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by

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Abstract

Marriage Laws and Practices in South China, 1930-1980

Wilson Miu

"Marriage Laws and Practices in South China, 1930-1980" traces and compares different models of state regulation of marriage via laws and campaigns and people's responses over five decades. It focuses on twentieth-century South China, a time and place in which successive regimes in China and a colonial government in Hong Kong each tried to reform marriage customs, with differences in scopes and methods across the Hong Kong–China border. In China under the Nationalist and collaborationist regimes and under the Communist Party in the People's Republic of China, the national government and its provincial counterpart adopted an active agenda to reform marriage, in contrast to the laid-back approach by the post-war colonial government in Hong Kong. Through analyzing changes in marriage customs in the context of three marriage laws--the Nationalist Civil Code in 1930, the People's Republic of China Marriage Law in 1950, and the Marriage Reform Ordinance in Hong Kong in 1971, this dissertation crosses the chronological divides of the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. It suggests that regime changes or political campaigns had a real but limited effect on changes in habits and customs. Furthermore, the regional specificity of South China and cross-border marriages in China and Hong Kong during the Maoist era made marriage governance more challenging for the state, as the people were less receptive

to the state's message of frugal weddings and transaction-free marriage. Gradually the state in China evolved into a regulatory behemoth, and its people's ability to act outside the law gradually diminished as state capabilities to regulate marriage expanded between the 1950s and the 1970s. Nonetheless, urban and rural residents frequently found ways to manipulate politics and policies while interacting with multiple levels of the Chinese state (local, provincial, national) and the colonial state in Hong Kong to retain their marriage practices and customs despite relentless campaigns from the top.

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Introduction

“Marriage Laws and Practices in South China, 1930-1980,” explores the penetration of an interventionist state and its power into the most intimate domain of people’s social and family lives: courtship, marriage negotiations, wedding rituals, and marital disputes. In this process the state was not a unitary entity, nor was society: many groups and organizations interacted with, influenced, or counterbalanced state policies on marriage regulation and customs reforms. At the same time, people adapted to state regulations and interventions within the context of increasing government reach in everyday life. The dissertation traces five decades of local responses to state discourses, regulations, and marriage laws from 1930 to 1980 in south China. In this region, four state regimes—Nationalist, collaborationist (during the Japanese occupation), socialist, and British colonial (in Hong Kong)—sought to reform Chinese marriage customs. Despite different political objectives and jurisdictions, each regime promoted free-choice marriage, reduced marriage expenses, and encouraged marriage registration and better marital relations.

The dissertation has three primary goals: to highlight the causes and effects of state governance in the everyday lives of ordinary people, to analyze the impact of wars and a national border on social life, and to provide a long-term narrative about changes in marriage customs. This research suggests that various state regimes could not control social life in south China despite their increasing intervention on both sides of the Hong Kong-China border. Both urban and rural residents frequently found ways to manipulate politics and policies while interacting with multiple levels

of the Chinese state (local, provincial, national) and the colonial state in Hong Kong. However, their ability to act outside the law gradually diminished as state capabilities to regulate marriage expanded between the 1950s and the 1970s.

I analyze changing marriage customs in relation to three fundamental marriage laws--the Nationalist Civil Code in 1930, the People's Republic of China Marriage Law in 1950, and the Marriage Reform Ordinance in Hong Kong in 1971. This analysis suggests that the state was not capable of controlling social life in south China, and people's reactions to state efforts and regulations ranged from enthusiastically embracing state mediation, to begrudgingly accepting or outright rejecting state laws and propaganda. Lineage organizations, the preexisting form of dominant social organization, saw their influence on marriage slowly replaced by the state but remained a factor in determining the pool of potential marriage partners, deciding wedding rituals, and adjudicating disputes. Also, the state did not work uniformly, and local agents often acted against the national government's interest in regulating marriages in their areas. The struggle over marriage costs and other wedding rituals reveals the construction and limits of the interventionist state in China in controlling domestic life.

Any discussion of state intervention in marriage reform and governance in China must take account of regional identity and peculiarities. Across China's varied territory and many provinces, state campaigns and efforts to reform marriage encountered uneven implementation and enforcement on the ground. Drawing on G.

William Skinner's (1977) concept of macroregions,¹ this dissertation focuses on the region of south China as an analytical unit to assess the impact of regionally specific factors on prolonging local marriage customs and influencing people's decisions to comply with marriage laws. Nonetheless, the macroregion as a framework has limits, as long-distance marriages in eastern Guangdong in the 1950s and 1960s and cross-border marriages between the PRC and Hong Kong both crossed regional, cultural and political boundaries. I consider the impact of local culture, migration, lineages, and external ties to Hong Kong when analyzing noncompliance with state marriage laws. In Guangdong, particularly near the Pearl River Delta, influence and wealth from Hong Kong complicated marriage governance in the PRC as the transnational yet porous border separating the PRC and Hong Kong likely induced women to use marriage to achieve social mobility, or to migrate away from the PRC during the Mao era.

Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to marriage and weddings in south China. Women in the Pearl River Delta in the late Qing and Republican China practiced marriage customs such as extended post-marital natal residence,² ghost marriages, and marriage resistance, including voluntary spinsterhood.³ In

¹ G. William Skinner, "Cities and the Hierarchy of Local Systems," in *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. William Skinner and Hugh D. R. Baker (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), 275-352.

² While the custom of post-marital natal residence of the bride could also be found in other parts of China such as in Shangdong, it was in south China where the duration of a wife's residence in her natal family was extensive. Often, the marriage was only a symbolic one, as the wife would pay for her husband to contract a concubine. On post-marital natal residence in other parts of China, see Ellen R. Judd, "Niangjia: Chinese Women and Their Natal Families," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 48, no. 3 (1989): 525-44.

³ Marjorie Topley, "Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung." In *Studies in Chinese Society*, edited by Arthur P. Wolf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978, 247-268; Helen F. Siu, "Where Were

Guangdong, there was also a large population of the wives of overseas Chinese men, and in the PRC, remittances from these husbands clashed with the socialist vision of self-sufficiency.⁴ On marriage transactions in Guangdong, the bride price was crucial in rural areas even during the Cultural Revolution,⁵ contrary to the ideal of the state.⁶ Scholars have identified a resurgence of bride price in marriage transactions after 1976,⁷ and the resurgence has been explained as a reconstitution of family ideals previously suppressed by the state.⁸

However, little is known about the correlation between political campaigns and changes in marriage practices. Expanding on Sara Friedman's (2006) concept of "intimate politics," in which the state civilizing agenda affected social practices and the life of women,⁹ I trace the effects of a half-century of state intervention in the south China region, where three successive governments (Nationalist,

the Women?: Rethinking Marriage Resistance and Regional Culture in South China," *Late Imperial China* 11, no. 2 (1990): 32–62; Janice E. Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860-1930* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989).

⁴ Shelly Chan, *Diaspora's Homeland: Modern China in the Age of Global Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

⁵ A "bride price" is a payment of money or goods from the groom's family to the bride or her family. In traditional Chinese wedding customs, the bride price is a payment to symbolize the groom's appreciation of the bride's parents for raising the daughter. Still, this payment could become transactional as the negotiation over the amount of the bride price is a significant contention in marriage negotiations.

⁶ William L. Parish and Martin King Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Li Bingkui, *Kuanglan yu qianliu: Zhongguo qingnian di ding lian yu hunyin, 1966-1976* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2015).

⁷ William L. Parish and Martin King Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China*, 1978; *Urban Life in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁸ Helen F. Siu, "Reconstituting Dowry and Bride Price in South China," in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, ed. Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell, Studies on China 17 (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1993).

⁹ Sara Friedman, *Intimate Politics: Marriage, the Market, and State Power in Southeastern China*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 2.

collaborationist, and Communist) in Guangdong worked to secure public compliance with marriage laws and to make weddings more “civilized” (in state parlance) from 1930 to 1980. In postwar Hong Kong, three decades of milder marriage reform and more hands-off regulation by the British colonial government from 1947 to the mid-1970s allows a comparison between the softer approach of regulating marriage in Hong Kong and the more interventionist approach by the PRC. Over time, the Chinese state became a regulatory behemoth by expanding to attempt to control most aspects of domestic life. The ruling regime was able to exert increasing level of influence and pressure on its people to conform, and popular marriage practices also adapted to state laws and regulatory oversights. Despite the policy goal of the various Chinese states to encourage free-choice marriage and frugal weddings, however, incomplete implementation was a chronic weakness of the state. In Nationalist and collaborationist Guangdong, the ruling regime lacked an apparatus of local agents to enforce its regulations on marriage; in the PRC, such a structure of local cadres existed to serve the state, but they were prone to selectively enforce the law to suit their needs.

Aside from tracing marriage governance in China through the framework of the interventionist state aiming to secure its vision of the modernization and regulation of everyday life, I also aim to modify the state narrative that a resurgence of bride price and dowry occurred in the 1970s, preceding the reform era. In south China, bride price was a constant feature of marriage in the Mao era. In Guangdong, the customs of bride price and other wedding expenses and rituals lingered after the

Marriage Law Campaign in 1953, and by the late 1950s, the state had made virtually no headway in this domain. From the 1950s to the late 1970s, the PRC government and its provincial and local counterparts in Guangdong tried to regulate bride prices by administrative and legal means. Still, they failed to temper the rise of marriage transactions based on materialist considerations in spousal choice.

Targeting Standard Marriage Practices in south China

State interest in marriage regulation in south China could be best categorized into three stages: courtship and betrothal, the wedding, and post-marital relations. Each stage had monetary and non-financial components that the Republican-era and subsequent states wished to change. In the 1930s, arranged marriage was the dominant form in spousal selection, and families would matchmake by themselves or find matchmakers who exacted fees for services. At the same time, however, new ideas on spousal selection were beginning to take hold in urban Republican China, and the younger generation was engaging in courtship activities to find their life partners. The state encouraged people to find their own matches, regarding this as preferable to arranged marriages, yet the side effect of courtship activities as a prerequisite of free-choice marriage was dating expenses. At the same time as the state discourse criticized arranged marriages, it also discussed the harmful effect of high courtship costs which left many men unable to find a spouse. Yet, state discourse could only advocate lowering the cost of courtship during times of hardship and war; direct regulation was not possible.

Once a couple decided to marry, the groom or his family paid engagement gifts and engaged in complex marriage negotiations over the amount and the timely payment of bride price. The acceptance of gifts by the bride or her family symbolized a betrothal. Any annulment required one of the contracting parties to be at fault or fully repay the engagement gifts if neither party was at fault.

As the appointed wedding day approached, grooms' families paid the bride price, which was substantial and was a perennial target of public criticism and state reform. Depending on the economic circumstances of the bride's family, they would convert a portion or all of the received bride price into a dowry. Before the wedding, brides in some areas of Guangdong sang laments on their trepidation at moving into strangers' households.¹⁰ On the wedding day, the groom's family would send a party to retrieve the new bride in a wedding procession, in which the bride would be transported in a bridal chair accompanied by trousseau boxes that constituted her dowry. After she arrived at the groom's household, the couple performed the rituals of worshiping heaven and earth and the groom's ancestors. A luxurious wedding banquet followed the ceremony, and a rowdy but well-intentioned crowd teased the newlyweds in their nuptial chamber. The following day after the presumed consummation of the marriage, the groom's family would send the bride's family a roast pig to demonstrate her premarital chastity, and the absence of such a pig was a prominent cause of marriage disputes. The wedding phase concluded with a post-

¹⁰ On bridal laments in south China, see May-bo Ching, "What Alternative Do You Have, Sixth Aunt?," in *Merchants' Daughters: Women, Commerce, and Regional Culture in South China*, ed. Helen F. Siu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 59–74.

marital visit to the bride's family by the newlyweds.¹¹ Throughout the period under study here, the Chinese state advocated for changes in the wedding rituals by replacing wedding banquets with tea ceremonies, inserting state symbols in weddings, and eliminating rowdy bride teasing.

The third object of state concern revolved around marital discord. While domestic quarrels were generally not a matter of state concern, authorities could become involved when serious disagreements led to domestic violence or spousal abandonment. Additionally, domestic troubles could also stem from husbands contracting concubines, or wives engaging in adultery or refusing to return to their husbands' homes. The results of marital discord were either informal mediation, extrajudicial resolution, police intervention, or lawsuits based on marriage laws.

Regarding standard marriage practices, the state in Republican China and in the PRC had both framed spending on courtship activities, marriage negotiations, and weddings as an unproductive use of resources that constituted a barrier to marriage and could contribute to involuntary bachelorhood. As China was not particularly prosperous between the 1930s and the 1970s, successive provincial governments in Guangdong were keen to instruct its people to conserve their financial resources and spend them productively by subscribing to government bonds. The high cost of

¹¹ Full description of marriage customs in south China can be found in James Hayes, *The Rural Communities of Hong Kong: Studies and Themes* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1983), 192-194, 227-228; also, in compiled documents from 1954 to 1960 in "Notes on Chinese Customs and Festivals in the New Territories", HKRS 119-1-92; and in an exhibition catalogue published by the Urban Council in Hong Kong in 1986-1987 on rites and rituals in Chinese weddings. See Hong Kong Museum of History, *Local Traditional Chinese Wedding* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, Hong Kong, 1986).

wedding expenses also prevented men from marrying. In the state's view, the custom of paying a bride price contributed to the continuation of arranged marriages, transactional marriages, and materialistic tendencies in spousal search. Likewise, state discourse targeted marriage customs that did not involve money for their perceived backwardness and inappropriateness. Customs such as bridal laments, divination for an auspicious wedding date, or the teasing of the newlyweds by wedding attendees were supposed to be replaced by a standardized form of formal and austere wedding under guidelines published by the Nationalist and the collaborationist governments. In the PRC, newlyweds were expected to imitate model marriages publicized in the press. In the government's plan, the result of the reform of marriage customs was the conformity to the ideal of a transaction-free marriage formed by mutual consent and a frugal but solemn wedding ceremony where the newlyweds became a productive couple for the nation.

Given the time frame of this dissertation and the multiple governments in China and Hong Kong it considers, I draw on a wide range of sources for each period. On state governance of marriage under the Nationalist and the collaborationist regimes from 1930 to 1949, I rely on magazines, comics, and newspapers to reconstruct the public discourse on marriage, along with marriage practices such as betrothal, financial transactions, and rituals. I also use police testimonies and court cases to evaluate people's compliance with marriage laws. On the PRC period, the dissertation prioritizes archival files such as internal correspondences from the provincial Women's Federation and the Department of Civil Affairs to trace changes

in marriage customs, while continuing to rely on published letters to the editor in newspapers when available. I include price indexes and economic statistics from gazetteers to compare them with bride prices and other wedding expenses recorded in state archives to give a quantitative angle on the burden of marriage transactions across five decades. On marriage governance and reform in Hong Kong, I rely on archival sources from the colonial government and non-state institutions, as well as newspaper articles, to analyze people's tendency to seek mediation and court adjudication in their marriage disputes.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter narrates the beginning of a regulatory regime on marriage practices and customs in South China in the 1930s. Under the Nationalist warlord Chen Jitang and the successive Nationalist central government's control in Guangdong, the state attempted to modernize Chinese society by changing its people's marriage practices. It advocated for frugal weddings and free-choice marriages while expanding legal awareness of the recently passed Civil Code and the Criminal Code in marriage dispute resolutions. As this occurred when the government was entrenching its presence in rural society, women had an opportunity to pursue justice in betrothal and marriage disputes independent of lineage organizations. However, weak state influence at the grassroots level and general non-compliance with guidelines on frugal weddings meant that state reform on marriage in the 1930s saw little implementation in the field before the Japanese occupation of Guangdong in 1938. Compared to marriage reform in Guangdong, the prewar colonial government

in Hong Kong left marriage reform to local Chinese intermediaries and refrained from involvement.

The second chapter compares the contrasting approach to regulating and reforming marriage of the Nationalist and the collaborationist regimes in Guangdong from 1938 to 1945. Despite being political adversaries, the two regimes shared an intellectual heritage from the prewar Nationalist marriage reform that made reforming marriage practices an essential requirement for a new Chinese nation. Aiming to steer public attention from the resistance to peacetime activities, the collaborationist government continued prewar Nationalist reforms by criticizing marriage taboos and advocating for extended courtship and free-choice marriage. In the collaborationist state discourse, promoting marriage reform legitimized the regime by showcasing its ability to return south China to normalcy. In contrast, the provincial Nationalist press argued against spending on courtship activities while emphasizing austerity and national resistance. During the war, residents of both regions sought state assistance in their marital disputes. Furthermore, the permeable wartime frontline in south China allowed people to cross between Nationalist and collaborationist-controlled counties to seek better opportunities or to chase fugitive spouses.

The third chapter evaluates the impact of wartime conditions on marriage practices during the Chinese Civil War from 1945 to 1949 when Guangdong experienced a brief peace and years of hyperinflation. The end of World War II allowed many spouses previously separated by war to return home, only to find that their spouses had disappeared or married new partners. Many disputes involved

bigamous, polygynous, or polyandrous relations entered on the presumption of a dead or missing spouse who suddenly reappeared. As the product of wartime contingencies, the public was more accepting of concubinage than before, placing social practices in conflict with the law. The chapter also discusses two phenomena in marriage practices in Guangdong during the Civil War: the social anxiety over "Jeep Girls," known for favoring American GIs over local men in spousal search, and the use of Hong Kong dollar, a foreign currency, in bride prices and marital disputes during a period of hyperinflation and devaluation of the Chinese yuan.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, I argue that the PRC continued strengthening the interventionist state in everyday life. Still, state efforts led only to partial success in reforming marriage customs. The fourth chapter evaluates the intensification of state regulation of marriage between 1950 and 1966. After passing the Marriage Law of the PRC in 1950, the provincial government spent three years on the publicity of the law and a nationwide campaign to facilitate divorces, outlawing bigamy and concubinage, and suppressing bride prices. Contrary to the official rhetoric that declared success in eradicating unwanted marriage customs such as underage marriage and large bride prices, provincial Women's Federation reports in the late 1950s and early 1960s reveal that these practices never went away. Local cadres often ignored, misinterpreted, or even violated the rules they were supposed to uphold, leading to uneven implementation of the Marriage Law at the county level. Long-distance intra-rural marriages within and between provinces were one response to economic inequality and sex-ratio imbalance, while cross-border marriage with Hong

Kong visitors and returnees incentivized hypergamy and threatened the socialist order.

Chapter Five discusses the marriage reform from 1966 to 1980, in which the state attempted to regulate marriage practices in an unending revolution even after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. State marriage reform began in 1972, after the height of revolutionary activism and politics during the Cultural Revolution, and was quickly incorporated into the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign. The interventionist state, briefly dormant in regulating marriage affairs during the early Cultural Revolution, expanded its oversight of people's marriage and wedding rituals. The death of Chairman Mao and the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 did not bring a stop to the state programs to revolutionize marriage customs, and both the rhetoric, goals, and methods of campaigns on marriage remained visible in the years of transition to the early reform era.

The final chapter provides a comparative framework on the Chinese interventionist state by shifting to marriage reform and regulation in postwar colonial Hong Kong. The colonial government needed to standardize four legally recognized marriage types in Hong Kong. It decided to pursue a limited reform that codified marriage registration and monogamy, but recognized concubines who had been acquired before an appointed date in October 1971. Marriage governance depended on informal and formal mediation provided by Chinese intermediaries and government organizations by the District Offices and the Department of Chinese Affairs. Comparing Hong Kong's approach to marriage reform to that of the PRC in

south China, a more passive and gradual approach to state intervention in everyday life allowed residents' courtship and marriage practices to change without repeated and ineffective campaigns by the state.

By investigating the boundary and relationships between everyday life and the state in south China, this dissertation reveals people's abilities and actions when encountering politics and adapting to policies that infringed on their daily lives. Through tracing the success and failure of the state in reforming marriage customs over five decades, this dissertation gives voices to the people as they experienced the state-driven modernization and reshaping of gender, marriage, and family in China. A study of adaptive responses to state marriage laws in China and Hong Kong has comparative value for studies of policy implementation and compliance in other parts of the world where government mandates and regulations have clashed with preexisting customs and habits.

Chapter 1

The Nascent Interventionist Chinese State

Until the final decades of the Qing Dynasty, the proverb "Heaven is high, and the emperor is far away"¹ aptly described the governance of south China as a frontier region of Imperial China.² However, when the emperor was no more and his authority was replaced by regional warlords and the Nationalist central government in the Republic of China (1911-1949), the government expanded its reach, attempting to manage local affairs with more oversight than before. If the imperial government was limited to taxation and punishment of illegal behavior as dictated in the Great Qing Legal Code, by the 1930s the ruling regime in Guangdong was expanding its activities to molding its people's everyday life, including marriage and family reform. After the nominal reunification of China under Nationalist control in 1928, the Nationalist Party was at liberty to actualize its planned modernization of the Chinese family and marriage.³ Observing high marriage expenses at a time when the country needed to conserve its wealth for economic development, the provincial government intervened in domestic life to by promoting frugal wedding and group wedding

¹ In Chinese, this proverb is “天高皇帝遠。”

² Until the availability of telegraphs in 1883 and steamships on the China coast, movement between Guangzhou and Beijing required extensive travel of between two or three months. For an express message such as an imperial command to be sent one-way, it required five to seven days on stage horses. On the history of telegraph connecting Beijing with Guangzhou, see Chen Lin et al., “The Telegraph and Modern Banking Development, 1881–1936,” *Journal of Financial Economics* 141, no. 2 (August 1, 2021): 730–49; on the speed before the telegraph, see “Qingchao cong Guangzhou dao Beijing zhen de xuyao yige yue?” [Did it really take a month to get to Beijing from Guangzhou?], *Zhihu*, last modified January 8, 2021, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/342980984>

³ Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 82.

ceremonies and outlawing unnecessary and frivolous rituals.⁴

From 1931 to 1936, Guangdong province was under the control of Chen Jitang, a warlord in the Nationalist Party who inherited the same goal of modernizing Chinese marriage held by the central government in Nanjing.⁵ Not unlike the central government that inaugurated the New Life Movement in order to reshape the Chinese society and citizenry,⁶ the warlord government in 1932 attempted to shape everyday life in the provincial Three-Year Administrative Plan, and followed the same statist notion of the Chinese family and marriage as envisioned by the central Nationalist government in the late 1920s.⁷ Although both the Guangzhou and the Nanjing governments began to expand state regulations in domestic life, factional rivalries in politics led to slight variation in the implementation of reformist programs, leading to the absence of the language of the New Life Movement in Guangdong, in contrast to other parts of the country held by Chiang's central government in the 1930s.

