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Fei Cheng Wu Rao (*If You Are the One*): The Media as a Reflection of Society

"Beauty does not lie in perfection, but in defects."

—Wang Peijie, JSBC director

Since its launch by Jiangsu Broadcasting Corporation (JSBC) in January 2010, Fei Cheng Wu Rao (FCWR, or *If You are the One* in English) has remained one of the most widely watched—and most-talked-about—TV shows in China. But despite its success, the show has also generated great controversy on many topics, including the true purpose of the show, the motives of the contestants, and most of all, the values the show promotes. As a dating reality show in China, FCWR juggles dual objectives of entertaining TV audiences and passing government scrutiny. The attractiveness of the show lies in its drama, reality, and provocation.

Wang Peijie, JSBC director and creator of the show, reflected on the challenges and successes of the last three years as he considered a newly presented opportunity. In the spring of 2013, TV stations from Zimbabwe and Namibia had approached JSBC for possible collaboration with FCRW to expand its franchise to Africa. Wang knew that expanding into the African TV market might present a great opportunity for the show to gain new viewership and exert international influence. FCWR had already seen some initial success in its collaboration with a few overseas Chinese TV channels. However, he was still contemplating the best approach to cooperate with African partners. Exporting cultural products has never been easy, and the show was heavily reflective of Chinese values and society. Adapting a show to an entirely new context might demand changes to the form, content, contestant choices, and even stage and music design. Translation could be another bottleneck since puns and quirks of the hosts and contestants might be hard to deliver for foreign viewers. Should JSBC take the plunge and enter the African market, and if so, what features of the show could easily translate to another context and which should be altered to local needs?

Furthermore, a more recent challenge to the show was the departure of one of the hosts, Le Jia. Having been on the show for three years, Le Jia suddenly announced his resignation in January of 2013. His leaving had discouraged a lot of his loyal fans from continuing to watch the show. It has taken Wang over half a year to find a new host that would satisfy the show's picky and possessive audience. He knew it would be impossible to find a replacement for Le Jia, but also saw a silver lining in that he could now bring a new face and perspective to the show. Of course, Le Jia's leaving also symbolized a greater problem. In a country with a fiercely competitive TV market, FCWR was by now a mature show facing fundamental questions of longevity. Facing these challenges, how could the show innovate to keep its novelty while keeping its most attractive features? Wang contemplated the basic, pressing question, "what could the show do to keep the audience from getting bored?"

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Industry and Company Background

The Chinese television industry had grown tremendously, both in scale and scope, over the past two decades. While in the early days of the industry, all broadcasting was developed and distributed exclusively by the Chinese central government, by 2013, there was a vibrant set of TV broadcasting stations mainly operated by China's provincial and city governments. Overall in China, broadcasting revenue had increased from $10 billion in 2004 to $33 billion in 2010.[i] As of 2011, 97% of Chinese households watched TV, making China the country with the world's largest TV audience.[ii] In the same year, the country's film and television industries directly contributed $15.5 billion (100 billion RMB) to the domestic economy.[iii]

China Central Television (CCTV), the predominant state broadcaster, was by far the largest player in China's broadcasting space. As of 2013, CCTV operated a total of 22 different stations[iv] (see **Exhibit 1**) and captured over 90% of national airtime.[v] CCTV's overall share of the Chinese television-watching audience was approximately one-third[vi]. Its most popular Chinese television program, the evening news *Xinwen Lianbo*, aired daily at 7:00pm across most domestic TV stations. Globally, CCTV has also been at the forefront of China's soft power push: in 2012, CCTV opened a 100-person news bureau in Washington DC and dramatically expanded its staff in Africa to match China's growing investment presence there.[vii]

While CCTV is in a traditional monopoly position, it had been facing increasing competition from regional broadcasters (see **Exhibit 2**). *Xingwen Lianbo* saw its ratings fall to just 10% of the ratings market in 2010, compared to 40% before 1998.[viii] Among the largest and most competitive regional broadcasters are Hunan Broadcasting, Jiangsu Broadcasting, and Shanghai Media Group (which operates Dragon TV),. Over the past decade, these companies have amassed cultural influence by attracting audiences through innovative and sometimes controversial programs, a sharp departure from CCTV's conservative programming style. For example, Hunan Broadcasting System's *Super Girl*, a singing competition similar to the US *American Idol*, was criticized as "poison disguised as entertainment" for Chinese youth. Liu Zhongde, a standing member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and former head of Ministry of Culture, said that the government should not allow something like *Super Girl* to exist.[ix] Commentators also considered *Super Girl* a watershed of democracy in China, as viewers could vote for their favorite singers via text message; over 800 million text messages were sent during the third season of *Super Girl*. The experience of *Super Girl* illustrated the difficult situation of regional broadcasters, which must balance attractive, exciting programming with self-censorship.

JSBC, the broadcasting company behind FCWR, is headquartered in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. The company was founded in June 2001, and as of 2013, had more than 4100 employees and 14 different television channels, including 3 satellite channels (Jiangsu Satellite Channel, International Channel, and Youman Cartoon Channel). From 2004 to 2011, Jiangsu Broadcasting had been featured on China's 500 Most Valuable Brands list, ranking fourth among TV companies.[x]

Initial Development of FCRW

The development of what would eventually be FCWR began in July 2010 when a JSBC sponsor, an ice cream brand owned by Unilever, approached the company with the idea of creating a show that would focus on changing relationship norms and lighthearted modern gender wars in China. Development of the show was led by Wang Peijie, who previously created the partnered singing game show *Jue Dui Chang Xiang* (or *Who Dares to Sing* in English). Wang recollected, "after our client brought this up, we observed shows overseas and took the good elements from our singing competition show to build FCWR."

By September 2010, the initial idea of the show had been fleshed out, and the team targeted an end-of-year launch. However, Unilever's manager for the ice cream brand changed, and the new leadership was unsure whether they wanted to sponsor the show. Eventually, the sponsor decided not to go through with the project. However, convinced of the strength of the emerging program, JSBC decided to proceed alone. Wang had borrowed the name *Fei Cheng Wu Rao*, which can be literally translated as "serious inquiries only," from a well-known movie. Such a name highlights the show's focus on "*xiangqin*" or matchmaking, a serious and traditional process with heavy family involvement, from the more casual "*yuehui*" or dating,

which is the name and focus of rival Hunan Broadcasting's program *Wo Men Yue Hui Ba* (or *Take Me Out* in English). In November, after an existing JSBC show, *Who Dares to Sing?* ended, the show's production team came to support Wang Peijie in developing FCWR.

