

TOP NEWS

NEW BLUEPRINT

Policy support urged to boost marriage rate

Experts stress importance of financial subsidies and inclusive work culture

By CHENG SI  
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Experts have called for stronger policy and financial support for young people and enhanced efforts to eliminate workplace discrimination to foster a marriage- and birth-friendly society.

According to the China Statistical Yearbook, which was published recently by the National Bureau of Statistics, about 6.1 million couples registered their marriage in 2024. Among them, 6.04 million were mainland residents, while 61,900 had spouses who were foreigners, overseas Chinese, or residents of the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions and Taiwan.

Data shows that the number of marriage registrations has fluctuated in recent years, with a marginal rebound in 2023 after continuous decline since 2013. In the first three quarters of 2025, there has been a modest increase in the number, with about 5.15 million couples registering their marriage, compared with 4.75 million during the same period last year.

Amid this trend, experts and members of the public have urged more policy and financial support from the government to ease pressures on young people of marriageable age and encourage them to marry and have children.

“From a demographic perspective, China’s current population of marriageable age — mainly those born after 1990 and 2000 — is shrinking. Young people’s views on marriage differ from those of previous generations. They tend to delay marriage or choose not to marry,” said Jiang Quanbao, a professor at the Capital University of Economics and Business’ School of Labor Economics in Beijing.

Social pressures and changing norms also influence marriage decisions, Jiang noted. “Young people face financial pressures from housing expenses, ‘bride price’, and wedding and childbearing costs. Also, women are becoming more educated and pursuing career success,” he said, adding that society has become more inclusive and open-minded about diverse attitudes toward marriage.

Zhang Xianling, an associate professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics’ School of Sociology and Psychology in Beijing, told Workers’ Daily that marriage is traditionally seen as essential for personal growth and carrying forward the family bloodline, but with rapid economic and social transformations, more young people now choose to delay marriage or not marry at all.

To boost marriage and childbirth rates, relevant authorities have rolled out new supportive measures, including streamlining

marriage registration procedures.

In May, people of marriageable age were allowed to register for marriage at their place of work or residence instead of their hometowns under the *hukou* system, also known as household registration.

In July, a financial support policy was introduced to give families 3,600 yuan (\$511) per year for each child under the age of 3 years.

The recently adopted recommendations for formulating China’s 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) also call for promoting positive attitudes toward marriage and childbirth by optimizing supportive policies and incentives.

Wang Xuanyi, 29, a financial analyst in Beijing, said that for ordinary people, the greatest pressures of marriage include home loans and child-rearing expenses. “For me, as a woman, I may face discrimination in the workplace, as some employers see pregnant employees as a burden.”

Wang emphasized that it is important for the government to promote healthier perspectives on marriage and childbirth by alleviating young people’s concerns about career development, high housing prices, and a work culture that is not friendly toward childcare.

“It will be a long journey, but I think things will get better if we receive stronger policy and financial support from the authorities,” she added.

Jiang, from Capital University of Economics and Business, said that encouraging young people to marry and have children requires a systematic effort involving financial support, improved public services and guidance on marriage values.

“The government can offer special housing subsidies, or low-interest or interest-free housing loans, to the newlyweds. In addition to childcare subsidies, it could explore benefits such as marriage and settlement allowances and tax reductions for couples,” he said.

Jiang said that it is crucial “to fully implement and optimize the maternity leave system and encourage men to share childcare responsibilities to reduce the ‘motherhood penalty’ — prejudices women may face in the job market due to childbirth.”

The expert also called for improvements in childcare services, and suggested that schools and residential communities organize lectures for young people on maintaining relationships and managing family tensions.

“It’s important to portray a healthy, fair and happy marriage and family life,” he said, adding that trade unions and communities could organize diverse and healthy dating activities or social events for young people.

Handcrafted happiness



A puppeteer interacts with visitors on Sunday during the Quanzhou International Puppet Festival in Quanzhou, a world heritage city in East China’s Fujian province. As a core event of the 2025 Maritime Silk Road International Cultural Tourism Festival, it has gathered over 500 puppeteers from China and other countries, including Russia, Argentina and Egypt. The festival, which kicked off on Thursday, featured a string of brilliant performances. WANG DONGMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Culture: Hanfu, digital tech drive boom

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The province, the cradle of Qilu culture and home to ancient philosophers such as Confucius and Mencius (372-289 BC), is leveraging its rich history as a dynamic resource to keep traditional Chinese culture thriving today.

President Xi Jinping’s continuous guidance on reviving cultural heritage has helped the province better inherit and develop traditional Chinese culture.

