




# Romantic relationships and attitudes in Asian emerging adults: Review and critique

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## Abstract

This article summarizes and critiques existing literature on the factors that might influence romantic relationships and attitudes among Asian emerging adults (18–29 years old). Forty-one studies were identified. Findings were categorized into two groups based on outcome variables: romantic relationship qualities (e.g., satisfaction;  $N = 22$ ) and attitudes toward dating and marriage ( $N = 19$ ). Common predictors of relationship qualities include parenting factors (e.g., parental divorce), culture-specific factors (e.g., filial piety), and psychological factors (e.g., identity status). Furthermore, findings suggest that Asian emerging adults tend to hold more conservative dating attitudes, prioritize parental approval, but also share some similarities in dating attitudes with their Western counterparts. We proposed specific recommendations regarding sample diversity and areas for further investigation in future research. Clinical implications are also discussed that highlight the importance of relationship therapists showing empathy and building therapeutic alliance with Asian emerging adult clients.

## KEYWORDS

Asian, dating attitudes, emerging adults, review, romantic relationships

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, a number of developmental psychologists have noticed a prolonged transition period from adolescence to young adulthood due to demographic changes in postindustrial societies (Erikson, 1968; Keniston, 1971; Levinson, 1978). These demographic changes involve the late entry or delay in marriage and parenthood as a result of increased participation in higher education (Arnett, 2000). Simultaneously, there have been changes in sociocultural values toward premarital sex and gender roles. The net result is that normative “adult-roles,”

such as establishing a stable career, getting married, and having children, are no longer perceived as normative among contemporary adults in their 20s compared to what they were 50 or 100 years ago (Arnett, 2000).

Arnett (2000) referred to this transition stage as emerging adulthood, a period distinct from adolescence and young adulthood that is characterized by five features: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and a sense of possibilities. Forming a self-identity is one of the primary developmental tasks of emerging adulthood, and romantic love is a crucial way to achieve this (Arnett, 2000). Dating various partners helps emerging adults understand their romantic preferences, what they look for in a partner, and their strengths and weaknesses in intimate relationships (Arnett, 2000, 2014). Although romantic relationships during this stage may be unstable, emerging adults value greater emotional and sexual intimacy than during adolescence (Arnett, 2000; Fincham & Cui, 2011). Romantic relationships during emerging adulthood tend to be longer, exclusive, and involve cohabitation (Arnett, 2000, 2014). Moreover, the development of romantic relationships during this stage is important because current romantic experiences predict the quality of future ones (Fincham & Cui, 2011; Mohr et al., 2010). Emerging adults perceive themselves as more capable of handling relationship issues and report higher relationship satisfaction through engaging in long-term committed relationships (Fincham & Cui, 2011).

## Romantic relationships in Asian emerging adults

The theory of emerging adulthood, however, is heavily based on demographic changes in the White middle class in the United States (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2015) later emphasized the influence of cultural norms on romantic relationships and called for research on romantic relationship development in non-Western cultures, including Asia. Romantic experiences of emerging adults in Asian countries differ from those in the West in two ways. First, despite the impact of globalization and the increasing adoption of individualistic values, collectivism remains a strong influence on Asian emerging adults. As a result, family obligations are more significant, and by extension, parental opinions about mate selection may carry more weight than for Western emerging adults (Arnett, 2015). In contrast, in the United States, finding a soulmate is a popular belief, reflecting an emphasis on individualism, where personal preferences and desires take priority in relationships (Arnett, 2000). Second, premarital sex is less accepted in Asian countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea, creating different experiences in love and sex for Asian emerging adults compared to their counterparts in the West (Arnett, 2015).

Despite cultural variations, recent statistics indicate that demographic shifts observed in the United States are also occurring in Asia due to rapid economic growth and increased globalization. For instance, there has been an increase in cohabitation rates, delayed marriage, and engagement in premarital sexual activities among the emerging adult population in Asia, particularly among those who are educated (Madigan & Blair, 2020; Mu, 2023; Yeung & Jones, 2023). In 2016, the average age of first marriage for men in many Asian countries, such as South Korea, Hong Kong, and Japan, was 31, and for women, it was 29 (Kameke, 2019). In addition, attitudes toward marriage and premarital sex have been changing in Asian countries. In a 2020 online survey of over 54,000 college students in China, 64.6% believed that having sex before marriage is acceptable (Blazyte, 2022). Similarly, delayed marriage is also observed in educated women in Southeast Asian countries, such as Singapore, Thailand, and Myanmar (Yeung & Jones, 2023). Consequently, romantic relationships have become a significant aspect of life for Asian emerging adults.

Furthermore, there is great diversity in romantic relationships and values within Asia. For example, dating values are very different between East Asia and South Asia, in terms of views on premarital sex, cohabitation, and age at marriage (Yeung & Jones, 2023). Early

marriage (married by 18) is commonly observed in South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, likely resulting in experiences and views of dating and marital values that would be very different from those regions where delayed marriage is observed (such as most of China, Japan, and Singapore; Torabi, 2023). Similarly, it is important to recognize the diverse ethnic and religious composition of many Asian countries. For example, Singapore is a multiethnic country comprised of Chinese, Malays, Indians, and other ethnic groups. Studies conducted on female emerging adults in Singapore and Malaysia found that family dynamics, romantic relationships, and attitudes toward premarital sex are shaped by the complex interplay of diverse religious, racial, cultural, and gender beliefs (Wong, 2012; Zainal, 2018).

Given the swift changes in social norms and ongoing transformations in Asian countries, the great diversity in dating values in Asian emerging adult populations, and the fact that Asia accounts for over half (59.7%) of the global population (Dyvik, 2023), it becomes crucial to attain an up-to-date understanding of dating and romantic relationships in this population. Therefore, the goal of this study is to conduct a critical review of existing research to inform future research and clinical practice.

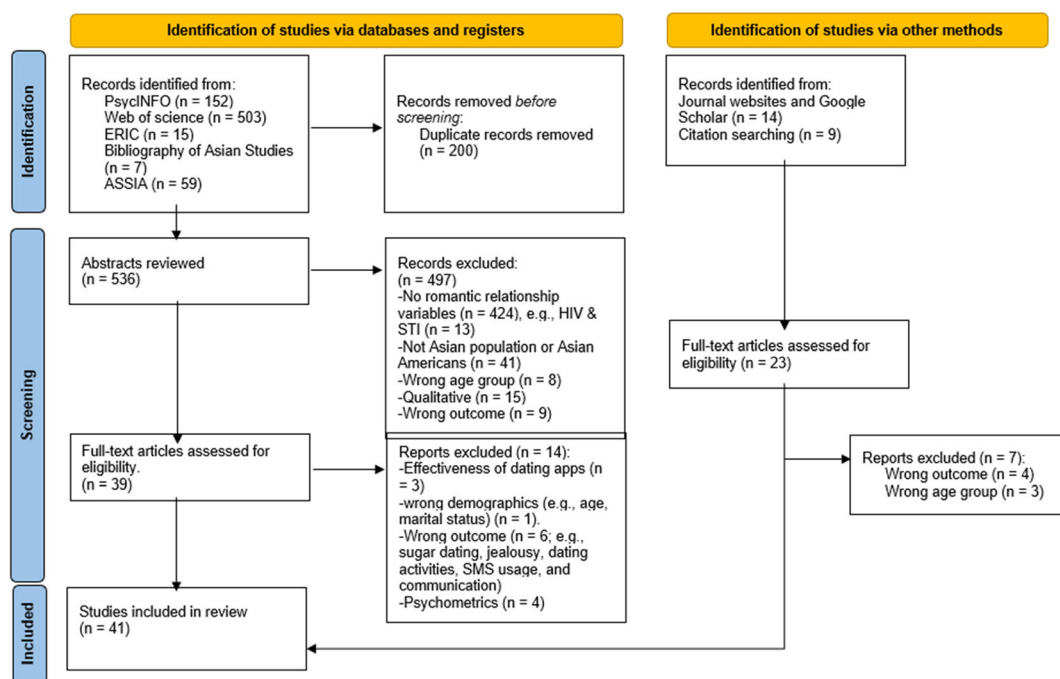
## Purpose of the present analysis

As previously noted, the theory of emerging adulthood is limited by its focus on Western culture and could be advanced by extending it to include the romantic experiences of those in non-Western cultures, including Asia. Toward this end, it is important to explore existing knowledge and research on romantic relationship development during emerging adulthood by examining the experiences of non-Western emerging adults. The current review focuses on factors that influence features and perceptions of romantic relationships among Asian emerging adults. There are several reasons for this focus. First, we aimed to synthesize existing knowledge of specific personal, cultural, and contextual factors that influence romantic relationships, values, patterns, and dynamics in this population. Second, we sought to provide a foundation for future research by identifying and exploring mechanisms necessary for establishing healthy romantic relationships. Third, focusing on the predictors of romantic relationships, values, and dynamics allows easier translation to clinical practice, so that therapists and practitioners can use the findings from this analysis to guide interventions aimed at enhancing romantic relationships among Asian emerging adults.

