

# There's no accounting for love

People around Asia have been giving valuations to life partners, reports *Nury Vittachi*



Photo: Brian Ching

Money can't buy love, the Beatles sang. My friend Eddie disagreed. "Maybe it can't buy you real love, but it can get you a pretty good replica," he said.

We were sitting at an outdoor restaurant in Lan Kwai Fong watching an ugly rich guy walking down the street surrounded by worshipful hangers-on of both sexes.

"That's not love," I told him. "That's commerce."

It got me thinking about money and relationships. I once wrote a column about an accountant who audited people's lives instead of their bank accounts.

But how would an accountant place a cash valuation on love?

I remember writing an article about a woman in India who gave a debtor a choice: "Pay back the loan – or marry me." Paravya was a 50-year-old widow from Karnataka. She had given the equivalent of US\$600 to a 55-year-old labourer called Sharanappar. After he comforted her after her bereavement, she reckoned six hundred bucks was about the right price for a husband and made the money-or-marriage offer. It was probably not the most romantic proposal in the history of the world, but it was accepted.

In Malaysia, spouses have a higher book price. Bachelors have been

choosing wives out of catalogues. Shy guys pick a pretty face from a book of photographs and agents sell them "one-stop wife packages." For the equivalent of US\$8,000, you get the works: a bride aged 18 to 21; a six-day, five-night trip to the country of the bride's origin (usually China, Indonesia or Vietnam); a certificate of virginity; a hotel stay; meals; an instant wedding; a crash course in Bahasa Malaysian (for the bride) and a course of sex education (also for the bride).

But one of the saddest money-plus-love stories from my news reporter days was the tale of a Japanese businessman named Kawarada who wanted to be murdered to give insurance money to his wife. "I want to die as a robbery victim," he explained to a 19-year-old he employed. "I'll pay you, so please help me."

Kawarada paid the youngster several hundred thousand yen to attack him with a knife and promised a one million yen bonus if he died of his injuries. (Not sure how he planned to hand that over.) The first bit worked as planned. The young man stabbed Kawarada. But the emergency services thoughtlessly fouled up the plan. Doctors saved the insured man's life and police charged the youngster with attempted murder. (Imagine

getting a direct order from your boss to stab him to death! Is this every employed person's deepest fantasy? Or just mine?)

Actually, there may be an even sadder example of money and love being entangled: the "It's me" scams, which started in Japan in 2004, then spread to Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China. It's a very simple trick.

Villain phones victim at random.

**Villain:** It's me!

**Victim:** Is that you, my beloved son/nephew/grandchild Yasunari?

**Villain:** That's right, it's your beloved son/nephew/grandchild Yasunari. I need five million yen transferred to my new bank account immediately.

**Victim:** Of course! Anything for my beloved son/nephew/grandchild Yasunari.

The "It's me" scamster has stolen a fortune from innocent people. How can they stop him? I don't know. But Japan is a strange place. One can only hope he's raising money to have himself polished off, in which case the problem will solve itself.

 **Quick link**

Visit Nury at [www.vittachi.com](http://www.vittachi.com) for fresh humour every weekday.