

From Obligations to Choice: Meanings of Marriage among Generation Z in Asia

Dari Kewajiban Menuju Pilihan: Makna Pernikahan di Kalangan Generasi Z di Asia

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Abstract

This scoping review collects empirical studies exploring the conceptualization, perception, and decision-making of Generation Z regarding marriage in Asia. This study examined literature related to meaning-making as marriage constructs, readiness standards that introduce individual decision trajectories, and sociocultural factors such as socioeconomic context, gender norms, family systems of support or control, and language use in social media. Following PRISMA-ScR, 17 empirical studies were synthesized and included in the final screening stage. The review reveals the following common threads: (1) marriage is more often construed as a personal choice than a social obligation; (2) readiness is multifactorial and includes psychological maturity, economic conditions, career plans, and partner preferences; and (3) decision pathways demonstrate heterogeneity ranging from active postponement to passive drifting. This article recommends directions for future research, particularly through longitudinal and cross-regional designs that can more rigorously test these patterns, along with practical implications for relationship readiness education and marriage support policies responsive to young people's psychological readiness and economic constraints.

Keywords Asia; Decision Pathways; Generation Z; Marriage; Readiness

Abstrak

Scoping review ini mengumpulkan sejumlah studi empiris yang mengeksplorasi konseptualisasi, persepsi, dan pengambilan keputusan Generasi Z terkait pernikahan di Asia. Studi ini menelaah literatur yang berkaitan dengan pembentukan makna pernikahan sebagai sebuah konstruk, standar kesiapan yang membentuk jalur keputusan individual, serta faktor sosiokultural seperti kondisi sosial ekonomi, norma gender, sistem dukungan atau kontrol keluarga, hingga penggunaan bahasa di media sosial. Mengacu pada panduan PRISMA-ScR, tinjauan ini mensintesis 17 studi empiris yang lolos tahap seleksi akhir. Hasil tinjauan mengungkap beberapa benang merah yang konsisten: (1) pernikahan lebih banyak dipahami sebagai pilihan pribadi ketimbang kewajiban sosial; (2) kesiapan menikah bersifat multifaktorial, mencakup kematangan psikologis, kondisi ekonomi, rencana karier, dan preferensi terhadap pasangan; serta (3) jalur pengambilan keputusan menunjukkan keragaman yang cukup luas, mulai dari penundaan yang disengaja hingga sikap pasif yang mengalir begitu saja tanpa arah yang jelas. Artikel ini merekomendasikan untuk penelitian mendatang, khususnya melalui desain longitudinal dan lintas-regional yang dapat menguji pola tersebut secara lebih ketat, serta implikasi praktis bagi pendidikan kesiapan berelasi dan kebijakan dukungan pernikahan yang responsif terhadap kesiapan psikologis dan kendala ekonomi generasi muda.

Kata Kunci : Asia; Jalur Keputusan; Generasi Z; Pernikahan; Kesiapan

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage as a social institution has changed considerably in many Asian countries over the last 10 years and has been characterized by falling marriage rates, rising age at first marriage, and the re-negotiation of its meaning among younger people (Jones & Gu, 2024; Lee et al., 2025). This shift suggests that marriage is no longer framed as a normative and universal stage in life but as an increasingly selective and contingent choice.

Marriage as a social institution has undergone substantial transformation across many Asian countries over the past decade, characterized by declining marriage rates, delayed marriage, and changing perceptions toward family formation among younger generations. In Indonesia, data from Badan Pusat Statistik showed that the number of marriages declined from 1,57 million in 2023 to 1,47 million in 2024, representing a lower figure since 1998. Similar trends are visible across other Asian countries. In China, approximately 6.106 million marriage registrations were recorded throughout 2024, a 20.5% decline year-on-year, according to the 2024 Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Civil Affairs released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (Li, 2025). In Japan, both the number of marriages and the marriage rate have been on a sustained downward trend since the 1970s, accompanied by rising age at first marriage and increasing rates of non-marriage (Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Japan, 2023). In South Korea, the number of marriages reached a historical low of approximately 192.000 in 2022 before recovering slightly in 2024 (Jones & Gu, 2024). These patterns indicate that the decline in marriage in Asia is a structural and regional phenomenon, not simply a contextually specific case.

From a structural perspective, the literature suggests that economic factors are important in the delay and decline of marriage. The high cost of living, particularly housing, and insecurity in the job market mean that young people are less able to fulfill the material conditions still socially associated with marriage readiness (Gao et al., 2022; Matsuda & Sasaki, 2020). In the complex relationships of seeking a partner, this phenomenon establishes a mismatch between matrimonial aspirations and available resources that leads to the postponement of marriage for many people who do not reject marriage ideologically (Jones & Gu, 2024).

In addition to economic reasoning, socio-cultural aspects influence the nature of making marriage choices (Gao et al., 2022; Matsuda & Sasaki, 2020). Other studies in China have pointed to modernization and urbanization, along with increased access to higher education, as factors in a movement away from collectivist orientations toward a more individualistic orientation characterized by priorities on self-actualization, psychological well-being, and personal achievement (Blair et al., 2025). Marriage is perceived as a serious commitment involving worship and responsibility among Indonesian emerging adults, yet it is also viewed as complicated and anxiety-inducing (“*ribet*”), reflecting a nuanced ambivalence toward the marriage institution

(Permana & Medyna, 2021). According to this vision, marriage must be a relational relationship that offers emotional and psychological rewards rather than simply fulfilling social obligations or obligations to the family. This ambivalent orientation can be understood as an adaptive response that includes navigating acute situational pressures, forcing many young couples in Southeast Asia to re-evaluate their marriage readiness (Sari & Alfaruqy, 2021).

Gender roles also reinforce this pattern. With most women now in higher education and the workforce, expectations regarding the balance between domestic duties and professional responsibilities are shifting. Marriage negotiation reflects the contradiction between gender equality aspirations and traditional institutional norms, leading to greater selectivity and more prudent reasoning among the younger generation making marriage decisions (Jones & Gu, 2024). This is also a reason why some people delay marriage until they reach a point of stability in terms of career and financial well-being.

A very salient aspect of this ephorate is Generation Z, that is, those who are entering early adulthood and the age of marriage. Generation Z, integrated into a digital world near the multiverses of social media and global popular culture, has alternative discourses about intimate relationships, family, and adulthood. This exposure widens their life choices while cultivating an ambivalent and nuanced perspective toward marriage and a better awareness of relational threats such as conflict, role inequality, and divorce (Blair et al., 2025). Consequently, the choice to marry is increasingly viewed as a reflection of a more thoughtful assessment of personal values and individual factors rather than mere social convention (Wang et al., 2025).