The present paper, therefore, provides a critical review and analysis of factors influencing romantic relationship qualities and attitudes during emerging adulthood among Asian populations. In doing so, it (a) identifies and synthesizes factors associated with romantic relationship qualities in Asian emerging adults; (b) reviews and synthesizes perceptions of romantic relationships, such as dating values, patterns, and dynamics, of Asian emerging adults. The review also explores potential cultural differences in these dynamics between Asian emerging adults and other cultural groups.

## METHOD

This review adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol (Moher et al., 2015) to investigate the romantic experiences and attitudes of Asian emerging adults. The PRISMA flowchart illustrating the inclusion and exclusion criteria is presented in Figure 1, which outlines the specific screening phases.



**FIGURE 1** Flow diagram for inclusion and exclusion steps in the study selection. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

## Eligibility criteria

Studies must meet the following criteria to be included: (a) the sample's mean age or age range should be between 18 and 29 years old and not-married to correspond with the demographics of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014); (b) the study sample had to either originate from Asian countries, currently reside in an Asian country, or have at least one such sample if multiple samples were included in a study; (c) studies had to include constructs that are directly relevant to romantic relationship qualities, dating dynamics, and attitudes as outcome variables; (d) quantitative studies had to be published since the proposal of the theory of emerging adulthood in the year 2000 in English peer-reviewed journals.

## Sources and search strategies

We searched several major Social Sciences databases, including PsycINFO, Web of Science, ERIC, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), as well as a Bibliography of Asian Studies database. The following search terms were used in searching both titles and abstracts: “romantic relation\*” OR dating OR marital\* OR courtship OR “intimate relation\*” AND “emerging adult\*” OR “young adult\*” OR “college student\*” OR “university student\*” AND Asia\* OR Afghanistan\* OR Bahrain\* OR Bangladesh\* OR Bhutan\* OR Brunei\* OR Cambodia\* OR Chinese OR “Hong Kong” OR India\* OR Indonesia\* OR Iran\* OR Iraq\* OR Japan\* OR Jordan\* OR Kazakhstan\* OR Kyrgyzstan\* OR Kuwait\* OR Laos\* OR Lebanon\* OR Macau\* OR Malaysia\* OR Mongolia\* OR Myanmar\* OR Nepal\* OR “North Korea\*” OR Oman\* OR Pakistan\* OR Qatar\* OR “Saudi Arabia\*” OR Singapore\* OR “South Korea\*” OR “Sri Lanka\*” OR Syria\* OR Taiwan\* OR Tajikistan\* OR Thailand\*

OR Philippine\* OR Turkmenistan\* OR Uzbekistan\* OR “United Arab Emirate\*” OR Vietnam\* OR Yemen\*. Truncation symbols were utilized to permit variations in terms. Although the primary focus is on romantic relationships and dating, we included other terms such as marital and courtship to ensure that studies involving marital attitudes and mate selection were also identified.

To expand our search beyond the selected databases, we employed two additional strategies. First, we explored journals that specifically focus on research on romantic relationships and dating during emerging adulthood, such as *Personal Relationships*, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, as well as a search in *the Asian Journal of Social Psychology* to specifically target publications pertaining to the Asian population. Second, we performed a reverse citation search within the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) database, using the studies identified through the previous search strategies as a foundation. This approach allowed us to uncover additional studies that referenced the initially identified studies.

## Study selection

Initially, the search yielded a total of 736 studies. Subsequently, 200 duplicates were identified and removed. The abstracts of the remaining 536 studies were screened independently by three raters using Rayyan (Ouzzani et al., 2016), an online review tool. The inter-rater agreement between the three raters was 98%. During this stage, 497 articles were excluded, and the reasons are detailed in Figure 1. Close inspection of the remaining 39 articles led to the exclusion of an additional 14 studies. Specifically, three studies evaluated the effectiveness of dating apps in finding a mate in Asian emerging adults but failed to examine dating experiences as outcomes (Lau et al., 2019). Four studies focused on measurement validation of romantic relationship features but did not investigate the predictors of these variables (Tan et al., 2021). Six more studies were excluded because they deviated from the intended focus by primarily examining other outcomes, such as sugar dating (i.e., a type of romantic relationship in which individuals engage to alleviate financial burdens; Tran et al., 2021), jealousy (Ma et al., 2015), and dating activities (Ip et al., 2022), rather than the broader concept of dating in general. Another study was excluded because its demographic characteristics were inconsistent with Arnett’s definition of emerging adulthood (married emerging adults, Utomo et al., 2016). Finally, our examination of journal websites and the reverse citation search within SSCI database identified 23 studies. These studies underwent a review process by three independent raters with an inter-rater agreement of 94.2%, and 16 were included following a full-text review. As a result, a total of 41 studies were included in this review.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results extracted from the reviewed studies, categorized according to the dependent variables (DVs) investigated. The first category comprises 22 studies that focus on romantic relationship qualities in Asian emerging adults as their primary outcome variables, such as romantic satisfaction, success, and commitment. The second category comprises 19 studies that explore attitudes and perceptions toward dating and marriage among Asian emerging adults. Within each category, studies are ordered alphabetically based on the first authors’ last names. The table also identifies the characteristics of the study participants (such as sample size, geographical region, gender composition, romantic relationship status, and, if reported, sexual orientation), theories, the DVs, any efforts made to establish the cultural appropriateness and validity of the measures employed, and the main findings.

TABLE 1 Summary of studies included in the review (*n* = 41).