In designing the show, Wang and the development team took inspiration from many sources, and the resulting format incorporated elements from foreign dating programs, prior JSBC shows, and also introduced novel ideas developed by the production team. The hallmark element of the show, women extinguishing their podium lights to turn down a male contestant, was inspired by the Dutch show *Take Me Out*, and led to frequent comparisons between the two shows. From JSBC's paired singing show came a number of other dramatic elements, including the male contestant's selection of a "crush" at the beginning and making his final match from two or three different women at the end. Other unique elements the team introduced included the dramatic entrance of the male contestant down a futuristic-looking elevator, and the development of short video clips providing background on male contestants. One of the most important innovations was the addition of two "expert" commentators, which Wang described as "our own touch. No one does that abroad." Alluding to the Chinese norm for relationships to be familial, if not downright communal, decisions, Wang felt that "having experts give advice on matters of love and matching fits Chinese culture well."

From the beginning, the team knew they were touching on incredibly important social and cultural issues. Wang selected former journalist and anchorman Meng Fei to act as the host, hoping his news background would "bring sincerity and objectivity to the show." Le Jia, a psycho-analyst who had developed an influential personality typing system, was selected as the first expert commentator. As Wang described, Le's role was to "help both contestants and the audience know themselves better, and more easily deduce whom they actually want."

These initial format and personnel decisions were seen as an important differentiator from a series of dating shows that had been introduced since the late 1990s. Some earlier dating shows such as *Date of Roses* from Hunan TV, which were hugely successful, were all stopped around 2005 because of dramatically falling ratings and viewers' dissatisfaction with lack of innovation. FCWR strove to combine novel dramatic elements that allowed contestants to express their true feelings, with a seriousness of purpose imbued by the host and commentators.

Conceptually, the producers also knew that they had to be realistic about what to expect from men and women meeting for the first time, for only 20 minutes, versus expectations of actual *xiangqin*, which implies matrimonial intent. As Richard Liao, a contestant put it: "The more traditional people, the parents, they assume that the minute you leave the show, you're married, because that's how *xiangqin* works. The younger people don't have that idea - they watch and think 'oh haha, that was fun.' Older people take it very seriously, they don't realize that you have to get to know someone and that it usually doesn't work out." As the production team got deep into developing the show, they realized they had to reconcile the advertised social goal of the program with the practical reality of making TV. Although matchmaking was the service provided on the show, showrunners could only provide the first step. From an entertainment perspective, the program itself had to be kept light-hearted.

Liu Yuan, head of JSBC Marketing and External Communications, also described how the broader purpose of the show became clearer over time: "We're not a marriage service, just a platform for single people. People think that just because a couple leaves the stage together, they should love and marry each other, so Chinese people still have very traditional expectations for the show, and we're constantly trying to push back on that, constantly trying to express that we just provide a platform. The show is only 30 minutes for each contestant - you can't decide your life in that time. Yet at the same time, it allows for broader discussion of love and values amidst the changing Chinese social environment."

Commentator Huang Han, a sociology professor who graduated from Nanjing University, described further goals: "our related purpose on the show is to raise our contestants' visibility so they may be able to find love not *on* the show but *through* the show, by giving them more opportunities offstage." Indeed, there are numerous cases of contestants who met their spouses not on the show itself but by being contacted afterwards by viewers at home. Huang also clarified that "another indirect purpose is to let all people and their parents know that if they want to get married, what kind of mindset they should have."

Production

"CAN YOU FEEL IT?" Blares the opening music, and the first male contestant descends down a transparent elevator onto the stage (see **Exhibit 3**). After a brief introductory dialogue with host Meng Fei, the contestants lock in their first impressions: the male candidate selects his "crush" from the 24 female contestants onstage, and they in turn are asked to turn off their podium lights if they are no longer interested.

Next, the first of three "VCR" short videos introducing the male contestant plays, describing his lifestyle, career, hobbies, and personality. Staying true to its *xiangqin* philosophy, FCWR's VCRs focus on what people in China actually share when they go on *xiangqin* in real life, which occur via setups by friends and coworkers, matchmaking services, or even the infamous "matchmaking squares," public love bazaars where parents advertise their children. FCWR VCRs are similarly promotional: production manager Wang Gang stresses that although every VCR covers the same basic information – age, location, career, etc – the production team focuses on the qualities that make each person unique, or in the words of one contestant, "something to make it pop."

After the video segment, Meng Fei selects women to ask the male contestant questions, interjected with comments from the "experts," Huang Han and Le Jia. Often, the women and experts take male contestants to task on their appearance, demeanor, and self-description in the VCR. The second video segment focuses on the male contestant's romantic history, the qualities of his ideal mate, and his relationship values. At any point, female contestants can continue to turn off their lights. The final VCR features short interviews from people in the male contestant's life attesting to his (mostly positive) attributes. By the end of this final video, if there are no more lit podium lights, the male contestant has failed and is bid a sympathetic but prompt farewell from Meng. This is a frequent outcome.

If there are women who are still interested, the male contestant may select two, plus his "crush" chosen at the very beginning of the show. At this point, he is able to select from a list of ten stock questions to gather more information on the women. Some of the most frequently selected questions are clips of the female contestants' homes, the qualities they dislike most in men, their portraits with no make-up, and hobbies and interests.

After this, the male contestant has the right to ask one final, personal question of his own choosing that he is most eager to know about his future girlfriend. The topics that a lot of male contestants are most curious about include: whether the woman would mind a long-distance relationship; what the woman expects from marriage life and being a wife; what the woman wants out of the next five (or two, three, or even 10) years of her life; and what the woman would do if her husband doesn't have a lot of time to spend with her. Finally, the male contestant makes his selection, the woman gives her final acquiescence (or not), and the happy pair leaves the show with the hosts' blessings. They are interviewed together briefly and, off-camera, sail off to the Maldives to begin their romance. This is the fulfillment fantasy promised by FCWR, and every weekend, ten new male contestants take their twenty-minute shot at love and fame.