While the persistent decline of marriage and the structural and cultural determinants contributing to it are well documented in the literature, most studies still focus on macro indicators or one single factor, i.e., either economics or education. While growing attention has been paid to Generation Z's marriage attitudes in the West, relatively few studies have systematically explored how Generation Z in Asia understands marriage, what they consider readiness for it, and their different choices when facing it, whether by active procrastination, drifting, or conscious refusal. These limitations prevent a fuller understanding of the psychosocial processes that shape marriage-related choices and how generational preferences intersect with structural barriers (Gao et al., 2022; Jones & Gu, 2024).

Thus, this article provides a scoping review of empirical studies covering the period of 2015-2025 discussing the concept, perception, and trajectory of youth marriage decisions in the Asian regional context. This study aims to address a gap in the literature by specifying how the interplay between structural barriers and digital exposure, along with value shifts, underpins the contemporary wedding landscape across Asia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted as a scoping review, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018). A systematic literature search was conducted in February 2026 using the Scopus and PubMed electronic databases. Google Scholars was used as an additional resource to identify potentially relevant literature that is not indexed in the main database. Google Scholar is treated as a complementary source and is separately filtered. No restriction on publication year is applied in the early stages of the search. The following keywords were used in the title, keywords, and/or abstract: ("young adults" OR "Generation Z" OR "Gen Z") AND ("Marriage" OR marriage OR marital) AND ("Attitude" OR "Decision Making" OR meaning OR perception* OR attitude* OR belief* OR value*) AND (Asia OR "Asian countries"). The following were considered as the inclusion criteria of the studies selected to respond to the objective of the present investigation: (a) original research articles, (b) written in

English, (c) using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods designs, and (d) discussing attitudes, perceptions, values, meanings, or decision-making related to marriage in the younger generation population in the Asian region. Study selection was conducted by two independent reviewers through a multi-stage process. First, all retrieved records were screened based on titles and abstracts. Full-text articles were then assessed for eligibility. Any discrepancies between the reviewers were resolved through discussion until a consensus was reached. The PRISMA flow diagram illustrates the study selection process. Search records identified 97 from Scopus, 9 from PubMed, and 121 from Google Scholar, leading up to 227 records being screened. Records were deduplicated using Rayyan before screening; no duplicate records were identified at this stage. After title and abstract screening, 210 records were excluded because they were irrelevant to the review aims. Then, 25 full-text articles were evaluated for eligibility (8 excluded: 7 non-English and 1 duplicate). A total of 17 studies comprised data in the final scoping review. Figure 1 shows the PRISMA flow diagrams.

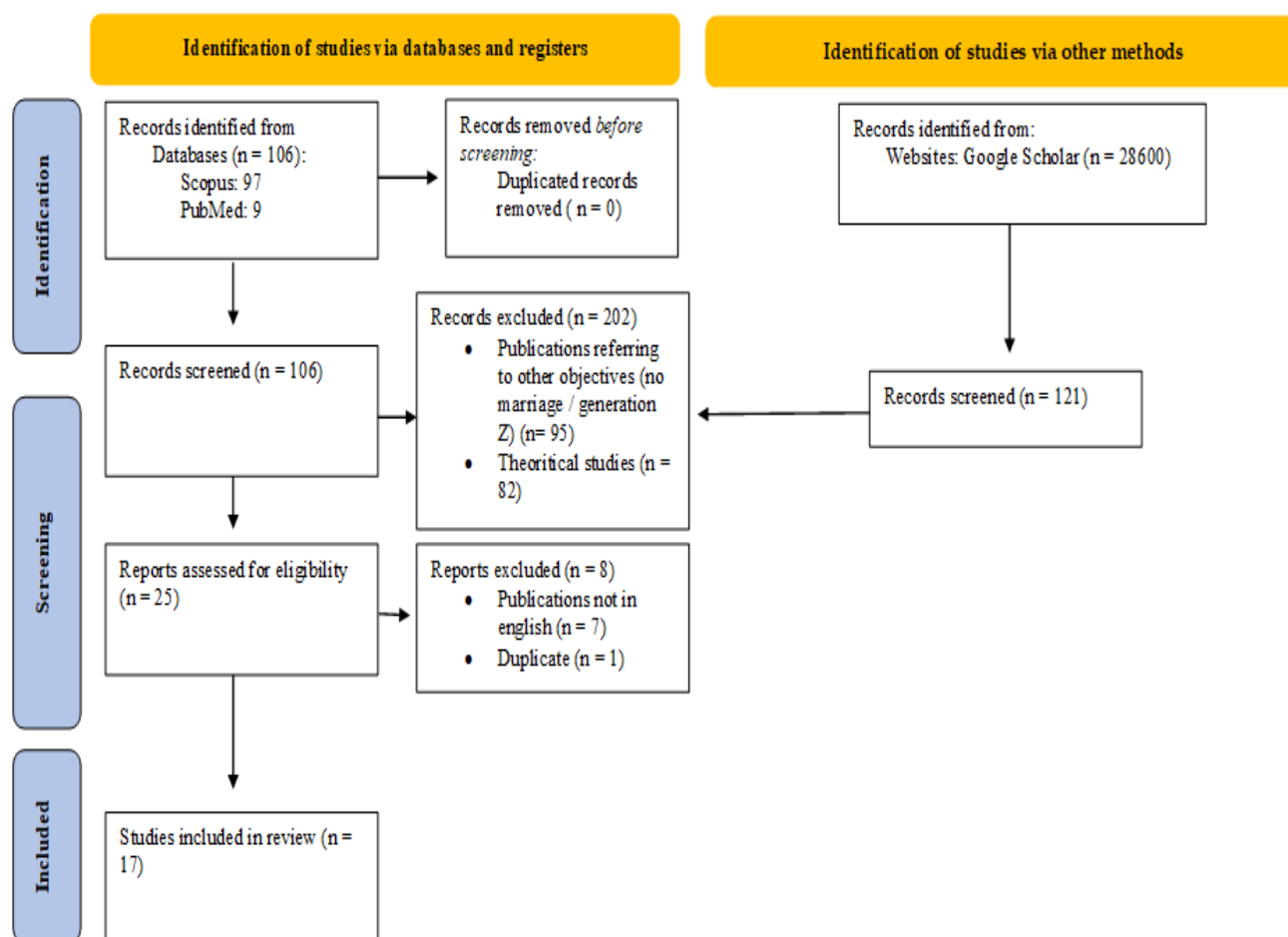


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process

The relatively small number of studies retained in this review (17 studies) reflects the narrowness of the specific intersection targeted by this review rather than a limitation of the search strategy itself. Although no publication-year restriction was applied, allowing the search to draw on more than a decade of potential literature, "generation z" has only

recently become a distinct, operationalized cohort in empirical research, as the oldest members of this generation have only begun entering the typical age range for marital decision-making within the past several years. Consequently, most records excluded at the title-and-abstract stage addressed marriage attitudes among 'young adults' or

millennials more broadly without differentiating generation z as an analytically distinct cohort, or addressed marriage primarily as a demographic or economic outcome, such as marriage rates or fertility statistics, rather than as a construct of meaning, perception, or decision-making as required by the inclusion criteria. At the full-text stage, a further eight articles were excluded, seven for not being reported in english and one as a duplicate, which is also consistent with the english-language restriction inherent to the search strategy. Taken together, the eventual pool of 17 studies represents not an exhaustive census of marriage-related literature in asia, but the subset of empirical work that specifically and explicitly examined how generation z constructs meaning around marriage, indicating that this remains an emerging rather than a saturated area of inquiry.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The 17 studies included in this review were published between 2019 and 2025 and were conducted in nine Asian countries spanning East, South, Southeast, and West Asia. Their publication timeline, geographic distribution, and research designs are summarized in Figures 2–4, while study-level findings and characteristics are reported in Tables 1–3. Figure 2 presents the temporal distribution of the included studies.