⁴ The Nationalist government also targeted other customs such as funerary rites and birthday celebrations and ordered a reduction of spending on these life events. *Shimin yaolan* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou shi gonganju tongjigu, 1934).

⁵ The warlord Chen Jitang was supported by Hu Hanmin, a key figure in marriage customs reform and the codification of the Nationalist Civil Code in the late 1920s. Hu Hanmin was the most influential political backer of the warlord regime in Guangdong after his falling out with Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the central Nationalist government in Nanjing. On Hu's role in codifying the Civil Code, see Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953*, 91-99.

⁶ Maggie Clinton, "Fixing the Everyday: The New Life Movement and Taylorized Modernity," in *Revolutionary Nativism: Fascism and Culture in China, 1925-1937* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2017), 128-160.

⁷ Chen Jitang adopted a Confucian approach to address social problems, and he was one of "reformist" warlords described by Xavier Paulès. On Chen's rapid expansion of education, see Xavier Paulès, "Warlords at Work: Four Crucial Realms and Four Dynamics of State Building in Republican China, 1916-1937," *Twentieth-Century China* 47, no. 1 (2022): 40-49; on the goal of the Three-Year Administrative Plan, see Alfred H. Y. Lin, "Building and Funding a Warlord Regime: The Experience of Chen Jitang in Guangdong, 1929-1936," *Modern China* 28, no. 2 (2002): 177-212. There was also an article about the warlord who reprinted the *Classic of Filial Piety* for his soldiers to read. "Chenbonan zhongkan xiaojing" [Chen Jitang reprinted the Classic of Filial Piety], *Yuehua bao* (hereafter *YHB*), September 29, 1933.

Otherwise, the state remained the chief agent in reforming customs and replaced the family as the object of veneration in highly choreographed wedding.⁸ Under Chen Jitang's control, the Guangdong provincial government's plan to transform marriage had three components: promotion of frugal marriages, reformation of uncivilized wedding customs, and expansion of the use of the Civil Code and the Criminal Code in the countryside. All three components created a template of a government increasingly attempting to control everyday life and establish guidelines on how people should or should not act in marriages and weddings.

Across the Hong Kong – China border, a colonial state in Hong Kong was much less willing to intervene and allowed the colonized subjects to handle their marriage reform and governance by themselves. The laissez-faire approach adopted by the colonial government was markedly different from that in Guangdong, and these differences in approach, methods, and goals continued to manifest in decades after the 1930s and will be traced in subsequent chapters.⁹

The chapter has four sections. The first introduces political and social developments in the south China region from 1930 to 1938. The second section evaluates marriage reform, dispute resolution, and the application of law in the Guangzhou metropolis during this period. The third section shifts to the countryside, where state influence on marriage was tenuous, and there existed a spectrum of

⁸ Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*, 81-99. Glosser noted that Hu Hanmin was the principal thinker on the Nationalist vision of the Chinese family “as a link connecting the individual to the state.” As Hu was the head of the Southwestern branch of the Nationalist Party and the political backer of the warlord regime, marriage reform in Guangdong continued to follow Hu's vision.

⁹ In chapter 6, the dissertation evaluates the effectiveness of marriage governance and reform in postwar Hong Kong and provides a comparison between Hong Kong and Guangdong.

compliance with the law, ranging from extrajudicial punishment to lawsuits in local district courts. The final section focuses on prewar Hong Kong under British colonization, where the colonial regime delegated most marital dispute resolution to Chinese intermediaries and left reforming marriage practices to local Chinese notables whose efforts were minuscule compared to those of the Nationalist government in China. In conjunction with the passage of the family section of the Nationalist Civil Code in December 1930,¹⁰ and other provincial orders on reforming social customs in the 1930s, government promotions of legal awareness and application of the marriage law were only the beginning of a longstanding trend of the state instigating changes among its people, and a template for subsequent Chinese states to follow in their intervention into households.

The Integrated Region of South China

The integrated region of south China, where similarities in language, culture, and societies outweighed any differences, sets the stage for us to evaluate the origin of the interventionist Chinese state in urban and rural Nationalist-controlled Guangdong in the 1930s. When the Nationalist Civil Code became law in South

¹⁰ The Nationalist Civil Code outlawed bigamy and expanded the justifications for women to initiate divorces, which were previously available only to men: spousal ill treatment, intolerable living situations, abandonment, and most importantly, adultery. Women used the Civil Code to divorce from their abusive or impotent husbands, while men used the same law to divorce or to compel their fugitive wives to return. The Civil Code sidestepped the issue of concubinage and placed concubines as household members. On the application of the Civil Code in lawsuits over divorce petitions, see Kathryn Bernhardt, "Women and the Law; Divorce in the Republican Period," in *Civil Law in Qing and Republican China*, ed. Kathryn Bernhardt and Philip C. C. Huang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 189-191, 200-201; on the civil code lawsuits over spousal abuse, see Margaret Kuo, *Intolerable Cruelty: Marriage, Law, and Society in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 1-3, 92-118; on the issue of concubinage and the Civil Code, see Lisa Tran, *Concubines in Court: Marriage and Monogamy in Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 35-54.

China, the region was embedded in factional struggles within the Nationalist Party. Guangdong was the headquarters of the Nationalist Party until its Northern Expedition in 1926. By the early 1930s warlord Chen Jitang, who belonged to an anti-Chiang Kai-shek faction of the Party, became the real powerholder in Guangdong Province. Backed by senior Nationalist party members whose tenure in the party preceded that of Chiang,¹¹ together they formed the Southwestern branch of the Nationalist Party and were subservient to Nanjing only in name.¹² Guangdong had its own army, navy, and air force, the exclusive use of local taxation,¹³ and an independent judiciary, the Southwestern branch of the Supreme Court.¹⁴ What Guangdong and Nanjing had in common were Nationalist Party membership and unity in legal codes, as both followed the same Criminal and Civil Code of the Republic of China. Just as Nationalist China experienced a brief period of economic

¹¹ They included Hu Hanmin, a member of the Tongmenghui (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance), the predecessor of the Nationalist Party; Sun Fo, the son of Sun Yat-sen, as well as other prominent Nationalist members who were in the Party before Chiang. While Sun Fo came back to Nanjing in 1932, Hu Hanmin stayed in opposition to Chiang until his death in 1936. Hu's seniority in the Nationalist Party made a conquest of Guangdong by Chiang Kai-shek politically impossible, even when militarily feasible. On Hu Hanmin's political influence and his relationship with the warlord Chen Jitang, see Chen Hongmin, "Hu Hanmin xinan zhengquan yu Guangdong shili pai (1932 — 1936)," [Hu Hanmin and the Southwest Regime and the Guangdong Warlords (1932 — 1936)], *Journal of Zhejiang University (Humanities and Science)* 37, no. 1 (January 2007).

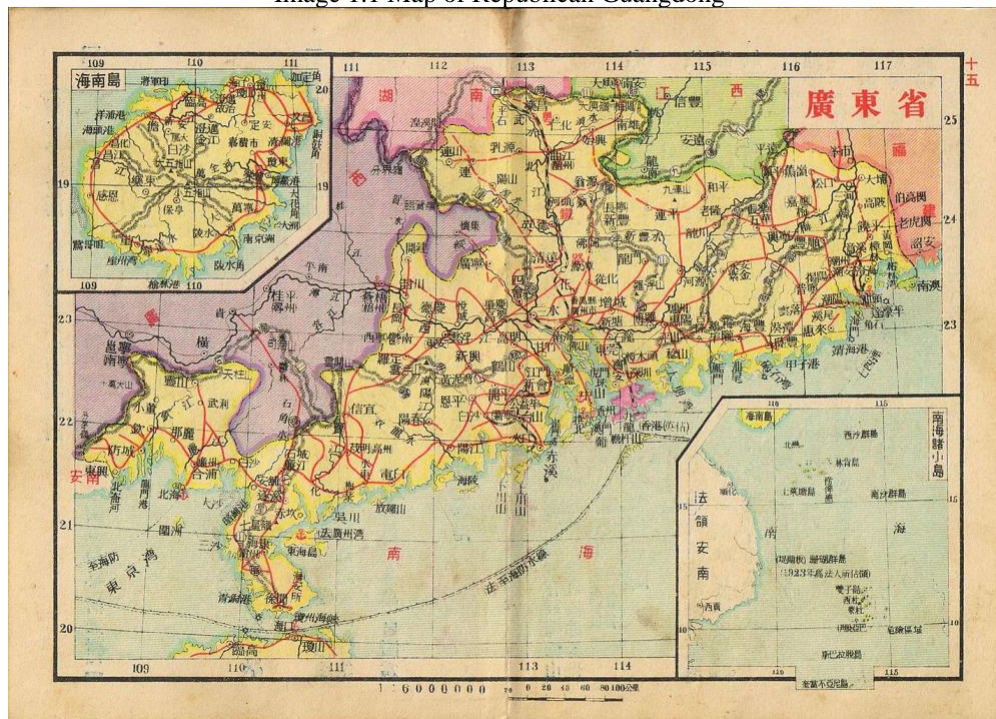
¹² On the history of factional politics that gave rise to the Southwestern branch of the Nationalist Party and its demise in July 1936, see Yu-Biao Ju, "Xinan liang jiguan de xingcheng, yunzuo yu xiaowang (1931-1936 nian)" [The Forming, Operating, and Disappearing (sic) of the Two Southwest Institutions (1931-1936)] (Master's Thesis, Taipei, National Chengchi University, 2021).

¹³ On Chen Jitang's exclusive hold on local tax revenue, see Alfred H. Y. Lin, "Building and Funding a Warlord Regime: The Experience of Chen Jitang in Guangdong, 1929-1936," *Modern China* 28, no. 2 (2002): 177-212.

¹⁴ On December 28, 1932, the Supreme Court of the Republic of China in Nanjing declared that it would not recognize the validity of verdicts ordered by the Southwestern branch of the Supreme Court in Guangzhou. *Zhonghua Minguo shi shi ji yao (chu gao). Gang wen bei lan*, vol.4 (Taipei: Academia Historica, 1993), 100.

development known as the Nanjing Decade (1927-37),¹⁵ Guangdong and the provincial capital Guangzhou under the Nationalist warlord were prosperous during this period, and Guangzhou was full of teahouses, opium dens, gambling halls, and Cantonese opera houses for its residents.¹⁶ Social policies between the warlord government and the central government were remarkably similar, and both shared the identical goals of reforming Chinese families and marriage and exerting state influence on everyday life. Therefore, official campaigns and their goals of improving marriage customs and adjudication of disputes saw no interruption until the Japanese invasion of south China in 1938.

Image 1.1 Map of Republican Guangdong¹⁷



¹⁵ Elizabeth J. Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China: Gender and Local Statebuilding, 1900-1937* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 109-111.

¹⁶ Virgil K. Y. Ho, *Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period*, Studies on Contemporary China (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ “Guangdong sheng mingxi ditu” [Detailed map of Guangdong Province], (Wuchang, Hubei, Yaxin dixueshe, August 1936).

The headquarters of Chen Jitang's warlord regime was the provincial capital of Guangzhou, a metropolis located in the Pearl River Delta in Central Guangdong. In the 1930s, the province of Guangdong could be divided into Eastern, Western, Northern, Central Guangdong, and Hainan Island.¹⁸ Central Guangdong, which included Guangzhou, was the administrative core and the most prosperous part of the province, with Western and Eastern Guangdong in secondary importance. Northern Guangdong was more mountainous than the rest of the province, while Hainan Island in the 1930s was an island under development (See map on image 1.1). In general, the provincial government had the most control in the urban centers, and the gradient of governance diffused from the center. The south China region also contained European colonies, and the French Guangzhouwan, Portuguese Macau, and the British colony of Hong Kong were products of unequal treaties and zones of opportunities for commerce and migration.¹⁹

Centered on the urban core of Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula, in 1898, the colonial government signed a 99-year lease with the Chinese state over the New Territories, an agricultural hinterland populated by farmers, fishermen, small craft workers, and rural town residents.²⁰ Although separated from China, colonial

¹⁸ John Fitzgerald, "Provincializing the City: Canton and the Reshaping of Guangdong Provincial Administration, 1912–1937," in *New Narrative of Urban Space in Republican Chinese Cities: Emerging Social, Legal and Governance Orders*, vol. 2, Brill's Series on Modern East Asia in a Global Historical Perspective (Brill, 2013), 197–222.

¹⁹ Each European territory had a different political relationship with the Guangdong hinterland that mattered greatly to migration and the national resistance during the Second Sino-Japanese War. For detail, see chapter 2.

²⁰ Convention between the United Kingdom and China respecting an extension of Hong Kong territory, signed at Peking, June 9, 1898. Date, 1898.

Hong Kong remained highly connected to Guangdong, and was susceptible to political chaos such as the 1911 Revolution that overthrew the Qing Dynasty and the Canton-Hong Kong General Strike in 1925-1926.²¹ By the 1930s, however, prewar Hong Kong was a haven where business flourished, and information and people crossed the Hong Kong- China border unrestricted, except for those subject to deportation orders from the colonial government to leave Hong Kong.²² Daily newspapers in Hong Kong reserved a page to report on developments in Guangdong, and readers consumed social news concerning marriage disputes in the provincial capital in the same newspapers that they read about Hong Kong.²³ Aside from colonial administration and British law, social life and marriage practices between Hong Kong and Guangdong were nearly identical.

Regulating Marriage Practices and Disputes in urban Guangdong

At the core of the warlord regime was the provincial capital Guangzhou, the seat of the government administration in the 1930s. Marriage and family were subjected to regulations by the municipal and provincial governments, which enacted edicts and proclamations to lower marriage expenses. In urban areas and surrounding suburban counties, residents relied on a hierarchal structure of police mediation and

²¹ John M. Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong*, Critical Issues in History (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 76-83, 99-105.

²² Deportation Ordinance of Hong Kong, 1917 edition. Also see Christopher Munn, "Margins of Justice in Colonial Hong Kong: Extrajudicial Power, Solicitors' Clerks, and the Case of Li Hong Mi, 1917-1920," *Law and Humanities* 11, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 102-20.

²³ Generally, prewar newspapers had headings to distinguish whether the content is based in Hong Kong or Guangdong. If the content was about Hong Kong, it would be located under 本港新聞 [local news], and articles on Guangdong would have a page called 省聞 or 粵聞 [provincial news]. This categorization did not apply to the front page.

court orders to seek official help in sorting out their disputes with the new Civil Code and the Criminal Code, resulting in state oversight of people's homes and bedrooms. As residents moved in and out of the provincial capital, legal awareness of the Civil Code and the Criminal Code followed them to the nearby suburban counties and extended the reach of the law.

In 1934, the provincial government published comprehensive "rules on promoting frugality and abolishing backward customs" to minimize wedding expenses and suppress rituals unwanted by Chen Jitang's warlord government. Claiming that spending on rituals was unnecessary, the state enacted strict limits on how much a couple and their families could spend on betrothal at fifty yuan, the bride price at two hundred yuan, and another fifty yuan for the ritual of a new couple's first return to the bride's family.²⁴ A wedding banquet could cost no more than eight yuan per table in the countryside and fifteen yuan per table in cities. Also, gift-giving was restricted to two yuan by wedding attendees, and non-cash gifts should be "national products" to foster local industry. Aside from financial restrictions, the state required betrothed couples to be at least 17 years old for men and 15 years old for women, consent to the marriage, and receive parental approval.²⁵

The provincial government's ambitious goals of reducing spending on

²⁴ This is called "Shishi jieyue gechu louxi guize" (Stipulations on implementing frugality and abolishing unwanted customs), as recorded in a guidebook for urban residents in Guangzhou. *Shimin yaolan* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou shi gonganju tongjigu, 1934). In the urban guidebook, the limit on a married couple's first visit to the bride's family was 50 yuan. However, in a rural magazine describing the same stipulations, the limit was 20 yuan. See *Fengcai yuekan* (Fong Toy Monthly Magazine), April 1934. It is unknown why this discrepancy existed if both were recording the same stipulation.

²⁵ *Shimin yaolan* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou shi gonganju tongjigu, 1934).

weddings and eliminating “backward” customs extended to prohibiting specific rituals before, during, and after the wedding. One example was Article 7 of the provincial guideline, which attempted to reduce spending on betrothal by mandating that the bride's family refrain from returning gifts to the groom's family during the betrothal, as most gifts flowed from the groom's family to the bride's family, not the other way around. The same article prohibited the custom of women singing their ritualistic pre-wedding laments which marked their transitions from maidens to married wives.²⁶ Bride-teasing during the wedding and roughhousing by attending guests were also off-limits. Furthermore, the state forbade the post-wedding custom of sending a roast pig during the newlyweds’ first return to the bride's family.²⁷ Violators would be cautioned for the first attempt and repeat offenders would be demoted or dismissed if they worked for the government.²⁸ Despite the comprehensiveness of the provincial guideline on minimizing wedding expenses and suppressing wedding rituals, there was no sign that people complied. Furthermore, the provincial and municipal governments’ reach in the urban society was not strong enough to proactively inspect all wedding processions, nor were they inclined to intervene in private lives without a complaint to the police or the court.

The government was much more successful in promoting group wedding

²⁶ On bridal laments in rural China in the 1920s-1930, see Anne E. McLaren, *Performing Grief: Bridal Laments in Rural China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 1-18. On bride laments in south China.

²⁷ A roast pig in the procession represented the groom's family's approval of the bride's purity and an indication that she had lost her virginity to her husband on the nuptial bed. On the debate on virginity in Republican China, see chapter 2.

²⁸ *Shimin yaolan* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou shi gonganju tongjigu, 1934). The regulation did not say how violators would be identified or the agency responsible for punishment. Also, a question is that, why would there be repeated offenders, unless the people involved are remarrying?

ceremonies than inducing residents to change their wedding practices and rituals. Like other cities in Nationalist China, such as Shanghai,²⁹ Wuhan,³⁰ and Tianjin,³¹ Guangzhou held its first group wedding ceremonies in December 1935,³² and there were seven such ceremonies in Guangzhou before the occupation of South China by the invading Japanese army.³³ The state organized group wedding ceremonies as publicity stunts to sway the public toward "civilized weddings" that minimized and standardized rituals, and reduced financial costs of marriage.³⁴ Group wedding ceremonies, the most economical of weddings as they eschewed the wedding banquets, were the aspirational model for others to emulate. The organizing governments invited social luminaries to attend and lend legitimacy. For example, the third group wedding ceremony on June 1, 1936, had eighty-two pairs of newlyweds and approximately 1,200 attendees.³⁵

²⁹ "Hu shoujie jituan jiehun mingri juxing" [Shanghai is holding its first group wedding ceremonies tomorrow], *Huazi ribao*, April 2, 1935.

³⁰ "Wuhan niban jituan jiehun" [Wuhan plans to hold group wedding ceremonies], *Huazi ribao*, February 25, 1935.

³¹ "Jinyu jiang juxing jituan jiehun" [Tianjin is planning group wedding ceremonies], *Kung Sheung Daily News* (hereafter *KSDN*), May 16, 1935. This occurred on June 14, as documented by a news article on June 25, "Tianjin shouci jituan jiehun huaxu" [Detail on the group wedding ceremonies in Tianjin], *Tianguang bao* (hereby abbreviated as *TGB*), June 25, 1935.

³² "Cuobi jituan jiehun yaoxun" [Important news on the planning the group wedding ceremonies], *YHB*, November 22, 1935.

³³ "Guangzhoushi qijie jituan jiehun shengkuang", *Kung Sheung Evening News* (hereafter *KSEN*), June 7th, 1937. *Kung Sheung Evening News* and *Kung Sheung Daily News* belonged to the same company.

³⁴ The term "civilized wedding" marked the distinction from traditional Chinese wedding rites, which were not the most kind or civil to the newlyweds. A civilized wedding was also a choreographed event and paid deference to the state, in contrast to the older style where the groom's family and his lineal ancestors took precedence. On the dissemination of the idea of "civilized weddings" to urban residents in Republican China, as well as new venues and formats used for such weddings, see Antonia Finnane, "Changing Spaces and Civilized Weddings in Republican China," in *New Narratives of Urban Space in Republican Chinese Cities: Emerging Social, Legal and Governance Orders* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 13–44.

³⁵ "Guangzhoushi juxin sanjie jituan jiehun ji" [A record on the third group wedding ceremonies in Guangzhou], *Huazi ribao*, June 2, 1936.

The provincial Nationalist government under the warlord Chen Jitang's control also displayed the symbols of the Nationalist Party and the state in group wedding ceremonies. The flags of the Nationalist Party and the Republic of China were a must in decorating the venue, which was the grand assembly hall of the municipal government or the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall. A portrait of Sun Yat-sen overlooked the ceremonies, and all wedding attendees and the newlyweds participated in a mass singing of the Nationalist Party anthem.³⁶ Despite political differences between Guangzhou and Nanjing, there was unity in establishing the presence of the Nationalist Party and the state in organized group wedding ceremonies.

Outside the provincial capital, there was also a group wedding ceremony in Shantou in March 1936. While dwarfed by its counterparts in Guangzhou with only seven newlywed couples, this and other group wedding ceremonies outside Guangzhou followed a similar format in the municipal building and were attended by high provincial officials.³⁷ As this was before the central government's takeover of the province, there was no discussion of the New Life Movement on this occasion. Still, the core message of forming harmonious families for the nation remained the same.

After the central government took over the governorship of Guangdong in July 1936, organizers focused on incorporating group wedding ceremonies into the

³⁶ Ibid. The anthem of the Nationalist Party is the same as the anthem of the Republic of China. “Dangge de youlai” [The history of the song of the Nationalist Party], the official website of the Nationalist Party, last accessed October 1, 2022, <http://www.l.kmt.org.tw/page.aspx?mid=29>.