The show's flow is fast-paced and packed with "decision points," from the male contestant's selection of his crush, his final two girls, and then his final girl, to the 24 women's power to reject him at any moment. The lights, music, and live audience all serve to highlight the constant drama onstage. (See **Exhibit 4**).

Contestant Selection

Though the show has been accused of being scripted or fake, FCWR is taped in front of a live audience, with about 120 minutes of total footage being trimmed into a 90-minute episode. There are no reshoots, so showrunners identify their main challenge as finding the most interesting people and using the show's format to bring out their entertainment value. As Wang Peijie explains, his philosophy is that:

> "TV is about and for people. Beauty does not lie in perfection, but in defects. Most importantly, we want to present a sample of all the richness of society. We want to showcase the people that make people think. Some people have a different understanding of common phrases like "gao fu shuai," [tall, rich and handsome]. We sometimes deliberately choose some people we know have flaws, that

will fail [in the show], to bring people to an understanding of why certain qualities or personalities are unacceptable. It is about diversity of values."

Thus, by far the most work-intensive and important aspect of the show's production is selecting contestants. More than any other aspect, the show's freshness is achieved episode after episode through showcasing interesting people. The selection process is demanding: not only should contestants demonstrate a desire to find a significant other, they must also satisfy the TV audience's needs. Every week, the production staff fans out across China to interview contestants, some 1000 a week, to find people from different backgrounds who have something new and interesting to say. In 2012 alone, over one million people applied to be on the show, (see **Exhibit 5**), most of them through partnering matchmaking websites. After filling out an initial application online, potential contestants are subjected to a filmed in-person interview. After reviewing the tapes, producers decide on new contestants with an eye for replacing contestants who've recently left, ensuring that there is always a diversity of backgrounds and opinions on set. Out of every 100 interviews, producers estimate, perhaps one contestant is chosen.

Besides willingness and ability to express themselves, people who make the cut must have interesting characteristics that are likely to generate lively debate. At the same time, the producers stay away from personalities that are too individualistic, extreme, or unrepresentative. As Wang Gang explains, "we try to find people that represent different sub-populations, not total one-of-a-kind types. We also try to maintain truth; for example, we never tolerate people who borrow friends' apartments to film VCRs in." As the show matures, the staff travels to ever more far-flung places – overseas and third or fourth tier cities – to find fresh crops of interesting people.

As the show matured, a commonly heard critique was that the female contestants were mostly going on the show to promote themselves rather than to find a partner. Because female contestants can stay on the show as long as they reject everyone, many women end up appearing in dozens of episodes and developing large fan bases. Huang Han attested that in her experience, after getting to know many of the women contestants, women's motivations for appearing on the show are indeed quite complicated, and it's not uncommon for contestants and their interests to change during the course of many appearances:

> "Motivations for being on the show are necessarily at odds, and people come on the show and have revelations. Some women find that they're more attractive than they thought, so they try to stay on the show longer to get more and more people writing to them. Some people come on to find a rich guy and find that their fame provides new opportunities. Some pretty girls come on the show to gain visibility for other careers but actually do fall in love. There is no one simple model that applies."

If contestants aren't hoping to find true love, it isn't always clear to audience members from older generations. One contestant, Jonathan Lin, describes the pressure he faced from family members who wanted updates on the "couples" he shared the stage with. For the more traditional generation, *xiangqin* means marriage, and through such a lens, the show's narratives become all the more dramatic. Young people, more accustomed to modern forms of entertainment, understand that at the end of the day, the show is just that.

Hosts

Since the show's inception, some 3,000 contestants have cycled through, but there have only been three hosts, and they all inspire rabid loyalty from the show's fans (see **Exhibit 6**).

Meng Fei Meng Fei fulfills a traditional host's duties of introducing contestants, facilitating dialogue, and setting the pace of the show. With so many personalities onstage, Wang Peijie saw early on the importance of having a strong host who could create compelling and coherent storylines. Meng's experience in news meant that he could engage people from all walks of life and bring an element of real-life credibility to the show. Meng also had a knack for making the mundane amusing, and his quips and puns bring refreshing levity to the show. Meng Fei emphasized that he tries hard not to be judgmental, but recognizes that his role sometimes necessitates steering discussions toward appropriate directions. For example, in one episode when one female contestant attacked a man for his lack of proof of materialistic

achievement, Meng interrupted her and claimed that it was unfair for women to only look at houses and cars instead of a man's efforts.

Huang Han Ph.D in social psychology from Department of Sociology, Nanjing University and professor from Public Administration Teaching and Research Department, Jiangsu Provincial Communist Party School Huang Han was brought on in mid-2010 in an effort to inject a dose of morality to the show. In her own words, the show's troubled early days "needed adjusting." She notes, "My presence probably has to do with these necessary adjustments and balance– different character, different personality, different gender, different background, to balance the show." As the lone female host, Huang is also both mother figure and idealized partner. Many young men describe wanting to find someone like "Huang Laoshi" (teacher Huang) in their VCRs. Despite her matronly appearance and gentle manners, Huang Han describes herself as a feminist, and has often initiated discussion on gender equality and women's independence. For example, in one of the overseas episodes, she recollected: "One of the male contestants mentioned that he travelled a lot and men were generally living a harder life than women, then I openly disagreed with him by pointing out his narcissism and lack of compassion."

Le Jia No TV panel worth its salt is complete without an acerbic character, and this was the role Le Jia filled. Originally brought on as a dedicated "relationship expert," Le Jia was a fresh face on television. Before appearing on FCWR, he was a psychology teacher in Shanghai and came to be on the show after being recommended through friends. According to Wang Peijie, "[Le Jia's] value is that he's constantly thinking about people and personalities on a daily basis – every person he comes across. With him it's not theoretical." He came to the show with a strong personality and point of view, and quickly became known for giving brutally honest suggestions to the contestants. Le Jia also developed an original personality analysis framework based on color theory, which he calls FPA (Focus, Personality, and Analysis), He often labeled male and female contestants by their "personality colors" and then gave them suggestions on how to improve their chances of finding a significant other. Many failed male contestants would request a final word of Le Jia's advice before leaving the stage.