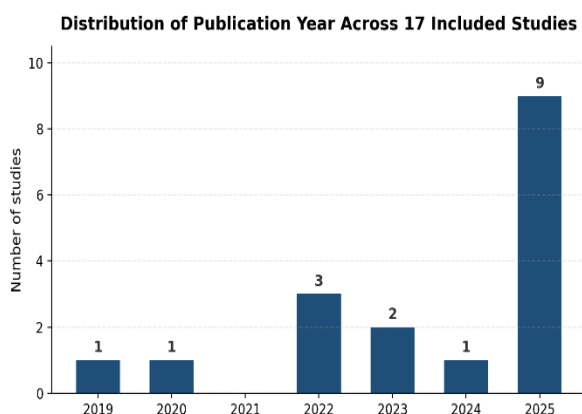


Figure 2. Distribution by Publication Year

Publication output was concentrated in recent years: nine studies (53%) were published in 2025 and 15 (88%) from 2022 onward, whereas no eligible study was identified for 2021. This temporal pattern indicates that empirical inquiry into Generation Z's marital meaning-making is recent and still developing, which is consistent with the cohort's relatively late entry into the age range typical of marital decision-making. As shown in Figure 3, the evidence base is geographically uneven.

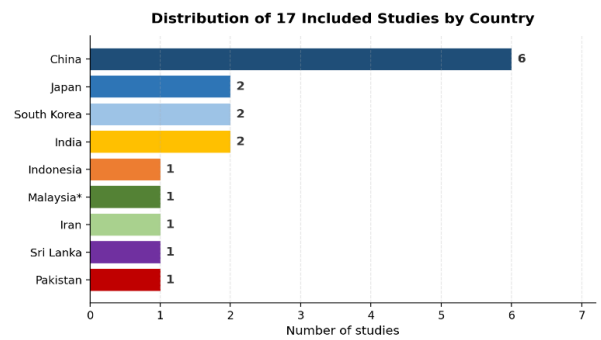


Figure 3. Distribution by Country

China accounted for the largest share ($n = 6$; 35%), followed by Japan, South Korea, and India ($n = 2$ each), whereas Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan were each represented by a single study. East Asian settings thus comprise ten of the 17 studies, compared with four from South Asia, two from Southeast Asia, and one from West Asia. Regional contrasts reported in the thematic synthesis therefore rest on an unequal number of studies per region and should be interpreted accordingly. Figure 4 summarizes the research designs of the included studies.

Distribution of Research Methods Across 17 Included Studies

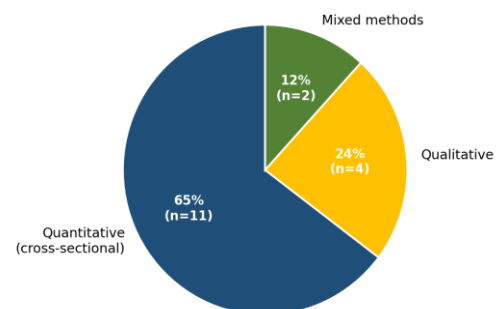


Figure 4 . Distribution by Research Method

Quantitative cross-sectional designs predominated ($n = 11$; 65%), followed by qualitative ($n = 4$; 24%) and mixed-methods designs ($n = 2$; 12%); percentages do not sum to 100% owing to rounding. Because most evidence derives from single-time-point surveys, the available literature primarily describes associations between marriage-related attitudes and their correlates and offers limited leverage on temporal or causal processes. Qualitative studies, although fewer, supply most of the evidence on how young people construct meaning around marriage. Study-level details are provided in Tables 1–3.

Table 1. Summary Table of 17 Included Studies

Author & Year	Title	Key Findings	Similarities	Differences
Ghaznavi et al. (2022)	Fish in the sea: Number, characteristics, and partner preferences of unmarried Japanese adults – analysis of a national survey	Analysis of a Japanese national survey mapped the characteristics & partner preferences of unmarried adults; the “fish in the sea” metaphor implies that although many singles remain, selective partner preferences slow marriage formation.	Shares East Asia's marriage-decline pattern with An et al. and Raymo et al.	Focuses on demographic characteristics & partner preferences rather than attitudes/intentions directly.
Xie & Hong (2022)	Research on Factors Affecting Chinese College Students' Marriage Intention: Applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour	Attitude, subjective norm, & perceived behavioral control (TPB) significantly predicted marriage intention (44% variance explained); students' marital intentions were not low despite devaluing marriage as an obligation; women's intention was significantly lower than men's.	Applies the TPB framework, similar to Yaru.	The only study to formally test all three TPB components separately.
Liu & Zhang (2023)	Singles' similarity preferences in an ideal partner: What, when, and why	Among 1,014 Chinese singles, participants preferred an ideal partner similar in HEXACO traits, physical attractiveness, & social resources; similarity in Honesty-Humility & Openness was most preferred.	Highlights personal preference in partner selection, as in several other studies.	Focuses on personality traits (HEXACO) rather than marriage attitudes/intention directly.
An et al. (2022)	Marriage Intention among Korean Young Adults: Trends and Influencing Factors	Positive marriage intention declined from 2010–2020 (61%→39%, ages 25-29), while neutral intention increased (36%→53%); negative intention remained relatively stable.	Similar East Asian decline trend to Ghaznavi et al. and Raymo et al. (longitudinal data).	The only study to analyze a 2010–2020 longitudinal trend rather than a single time-point snapshot.
Lee, Song, & Park (2025b)	Does perceived gender conflict shape young Koreans' attitudes toward marriage and childbearing?	Perceived gender conflict was associated with more unfavorable attitudes toward marriage & childbearing; the effect was stronger among women.	Highlights gender issues as in several other studies (Hameed et al., Kulathunga & Abeysinghe).	The only study specifically focused on gender conflict & childbearing attitudes together.
Wang et al. (2025)	Online exposure to marriage information and marriage expectations of Generation Z in China: The roles of marriage value and relative information exposure	Online exposure to the practical benefits of marriage increased intention; exposure to cost-related information decreased intention; emotion-centric information had no effect; marriage values mediated this relationship.	Highlights digital media influence, similar to Hameed et al. and Yaru.	Complex moderated-mediation model distinguishing content type (cost vs. benefit information).
Mostafapour et al. (2025)	A Narrative Exploration of Transformation of Moral, Social and Cultural Values among Generation Z in the Context of Marriage	Qualitative, 29 participants, Tehran, focus groups, Braun & Clarke reflexive thematic analysis: 6 themes emerged (meaning-making of marriage, partner selection, traditional family roles, premarital sex, parenthood, marriage customs). Marriage remains an implicit reference point with social/cultural/moral legitimacy, but	Qualitative design with Herawati et al., Kulathunga & Abeysinghe, and Himawan; shares the “shift toward personal choice” pattern with most other studies.	Only study using focus-group-based reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) across 5 separate age/gender-stratified groups; Iranian context, unique among the 17 studies.