³⁷ “Shantou jituan jiehun” [Group wedding ceremonies in Shantou], *Huazi ribao*, March 4, 1936.

ongoing national New Life Movement.³⁸ Banners with slogans such as “forming new families and implementing a new lifestyle” decorated the wedding venue,³⁹ and the chief witnesses lectured on the importance of newly married couples participating in the New Life Movement by embodying the four Confucian virtues of proper rites, justice, honesty, and a sense of right and wrong in their daily behavior. They should also purge unwanted customs of the past and adopt a scientific method for childcare and home management. Last but not least, the chief witness reminded them that a happy family could help strengthen the nation. With a headcount of more than a few thousand attendees, government officials' message on linking marriage with the New Life Movement was not only a lecture for the newlyweds but also another venue for the state to encourage marriage reforms among the populace.⁴⁰

The official message for frugality via group weddings gave rise to satire. In one satirical article in a Guangzhou newspaper,⁴¹ the writer acknowledges the popularity of group wedding ceremonies while describing Mr. Tang and his three friends who heeded the call for frugality to acquire concubines. Whereas couples

³⁸ The New Life Movement was a political and cultural movement to reform Chinese social and everyday life according to the compass of four Confucian virtues: decorum, righteousness, integrity, and a sense of shame. This movement began in 1934 and was interrupted by the onset of hostility against Japan. On the New Life Movement and the preferences for orderly lives, see Maggie Clinton, *Revolutionary Nativism*, 128-160. In Guangdong Province, the official start date of the New Life Movement began on August 19, 1936. “Benshi tuixing xinshenghuo xiansheng” [Beginning the New Life Movement in this city], *YHB*, August 19, 1936. The fifth group wedding ceremonies in Guangzhou were the first where the officiant explicitly mentioned the New Life Movement, four months after the transition of governorship from the warlord to the central government. “Juxing diwujie jituan jiehun,” *YHB*, December 7, 1936.

³⁹ “Guangzhoushi qijie jituan jiehun shengkuang,” *KSEN*, June 7, 1937.

⁴⁰ “Chunse mingmei zhong guangzhou wushiye dui kangli jituan jiehun” [In the brightest spring, 51 couples married in a group wedding ceremony in Guangzhou], *Huazi ribao*, March 8, 1937.

⁴¹ The article was published in the supplement section of the newspaper, in contrast to those published under “social news.” While articles under social news were actual events of domestic disputes, articles in the supplement could be commentaries or fictional.

married in state-organized group wedding ceremonies were monogamous, the four male protagonists used group ceremonies for concubinage. Each wanted to contract a concubine but wished to be frugal, hence they decided to split the cost of the wedding banquet by hosting a collective group ceremony. They printed invitations to their friends as a group, decorated the venue with bright lights, and adopted elements of civilized wedding customs, such as taking group photos together. Similar to group wedding ceremonies attended by high-level officials lecturing on the benefits of frugality and the New Live Movement, there was also a lecture on the benefit of group ceremonies for contracting concubines, as well as a witty speaker who encouraged them to create the future generation of citizens.⁴² While the attempt to economize spending on ceremonies aligned with the state's goal for frugal weddings, the Nationalist government was not intending group ceremonies for men to contract concubines, especially since the Civil Code forbade concubinage as a practice. Nonetheless, although a fictional and possibly satirical anecdote could not prove whether group ceremonies for contracting concubines took place or not, it revealed public awareness of the state's propaganda for frugal weddings.

In retrospect, group wedding ceremonies were likely the most apparent success of the government's marriage reform before the war. With much publicity over group wedding ceremonies in the cities and voluntary by nature, the people opened up to the idea of participating in or attending group wedding ceremonies, even

⁴² "Jituan naqie chuangwen" [The creation of a group ceremony for contracting concubines], *YHB*, January 21, 1937.

when they did not follow the provincial guidelines for frugal marriages. The usefulness of group wedding ceremonies as cost-saving exercises and publicity stunts meant that regardless of political allegiances, the successive ruling governments in Guangdong had incentives to continue organizing them to reform Chinese marriages.⁴³

Marriage dispute resolution in Guangzhou metropolis

Aside from promoting group wedding ceremonies, the provincial and municipal government also regulated marriage via dispute mediation and court judgments. In the Guangzhou metropolis, which included the urban core and nearby counties, regulations of marriage practices depended on a system of police ensuring proper behavior and the court upholding the law. In this period, the police and the courts were purely reactive, did not instigate marriage reform, and only responded to disturbances on the streets, invitations by the people to mediate, or lawsuits from petitioners. The municipal police handled most marriage disputes by mediating between the quarreling couples and associates, but they were reluctant to intervene in complex cases such as divorce. As in other parts of Republican China, petitioners started the chain of state intervention at the police station, escalating the administrative ladder to the district court, followed by the provincial circuit court, and ending at the Southwestern branch of the Supreme Court.

A Chinese marriage in the 1930s had numerous ways to go astray, and an

⁴³ The central government that took over from Chen Jitang's warlord regime continued group wedding ceremonies by injecting them with elements of the New Life Movement. During the Second Sino-Japanese war, both sides of the war also hosted group wedding ceremonies in their areas of control in Guangdong. For details, see Chapter 2.

overview of common marital and premarital disputes is beneficial to understand the degree of marriage governance in urban Guangdong. During the betrothal stage, conflicts could arise from the groom's incomplete payment of the bride price,⁴⁴ a breach of promise by an extended delay of the wedding,⁴⁵ annulments of engagement, or an outright rejection of an arranged marriage.⁴⁶ Immediately after the wedding, a husband or his family could question the wife's virginity, which carried significant implications for the bride's family honor. In post-marital life, couples quarreled over financial difficulties and home management, which could escalate into accusations of abuse. Furthermore, husbands could attempt to contract concubines to join their households to create progeny or for sexual satisfaction. The act of acquiring concubines often resulted in complaints of spousal abandonment by wives and demands for financial maintenance,⁴⁷ as well as creating conflicts between concubines and wives.⁴⁸ When women unknowingly married men who turned out to have wives in the countryside, there was cause for accusing them of committing bigamy and marriage fraud.⁴⁹ Lastly, there were charges of adultery, where husbands caught their wives with another man.⁵⁰ Each dispute had its mediation or resolution,

⁴⁴ “Weihunqi yu weihunfu chongtu” [Conflict between a fiancée and a fiancé], *Guohua bao*, March 23, 1932.

⁴⁵ “Song qing fayuan cu fujia yingqu” [A lawsuit to urge the husband’s family to complete the wedding], *YHB*, September 20, 1933.

⁴⁶ “Qing jie hunyue zhi xin jiu zhengbian” [Dispute over the custom of a marriage engagement between the old-fashioned and the modern people], *YHB*, December 6, 1934.

⁴⁷ “Kongfu yiqi an tiaojie bucheng” [Mediation has failed over a wife accusing her husband of spousal abandonment], *YHB*, September 29, 1933.

⁴⁸ “Xiangfu sougong zhi pingdi fengbo” [The turmoil over a village woman’s ambush at her husband’s concubine’s place], *YHB*, January 24, 1934.

⁴⁹ “Hunbianan yubo” [The aftermath of a marriage dispute], *YHB*, January 22, 1934.

⁵⁰ “Banya ludian zhong qinfu zhaojian” [In Hotel Banya a husband caught his wife committing adultery], *YHB*, January 4, 1934. One can find a comprehensive list of typical marriage disputes in

but the rule was that parties would go to the local police precinct as the first step of seeking help from the state.

Paternalistic mediation by the police

The police precinct was the basic level of marriage governance in urban Guangdong. However, despite being agents of the state, the police focused on maintaining domestic stability and harmony,⁵¹ rather than full compliance with the Civil Code. Hence, the municipal police attempted to defuse the situation by mediating between disputing parties or instructing them to seek court orders.⁵² Two cases published on the same page of a newspaper in 1930 revealed the limit of and potential biases in police mediation. The first case describes a woman who went to the police station to accuse her husband of beating her and withholding financial support, so she wanted to divorce him. However, the police immediately instructed her to go to court without attempting to bring in the husband for questioning or mediation.⁵³ In contrast to the police's inactivity in the first case, the second case describes a dispute over a young concubine who ran away after periodic mistreatment

prewar Guangzhou and newspaper descriptions in a book focused on social news in Guangzhou by Hu Xuelian (2017). See Hu Xuelian, *Wuyishi zhi li: 1927-1937 nian Guangzhou bao zhi she hui xin wen yan jiu* [The power of the unconscious: research on social news in Guangzhou newspapers from 1927 to 1937] (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2017).

⁵¹ The function of the police in Guangzhou was not dissimilar from that of the police in Beijing, as David Strand found the Beijing police in the 1920s were not designed to handle family affairs. Instead, the police were designed to reinforce patriarchal authority and prevailing social order. Nonetheless, the police would intervene if a life-threatening situation occurred. On the inactivity of police with respect to family affairs, see David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 85-87.

⁵² “Chaimi fuqi shuangfang yuan liyi” [A “firewood and rice” couple willing to separate by mutual consent], *Guohua bao*, February 29, 1932.

⁵³ “Furen bei fu nuedai qing liyi” [A wife was abused by her husband and asked for a divorce], *YHB*, February 9, 1930.

by the principal wife. The police brought all parties involved to the precinct, commanded the wife to stop abusing the concubine, and ordered the concubine to return home to with the principal wife.⁵⁴ The distinction between these two cases reveals the scope for police intervention in the 1930s as peacekeepers and not defenders of rights.

The proximity to police stations in urban areas such as Guangzhou allowed women to seek mediation at will for their premarital or marital problems.⁵⁵ When a man delayed his betrothal and repeatedly ignored his fiancée's family's request because he was not financially capable of holding a wedding, she went to the police station to ask for an annulment of engagement.⁵⁶ In other situations, such as a dispute over a wife's refusal to return to her husband's home,⁵⁷ or when husbands withheld financial support and assaulted their wives,⁵⁸ the first course of action was a mediation attempt at the police station. When a woman ran away from her husband in Guangzhou in April 1932, her husband sought her whereabouts and reported to the police station. After a year of investigation, he found her working as a maid in other parts of the city. Since she refused to return home, he sought police assistance, which brought her back to the station. Even then, she exacted conditions before consenting

⁵⁴ "Shaoqie bei dafu nuedai sitao" [A young concubine fled after abuse from her husband's principal wife], *YHB*, February 9, 1930.

⁵⁵ "Ouda weihunqi bei jing daiju" [Beating one's fiancée and brought to the police station], *YHB*, September 25, 1932.

⁵⁶ "Jiaqi luwu qing jiechu hunyue" [Petition to annul a betrothal because of repeated delays], *YHB*, November 16, 1931. In this story, both wanted to separate, but the police station told them either to settle the dispute outside or go to court.

⁵⁷ "Yanlu zhuiqi zhi yimu huaju" [A play over a man chasing his wife along the road], *YHB*, November 30, 1932.

⁵⁸ "Xiangfu tao mifan beiou zhongshang" [Severely beaten by her husband after seeking spousal maintenance], *YHB*, September 16, 1933.

to return home, which was that he had to pay her debt of forty yuan and promise not to abuse her in the future.⁵⁹ In that respect, women strategically used police intervention to secure concession from their husbands or to threaten further legal actions in court. However, intervention could also backfire, as shown in a 1930 dispute between a jealous wife, her husband, and his concubine. The outcome of police mediation gave the wife the right to govern the concubine by ordering her to live in the same household with the wife,⁶⁰ but it also fulfilled the husband's goal of overriding his wife's objection to contract a concubine.⁶¹ While the outcome brought peace as desired by the police, it ignored the wife's original goal of preventing her husband from contracting a concubine. Nonetheless, Guangzhou newspaper recorded numerous cases of women using the police to attempt mediation even when success was not guaranteed. Often mediation by the police satisfied both parties, and the documentary trail ended there, while others went on to the second level of the governing hierarchy in Guangdong. As the base tier of state regulation of marriage, the municipal police gave disputants a chance to reach an official but not necessarily a legal solution to their marital difficulties.

A subset of marriage disputes narrated in Guangzhou newspapers involved parties living in nearby suburban counties. When people moved back and forth between the city and villages, marriage ties and accompanying problems crossed

⁵⁹ “Xiaofan yu yuan pojing zhi tiaojian” [The condition for a hawker to repair a broken mirror (have his wife returned to him)], *Guohua bao*, June 13, 1933.

⁶⁰ This meant acknowledging the wife's superior status over the concubine in the family.

⁶¹ “Xianfu naqie yan sougong huoju” [A drama when a wife entered her husband's concubine's home], *YHB*, December 31, 1930.

administrative boundaries to villages in nearby counties, primarily the neighboring Nanhai, Panyu, and Shunde counties.⁶² Social news articles provided clues by identifying people's addresses in a specific county, ward, and village, such as a wife in a dispute who was residing at her husband's village of Zhanqi in the third ward of Nanhai County, while the husband lived on Da'nán Road in Guangzhou.⁶³ A common theme in these suburban marriage disputes began when the party residing in Guangzhou failed to fulfill their duties to the party living in the village, and the village-residing partner would "come to the city" and argue,⁶⁴ leading to attempted dispute mediation in the police station in Guangzhou.⁶⁵ While the police handled these suburban cases identically to other urban marriage disputes, the act of seeking police intervention in the city indicated that people in these suburban counties were aware of the option available and were not afraid of involving the state to help their cases.

Suing one's spouse in the district court and above

When mediation by the police failed or when they refused to intervene, urban petitioners brought their cases to the district court. After a petition to the district court, the court would generally advise parties in civil cases to try mediation once more before resorting to litigation.⁶⁶ When the respondent failed to appear to the

⁶² This is called the Nanpanshun area, historically the hinterland of Guangzhou.

⁶³ "Fenfu liqie jujia guíng qu" [Angered by her husband's contracting a concubine, she left for her natal home], *Guohua bao*, November 30, 1932.

⁶⁴ The term in Chinese is [來省], which means "going to Guangzhou."

⁶⁵ "Nuzi kong dengtu shiluan zhongqi" [A woman accuses her fiancé of being insincere and abandoning her], *YHB*, November 16, 1931; "Yinu pei erfu sha fei tiaoting" [A woman is engaged to two different men and took great effort to mediate], *YHB*, May 15, 1933.

⁶⁶ "Chengqing tiaojie haiqi zhi chenci" [A petition for the mediation service of the district court to

required mediation, the court perceived absence as a rejection of mediation and instructed the petitioner to file a lawsuit officially.⁶⁷ Despite attempts by the court to advise mediation, such mediations were most likely failures since cases that entered the court system were generally irreconcilable, or they would have been settled beforehand.⁶⁸ Only the legal code remained to allow determined petitioners to seek justice as they turned to either the civil division or the criminal division of the district court.

In contrast to mediation emphasizing domestic harmony over legal rights, plaintiffs and defendants in the civil division of the district court relied on the Civil Code to advance their cases. From printed verdicts and newspapers reporting on marriage disputes, there was a remarkable abundance of female plaintiffs in comparison to male plaintiffs.⁶⁹ Lawsuits heard in the civil division included but were

return one's wife], *Guohua bao*, February 20, 1932.

⁶⁷ "Fuqi hukongan tiaojie bucheng" [Failed mediation in a dispute where both spouses accused each other], *YHB*, June 13, 1933.

⁶⁸ "Yiqi chonghun chu tuxing liuyue" [A man was sentenced to six months in jail for bigamy], *YHB*, August 12, 1933. Regarding this story, the wife surnamed Mei married Zhang in 1920, and they had a son who died when he was five. They lived separately as he ran a business in Hong Kong while she stayed in the village, but later, he married another woman surnamed Mo as a wife in August 1926. Mei came to Guangzhou to find him, but he refused to acknowledge her as a wife, so Mei went to the mediation office of the civil division of the district court, and the mediation failed. Afterward, Mei petitioned the prosecutor to investigate, and the prosecutor charged Zhang in the criminal division of the district court for bigamy. The judge found him guilty and sentenced him to six months' imprisonment. Other failed court-mandated mediation included divorce cases. "Kongfu yiqi an tiaojie bucheng"; "Fayuan panjue liangzong lihun an", *YHB*, September 22, 1933.

⁶⁹ This was to be expected, as men had more economic resources at this time. While women had to ask for spousal maintenance, divorce, or the court to mandate the completion of the wedding, male plaintiffs usually sued for the court to return their wives to their households. Furthermore, since men could contract concubines, they were not as pressed to secure a divorce when compared to women. In other cities of Republican China, such as Beijing and Chengdu, sociological studies published at the time also reflected that there were more female plaintiffs than male. See Wu Zhixin, "Zuijin shiliunian zhi Beiping lihun an" [Divorce cases in the past 16 years (1917-1932), in *Minguo shiqi shehuidiaocha congbian: hunyin jiating juan*, ed. Li et al. (Fuzhou, China: Fujian jiaoyue chubanshe, 2005), 386; Xiao Dingying, "Chengdu lihun an zhi fenxi" [An analysis of divorce cases in Chengdu], in *Minguo shiqi shehuidiaocha congbian: hunyin jiating juan*, ed. Li et al. (Fuzhou, China: Fujian jiaoyue chubanshe, 2005), 386.

not limited to petitions to annul marriage engagements,⁷⁰ divorce, or force fiancés to honor betrothals.⁷¹ As parents arranged many marriages in the 1930s, the district court in Guangzhou also had its share of women arguing in favor of free-choice marriage to annul their unwanted arrangements.⁷² Regarding petitions to divorce, court testimonies and newspaper transcripts show that physical abuse, addiction to gambling or opium,⁷³ or vicious conflicts between wives and concubines or mistresses were the most common causes.⁷⁴ Other legitimate reasons, such as women's accusations that their husbands were impotent, generated public media attention,⁷⁵ and newspapers provided detailed information on such cases, followed by derisive commentaries afterward.⁷⁶

An intriguing marital dispute case in 1932 revealed that plaintiffs engaged in strategically choosing the type of law under which to sue when bringing their case to

she, 2005), 413-414.

⁷⁰ "Bei weihunfu nuedai qing liyi" [Abused by her fiancé, she wanted to separate], *YHB*, February 13, 1930.

⁷¹ "Suqing fayuan cu fujia yingqu" [Petition the court to accelerate the wedding], *YHB*, September 2, 1933.

⁷² "Qing jie hunyue zhi xin jiu zhengbian."

⁷³ "Kong fu shi yandu panzhun lihun" [Petition to divorce was granted because the husband is a gambling and opium addict], *YHB*, November 8, 1935.

⁷⁴ A typical case was "Panzhun kong lang boxing liyi an" [The court granted a divorce after a woman accused her husband of being heartless], *YHB*, February 22, 1932. The husband abused the plaintiff because he was cohabiting with another woman, even when the plaintiff had given birth to two sons and two daughters. The court found that the wife had a legitimate reason to separate.

⁷⁵ "Kong fu tianyan qingqiu liyi" [Accusing one's husband of being impotent and petitioning for divorce], *YHB*, January 18, 1934.

⁷⁶ A column pretended to be the judge and gave a comic verdict on the divorce case based on impotence. Written in the format of a judgment seen in Republican court documents, the wording chosen by this jester was comical but, in principle, agreed that she should be free to find another "great talent" (偉器), a term which could also be understood as another man with a more capable male reproductive organs. "Xiepan 1" (Jest verdict #1), *YHB*, October 24, 1933. For more about the public curiosity about impotence cases in Guangdong newspapers, see Hu Xuelian, *Wuyishi zhi li: 1927-1937 nian Guangzhou bao zhi she hui xin wen yan jiu*, 135-136.

the district court. When a woman accused her fiancé of stealing the marriage engagement document, she turned to the Civil Code and not the Criminal Code for redress.⁷⁷ Her two mutually exclusive demands to her fiancé in the courtroom illuminated why she chose the civil division instead of the criminal division of the same court. He had to either return the marriage engagement document and complete the wedding or annul the engagement and compensate her for the breach of honor. Rather than suing for thievery, which could lead to a trivial fine under the 1928 version of the Criminal Code, the plaintiff wanted the district court to compel him to marry her or pay a sizable compensation since they had engaged in premarital sex and entered cohabitation.⁷⁸ In this case, selective shopping among articles of law would allow her to extract the maximum concession from him, a goal shared by many women plaintiffs who sued their fiancés.

The criminal division of the district court handled rare cases of bigamy with the Criminal Code.⁷⁹ Unlike orders to separate or to accelerate the wedding process, bigamy was punishable by imprisonment, as in one case where a judge had sentenced

⁷⁷ Since she is accusing him of stealing a document, the relevant statute in the 1928 version of the Criminal Code was Article 337, with a maximum of no more than five years' imprisonment or a fine of no more than five hundred yuan. It was also possible that because a criminal case required the state prosecutor to charge the husband formally, the crime of stealing a marriage engagement paper was not likely to be the state's priority.

⁷⁸ The outcome is unknown, although the groom denied the engagement, asked for furniture to be returned to him, and proclaimed that he would never marry her in consideration of the lawsuit. "Zaishen tou weihunqi hunyue an" [A second hearing of the suit over stealing a fiancée's marriage contract], *Guohua bao*, July 1, 1932.

⁷⁹ Bigamy cases were rare because husbands would try their best to avoid the court and secure arrangements with either woman. They could convince their wives to accept the status of "equal wives" or pay large one-time alimony to separate from the women they liked least. Bigamy as a crime was codified in the 1928 version of the Criminal Code under Article 254.

a bigamous husband to a six-month stay in prison.⁸⁰ Two bigamy cases in 1933 exemplified the process of the district court. In the first case adjudicated on April 17, 1933, the defendants, Mr. He and Ms. Chen, were in custody and represented by lawyers.⁸¹ The court found the bigamy case meritless because the legitimate wife, surnamed Lao, did not provide concrete proof of an open wedding ceremony between the two defendants.⁸² Furthermore, circumstantial testimony revealed that Chen was only brought into He's household as a concubine, despite a letter from He to Chen that he would treat her "as a principal wife." Both defendants were set free, and the state prosecutor could appeal to the provincial circuit court.⁸³ In the second bigamy case, a woman accused her husband of bigamy after she realized he already had a wife and a concubine in his village.⁸⁴ Once she complained to her relatives about the arrangement, he burned the marriage certificate and a photograph of their wedding to tamper with evidence and started abusing her. In the court, her husband denied these actions and claimed she was only his concubine, but the state prosecutor found that he

⁸⁰ "Yiqi chonghun chu tuxing liuyue" [A man was sentenced to six months in jail for bigamy], *YHB*, August 12, 1933.

⁸¹ Under Article 254 of the 1928 Criminal Code, both spouses entering the second marriage would be equally guilty if they knew about the existing union; hence both defendants were in custody.

⁸² It was supposedly a film of the wedding, as the wife alleged its existence. From the text in Chinese, 結婚影片, it is difficult to tell whether she meant a film or a photograph. Photographing the couple in a new-style, "civilized" wedding was customary, and filming was prohibitively expensive for the occasion. Article 982 of the 1930 Nationalist Civil Code also determined what constituted a legitimate wedding ceremony. On the legal complication caused by Article 982 regarding recognition of marriage, see Lisa Tran, *Concubines in Court*, 129-151.

⁸³ "He Naicang chonghun an panjueshu" [The verdict in He Naicang vs. the Republic of China on his bigamy case], *YHB*, April 18, 1933.

