

Dr Love figures out the maths of matchmaking

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the profiles of the people who have dated successfully and put this back into your database."

It's a large database to compile statistics from.

"Our matchmakers call both sides to fix a date, and tell each side, based on our statistics and facts, what works.

"We're not trying to be politically correct, we just tell you that this is based on what we have observed."

Ideally, men should wear business suits – but Li and his statisticians have found that looks are not the main pull for women.

"Physical appearance matters far less for women, whereas profession, social status and income still matter a lot, despite the feminist movement of the last several decades. The facts don't really support people's claim that things have changed.

"I studied evolutionary biology at Cornell before I switched to finance, so maybe there is something genetically rooted in men being hunters," Li said.

"There was an academic study in the US that surveyed female millionaires, asked them to review what kind of men they would like to date, and they set even higher standards than less wealthy women.

"The theory is that even though in their lives they are doing well and are financially independent, in their distant memory their genes still remember the hunger and the insecurity."

Li's most popular profiles reveal that most women seek 33-year-old professional managers, at least 1.75 metres tall, with a monthly salary of 15,000 yuan (HK\$17,000).

"For men, the most popular profile is 27 years old, either a teacher or a nurse, around 1.62 metres, and the average monthly salary doesn't really matter – around 5,000 yuan," he said.

And long, straight hair.

In fact, the "triple high" women – those with high education, a high salary and a high job position – are being left high and dry in Singapore and Hong Kong as their male peers choose the lower earners on the Chinese mainland, Li's team has discovered.

"First, there is a larger pool of women, and they are still more willing to compromise, so to speak.

"We also found that among mainland women, the most attractive cities were Hong Kong, then Taiwan, then Shanghai. This is again probably for financial considerations.

"But men feel threatened in Singapore and Hong Kong by these triple high women. They should be the hunters," he said.

Prehistorically perhaps men were the hunters. But today it seems they are not putting their money where their prey is.

Whereas they outnumber Li's registered women by three to two, the statisticians are the reverse when it comes to actually paying for the service.

"Only one side has to pay for the date to be set up – if you don't pay, you are passive, you can respond, but you can't actively look. You have to be confident that your profile is good enough that someone will contact you.

"And for every 40 male registered users, 60 women pay up."

Once the money is in – 3,000 yuan for six months – then a call centre matchmaker will ring both sides and set up the date.

"Seventy per cent of our members still use their banks to wire us the fee," Li said.

"Here you will find a big difference between China and the West. Whereas in the West, a credit card will automatically take the money from your card until you stop the service, here most people use debit cards, or go to their banks, so the payment doesn't roll over.

"We have a pretty good CRM system but our payment system lags far behind those of the West, which creates very different economics.

"So you have to provide some value-added service for a period, a multiple-month service. And this is why we added call centre services.

"Our matchmakers not only fix up the dates and give recommendations to customers, they also call each party after the date and give them feedback over what could have gone wrong."

Li believes his company is the largest combined website and call centre company that focuses solely on matchmaking.

He says the Chinese matchmaking tradition dates back at least 1,000 years, where old women – *meipo* – would run

between villages with lists of names to match up the singles.

"They were professionals and there are still a lot of them today. For people living in the countryside, where social circles are limited, this is still one of the primary channels of meeting. In the cities, small agencies have a few hundred clients on their books," Li said.

"But today [China] has about 350 million internet users, so it's a natural progression that they should move from the smaller agencies to the internet.

"In the last 30 years, China has turned itself from a planned economy into a market economy, and all of a sudden you're on your own.

"Suddenly everyone has to work extremely hard just to keep their job. People don't really have a very strong

Love by the numbers Zhenai owner says matchmaking is all down to probability

Percentage of clients that Zhenai.com
aims to secure at least one date

93%

sense of financial security in this country because of the huge population, so everyone devotes most of their time to their jobs," Li said.

"We fill the need for a convenient, online version of a traditional matchmaking agency."

China's booming divorce rate – said to have increased from just 500,000 in 2000 to 1.71 million last year, according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs – is certainly a boost to Li's matchmaking business.

And where in the past finding a second husband may have been difficult for a divorced woman, Li's success rates are pretty good.

"We do find a lot of divorced men end up marrying divorced women on our site. It's not that difficult if you're a

divorced woman, we find divorced men are quite receptive, but we find it's more difficult if you have children.

"It all comes down to the law of life numbers, that's why you need to have a service provider with lots of numbers. It's all down to probability."

He simply recommends the facts-driven approach.

"The problem with a qualitative approach is it's very difficult to get all your key members to focus on a key objective," Li said.

"I always try to make everything as quantitatively measurable as possible. Especially as a start-up, you need to focus on a small number of key performance indicators in order to execute effectively, and cost-effectively. And it also makes an entrepreneur's life much easier.

"You can never 100 per cent rely on models, at the end of the day you have to sometimes act on your intuition, so it's not 100 per cent science, not 100 per cent art, it's a combination of both."

So now the maths has been applied, what is the actual success rate of Li's approach?

"Because there are a lot of steps on the road leading to marriage, there's a time delay. So after these two people date it may take a couple of years, so it's not practical to use this as an operational matrix.

"We define success rate with two matrices – the time it takes for you to get your first date, and the percentage of people who have registered at our website for the past six months and have got a first date.

In other words, Li's business aims to get 93 per cent of registered users one date at the very least, and these should be brought to fruition within two weeks after contact is first made.

Li is enthusiastic about the nature of internet dating, or matchmaking – but he is keen to stress the difference.

"If I wasn't married I would definitely use it. In a bar you have to spend a long time just to get the basic information, but you go to the internet and it's all clear, their profile is there and the ice is already broken when you do meet."

Li met his wife at a social club in Hong Kong.

She was wearing black, transparent tights.