		is increasingly redefined around individual preference rather than a single fixed concept.		
Herawati et al. (2023)	A Qualitative Study: Exploring Marital Readiness among Generation Z	In-depth interviews found that the ability to handle marital responsibilities, financial stability, & career planning increased Gen Z participants' confidence in deciding to marry.	Marital readiness as a focus, as in several other studies.	Qualitative (interview-based) design – corrected from “quantitative survey” in the original Table 2 (see citation audit No. 19).
Kulathunga & Abeysinghe (2024)	Love and Marriage in the Eyes of Gen Z: A Qualitative Exploration	With 11 participants, 5 themes emerged (views on love, relationship expectations/breakups, views on marriage, marriage rates, role of culture); love emerged as a key motivator for marriage among the newer generation.	Qualitative design, as in Herawati et al. and Himawan.	Focuses on perceptions of love as a precursor to marriage, rather than readiness/obligation.
Hameed et al. (2025)	Modern Family Dynamics; How Millennials and Gen Z Are Shaping New Relationship Norms	mixed-methods (N=300: 150 Millennials, 150 Gen Z; surveys + in-depth interviews; IRB-approved). Millennials showed significantly stronger preference for nuclear families (64% vs. 39%, $p<.001$) and rated marriage more important ($M=4.3$ vs. 3.5 , $p<.001$); Gen Z showed greater acceptance of cohabitation ($M=4.5$ vs. 3.9 , $p<.001$), multigenerational living (38% vs. 22%, $p<.001$), work-life balance priority (71% vs. 52%), and reliance on digital communication for family engagement (63% vs. 35%, $p<.001$).	Compares Millennial vs. Gen Z generations, as in several other studies.	Confirmed mixed-methods design (corrected from “quantitative survey” in the original Table 2); broadest scope of family dynamics (parenting style, social media influence, gender roles) beyond marriage alone.
Raymo et al. (2020)	Marriage intentions, desires, and pathways to later and less marriage in Japan	Marriage intentions & desires remained high even as actual marriage rates declined & were delayed; the mismatch between desire and attainment was linked to structural-economic barriers.	Japanese context, similar to Ghaznavi et al.	Distinguishes intention/desire from actual marriage attainment (the structural gap).
Cai et al. (2025)	Marriage intention and influencing factors of ethnic minority residents in Zang-Qiang-Yi Corridor: a perspective based on the Andersen's behavioral model	Marriage intention varied significantly by gender, age, residential place, number of houses, religious belief, & floating-population status (but not by education level); demand factors (self-efficacy, family communication) had the strongest influence.	Quantitative correlational design, as in most other studies.	Focuses on ethnic minority populations & applies Andersen's behavioral model (rather than TPB/self-discrepancy).
Wu et al. (2025)	Analysis of Youth Marriage Intention Integrating Social Media and Statistical Data	Combined 2010–2022 provincial panel data (30 provinces) with 5,704 Weibo comments; principal component regression ($R^2=0.822$). Economic-cost factor: 1-unit increase → 59,200 fewer marriage registrations ($p<.001$). Fertility-policy liberalization unexpectedly suppressive: 1-unit increase in policy openness → 67,400 fewer	Chinese context & media-related focus, as in Wang et al. and Yaru; quantitative panel/regression design similar to most other studies.	Only study combining structured panel-data regression with computational social-media text mining (word cloud, Word2Vec, sentiment analysis) as a triangulation method.

		registrations. Demography/public-services factor positively boosts willingness to marry. Unemployment rate not significant ($p=.537$). Text mining: 60.2% of high-frequency words concern housing/childcare pressure; sentiment 42% positive, 23% neutral, 35% negative, cross-validating the regression findings.		
Yaru (2025)	Why Don't People Get Married? A Study On The Factors Influencing The Marriage Intention Of Young People	Combined survey & interview data showed that family/close social circle influence outweighed media influence on marriage decisions, alongside economic factors & gender equality considerations.	Highlights social influence, as in Wang et al. and Hameed et al.	Emphasizes that family/close-circle influence is in fact stronger than media influence.
Himawan (2019)	Either I do or I must: An exploration of the marriage attitudes of Indonesian singles	Indonesian singles experienced strong social pressure to marry (framed as "must" rather than "want"), producing ambivalence between personal desire & social obligation.	Southeast Asian context, similar to Herawati et al. and Kulathunga & Abeysinghe.	Focuses on the "must vs. want" ambivalence driven by social pressure to marry.
Paul et al. (2025)	Marital choice, spousal communication, and contraceptive self-efficacy and use among newly married girls in India: Evidence from the UDAYA study	Among 5,018 Indian women, involvement in spouse selection was associated with better spousal communication & higher contraceptive self-efficacy/use, particularly significant in urban areas.	South Asian context, similar to Bhattacharyya & Range.	Focuses on already-married young women & reproductive autonomy, rather than pre-marital attitudes.
Bhattacharyya & Range (2025)	Attitudes Toward Marriage and Subjective Well-Being Among Indian Young Adults	Among 113 participants, attitudes toward marriage were related to subjective well-being, but marriage intention was NOT correlated with well-being (unlike in other countries); participants were ambivalent about their marriage intentions.	Indian context, similar to Paul et al.	The only study to explicitly test the attitude–subjective well-being link, with a finding that diverges from other countries.