Refining the Model Over Time

Over the years, the FCWR staff has made refinements to the show with the dual purposes of keeping the format fresh and providing better services. For example, the offstage "Love Corner" was introduced to provide another 24 runner-up women, who wanted to find love but were not selected as contestants, a way to contact failed male contestants. If, after all the female contestants have rejected a male contestant, a woman sitting in the Love Corner likes a male contestant, she can stand up and declare her interest. The male contestant then has a minute to decide whether or not to leave with her. Love Corner increases the show's "usefulness," adds another decision point, and introduces an element of surprise.

Overall, changes have been subtle, as producers generally operate under a "don't fix what isn't broke" mantra. One popular addition has been an "explosion light" which allows a female contestant to explicitly express her desire to leave with a male contestant at any point. Producers have also allowed more flexibility in existing features: the predefined final questions are sometimes answered via pre-taped videos. Male contestants can also opt for a live talent performance in lieu of a third VCR.

The introduction of themed episodes has been especially popular. Along with special episodes featuring migrant workers, teachers, and previous failed-but-popular contestants, the show has also hit the road, filming foreign special episodes in eight other locations: US, South Korea, UK, Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand and Germany.

Foreign episodes feature a mixture of local (but usually still ethnically Chinese) contestants and Chinese contestants. For these episodes, producers try to highlight the cultural differences and local quirks of their overseas contestants. One Americas contestant recalls being encouraged to explain the difficulty of dating in New York as one of his motivations for going on the show.

For many overseas contestants, the FCWR experience was a cultural awakening. Taiwanese-American contestant Jonathan Lin appeared on the show twice, having failed the first time in part because he was seen as "unreliable" due to his international background and love of travel, qualities that are usually

positives in the American dating market. Contestant Michael Lewis recalls his bewilderment when one girl asked, "If you are so good looking, how am I supposed to feel secure with you?" Indeed, female contestants are not only savvy of cultural differences, they don't let international men off the hook easy. Jonathan describes being asked whether he owned a house, a marriage prerequisite for many Chinese women.

> "I said 'not in Shanghai,' and she said 'why not?' And I said, 'it's not a good time, property values are overvalued; I'd rather put my money in other countries.' So there are things that are passed down from the parents, and even though society is changing, it's still very apparent. And that translates on the show."

Contestants familiar with Western dating shows also note how serious FCWR is by comparison. As Jonathan observes, "the show is based on *Take Me Out* and all these other international shows, and if you watch the foreign versions, it's all very fun. The guys who do well are the ones with the six-pack abs, but it doesn't really work that way in China." Indeed, despite the show's early controversy, sex or sexual fun is one element that has always been studiously missing, in part because of the conservative environment and in part because it would contradict the show's advertised mission. In China, the Western concept of dating is still overruled by the more chaste, target-oriented *xiangqin*, and FCWR's success lies in its ability to depict the *xiangqin* process without actually producing lasting couples.

FCWR's Success and Impact

Party newspaper Jiefang Daily once compared FCWR to contemporary China's version of the painting "Qingming Festival by the Riverside," a metaphor of a 360-degree panoramic scene. The show's success is undeniable: it is the most-watched dating program China and likely the world (see **Exhibit 7**) and JSBC's microblog has the most followers out of any TV station in China. The show's viewership is just as diverse as the featured contestants – young, old, rich, poor, urban, and rural.

FCWR first aired in early 2010, right after Sina Weibo, China's leading microblog platform, launched, and quickly became a hot topic among netizens. In 2010, the show partnered with Baidu.com to create an "internet Valentine's Day," an event that was repeated in partnership with Tencent QQ in 2011 and Sina Weibo in 2012. In the 2010 event, the Baidu logo became a joint Baidu/FCWR logo – the first time Baidu had ever modified its logo. In the US, this would be the equivalent of Google featuring *The Bachelor* in its doodle. In 2011, QQ's login box bore the FCWR brand, and in 2012, Sina Weibo's background featured FCWR branding. For each company, it was the first time they shared their branding with a TV program. These types of events were highly effective in drawing attention to the show and establishing ubiquity. The show's segmented format – each male contestant providing a contained 20-minute story arc – was also perfect for new media. Episodes are chopped into these smaller segments before being uploaded to Youtube and Youku (the Chinese Youtube clone) the day they air. Furthermore, the FCWR staff maintains close connections with former contestants and use the show's carefully tended Weibo account as a way to provide fans with behind-the-scenes scoop. As Wang Peijie observes, "before, you only looked at how many people watched something, now you need to focus on how many people discuss something. If a lot of people discuss FCWR on new media, they'll attract even more viewers."

Wang Peijie attributes the show's popularity to its content and format, plus enhancement through social media. Content-wise, the show addresses pressing issues that extend beyond relationships: family, work, and China's changing gender dynamics, issues that are as interesting to older viewers as they are to the younger generation. "People's born affinity to relationship topics and the reality of life are the two secrets of success," Wang says. FCWR was the first show to showcase ordinary people's true views on dating and marriage. Producers acknowledge that the program is only possible in today's China. "We worried that Chinese people's ability to express themselves weren't as good as Westerners, that they wouldn't be so vivid, but people born after 1980 exceeded our expectations." Compared with most traditional dating shows, which leave only one decision point to the end, FCWR's format also fits particularly well with the social media generation's need for constant entertainment.

Social Impact

With all of China watching, it's hard to underestimate FCWR's impact on Chinese society. Sociologist Huang Han breaks down the show's impact into three parts:

> "First, it lets an ordinary person walk onto a highly visible stage. This is a trend of social development. It gives people who had no speaking rights – previously, only officials or heroes, big people, were so visible on traditional media – a chance to be seen and heard. There's no threshold, we give completely ordinary people a right to express themselves on stage. Secondly, the show gives an opportunity for us to understand real ordinary lives with no selection bias. Before, when we saw an ordinary life on TV, it was retold, edited, chosen through a mainstream lens. The implicit message is that ordinary people's lives are important and meaningful. Thirdly, it allows people to gradually accept talking about private matters in public. If not exactly something shameful, love and marriage are still something Chinese people think should be considered in private, in low voices. But there are many pressures and challenges on love and marriage today, and talking about them in public and on TV is a good way to solve these problems."

