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# *Factors Influencing Payment Methods and Attitudes During Dating*

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***Abstract.*** This study examined the influence of gender, income, cultural background, and relationship stage on dating payment attitudes through a questionnaire survey. The sample comprised 30 participants—20 males and 10 females—born between 1989 and 2006, including both international and domestic (Chinese) students. The findings do not fully align with traditional assumptions about dating payment behaviors, as neither gender nor income significantly predicted payment preferences. Splitting the bill was most common during first dates, whereas in stable romantic relationships, the proportion of men covering the cost increased significantly. Chinese domestic students showed a stronger tendency to split the bill equally, which may stem from the effects of the one-child policy and compulsory education, potentially making young people more attuned to their own emotions while also seeking more equal relationships. In contrast, international students maintained traditional male payment patterns but expressed stronger negative attitudes toward women unwilling to pay, suggesting a cultural rebound effect.

***Keywords:*** Gender, Income, Age, International/Chinesedomesticstudents, Traditional Social Norms

## 1. Introduction

Who really pays the bill on a heterosexual date? Is the first reaction of most people to “go Dutch” (split the cost equally), or do they believe that one gender should take responsibility for payment? This seemingly simple question conceals a complex interplay of social norms, cultural expectations, and economic considerations.

Previous studies have shown that norms of male-dominated payment behavior are widespread across cultures. Among young Hispanic adults in the United States, payment scripts are shaped by strong gender expectations [1], while in Japan, men are commonly expected to fulfill the breadwinner role [2]. In Western countries such as the United States [3] and the United Kingdom [4], it is also common for men to take the initiative in paying for dates, reflecting traditional gender roles in which men are seen as providers. For example, in Barron’s [4] UK sample, although 72.3% of women offered to share the cost, 86.7% of men ultimately paid.

Will the results be different for a Chinese sample? Recent studies on dating in China similarly reveal entrenched gender norms. An ethnographic study by Zheng [5] found that women participating in commercial matchmaking services often had to maintain a delicate balance, adopting

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strategies of "self-objectification" to maximize their prospects in a system that continues to judge older, accomplished women harshly. Ong and Wang [6] provided quantitative evidence of this pragmatic approach through a large-scale field experiment, confirming that "women of all income levels visited our male profiles with higher incomes at higher rates." Attractiveness ratings for these male profiles increased discontinuously once their income surpassed the women's own. Consistent with this, Blair and Madigan [7] found that "females expressed a significantly higher preference for a male partner who is well educated, wealthy, successful, and ambitious."

Our study incorporated Chinese international students. In recent years, the idea of "going Dutch" has gained wider discussion, raising the question of whether young Chinese international students and their domestic counterparts have developed new perspectives on paying for dates.

Furthermore, because much of the existing research has been conducted within a Western cultural framework, this study also seeks to compare whether men's and women's payment behaviors in dating contexts differ between China and the West.

The analysis is grounded in two theoretical perspectives. First, Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that economic behaviors in intimate relationships involve resource exchange, and that perceptions of fairness directly influence relationship satisfaction [8]. Second, Gender Stereotype Theory highlights that payment behaviors reflect social expectations of masculinity (e.g., financial competence) and femininity (e.g., being cared for) [1].

## 2. The present study

This study investigated public attitudes toward gender roles in dating expenses, with particular attention to whether men are expected to contribute more on a first heterosexual date. We examined how gender, age, and income influence these perceptions. Based on prior research and cultural expectations, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Owing to prevailing social norms, male respondents are more likely than female respondents to pay on dates. H2: Individuals with higher income are more likely to assume payment responsibilities when dating. H3: Splitting the bill is the most common approach to managing dating expenses. H4: International students are more willing than domestic Chinese students to split the bill on dates.

## 3. Method

The present study employed a structured survey to investigate individuals' attitudes and intentions regarding payment practices on the first date. The questionnaire comprised 21 core items organized into three components:

Predictors of payment attitudes. A range of demographic and situational variables was measured to examine their relationship with payment preferences. These variables included gender (Q1), age (Q2), immigration/study-abroad status (Q3–Q4), nationality (Q5), income level (Q7; five levels), and marital status (Q9).