Three convergent patterns can be identified across the studies. First, marriage is increasingly conceptualized as a conditional personal decision rather than a normative obligation, although its expression varies by context (An et al., 2022; Himawan, 2019; Bhattacharyya & Range, 2025). Second, the desire to marry often persists even as marriage is delayed or foregone, with structural and economic barriers constraining the translation of desire into attainment (Ghaznavi et al., 2022; Raymo et al., 2020). Third, digital exposure, gender perceptions, and marital readiness recur as explanatory factors (Wang et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2025; Herawati et al., 2023). These convergences are elaborated in the thematic subsections that follow. Table 2 presents the extrinsic characteristics of the included studies, namely institutional affiliation, publication type, and country of study setting

Table 2. Extrinsic Characteristics

References	Institutional affiliation	Publication Type	Country of the Experience
Ghaznavi et al (2022)	Department of Global Health Policy, Graduate School of Medicine, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan; Medical Education Program, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri, United States of America; Department of Tropical Medicine and International Affairs, Tokyo Women's Medical University, Tokyo, Japan; Department of Health Policy and Management, School of Medicine, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan; Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research, Tokyo, Japan; Division of Biostatistics and Bioinformatics, Graduate School of Public Health, St. Luke's International University, Tokyo, Japan; Clinical Epidemiology Division, Department of Medicine, Solna, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden	Article	Japan
Xie & Hong (2022)	Communist Youth League Committee, Wenzhou Medical University, Wenzhou, China	Article	China
Liu & Zhang (2023)	Department of Education, Northeast Normal University, Changchun, Jilin, China; School of Philosophy and Sociology, Jilin University, Changchun, Jilin, China	Article	China
An et al. (2022)	Department of Health Administration, Kongju National University, Gongju, Korea; Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, Sejong, Korea; Institute of Health and Environment, Kongju National University, Gongju, Korea	Article	Korea
Lee et al. (2025)	Department of Sociology, Chung-Ang University, Seoul, South Korea; Gyeonggi-do Women and Family Foundation, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea; Department of Sociology, Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea	Article	Korea
Wang et al. (2025)	School of International and Public Affairs, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China; School of Marxism, Chongqing University, Chongqing, China; School of Public Policy and Administration, Chongqing University, Chongqing, China	Article	China
Mostafapour et al. (2025)	Department of Clinical & General Psychology, Faculty of Psychology & Education, University of Allameh Tabataba'i, Tehran, Iran.	Article	Iran
Herawati et al. (2023)	Center for Research in Psychology and Human Well-Being, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia; (co-affiliation) Faculty of Psychology, Riau Islamic University, Pekanbaru, Indonesia.	Article	Malaysia
Kulathunga et al. (2024)	Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT)	Conference paper	Sri Lanka
Hameed et al. (2025)	Department of Psychology, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Faisalabad Campus	Article	Pakistan
Raymo et al. (2020)	Department of Sociology, Princeton University	Article	Japan
Cai et al. (2025)	School of Social Development and Public Policy, Beijing Normal University	Article	China
Wu et al. (2025)	School of Sociology and Population Studies, Renmin University of China	Article	China
Yaru (2025)	Department of Sociology, Sun Yat-sen University	Article	China
Himawan (2019)	Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia	Article	Indonesia

Paul et al (2025)	Indian Social Institute (India); Research Intelligence and Business Development Manager, Somerset Council, United Kingdom; Center on Gender Equity and Health, Department of Medicine, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA, USA; Institute for Global Health Sciences, University of California San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA	Article	India
Bhattacharyya & Range (2025)	Department of Counseling and Behavioral Sciences, University of Holy Cross, New Orleans, LA, USA	Article	India

Sixteen of the 17 studies were journal articles, and one was a conference paper (Kulathunga & Abeyasinghe, 2024). The authors’ affiliations span psychology, counseling, sociology, public health, education, and public policy, indicating that marriage among young people is examined across disciplinary boundaries. Psychological evidence should accordingly be read alongside demographic and sociological findings

Table 3. Methodological Characteristics Declared by The Authors

References	Design	Data collection technique or instrument	Observed dimensions
Ghaznavi et al (2022)	Cross-sectional survey (secondary data analysis)	National Fertility Survey of Japan 2015; self-administered structured questionnaires; population-weighted statistical analysis	Marriage intention; Partner preferences (education, occupation, income, personality, housework/childrearing, appearance); Socioeconomic status; Employment; Education; Ideal age of marriage
Xie & Hong (2022)	Cross-sectional quantitative survey	Self-administered online questionnaires based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB); Likert-scale items (7-point); demographic questionnaire	Affective beliefs; Instrumental beliefs; Normative beliefs; Motivation to comply; Control beliefs; Power of control beliefs; Marriage intention
Liu & Zhang (2023)	Cross-sectional quantitative survey	Online self-report questionnaires: HEXACO-60 (self and ideal partner), Physical Attractiveness Scale, Social Resources Scale, Fear of Being Single Scale, Mate Value Scale, Forecasted Satisfaction Scale	Personality traits (HEXACO); Ideal partner similarity; Physical attractiveness; Social resources; Fear of being single; Mate value; Forecasted relationship satisfaction
An et al. (2022)	Cross-sectional survey (secondary data analysis; repeated cross-sectional trend analysis)	National Social Survey data (Statistics Korea, 2010–2020); structured survey items on marriage intention, demographic, economic, subjective, and family characteristics; logistic regression analysis	Marriage intention (positive, neutral, negative); Demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, region); Economic activity and income; Subjective satisfaction, health, stress; Family relationships and family size
Lee et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional survey (secondary data analysis)	2022 Comprehensive Survey on Youth (nationally representative); structured questionnaire; binary and Likert-scale items; weighted logistic regression analysis	Perceived gender conflict; Attitudes toward marriage (importance of marriage, marriage intention); Attitudes toward childbearing (importance and intention); Gender differences; Socioeconomic characteristics
Wang et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional quantitative survey	Self-administered questionnaires distributed online and offline; Online Exposure to Marriage Information Scale; Relative Information Exposure Scale; Marriage Values Scale; Marriage Expectation Scale; Likert-type scales; statistical analysis using SPSS and PROCESS macro	Online exposure to marriage utility information; Online exposure to marriage cost information; Marriage utility values; Marriage cost values; Relative information exposure; Marriage intention; Expected marriage age

