerable proportion of elderly individuals face challenges in retirement, including insufficient familial support and solitary living conditions. The growing reliance on public pension systems has exacerbated the financial burden on government budgets and the social care infrastructure. At the same time, the weakening of familial emotional networks may lead to individual mental health issues and heighten feelings of social isolation, representing a critical risk warranting urgent attention in social governance.

Fourth, the sense of national belonging and social cohesion are facing challenges. Traditional marriage and family structures have long served as vital conduits linking individual identity to social stability and national affiliation. However, an intensified focus on individualism has progressively eroded collective awareness and reduced the communal feeling of civic responsibility, potentially diminishing citizens' emotional connections to their communities and the nation. Moreover, on major public issues, significant differences in values between generations may lead to diverse and even opposing public opinions, increasing the difficulty of national policy coordination and public opinion guidance.

## 5. How to Balance Individualism and Youth's View on Marriage?

Striking a balance between individualism and contemporary youth's perspectives on marriage necessitates guiding young people toward a rational and reflective understanding of marital relationships, while simultaneously upholding respect for individual autonomy. A multitude of young individuals reject marriage, driven not only by the ascendance of individualistic ideas but also by escalating survival challenges. For example, the stark mismatch between soaring housing costs in first-tier cities and the relatively modest

income levels of the younger generation has become a major structural barrier. To address these challenges, the state and society should enhance the constructive role of marriage in promoting social stability and intergenerational responsibility through comprehensive policy support and cultural guidance. By applying marriage and childbirth support systems and building a family-friendly environment, while advocating healthy views on love and marriage, individual autonomy can be preserved alongside the sustainable development of the marriage institution—thus achieving a harmonious integration of personal values and societal interests.

### 5.1 Strengthen the guidance to individuals

Effective guidance for individuals should begin with a recognition of their positive contributions to social development. Nonetheless, in the absence of appropriate leadership, an excessive emphasis on individual interests could undermine social cohesion, weaken civic awareness, and foster value nihilism, along with a diminished sense of community responsibility. Therefore, effectively guiding individuals requires a balance between personal freedom and social responsibility. Education is instrumental in this balancing act, as it informs individuals of their rights, supports the development of independent character, and stimulates critical thinking. At the same time, enhancing awareness of public spirit and civic responsibility can help individuals understand their societal relationships and realize their personal worth. In addition, the media and public policy should also provide support through institutional design, cultivating a social atmosphere that respects individual autonomy while encouraging cooperation.

### 5.2 Policy support for youth

Firstly, support programs targeting young individuals should be systematically enhanced to mitigate the structural constraints, particularly the financial pressures, that shape their matrimonial decisions. Faced with the compounded burdens of exorbitant housing costs, escalating educational expenditures, and substantial childcare responsibilities, many young adults are caught in a predicament of "willing to marry but financially incapable" (Yang, Ren, & Wang, 2024). To address this, national and local governments can play a pivotal role by providing targeted housing subsidies and expanding the availability of public rental housing (Xu & Lu, 2022). Concurrently, safeguarding labor rights, improving job quality, and enhancing income stability are essential for encouraging young people's willingness to start families and boosting their overall confidence in life. Ultimately, marriage can be redefined—not as a burdensome social obligation but as a voluntary and fulfilling lifestyle choice—only when basic living conditions have been substantially improved. This transformation is crucial to nurturing a virtuous cycle between individual autonomy and the institutional framework of marriage.

Secondly, increasing investment in public resources—especially childcare facilities—is a pivotal strategy to alleviate the pressures of marriage and childrearing, thereby promoting

higher marriage and fertility rates among young adults. The state should accelerate the establishment of an inclusive and accessible childcare system, facilitate the equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities, and, critically, safeguard women's employment rights during and after childbirth to alleviate the adverse impacts of marriage on individual career development and economic well-being (Zhang, 2025). Concurrently, a multi-stakeholder childcare service model should be proactively developed—led by the government, broadly supported by civil society, and strategically supplemented by market mechanisms—alongside efforts to professionalize and systematically train childcare workers (Duan & Li, 2025; Zhao, 2023). The ultimate goal is to establish a comprehensive childcare system that is inclusive of both urban and rural populations, structurally sound, and financially accessible.

## 6. Conclusion

In the context of continuous modernization and globalization, China's traditional view of marriage, which is based on family-oriented values and group interests, is gradually being supplanted by individualistic ideals that emphasize personal autonomy and self-fulfillment. This change is particularly pronounced among urban youth, whose marital attitudes have been significantly shaped by individualist orientations. Marriage is no longer widely regarded as an essential life milestone; instead, it is perceived as an elective pursuit closely tied to personal development and emotional gratification. This transition has led to an increase in late marriage, non-marriage, and cohabitation, reflecting a deeper connection between the diversification of marital patterns and a greater evolution of society values. Moreover, the rise of individualism has facilitated a move toward emotionally driven and egalitarian partnerships. Young individuals are progressively valuing personality compatibility and mutual respect in choosing partners, while traditional concerns with familial duty and social conformity have notably diminished.

However, the freedom-oriented conception of marriage also carries inherent risks, most notably the erosion of marital stability and the diminishing of marriage's institutional and societal functions. As its purpose shifts from facilitating intergenerational reproduction to providing emotional fulfillment, the family's traditional roles—in social integration, eldercare, and childrearing—are consistently weakened. This transformation places growing pressure on existing social security systems and population governance structures.

Overall, individualism has contributed positively to the advancement of gender equality and the enhancement of marital relationship quality. However, it also poses significant challenges to the adaptability of marital institutions and the long-term stability of socio-cultural structures. In response, it is essential for the state to undertake institutional reforms and refine marriage-related policy frameworks, aiming to uphold individual autonomy while effectively addressing the evolving demands arising from shifting social

structures and value orientations.

Although this paper explores the impact of individualism on the transformation of Chinese youth's perceptions of marriage—emphasizing its constructive role in fostering emotional intimacy and egalitarianism within marital relationships, as well as its disruptive effects on traditional marital norms—several limitations remain in the present study.

First, while this paper primarily focuses on macro-level social transformations and shifts in value systems, it lacks a nuanced analysis of variations in marital attitudes across specific subgroups—such as youth from urban and rural areas, different socioeconomic strata, and diverse educational backgrounds. Consequently, the study does not fully capture the complexity and heterogeneity of individualism's influence on perceptions of marriage.

Second, the analysis relies predominantly on literature-based methods and lacks empirical data support, which limits the ability to accurately assess the degree to which individualism shapes marital behaviors. Moreover, the study does not offer a systematic analytical framework or a feasibility assessment of how national policies might effectively reconcile individual autonomy with the imperative of preserving marital institutional stability.

Future research should consider integrating quantitative analysis with case-based approaches to strengthen empirical investigation into the evolving marital attitudes of young people. Such efforts would help generate more context-sensitive insights and actionable recommendations for the reform of marital institutions and the refinement of public policy.

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