During his visit to Qufu in 2013, Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation must be supported by thriving Chinese culture.

In 2014, while speaking at the opening ceremony of the International Conference Commemorating the 2565th Anniversary of Confucius’ Birth, Xi called for learning to transform and boost traditional culture in a creative way, to integrate old and new, and let both serve the current mission of cultivating the people.

Starting from Confucius’ hometown, cultural workers from across the country have been encouraged to look back on the legacies left by history and turn them into modern inspiration.

This principle was written into the report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC in 2017. Since then, its role in guiding theoretical and practical innovation has become increasingly prominent.

In May 2024, when visiting Shandong again, Xi urged the province to further explore the best of fine traditional Chinese culture, advance its innovative transformation and development, and use platforms like the International Confucius Cultural Festival to deepen exchanges and mutual learning with other civilizations and enhance the appeal of Chinese culture.

Heeding this call, Shandong is playing to its strengths, making once distant traditions feel touchable and engaging.

The province hosted the 11th Nishan Forum on World Civilizations in July, bringing together more than 560 guests from over 70 countries and regions. Under the theme of “Beauty in Diversity: Nurturing

Understanding Among Civilizations for Global Modernization”, participants explored the interplay between cultural diversity and modernization.

Since its inception in 2010, the Nishan Forum, named after Confucius’ birthplace, Nishan Hill, has evolved into a globally recognized platform for civilizational dialogue, reinforcing Shandong’s role as a hub for mutual learning with other civilizations.

Cities across the province are also developing their cultural resources in a creative way to enhance the appeal of Chinese culture.

In Heze, the ancient art of *hanfu*, the traditional attire of China’s Han ethnic group, is driving a modern economic boom.

“*Hanfu* represents the essence of China’s attire and is a symbol of our fine traditional culture. We are seizing the new opportunities presented by a wave of *guochao*, or China-chic trends, to build a development pattern where culture fosters industry and industry promotes culture,” said Cao Lin, a local official.

Heze has invested over 5 billion yuan (\$709.5 million) to construct industrial parks, establishing a complete supply chain from designing, dyeing and tailoring to finished garments. Annual sales have exceeded 12 billion yuan and captured half of the domestic market, with products exported to more than 20 countries and regions including Europe, the United States and Southeast Asia.

“We integrate cultural elements like the 24 solar terms into *hanfu* designs, catering to the trend popular among youth,” Cao said.

Heze also hosts immersive activities like *hanfu* shows to weave traditional culture into the fabric of modern life. *Hanfu* producers in the city have collaborated with more than 20 universities to produce co-branded doctoral robes.

The city’s *hanfu* has graced international stages such as the international Chinese apparel show in Milan, Italy, and cultural promotion events in the Republic of Korea, showcasing cultural confidence through traditional wear.

Digital technology is also providing a powerful boost to these cultural efforts in Shandong. At a virtual real-

ity experience center on Weihai’s Huoju Eighth Street, Li Junming, a fifth-grade student, put on a headset and was instantly transported into the epic landscape of *The Long March*, a poem (authored by Chairman Mao Zedong) paying tribute to the monumental feat completed by the Chinese Red Army between 1934 and 1936.

“I used to think climbing snow-capped mountains and crossing marshy grasslands was a distant story. Now I understand that the ‘hardship’ described in the texts was something they had to measure step by step with their feet and fight for with their lives,” Li said.

Liu Guang, a local official, said, “Weihai focuses on integrating tradition with modernity, using new forms, technologies and creative ideas to enhance the appeal of traditional culture.”

This approach is demonstrated in a recent digital short film on construction techniques used in seaweed-roofed houses. The film used high-precision motion capture to perfectly replicate an old craftsman’s fluid movements. Viewers could clearly see the direction of the wood grain, the force of the chisel and even the trajectory of flying wood chips.

Within just one week of its release, the short film attracted queries from hundreds of university students. A craft once on the verge of extinction soon became a new trend pursued by young people.

Through a multipronged strategy, Shandong is sustaining momentum in integrating tradition into modern life, developing immersive cultural experiences and growing brands like Shandong Craft, said Tang Weihong, director of the research institute of people.cn, at a symposium on promoting creative transformation and innovative development of fine traditional Chinese culture held in Qufu last month.

“These efforts in promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of fine traditional Chinese culture have unleashed a vibrant flow of excellent traditional culture across the land of Shandong,” Tang said.

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Political Lens

China, Singapore pledge to expand cooperation

Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang met with Singaporean Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong in Chongqing on Monday and said that China and Singapore should further strengthen mutual trust, respect each other’s core interests and promote the steady, long-term development of bilateral relations.