Mostafapour et al. (2025)	Qualitative	Focus group conversations, manually transcribed (118 pages), each session lasting 2.5–3 hours; analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis.	Attitudes toward marriage; Family and cultural values; Perceived social norms; Economic considerations; Individual expectations of marriage
Herawati et al. (2023)	Qualitative exploratory study	Semi-structured in-depth interviews with Generation Z informants; purposive sampling; data analyzed using interactive analysis.	Marriage readiness (emotional, financial, social readiness); Psychological well-being; Perceived family support; Demographic characteristics
Kulathunga et al. (2024)	Cross-sectional survey	Structured self-administered questionnaire; items adapted from previous family and marriage attitude studies; Likert-scale measures; descriptive and inferential statistical analysis	Attitudes toward marriage; Gender role attitudes; Economic stability perceptions; Family influence; Marriage intention
Hameed et al. (2025)	Mixed-methods	Structured questionnaire (measuring relationship satisfaction, cohabitation trends, communication patterns) combined with semi-structured interviews; data collected via online survey (Google Forms/social media) + recorded Zoom or in-person interviews; reliability assessed with Cronbach's alpha, validity ensured through expert review and pilot testing.	Attitudes toward marriage; Perceived economic readiness; Perceived social and familial expectations; Marriage intention; Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics
Raymo et al. (2020)	Cross-sectional survey (secondary data analysis)	Nationally representative Japanese survey data (e.g., National Fertility Survey / related population-based datasets); structured interview and self-administered questionnaires; population-weighted statistical analysis	Marriage intentions; Timing expectations for marriage; Educational attainment; Employment status; Economic insecurity; Gender differences in marriage attitudes
Cai et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional quantitative survey	Self-administered questionnaires collected online; validated scales assessing marriage values, individualism–familism orientation, and perceived marriage costs and benefits; Likert-scale responses; structural equation modeling	Marriage values; Individualistic and familistic orientations; Perceived marriage benefits; Perceived marriage costs; Marriage intention
Wu et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Self-administered structured questionnaire; standardized survey items measuring marriage attitudes, socioeconomic conditions, and fertility-related considerations; Likert-scale responses; multivariate statistical analysis	Marriage intention; Economic readiness for marriage; Perceived marriage costs and benefits; Work–family expectations; Gender differences in marriage attitudes
Yaru (2025)	Mixed-methods (exploratory qualitative + quantitative survey)	Semi-structured in-depth interviews with youth; self-administered questionnaire based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB); adapted Likert-scale items; statistical analysis of survey data	Behavioral attitudes toward marriage; Subjective norms; Perceived behavioral control; Marriage intention; Social and familial pressures
Himawan (2019)	Qualitative phenomenological study	In-depth semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis of narrative data	Meaning of marriage; Personal and cultural values related to marriage; Relationship expectations; Perceived barriers to marriage; Individual decision-making processes
Paul et al (2025)	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Secondary analysis of UDAYA (Understanding the Lives of Adolescents and Young Adults) survey; structured household	Marital choice (self vs arranged); Spousal communication (fertility and contraception discussion); Contraceptive self-efficacy; Current contraceptive use; Socio-demographic characteristics

		questionnaire; nationally representative longitudinal survey data	
Bhattacharyya & Range (2025)	Cross-sectional survey	Cross-sectional online self-report questionnaire; standardized scales (SWLS, Attitudes to Marriage Scale, Intent to Marry Scale); Likert-scale items	Life satisfaction; Attitudes toward marriage; Intent to marry; Demographic characteristics

Most studies employed self-administered questionnaires, several analyzing nationally representative secondary datasets from Japan, South Korea, and India (Ghaznavi et al., 2022; An et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2025; Raymo et al., 2020; Paul et al., 2025), whereas qualitative studies relied on interviews or focus groups analyzed thematically (Himawan, 2019; Herawati et al., 2023; Mostafapour et al., 2025). Marriage intention was the most frequently measured construct, while realized marital transitions were seldom examined directly.

Shifts in the Meaning of Marriage in Generation Z

The review literature calls marriage a conditional, personalized choice rather than a universal life requirement. Whereas Millennials were more aligned with conventional family values, Generation Z has been seen as having more flexibility around partnership arrangements (i.e., a willingness to cohabitate prior to marriage and taking on alternative caregiving roles) (Hameed et al., 2025; Mostafapour et al., 2025). This shift appears across multiple Asian cultural contexts, although its underlying dynamics differ by region. Studies in East Asian countries, such as South Korea, Japan, and China, consistently report declining marriage intention, delayed marriage, and increasingly ambivalent attitudes toward family formation (An et al., 2022; Ghaznavi et al., 2022; Raymo et al., 2020). Despite rapid modernization, these countries are characterized by highly competitive educational and labor environments, expensive housing markets, and persistent traditional gender expectations. In South Korea, for example, perceived gender conflict and unequal domestic expectations contribute to young adults' negative attitudes toward marriage (Lee et al., 2025). Marriage postponement is closely associated with employment insecurity and changing life priorities among unmarried adults in Japan (Ghaznavi et al., 2022). In China, growing concerns regarding financial burden, housing costs, and online discourse surrounding marriage have increasingly shaped cautious marital attitudes among Generation Z (Wang et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, marriage remains culturally valued and closely connected to family expectations, religion, and collectivist social norms in South and Southeast Asian contexts such as India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. However, Generation Z increasingly reinterprets marriage through emotional compatibility, psychological readiness, and practical preparedness rather than unquestioned social obligation (Bhattacharyya & Range, 2025; Himawan, 2019; Kulathunga & Abeysinghe, 2024). In Indonesia, marriage is still perceived as an important developmental milestone, yet younger adults increasingly emphasize emotional maturity, financial readiness, and relationship quality before deciding to marry (Himawan, 2019). Similarly, in India and Sri Lanka, younger generations continue to respect traditional family structures while simultaneously negotiating personal autonomy and individual well-being in marital decision-making (Bhattacharyya & Range, 2025; Kulathunga & Abeysinghe, 2024).

This pattern can be interpreted through the lens of Second Demographic Transition theory (Lesthaeghe, 2010), which explains long-term shifts in family behavior across industrializing societies as a movement from norm-conforming, obligation-based family formation toward individualized, self-actualization-oriented life choices. Marriage postponement and reinterpretation among Generation Z in Asia may reflect an early or partial manifestation of this transition, in which economic security and family formation timing become subordinate to personal readiness and self-fulfillment. However, unlike the more

linear trajectory observed in Western contexts, the coexistence of declining marriage intention in East Asia alongside persistent marriage valuation in South and Southeast Asia suggests that the transition unfolds unevenly across the region, shaped by the depth of individualization relative to enduring collectivist and religious structures.

Influence of Digital Mediation on Marriage Perception

Digital environments have been identified as an influential factor shaping marriage perceptions among Generation Z across several Asian contexts. Social media and online platforms function as a double-edged sword by facilitating interpersonal connection while simultaneously amplifying anxiety regarding relationships, financial readiness, and future family life (Hameed et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2025). Digital platforms have become major sources of information regarding romantic relationships, marriage expectations, and lifestyle aspirations among Generation Z, thereby influencing how young adults evaluate marital decisions.

In China, exposure to online content emphasizing the financial costs of marriage was negatively associated with marriage intention, whereas exposure to content highlighting emotional and relational benefits was positively associated with favorable attitudes toward marriage (Wang et al., 2025; Xie & Hong, 2022). This finding suggests that digital exposure does not uniformly discourage marriage; rather, its influence depends on the dominant narratives and values presented within online environments. Similar patterns were observed in Pakistan and other contexts, where social media intensified concerns regarding economic burden, relationship instability, and idealized standards of marriage (Hameed et al., 2025). These findings indicate that digital environments play a significant role in shaping how Generation Z interprets marriage by continuously exposing them to discussions regarding financial pressure, relationship quality, divorce, and lifestyle expectations. Marriage is increasingly evaluated through personal risk-benefit considerations rather than solely through cultural obligation or family expectation.