Dating payment preferences and intentions. Participants' preferences regarding who should pay on the first date were assessed (Q10), along with their behavioral intentions in future scenarios (Q11, Q13, Q14). Additional items addressed income-driven payment attitudes (Q12, Q15–Q16), measuring how income status influences payment expectations.

Perceived equity and gender stereotypes. This section examined participants' subjective attributions, including attitudes toward offering to pay (Q17: male-dominant; Q18: female-

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dominant), judgments about refusing to pay (Q19: male refusing to pay; Q20: female refusing to pay), and attitudes toward going Dutch (Q21).

## 4. Analytical approach

All analyses were conducted using SPSS, with the significance level set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed).

Categorical variables. For categorical outcomes such as payment preferences (Q10, Q13), descriptive statistics were first computed to present the percentage distribution of each response option. The effects of categorical predictors (e.g., gender [Q1], study-abroad background [Q3]) on payment preferences were examined using chi-square tests ($\chi^2$). When significant differences were observed ($p < .05$), adjusted standardized residuals were calculated to identify the sources of group differences.

Ordered categorical variables. For ordered categorical predictors such as income groupings, nonparametric tests were employed. Specifically, the Mann–Whitney U test was used for two-group comparisons, and the Kruskal–Wallis test was applied for comparisons across more than two groups. All categorical response options were numerically coded (e.g., Q10: 1 = male pays, 2 = female pays, 3 = split bill, 4 = other).

Continuous variables (Likert scales). For items assessed on 5-point Likert scales (Q11–Q12, Q14–Q21), reverse-coded items were first recoded for consistency. Means and standard deviations were then computed for the total sample and relevant subgroups. Group differences were analyzed as follows: independent-samples t-tests were used for two-group comparisons (e.g., gender). If normality was violated, the Mann–Whitney U test was applied; if homogeneity of variance was violated, Welch's corrected t-test was used. For comparisons across multiple groups (e.g., income subgroups), one-way ANOVA was conducted. If normality was not satisfied, the Kruskal–Wallis test was used; if variance homogeneity was not satisfied, Welch's ANOVA was applied. Finally, Spearman's rank correlation was used to assess associations between variables such as income level (Q7) and willingness to pay (Q11, Q14).

Cross-item associations. Cross-tabulations were used to examine the relationship between payment preferences (Q10) and attitudes toward going Dutch (Q21). In addition, graphical visualizations were produced to present the analysis results.

## 5. Results

The analysis proceeded in three stages: (1) descriptive analysis of payment preferences, (2) association tests for categorical variables, and (3) comparisons and correlation analyses for continuous variables.

### 5.1. Payment preferences and the effects of demographic variables

First, percentage distributions were calculated (Q10 and Q13). Results showed that 60% of respondents chose to split the bill ("AA") on the first date, 23.3% preferred male payment, and 13.3% preferred female payment. The proportion favoring male payment was thus higher than that favoring female payment (23.3% vs. 13.3%). In more stable relationships, the proportion of male payment rose to 43.3%, while splitting the bill dropped to 36.7%. Other options accounted for 10%, indicating that some participants preferred alternative arrangements. Next, a cross-tabulation of gender and first-date payment preferences revealed that the proportion of men selecting "male payment" (25%) exceeded that of women (20%), but the chi-square test was not significant ($\chi^2$ =

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2.821, p = 0.420, φ = 0.307). Fisher's exact test confirmed this result (p = 0.433, two-sided), well above the 0.05 threshold. This supports the conclusion that there is no statistically significant association between gender and first-date payment preference. In other words, H1 is rejected: the proportion of men choosing to pay on the first date does not differ significantly and may be attributable to random variation. Although not statistically significant, the distribution patterns are noteworthy. Among male respondents, 65.0% preferred splitting the bill, 25.0% believed men should pay, and 10.0% believed women should pay. Among female respondents, 50.0% preferred splitting, 20.0% favored male payment, 20.0% favored female payment, and 10.0% chose other options. These results partially support H3, as splitting the bill was indeed the most common choice for first dates (Q10). However, in stable relationships (Q13), male payment replaced splitting the bill as the predominant pattern.