⁸⁴ His rationale for marrying another wife was that he was inheriting another family line, known as combined succession or "kim tiu" in Cantonese. As he was inheriting two family lines, he would require two marriages, even when Republican jurists did not recognize this arrangement. See Lisa Tran, *Concubines in Court*, 118.

had committed bigamy and forgery.⁸⁵ Although the outcome of the second case was unknown, these two cases revealed that urban women in Guangdong accused their husbands of criminal acts in the district court when their demands were unmet. Undutiful fiancés and husbands were held accountable by orders of separation or divorce, while plaintiffs who attempted to shrink from their spousal duty had their cases denied by the court.

Plaintiffs or defendants could appeal to the provincial Circuit Court and the southwestern branch of the Supreme Court when district court judges' verdicts were not to their liking. Whereas cases in district courts might be argued *pro se*, parties at the provincial Circuit Court generally retained counsel to argue on their behalf. Regarding outcomes, the provincial circuit court could reject the appeal,⁸⁶ quash the original verdict by the district court,⁸⁷ or allow parts of the verdict to stand.⁸⁸ In their justification, the provincial court judges relied exclusively on legal codes,⁸⁹ such as referring to Articles 972 and 973 of the Civil Code in disputes involving arranged

⁸⁵ The newspaper article notes, "The prosecutor charged him with Article 224 of the Criminal Code." As this case was in 1933, the Criminal Code referred to here was the 1928 version, not the 1935 version of the Criminal Code. Article 224 of the 1928 version dealt with forgery, while Article 224 of 1935 version dealt with sexual offences, on obscene act against a person's will through the use of violence or intimidation. "Lao Fei chonghun an shenxun zhongjie" [The trial of the bigamy case of Lao Fei has ended], *YHB*, June 25, 1933.

⁸⁶ "Guan Peiqiong yu Deng Huayue yin lihun zhuanglian fuwei jin she susong an" [The lawsuit over divorce and dowry between Guan Peiqiong and Deng Huayue], *Guangdong shifa yuekan* 1, issue 4, April 30, 1932.

⁸⁷ "Zhang Xueyao yu Xiao Jiafeng yin lihun shesong konggao an" [The divorce case between Zhang Xueyao and Xiao Jiafeng], *Guangdong shifa yuekan* 1, issue 5, May 31, 1932.

⁸⁸ "Chen Yazhou yu Liang Laidi yin jiechu hunyue lihun shesong konggao an" [The annulment case between Chen Yazhou and Liang Laidi], *Guangdong shifa yuekan* 1, issue 11, November 31, 1932.

⁸⁹ In a court verdict for a civil case, the judge would cite the Civil Code to justify their orders and the Code of Civil Procedure (1930) to explain the execution of the order.

marriage engagements,⁹⁰ or Article 1057 to order spousal maintenance for women.⁹¹ When a husband in 1932 appealed to the circuit court to divorce his wife after alleging that she failed to live with him, the judge ruled that while Article 1001 of the Civil Code required a wife to live with her husband, she had a legitimate reason to live separately, as there was a concubine in his house. Therefore, his case did not satisfy Article 1052 of the Civil Code, and his appeal was denied.⁹² Regarding bigamy, the provincial circuit court also applied the Criminal Code to sentence a bigamous husband to imprisonment.⁹³ For parties who wished to appeal further, the provincial Circuit Court gave them twenty days to appeal to the Southwestern branch of the Supreme Court,⁹⁴ an option not many took.⁹⁵ In short, the provincial circuit court gave plaintiffs additional opportunities to appeal their cases and corrected errors by judges in district courts.

Together with district courts, the tri-level judicial system in prewar

⁹⁰ Articles 972 and 973 of the Civil Code required both parties to enter a marriage engagement of their free will and an age requirement to enter into an engagement. "Chen Yazhou yu Liang Laidi yin jiechu hunyue lihun shesong konggao an". The same article 972 was also referred to in "He Yuandeng yu yin Ou Qun qingqiu hunyue wuxiao di er shen shangsu an" (The appeal in He Yuandeng v. Ou Qun on annulling the marriage engagement), *Guangdong shifa yuekan* 4, issue 2, February 28, 1935.

⁹¹ Article 1057 of the Civil Code regulated alimony payable to the non-at-fault spouse after a court-mandated divorce. The court ordered the man to pay his ex-wife 300 yuan in this case. "Zhang Xueyao yu Xiao Jiafeng yin lihun shesong konggao an"; also, in "Li Jianong yu Yu Yaoqiong qingqiu lihun ji geiyu shanyangfei di er shen shangsu an" [The appeal case between Li Jianong v. Yu Yaoqiong on divorce and alimony], *Guangdong shifa yuekan* 4, issue 2, February 28, 1935.

⁹² Article 1052 stipulated conditions for petitioning the court for a divorce.

⁹³ "Cai Damu yin heyong konggao an" [In re: Cai Damu's case on inducement], *Guangdong shifa yuekan* 1, issue 9, September 1932.

⁹⁴ The phrase is usually this: "the parties can appeal to the Southwestern branch of the Supreme Court within twenty days." "Ren Huifang yu Zeng Zaolian qingqiu lihun ji geiyu shanyangfei shijian shangsu an" [The appeal between Ren Huifang v. Zeng Zaolian on divorce and alimony], *Guangdong shifa yuekan* 4, issue 7-8, 1935.

⁹⁵ Supreme Court verdicts on marriage disputes were recorded in the *Guangdong shifa yuekan*, but they were infrequent. The rarity could be explained by the difficulty and cost of appealing to the highest court in the land and whether the Supreme Court would hear them.

Guangdong enabled the formal application of law in urban areas at a time when the Nationalist warlord Chen Jitang and the central government were only beginning to establish solid control over people's marriages. In urban areas such as Guangzhou, the combined police mediation and court adjudication created all-encompassing governance of marriage as long as the people brought their cases to the attention of the state. While the Nationalist government in Guangdong in the 1930s was not in a position to mandate complete adherence of existing marriage practices to its legal code, urban and suburban plaintiffs had the opportunity to have their grievances against their spouses heard by the judiciary, an option not readily accessible in the countryside.

Marriage Governance in the Countryside

Marriage reform was a secondary goal to many county governments in Guangdong as they focused on governance and pacifying the countryside from banditry.⁹⁶ Consequently, reform was primarily aspirational, as decrees and proclamations restricting wedding expenses existed only on paper. With limited reach in rural societies, state regulation of marriage stayed at the county level and left most

⁹⁶ On the expansion of state power in rural counties and the provincial government's role in bringing counties under control in Guangdong, see John Fitzgerald, "Provincializing the City: Canton and the Reshaping of Guangdong Provincial Administration, 1912–1937," in *New Narratives of Urban Space in Republican Chinese Cities: Emerging Social, Legal and Governance Orders*, (Brill, 2013), 197–222. On state-building projects in rural counties, two dissertations on Mei County in Eastern Guangdong and Zhongshan County in Central Guangdong reveal the challenges faced by the Nationalist (warlord) and the Nationalist (central) government when interacting with local organizations such as lineages and villages, as well as the limitation of police, health and court. On state-building in Mei County, see Wenjuan Bi, "State Penetration and Local Autonomy in Mei County, Guangdong Province, 1900s-1930s" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University, 2015), 283-297. On Zhongshan County, see Venus Viana, "Modernizing Zhongshan: The Implementation of Nation-Building Policies and Responses of the Local People, 1930-1949" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 2012).

dispute resolution to families or lineages. When disputing parties and their lineage backers could not reach a settlement, or in cases involving deaths, parties sought state intervention in the form of police mediation or lawsuits in the district courts. Despite the massive influence of lineage organizations in marriage and family dispute resolution, county governments began supplanting lineage vigilantism with law in the 1930s.

The aspirational marriage customs reform

In rural counties of Guangdong, marriage customs reform emphasized voluntary adoption of marriage practices such as promoting group wedding ceremonies,⁹⁷ lowering the cost of marriage transactions,⁹⁸ prohibiting physical abuse of the bride, and limiting the use of firecrackers in weddings.⁹⁹ Additionally, these announcements tended to restrict the number of goods a wife could take back to her natal family during her annual visit to reduce any unnecessary spending.¹⁰⁰ Violators would generally receive a warning to change, and the government could theoretically demerit, fine, or even dismiss public officials or bureaucrats from employment.¹⁰¹

Differences existed in the implementation of counties' policies or

⁹⁷ "Jin ge hunyin louxi banfa" [Measure on banning backward marriage customs], *Huazi ribao* (*Chinese Mail*), February 2, 1936.

⁹⁸ "Lu xian zhang quandao renmin hunyin" [County magistrate Lu persuaded people on marriage], *Kung Sheung Daily News* (hereafter *KSDN*), December 18, 1936.

⁹⁹ "Jin ge hunyin louxi banfa", *Huazi ribao*, February 2, 1936.

¹⁰⁰ "Jin ge hunyin louxi banfa", *Huazi ribao*, February 2, 1936. The state's professed goal was to reduce spending, especially as a part of wedding or marriage rituals. This was at a time when the government wanted people to be frugal and save for the nation, hence the state preferred people to save, and buy national products if they must.

¹⁰¹ "Gexian xu lixing jieyue gechu louxi" [Every county must resolutely implement austerity measures and abolish backward customs], *Xinning zazhi* [Xinning Magazine] 10, 1935. There was no mention of a mechanism for identifying violators.

announcements on marriage reform. On the one hand was a conciliatory approach of gradual persuasion, such as the case of one county magistrate in Longmen County who explicitly said that he was unwilling to enact an order without giving time for people to adjust. Instead, he wished for the more culturally enlightened residents to spread awareness to their families and for village chiefs to discuss with their villagers the harms of early marriage, child daughters-in-law, extended post-marital natal residence, and high wedding costs.¹⁰² On the other hand was the strict approach as exemplified by Xinhui County's policy that stipulated punishment for violators, as well as designating ward, village, township office, and local police to enforce the policy on banning unwanted marriage practices. In severe cases where a party refused to abide by the terms set by their local administration, the county would turn the violators over to the court.¹⁰³

The result of these marriage reforms in rural counties is difficult to verify, as no written documents except those describing state-organized group wedding ceremonies remain. Newspapers confirmed that group wedding ceremonies took place in Bao'an County.¹⁰⁴ Also, the Nationalist provincial party directive instructed the Huiyang County branch to transfer the responsibility of organizing group wedding ceremonies to the respective county governments, and the order was copied to its

¹⁰² "Lu xian zhang quandaoren min hunyin," *KSDN*, December 18, 1936. The county chief mentioned extended post-natal residence of brides as a backward custom, but he blamed the custom on early marriage where underage girls refused to move into their husbands' household. In general, the provincial government was aware of this custom, but did not pay much attention on it when compared to marriage transactions and wedding expenses.

¹⁰³ "Jin ge hunyin louxi banfa," *Huazi ribao*, February 2, 1936.

¹⁰⁴ "Bao'an xian gongbu gaige hunyin xing pin shechi louxi" [Bao'an County promulgates measure on reforming extravagant wedding customs], *KSDN*, January 19, 1936.

subordinate branch across Guangdong. The Nationalist party branch in Taishan County swiftly followed the provincial directive.¹⁰⁵ Tying the marriage and family to the Chinese state, ceremonies took place in county seats and were decorated with the Nationalist Party flags,¹⁰⁶ with celebratory scrolls given to newlyweds with the inscription “strengthen the race and save the nation.”¹⁰⁷ By 1938, newspapers recorded multiple group wedding ceremonies in rural counties such as Taishan,¹⁰⁸ Shunde,¹⁰⁹ Huiyang,¹¹⁰ Zhongshan,¹¹¹ and Boluo,¹¹² before the Japanese occupation of south China.

Aside from these state-organized group wedding ceremonies, county governments made little progress on changing actual wedding customs. Nonetheless, some rare followers heeded the call for simplifying wedding rituals and encouraging thriftiness. On one occasion, a newspaper commentator wrote a report stating that

¹⁰⁵ “Dang bu bude zhuchi jiti hunyin” [Party branches shall not preside over group wedding ceremonies], *Xinning zazhi* [Xinning Magazine] 27, 1935. *Xinning Magazine* was a *Qiaokan*, a magazine catered to Overseas Chinese in Republican China and other parts of the world. On its audience and scope of reporting, see Madeline Y. Hsu, “‘Qiaokan’ and the Transnational Community of Taishan County, Guangdong, 1882—1943,” *China Review* 4, no. 1 (2004): 123–44.

¹⁰⁶ On the Nationalist government plan to tie the Chinese family to the state, as well as the guidelines for an idealized marriage ceremony for individuals, see Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 84-91.

¹⁰⁷ “Shantou jituan jiehun” [Group wedding ceremonies in Shantou], *Huazi ribao*, March 4, 1936; “Guoqingri zhongshan xian juxing shoujie jituan jiehun” [On the Nationalist Day of the Republic of China there was the first group wedding ceremonies in Zhongshan County], *Kung Sheung Evening News* (hereafter *KSEN*), December 12, 1935.

¹⁰⁸ “Chouban sanjie jituan jiehun” [Organizing the third group wedding ceremonies (in Taishan)], *Huazi ribao*, February 21, 1936.

¹⁰⁹ “Jianhun she ban jituan jiehun” [The frugal marriage association planned a group wedding ceremonies], *Huazi ribao*, June 7, 1936; “Chouban dierjie jituan jiehun” [Organizing the second group wedding ceremonies (in Shunde)], *Huazi ribao*, March 3, 1937.

¹¹⁰ “Juban jituan jiehun” [Organized group wedding ceremonies (in Huiyang)], *Huazi ribao*, January 6, 1938.

¹¹¹ “Guoqingri zhongshan xian juxing shoujie jituan jiehun”; “Sanjie jituan jiehun jiang juxing” [The third group wedding ceremonies will be held], *KSDN*, March 15, 1935.

¹¹² “Dingqi ban shouci jituan jiehun” [Organize the first group wedding ceremonies and they will become regularized (in Boluo)], *KSDN*, May 12, 1936.

only 1-2% of the population in Raoping County conducted new-style weddings, and the rest were either in arranged marriages or married with high bride prices. The protagonist of the report, a graduate of Peking University, wanted to accelerate the adoption of new-style marriage and weddings by entering into a free-choice marriage with a local secondary school graduate from Raoping. Not only did he forgo the extravagant rituals of a traditional Chinese wedding, but he also rejected wedding gifts except those from his closest friends while replacing the wedding banquet with a simple tea ceremony.¹¹³ Lineages also showed signs of encouraging thriftiness in marriage rituals, as recorded in a periodical about a branch of the Yu lineage in Enping County that had established “a committee of promoting frugality in marriage” to limit the number of goods married women could bring back in annual return to their natal family.¹¹⁴ This policy applied to women who married into or out of the Yu lineage, and the original stipulation in December 1932 required fines to be paid by violators. December 1932. A revision in September removed the penalty, but the Yu lineage continued to advocate for fellow members to comply with lineage rules on austerity in marriage customs.¹¹⁵ These two isolated cases of compliance suggest that reform in marriage practices in the 1930s countryside was more promotional than real, and that the state depended on voluntary compliance of individuals and lineage

¹¹³ “Raoping hunyin zhidu oushu” [An occasional statement on marriage customs in Raoping County], *Huazi ribao*, April 28, 1936.

¹¹⁴ Not necessarily a wedding ritual, this was nonetheless a marriage custom that married women return to their natal families during the Lunar New Year.

¹¹⁵ “Hunyin chong jian hui xianzhi dan jie” [The Thrift Committee on Marriage limits the goods brought by women in their natal home visit during the Chinese New Year], *Fengcai yuekan* [*Fong Toy Monthly Magazine*] (hereafter as *Fong Toy*), September 1933, 79.

organizations rather than coercing changes.

The hierarchy of marriage governance in rural Guangdong

Compared to the near absence of marriage customs reform in rural Guangdong, local governments were more active in regulating marriages when it came to dispute resolution and adjudication. Unlike the urban residents of Guangzhou, however, the people were reluctant to involve state authorities in their marital disputes. The most common disputes in the 1930s concerned adultery or runaway women.¹¹⁶ Others included disagreements over women's supposed virginity,¹¹⁷ women's remarriage,¹¹⁸ and proxy marriage.¹¹⁹ Generally, disputants sought official intervention when they could not reach terms, or when petitioners desired official verdicts. From the grassroots level of mediation between families or lineages, to mid-level administration such as village offices or ward police, to local district courts where parties resorted to lawyers and legal codes, lineage organizations were influential in many steps of the process of mediating marriages disputes. Nonetheless, this dominance was slowly declining as people became more receptive to pursuing mediation from police and adjudication from state courts. As the first

¹¹⁶ Examples included the two village women who ran away in "Ai de moli you leile liang xiangfu" [The magic of love caused two village women to escape], *Fong Toy*, July 1933, 39-40. Similar stories of runaway women could be found in "Shaofu xiezi sitao" [A young married woman became a fugitive with her son] and "Bukan nuedai shaofu sitao" [Unable to bear abuses, a young married woman escaped], both in *Fong Toy*, September-October 1937, 22-23, 34.

¹¹⁷ "Huang yu liangjia fasheng chunumo zhi zhengzhi" [Dispute between the Wong and the Yu over a hymen], *Xinning zazhi* 24, 1935

¹¹⁸ Such as "Zaijiao fu zhen fu siben" [The woman who married again poisoned her husband to run away], *Xinning zazhi* 10, 1935. In this story, she is compared to scorpions and snakes.

¹¹⁹ "Youyou yi xiongji yingqu zhe" [Another case of proxy marriage with a male chicken], *Xinning zazhi* 10, 1935. In the story, the husband's mother used a chicken as a proxy in the wedding ceremony. The wife became depressed about her husband's prolonged absence and died.

instance of state oversight of marriage, the village or ward office and police depended heavily on people's volition to seek official solutions to their disputes. Despite the hegemony of lineage organizations over rural social lives and marriage practices and resolutions, village offices and police allowed the Nationalist government a modicum of control in situations that would otherwise leave no recourse for feuding couples and their backers to attain mediation independent of lineages in the Guangdong countryside.

In rural Guangdong, marriage governance began with neighbors' or lineage members' mediation or intervention. In villages, fellow villagers provided checks against husbands' recurrent abuses,¹²⁰ or acted as lookouts to catch unfaithful women in the act.¹²¹ Male lineage members living in "bachelor houses" acted on prior suspicions of illicit relations between a married woman and a man that was not her husband.¹²² Once a couple was caught, a community of elders convened in lineage halls to decide the punishment of adulterous couples based on a set of previously agreed village codes of conduct. Punishments included a fine of 200 yuan,¹²³ an order

¹²⁰ "Yuren bushu wuning si" [I would rather die], *Xinning zazhi* 8, 1935.

¹²¹ "Mu nü pinhan paiyan naoju" [A mother and a daughter were caught in a threesome act], *Xinning zazhi* 17, 1935.

¹²² Bachelor houses were closely related to the local self-defense force, and membership often overlapped. On bachelor houses in lineage villages in rural South China, see Robert F. Spencer and S. A. Barrett, "Notes on a Bachelor House in the South China Area," *American Anthropologist* 50, no. 3 (1948): 463–78; on lineage bachelors who served as local watchmen, see James Watson, "Self Defense Corps, Violence, and the Bachelor Sub-Culture in South China: Two Case Studies," in *Village Life in Hong Kong: Politics, Gender, and Ritual in the New Territories* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004), pp. 254–258.

¹²³ The same periodical *Xinning zazhi* published a price index for commodities. On June 25, 1935, the day the periodical was published, a picul (100 jin) of superior rice cost 9.6 yuan, and a jin (500g) of pork cost 0.45 yuan. The fine of 200 yuan would allow the purchase of 20.83 piculs of rice, or 4.44 piculs of pork, itself a substantial financial punishment.

to exile both the man and woman involved,¹²⁴ or both. In a situation where a dispute involved a wife whose husband was overseas, lineage members convened a general meeting to collectively coerce her to change, for instance, sending a cease and desist letter on behalf of her husband's lineage to stop a wife from associating with a male employee or face permanent expulsion from her husband's village.¹²⁵

In addition to their roles as mediators or interveners, lineage organizations also served as instigators of disputes. On many occasions, fellow lineage members provided the manpower for the spouse to physically intimidate the other side, and conflicts often turned into arguments between two families. As the ad hoc moral police, lineage villagers prevented women of ill repute from marrying into their village, such as on one occasion in 1935 when lineage members from the “bachelor house” blocked the wedding sedan chair of a woman who engaged in adultery with a man of the same surname while her husband was working in the United States.¹²⁶ unable to bring the bride into his village, the intended husband had to cancel the marriage and negotiate with her over returning the bride price and the wedding

¹²⁴ “Mu nü pinhan paiyan naoju”; “Jinbuzhu dengtu youhuo” [Unable to resist temptation], *Xinning zazhi* 8, 1935. These punishments of fines and expulsion were part of clan rules, or village rules. For more information about penalties as dictated in clan rule, see Wen-Yen Tsao, “The Chinese Family from Customary Law to Positive Law,” *Hastings Law Journal* 17, no. 4 (1966): 727–65.

¹²⁵ “Nishuilao caise jianshou” [A general builder had both money and sex], *Fong Toy*, July 1933, 68–69. Her husband's remittance enabled the wife to start a business in Taishan, Guangdong, and she was rumored to be having an illicit affair with a male employee. Hence, the letter sent on behalf of all lineage members in the village was a severe reprimand that she was urged to heed if she wanted to continue receiving remittances. On the other hand, if the business was thriving and she could afford to cut ties with her husband's lineage, there was not much they could do except expelling her from their village.

¹²⁶ The explanation given was that villagers believed that such woman would bring misfortune and shame to the village. Considering her past history and how she absconded from her husband, it was likely that her husband's lineage would cause trouble.

ring.¹²⁷ Lineage institutions also supported their daughters if they perceived that they were being mistreated by their husbands. Actions included alleging spousal abandonment in court,¹²⁸ or gathering a crowd to complain at the husband's village.¹²⁹ Occasionally this could escalate into fights between two lineages, with outcomes of either a successful mediation,¹³⁰ or further escalation by involving the local police.¹³¹

Once a dispute reached the village or ward office or a police station, it entered the middle level of marriage governance hierarchy and the first instance of state regulation. Disputes came to the state either by referral from lineages or families or by direct petitions from residents in rural towns. When lineages were intervening in or fomenting disputes on behalf of their fellow lineage members, parties could report to the village office and accuse the other side of committing a crime against their daughters.¹³² If a dispute was unresolvable by unofficial mediation or settlement, the parties involved could either drop the matter or invite the state into their private affairs.

