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Interactive Installations  
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## Match-Making: An Interactive Installation for Shanghai's Marriage Market

### Project Brief:

*Match-Making* is an Interactive Installation of rotating blocks that allows users to choose their ideal spouse intended for Shanghai's Marriage Market.

### Ideation Process:

When we first met as a group, we decided that we wanted to approach the assignment of creating an interactive installation based on a given location starting with an issue based in China that we wanted to comment on and then finding a suitable location to house that message and concept. In this process, we discussed multiple ideas, including pollution, migrant worker issues, etc., but in the end we decided that we wanted to address the issue of 剩女, or "leftover women" because of its particular relevance to China specifically. This term "leftover women" is used as a derogatory term in China to describe women who remain unmarried past the age of 25. These women, though typically highly educated and successful in their careers, are often criticized for their decision to abstain from marriage for their careers or educations. They are often called selfish, spoiled, or entitled by members of the older generation and are handed societal pressures to settle down sooner rather than later, regardless of who it might be with.

After deciding on this topic, we talked about what kind of message we might want to make related to this issue and also about the "force" of our message. Collectively, we decided that we wanted to try to do a project that would dissuade members of the older generation from thinking of "剩女" as failures for pursuing their education and careers over getting married. We also decided because of sociological effects of China's political nature that often encourages members of the society to distrust very forward messaging that we wanted to make our brand of messaging subtler and reliant on the viewers own realizations.

### Location Selection and Analysis:

Because of our ideation, which resulted in deciding on targeting the older generation and this concept of 剩女, we decided that the Shanghai Marriage Market might be an ideal location to house our messaging. The Shanghai Marriage Market appears much like a park, but is used by members of the older generation to "sell" their children to other children's parents in the hopes of match making their children together. When you go to the Marriage Market, what is most apparent about the space is the crowding of people, the flyers of children for "sale" to be married, and the scarcity of space. Because of the function of the space, which is to advertise single adults, there is often a crowding of people around the posters advertising the traits of potential spouses because of the inherent difficulty to read A4 sized papers from afar. To

note- when you read these posters, you see that the traits advertised include 户口 location, which describes the city of allowed Residence, ownership, whether that is of a car, a house, or an apartment, and physical traits, like pale skinned, tall, beautiful, or handsome. This crowding causes a scarcity of space at times, which is important to note since our interactive installation, by definition, will be occupying space. We also noted that we could not find an abundance of outlets, which would mean that our installation could not readily rely on electronics or lighting elements.

### **Design Process:**

After analyzing our space, we realized that for our location it would be wise of our design to use interactivity that did not have any reliance on technology or electricity in general, but also employed vertical space because of crowding and the scarcity of space. With this leading our discussion, we contemplated several ideas like a pulley system that would put education, happiness, and other traits at odds with marriage, and sculptures, but ultimately decided to create a tower of rotating blocks that allowed parents to choose their “ideal” spouse. We made this decision in the end because of its ease of interactivity, how it corresponded the space’s main function as a park before marriage market, and because it played on the ideas of this matching making as being something game like. We also liked this idea because it didn’t require prompting to understand the idea and provided us with a subtler way to make commentary on the issue we decided to present because it relied on the user to make personal choices and thus make a personal determination of what the project meant. Since we wanted to make sure that this commentary had the opportunity to present itself, though, we decided that we wanted to use this idea of “positive” and “negative” trait blocks that would both play on this idea that no one person can truly be perfect and force decisions for the user to analyze what they really valued in the end. How bad would a 剩女 really look in comparison to other alternatives? What was the most important thing to really look for in a spouse for your child?

### **Fabrication Process:**

With this idea of rotating blocks in mind, we began the fabrication process. To create this project, we realized that we would need designs for the blocks, the blocks themselves, a pole to hold the blocks, and a base to prevent the piece from falling over. Since this was just a proof of concept, we decided to make 2 small scaled models, one girl and one boy, that would each be 1-meter-high with 3 “decision” or “trait” blocks, with the future intention, if presented the opportunity, to scale the piece up in size and quantity. Knowing what we needed, we immediately ordered two 1-meter metal pipes from Taobao, since we knew that we would have to wait on this element of the project before we could produce our boxes. While these pipes were being shipped, Shirley designed the box designs in Adobe Illustrator, so that we could laser cut the boxes with the designs and later paint them. Once the pipe arrived, we tested different size circles in the laser cutter, to see what measurements might work best for the holes in the boxes. After making a decision these hole sizes were added to each of the boxes and we proceeded to start laser cutting our designs. One trouble we ran into on the first

box was that we had accidentally applied one of the designs to the wrong size of our box, so we quickly corrected that in the future box designs. On that errored box, I decided to apply different paints to see what might best be used for coloring the designs. After trying water color, gouache, acrylic, and oil, we collectively decided to go with gouache because it dried quickly and didn't fully cover the wood grain. After Echo and I painted all of the elements and they dried, I used wood glue to hold the boxes together and tape to stabilize the piece during the drying phase. We then began to work on our base, which we formed out of Styrofoam pieces and tape. Recognizing that this would be a bad end aesthetic for our piece, we hand dyed fabric to go over top of our bases. All in all, however, because we had spent so much time on pre-planning the installation process went pretty smoothly.

#### Installation Process:

Once all of the elements were done, we went to the space to install the piece in the space that was given to us by the class. This space 1 meter by 1 meter was a great way to show our piece because it had ample vertical space, which our piece needed. After putting the blocks on our pole, we realized two main issues (1) friction between the blocks and (2) a lack of stability in the pole. To address the first issue, we used rubber bands between the block pieces so that they would spin more smoothly. As a temporary fix, this worked rather well, though the rubber bands do on occasion "slip" making the wood blocks fall out of place. Because of this, for future installations, we would be keen to use a more permanent means to separate the blocks. As for the second issue, the stability of the pole, we realized that because the base was made of Styrofoam that the pole was able to move too much causing a slant in the pole. While this did not end up altering the functionality of the piece, it did make it look less finished and for the future we talked about we could have used perhaps a 4<sup>th</sup> block to act as a base of the piece. If we were to actually install this in the Marriage Market, we would want to scale the piece up to have more effect in the space, but we would also have to worry about weather proofing the installation. To do this, we talked about how we would have to put a clear paint coat that is water resistant on the blocks and buy a better quality pipe that would be less prone to rusting in the rain.