These patterns align with Cultivation Theory (Shrum, 2017), which posits that repeated exposure to a particular symbolic environment gradually shapes individuals' perceptions of social reality. Applied to Generation Z's digital environment, sustained exposure to online narratives emphasizing the financial or emotional costs of marriage may cultivate a heightened perception of marriage as inherently risky or burdensome, independent of an individual's direct experience, whereas exposure dominated by narratives of relational benefit may cultivate more favorable marital schemas. This suggests that platform algorithms, by curating which narratives are more frequently encountered, function as a contemporary agent of cultivation, in place of the more homogeneous broadcast media environment in which the theory was originally developed.

Gendered Marriage Perception

Gender inequality perceptions have also emerged as a distinct factor influencing marriage attitudes among Generation Z. In South Korea, higher perceived levels of gender conflict were associated with more unfavorable attitudes toward marriage and childbearing (Lee et al., 2025). This pattern is particularly salient among Generation Z, who have grown up in socio-digital environments where public debates regarding feminism, misogyny, gender equality, and changing family roles are highly visible and frequently contested.

As a result, many young women are increasingly questioning traditional marital arrangements that perpetuate unequal domestic labor, emotional burden, and career limitations. Marriage is therefore assessed not merely as an intimate relationship but also as a social institution potentially associated with unequal gender expectations. Simultaneously, some young men demonstrate resistance to changing gender norms, perceiving these transformations as threatening or disadvantageous, which may further intensify the interpersonal and ideological tensions surrounding marriage. These dynamics contribute to a broader social climate in which marriage is no longer universally perceived as a necessary developmental milestone. Instead, many Generation Z individuals increasingly approach marriage cautiously, selectively, and conditionally, particularly when expectations regarding equality, autonomy, and mutual responsibility are perceived as unclear or unattainable.

These findings can be interpreted through the framework of Doing Gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), which conceptualizes gender not as a fixed trait but as an ongoing interactional accomplishment that is continuously negotiated and held accountable to social expectation. Within this framework, marriage functions as a key site where gendered accountability is enacted: women's growing reluctance toward marital arrangements associated with unequal domestic labor reflects resistance to being held accountable to traditional gender performance, while some men's resistance to changing expectations reflects an attempt to preserve conventional accountability structures. The tension identified in this review therefore does not merely reflect differing individual attitudes, but a broader renegotiation of what constitutes appropriately "gendered" conduct within marriage.

Decision pathways and structural constraints

The studies reviewed demonstrated intricate decision processes on the path to marriage, identified as gaps between positive attitudes toward romantic relationships and their translation into actual marriages. Similarly, structural and socioeconomic restrictions did not consistently facilitate marriage intentions (Yaru, 2025).

In South Asia, marital trajectories ultimately depended on the extent of personal agency (i.e., power and choice) in the selection of partners. In India, women who played a role in partner choice reported improved reproductive health communication and greater relational

autonomy (Paul et al., 2025). For instance, women in Bangladesh were reported to have relied on informal community-based legal mechanisms (shalish) to negotiate marital legitimacy and social validation beyond the constraints of formalized legal systems (Hoque, 2025).

Structural obstacles were particularly visible in East Asian settings. On the other hand, Japan has often labeled non-marriage as a passive outcome of mismatch in partner markets, selective mate preferences, and unstable labor market (Ghaznavi et al., 2022; Raymo et al., 2020). Other research indicated that marriage opportunities for younger cohorts were further limited as criteria for partner selection became increasingly stringent on personality and physical qualities (Liu & Zhang, 2023). Psychosocial factors, such as self-efficacy and mental health, were found to be related to marriage-related decision-making behavior, especially among socially insecure groups (Cai et al., 2025).

These findings are consistent with *Life Course Theory* (Elder Jr, 1994), particularly its central proposition that individuals exercise human agency in constructing their life course, but always within the constraints and opportunities structured by their historical and social context. The agency exercised by women in India and Bangladesh in negotiating partner choice and marital legitimacy illustrates how individuals actively construct pathways to marriage even under constraining structural conditions. Meanwhile, the structural obstacles documented in Japan and China reflect how linked lives, the interdependence between individual decisions and surrounding institutional arrangements such as labor and partner markets, constrain the timing and form that marital transitions can take. Viewed together, decision pathways toward marriage among Generation Z in Asia are best understood not as purely individual choices, but as the product of agency continuously exercised within, and against, structural constraint

DISCUSSION

Taken together, these four patterns can be read through a single interpretive lens: *Life Course Theory* (Elder Jr, 1994), which conceptualizes individual development as a continuous negotiation between personal agency and the historical, structural, and relational context in which that agency is exercised. Rather than treating marriage postponement, digital exposure, gendered perception, and structural constraint as four independent findings, this framework positions them as different facets of the same underlying process: Generation Z's marital pathways in Asia are being reshaped by a historically specific set of conditions that both open and constrain the choices available to them (An et al., 2022; Ghaznavi et al., 2022; Jones & Gu, 2024).

The first proposition of *Life Course Theory*, that individuals actively construct their own life course through the choices they make within existing constraints, is directly reflected in the shift observed across this review from marriage as an obligatory life stage toward marriage as a deliberated personal choice (Jones & Gu, 2024; Wang et al., 2025). This exercise of agency is most visible where structural constraint is comparatively loosened, for instance in

women's growing role in partner selection in India and in the use of community-based legal mechanisms to negotiate marital legitimacy in Bangladesh (Paul et al., 2025; Hoque, 2025). In both cases, the same interpretive principle, agency exercised within constraint, explains both why marriage is increasingly evaluated on personal terms and why that evaluation still occurs unevenly across contexts.

A second proposition, *linked lives*, holds that individual transitions are embedded in relationships and institutions that extend beyond the individual, such as labor markets, partner markets, and family systems. This principle accounts for the structural stagnation observed in East Asia, where employment insecurity, expensive housing markets, and increasingly selective partner markets in Japan and China constrain the timing and feasibility of marriage independent of individual willingness (Ghaznavi et al., 2022; Liu & Zhang, 2023; Raymo et al., 2020). Rather than representing a rejection of marriage, the patterns identified in Japan and China are more consistent with what Life Course Theory terms delayed or blocked transitions: individuals whose linked institutional context, not their personal preference, limits their pathway to marriage (Cai et al., 2025).

Third, Life Course Theory situates individual development within a specific *historical time and place*, recognizing that each generation encounters distinctive social conditions that earlier cohorts did not. For Generation Z, the digital environment constitutes precisely this kind of historically specific context: unlike earlier generations, their evaluation of marriage is continuously mediated by algorithmically curated narratives regarding its costs and

benefits (Wang et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2025). This positions digital exposure not as an isolated variable but as part of the broader social timing in which Generation Z's marital attitudes are being formed, reinforcing rather than replacing the structural and cultural conditions already discussed above.