Citations	Region	Theory	Sample	DV's	Main findings
Romantic relationship outcomes					
Anderson et al. (2014) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	China	The development of early adult romantic relationships (DEARR) model	<i>N</i> = 224, 46.4% F	Success	Family dysfunction (–) related to success through (–) problem solving and (+) depression symptoms.
Chen and Wu (2017) <sup>a,c</sup>	Taiwan	Attachment; social learning theory; Lee's love styles; filial piety	<i>N</i> = 412, 51% F	Satisfaction	Reciprocal filial piety (+) related to satisfaction through (+) Storage love for females; authoritarian filial piety (+) association through (+) Agape love for both genders.
Chen and Wu (2021) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	Taiwan	Implicit theories of relationships; filial piety	<i>N</i> = 205, 63.9% F	Intimacy	Authoritarian filial piety (–) related to intimacy through (+) destiny beliefs. Reciprocal filial piety (+) with intimacy.
Cho et al. (2022) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	Singapore	Attachment; parenting framework; Erikson's psychosocial theory	<i>N</i> = 155, 66.5% F	Commitment and compromise	Authoritative parenting profile (–) related to commitment and (+) related to compromise. Authoritarian parenting profile was non-sig.
Deitz et al. (2015) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	China	Attachment; DEARR	<i>N</i> = 189, 44.7% F	Satisfaction	Family dysfunction (–) related to satisfaction through (+) avoidant attachment for men, and through (–) problem-solving skills for women.
Ho et al. (2010) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	Hong Kong and the United States	Attachment	<i>N</i> = 367, 52.6% F, heterosexual	Insecure attachment	Insecure attachment to mothers (+) related to insecure romantic attachment. Partner support (–) related to insecure attachment, stronger for Hong Kong.
Johnson et al. (2015a) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	China	DEARR; Confucianism	<i>N</i> = 200 heterosexual couples	Satisfaction	*APIM: Shame proneness indirectly (–) related to relationship satisfaction for male and female partners through (+) insecure attachment to the partner and (–) adaptive interactions (i.e., constructive problem-solving and negative interactions).
Johnson et al. (2015b) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	China	Attachment; The vulnerability-stress-adaptation model of marriage (VSA)	<i>N</i> = 200 heterosexual couples	Success	*APIM: Male partner's family dysfunction (–) related to their own success via (+) negative couple interaction. Female partner's family dysfunction (–) related to their own success via (+) mental health problems and (–) related to male partner's success via (+) mental health problems and (+) negative couple interaction.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Citations	Region	Theory	Sample	DV's	Main findings
Li et al. (2020) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	China	Attachment; emotional security theory	N = 202, 65.4% F	Relationship quality	Interparental conflict (–) related to quality through interpersonal security.
Li et al. (2023) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	China	Attachment; life history theory	N = 160 heterosexual couples	Relationship quality	Interparental conflict (–) related to quality through (–) maternal attachment for males, but through (+) romantic anxiety for females.
Marshall (2012) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	Japan	n/a	N = 30 heterosexual couples	Relationship quality	*Longitudinal: Men's anxious attachment (+) related to quality through (+) <i>amae</i> behavior; and men's avoidant attachment (–) related to quality through (–) <i>amae</i> behavior.
Marshall et al. (2011) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	Japan	Attachment	N = 30 heterosexual couples	Relationship quality	*Longitudinal: <i>Amae</i> behavior (–) related to quality but (–) related to conflict. <i>Amae</i> behavior (+) with quality through (+) motivation to enhance closeness.
Moore et al. (2012) <sup>a</sup>	Australia and Hong Kong	Attachment	N = 666, 76% F	Romantic interests and breakup distress	Immature identity statuses and insecure attachment (–) related to romantic interests, but (+) related to breakup stress. HK was (–) to romantic interests and breakup although romantic relationships being normative in both cultures.
Sarwar et al. (2020) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	Pakistan	Parenting framework; Erikson's psychosocial theory	N = 142, 52.8% F	Breakup distress	Paternal overprotection and rejection (+) related to breakup distress.
Wang and Lu (2017) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	China	Attachment; individualism and collectivism	N = 191, 50.8% F, heterosexual	Commitment	Vertical collectivism (+) related to commitment through (–) romantic insecurities.
Wang et al. (2022) <sup>a,b,c</sup>	China	Interpersonal model of intimacy; attachment	N = 555, 51.7%, COVID-19	Well-being	Ambivalence over emotional expression (–) related to relationship well-being through (+) fear of intimacy and (+) attachment avoidance, separately and sequentially.
Wang and Chen (2023) <sup>a,b</sup>	Taiwan	Parenting framework; implicit theories of relationships	N = 597	Motivation—growth and destiny beliefs	Authoritarian parenting (+) related to destiny belief for those who were in a relationship or once in a relationship. Authoritative parenting (+) related to growth belief for those who were once in a



TABLE 1 (Continued)

Citations	Region	Theory	Sample	DVs	Main findings
Wang and Wang (2012) <sup>a,b</sup>	China	Attachment	N = 302, 57.3% F	Attachment	relationship. Authoritative and authoritarian both (+) related to growth belief for those never in a relationship. General and romantic attachment (+) interrelated. Profiles of attachment (parent, peer, and romantic): All-average, all-secure, romantic-insecure, peer-secure.
Wongpakaran et al. (2012) <sup>a</sup>	Thailand	Attachment	N = 398, 64% F, 85% heterosexual	Satisfaction and length	Attachment anxiety was (-) related to relationship satisfaction and the length of relationships only for women who were in a dating relationship, but for men.
Wu et al. (2022) <sup>a,c</sup>	China	Stress and coping model	N = 103, 62.1% F	Satisfaction	Gratitude (+) related to satisfaction through (+) forgiveness.
Ye et al. (2016) <sup>a,c</sup>	Hong Kong	The social exchange theory and equity theory	N = 103 heterosexual couples	Satisfaction	*APIM: Narcissism (-) related to satisfaction on self and partners' satisfaction through (+) actor effects on perception discrepancy. Self-esteem had (+) actor effects with self and partner's relationship satisfaction.
Yu et al. (2019)	Taiwan	Life Course Theory	N = 5172, 46.6% F.	Relationship involvement	Co-residence with parents (-) related to quantity and quality of romantic relationships.
Dating values and dynamics Bejanyan et al. (2014)	India (partly US resided) and the United States	Individualism and collectivism	N = 209, 43.1% F	Romantic beliefs and mate preferences	Indian culture (+) related to romantic beliefs through (+) collectivism; Indian culture (+) related to preferences in traditional characteristics for a marital partner through (+) collectivism and (+) traditional gender beliefs.
Blair and Madigan (2019) <sup>a</sup>	China	Confucianism	N = 954, 58.8% F	Date/marry without parental approval	Females: Religiosity, desire for appearance and pragmatic qualities, and willingness to have sex at first date was related to (+) date/marry without parental approval and (-) comply with parents.

(Continues)



TABLE 1 (Continued)

Citations	Region	Theory	Sample	DV's	Main findings
Blair and Scott (2019) <sup>d</sup>	China	Confucianism; filial piety	N = 954, 58.8% F	Attitudes in sexual intimacy, for example, kissing and having sex on the first date	Males: Two-parents family, close relationship with parents, traditional gender roles belief, desire for heterogamy, and maternal employment were related to (-) date/marry without parental approval. Both sexes reported a stronger desire to date but lower desire to marry.  Willingness to kiss on a first date: Men > women; longer time waited to have sex after the first date: Women > men. Factors affecting decision on sexual intimacy: Family characteristics (e.g., parental education, two-parent family, and willingness to marry without parent approval) more salient for females; individual traits (e.g., desire for heterogamous relationship and caring qualities, and religiosity) more salient for males.
Darak et al. (2022)	India	Life Course Theory	N = 1240, 47.2% F	Typologies of relationships	Four typologies of relationships: (a) commitment-no sex, (b) commitment-sex-some exploration, (c) no commitment-exploration, (d) no relationship. Likelihood of following the "Commitment-no sex" typology: Women > men.
Farahani and Cleland (2015) <sup>a,b</sup>	Iran	n/a	N = 1743, all females	Norms in premarital relationships	Greater liberal norms found in those with older age, educated fathers, and studying in a mixed-sex university. Access to satellite TV (+) related to liberal norms.
Hu and Wu (2019) <sup>a</sup>	China	Social closure theory and post-materialism	N = 2473	Realistic or romantic attitudes toward love	*Longitudinal: Parental education (+) related to realistic attitude via (+) family income and cultural capital.
Huang and Lin (2014) <sup>a,b</sup>	Taiwan	Social learning theory; Erikson's psychosocial theory	N = 1113, 56% F	Marital attitudes	Positive marital attitudes were more likely to be reported by males (vs. females), those experienced low parental conflicts and those who came from intact families.