Whereas lineage organizations were dominant in governing marriage practices in villages, residents of rural towns, like the urban residents of Guangzhou, preferred

¹²⁷ The woman Liu Yacai was married to an overseas Chinese husband in Nankeng village in Taishan, but she ran away from home. Her intended husband resided in Qunhou village, which was only 5 km away. Hence, lineage members of the intended husband were already aware of her reputation.

“Liuyacai yiye huishi” [Bad history of Liu Yacai], *Xinning zazhi* 8, 1935.

¹²⁸ “Fuxu wuqing zong jandwei qian” [The husband is heartless for money], *Xinning zazhi* 32, 1935.

¹²⁹ “Zhenshi yimu jia'ou bingrong huoju” [What a drama between a couple], *Xinning zazhi* 9, 1935; “Baofu nueqi zhi jiufen” [A dispute between a bad-tempered husband who abuses his wife]. *Xinning zazhi* 17, 1935

¹³⁰ “Baofu nueqi zhi jiufen”.

¹³¹ “Zhenshi yimu jia'ou bingrong huoju”.

¹³² “Younu zaijjiao xingshi wenzui zhi diru [Assisting one's daughter to remarry and her husband brought friends to argue], *Fong Toy*, July 1933, 45-46.

the police as mediators. Instead of relying on lineage bachelor houses or a community of fellow lineage members, town residents turned to the police, whose presence was necessary to legally enter a private residence to catch adulterers in the act.¹³³ Additionally, police could stop the commotion caused by disputing spouses when officers rushed to the scene and served as mediators on-site or at the station.¹³⁴ The tendency to substitute police for lineage intervention in marriage disputes was primarily geographical, as residents in small towns could rely on nearby police. Additionally, police intervention benefited from a veneer of official authority and neutrality that lineage intervention or mediation did not. If decisions made by lineages depended on social coercion, collective pressure, or the threat of violence, police were local agents of the Nationalist state,¹³⁵ and they could work with village or ward officers to escalate cases to the county government.

Ward and village offices were sites where men could post a bounty for their fugitive wives or concubines, or places where local government officials could transfer cases to the court. In many marriage disputes where the wife or concubine ran away from home, husbands would post bounties at the local ward or village office asking for information on their whereabouts, and informers could come to the ward or village office to claim the reward.¹³⁶ When cases warranted official attention because

¹³³ “Fu zhao qi jian” [A husband caught a wife committing adultery], *Xinning zazhi* 32, 1935. The police mediated the dispute, but the husband decided to petition the local court for a divorce.

¹³⁴ “Fuqi dachu jie jingbo zuo diaoren” [A couple fought on the street and the police served as peacemakers], *Fong Toy*, March 1934, 22; “Fu zhao qi jian”.

¹³⁵ It should be said that the police were quite corrupt at this time. On police corruption in Zhongshan, a notable and model county of Guangdong, see Venus Viana, “Modernizing Zhongshan: The Implementation of Nation-Building Policies and Responses of the Local People, 1930-1949,” 33-37.

¹³⁶ “Yifu jia liangfu zhi qiwen” [The strange news of a woman simultaneously married to two men],

of criminal matters or when someone lost a life, the village or ward office transferred them up the hierarchy of marriage governance to the district court. Two cases exemplified the work of the village or ward office on transferring cases. The first case concerned a woman renowned for being a good wife who committed suicide in 1934 after persistent abuse by her husband's family. Her grandfather reported her death to the village office, which subsequently sent officers to inspect the body. Afterward, the local village office reported the death to the district court, which again sent inspectors to the site.¹³⁷ In another case, the male plaintiff complained to the village office about a matchmaker abducting his wife and arranging her remarriage to another man. The village office deemed it a judicial matter and sent the parties to the local district court.¹³⁸ While the act of transferring cases appeared bureaucratic, it allowed and alerted the district court to begin investigations of potential offenders of the Criminal Code.

At the top of rural marriage governance were the county government and the district court. The county government was primarily responsible for promoting marriage reform and adjudication depended on the district court. Nonetheless, the county government could intervene in disputes between two lineage villages by issuing administrative directives. In one such case, a county government approved a

Xinning zazhi, 10, 1935. In this story, the husband posted a bounty of 30 yuan to find his wife, who had been away for eight months, and someone from a nearby village found her and reported to the district office.

¹³⁷ "Shaoxi beipo zisha" [A young daughter-in-law was forced to commit suicide], *Fong Toy*, April 1934, 42-43.

¹³⁸ "Meifan you liangjiafu beifu gaijia" [A matchmaker abducts a wife to run away from her husband to remarry], *Xinning zazhi* 6, 1935.

Mr. Lin's request to order a village chief surnamed Lei to compel his lineage member's son to return Mr. Lin's wife.¹³⁹ While county governments rarely concerned themselves with personal affairs such as marriage disputes, this directive was an extraordinary intervention, possibly because only the county government had the authority to mediate between two lineages at odds with each other that occupied positions of power in their village offices.¹⁴⁰

Compared to rare directives from county governments, rural residents intermittently petitioned the district court to give formal rulings. From annulling betrothal to granting official divorce and financial restitution,¹⁴¹ the district court heard cases that village offices and district police considered judicial matters,¹⁴² or cases in which disputants insisted on a definitive answer. Despite coverage in rural periodicals on court cases, the exact working of the rural district court and outcomes are currently unknown, other than that appeals would be routed to the provincial circuit court and beyond. Furthermore, printed media reports reveal that petitioners in marriage disputes were suing on behalf of their daughters, such as one 1934 lawsuit

¹³⁹ "Gong du: Taishan xian zhengfu pishi" [Official document: directives from Taishan County government], *Xinning zazhi* 6, 1935.

¹⁴⁰ The recipient of the county directive was a village chief surnamed Lei. He shared the same middle character with the perpetrator's father, indicating they belonged to the same generation and branch of the lineage. Possibly, this abduction case had gone through informal mediation between the Lin and the Lei lineages, but because the perpetrator had his lineage's support, the husband had to resort to an official channel.

¹⁴¹ "Zeng Cuiyu lihun zuo zhaishen" [The second hearing of the Zeng Cuiyu's divorce petition], *Xinning zazhi* 17, 1935. The periodical noted that she went into town [Taishan] to attend her court date. She stated to the court that she had been abused by her husband and had lived separately from him for the past five years, and she wanted him to return her 200 yuan dowry and a one-time maintenance payment of 600 yuan.

¹⁴² "Judicial matters" is a vague term, but in marriage disputes, the term usually referred to suicide, murder, bigamy, divorce, or other serious accusation of crime.

where a man surnamed Yu annulled his betrothal to his fiancée surnamed Zhu because Yu perceived her to be physically disagreeable and sought to recoup the engagement gift. In response, Zhu's parents sued Yu in court to reverse the annulment after prior mediation with Yu's family failed.¹⁴³

Another dimension of rural legal adjudication was the value of the district court to married women. While women were not powerless in their married families and could attempt to run away, they had few avenues to seek redress within the boundary of their husbands' lineage villages. Relying on the law, many women had a chance to pursue justice, or in many cases divorces or spousal maintenance payments, such as one case in 1935 where a woman surnamed Zeng petitioned the court to divorce from her husband.¹⁴⁴ Even when married women died, parents could sue in the district court when their daughters passed away after egregious abuse by their husbands or their families, to seek retribution, compensation, or even explanation on how their daughters died.¹⁴⁵ While domestic disputes were common in rural

¹⁴³ "Xiannu maoqin yu tuihun reqi songsu" [A lawsuit over an annulment of a betrothal because the fiancée is ugly], *Fong Toy*, April 1934, 45-46. This was a strange case. The fiancé wanted an annulment as he deemed his fiancée to be physically unappealing and not because she committed dishonorable acts. However, her parents sued in court to protect her family's honor and claimed the other party was annulling the betrothal without cause. According to Article 976 of the 1930 Civil Code, being physically unappealing was not one of the causes that allowed the recoupment of engagement gifts. Article 977-978 allowed the innocent party to sue for damage. The court, however, could not reverse the annulment. Quite possibly, the point of contention was not her or her family's honor, but the engagement gift paid by the fiancé's family that included a golden ring. Social customs at the time dictated that the party that annulled the betrothal was responsible for a no-fault annulment of engagement. If a man canceled the engagement, the woman's family did not need to return the engagement gift, but her family would need to replace the gift if the woman initiated the breakup. Hence, her family likely petitioned the district court to keep the engagement gift.

¹⁴⁴ "Zeng Cuiyu lihunanzuorizhishen."

¹⁴⁵ Margery Wolf (1975) observed that when young women in Taiwan attempted or committed suicide due to unhappiness in their marriages, it was an attempt to implicate others, as well as bringing social shame to their husbands' families. Their natal families would have to intervene on their behalf by demanding better treatment in the future if their daughters survived. See Margery Wolf, "Women and

Guangdong, residents sought the courts' assistance when prior informal interventions to stop abuses were unsuccessful.¹⁴⁶ In one instance, a husband assaulted his wife on the same night her family went to his village to complain;¹⁴⁷ in another case, neighbors had repeatedly intervened in arguments between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law.¹⁴⁸ In both instances, the suicide of young wives after attempted interventions made indignant parents unwilling to accept mediation. The district court was their only recourse in the marriage disputes between their deceased daughters and their husbands, but outcomes in court are unrecorded.¹⁴⁹

In cases that concerned domestic disputes, and no one lost their lives, the general aversion to going to court held for rural inhabitants of Guangdong in the 1930s.¹⁵⁰ When possible, people would settle marriage disputes outside the purview of the legal system. When they required state presence, the people preferred the village office or the police as both were more relatable and less time-consuming than the district court. The hierarchy of marriage governance in rural Guangdong then allowed villagers and small-town inhabitants to mediate their disputes without

Suicide in China," in *Women in Chinese Society*, by Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford University Press, 1975), 111–41.

¹⁴⁶ "Youyou xiufen ziyi zhi fu" [Another case of a woman hanged herself in shame], *Xinning zazhi* 17, 1935. In this story, the wife had returned to her natal family for support after her husband stole her dowry. They complied and talked to her husband with some relatives in attendance, but he ignored them. Afterwards, he severely assaulted her, and she committed suicide that night. Understandably, her natal family would be angry at her husband, and informal mediation would not bring their daughter back to life.

¹⁴⁷ "Youyou xiufen ziyi zhi fu."

¹⁴⁸ "Bukan yapo ziyi si" [Committed suicide under oppression], *Fong Toy*, September-October 1937, 44-45.

¹⁴⁹ It was likely that the parents wanted criminal penalties to be applied to their deceased daughters' husbands, in addition to financial settlements.

¹⁵⁰ In Chinese, this is called "生不入官門" [not going to court while alive].

involving the judiciary and selectively invited the local government into their domestic affairs, but that also meant that the state could only exert minimal legal oversight of rural marriage practices. The Civil Code and the Criminal Code were applicable when disputing parties or their lineage backers voluntarily asked for adjudication in their marriage disputes, leaving many possibilities of extrajudicial punishments by lineage organizations.¹⁵¹

Entrenching legal awareness in the countryside

Throughout the 1930s, the provincial Nationalist warlord government and the central government suppressed extrajudicial actions in marriage disputes and disseminated legal awareness. Not only did periodicals report flogging and physical beating of the adulterers by lineage members of the offended husband,¹⁵² they also wrote about lineage organizations making threats to drown adulterers in a wicker basket.¹⁵³ In attempts to steer residents from vigilantism to law, county governments planned to provide low-cost legal advisory services,¹⁵⁴ established local mediation

¹⁵¹ Marriage governance in rural Guangdong was not too different from the rest of rural Nationalist China in the 1930s, except for the tendency to resort to extrajudicial punishments by lineage organizations. While the Civil Code had barely penetrated rural societies, evidence from other provinces, such as Jiangxi, showed that rural women filed for divorce at the district court in a county town and that the local *baojia* (neighborhood watch) chief served as the first-line marriage dispute mediators. See Liu Zhijuan, “Minguo zhong houqi hunyin jiufen yu jiceng sifa yanjiu” (Ph.D. Dissertation, East China University of Political Science and Law, 2019), 73-74.

¹⁵² Such as cases in “Mu nü pinhan paiyan naoju” and “Jinbuzhu dengtu youhuo”. Flogging and physically beating were criminal activities according to Article 277-279 and Article 283 of the Criminal Code, but adulterers were unlikely to sue for damage.

¹⁵³ “Xianfu nianlao zhaoyin pinhan rushi” [Inviting an adulterer because the husband is old], *Xinning zazhi* 24, 1935. In this story, lineage members backed off from drowning the woman because they thought adultery was not a capital crime.

¹⁵⁴ “Minjiaoguan sheli minzhong falu guwenchu” [The Public Education Office establishes a legal advisory office], *Xinning zazhi* 9, 1935. No record existed on how the people use this legal advisory office.

committees,¹⁵⁵ and discussed relevant changes in the Criminal Code in rural periodicals.¹⁵⁶

The Nationalist government had three goals in increasing people's respect for the law: suppression of vigilantism, protection of legal rights, and making the judiciary system accessible. In its announcement of establishing a public legal advisory service, not only did the Taishan County government retain lawyers to answer people's questions for free, but they also worked pro bono or at a reduced rate on lawsuits.¹⁵⁷ To combat vigilante tendencies, the provincial government enacted specific interim measures on holding participants of lineage feuds accountable. The measures required local social organizations and lineage elders to mediate and to report the result to respective local governments.¹⁵⁸ While the measure concerned long-standing feuds between neighbors or lineages, marriage disputes with lineage backing had the potential to spark fights. Likewise, the establishment of local mediation committees aimed to prevent private feuds and strengthen the rule of law in the countryside.¹⁵⁹ The repeated calls for the rule of law and an end to extrajudicial actions were a deliberate strategy to replace collective coercion with legal codes and to reduce lineage dominance in everyday lives. Rather than having the population rely on their lineage organizations to resolve disputes, the Nationalist government wanted

¹⁵⁵ "Xianfu lingfa qu xian zhen tiaowehui banshi xize" [Detailed rules from the county government on mediation committees in districts, villages, and towns], *Xinning zazhi* 17, 1935.

¹⁵⁶ "Xingfa xinding fanghai hunyin ji jiating zui" [New revision of the Criminal Code on offenses against marriage and family], *Xinning zazhi* 9, 1935.

¹⁵⁷ "Minjiaoguan sheli minzhong falu guwenchu."

¹⁵⁸ "Chengban xiedou zhanxing banfa zhi jieshi" [Clarification on the interim measure for punishing private feuds], *Xinning zazhi* 10, 1935.

¹⁵⁹ "Xianfu lingfa qu xian zhen tiaowehui banshi xize."

its people to use the law and settle their differences.

The Nationalist government found a populace receptive to promoting legal awareness in the countryside. While rural inhabitants had minimal knowledge of the legal code, they recognized that they could turn to the state when mediation within or between lineages failed. When an article in 1934 described villagers and their lineage backers fighting over accusations of a man's bigamy, the press appended a commentary suggesting the court should try the husband for lying to the families of his wife and the woman he intended to marry. The article did not state whether the parties went to court, but the editor who wrote the commentary suggested that they should.¹⁶⁰

While details of court cases and the state efforts to increase legal awareness in rural Guangdong are incomplete, records on people's respecting the law and suing in court suggest that the judiciary system had limited effect despite increasing accessibility to villagers and town residents. Residents in marriage disputes remained mired in their ways of private settlements or extrajudicial actions, and they often dodged court summonses. Likewise, district courts lacked the will to intervene directly in marriage disputes. Wanting villagers to bring their cases instead of engaging in private feuds, the court was reluctant to dispatch the police to compel appearances. The district court restricted its arresting power only to severe disputes such as those involving a dead person or defendants who contemptuously violated the

¹⁶⁰ The husband, surnamed Kwan, was an adult adoptee of the Yu lineage, and fellow Yu lineage members did not welcome this move. They severely beat him after his marriage with another woman went sour. "Minglingzi renmian shouxin" [The beastly nature of an adopted son (from outside the lineage)], *Xinning zazhi* 35, 1934.

law by physically assaulting the plaintiff with accomplices after failing to appear multiple times. Nonetheless, despite the ineffectiveness of state regulation and reform, these efforts in the 1930s were the beginning of a Chinese state effort to intervene in everyday life.

Unofficial Marriage Reform and Adjudication in Prewar Hong Kong

Prewar colonial Hong Kong allows a comparison to the marriage reform and regulatory regime in Nationalist south China. Whereas the warlord government under Chen Jitang and the central administration attempted to inculcate legal awareness among the people in the countryside when resolving marriage disputes and commencing marriage reform, the colonial government in Hong Kong took no part in changing Chinese marriages. Perhaps the colonial government was preoccupied with other matters, such as political pressure from London to outlaw prostitution from 1930 to 1935,¹⁶¹ and commit to a gradual abolition of female indentured servants, locally known as “mui jai.”¹⁶² Other aspects of social life, such as marriage, were left to existing Chinese organizations to handle, with the rare exception of mediating or adjudicating spousal support payments.¹⁶³ In place of government inactivity in

¹⁶¹ R.J. Miners, “State Regulation of Prostitution in Hong Kong, 1857 to 1941,” *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24 (1984): 143–61.

¹⁶² A “mui jai” was a female indentured servant who served in her master’s household until marriage. While she was a household member, she usually did not have sex with her master or other men in that family. Although rare, she was theoretically available for her master’s sexual pleasure. For more on female indentured servants and their differences from concubines, see Rubie S. Watson, “Wives, Concubines, and Maids: Servitude and Kinship in Hong Kong Region, 1900–1940,” in Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, eds, *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991; on the state regulation of mui jai, see Angelina S. Chin, *Bound to Emancipate: Working Women and Urban Citizenship in Early Twentieth-Century China and Hong Kong* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 40–67.

¹⁶³ This was known as “maintenance” in the colonial bureaucratic lexicon in Hong Kong.

reforming marriage customs, unofficial organizations with the backing of eminent Chinese citizens in Hong Kong led the charge. The Chinese YMCA followed the format of group wedding ceremonies in China and organized group wedding ceremonies in the colony. From the beginning in 1934 to the war-induced suspension in 1938, three group wedding ceremonies occurred with much publicity in the press,¹⁶⁴ with Chinese notables such as unofficial members of the Executive Council serving as chief witnesses.¹⁶⁵

As in Nationalist China, the organizers of group wedding ceremonies in Hong Kong had identical goals of lowering marriage costs and replacing frivolous rituals. However, their priorities and implementation were quite different. In Nationalist south China, the state had an overbearing presence in group wedding ceremonies, with county magistrates serving as chief witnesses and political luminaries attending

¹⁶⁴ The Chinese YMCA organized three group wedding ceremonies in prewar Hong Kong. The first occurred on February 15, 1936, the second on October 10, 1936, and the third on April 17, 1937. The YMCA had planned for the fourth group wedding ceremony to occur on October 9, 1937, but postponed it to January 1938, and later decided to suspend group wedding ceremonies to prioritize national resistance against Japan. "Diyijie jituan jiehun jinri juxing" [Today was the day for the first group wedding ceremony], *KSDN*, February 15, 1936; "Dierjie jituan jiehun jinri juxing" [The second group wedding ceremony was held today], *KSDN*, October 10, 1936; "Sanjie jituan jiehun jinri juxing" [The third group wedding ceremony was held today], *KSEN*, April 17, 1937; "Qingnianhui tingban jituan jiehun" [The YMCA suspended organizing group wedding ceremonies], *Huazi ribao*, January 12, 1938.

¹⁶⁵ In prewar Hong Kong, the highest government position a person with Chinese heritage could attain was becoming an unofficial member of the Executive Council. He served as a bridge between the colonial government and the Chinese residents. Hence, having such members as chief witnesses in group wedding ceremonies lent prestige and credibility to the organizers and the events. The Chinese YMCA invited Chou Shouson, a highly respected former unofficial member of the Executive Council, to be the chief witness for the first group wedding ceremony, and Robert Kotewell for the second and third group wedding ceremony. "Diyijie jituan jiehun jinri juxing"; "Jituan jiehun de qinglu yao tingjiang tinghua" [Participants in group wedding ceremonies must listen to lectures], *Huazi ribao*, September 19, 1936; "Sanjie jituan jiehun guanli ji" [Witnessing the third group ceremony], *Tianguang bao*, (hereafter *TGB*), April 18, 1937.

the group wedding ceremonies.¹⁶⁶ In contrast, organizers in Hong Kong saw group wedding ceremonies as vehicles to improve the Chinese family by providing family education, lowering marriage costs, and simplifying wedding rituals. In preparation for the first group wedding ceremony, the organizers required four lectures for the participants: "The art of cultivating a harmonious spousal relationship,"¹⁶⁷ "The meaning of marriage," "discussion on married life," and "women's physiology."¹⁶⁸ Likewise, there were lectures on family education for participants in the second group wedding ceremony, namely "family education," "marriage in the contemporary era," "modern family," and "birth control and eugenics." Except for the lecture on birth control and eugenics that limited attendance to participants and married couples, these lectures were also open to the public.¹⁶⁹ In using group wedding ceremonies to instruct the public on simplified wedding rituals, the Chinese YMCA as the organizer required extensive rehearsals,¹⁷⁰ and had strict rules regarding wedding dress for the grooms and brides, pre-signed wedding certificates, and the exchange of wedding rings on stage.¹⁷¹ If one spouse desired it, the other spouse had to subject him or herself to a premarital health examination.¹⁷² Explicit in the goal to promote group

¹⁶⁶ "Juban jituan jiehun", *Huazi ribao*, January 6, 1938; "Shantou jituan jiehun" [Group wedding ceremonies in Shantou], *Huazi ribao*, March 4, 1936.

¹⁶⁷ "Zuowan yanjiang jing'ai zhi dao" [Last night's lecture on harmonious spousal relationship], *KSDN*, February 10, 1936.

¹⁶⁸ "Shoujie jituan jiehun xuanyan" [Announcement on the first group wedding ceremony], *Huazi ribao*, February 6, 1936.

¹⁶⁹ "Jituan jiehun de qinglu yao tingjiang tinghua."

¹⁷⁰ "Jituan jiehun yanxi guanli ji" [Rehersal ceremony for the group wedding ceremonies], *KSDN*, February 14, 1936.

¹⁷¹ "Bengang qingnianhui fachu jituan jiehun xuanyan" [Declaration from the YMCA on group wedding ceremonies], *KSDN*, February 6, 1936.