Finally, the gendered patterns identified in this review can also be read through the relational dimension of linked lives, since marital decision-making is rarely an individual act but one negotiated between partners whose expectations may or may not be aligned. Higher perceived gender conflict was associated with more unfavorable attitudes toward marriage and childbearing in South Korea, particularly among women (Lee et al., 2025), suggesting that the renegotiation of gender roles constitutes another domain in which linked lives either support or obstruct individual pathways toward marriage.

Viewed together, these four patterns are therefore not separate findings requiring separate explanations, but converging expressions of the same life-course dynamic: Generation Z in Asia is exercising increasing agency over marital decisions, but that agency remains embedded within historically specific structural, digital, and relational conditions that vary considerably by region. Future research employing longitudinal, cross-regional designs would allow this dynamic interplay between agency and structure to be tested directly, rather than inferred from cross-sectional, single-timepoint data as in the studies reviewed here. Table 4 consolidates the literature gaps identified in this review and the corresponding directions for future research.

Table 4. Literature Gaps and Future Research Directions

Literature Gap	Future Research Direction
Predominantly cross-sectional, single-time-point designs (15 of 17 studies); only An et al. (2022) and Wu et al. (2025) use longitudinal/panel data.	Prioritize longitudinal and cohort designs tracking the same individuals over time to establish temporal/causal ordering between antecedents and attitude change.
Direct intergenerational comparison (Gen Z vs. Millennials within the same instrument) is rare – only Hameed et al. (2025) compares both generations directly.	More studies using matched, cross-generational samples with identical instruments to isolate generational effects from life-stage effects.
Methodological approaches are unevenly distributed by region: East Asian studies (Japan, Korea, China) are almost exclusively quantitative, while richer explanatory evidence comes mainly from qualitative work in South/Southeast Asia and Iran.	Qualitative and mixed-methods research in East Asian contexts to surface the lived meaning behind quantitative trends (why intention is declining, not just that it is).
Search strategy and inclusion criteria were English-language only, risking exclusion of local-language literature.	Future reviews should incorporate multilingual search strategies and local-language databases (e.g., CNKI, Bahasa Indonesia journals) to capture region-specific evidence.
No included study evaluates the effectiveness of interventions or policies (e.g., marriage-support subsidies, relationship education); all evidence is observational/correlational.	Intervention and policy-evaluation studies (quasi-experimental or program-evaluation designs) to test whether structural or educational interventions actually shift marriage attitudes or behavior.
Most studies measure attitudes/intentions rather than actual marital decision-making behavior, limiting insight into the attitude-behavior gap.	Studies linking attitudinal data to actual behavioral/administrative outcomes (e.g., matched survey-registry data) to test whether stated attitudes predict realized decisions.

No formal quality/risk-of-bias appraisal was conducted across the 17 studies (consistent with PRISMA-ScR's optional status for scoping reviews).

Reviews addressing a narrower research question could incorporate structured appraisal tools (e.g., MMAT) to weight or contextualize findings by study quality.

The gaps converge on three issues: the predominance of cross-sectional designs, which constrains temporal and causal inference; the scarcity of direct cross-generational and cross-regional comparisons; and the emphasis on marital intentions rather than realized marital transitions. Longitudinal, mixed-methods, and intervention-evaluation designs would allow the interplay between agency and structure proposed in this discussion to be examined empirically rather than inferred.

LIMITATION

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the final sample comprised 17 studies that were considerably heterogeneous in terms of country context (spanning East, South, and Southeast Asia), study design (cross-sectional quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and mixed-methods), and the specific constructs measured (attitudes, intentions, readiness, and marital choice). Drawing a single "Asia-wide" conclusion from such a small and varied evidence base carries a risk of overgeneralization; findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative regional patterns rather than a unified trend. Second, although the search covered Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar, both the databases and the search strategy relied solely on English-language terms; combined with the exclusion of seven non-English records, this may have excluded relevant local-language literature (e.g., national journals from Indonesia, China, or India), introducing a language bias. Third, the search was conducted once, in February 2026, without an updated search prior to submission; therefore, studies published after this date are not reflected in this review. Fourth, as this review adopts a scoping methodology, a formal quality or risk-of-bias appraisal of the included studies was not undertaken, which is consistent with the PRISMA-ScR guidance in which critical appraisal is an optional rather than a mandatory reporting item. Future reviews addressing a narrower research question may benefit from incorporating a structured appraisal tool (e.g., the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool) to enable a more rigorous synthesis.

CONCLUSION

This scoping review suggests that marriage attitudes among Generation Z in Asia are shifting from being regarded as an unavoidable social obligation to a more deliberate personal decision. These outcomes illustrate that current marriage decision-making largely focuses on deliberative evaluations concerning psychological readiness, financial situation, emotional compatibility, digital exposure, and expectations regarding gender equality and relational autonomy. This contributes to heterogeneous decision paths, including active delays motivated by structural economic constraints (and uncertainty in labor markets),

suggesting that a decline in marriage rates across parts of Asia may reflect an adjustment response to macro realities rather than an ideological aversion to marriage itself. As the evidence underlying these findings is drawn predominantly from cross-sectional and correlational studies at a single point in time rather than direct intergenerational comparisons, this pattern should be read as an indicative, emerging shift rather than a confirmed, wholesale transformation.

This review contributes to the psychological literature by synthesizing how digital mediation functions as a contemporary socializing agent, shaping perceptions of relational risks versus benefits following exposure to social media content. The synthesis also highlights the role of relational autonomy, particularly among women who prioritize emotional compatibility and domestic justice as primary conditions for long-term commitment. Therefore, while this review adds to the developmental psychology literature by mapping evidence that questions marriage as a universally expected stage of adulthood, it highlights the need for future research to more directly examine the interaction between personal agency, digital exposure, and structural stress in shaping how young people's transition into family life will change in the coming years.

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ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study is a scoping review based on secondary, publicly available published literature and did not involve primary data collection from human participants; therefore, formal ethical approval was not required.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

TRANSPARENCY OF DATA

The data extracted from the included studies are available within the article (Tables 1–3) and its supplementary materials. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Fitri Annum Malasari conceptualized the study, conducted the literature search and data extraction, performed the analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Yudiana Ratnasari supervised the study, provided critical revisions, and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

AIUSAGESTATEMENT

In preparing this manuscript, the author used artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool to edit the language and improve paragraph structure. All research data, case analyses, interpretations, and conclusions were compiled by the author. The author has also reviewed and double-checked the AI-generated results against relevant sources and assumes full responsibility for the content and accuracy of the manuscript.

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