Current issues facing Chinese society are refracted through male contestants, who represent different segments of society. Putting these different contexts and values on display, the show asks the audience, represented by the female contestants, to judge and debate their merits. According to Wang Peijie, the show's most important innovation is its willingness to showcase different views and to inspire people through debates in a society that traditionally only allowed one right answer.

> "Whether in China or America, there is a mainstream set of values and that can only be established through a countering set of values. The right values are highlighted through clashes with non-mainstream values. When you show the other side, your competitors and audience will amplify it and attack you. Before, Chinese TV only showed the "good." Our show shows the good and bad, because we show real people and people have both, and we let our audience make the judgment. Without doing this, how do we make progress? You have to leave something to the audience."

Female empowerment is one modern condition the show has dealt with in myriad forms. During Mao's time, gender equality was the Party line, but it was Deng Xiaoping's post-1978 Reform and Opening that provided Chinese women a wealth of opportunities to make economic equality a reality. However, even as women have become more independent, traditional mindsets have been slower to change. The show's highly accomplished female contestants often reflect the traditional requirements that a husband must be taller than they are and earn more than they do. "They don't realize their pool is a lot smaller because they're already so strong," Huang Han points out, "obviously, some of the men are to blame as well. Sometimes even if a woman can accept someone who's not as successful, the man can't."

The current disconnect between modern gender conditions and traditional gender values explains why FCWR (not to mention dating and matchmaking services all over China) has such a steady supply of strong female contestants. There's even a term currently in vogue for describing single women in their late twenties and beyond: "leftover women." China, like most conservative patriarchal societies, has long taught women to marry young and marry up. But while most Western societies have already gone through multiple waves of feminism and sexual revolution, China's current mentality on love and marriage wouldn't be out of place in *Pride and Prejudice*. Marriage-related social pressures have been the source of criticism, shame, and anxiety for many women who are labeled as "leftovers." Zhu Hong, a Nanjing University professor as well as a sociologist, commented,

> "The single-child policy has caused a noticeable disproportion in China's gender balance. Meanwhile, there has emerged a new group of "3H" women: high educational background, high social status, and high age level. Whether and how these 3H women get married is not only a concern for themselves, but also a concern of their parents and even their grandparents." Ultimately, the producers hope that FCWR can educate the public and help people find their way as Chinese society becomes increasingly heterogeneous.

Wang Gang cites one example: "I saw a post on Weibo from a guy saying his family had always opposed his dating an older woman, but after FCWR, they changed their opinion." And Wu Yu, a novelist based in Shanghai, described how economic improvements in her life caused by the show have in turn caused changes in her family's attitude. "Aside from writing, I am now a hostess on TV. Being on the show led to a boost in my visibility, so I naturally have more fans and more opportunities now. My family has become more understanding, and they no longer bug me about getting married."

Impact on Contestants

Undoubtedly, the show's greatest impact has been on contestants themselves. Beyond the obvious overnight fame, many cite career opportunities and advantages conferred by the show. Because contestants are so widely recognized, even months after their appearances, FCWR eases introductions and makes it easier to establish a strong connection in business relationships. In China's relationship-reliant business environment, feeling as if you know someone - even if you've only seen them on TV - is invaluable. Following his two stints on the show, Jonathan leveraged his FCWR appearances into starting his own dating company, now evolving into a dating show. "Whenever I walk into a meeting now, people recognize me," he says. "It definitely helps build trust, everything from recruiting people – oh it's his company, I trust him - to going to meetings. Having people recognize me always helps a little bit." Many of the insights he's bringing to his new ventures were gleaned from his experiences on FCWR. He believes that when relationships fail in modern China, most of the time the value system is to blame, a value system that people fail to interrogate.

> "Most people don't sit around thinking about this all day. Most people think "gold-digger" and push that gold-digger away, but there's a value system behind why someone's a gold-digger, or why someone is overly attached. When you go on the show, this is all of China, so you get to see people's attitudes, you can test stuff. I will post something on Weibo about a certain value system or whatnot and the comments really surprise me."

Jonathan isn't the only former contestant whose career changed course after the show. Michael, who appeared on the show to promote his food delivery startup, decided to start a dating app, which achieved early popularity due to the high number of Weibo followers he gained after appearing on the show. He credits the show with spurring him into researching China's dating market and the current dearth of suitable venues for finding a mate. Even as FCWR has provided a mass media depiction of China's traditional *xiangqin* process, the show has also illuminated the contemporary limitations of *xiangqin* and inspired people to create new avenues for dating.

Female contestants credit the show with widening their social circle. Women contestants often live, eat, and socialize together, and for many, it's a rare opportunity to engage a diverse set of accomplished women. Former female contestants say the bonds they've formed with each other have been the most valuable benefit of appearing on FCWR. Many describe the experience as eye-opening and humbling, and the prolonged exposure to so many different types of people – along with public scrutiny – indeed seems to have left deeper marks on the women. One popular contestant, Xing Xing, admitted that, "After being on the show for many episodes, I know myself better. The show pointed out my own deficiencies, because there are so many people stronger than me. Now my next step plan will be to continue to improve myself." Another well-known female contestant, Liu Jiani, recalls how the show changed a lot of her initial thinking:

> "I grew a lot over the show. In the beginning, I was very confident – I had many years of work experience and my work involved communicating with people and dealing with issues – so I thought I knew how to judge people and had seen more than other women. By the end, I realized how complicated life was and how my perspective only captured such a small slice of that. It's been very important to my view of self and of relationships. I had fantasies and requirements, and I hoped to find someone more outstanding than me. After seeing a lot of the male contestants on the show, I found a very realistic issue was that it was not easy to find a man that matched my age, experience and other aspects. Therefore, whether you are a man or a woman, it is most important to see yourself clearly and find the right position for yourself."

Though it's exceedingly rare for contestants to maintain relationships with the people they are matched with, many describe their dating opportunities opening up after the show. Not only are contestants deluged by correspondence from audience members, some of which actually lead to relationships and marriages, they tend to have gained insights about themselves and how they fit into China's dating market.