¹⁷² "Erci jituan jiehun zengjia zeli liangtiao" [Two additional rules for the second group wedding ceremony in Hong Kong], *TGB*, July 4, 1936.

wedding ceremonies to create better families by giving lectures on childcare and spousal relations,¹⁷³ group wedding ceremonies in Hong Kong focused on fostering harmonious families, with frugality for conserving resources for the Republic of China as an additional but secondary goal.¹⁷⁴ While comparatively fewer couples celebrated their ceremonies at group wedding ceremonies in Hong Kong, with eleven pairs participating in the first ceremony, twenty-eight pairs in the second ceremony, and ten pairs in the third wedding ceremony, there was much public fanfare about the events.¹⁷⁵

Colonialism also created other conundrums about the presence of the state and laws in group wedding ceremonies in Hong Kong. Regarding flags and allegiance, both Chinese and British national flags were present in the first and third group wedding ceremonies,¹⁷⁶ but the British flag was absent in the second group wedding ceremonies. Since the ceremony took place on October 10, the National Day of the Republic of China, organizers decorated the venue with the Nationalist Party flag, showing a further alignment of group wedding ceremonies with the Nationalist Party.¹⁷⁷ While flags of the Republic of China and the Nationalist Party were staples in marriage ceremonies in Guangdong, their presences in Hong Kong took on secondary but unmistakable importance that these reformers and organizers were

¹⁷³ “Sanjie jituan jiehun guanli ji.”

¹⁷⁴ Some participants and organizers in group wedding ceremonies in Hong Kong saw themselves Chinese nationals sojourning in the colony; hence they were loyal to the Republic of China.

¹⁷⁵ “Bengang qingnianhui fachu jituan jiehun xuanyan”; “Jituan jiehun de qinglu yao tingjiang tinghua”; “Sanjie jituan jiehun guanli ji.”

¹⁷⁶ “Diyijie jituan jiehun jinri juxing”; “Sanjie jituan jiehun guanli ji.”

¹⁷⁷ “Dierjie jituan jiehun jinri juxing” [The second group wedding ceremony was held today], *KSDN*, October 10, 1936.

loyal to the Nationalist government and not the colonial regime. Although on British soils, these organizers of group wedding ceremonies wanted to create better Chinese marriages, and the colonial government allowed its subjects to do without being involved in the reform of customs.

Regarding the legality of group wedding ceremonies, the Chinese YMCA stressed that group wedding ceremonies were legal,¹⁷⁸ but did not specify under which sets of law these group wedding ceremonies would be performed. While the organizers received permission from the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs and the Registrar-General to proceed,¹⁷⁹ which created the assumption that organizers were relying on British law,¹⁸⁰ other evidence implied that group wedding ceremonies were meant to conform to the Nationalist Civil Code, as stated in a press account that "group wedding ceremonies can satisfy the demand of law and marriage customs of our country."¹⁸¹ Chinese newspapers printed in prewar Hong Kong referred to Nationalist China as "our country," as exemplified by a commentary on marriage and family that "Article 980 of our country's new law" prevented underage marriages, further indicating alignment with the Nationalist Civil Code rather than British law.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ The organizers said: "The group wedding ceremonies we are organizing will have formal marriage certificates, famous people as witnesses, and a film recording. Hence there is no challenge to the legality of these marriages." "Bengang qingnianhui fachu jituan jiehun xuanyan."

¹⁷⁹ "Bengang jituan jiehun zi chouban jingguo ji jinhou jinxing" [A description on the planning of group wedding ceremonies in Hong Kong], *KSDN*, February 13, 1936.

¹⁸⁰ Were marriages celebrated in prewar group wedding ceremonies "registry marriages" that received the complete protection of the colonial law that strictly limited causes for divorce and only by court orders, or were they "foreign marriages" recognized in the colony that allowed divorce by mutual consent? While none challenged the legality of these marriages, conformance to which set of law had significant implications when these couples wished to separate. On the complicated history of legally recognized marriages in Hong Kong, see Chapter 6.

¹⁸¹ "Bengang qingnianhui fachu jituan jiehun xuanyan."

¹⁸² "Hunyin yu shehui" [Marriage and society], *KSDN*, January 11, 1937.

Group wedding ceremonies and their organizers created a situation where non-state actors were reforming the marriage customs of the colonized to comply with a foreign legal code (the Nationalist Civil Code), with the tacit agreement of the colonial government. It was a testament to non-interference in Chinese marriage practices while showcasing the lack of political will by the prewar colonial regime to intervene.

The same attitude of limited interference in Chinese marriage also appeared in resolving marriage disputes via mediation and court rulings. Dispute resolution at this time rested nominally with the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs (SCA), while official adjudication was in the realm of the colonial court. In practice, however, the colonial government worked with Chinese organizations such as the Po Leung Kuk (PLK),¹⁸³ an entity created to protect the rights of women and children in Hong Kong, to handle dispute mediation on behalf of the state. In many instances, the PLK had informal judicial power over women,¹⁸⁴ and handled divorce or marriage disputes.¹⁸⁵ However, the colonial government did not leave all marriage dispute mediation to the PLK. In the colonial marriage dispute resolution hierarchy, the SCA was often the first step where disputants brought their complaints.

A letter sent to the PLK on July 16, 1941, less than five months before the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong, illustrates the role of the SCA, the PLK, and other components of colonial marriage governance. Mr. Zheng, a farmer, petitioned the

¹⁸³ The official translation is the "Society for the Protection of Women and Children," but colonial records referred to this agency as the Po Leung Kuk.

¹⁸⁴ Angelina S. Chin, *Bound to Emancipate*, 61.

¹⁸⁵ Angelina S. Chin, *Bound to Emancipate*, 43, 178-181.

PLK to intervene and send his fugitive wife back to the village office in Yuen Long, a rural town in the New Territories. He first complained to the SCA, which ordered the Yuen Long police station to remand her to the nearby village office. At the village office, a local Justice of the Peace surnamed Tang ruled that she was to be returned to him, but she escaped shortly after. He had learned of her location and asked the PLK to summon and examine her and, if possible, escort her back to the Yuen Long village office. This letter reveals three points about marriage governance in Hong Kong. First, Chinese residents saw the SCA as the government agency they turned to for redress. Second, the PLK was the respected neutral party that handled complicated disputes; and third, that local gentry had a role in managing marriage disputes in the New Territories.¹⁸⁶ Another letter, from the correspondence between the SCA and PLK, further reinforces the notion of the local gentry and the District Office taking part in governing marriages in Hong Kong.¹⁸⁷

While the combined efforts of the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs and the Po Leung Kuk handled the majority of marriage disputes in the colony, the colonial court provided definitive judgment on disputes over spousal maintenance and child custody.¹⁸⁸ The SCA had previously mediated many disputes that reached the court,

¹⁸⁶ PLK records, *Gebu laiwang xin* (external correspondences), 1941.

¹⁸⁷ PLK records, *huamin zhengwu shubu* [correspondence from the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs], July 18, 1941. This letter mentions that the SCA has recently heard a case regarding a sale of a wife; it had been witnessed by a local member of the gentry surnamed Ho, as well as having evidence of prior involvement from the Tai Po District Office.

¹⁸⁸ There were many articles on different marriage disputes adjudicated by the court, such as “Kong fu zhuitao shanyang fei” [Suing her husband for spousal maintenance], *KSDN*, November 1, 1936; “Su Anping huozhun yu fu fengju” [Su Anping is permitted to separate from her husband], *Huazi ribao*, May 23, 1939.

but parties could petition the court when complications appeared after mediation.¹⁸⁹ Court proceedings were routine and generally ended with the award of spousal maintenance to wives. Still, the court preferred to let the SCA deal with the minute details by instructing disputing parties to work out an arrangement with the SCA over monthly spousal maintenance.¹⁹⁰

The prewar colonial court dismissed lawsuits over maintenance when defendants were financially destitute, or when the petitioners lacked standing. When a wife petitioned the court in 1932 for monthly maintenance of sixty Hong Kong dollars (HKD), the judge dismissed the lawsuit, not on the merit of her case but because her husband recently had become unemployed.¹⁹¹ In another court case in November 1935, a husband used a similar rationale of financial destitution to petition for lowering his spousal maintenance to his wife. Under examination in court, the judge found that he had registered properties in the name of his concubine, and the judge ordered the same monthly payment of sixty HKD as before.¹⁹² A judge could also dismiss a lawsuit over the petitioner's marital status, and the court relied on Chinese law to determine whether a woman was a wife or a concubine. Unlike a wife, a concubine was ineligible to receive spousal maintenance and establishing a

¹⁸⁹ While newspaper accounts of marriage disputes wrote that the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs had previously intervened, it is possible that the SCA transferred disputes to the PLK to mediate on behalf of the government.

¹⁹⁰ "Kongfu yiqi ji ouda an xunjue" [A verdict on a lawsuit over spousal abandonment and physical assault], *KSDN*, May 28, 1935.

¹⁹¹ "Jinchen jiulong caipanshu zhi shaofu kong fu tao shanyangfei" [Today's hearing in the Kowloon Magistracy over a wife who sued her husband for maintenance], *KSEN*, October 12, 1932.

¹⁹² "Beigao qiujian shanyangfei" [The defendant asks for lowered spousal maintenance], *KSDN*, November 10, 1935.

woman's married status determined whether the judge would hear her case.¹⁹³

Petitioners had to prove their status as married wives, and counsels invited legal experts in the Nationalist Civil Code to explain Chinese law and marriage customs to the colonial court.¹⁹⁴

Limited to ordering spousal maintenance and reluctant to overrule the SCA, the colonial court nonetheless represented the definite state regulation of Chinese marriages in Hong Kong. Legally binding verdicts required parties to retain lawyers or Chinese legal experts, and so litigation was preferable to informal mediation when husbands had sizable assets or monthly income to garnish. Reliant on the people bringing their disputes first to the SCA and then to the court, the colonial regime kept its intervention in Chinese marriage to a minimum.

Comparing prewar Hong Kong and Nationalist south China shows the beginning of a diverging approach to marriage reform. While both places relied heavily on unofficial mediation and residents taking the initiative to seek state adjudication, the principal difference was the government's presence or absence in reforming marriage practices. In Hong Kong, non-state organizations replaced the colonial government. Consequently, group wedding ceremonies had minimal state presence, and organizers preached about improving Chinese families by fostering harmonious spousal relations. In contrast, In Guangdong the provincial government under the warlord Chen Jitang and the central government organized group wedding

¹⁹³ "Liang Shaofang kongfu an xuanpan" [The verdict on the lawsuit between Liang Shaofang and her husband], *KSDN*, November 30, 1941.

¹⁹⁴ "Qieshi yi jishi jiufen susong" [The litigation over a woman's status as a concubine or wife], *Ta Kung Pao*, September 13, 1941.

ceremonies, and its vision of modernizing wedding rituals for the state became paramount. Not only was the divergence of priorities applicable in prewar south China, but it also progressed to major differences in marriage customs reforms decades afterward.

Government actions regulating everyday life in the 1930s were the embryonic template for the interventionist Chinese state for decades to come. As part of the mission to transform Chinese society, the Nationalist government commenced rudimentary marriage reform to reduce marriage spending and eliminate unwanted wedding customs. At the same time, the promulgation of the Civil Code and the Criminal Code standardized the adjudication of marital disputes. Despite factional rivalries with the central government, uniformity in legal codes and mostly shared goals of improving Chinese marriages for the nation led the provincial government, like its central rival, to establish boundaries on what people could or could not do regarding their marriages.

State influence and oversight of marriage varied with the urban-rural divide. Compared to the urban core of Guangzhou, where the provincial government had a firm grasp of regulating marriage disputes and people readily sought police mediation and court verdicts, the countryside was still undergoing pacification and state-building. Local power holders such as lineage organizations remained influential in rural life and dominated marriage dispute resolution, giving women few options to challenge their husbands over domestic issues. The introduction of the Civil Code and

police and district courts allowed women to pursue justice not based on collective coercion and extrajudicial actions of the patriarchal lineages. Although ineffective in fostering voluntary changes in marriage practices except in organizing group wedding ceremonies, the provincial government was more successful in promoting legal awareness in the countryside.

Reforming marriage practice to modernize the Chinese nation took on a twist in colonial Hong Kong. While the Nationalist government began marriage reform, the colonial government was more content with leaving Chinese intermediaries in charge. The result was that Guangdong had a head start in shaping the marriage customs of its people and regulating marriage formation and dissolution; the colonial government was inactive and a latecomer in reforming Chinese marriage customs.¹⁹⁵ These differences persisted as south China as a region fractured into competing regimes during the wartime period from 1938 to 1949.

¹⁹⁵ The postwar Chinese state became even more active in modernizing marriage customs and intervening in people's marriages. In contrast, the laissez-faire colonial government was a late starter in reforming the marriage practices of its people, and it was a three-decades-long process that will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2

Wartime Marriage Regulation and Practices

“I have fallen in love with my maid in Guangzhou, but I wish to continue my marriage with my wife in the countryside. What should I do?”¹ This inquiry to a love advice columnist was ordinary, but the timing and context were not. The writer had returned to collaborationist south China in June 1940 to find a job, as he wrote that the scorched-earth tactics of the Nationalist government had destroyed his properties and livelihood. Only in collaborationist Guangdong was he able to reestablish his life and worry about love. Yet, why did the press print this ordinary snippet of everyday life and many others like this at a time of a global war?

This chapter traces the state discourses and regulations on reforming marriage customs in both the collaborationist and the Nationalist governments in South China. Why was each state interested in reforming marriage customs? Which marriage practices were criticized in the collaborationist and Nationalist press? Did residents adhere to state discourses and regulations of marriage? Furthermore, what can commonalities and divergences in state discourses on marriage indicate about social life during this period of war in both collaborationist and Nationalist south China?

Despite being political adversaries, the collaborationist and the Nationalist discourses on marriage had the same prewar intellectual heritage that equated the modernization and reform of marriage practices with a new Chinese nation. Official

¹ "Wan furen xinxiang" [Mrs. Wan's column]. *Minsheng ribao* (hereby abbreviated as *MSRB*), June 11, 1940.

newspaper in both governments hailed monogamy and frugality as the ultimate goals, and both sides continued to organize group wedding ceremonies as the means to achieve those goals. Both sides discouraged the pursuit of material benefit in dating, in marriage negotiations, and in married life.

Nevertheless, dissimilar wartime priorities between the two rival regimes led to differences in their positions on marriage customs. The collaborationist press continued prewar Nationalist reforms, aiming to return to peace, prosperity, and normalcy to enhance its own legitimacy.² It encouraged love-based courtship and dating, while exhorting the youth to overcome local marriage taboos such as same-surname marriage and intra-lineage endogamy. In contrast, the Nationalist press emphasized austerity and national resistance in their discussion of marriage practices. Nominally in favor of free-choice marriage, the Nationalist press suggested delaying romance during the war, and venues for dating were rapidly shuttered for cost-saving purposes. Although state discourse did not forbid the pursuit of love, only frugal dating and marriage would align with the state's demand for resources and stability, and hedonistic love criticized as an unaffordable luxury.

However, social news articles, legal columns, and in the collaborationist press, love advice columns indicated that residents were not influenced by the state discourses on marriage. Nonetheless, the same publications indicated that residents were mindful of state laws and regulations, often voluntarily introducing the state into

² This was not unique in south China. For example, the Japanese occupier also used similar language of “anju leye” [living in peace and taking pleasure in one’s work], translated by Timothy Brook, in Japanese propaganda in Central China. See, Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 38.

their marital disputes, and crossing wartime frontlines when necessary to seek redress.

The merit of studying wartime discourses on marriage by each government was more than understanding their attempts to reforms on “undesirable” marriage practices. On this, both states were not successful in creating meaningful changes. However, these discourses of reforming marriage customs indicated that despite wartime hardships, everyday life continued in south China, and that wars or occupation did not prevent residents from facing marriage disputes. This was especially true in collaborationist Guangdong, where newspapers revealed a vibrant society full of dating, weddings, and marriage woes. Also, the permeable frontline in South China led to further complexity by enabling cross-warzone familial ties to perpetuate, and these ties challenged existing notions about the effects of war on separating families and marriage.

The rest of the chapter is divided into six sections: Guangdong during the Second Sino-Japanese War; the public discourse in wartime newspapers; dating and courtship under the Nationalist and collaborationist government; each government’s position on unwanted marriage customs, bride prices, and marriage taboos; promotion of group wedding ceremonies and the promulgation of sumptuary laws and administrative measures by both regimes; and local residents’ adherence to state regulations and laws in their marriage disputes during the war.

Guangdong during World War II

War in south China broke out a year after the Japanese invasion of Shanghai

and north China, and the Japanese army invaded southern China in October 1938 to seal off Nationalist China from the outside world. However, European colonies such as British Hong Kong, Portuguese Macau, and French Guangzhouwan (now known as Zhenjiang, Guangdong) were neutral entrepôts and continued to send materiel into China, requiring Japan to control the land connections and waterways surrounding them.³ After invading the port of Shantou, and western parts of Guangdong near the French-controlled Guangzhouwan in 1939, Japan attempted to push north, but was repulsed by the Nationalist government in 1940. From 1940 to 1944, the frontline stagnated. As for the European colonies, Hong Kong was invaded in December 1941, Guangzhouwan was turned over to de facto Japanese administration in 1943, and Macau remained neutral to the end of the war.

After the initial Japanese invasion of Guangzhou, the Nationalist provincial government retreated to mountainous northern Guangdong and continued administering areas under its control from Shaoguan, 140 miles north of Guangzhou. The frontline solidified near Wengyuan County and Yingde County, 77 miles from the provisional capital at Shaoguan.⁴ Throughout the war, low intensity military conflict between the Japanese army and the Nationalist army took place in Northern Guangdong, leaving parts of Guangdong unoccupied or uninvaded for the lack of

³ After landing near Huizhou, Guangdong, the Japanese army encountered weak resistance and overcame the defense of Guangzhou and surrounding counties. The strategic goal of the Japanese army was not about extending its territory or to open a second front, as it lacked the manpower to do so. In the middle of 1940, the Japanese army invaded parts of Zhongshan county to expand its territory but did not remain there.

⁴ “Guangzhou lunxian qu de riri yeye” (Every day and night in Occupied Guangzhou). Party History Research Office of the Chinese Communist Party Guangzhou Branch, 1998. p.190.

strategic value. In late 1944 the Japanese army commenced Operation Ichi-go and the provisional Nationalist provincial government at Shaoguan evacuated in early 1945 to nearby mountainous Liangzhou County, where it stayed until the Japanese surrender in August 1945.

The Japanese military authority, using the same governing model as in other parts of occupied China, installed collaborators to govern civilian affairs in south China. The collaborationist government first led by Peng Dongyuan in 1938 was absorbed by the reorganized Nationalist government under Wang Jingwei in 1940.⁵ Claiming its legitimacy as the successor to the Nationalist government, the collaborationist regime preserved the Nationalist Civil Code of 1930 and the Criminal Code of 1931 as the backbone of its legal regulations on marriage and family.⁶ Territorially, the collaborationist government had control over the provincial capital of Guangzhou, suburban Panyu county, and a nearby town named Zengcheng, and exercised some degree of control in Shunde, Dongguan, Huizhou, and Xinhui counties.⁷ However, with the exception of urban Guangzhou, guerrillas of all kinds, including Nationalist, Communist, and bandits with no governmental affiliation all

⁵ "Lunxian shiqi Guangzhou jiaoyu gaikuang" [general situation on education during the occupation of Guangzhou] from "Guangzhou wenshi" [Literal and Historical Material of Guangzhou] http://59.41.8.205/gzws/gzws/sqfl/krzzsq/200809/t20080916_7578.htm; "Guandong Shengzheng Gaikuang" [A general view of provincial politics of Guangdong]. Guangdong Provincial Government Secretariat, May 1942.

⁶ The Civil Code stipulated the definition and the requirement of a legal marriage, while the criminal code was used in court when dealing with bigamy, abandonment, or maintenance lawsuits.

⁷ This is taken from statistics from Guangzhou Municipal Government, Social Branch, where it published data on the origin of traveler coming to Guangzhou, listing the abovementioned counties in June 1941. *Guangzhou Shi Shehui tekan* (Special Edition of Guangzhou Society), Guangzhou Municipal Government, Social Branch, 1941.

operated near or inside the Japanese zone of control.⁸

The Censored Public Discourse in Wartime Newspapers

Newspapers in wartime south China were heavily censored or outright controlled by the government. When the Japanese army installed collaborators, it quickly established newspapers as a propaganda organ of the collaborationist government. From the early months of occupation to the end of occupation on August 15, 1945, these heavily censored newspapers, including the Chinese-language *Guangdong xunbao*, which was printed by the Japanese military, recurrently published articles about domestic quarrels that bore no relevance to the war. In Nationalist Guangdong, newspapers were either government funded or were heavily censored by the state, although some criticized the government on corruption or on economic hardship in editorials and commentaries.

The relationship between the contents and the government was less opaque, but nonetheless columnists and contributors had to write within an acceptable bound considered by government censors. Therefore, regardless of subject matter, collaborationist newspapers portrayed negatively the “useless resistance” by the Chongqing regime while boosting the efforts of the collaborationist government, and vice versa in Nationalist press. Even in apolitical sections of newspapers such as love advice columns or social news articles, the writing reflected the political objective to

⁸ “Nanpanshun qingxiang ducha zhangyuan gongshu bugao: Jiaoban xihai gexiang feigong” [Proclamation of the Nanhai-Panyu-Shunde counterinsurgency department: exterminate bandits and Communists in each village in Xihai, Panyu District], *Guangdong xunbao*, April 24, 1945. (Hereafter abbreviated as *GDXB*); Regarding bandits in no-man’s land, see Helen Siu, *Agents and Victims in South China: Accomplices in Rural Revolution*. Stanford University Press, 1989. p. 88-115.

denigrate the opposing government while parroting official positions.

The public discourse cultivated by the newspaper editors, owners, and censors in collaborationist press discussed daily struggles such as relationship and marriage customs in editorials, commentaries, love advice columns and social news articles. It is impossible to ascertain the reception of the public discourse on the local population, and the questionable authorship of reader's questions to love advice columns, especially when subjects inquired in these questions coincided with official policies discussed in the same newspapers.

Dating and Romance in Wartime

The war in south China did not stop either the collaborationist or the Nationalist government from influencing the public on marriage customs. Dating was an inevitable precursor of free-choice marriages, and both the collaborationist and the Nationalist press shared a number of views on dating practices during wartime. However, there were major differences which could be attributed to political objectives of each state. The collaborationist government desired its people to focus on dating and romance as part of its propaganda to restore normality under its governance, while the Nationalist government wanted suspension of dating for the population to focus on national resistance.