The effect of income on payment practices was then examined. A Kruskal–Wallis test showed no significant effect of income on first-date payment preferences (Q10) (p = 0.710). Higher-income individuals were not more willing to pay, leading us to reject H2. It is worth noting that the RMB 3,000–8,000 income group displayed lower willingness to pay in uncorrected comparisons, though this difference was not significant after Bonferroni correction.

We also tested whether study-abroad status influenced payment preferences. Comparing Q3 and Q10, Fisher's exact test yielded a p-value of 0.037 (< 0.05), indicating a statistically significant difference between international and domestic students. Cramer's V was 0.520, suggesting a strong and practically significant effect. Specifically, 31.8% of international students believed men should pay, while none of the domestic students held this view; instead, the vast majority of domestic students (87.5%) strongly preferred splitting the bill. Accordingly, H4 is rejected: international students tended to adhere more to the traditional male-paying model.

Finally, a comparison of Q3 and Q13 using Fisher's exact test (p = 0.746 > 0.05; Cramer's V = 0.243) revealed no significant differences in payment preferences for stable relationships between international and domestic students. Both groups predominantly favored either male payment (45.5% of international students vs. 37.5% of domestic students) or splitting the bill (31.8% vs. 50.0%, respectively).

### 5.2. Income and willingness to pay (Q7/Q11/Q14)

To further test the relationship between income and willingness to pay, we conducted Spearman correlation analyses. The results for Q7 vs. Q14 (income and secondary willingness to pay) yielded ρ = –0.316, p = 0.088, indicating a marginally significant negative correlation. In other words, higher income was associated with a tendency to contribute less on a second date, although the relationship did not reach the conventional significance threshold of p < .05. In contrast, Q7 vs. Q11 (income and willingness to pay on a first date) produced ρ = –0.123, p = 0.516, showing no statistically significant relationship. However, the correlation between Q11 and Q14 was strong (ρ = 0.471, p = 0.009), with an effect size approaching Cohen's definition of a large effect (ρ > 0.50). This finding suggests good internal consistency for the willingness-to-pay scale.

Next, the Mann–Whitney U test was used to examine the effect of gender (Q1 vs. Q11/Q14). For Q1 vs. Q11, the result was U = 104, p = 0.880; for Q1 vs. Q14, U = 130.5, p = 0.183. Both results were nonsignificant, leading us to reject H1. We then tested the effect of income using the Kruskal–Wallis H test (Q7 vs. Q11/Q14). For Q11, p = 0.167 > .05; for Q14, p = 0.343 > .05. Thus, H2 was also rejected. Pairwise comparisons revealed that willingness to pay on a first date (Q11) was significantly lower in the "RMB 3,000–8,000" group than in the "RMB 8,000–15,000" group (uncorrected p = 0.037), although this difference did not remain significant after correction. No

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significant between-group differences were observed for Q14. The strong correlation between Q11 and Q14 ($\rho = 0.471$, $p = 0.009$) further supports the internal consistency of the willingness-to-pay measure.

In summary, both H1 and H2 were rejected. The effect of income appeared only in a marginal relationship with willingness to continue paying on the second date. These findings should be interpreted with caution given the limited sample size (n = 30; men = 20, women = 10) and the small number of participants in the higher-income groups.

### 5.3. The effects of social cognitive rules (Q17–Q20)

This section examines how demographic and experiential factors—gender (Q1), age (Q2), study abroad experience (Q3), and income level (Q7)—influence social cognitive rules regarding payment behaviors (Q17–Q20). Specifically, these items assess beliefs about whether men or women should take the dominant role in paying for dates, and whether refusal to pay is perceived as stinginess when enacted by men or by women. First, the Mann–Whitney U test was employed to analyze the relationship between gender (Q1) and social cognitive rules (Q17–Q20). Across all four comparisons, the p-values exceeded 0.05 (0.286, 0.588, 0.846, and 0.619), indicating no statistically significant gender-based differences. This highly consistent pattern of non-significance suggests that male and female respondents hold strikingly similar attitudes toward these payment-related social norms. In other words, such rules may not align with traditional gender role expectations but instead reflect a broader social consensus. Next, the p-values for the effect of Q2 (age) on social cognitive rules were all greater than 0.05 (0.425, 0.880, 0.201, and 0.310), indicating no statistically significant differences, we cannot draw definitive conclusions.