Increasing Scrutiny and Challenges

FCWR broke ratings records in the first half of 2010. By May 2010, its ratings were second only to CCTV evening news, which all satellite stations are required to broadcast. However, the huge interest from viewers also incurred close monitoring from the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). After one contestant, Ma Nuo, famously rejected a man offering a bicycle ride (and immediately launched a popular meme) by saying "I'd rather cry in a BMW," intense debate reverberated through all circles of society over whether the show promoted unhealthy values. People's Daily, the Party's official paper, ran a commentary in October 2010 that pointed out the negative influence of "some" dating shows. "Some programs seek novelty as their objective," the article said. "They rely on peering into the privacy of others to achieve it, and they hype money worship and pleasure-seeking, which have aroused the antipathy of the audience." SARFT issued a harsh set of new rules in early June 2010 on matchmaking programs. "Incorrect social and love values such as money worship should not be presented on shows," the notice read. It also demanded that participants undergo stricter screening procedures and "be cautious before mouthing venturous remarks."

The message was loud and clear: tone down or be cancelled. The heads of the Jiangsu and Hunan satellite stations were summoned to Beijing for a meeting with SARFT officials. Zhejiang Satellite Television's dating show "Run for Love" was cancelled. FCWR undertook an overhaul responding to the SARFT's edict. In one of the self-examination reports presented to the SARFT, producers emphasized three principles fundamental to the show: ensuring truth, extending service, and providing education. By the truth principle, they screened the contestants by stricter standards to fulfill greater representativeness by the SARFT's definition. For example, more "higher-end" female contestants such as researchers, policeman, government officers, professors, PhDs were selected, and anyone who was a model, actress, or had anything to do with the entertainment industry was strictly excluded. What is more, the show repositioned itself as a life service platform rather than a dating show or entertainment program. Some moves included organizing special episodes for school teachers, migrant workers and other disadvantaged peoples, and encouraging contestants to get involved in charitable undertakings by donating their Maldives trip to the Red Cross or Project Hope.

One of the most visible adjustments to SARFT's warning was the hiring of Huang Han as the third "expert commentator." With her Party school background, Huang knew her role on the show would be to promote "correct" values and steer conversations away from materialism. On the other hand, she also recognized that a TV show is not the place for lectures, and that to affect any sort of influence, she had to win over the skeptical audience first. "Before I joined, there was a survey asking if people supported my joining, and 90% were against it. I'm trying to get people's impression of me to be not of a Party member but just of a middle-aged professional woman with a background in sociology and psychology, like a mother figure to the contestants." Huang's gentle approach of respecting all viewpoints and facilitating harmony eventually won over audience and contestants alike, and she is now one of the most beloved figures on the show. She is also an ideal figure to address the changing conditions of Chinese womanhood. She describes her diplomatic approach to promoting gender equality: "The idea I try to get across is that we're all different but equal, and the only question is whether we are right for each other. I try to promote the view that there's only compatibility, no right or wrong or hierarchy between two people, no superior and inferior."

These changes had helped FCWR avert a shut-down in its infancy, but the show continued to expose the clashes of values among Chinese youth, not only towards dating and marriage, but also towards work, life and various facets of society. More serious scrutiny was imposed in late October 2011 when a new edict from SARFT asked all the provincial channels to broadcast no more than two entertainment shows in the "golden time" between 7.30pm and 10pm, and to limit particular types of programs such as dating shows to

prevent what regulators described as "vulgar tendencies." Liu Yuan admitted that, "never before had people professed their own values so openly in public, especially their specific conditions for love and marriage. Because of this, in 2011 the show faced huge pressure."

Pressure came not just from state regulators but also from the audience, which exerted a countering force on the show to be as "real" as possible. Oftentimes, the fans of the show could not disentangle what happened onstage and off, and even blamed the show for contestants' behavior in their personal lives. Liu Yuan complained, "Not only are they FCWR contestants, they're people! When things happen to them after they've been on the show, these things will be magnified in society! For example, a female contestant was in a car accident and the news the next day was 'FCWR contestant hits someone in a car…' Because they're seen as our contestants, we have to care what they do. It's very burdensome sometimes."

More recently, FCWR has taken advantage of new media tools for crisis communication. With over 4 million followers on Weibo, FCWR has a direct line to its fans. Liu Yuan explained the benefits conferred by Weibo: "In the past, we'd try to block or obstruct rumors and scandals. Now, there's no need. We can openly express the truth and identify who's responsible. If something has to do with the actions of contestants in their personal lives, we make that known." In one recent example, a female contestant who recently left the show was photographed with another man. Though she was no longer a contestant, FCWR staff knew that to protect the romantic mythology of the show, they had to be proactive: they got the truth behind the incriminating photo from the contestant (he was just a friend), and posted it on Weibo. "The broader social environment is changing, and so must we," concludes Liu.

Striking a Long Term Balance

With FCWR entering its fourth year, veteran staff members have long accepted that as long as there are attractive, interesting people on the show, there will be controversy. In many ways, the show's leaders identify their challenge as striking a balance between dual roles: creators of entertainment and shapers of cultural values. Many of the producers have adopted "baseline" moral codes to help them navigate these competing pressures. While still striving to include all viewpoints, showrunners will now only hint at more scandalous topics. For example, when it comes to money, Liu shares:

> "It's interesting and should be discussed, but we do it in the context of the characteristics of the guests. With the second generation rich, we will ask how that affects their values, and the female contestants will also ask whether they support themselves. But it depends on people's individual stories and what's interesting about that person. Also, when someone's story comes out – his career, his family, his romances, you can make an educated judgment on his financial condition."

Even though few contestants find love on the show, the staff deeply believe in the service they provide. In attempting to capture Chinese society as it becomes ever more heterogeneous, the show empowers contestants and audience alike through the spectacle of choice: choice in identities and choice in romantic decisions. Though the staff readily admits that managing government relations adds a layer of difficulty, a philosophy of inclusion prevails. "It's not like we promote bad values, we just promote open discussion," says Liu. The light touch appears to have paid off: the show is subject to little interference today, and the Chinese government has even helped facilitate the eight overseas specials.