Commonalities

In their respective newspapers, articles, editorials, general advice columns, and (in collaborationist Guangzhou) dedicated love advice columns, columnists and authors in state affiliated or censored newspapers criticized women's materialist

tendencies and lamented the excessive expenses incurred in dating, which became increasingly unaffordable due to wartime inflation. With the arrival of Japanese invaders, Nationalist newspapers in south China shifted from nonintervention in dating behavior to a heavy-handed suppression of romance, while printing numerous exhortations to court frugally during a period of wartime austerity. Acknowledging the role of money in facilitating dating, when a date in a restaurant could cost hundreds of Chinese yuan, and marriage preparation would require tens of thousands, columnists in Nationalist newspapers nonetheless suggested that money could not buy love.⁹ Possibly as a continuation of the pre-war narrative against consumerism by modern girls, women were vilified for causing the commodification of romance.

Columnists in Nationalist newspapers also alleged that excessive dating expenses were the cause of involuntary bachelorhood. An article on involuntary bachelorhood said that only the rich could afford dating behaviors such as holding hands in a public park, watching a movie with a date, or eating at a restaurant. They were beyond the reach of lower or middle-level bureaucrats or schoolteachers. The article also charged that women, particularly modern girls, were materialistic and incapable of suppressing their desire for luxury even during a national emergency. Although the same article said that sex ratio imbalance was a factor in making it difficult for men to date, the author blamed women and high dating costs as the root cause of involuntary bachelorhood.¹⁰ In another article, the commentator charged that

⁹ “Aiqing yu shangpin” [Love and merchandise], *Chenbao*, February 14, 1944.

¹⁰ “Lian'ai nan jiehun you nan” [Falling in love and getting married are difficult], *Daguang Bao*, September 8, 1942.

the inability of many men to find a suitable mate due to high dating costs created involuntary bachelorhood.¹¹

In collaborationist press, commentators were equally critical of women's materialism and the role of money in dating. Editors preached to female readers to refrain from selling their love or bodies for money. In a two-part treatise on the meaning of love published in 1939, the opinion writer argued that "some traded love for material goods, and they were worse than prostitutes, since prostitutes were forced by poverty." Furthermore, the author suggested that "some educated women are using dating and love to exchange for pretty clothing, good meals, a nice car, and a large house, but their marriages are bound to fail." For those women mired in the dream of materialist comforts, the author implied nothing could save them from the path of destruction.¹²

Other than a common ground on diminishing dating expenses, each government press participated in public matchmaking. In collaborationist newspapers, love advice columns printed personal advertisements from readers.¹³ Love advice columnists agreed to publish these advertisements as a public service, noting that the

¹¹ "Zhao nupengyou" [Looking for a girlfriend], *Chenbao*, May 12, 1943.

¹² "Lian'ai wenti" [Questions on dating], *GDXB*, September 14, 1939.

¹³ The most famous and recurring love advice column during this time was "Luofunu" [A pretty and chaste woman from Qin, taken from a Tang Dynasty poem by Li Bai (701-762)], which began on April 15, 1941, in *GDXB*. This love advice column ran almost daily at first, but by 1943, it became an irregular column and expanded to answer all questions besides relationship on the collaborationist newspaper. Initially, the title of the column was "Lian'ai wenda" [Love Q&A,] responded by someone with the pseudonym of Luofunu. The title had changed to "Luofunu xinxiang" [Luofunu's column] on March 18, 1942. Other collaborationist newspapers also printed love advice columns, for examples, there were "Lu xiaojie xinxiang" [Miss Green's column] in *Minsheng wanbao* (hereafter abbreviated as *MSWB*) and "Wan furen xinxiang" [Mrs. Wan's column] in *MSRB*.

"half new and half old" Chinese society caused difficulty in finding a mate.¹⁴ Advice columns facilitated matchmaking by posting responses from other readers.¹⁵ These personal advertisements expressed qualities desired in a potential mate, such as youth, health, and some degree of education.¹⁶ Intended to help frustrated young people find their true love, these columns reinforce the perception that the collaborationist government was encouraging dating and marriage to facilitate a return to a normal life.

The Nationalist state also provided matchmaking services for unmarried youth but with fewer successes.¹⁷ The nationalist press announced that in 1944, one hundred and six people registered at the social services departments for marriage introduction, resulting in six successful matches. The title of the announcement that "it was harder for men to find a mate than women" reflected the Nationalist government's desire to facilitate marriage and alleviate the problem of involuntary bachelorhood for the sake of maintaining stability in wartime society.

Contrasts

The two regimes held opposite positions on dating and diverging attitudes about free-choice marriages. The collaborationist government was politically

¹⁴ "Lian'ai wenda: Zailai yifeng zhengqiu nuyou de xin" [Love Q&A: another personal advertisement for a girlfriend], *GDXB*, December 31, 1941.

¹⁵ For example, a woman posted a personal advertisement on March 2, 1942. There were two responses, on March 10, and March 17, 1942, all of which the love advice columns published. "Lian'ai wenda: Zhengqiu nanyou" [Love Q&A: looking for a boyfriend], *GDXB*, March 2, 1942; "Yifeng da xuehen nushi di gongkaixin" [A public letter responding to Miss Xuehen], *GDXB*, March 10, 1942; "Lian'ai wenda: Fu xuehen nushi shu" [Love Q&A: Responding to Miss Xuehen], *GDXB*, March 17, 1942.

¹⁶ "Lian'ai wenda: Zhengqiu nanyou," *GDXB*, December 31, 1941.

¹⁷ "Youzhengju: Nanzi qiu'ou nan, nuzi qiu'ou yi" [There is proof that it is harder for men to look for a mate while easier for women], *Chenbao*, January 12, 1944.

interested in preserving continuity of everyday life and fostering romance as its propaganda offered a return to normalcy. Hence, the collaborationist press portrayed extended dating as a precursor to a happy marriage in an ordered, peaceful society, and commentators in newspapers provided copious dating tips. In contrast, the Nationalist press diminished the role of dating, while arguing that wartime resistance against Japan took precedence over romance. Similarly, while the collaborationist press preached the values of free-choice marriage, the Nationalist discourse was more cautious in its praise of free-choice marriage. Although it continued to uphold free-choice marriage as a worthy goal in the reform of marriage customs, Nationalist commentators cautioned youth not to exert their free choice too recklessly.

The collaborationist press emphasized the positive value of dating, but with restraint. In the early years of the Japanese occupation of Guangdong, a series titled "Guides on the River of Love" was published at the back of a Japanese military-funded newspaper. Within, it preached values such as focusing on personalities and the spiritual union between couples while facing adversity.¹⁸ Other columns suggested that the readers extend their dating period and allow mutual attraction to grow, rather than making hasty decisions and rushing into marriage. The longer the dating period, the article indicated, the happier the couple would be after marriage.¹⁹ Timing was also important, and columnists instructed young readers to marry only after retaining the legal age of marriage and attaining financial independence.²⁰

¹⁸ These pieces of advice were short and often vague. However, they were recurrently printed in the Japanese funded and controlled newspaper, *Guangdong Xunbao*.

¹⁹ "Aiqing yu miyue" [Love and Honeymoon], *GDXB*, September 26, 1939.

²⁰ "Kafei zuo: Jiehun dehua" [Cafe talk: on getting married], *MSRB*, October 23, 1943.

Collaborationist commentators and columnists provided copious dating tips for their readers to succeed in seeking marital bliss in an ordered, peaceful society. In one instance, a columnist gave meticulous advice to young men on proper behavior when on a date, such as being a gentleman in a restaurant or a tea house, escorting the woman back home before nightfall, wearing appropriate attire, and refraining from writing fawning letters to one's preferred romantic partner.²¹ Similar advice on proper dating behavior was given to the reader via love advice columnists such as the prolific Luofunu in *Guangdong xunbao*. In one article, a young man asked if he should confess his feelings to a woman he liked, even though he did not know her well. The advice columnist answered that he should first get to know her, followed by outings with her at movie theaters and teahouses, and only when mutual feeling had been developed should he confess to her.²² Columnists' advice served more than guiding men in dating, but also subtly advertised the prosperity of south China under collaborationist governance. With descriptions of youth and their love troubles, the collaborationist press presented to its readers a society where the youth's primary concern was about their marital happiness, such as learning proper behavior in a tea house, restaurant, or cinema, and writing love letters. These dating activities were typical in peacetime, but their discussions in the middle of a war conjured an image of living a happy life where people pursued love in peace and not war, the exact

²¹ "Jiaoji xuzhi: Nanhaizi yingyou de zhishi" [What young men should know in social interactions], *GDXB*, December 2, 1942.

²² "Lian'ai wenda: Wen ta shifou youyi aiwo" [Love Q&A: Does she like me?], *GDXB*, April 30 and May 1, 1941. This sentiment in favor of letting friendship blossom into a relationship after an extended dating period could also be seen in other articles within the same series. For example, see "Lian'ai wenda: Ceyan airen xin" [Love Q&A: testing her heart], *GDXB*, August 10, 1941.

opposite of the image in the Nationalist press.²³

The Nationalist press initially suggested a temporary suspension of dating. Columnists questioned the compatibility of dating with war support, while commenting that dating was a waste of time and money that could be repurposed for the home front. Articles published by state-affiliated organizations such as the Three People's Principles Youth Corps instructed the youth to organize for collective life and wean themselves from selfishness, unruliness and hedonism.²⁴ Other articles instructed men and women to forget about love and contribute to the front line, where young women were instructed to stop dating and spending extravagantly, and young men to postpone their search for love while an enemy was threatening China. Instead of indulging in unrequited love, a young man should love the nation and the people suffering from the war.²⁵

Later in the war, the nationalist press softened its position on dating, instead advocating for economizing time and money spent. In a moralizing treatise in *Daguang bao*, a newspaper published in Shaoguan in August 1941, the author acknowledged that dating and romance had transformative power that could lead to higher productivity and a happier lifestyle. However, the author stated the danger of

²³ This sentiment was most explicit in one of the earlier love advice columns. The questioner explained his rationale for leaving his wife in his village in Nationalist south China to go to Guangzhou, as the "war of scorched-earth resistance" destroyed his properties and brought in hyperinflation. In Guangzhou, the narrator found a good job and secured a living due to a shortage of administrative talents. His well-paying job connected him with another woman, hence the necessity of writing to a love advice columnist. See, "Wan furen xinxiang" [Mrs. Wan's column], *MSRB*, June 11, 1940.

²⁴ "Guangdong qingnian: Kangzhan shiqi qingnian yingyou de juewu" [Guangdong Youth: What the youth should know during the war of Resistance against Japan], *Daguang bao*, December 6, 1939.

²⁵ "Gei xiaojiemen" [To missus], *Kaiping Ribao*, December 15, 1939; "Pengyou buyao kuchan taba" [My friend, stop bothering her], *Kaiping Ribao*, December 20, 1939.

spending too much time on dating while ignoring the nation's plight.²⁶ In April 1943, the government enacted an edict banning dancing in the name of promoting wartime austerity. Dancing was among the more common dating activities for young couples, but the state charged that “dancing between sexes could lead to moral decadence” and mandated hard labor and possible conscription into the army for men who violated this edict. No punishment was mandated for women.²⁷

Free-Choice Marriages

The collaborationist press described arranged marriage as one evil of the traditional family structure that deprived people of marital happiness. Since there was no love between the new couple in an arranged marriage, the editor of a forum on this topic suggested that arranged marriages led to unhappy wives and to husbands visiting brothels. Instead of arranged marriages, the forum editor advocated a version of free-choice marriage in which elders could introduce a couple who could then date. Alternatively, the couple could choose each other and receive parental supervision, guidance, and approval to marry.²⁸ Likewise, love advice columns wrote about free-choice marriages. When questioners wrote for help in choosing between a partner arranged by others or one found through free choice, the columnist usually advised

²⁶ “Lian'ai yu kangjian” [Romance and construction in the resistance against Japan], *Daguanq bao*, August 26, 1941.

²⁷ “Jieyuehui jueyi: Yanjin nannu tiaowu” [The committee austerity ordered that dancing between men and women will be banned], *Daguanq bao*, January 24, 1943.

²⁸ This was not a public forum where people could write to the editor and express their opinion on the topic; rather, it was a space where the newspaper editors publicized their views, and they did not take any material from the readers. “Luntan: xiandai qingnian duiyu jiujiatin yinbao de taidu, 1-3” [Forum: modern youth's attitudes toward the old and traditional family 1-3]. *GDXB*, September 8 to September 10, 1939.

picking the free-choice partner.²⁹ Columnists instructed men to become economically self-sufficient before formally renouncing a marriage contract arranged by parents.³⁰ The collaborationists continued to promote free-choice marriage, even in July 1945 when Japanese defeat was imminent.³¹

Nationalist newspapers, in contrast, were ambivalent about promoting free-choice marriage. While careful to say that free-choice marriage remained the ultimate goal, columnists in newspapers accused youth of abusing their freedom of choice. They claimed that in response to pre-war discussion of free-choice dating and marriage, young men and women had developed “abnormal perspectives on love,” including insincerity, lust, and greed in dating.³² They particularly criticized the belief that romance necessitated full attention while ignoring one's education and the national struggle against Japan.³³ In discussing wartime gender relations in 1943, an article writer accused some youth of cohabitating or marrying without parental guidance. The result of these hasty marriages was separation, spousal abandonment, and unwanted children in state orphanages.³⁴

A satirical piece on wartime neologisms about dating in June 1944 exemplified disparagements of free-choice marriage and some dating practices in the

²⁹ “Luofunu xinxiang: Liang quan banfa” [Luofunu’s column: methods to solve two problems], *GDXB*, November 21, 1942.

³⁰ “Luofunu xinxiang: Fandui manghun” [Luofunu’s column: against arranged marriage], *GDXB*, February 28, 1943.

³¹ “Shehui luntan: Hunyin ziyou tan” [Social forum: on free-choice marriages], *GDXB*, July 8, 1945.

³² “Luanshi nannu” [Men and women in this challenging world], *Chenbao*, July 29, 1943.

³³ “Nannu guanxi de zong jiantao” [A general analysis of the relationship between men and women], *Chenbao*, July 19, 1943.

³⁴ “Luanshi nannu”, *Chenbao*, July 29, 1943.

Nationalist press. For example, "opening up the second theatre of operation" meant engaging in bigamy, and "a two-front war" referred to dating two women at once.³⁵ The neologism of "a speedy battle," denoting immediate cohabitation after five minutes of romance and ten minutes of negotiation, was fictional and unlikely.³⁶ But to the reader, these neologisms served to ridicule the exercise of free choice and to exaggerate youthful abuse of newfound freedom in choosing mates.

Instead of making rash decisions, commentators in the Nationalist press suggested choosing spouses based on mutual feelings and interests, and consulting with parents before the final decision. For instance, when a woman asked in a general advice column whether she should take the initiative to ask out her shy love interest, the editor replied by telling her that women should not be passive in love affairs, and that she should directly take the lead by asking him via letters. Furthermore, since her parents encouraged her to choose freely, she should ask her mother for ideas.³⁷

Ultimately, the Nationalist government had different priorities than its collaborationist counterpart, and its focus on cost and stability appeared conservative and even regressive compared to the New Culture Movement's ideal of reform of romance in pre-war public discourse in South China. Whereas the collaborationist press promoted dating and romance to induce a vision of returning to normality under its rule,³⁸ the Nationalist regime was not politically motivated to promote dating, and

³⁵ "Zhanshi lian'ai xinci" [Wartime neologism on romance], *Chenbao*, June 12, 1944.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Nuzi ying zhengqu zhudong" [Women should take the initiative], *Chenbao*, February 7, 1944.

³⁸ This sentiment was most explicit in one of the earlier love advice columns. The questioner began by explaining his rationale for leaving his wife in his village in Nationalist south China to Guangzhou, as "war of scorched-earth resistance" destroyed his properties and brought in hyperinflation. In

its press was interested only in suppressing dating costs. The posture of the Nationalist state on diminishing dating conflicted with the goal of wanting free choice dating and marriage, as the government found it necessary to restrain the youth from exercising their free choice.

The Role of the Civil Code in Reforming Unwanted Marriage Customs and Taboos

Reforming marriage customs was a priority for both the Nationalist and the collaborationist regime, as they shared the same pre-war Nationalist vision that some customs were illegal, economically unnecessary, and outdated. Both regimes found child daughter-in-law, concubinages, and bride prices targets for reform during the war, but with different political motives. The collaborationist amplified the liberal element of the pre-war Nationalist vision to foster a return to a prosperous and peaceful society under its control, linking social order with the legitimacy of the collaborationist regime. In contrast, the Nationalist regime that retreated to Chongqing cracked down unwanted marriage customs they considered unhelpful to wartime austerity.

Besides reproaching marriage customs that conflicted with the Civil Code or the economic objective of frugality and austerity, the collaborationist and the Nationalist press examined cultural notions relevant in marriage such as virginity and chastity. Commentators called the custom of proving virginity via nuptial blood

Guangzhou, the narrator found a good job and secured a living due to a shortage of administrative talents. It was his well-paying job that brought him in connection with another woman, hence the necessity of writing to a love advice column. See, "Wan furen xinxiang" [Mrs. Wan's column], *MSRB*, 11th June 1940.

unscientific, while at the same time advocated for wider acceptance of widow remarriage. In a bold step of reforming marriage customs, collaborationist columnists urged youngsters to overcome marriage taboo regarding behaviors that were legal but socially intolerable, at the same time condemning the outsized influence of lineage organizations on marriage practices.

Concubinage and child daughters-in-law

The Nationalist Civil Code in 1930 had *de jure* banned concubinage and child daughters-in-law, but these practices remained prevalent in occupied south China.³⁹

In fact, in the earliest days of the Japanese occupation, the newspaper linked the resurgence of matchmaking and contracting concubines with the restoration of peace in south China. Claiming that "residents were returning to Guangzhou and social order has been restored," commentators said that the renewed interest in acquiring concubines for procreating future offspring or diversionary entertainment became an indicator of collaborationist success in governance.⁴⁰

Eventually, however, collaborationist newspapers abandoned this favorable attitude toward concubinage, linking it instead with marital disharmony and increased cost of living. In a recurrent column titled "Public Research Forum on Social Questions" in 1941, the forum editor analyzed the rationale for contracting a

³⁹ Statute 980 forbade underage marriage, where a man under 18 or a woman under 16 was not allowed to marry. Statute 985 banned bigamy but did not directly address concubinage, and concubinage continued to be practiced in south China. However, *de jure* concubinage could not be formed according to the Nationalist Civil Code.

⁴⁰ "Yinyuan chashi zhi jinkuang" [Recent situations about finding a match in tearooms], *GDXB*, December 15, 1939.

concubine and the detrimental effects of concubinage on marriage.⁴¹ Conceding that men often took concubines to satisfy sexual desire, produce descendants, or find emotional satisfaction when there were incompatibilities between husband and wife, the editor nonetheless argued that concubinage could create jealousy between the principal wife and concubines while adding the cost of supporting additional members in the household. The forum concluded with a fictitious self-criticism of an emotionally and financially drained man whose wife had argued with him nonstop after he acquired a concubine. He remained financially responsible for both households and their maintenance without any increase in income.⁴² At the end of the story, the drained husband lamented that concubinage had brought ruin to his family.⁴³ The implicit message was that monogamy could prevent domestic disaster.

In Nationalist Guangdong, the state press criticized the custom of bringing in child daughters-in-law, while sidestepping the issue of concubinage.⁴⁴ Although both were already illegal, in 1940 the provincial government decided to reinforce the ban on bringing in a child daughter-in-law, suggesting that this practice remained widespread despite the Civil Code.⁴⁵ Then, in a recurring commentary column

⁴¹ "Shehui wentí gongkai yanjiulan: Heyiyao qu qieshi?" [Public research forum on social questions: why contract a concubine?], *GDXB*, April 27, 29, and 30, 1941.

⁴² The man's name "Qiren" [A person from the Kingdom of Qi] is an allusion to a story in the *Mencius* that describes a man from Qi who has both a wife and a concubine. In the Republican newspaper lexicon, "Qiren" or the "Happiness of Qiren" refers to a husband who has a concubine and a wife.

⁴³ "Shehui wentí gongkai yanjiulan: Heyi yaoqu qieshi?", *GDXB*, April 30, 1941.

⁴⁴ It was not that the Nationalist newspapers did not mention concubines or the issue of polygyny; they did, but they belonged in the social news sections and appeared in the form of troubles with mistresses, not concubines. The newspapers' commentary section did not give much space to discuss the pros and cons of concubinage, for the Nationalist government had already determined concubinage illegal, and they had a war to fight against Japan.

⁴⁵ "Shengfu tongling gexian qieshi tichang xiangcun jituan jiehun: Bing tichang hunli jieyue funu jianfa yanjin tongyangxi qudi funu chuaner" [The provincial government ordered each county to

published in 1942, Nationalist commentators argued the parents who brought in a child daughter-in-law was being self-serving, as they gained an abusable domestic serf to the detriment of the future married couple's happiness.⁴⁶

To aid child daughters-in-law and to foster legal awareness about this custom, the Nationalist press also published about emancipation methods in legal columns. Within these stories of child daughter-in-law seeking freedom from her husband, the press discussed the path of a child daughter-in-law journeying to the provisional provincial capital Shaoguan to retain a counsel in her nullification suit. Her education was the catalyst for freedom as she claimed her education in the county secondary school enlightened her to strive for a free-choice marriage and a better mate. Her husband, she said, was the son of a farmer, a dim-witted primary school graduate, and incapable of responding to her affection.⁴⁷ For underage child daughters-in-law, the legal column suggested no need for a lawyer or a court action. Instead, an underage child daughter-in-law with a twelve-year-old husband could talk to the son's parents and an announcement in the newspaper would suffice.⁴⁸ Also, since the practice of

earnestly encourage rural group wedding ceremonies: and to promote frugal wedding, haircutting, and resolutely banning child daughter-in-law and women's earrings], *Kaiping ribao*, February 2, 1940.

⁴⁶ "Fenghuo manhua: Kuliao ernu tongyangxi zaohun" [Talking among smoke signal: child daughter-in-law and early marriage will ruin the offspring], *Daguang bao*, November 9, 1942

⁴⁷ It is not known if she has already consummated the marriage. "Tongyangxi dule zhongxue qingqiu jiechu hunyue" [A child daughter-in-law in secondary school asks for voiding her betrothal], *Chenbao*, May 2, 1943.