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Citations	Region	Theory	Sample	DVs	Main findings
Jankowiak et al. (2015) <sup>a,b</sup>	China	Fisher's model of love	N = 151, 75.5% F	de Munck et al.'s model of love	Chinese sample generated similar factors in love with the United States, Russia, and Lithuania (found in De Munck et al., 2009, 2010), which are intrusive thinking, self-actualization, and emotional fulfillment. Sexual attraction was not asked in the survey.
Kim et al. (2018) <sup>a,b</sup>	China and the United States	The triangular theory of love; individualism and collectivism	N = 581, 53%–65% F	Value in communication skills	Value in affective communication: US > China. Chinese nationality (+) related to instrumental communication through (+) interdependent self-construal, but (–) related to affective communication through (–) independent self-construal. Female sex (+) related to affective and instrumental communication through (+) femininity in both cultures. Both cultures placed greater value on affective communication than in instrumental communication. No differences in values in regulative skills.
Kline et al. (2012) <sup>a</sup>	China (C), India (I), Japan (J), Malaysia (M), South Korea (SK), and the United States	Evolutionary theory; individualism and collectivism	N = 375, 49.3% F	Desirable traits of “good and bad husband/wife” and “good and bad marriage”	Home-focus belief for good/bad wife: East Asians > US Beliefs about love and caring: US (for good wife) = M = I, > C, J & SK; US (for good marriage) = C = I = SK > J & M. Preferred respectfulness and gentleness (for good wife): C & SK > US = J. No differences in disrespect and controlling behavior for bad husband/wife/marriage.
Lam et al. (2016) <sup>a,c</sup>	Taiwan and the United States	Ideal standards model	N = 2048, 68.7% F	Ideal traits of partner and relationship satisfaction	Ideal of resources and extended family: Taiwan > the US, due to higher levels of interdependent self-construal. Ideal-perception consistency (+) related to satisfaction in both groups.
Madigan and Blair (2020) <sup>a</sup>	China and the United States	Life Course Theory	N = 645	Dating attitudes and behaviors	Gaps in the average age of first date, the possibility of never had a romantic relationship, against kissing and having sex on first date, peer pressure in dating, pressures of parental approval, sex after marriage: China > US. Cohabitation, heterogamy, the likelihood that

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Citations	Region	Theory	Sample	DVs	Main findings
Medora et al. (2002) <sup>a</sup>	India, Turkey, and the United States	Erikson's psychosocial theory; Goode's theory on romantic love; individualism and collectivism	N = 641, 49% <sup>b</sup> –57% F	Romanticism—attitudes toward romantic love; mate selection	parents approved of a romantic partner, and feeling upset if parents disapprove of a romantic partner: US > China. Romanticism: US > Turkey > India. "Has the same religion" in a mate: American women > American men; Turkish women > Turkish men. "Intelligence" in a mate: American men > American women; Turkish women > Turkish men. Female sex (+) related to romanticism across the three cultures. (*The Indian sample was not included in the mate selection study)
Pan (2014)	Taiwan	n/a	N = 1587, 49.5% F, parental divorce	Marriage expectations and romantic involvement	*Longitudinal: Parental divorce before age 12 (–) related to marriage expectations, (+) related to romantic involvement and the number of partners. Current better parent–child relationship (+) related to marriage expectations for those who experienced parental divorce before 12. Early mother–child relationship (–) related to romantic involvement for those experienced parental divorce after 12. Parental conflict was (–) related to marriage expectation.
Rempala et al. (2014) <sup>a</sup>	East Asia, Polynesia, (US resided) and the United States	Evolutionary theory	N = 206, 53.6% F	Desirable traits in marriage partners	Values in social level: East Asian > US, East Asian > Polynesian. Values in kindness: US > East Asian; Polynesian > East Asian; egalitarian female > traditional female. Among males across all cultures: Traditional values (+) related to physical attractiveness.
Tan et al. (2021) <sup>a,b</sup>	India, Japan, and Malaysia	Investment model of commitment	N = 1108, 68.2% F	Attitudes toward singlehood	Desirability of control was (+) related to attitudes toward singlehood. Relational mobility was (+) related to attitudes toward singlehood at low subjective SES; subjective SES was (+) related to attitudes toward singlehood at low relational mobility.

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Citations	Region	Theory	Sample	DVs	Main findings
Tang and Zuo (2000) <sup>a</sup>	China and the United States	Erikson's psychosocial theory	N = 378, 57% F	Dating attitudes and behaviors	Description of "steady" relationships, liberal views in expectations of outing, appropriate dating age, commitment, sexual relationship, quantity of dates: US > China. Belief that the purpose of dating is to find a marital partner, willing to date someone from a different social class: China > US.
Xu and Ocker (2013)	China	Confucianism	N = 297 (including EAs and elderly), 64%–74% F	Attitudes toward premarital sex and beliefs of successful marriage	Conservative attitudes about premarital sex and perceptions of the importance of money: Elderly > EAs. Acceptance of cohabitation and perceptions of the importance of love: EAs > elderly.
Zhang and Kline (2009) <sup>a,c</sup>	China and the United States	Evolutionary theory	N = 616; 50.2% F	Relationship expectations and marriage intentions	Influence of parents and close friends on decision-making, dating partner should meet filial piety beliefs, report parental disapproval as an obstacle to marriage: China > US. Among Chinese participants, family and friend influence (+) predict marital intentions, whereas attitudes on romantic love, career support, and family and friend influence (+) predict relationship commitment.

Note: –, negative/negatively; +, positive/positively; >, greater than; DVs, dependent variables; F, female.

<sup>a</sup>–<sup>\*\*\*</sup> in Table 1 refers to dyadic samples.

<sup>b</sup>Participants are college students.

<sup>c</sup>Evidence provided for measure.

<sup>e</sup>The participants were currently engaged in a romantic relationship or had prior experiences in romantic relationships.

## Theories

Most studies included theoretical frameworks, with only three exceptions (Farahani & Cleland, 2015; Marshall et al., 2011; Pan, 2014). Although the cited theories were originally developed in the Western context, most studies discussed their theoretical frameworks within a cultural-specific context, highlighting the need to test the applicability of these theories beyond Western cultures. Specifically, attachment theory was the most frequently cited ( $n = 12$ ; Chen & Wu, 2017), and studies illustrated how culture shapes parent-child attachment (Ho et al., 2010; Wang & Wang, 2012; Wongpakaran et al., 2012). Additionally, developmental theories (such as Erikson's psychosocial theory) were employed in several studies ( $n = 5$ ; Medora et al., 2002; Sarwar et al., 2020; Tang & Zuo, 2000), emphasizing the significance of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood, as well as cultural variations compared to the West. Other cited theories included family-related frameworks such as the parenting framework ( $n = 3$ ; Cho et al., 2022), and these studies demonstrated differences in parenting norms between collectivistic cultures and the West (Cho et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2020). Furthermore, several studies linked theories with specific cultural aspects of the target groups. For example, Chen and Wu (2017) linked attachment and love styles with filial piety in Chinese culture. These studies reflect the importance of understanding romantic relationships across cultures and emphasize the need to expand the theory of emerging adulthood.

## Sample characteristics

Sample sizes varied, ranging from 30 couples (Marshall, 2012; Marshall et al., 2011) to 5172 individual emerging adults (Yu et al., 2019), and totaled 28,645 participants. Among these participants, the majority (70.3%) were college students, with a smaller subset investigating other emerging adult participants (Medora et al., 2002; Pan, 2014). Regarding gender composition, 13% of the overall participants lacked gender information (Madigan & Blair, 2020). Among those with gender information available, the sample had a gender-balanced distribution, with 57.2% being female participants.

Regarding relationship statuses, 23.9% of the overall participants were required to be currently involved in a romantic relationship or to have had prior romantic relationship experiences (Anderson et al., 2014; Li et al., 2020, 2023; Ye et al., 2016). Additionally, 5% of the overall participants consisted of dating-couple dyads within a college setting (Li et al., 2023; Marshall, 2012; Marshall et al., 2011; Ye et al., 2016). Sexual orientation information was provided for 8.0% of the overall participants, predominantly indicating a heterosexual orientation among participants (Ho et al., 2010; Li et al., 2023), with only 3% identifying as other sexual orientations. Furthermore, 2% of the participants were recruited during the COVID-19 pandemic to investigate relational well-being during this specific period (Wang et al., 2022), and 6% had experienced parental divorce to investigate the relationship between the timing of parental divorce and emerging adults' marital expectations (Pan, 2014).