Next, we assessed the influence of age (Q2) using the same test. Again, all p-values were above the significance threshold (0.425, 0.880, 0.201, and 0.310), suggesting no robust evidence for age-related differences in attitudes toward these social cognitive rules. Thus, no definitive conclusions can be drawn regarding age effects.

We then examined the impact of study abroad experience (Q3). The results showed mostly nonsignificant outcomes (p-values = 0.420, 0.909, 0.662), with one exception: Q20 (evaluations of women refusing to pay) yielded a marginally significant result ($p = 0.078$). Notably, international students demonstrated higher mean ranks than non-international students, indicating a stronger negative perception of women refusing to pay.

Finally, the Kruskal–Wallis H test was applied to evaluate the influence of income level (Q7) on Q17–Q20. Income showed a significant effect only for Q19 (negative evaluation of men refusing to pay), with $p = 0.05$. Specifically, respondents in the "no income" group differed from those in other groups, especially the "3,000–8,000" income range ($p = 0.009$). However, after applying the Bonferroni correction, these differences were no longer statistically significant. While the post-hoc results must therefore be interpreted with caution, the consistent trend observed in the uncorrected values may still offer useful insights.

## 6. Discussion

The present study examined attitudes and intentions regarding payment practices in dating contexts, with particular attention to demographic and cultural factors. Several key findings emerged.

First, descriptive results indicated that splitting the bill was the most widely preferred option on the first date. However, as relationships became more established, preferences shifted toward male

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payment, suggesting that traditional gender norms may resurface over time, even in contexts where egalitarian practices initially dominate.

This finding partially aligns with Lever et al. [3], who observed that in long-term relationships (six months or more), men still assume greater financial responsibility. In our study, among long-term romantic relationships, male payment was significantly more common than female payment or other arrangements, with splitting the bill ranking second. This pattern underscores that traditional expectations regarding men's financial responsibility remain influential, even as broader dating norms increasingly emphasize equality.

Moreover, social cognitive norms were found to be widely shared across groups. Consistent with Lever et al. [3], many men believe that women should contribute to dating expenses yet experience guilt when accepting payment from women. Study abroad status emerged as a significant predictor of first-date payment preferences: international students were more likely than domestic students to expect men to pay on first dates and expressed stronger negative reactions when women refused to pay. This finding illustrates that societal expectations of gender roles are often widely shared but internally contradictory. As cultural minorities abroad, international students may adhere more closely to traditional gender roles to reinforce identity and avoid social exclusion.

Analyses of social cognitive rules further revealed remarkable consistency across gender, age, and income groups. Respondents generally believed that neither party holds a dominant position in the relationship regardless of who pays. Unlike previous studies, gender and income had limited influence on payment attitudes in our sample. One possible explanation is the cohort under study: participants born between 1989 and 2006 likely include many only children due to the one-child policy, and widespread nine-year compulsory education may have fostered egalitarian values. This cohort tends to prioritize personal interests, resist one-sided giving, and view dating expenses less as a means of demonstrating capability or reinforcing gender roles. Nonetheless, these results do not suggest that traditional gender norms have entirely disappeared.

Taken together, these findings indicate that payment practices in dating reflect both emerging egalitarian norms and enduring traditional expectations. While equity is valued—particularly on first dates—gendered conventions tend to reemerge as relationships develop. These results contribute to the literature on dating and gender norms by highlighting both the universality and cultural variability of payment practices.

## 7. Limitations and future directions

This study has three main limitations. First, the small sample size (N = 30) restricts the statistical power of the analyses and limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should employ larger, more demographically balanced samples to validate and extend these results. Second, as a cross-sectional study, it captures attitudes and behaviors at a single point in time. Longitudinal research tracking couples from initial dating to long-term relationships is needed to better understand the dynamic evolution of payment norms. Finally, the "other" response category was not clearly defined, leading to the loss of nuanced data and affecting the analysis. Future studies should refine survey options to ensure clarity and capture a wider range of responses.

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