

## Singles' hell at Lunar New Year

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*It is that time of the year again and this year is the Year of Horse, a lucky year according to the Chinese.*

It is the time where you see red everywhere, from home decorations and clothes to, of course, the most-wanted “item” for the kids – ang pow.

It is also the time where you get to see lion dances in homes, malls and offices.

For many Chinese, who live far away from home, Chinese New Year is a once-a-year opportunity to visit relatives.

It is a season of joy but not for all, particularly, singles.

It is also a time where many young single Chinese particularly feel the pressure of constant questions by the elderly on when they are going to settle down and start a family.

It has gone to the extent where some Chinese newspapers have termed this “scenario” as “marriage pressure season”.

Recently, a Chinese mother bought a full front-page advertisement in the form of letter in Chinese Melbourne Daily, begging her son to come home for New Year and promised that the parents would not pressure him to get married again.

According to news reports, the son is working in Australia where he had completed his study.

He refused to return to China as his family had constantly pressured him to find a Chinese girlfriend and settle down.

So he retaliated by not answering their calls.

The message reads, “Peng, I have called you several times but you did not pick up. Maybe this is the only way for you to receive my message. Mum and Dad will not pressure you to marry again. Please come home for Chinese New Year! From your Mum who loves you.”

Such action surprised Chinese social media websites.

Odd but true, there are Chinese websites that offer services of fake boyfriends or girlfriends for hire at various rates. These “partners” accompany them home for the New Year. The rates depend on the kind of services needed.

Many are under great pressure, especially single women to bring home potential partners during the festive season. So some opt not to return home.

For single ladies who reach 27, China has a special term for them – shengnu or “leftover women”.

This term was added to the Education Ministry’s list of words in August 2007.

To “overcome” such scenario, Taobao launched a rent-a-boyfriend service that allows the customers to rent a partner.

Taobao is the Chinese version of Amazon and eBay.

The phenomenon of renting a boyfriend or girlfriend is not new in China. It started in the early 2000s. Such pressure has been perpetuated by the one-child policy that was introduced in 1979 by the Chinese government.

Therefore, parents focus all their attention on the success of their one child, including marriage.

Moreover in China, it is crucial to retain the family last name and continuing the family tree.

Some find ways to “release” the pressure.

In a recent advertisement posted on iweju, a Chinese social media app, a 25-year-old offered 1 million yuan (RM540,000) to anyone willing to pose as a “girlfriend” for a week, over the New Year holidays. However, he cancelled the offer after the posting went viral and was criticised severely.

Families forcing marriage is a real headache, not only for the Chinese but also to some Malaysians.

Will this phenomenon become a trend in Malaysia in years to come? I hope not. – February 3, 2014.