Moreover, most studies focused on recruiting participants from a single Asian region. Among these participants, 82.3% were from East Asian regions (e.g., China, South Korea, Japan, etc.; Chen & Wu, 2017), 15% were from Middle and South Asian regions (e.g., India, Iran, and Pakistan; Darak et al., 2022; Farahani & Cleland, 2015), and 3% were from Southeast Asian regions (e.g., Singapore, Malaysia; Cho et al., 2022). In addition, 27.4% of the total participants were drawn from cross-cultural samples, which involved comparisons between different regions, such as Australia and Hong Kong (Moore et al., 2012), China and the United States (Kim et al., 2018), and India and the United States (Bejanyan et al., 2014). Among these cross-cultural samples, 16.6% came from more than two regions, such as India, Turkey, and the United States (Medora et al., 2002) and East Asia, Polynesia, and the

United States (Rempala et al., 2014). Furthermore, 18.9% of the cross-cultural samples involved participants from multiple Asian regions, such as China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia (Kline et al., 2012; Tan et al., 2021). Notably, 5.3% of the cross-cultural sample involved Japanese, Indian, or East Asian participants residing in the United States for comparison with American participants (Bejanyan et al., 2014; Rempala et al., 2014).

## Study designs

The majority of studies were cross-sectional, with only four using a longitudinal design. Of these, two studies involved data from Chinese individuals across several waves (Hu & Wu, 2019; Pan, 2014), and two studies utilized daily diaries spanning a two-week period (Marshall, 2012; Marshall et al., 2011). Moreover, self-report surveys were utilized in most studies as the primary source of data. Only one study incorporated open-ended questions within their survey format (Kline et al., 2012), and another study incorporated a relationship history calendar (Darak et al., 2022). Furthermore, only six studies used a dyadic approach in data analyses to investigate relationship satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2015a, 2015b; Li et al., 2020; Marshall, 2012).

## Measurement

Most studies used measures originally developed in Western contexts, either directly or using translated versions. One study utilized a parenting measure that had been previously adapted for their local population (Cho et al., 2022), whereas another study translated key measures by incorporating popular expressions in the local language (Jankowiak et al., 2015). Translated measures predominantly used back-translation procedures or provided psychometric evidence, such as confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), to establish the validity of the measures within the local culture ( $N = 21$ ; Anderson et al., 2014). Although other studies used measures that generally demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .70$ ) within their respective samples, they did not explicitly detail the translation or adaptation procedures used and only relied on directly translating measures originally developed in Western cultures.

## Romantic relationship qualities

### Family and parental factors as predictors

Consistent with the theory of emerging adulthood, the first category concerns the influence of family and parental factors in predicting romantic relationship outcomes among Asian emerging adults. The process of parental socialization remains significant in shaping interpersonal relationships with parenting and family factors playing a key role in relation to romantic relationships in emerging adulthood within the Asian context (Arnett, 2014, 2015). Specifically, family dysfunction, parental divorce, parental overprotection, rejection, as well as negative parenting practices that lead to insecure attachment to parents are negatively related to romantic relationship outcomes (Ho et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2015b; Sarwar, 2020). For example, interparental conflict is related to lower relationship quality through poorer parent-child attachment and interpersonal security among Chinese emerging adults (Li et al., 2020). In addition, Yu et al. (2019) found that living with parents was negatively linked to the quantity and quality of romantic relationships in a Taiwanese sample. However, none of these studies employed cross-cultural samples, making it difficult to determine whether parental and family

factors have a greater influence on relationship outcomes within the Asian context compared to the Western context.

Despite the absence of cross-cultural research, some studies have found evidence supporting Arnett's (2015) proposition that cultural differences may exist regarding the influence of parenting on romantic relationships in Asia. Specifically, Cho et al. (2022) found that authoritative parenting, typically viewed as a positive parenting style, was associated with both positive and negative relationship outcomes, such as lower commitment and higher compromise in a Chinese Singaporean sample. Authoritarian parenting, on the other hand, was not harmful to relationship commitment or compromise as expected. However, another study examined the associations between authoritative and authoritarian parenting and motivation in romantic relationships among Taiwanese emerging adults, finding that they were moderated by relationship status. For instance, authoritative and authoritarian parenting were both positively related to growth beliefs (i.e., the belief that relationships require effort to grow and succeed) for those who had never been in a relationship. Authoritarian parenting was related to higher destiny beliefs (i.e., the belief that partners are either destined to be together or not meant to be together) among those who were currently in a relationship or previously in a relationship (Wang & Chen, 2023). These findings suggest that cultural differences in parenting could be related to the characteristics of emerging adults, such as their relationship status.

## Cultural factors as predictors or mediators

The second category includes studies that examined cultural factors as predictors. We define cultural factors as those reflecting ideas, values, and behavioral norms within a particular culture (Hitchcock et al., 2005). Several studies focused on factors related to Confucianism, which is valued in most East Asian countries. First, using Chinese samples, reciprocal filial piety, which involves mutual respect and love driven by gratitude and care between parent and child, was positively related to satisfaction through the Storge love style (i.e., friendship/companionate love) for females, and directly related to higher intimacy (Chen & Wu, 2017, 2021). However, mixed results were found regarding authoritarian filial piety (i.e., the obligation to show respect and obedience to parents), which was positively related to relationship satisfaction through an Agape love style (i.e., self-sacrificing love), but negatively related to intimacy through greater destiny beliefs (Chen & Wu, 2017, 2021).

Second, one study examined individuals' cultural beliefs in relation to romantic relationships, specifically vertical collectivism. Vertical collectivism emphasizes prioritizing group goals over personal goals and showing compliance to authority figures, aligning with the values of Confucianism. In a Chinese sample, vertical collectivism was related to higher commitment through lower levels of romantic insecurity (Wang & Lu, 2017). Another distinctive factor in Confucian culture is shame proneness, characterized by intense negative emotion evoked by self-reflection. Although shame proneness is associated with feelings of inferiority and guilt, it is valued in Confucian societies, such as China, because it is seen as encouraging self-evaluation that triggers desirable changes (Li et al., 2004). However, despite its value in Chinese society, shame proneness was related to lower relationship satisfaction through insecure attachment and less adaptive reactions in Chinese couples (Johnson et al., 2015a).

In addition to characteristics related to cultural values, another example of a cultural factor is characteristics specifically related to dating dynamics. For example, *amae* behavior is distinct in Japanese culture, which involves making requests even if they may be inappropriate, with the expectation that the other person will accept them to demonstrate indulgence and understanding, a behavior commonly observed in Japanese dating couples. Marshall (2012) and Marshall et al. (2011) found that high levels of insecure attachment styles were related to lower relationship quality through higher levels of *amae* behavior among Japanese male participants



(Marshall, 2012). However, *amae* behavior was also positively related to relationship quality through greater motivation to enhance closeness (Marshall et al., 2011).

These studies examining cultural factors have shed light on the complicated interplay of cultural values with the romantic relationships of emerging adults in the Asian context, particularly in societies influenced by Confucianism. Although certain values, like vertical collectivism, appear to enhance romantic relationship qualities, others, such as shame proneness, despite being valued in Chinese society, may not necessarily benefit emerging adults' romantic relationship well-being. Additionally, filial piety and *amae* behavior showed mixed influences, with both positive and negative impacts on romantic relationship qualities. Collectively, these studies provided valuable insights into the nuanced relationships between cultural factors and romantic relationship functioning during emerging adulthood.

## Psychological traits as predictors

The last category includes studies that focused on psychological traits as predictors (Marshall, 2012; Moore et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2022). Consistent with the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), emerging adults explore their self-identity by navigating romantic relationships. Thus, factors related to ambivalence and immature identity are shown to be negatively related to emerging adults' romantic relationship qualities. Specifically, immature identity statuses, ambivalence over emotional expression, and narcissism are associated with poor relationship well-being and satisfaction, and higher breakup stress (Moore et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2016), whereas gratitude and high self-esteem are positively related to relationship satisfaction (Wu et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2016).

However, these studies relied on single-sample designs and therefore lacked cross-cultural comparisons. Consequently, we cannot determine whether the strengths of these associations differ across cultural groups. One study (Moore et al., 2012) that compared Australian and Hong Kong Chinese samples shed some light on this issue, showing that the association between immature identity status and insecure attachment with breakup distress did not differ across cultural contexts. Interestingly, despite both cultures considering romantic relationships as normative, Hong Kong Chinese emerging adults reported lower levels of romantic interests and experienced fewer breakups compared to their Australian counterparts (Moore et al., 2012). This particular study underscores the need to employ cross-cultural samples to explore the link between psychological traits and romantic relationship qualities across cultures.