Gan said that Singapore attaches great importance to its relationship with China, firmly upholds the one-China policy and opposes “Taiwan independence”, adding that Singapore stands ready to maintain close exchanges at all levels to advance bilateral ties.

On Monday, the two leaders also jointly chaired four bilateral cooperation mechanism meetings and agreed to further align the development strategies of the two nations.

CHINA DAILY

Sanctions on Japan’s former senior official announced

By WANG QINGYUN  
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China announced countermeasures on Monday against a former senior official of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces for colluding with “Taiwan independence” separatist forces, and stressed that the Taiwan question is a red line that must not be crossed.

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According to a decree released by the Foreign Ministry, the sanctions, which took effect on the same day, include freezing movable and immovable properties and all other types of assets in China of Shigeru Iwasaki, former chief of the Joint Staff of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces.

Organizations and individuals in China are prohibited from conducting transactions or cooperating with Iwasaki, who will not be issued Chinese visas or allowed to enter China.

The sanctions were imposed according to China’s Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law because Iwasaki has seriously violated the one-China principle and the four China-Japan political documents by openly colluding with “Taiwan independence” separatist forces, the ministry said. It also said that Iwasaki’s moves have constituted serious interference in China’s internal affairs, and undermined its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

“The Taiwan question is at the core of China’s core interests and is the red line that must not be crossed,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said at a news conference in Beijing. “China firmly opposes Iwasaki taking the post of the so-called ‘political consultant’ of the Taiwan authorities.”

China has protested to the Japanese side more than once, but the former Japanese senior official refused to reflect on and correct his wrongdoings, Guo said. “Instead, he has continued to collude with ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces and make provocations,” Guo said, adding that his egregious moves triggered the sanctions.

Verdict: Authorities welcome trial outcome

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Lai was found guilty on all charges in the 855-page verdict returned on Monday by judges Esther Toh Lye-ping, Susana Maria D’Almada Remedios, and Alex Lee Wan-tang.

The hearing started at 10 am and lasted about an hour, marking the end of a 156-day marathon trial that began on Dec 18, 2023. The prosecution completed its presentation of evidence in June 2024, while Lai finished giving his testimony in March this year.

The 78-year-old Lai was accused of utilizing his media outlets and online platforms to prompt international sanctions and incite public disaffection toward the authorities from April 2019 through June 2021, as well as offering financial support to an advocacy group to provoke hostile

actions from Western powers.

The trial was the first under the Hong Kong SAR National Security Law for the offense of colluding with foreign forces. Those found guilty face a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

The hearing on mitigation submissions, expected to last four days, is scheduled to start on Jan 12.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said on Monday that the judicial authorities of the Hong Kong SAR have carried out their duties in strict accordance with the law, upholding its authority and safeguarding national security, which is an entirely justified, lawful and indisputable course of action.

Guo said that the central government firmly supports the SAR in lawfully preserving national security

and punishing acts that endanger it.

Guo expressed strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition as he said certain countries have openly vilified and discredited Hong Kong’s judiciary.

In a statement released after the verdict, the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council expressed its resolute support for the Hong Kong SAR’s duty to safeguard national security, endorsing Lai’s conviction.

According to the statement, facts revealed during the trial proved that Lai’s actions were detrimental to State security, identifying him as the “chief culprit” of past unrest and a “traitor” serving foreign interests.

“All people, including Hong Kong compatriots, are filled with righteous indignation and strongly demand his severe punishment,” it said.

Hong Kong Chief Executive John

Lee Ka-chiu also welcomed the verdict.

Before departing for Beijing to deliver his annual duty report on Monday, Lee told reporters that Lai’s actions had harmed the fundamental interests of the nation and the well-being of Hong Kong residents, and described his behavior as shameful and his intentions as malicious.

The law does not tolerate individuals publicly harming their own country and compatriots under the guise of human rights, democracy or freedom, he added, affirming that the SAR has a duty to safeguard national security and resolutely fend off any actions or activities that endanger it.

Regina Ip Lau Suk-ye, convener of the Executive Council and the city’s former security chief, said the verdict is not surprising given the undeniable evidence presented during the trial.

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Anti-fraud efforts



A military officer looks at photos displayed on Sunday during a news conference on the elimination of telecom fraud and online gambling in Yangon, Myanmar. Over 70,000 foreign nationals involved in these scams were repatriated to 54 countries in more than two years, while a total of 398 buildings in the KK Park area used as crime dens were also demolished as of Friday, according to Myanmar’s authorities. THEIN ZAW / AP