Yet, "even the most successful TV shows have expiration dates." In Wang Gang's words, "Our enemy is boredom." Already, FCWR is experiencing mid-lifecycle "punctuation marks," such as the departure of beloved host Le Jia. In the upcoming years, how will Jiangsu Broadcasting battle audience boredom? As overseas development opportunities arise, particularly in Africa, the producers must also consider whether their particular brand of love is universal. Can a show that's so uniquely Chinese be transported elsewhere?

Executives at JSBC admit that Le Jia's decision to resign from the show will deeply impact the show, but according to Wang Gang, "changing a person is the easiest way to inject a breath of fresh air." To replace Le, the show needs another strong personality who also has practical experience that can be applied to romance and dating, yet presents a novel perspective. All tall order that has yet to be filled.

While the search for a new host continues, the show must also decide how much to tinker with other productive elements and features. Previous adjustments such as the "explosion light" have been well received, and the continuing challenge is to increase the show's "watchability" and "debatability" without taking it too far and turning off old fans – or offending the SARFT.

The FCWR team remains hopeful about the show's prospects. Huang Han echoes Wang Peijie's words, "I know love and marriage is a basic question in human life. The show speaks about population, and relationships between genders, and women in China getting stronger even as their values remain somewhat traditional. So, these are still important issues and I believe the show will continue to be relevant."

As Wang Peijie considers franchising FCWR in Africa, he faces yet another set of questions. Would the show's reliance on the deeply Chinese *xiangqin* model translate well abroad? More broadly, could FCWR's success, which stems from its ability to capture Chinese culture in transition, be exported to a different context?

Exhibit 1 List of CCTV TV Stations (as of 2013)

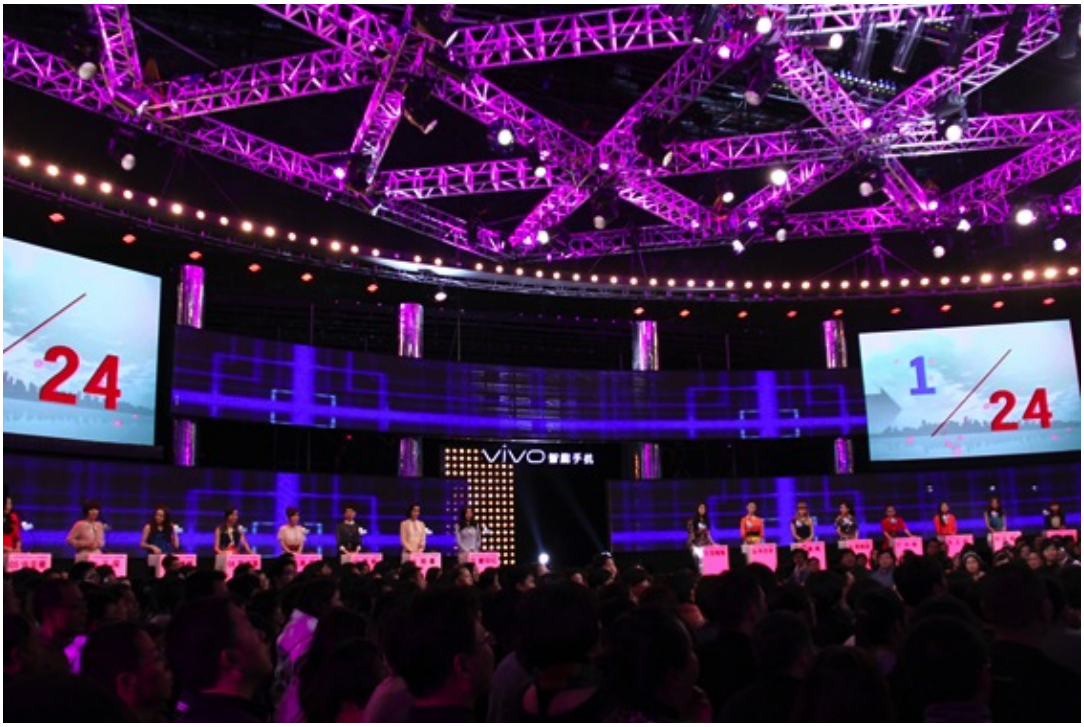
1. CCTV-1 General
2. CCTV-2 Finance and Business (formerly Economy & Life until 24 August 2009)
3. CCTV-3 Arts and Entertainment (literally Variety Show)
4. CCTV-4 International (in Chinese, 3 channels: Asia, America, and Europe)
5. CCTV-5 Sports
6. CCTV-6 Movie
7. CCTV-7 Military and Agriculture
8. CCTV-8 Serials
9. CCTV-9 Documentary (2 channels: Chinese and International)
10. CCTV-10 Science and Education
11. CCTV-11 Chinese Opera
12. CCTV-12 Society and Law
13. CCTV-13 News
14. CCTV-14 Children
15. CCTV-15 Music (Pop music programs broadcast in the CCTV-3)
16. CCTV-NEWS International (in English; formerly CCTV-9)
17. CCTV-Français International (in French)
18. CCTV-Español International (in Spanish)
19. CCTV-العربية International (in Arabic)
20. CCTV-Русский International (in Russian)
21. CCTV-HD High-definition
22. CCTV-3DTV 3D test channel