## Dating values and dynamics

### Cultural variations in dating values and partner selection

Many studies compared American and Chinese emerging adults and revealed that American emerging adults generally display more liberal views toward dating and sexual behavior compared to their Asian counterparts. Tang and Zuo (2000) and a replication study conducted by Madigan and Blair (2020) found that Chinese emerging adults are more likely to engage in first dates at a later age, resist engaging in activities like kissing and sexual intercourse on the first date, view dating primarily as a means to find a marital partner, demonstrate lower acceptance of cohabitation and heterogamy, and experience peer pressure and parental approval pressures in dating. These findings suggest that cultural differences in dating patterns between American and Chinese emerging adults continued to persist in the past two decades.

Similarly, several studies identified cultural variations in the desired traits of a marriage partner. Chinese emerging adults were more likely to be influenced by their parents and close

friends in the mate selection processes, to emphasize a dating partner's ability to meet filial piety beliefs, and to report parental disapproval as a barrier to marriage compared to their American counterparts (Zhang & Kline, 2009). Chinese emerging adults are, however, less likely to experience parental approval for romantic partners but feel less distressed when parents disapprove of a romantic partner compared to their American counterparts (Madigan & Blair, 2020; Tang & Zuo, 2000). Emerging adults from China, India, Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea displayed a preference for traditional beliefs in mate selection, valuing traits such as home-focus, respectfulness, and gentleness in wives (Kline et al., 2012), and placed greater emphasis on social status compared to kindness in marriage (Rempala et al., 2014).

Cultural variations were also observed in communication values, with both American and Chinese participants placing greater value on affective communication than instrumental communication, but American participants reported a higher value for affective communication compared to Chinese participants (Kim et al., 2018). However, mixed results were found regarding cultural differences in romanticism. Medora et al. (2002) reported that Americans exhibited higher levels of romantic attitudes compared to Turkish and Indian emerging adults. In contrast, Bejanyan et al. (2014) found that Indian culture was associated with higher levels of romantic beliefs through higher levels of collectivist values.

Overall, Asian emerging adults tend to consider parental approval, family characteristics, and filial piety in their sexual attitudes and partner selection, which diverges from the emphasis on personal fulfillment in the United States. Similarly, these studies also indicated that more liberal dating and romantic attitudes, such as engaging in kissing on the first date, showing affection in intimate relationships, premarital sex, and cohabitating, are less accepted in Asian countries such as China, South Korea, and India. Conversely, traditional views such as considering dating as a means to find a potential marital partner remain prevalent among Asian emerging adults. However, the findings regarding romanticism revealed mixed results when comparing American and Indian emerging adults, suggesting the need to further investigate this difference.

## Cultural similarities and shifts in values

Despite documented cultural differences in dating values and dynamics between American and Asian emerging adults, several studies also highlighted cultural similarities in dating and mate selection. For instance, no significant differences were found in the endorsement of disrespectful and controlling behaviors as indicators of an unfavorable spouse or marriage among Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Malaysian, South Korean, and US samples (Kline et al., 2012). Although not employing a cross-cultural design, Jankowiak et al. (2015) found that a Chinese sample exhibited factors of love (such as intrusive thinking, self-actualization, and emotional fulfillment) similar to those identified in prior studies conducted in the United States, Russia, and Lithuania (De Munck et al., 2009).

Additionally, Xu and Ocker (2013) reported that Chinese emerging adults displayed lower conservatism in attitudes toward premarital sex as well as greater acceptance of cohabitation and prioritization of love in marriage compared to older generations, signifying a shift in acceptance of these behaviors. Lastly, among Chinese participants, it was found factors valued in Western contexts, such as romantic love and career support, showed positive significant associations with relationship commitment (Zhang & Kline, 2009).

## Factors associated with liberal dating norms

Several studies have explored factors linked to the adoption of liberal dating norms among Asian emerging adults, ranging from socioeconomic and parental factors to individual factors.

For instance, among Iranian female emerging adults, factors such as older age, father's education level, attending a mixed-sex university, and access to satellite TV were correlated with greater adherence to liberal norms (Farahani & Cleland, 2015). In terms of parental factors, studies echo findings regarding relationship qualities, where negative parental factors tend to correlate with less favorable attitudes toward romantic relationships or marriage. For example, Taiwanese emerging adults who experienced parental divorce before age 12 reported negative marriage expectations and higher relationship instability (e.g., greater romantic involvement and higher number of partners) during emerging adulthood (Pan, 2014). Conversely, those who experienced low levels of interparental conflicts, positive parent-child relationships, or were from intact families were more likely to hold positive marital attitudes and engage in romantic relationships (Huang & Lin, 2014; Pan, 2014). Lastly, individual factors were also examined. For example, desirability of control (i.e., one's perceived level of control over their own life) was associated with positive attitudes toward marriage, and relational mobility (i.e., the tendency to casually seek a partner in social settings) was associated with positive attitudes toward singlehood, particularly for those with lower subjective socioeconomic status (SES) (Tan et al., 2021).

## Gender differences

Although not the central focus of our analysis, we also identified gender differences in dating attitudes. First, it is evident that men and women hold different attitudes toward sexual intimacy. In a Chinese sample, males exhibited a greater willingness to engage in physical intimacy, such as kissing on a first date, in comparison to females. Conversely, females tended to delay sexual intercourse after the first date (Blair & Scott, 2019). They were also more likely to attribute their attitudes toward sexual intimacy to family characteristics, whereas males reported individual traits as influencing factors (Blair & Scott, 2019). This finding aligns with results obtained from an Indian sample, where the likelihood of adhering to the "commitment-no sex" dating style was higher for women than for men (Darak et al., 2022). These gender differences in sexual attitudes among Asian emerging adults show variations compared to research conducted in the Western context. A meta-analysis, drawing from major meta-analyses and national datasets representing the United States, Great Britain, and Australia (Petersen & Hyde, 2011), indicated that men reported higher rates of sexual intercourse with heterosexual partners than women only in older age groups, not in younger participants. Furthermore, there was a trend toward increased permissiveness regarding premarital sex for both men and women from the 1990s to the 2010s (Petersen & Hyde, 2011). These findings suggest that gender differences in dating and sexual attitudes are more pronounced among emerging adults in an Asian context compared to the Western context.

Second, gender differences were observed in the preferences for specific traits in mate selection. Rempala et al. (2014) found that across samples from East Asia, Polynesia, and the United States, males with traditional values emphasized physical attractiveness in mates, whereas females with egalitarian values prioritized kindness. Similarly, in a Taiwanese sample, males were found to have more positive attitudes toward marriage compared to females (Huang & Lin, 2014). However, there is an interaction between gender and country of residence that influences preferred traits in mate selection. Both American and Turkish women valued having a partner of the same religion more than men did. Conversely, American men placed a higher value on intelligence in a mate compared to American women, whereas the reverse was true for Turkish men and women (Medora et al., 2002). These findings align with a cross-national study involving 53 countries, which indicated that men tended to value physical attractiveness more than women across all countries, but gender differences in values related to personal traits such as honesty and kindness varied across nations (Lippa, 2007). This highlights the importance of considering cultural differences in gender-related mate selection preferences.

## Cultural variations within Asia

The findings above involve comparing Western samples with Asian samples, however, only a limited portion of the cross-cultural samples included multiple Asian subgroups. Among these studies, diverse Asian groups were treated as a singular cultural group representing “Asian culture” (Tan et al., 2021), or certain groups were not consistently included in all aspects of analyses (Medora et al., 2002). Only one study compared various Asian groups in the context of mate selection and yielded mixed results regarding cultural variability (Kline et al., 2012). Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean emerging adults placed lower importance on a traditional trait associated with a “good wife” (i.e., loving and caring) compared to their Malaysian, and Indian counterparts (Kline et al., 2012). However, Chinese and South Korean emerging adults also placed greater value on other traditional traits for a “good wife” (i.e., respectfulness and gentleness) compared to Japanese emerging adults. Much remains unknown regarding cultural variations in dating values and dynamics during emerging adulthood without multiple-group analyses based on diverse Asian cultures.

## DISCUSSION

In total, 41 studies met our inclusion criteria, and their samples, study designs, use of culturally validated measurements, and key findings were documented. This was done in the service of providing insights for future research and clinical work that is specifically tailored to the Asian emerging adult population. Consistent with Arnett’s (2000, 2014, 2015) theory of emerging adulthood, parental factors remain an important influence in Asian emerging adults’ romantic relationships and dating values. Moreover, findings also highlight the complicated role of cultural factors (e.g., filial piety, shame proneness, and *amae* behavior), suggesting certain cultural values might have both positive and negative implications for relationships among emerging adults. The findings also revealed significant differences in dating values between Asians and Americans. Asian emerging adults tend to hold more conservative dating values compared to their American counterparts. Nonetheless, there is also evidence indicating cultural similarities and shifts across generations in dating values, which call for further research into the factors driving such changes. Lastly, without cross-cultural samples within the Asian context, our understanding of the diversity in dating values across various Asian cultures remains limited.

We now turn to consider cultural variation by identifying possible directions for future research methodologies and investigations on romantic relationships with the aim of extending the theory of emerging adulthood to emerging adult relationships in the Asian context. We conclude with recommendations for applied work based on the findings of the present study.

## Critique and future directions for methodology

### Sample characteristics

Although current research maintains a gender-balanced approach and includes various Asian regions, existing studies do not address inclusivity in two specific aspects. First, most studies examined college students. However, such samples are not representative of the population of Asian emerging adults. In the American context, Arnett (2016) argues that college students are more likely to come from higher SES backgrounds, resulting in different developmental experiences compared to those who do not attend college. Similarly, in Asian countries, there are variations in college attendance rates. For instance, regions like Macao, South Korea, and Singapore have high college attendance rates, exceeding 90%, whereas countries like China,

Iran, and Malaysia have lower enrollment rates, with approximately half of the population pursuing tertiary education (The Global Economy, 2020). In some countries, such as China, the college attendance rate is associated with residence (e.g., urban vs. rural origin) or SES, which can influence relationship qualities and attitudes toward dating and premarital sex (Chen et al., 2016; Yeung, 2013). Therefore, researchers should be mindful of SES, and strive to recruit a noncollege student sample, particularly in countries with lower college attendance rates. If this is not feasible, researchers should discuss how these characteristics may have influenced study results.

Second, only a few studies reported sexual orientation, and the focus was primarily on heterosexual emerging adults, with limited attention being given to LGBTQ+ emerging adults. Systematic reviews on LGBTQ+ individuals in Asia have indicated that these individuals frequently express reservations about disclosing their sexual orientation to both healthcare providers and family members due to the prevalence of conservative family values and homonegative attitudes (Breen et al., 2020; Tan & Saw, 2022). This trend persists even in Taiwan, despite the recent legalization of same-sex marriage in Taiwan (the first to do so in Asia; Au, 2022; Eng & Yang, 2020), which can shape the romantic relationship experiences of LGBTQ+ emerging adults in Asia. Thus, there is a need to ensure the inclusion of LGBTQ+ Asian emerging adults, with sensitivity to the challenges they face. Several approaches can be adopted, including (a) ensuring confidentiality of participants' sexual orientation information before data collection; (b) using informed consent procedures to ensure participants understand the study's purposes and potential risks; (c) bringing awareness to LGBTQ+ participants regarding the value of their perspectives in Asian emerging adult romantic relationship research to encourage their participation in such studies; and (d) approaching LGBTQ+ participants with respect and using appropriate language, such as gender pronouns (in languages with grammatical gender), that acknowledge and affirm their identities.

## Study designs used

First, longitudinal studies remain limited in studying romantic and dating dynamics among Asian emerging adults. The importance of longitudinal studies to investigate various aspects of romantic relationships in emerging adulthood cannot be overemphasized. Consequently, in recent years, there has been a growing emphasis in the Western context on conducting longitudinal studies to investigate relationship stability, quality, and attachment during emerging adulthood, specifically focusing on family of origin and psychological traits as predictors (Dion et al., 2019; Hadiwijaya et al., 2020; Meier & Allen, 2009). However, such research is lacking in the Asian context. Areas that can be explored using a longitudinal design include examining the transition of romantic relationships across development stages, such as from adolescence to emerging adulthood or from emerging adulthood to young adulthood, and investigating how early relationships influence later ones. Another area of focus could be identifying the factors associated with changes in relationship qualities (such as satisfaction, commitment, or conflict) over time to enhance our understanding of the factors that shape these outcomes among Asian emerging adults.

Second, most studies used individual-level data collected from self-reported measures, which might introduce the possibility of biases, and the study of individuals cannot accurately reflect the interdependence and mutual influence present in romantic partnerships. Factors such as coping strategies, love styles, and satisfaction are subject to interdependence whereby the behaviors and experiences of one partner impact the other (Gana et al., 2013; Vedes et al., 2016; Winterheld et al., 2013). Therefore, future studies should consider adopting a dyadic approach, particularly when examining romantic relationship outcomes, such as satisfaction, quality, and conflict, especially because appropriate tools for analyzing dyadic data are well-documented and widely available (Ackerman et al., 2011; Kenny et al., 2006; Stas et al., 2018).

## Measurement

It is crucial to ensure the psychometric integrity and cross-cultural adequacy of applying measures across cultures. Doing so is necessary to ensure that the same concept is understood in the same way across different cultural contexts (Ariely & Davidov, 2011). Common methods for cultural validation include techniques such as CFA, exploratory factor analysis, and testing for measurement equivalence at different levels (configural, metric, and scalar equivalence) (Miller & Sheu, 2008). This is important because indicators of a *happy relationship* might differ across cultures. For instance, in individualistic cultures like the United States, there may be a greater emphasis on personal happiness and achievement in marriage, whereas collectivist cultures like Japan prioritize social harmony (Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2010). Therefore, future research is encouraged to develop measures that are specifically adapted to the local population or that, at the very least, rigorously examine psychometric properties to ensure cultural adequacy (Ariely & Davidov, 2011).

### Using a cultural lens to examine parenting and family factors is critical

Given the considerable influence of parents and families on the romantic lives of Asian emerging adults, one way to enhance the application of the theory of emerging adulthood is to delve deeper into the relationship between parenting practices, parent–child relationships, and romantic outcomes during emerging adulthood through a cultural lens. For example, the results of a meta-analysis on cultural variability in the effects of parenting styles showed that the detrimental impact of authoritarian parenting on children’s behavior problems and academic achievement tends to be less pronounced in Asian families compared to non-Hispanic, White families (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018). Such findings underscore the importance of future research in unpacking the cultural meanings embedded within these constructs in relation to emerging adults’ romantic lives. There are two recommended approaches to investigate this phenomenon. First, researchers can examine parenting styles and behaviors prevalent in Asian cultures, such as parental involvement, monitoring, and guidance, and explore their associations with romantic relationship qualities among Asian emerging adults. Second, researchers can conduct cross-cultural research to explore the role of parental and family influences on romantic relationship qualities between different cultures. To ensure the validity of these studies, it is important for researchers to develop hypotheses that align with cultural norms (e.g., parental monitoring and involvement might not be harmful among Asian emerging adults) and to utilize culturally adapted or validated measures of parenting that are specific to each cultural group.