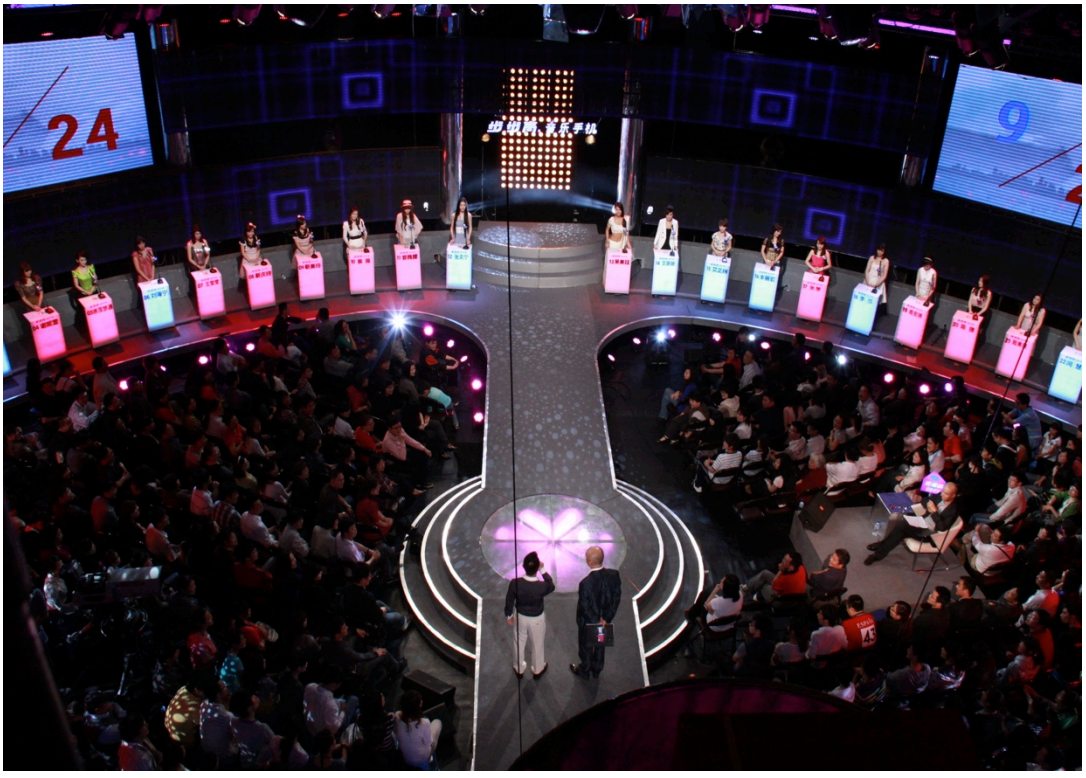
Exhibit 2 List of most popular channels

Rank	Top 12 Channels in China	2010 Viewership Ratings	Rank	Top 12 Channels in China	2010 Viewership Ratings
1	CCTV 1	0.66	7	Jiangsu Satellite TV	0.28
2	CCTV 6	0.43	8	Zhejiang Satellite TV	0.27
3	CCTV 8	0.37	9	CCTV 13 (News)	0.26
4	CCTV 3	0.34	10	CCTV 4	0.23
5	Hunan Satellite TV	0.32	11	Anhui Satellite TV	0.23
6	CCTV 5	0.29	12	CCTV 14	0.20

Source: JLJ analysis based on multiple sources

Exhibit 3 FCWR Stage





Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 4 FCWR show procedure

a. 24 female contestants enter the stage:

b. Male contestant descends from the elevator:

c. Three rounds of VCRs accompanied by female contestants extinguishing lights:

d. The two experts comment on the male contestant:

e. The male contestant chooses one question to ask the remaining women:

f. The happy couple leaves the stage hand in hand:

g. Or, the rejected male contestant leaves the stage alone:

h. Lastly, the matched couple shares their experiences on the stage, their feelings for each other, and their expectations for the future:

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 5 The Application forms for Women and Men

Name		Gender		Date of birth		Nationality			
Telephone		Emergency contact			Q Q				
Email		Birthplace			Zodiac sign				
Height		Weight		City of working					
ID				Microblog					
Company		Job position		Monthly salary					
University		Major		Educational background					
Car		Property		Marriage		Number of ex-girlfriends		Memorable reason for break-up	
Words to your ex-boyfriend		What men can do to touch you		Which body part of man do you like most					
Memorable experiences (including from previous relationships)				Hobby and skill					
Quirk and foible		Plan for future		Duration of being single		Will you go after man you like (such as through explosion light)			
Comments from friends				Self-evaluation					
Residence of parents		Job of father		Job of mother		TV show experience			
Opinion about female contestants on the stage									
Criteria for future husband									
Ideal boyfriend type									
Age range		Height		Educational background		Salary			
Car and House		Region		Marriage history		The most intolerable weakness			
Sign□	Date□								
Comments from directors	Sign of director□								

Exhibit 5 (cont'd)

Name		Gender				Date of birth		Birthplace			
Telephone			Emergency contact					Zodiac sign			
Email						QQ					
Height		Weight				City of working					
ID						Microblog					
Company			Job position			Monthly salary					
University			Major			Educational background					
Car		Property		Marriage		Number of ex-girlfriends		Memorable reason for break-up			
Do you mind your girlfriend earning more than you do and why			Words to your ex-girlfriend					Which body part of woman do you like most			
Memorable experiences (including from previous relationships)											
What do you find most intolerable in life and relationship											
Hobby and skill						Greatest virtue					
						Greatest shortcoming					
Quirk and foible								Duration of being single			
Comments from friends						Self-evaluation					
Residence of parents		Job of father		Job of mother				TV show experience			
Interest in particular female contestant			Words to the three hosts								
Ideal girlfriend type											
Sign□		Date□									
Comments from directors		Sign of director□									

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 6 The Three Hosts of FCWR

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 7 Television Rating Comparison Among the Four Leading Dating Shows in China

Program	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	TV rating	Shares	TV rating	Shares	TV rating	Shares	TV rating	Shares
FCWR/Jiangsu	3.421	9.621	3.715	11.273	3.375	10.381	2.649	8.048
Take Me Out/Hunan TV	1.765	4.517	1.527	4.004	0.701	3.91	0.632	3.617
Connected by Love/Zhejiang TV	0.754	2.544	1.182	4.11	0.938	4.379	0.605	2.875
One out of Hundred/East TV	0.643	1.768	0.848	2.3	1.127	3.498	0.807	3.267
Who Can Choose One out of HundredEast TV	*	*	0.768	2.178	0.922	3.475	0.814	2.711
When Love Knocks at the Door/Shandong TV	0.392	1.159	*	*	*	*	*	*
Dear to Each Other/Guizhou TV	0.28	0.928	*	*	*	*	*	*
Be There or Be Square/Jiangsu TV	0.728	2.339	*	*	*	*	*	*
To One's Satisfaction/Hunan TV	1.42	3.796	*	*	*	*	*	*

Source: CSM71.

End Notes

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