### Sensitivity to the cultural meaning of constructs is needed

In addition to exploring romantic relationships during emerging adulthood beyond Western cultures (Arnett, 2015), more studies are needed to unpack the meaning of concepts in the Asian context, considering that certain cultural values might have both positive and negative implications for romantic relationships among emerging adults (Chen & Wu, 2017, 2021). The exploration of cultural concepts provides a significant advantage, as it allows for a comprehensive understanding of cultural and contextual factors prior to data analysis (Hitchcock et al., 2005). In addition to the previously reviewed factors (e.g., filial piety, shame proneness, *amae* behavior), other factors to consider include cultural dimensions such as individualism and collectivism. Anthropological perspectives suggest that individualistic values might potentially conflict with the need for interdependence with a romantic partner, thereby distinguishing their experiences in love and dating from those rooted in collectivistic values (Karandashev, 2015). Another



dimension worthy of examination is the expression of love. Certain cultures tend to engage in indirect and implicit ways of expressing affection, such as in Filipino and Chinese cultures, in contrast to the more explicit expression observed in American culture (Karandashev, 2015). Therefore, we encourage future researchers to further investigate culture-specific concepts in the context of romantic relationships among Asian emerging adults.

## Considering contextual factors in cross-cultural research

The findings of this analysis highlight the presence of cultural differences in dating and romantic relationships. However, it is important to incorporate contextual factors specific to different cultures and regions when making such claims in applying the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2015) across cultures. For example, the practice of living with parents is prevalent and socially acceptable in many Asian regions, such as Hong Kong and Southeast Asian nations (e.g., Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, and the Philippines; Dommaraju & Tan, 2014; Winsor, 2018). Co-residence with parents may expose Asian emerging adults to greater parental influences, potentially contributing to their more conservative romantic attitudes. In contrast, Western emerging adults often experience greater independence and autonomy as they leave their parental home around the age of 18, potentially granting them greater freedom to explore various romantic and sexual relationships (Arnett, 2000). Another contextual factor that may influence dating attitudes is religiosity, as countries with more rigid religious practices may hold more conservative dating attitudes. Recognizing these contextual factors is crucial in understanding differences in dating attitudes among cultural groups.

To incorporate contextual factors, one approach is to recruit samples that are comparable in these factors, such as an Asian sample with participants living with parents and an American sample with a similar living arrangement, and compare their dating attitudes and experiences. Another strategy involves including these contextual factors as covariates in data analyses to ensure the influences of these factors are controlled for in each cultural group. By accounting for contextual influences, researchers will obtain a more accurate understanding of differences and similarities that exist in romantic relationships among Asian and Western emerging adults.

## Investigating diversity in dating values within Asia

Although the findings support the need to examine romantic relationships and dating dynamics among Asian emerging adults, the relative neglect of diversity in dating dynamics within the Asian context is striking. For example, most of the studies focused on East Asian regions, such as China, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan, with limited representation from other regions of Asia, such as the Middle East and South Asia. Future researchers should acknowledge heterogeneity within Asia and compare dating dynamics among culturally distinct subgroups.

Furthermore, given the cultural similarities in dating and romantic relationships between emerging adults in Asia and in the West, as well as a generational shift in China in dating values (Xu & Ocker, 2013), future research should also compare cohorts within the Asian context to track generational change. In a similar vein, it is important to document geographical and cultural differences within the Asian context itself. One possible approach is to compare urban and rural areas within a particular Asian country, as these areas often represent divergent cultural norms and practices that can shape romantic relationship dynamics. Another option is to compare regions with distinct dating practices. For instance, contrasting regions where early marriages are common with those where delayed marriage is observed could provide valuable insights. Additionally, researchers may choose to compare technologically advanced regions, which may be more influenced by Western values and norms, with less economically developed regions that potentially maintain stronger traditional values.



In addition to comparing cohorts and geographical regions, another way to further investigate changes in attitudes toward premarital sex, cohabitation, and singlehood among Asian emerging adults is through the utilization of a person-centered approach in data analysis, such as profile analysis. Unlike the variable-centered approach, which assumes homogeneity in attitudes toward dating and premarital sex within a population, employing a person-centered approach recognizes the existence of subgroups that may hold distinct attitudes, including both liberal attitudes and conservative attitudes. Indeed, Darak et al. (2022) found four typologies of relationships among Indian emerging adults, namely commitment-no sex, commitment-sex-some exploration, no commitment-exploration, and no relationship. A person-centered approach would also allow investigation into variations in romantic relationship dynamics across these typologies. For example, using a person-centered approach, it is possible to examine how parental influences may differ in relation to romantic relationship qualities among Asian emerging adults who hold different attitudes toward dating and premarital sex. In doing so, researchers not only acknowledge the diversity in dating attitudes among Asian emerging adults but also strive to accurately identify and explore the patterns underlying these attitudes.

## Gender differences

Gender differences are evident in dating attitudes and mate selection, aligning with research indicating gender disparities in Asia. For example, in Iran, gender segregation is enforced in both public and domestic settings (Farahani & Cleland, 2015). Similarly, a study examining women in Taiwan, Japan, and Korea revealed that traditional gender roles continue to influence their behavior in the workplace and personal relationships, despite their adaptation to more egalitarian gender role attitudes (Takeuchi & Tsutsui, 2016). Although not the primary focus of this review, our findings underscore the importance of incorporating gender as a moderator or, at the very least, a covariate in future investigations of romantic relationships and attitudes among emerging adults.

## Implications for clinical practice and applied work

The findings of this review and critique have significant implications for relationship therapists who work with culturally diverse emerging adults, particularly those with Asian backgrounds such as Asian immigrants and those in interracial relationships. Asian immigrants who have moved to Western countries (e.g., the United States) might encounter challenges in the dating market due to different dating attitudes, such as conservative norms in premarital sex and adherence to traditional gender beliefs. Similarly, interracial couples might face the possibility of conflicting dating attitudes, as well as differences in parental influence within their relationships. Those with Asian backgrounds might be more concerned about family approval than their American partners. Therefore, it is crucial for relationship therapists to have knowledge about potential cultural differences, and to understand the difficulties faced by clients within a broad cultural context. In this way, therapists can better support clients in increasing awareness and understanding of their dating circumstances, or partners. By acknowledging the influence of culture, therapists can also demonstrate empathy toward clients' situations and establish a stronger therapeutic alliance, which is essential for effective therapy.

In a similar vein, it is important for those working with emerging adults in tertiary education to be aware of cultural differences among Asians. For example, career counselors might routinely explore the origins of career aspirations among emerging adults to determine the extent to which they derive from parental or romantic partner pressure rather than the individual's own desires. Not all aspirations deriving from such sources will necessarily be ego dystonic

as some Asian emerging adults might see them as culturally appropriate and view their own desires as secondary. Similarly, when Asian students encounter academic problems (e.g., procrastination, burnout), the role of parents and romantic partners should be explored. When undue pressure plays a role in these problems, it may be necessary for the parents and/or romantic partners to be engaged in psychoeducation to learn about counterproductive parental practices or the role of healthy intimate relationships in facilitating optimal academic performance. Finally, to the extent that parental involvement in a student's romantic relationship results in them experiencing dysphoria and academic distress, it may similarly be advisable for academic counselors to provide psychoeducation to parents.

## Limitations

The present analysis needs to be viewed in the light of its limitations. For example, the inclusion criteria required studies to be peer-reviewed and published in English. Therefore, studies published in other languages or not subjected to peer review were excluded, which might lead to language and publication bias. Another limitation arises from the specific focus of the review. Topics such as the use of dating apps as outcomes, intimate partner violence, and psychometric studies were not included, limiting the comprehensiveness of the findings and potential insights into these areas.

## CONCLUSION

The themes we identified include parenting, cultural, and psychological factors in relation to romantic relationship qualities among Asian emerging adults. We also found both cultural differences and similarities in dating attitudes among emerging adults in Western and Asian contexts. Such differences can be used to expand the scope of the theory of emerging adulthood. To enhance future research, several recommendations were proposed including (a) increased diversity in samples by including noncollege students, ensuring geographical and ethnic-racial representation, and considering sexual orientation; (b) investigating diversity in dating values within Asia; (c) exploring cross-cultural differences in parenting and familial factors in relation to romantic relationship qualities, and incorporating cultural concepts; (d) considering contextual factors in understanding the underlying mechanisms; (e) investigating generational and regional variations in dating attitudes; and (f) recognizing gender differences in romantic relationships among Asian emerging adults. The clinical and applied implications of the research were also outlined.

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