⁴⁸ The lawyer was only concerned with the illegality of the marriage between a child daughter-in-law and her future husband, and he paid no attention to her livelihood after the proposed announcement on newspapers. An underage daughter-in-law would have no resource to rely on, and where would she go when she departed from the future husband's family that raised her? It would be rare for her natal family to take her back, as she was sold due to poverty. Also, why would the future husband family accept this, without causing some trouble to her? Hence, the lawyer's recommendation was *de jure* correct but impractical. "Yiri yida: Tongyangxi qingqiu tuoli guanxi" [A daily Q&A: a child daughter-in-law asking to separate], *Chenbao*, March 30, 1944.

raising child daughters-in-law violated the Nationalist Civil Code Article 973 for betrothal below the minimum age, which was seventeen for a man and fifteen for a woman, and Article 972 for an arranged marriage, the legal advice columnist assured the young woman that the Civil Code was on her side.⁴⁹

Stories of child daughters-in-law seeking nullification of their engagements with their future husband raised questions about the truthfulness of published material in the press and its relevance in real marital disputes. Although the press suggested that the court or a legal notice from a lawyer would suffice, it did not answer the practical question of survival after lodging the legal complaint, and whether a child daughter-in-law could gather enough money for long-distance travel and the lawyer's fees. Considering that she was a child daughter-in-law who wish to abscond from her family that raised her since she was sold, where could she raise the necessary funds? After suing her future husband, she could not be expected to stay at his residence anymore, and where could stay if she did not receive outside help?⁵⁰ Neither commentators or lawyers in the Nationalist press answered these practical questions, suggesting a large gap between the discussion on newspapers and the reception of the state's law among the populace.

⁴⁹ For more information about actual application of the Nationalist Civil Code, see Margaret Kuo, *Intolerable Cruelty: Marriage, Law, and Society in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 2012.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Although the social news editor describes this article positively, some facets of her story remain murky. How did she come up with the fund to travel to Shaoguan from Lechang County, a 50 kilometers journey, and retained a lawyer when legal fees were high? A child daughter-in-law would not be able to come up with that amount of money herself. Also, where would she stay and live after she filed the suit? The article is silent on this, but one could suspect outside help, possibly a lover she met at the Lechang County secondary school who was willing to help her leave her betrothal to marry her himself.

Criticisms of bride price and dowry

Without disputing the legality of bride price and dowry, both regimes had an economic interest to suppress these practices of marital transactions. In attacking bride price on several causes such as being financially exacting for young men and the transactional nature in marriage negotiations for men and women, both the collaborationist and Nationalist press pinpointed bride price as a representative of the old society's backward marriage customs.

The collaborationist government had an economic interest in suppressing marital transactions. Bride price was financially exacting for young men and seen as objectifying women into exchangeable commodities. Newspaper articles revealed the adverse effects of high bride prices and dowry. One example in 1939 described the impact of bride prices on lower-income households in Chaozhou, a city 216 miles from Guangzhou, where local bride prices ranged from 100 to 200 Chinese yuan. Young men had to work for years to acquire the money to pay the bride price, only to find that they could either marry an unappealing wife or risk involuntary celibacy. The article described a local practice of turning a betrothal agreement into a promissory note. A young man or his family would provide a down payment with the promise of full payment by a specific date, guaranteed by reputable stores. Only when the groom's family paid in full would the wedding proceed. Otherwise, the contract would expire, and the betrothal would be void.⁵¹ A corollary of high bride price was

⁵¹ The term used in the article is "qipiao," which in English translates to a "promissory note." However, it is not the most precise translation. A promissory note is a legal instrument between two parties in which the payer (the groom's family) will pay the payee (the bride's family) on-demand or on a predetermined future date, which is not the case here because the groom can pay at his convenience. It

the strategy of marrying off a daughter and using her bride price to bring in a daughter-in-law, minus ten or twenty percent for the daughter's dowry. This was not unique to south China, but the writer lamented that this had become a common phenomenon in the countryside and that young men who lacked sufficient funds or sisters of marriageable age were doomed to bachelorhood.⁵²

The official critique of high bride prices was most noticeable in love advice columns where readers recurrently wrote about marriage transactions as obstacles to marriage. In a collaborationist love advice column, a male reader accused his girlfriend's mother of "hoarding the girlfriend as a rare commodity" by demanding twenty piculs of Chinese wedding pastries, which he could not possibly afford.⁵³ The columnist responded that women are not a commodity and could not be hoarded and that he would have no obligation to pay for the pastries as long as the girlfriend

is also not a promissory note because a promissory note is a legal tender of transferable exchange (to another person or entity). Still, the bride's family could not use the betrothal contract in question. Instead, this is akin to an "American (style) option contract." The groom's family acts as the buyer of a call option (the engagement contract) because they have purchased the right (option) to exercise (pay in full) at the specific strike price (the agreed-upon bride price) before or at the specified time for the specified commodity (the bride). The sellers of this call option are the bride's parents because they would be obligated to marry off their daughter whenever the groom exercises his option, regardless of how beautiful, knowledgeable, or desirable she becomes (and whether she might now be able to contract a higher bride price). Although the bride's parents can pocket the premium (down payment) if he does not pay in full and abandons his promise, it will be the bride's loss because she would lose years of her youth, and age was an essential factor in determining the value of a bride price in Republican China. In contrast, the most the groom's family could lose was the down payment in not honoring the contract if they did not complete the engagement. They could let this option expire by not paying in full if there was a reason, such as finding a better woman for their son or rumors about the bride's undesirable qualities such as congenital diseases or premarital sex with someone else. "Maimai hunyin" [transactional marriages], *MSRB*, August 6, 1939.

⁵² "Maimai hunyin", *MSRB*, August 6, 1939.

⁵³ A picul (unit of mass) is 100 *jīn*, or 50 kilograms. Here, the mother asks for 20 piculs of Chinese wedding cakes, which equals 1000 kilograms of wedding cakes. That would be many Chinese wedding cakes to share with friends and relatives or an insincere offer to reject the male questioner's proposal to marry her daughter.

agreed to marry him without them. The columnist further suggested that the girlfriend's mother was soulless and backward for equating her daughter's marriage with a bride price.⁵⁴

Related to the critique of high bride prices was the condemnation of excessive dowries as a sign of social status. In a 1941 "Public Research Forum on Social Questions" column, the columnist argued that exorbitant dowries were draining financial resources during a time of national scarcity and reconstruction. Bemoaning the fact that parents often went into debt to provide for their daughters' dowries while burdening relatives with the obligation to give gifts corresponding to the dowry's size, the columnist advised readers to economize on marriage expenses, not unlike the Nationalist counterpart across the war-zone.⁵⁵

After its official declaration of war in January 1943, the Nanjing collaborationist government intensified its opposition to bride price as a frivolous marriage custom. The official entry into the war led to an increase emphasis of combatting bride price in the context of wartime austerity. Couples who could not gather enough money for a lavish wedding should commit to a frugal one, and donate the money saved to the war effort.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ This was a bride price requested in goods. "Luofunu xinxiang: Qihuokeyu" [Luofunu's column: hoarding a rare commodity], *GDXB*, January 8, 1943.

⁵⁵ The first line of this three-part series mentioned the Department of Education's proclamation on changing local customs and the government's responsibility to enforce local customs changes, including those affecting weddings and funerals, to economize for the sake of the nation recovering from disasters. The ultimate receiver of the wedding gifts remained unknown, as the article omits that detail. "Shehui wenti gongkai yanjiu lan: Guanyu gaishan shehui louxi" [Public research forum on social questions: on improving bad habits in our society], *GDXB*, May 1, 1941.

⁵⁶ "Zhanshi gongwuyuan yanhui ji songli xianzhi zhanxing banfa" [Interim wartime measures for restriction on banquets and gifts for Civil Servants], *MSRB*, December 15, 1943.

The Nationalist press was equally disparaging about bride price. In a darkly humorous commentary over the relationship between bride price and women's commodification in 1943, the commentator cited high bride prices and mockingly advocated price stabilization. Using business terminology, the article narrated the selling price for two women in different economic circumstances and their bargaining power in a marriage search. The first woman was trafficked by her starving refugee husband for three hundred Chinese yuan, while another well-to-do unmarried woman's betrothal agreement with a male banker yielded her thirty thousand Chinese yuan. In responses to large variation in bride prices, the writer suggested that a bride price should be based on previous usage (virginity) and desirability:

“One should receive a penny's worth of goods for a penny, and since the refugee's wife has already been used, a second-hand product could not fetch a high price. The unmarried young lady is in pristine condition, and the price would be different. Furthermore, the refugee's wife was in a buyer's market, but a seller's market for the unmarried lady.”

In the end, however, the article criticized the exorbitant bride price of the well-to-do unmarried woman by arguing that she could not exchange money for happiness and that she should reconsider her decision of selling her future for the thirty thousand Chinese yuan.⁵⁷

A comparison of bride price with rice prices in this period revealed that the average bride price was worth less as war progressed in both Nationalist and

⁵⁷ “Nuren de shenjia” [bride prices], *Chenbao*, June 19, 1943.

collaborationist China, but rapid inflation made it more difficult to pay as the war progressed. Sources are limited to bride prices reported in social news articles that only mentioned the nominal value, while other articles and price indexes reported the price of rice. Based on assumptions that price indexes are accurate and that the cost of rice serves as an inflation indicator, rampant inflation in the years of 1943-1945 had the largest effect on the diminishing amount of bride prices. Detailed rice price calculations, the exchange rate between currencies, and bride price in both collaborationist and Nationalist south China are given in Appendix I.

Early collaborationist newspapers indicated that the money given in bride prices in south China in 1937 was worth 6-7 piculs of rice, which served as a baseline of comparison for bride price during the Japanese occupation. Using newspaper articles around the same time, it appeared that the worth of bride price in the initial years of occupation dropped slightly. For example, one dispute in 1939 was about a bride price of one hundred Chinese yuan, of which eighty yuan was unpaid. The disputing parents established the bride price before the Japanese occupation, and yet, they were arguing over the same amount of money even when the previously agreed-upon bride price would now be worth fewer piculs of rice, around 4.76 piculs.⁵⁸ Compared to the baseline of 6-7 piculs of rice, marriage between prominent families had a higher bride price, in one case reaching one thousand Chinese yuan, equivalent

⁵⁸ Eighty yuan before the occupation would be sufficient to purchase six piculs of rice but would yield only 4.76 piculs of rice in February 1939, the time of publication of the social news article. “Zhui pinjin qingjia bian yuanjia” [Seeking bride price caused good in-laws to turn into adversaries], *MSRB*, February 24, 1939.

to one hundred piculs of rice.⁵⁹ (See Appendix I, Figure 3)

Bride prices diminished in later years of occupation from high inflation. In May 1941, a bride price of sixty Japanese military notes could buy one and a half piculs of rice. A bride price of five thousand Collaborationist Central Reserve Bank yuan, worth nine hundred Japanese military notes, could purchase only one-quarter picul of rice in June 1945.⁶⁰ Using the inflation-adjusted registration fees for group wedding ceremonies in collaborationist Guangdong as a benchmark, which was between one-third and one-half picul of rice, the bride price recorded in June 1945 was worth less than the registration fee for group wedding ceremonies. These numbers were not definitive but reflected a steep decline in bride prices.

In contrast to collaborationist areas, bride prices in Nationalist south China experienced a milder decline. In January 1943, a desperate farmer paid over three thousand yuan for his wife, equivalent to between seven to eight piculs of rice.⁶¹ In November, a man committed to a bride price of four thousand yuan, enough at the time to purchase four piculs of rice.⁶² The decline in bride price became noticeable in 1944 when a man paid 3000 yuan for a concubine, but this was worth only 2.25 piculs

⁵⁹ “Mei dai hunjia jiecheng meiman yinyuan” [Sister married in substitute and result in a good match], *MSRB*, January 8, 1940.

⁶⁰ In the article, the man recovered half of his bride price. Hence, he lost thirty yuan to cohabit with a woman for three days. “Sanshi yuan daijia tongju santian” [Spent thirty yuan to cohabit for three days], *MSRB*, May 17, 1941; “Ji jingfeng yu man langzhong” [A hurrying wind met a slow doctor], *GDXB*, June 8, 1945.

⁶¹ The bride absconded after less than three months of marriage. “Budan caifeng suiya” [Not willing to go with the crow (the farmer)], *Chenbao*, April 19, 1943.

⁶² “Tongchuang yimeng: Yige xiang suohui zengwu, yige xiang kuaishou lijin” [Having different priorities: one side wanted to recover gifts, the other to receive the bride price immediately], *Chenbao*, January 12, 1944.

of rice in September 1944 compared with seven to eight piculs in January 1943.⁶³ Similarly, a bride price in November 1944 described in a legal advice column of four to five thousand Chinese yuan was equivalent to three to four piculs of rice.⁶⁴ Compared to the minimal bride price of less than one picul of rice by the end of the war in the collaborationist area, bride prices in Nationalist south China remained a non-trivial expense.

There were also rare exceptions to the average. An article in February 1944 noted a wealthy man spent 30,000 Chinese yuan to acquire a college student to be his concubine, a sum that the press considered excessive and found it morally wrong.⁶⁵ That bride price would worth 15-20 piculs of rice. An extreme case involved an uxori-local marriage advertisement in March 1944, where a father who owned a jewelry shop offered one *jin* of gold, equivalent to 384,000 Chinese yuan, to anyone willing to marry his daughter.⁶⁶

Although both regimes criticized the practice of demanding bride price at length, neither state was able to persuade its people to stop spending on marriage during the entirety of the war in south China (1938-1945). Records indicate that a

⁶³ “Doufufan quqie” [A tofu seller contracted to bring in a concubine], *Chenbao*, September 21, 1944.

⁶⁴ “Chenbao xinxiang: Wo dasuan jiechu hunyue” [Chenbao’s letterbox: I am considering reneging my marriage engagement], *Chenbao*, November 7, 1944.

⁶⁵ “Daxue nusheng jia laoye zuoqie xuwen” [Follow up on the news about a college student becoming a rich person’s concubine], *Chenbao*, February 17, 1944.

⁶⁶ South China residents consider an uxori-local marriage dishonorable, as the husband would abandon his lineage to marry into his wife’s family. Only desperate men, or sons of higher birth order, would consider this. Subsequently, the father has to offer a “groom price” to incentivize a man to marry his daughter, which the article described her appearance to look like a melon and was “exceptional” (most likely not pretty). She had her engagement canceled over an unspecified reason and was desperate to find a husband. A *jin* equals 500 grams. “Huangjin yijin feng qiu huang” [A jin for gold for an uxori-local marriage], *Chenbao*, March 6, 1944.

bride price remained expected in marriage, and residents spent a non-trivial amount on bride price even during years of wartime inflation. Despite the best effort of both the collaborationist and the Nationalist regime in vilifying bride price for the sake of austerity or discussing it as a backward and untimely marriage practice, the people did not comply, nor did state discourses matter on this matter. The state could speak or disseminate its positions on newspapers, or in this period by two rival regimes, but they were not powerful or influential enough to regulate this level of intimate life in south China.

State discourses on virginity and chastity

In addition to lambasting illegal and uneconomical marriage practices, newspapers across the wartime frontier discussed cultural norms or notions in marriage such as women's virginity and chastity. In south China, there was a custom of using a roast pig to announce the bride's virginity as the word "pig" and "virginity" are homonymous in Cantonese, the lingua franca of that region.⁶⁷ When the bride returned to her natal home for the first time, the groom's family would send accompanying roast pigs to mark the acceptance of her into his family, and her parents would share the pigs to relatives and friends. The presence of roast pigs brought social honor to her natal family, but its absence could lead to permanent exile from the groom's family.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ An accurate description of equating roast pig and virginity can be seen in "Guangdong yinyu xietan 14: Zhubu" [Cantonese idiom #14: pig], *GDXB*, July 29, 1941. To describe a woman who is a virgin, local lexicon used the word "Shidezhu" [able to consume pork], hence linking a woman's virginity with roast pig.

⁶⁸ "Mianshi hunli xisu tan" [Marriage customs in the cotton city (Guangzhou)], *GDXB*, September 8, 1940. If the bride was cast out in this fashion, the groom's family would likely initiate a suit to recover

The collaborationist press criticized this notion of virginity and its symbolic equivalence with roast pigs by suggesting that this custom was old-fashioned and frivolous, while expressing hope that this equivalence would be replaced as society became more modern.⁶⁹ In love advice columns, the columnist extensively expressed its opinions on women's virginity and its negative influence in marriage negotiations.⁷⁰ The message, however, depended on the questioners and the intended audience. To women writing about issues in their relationships, the advice was to remain celibate and reject their boyfriend's desire to engage in premarital sex.⁷¹ However, when premarital sex had already happened, the collaborationist state discourse oscillated between regretful and supportive. Responding to a woman pregnant with her boyfriend's child, the columnist lamented that the woman's virginity was quickly taken by a well-to-do man's trickery.⁷² In another response to similar questions, the columnist opined that virginity should not be the sole determinant in a marriage negotiation and that "a person with an open mind would not care too much about it."⁷³ Although women's virginity was ideal for a new bride, the absence of virginity should not be an insurmountable obstacle for women to

some of the bride prices, explained later in this chapter.

⁶⁹ "Mianshi hunli xisu tan", *GDXB*, September 8, 1940.

⁷⁰ Women's virginity as a status was a determinant in marriage negotiation as there were men who were unwilling to marry a non-virgin, and a man's family could cancel a betrothal if she was later found to have engaged in pre-marital sex with someone else. Also, a woman who was no longer a virgin could expect a diminished bride price paid to her parents during the betrothal process.

⁷¹ "Luofunu xinxiang: fu meijuan nushi: xiang nanzi qiuhun" [Luofunu's column: responding to Ms. Meijuan how proposing to a man], *GDXB*, April 17, 1942.

⁷² "Luofunu xinxiang: wen youhe banfa zaori jiehun" [Luofunu's column: asking how to get married quickly], *GDXB*, April 23, 1941.

⁷³ "Luofunu xinxiang: qianlu mangmang" [Luofunu's column: uncertain future], *GDXB*, January 7, 1942.

achieve marital happiness.⁷⁴

On the flip side of expressing sympathy to women who suffered from outdated notion of virginity, the collaborationist press publicly scolded men who tarnished women's reputations by tricking them into surrendering their virginity. When a man asked on 23rd May and 24th May 1942 for advice on rescinding a betrothal with a woman who had cohabited with him and slept in the same bed, because he wished to marry her younger sister, the response was an outraged admonishment. Their prior cohabitation would cause a significant problem in her future spousal choice and marriage negotiations, leading to lower desirability despite his claim that she remained a virgin. Nonetheless, if she was indeed a virgin, a medical inspection would alleviate her future husband's concern.⁷⁵

In addition to the discussion of premarital sex and its impact on women's marriage choice, the collaborationist press also scolded men who wanted to leave a wife after discovering her unproven "impurity" from the absence of blood during consummation. Rather than casting one's wife from an unscientific understanding of women's virginity and anatomy, a man should not use hymen blood to prove virginity, as it was grossly inaccurate and carried implications severe enough to cause women accused of impurity into committing suicide. Instead, he should judge one's wife based on her behavior or circumstance that she had no control, such as being force raped against her will.

⁷⁴ There was a double standard in society regarding virginity, as women's virginity was considered essential, but men's virginity did not matter in marriage negotiations and post-marital life.

⁷⁵ "Luofunu xinxiang: bao qinchou weiji yu luan" [Luofunu's column: in the same blanket but without causing moral deviation], *GDXB*, May 23-24, 1942.

The emphasis of giving women a second chance in the collaborationist press could be further observed in a love advice column in November 1942. The columnist told the questioner that post-marital behavior matter more than a woman's history before marriage.⁷⁶ The columnist wrote:

"You have won the ultimate prize (marriage) and should be satisfied!

Why does it matter? As long as she loves you and no one else, then she is a good wife! Do not obsess over the hymen, for it has wrongly killed many women in society! Since both of you like each other, do not let this trivial affair cause discord, but instead enjoy your foreseeable marital bliss!"⁷⁷

In conjunction to the discussion of virginity was the definition and redefinition of chastity in the press. In Nationalist newspapers, the discussion of chastity focused on individual choice, marital fidelity, and gender equality. In 1943, an opinion piece in *Chenbao* advocated for a redefinition of chastity that would consider personal circumstances rather than treating chastity as an uncompromising moral requirement.⁷⁸ Chastity, the writer of the piece argued, was "a relative attitude between couples" and came with rights and responsibilities between couples. Thus, a new definition of chastity would require both husband and wife to be loyal to each other, and a wife would not need to remain chaste if he visited prostitutes or took a concubine. Also, as the concept of chastity was applicable only between couples,

⁷⁶ "Luofunu xinxiang: Gugeng zaihou" [Luofunu's column: a bone stuck at the throat (idiom: must express displeasure or will feel terrible)], *GDXB*, November 27, 1942.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "Tan zhencao guannian" [On the concept of chastity], *Chenbao*, September 4, 1943.

none should interfere in the widow's choice to remarry and no distinction between a widow's remarriage and a widower's remarriage.⁷⁹

Similarly, the collaborationist press also attempted to redefine chastity, but unlike the Nationalist press, the public debate focused on the widow remarriage and its social acceptance.⁸⁰ In 1942, when a recently widowed woman wrote to the love advice column to ask if she should remarry to a good-looking young man, the answer was positive. The columnist answered that widow remarriage was legal, and none had the right to interfere. Also, the column stated that discrimination was the primary cause of widows not remarrying. In the end, the columnist directed the woman to look for services of matchmakers specializing in widow remarriage in "auspicious places for contracting marriage."⁸¹

The collaborationist press tied chastity and widow remarriage with attaining both economic independence and wise motherhood.⁸² A rare six-part public conversation in April and May 1942 between a love advice columnist and two readers began by discussing the discrimination faced by widows regarding remarriage. The

⁷⁹ Ibid. No indication about this being catering to a rural versus urban audience.

⁸⁰ It did not mean that there were no unfaithful women in the collaborationist newspapers, for there were many social news articles. Nonetheless, in love advice columns and other columns, widow remarriage took the central stage of chastity's public discussion.

⁸¹ "Luofunu xinxiang: Zaijia" [Luofunu's column: (widow) remarriage], *GDXB*, January 3, 1942. An interesting point of note is the written language used in this particular response. The questions and the answer were both in Cantonese, the local lingua franca, instead of the standard Chinese used by the same love advice columnist used in other responses.

⁸² For more information about womanhood and the discourse of ideal women as "Good Wives, Wise Mothers" in Collaborationist Guangdong, a recent presentation by Dr. Bianca Yin-Ki Cheung covered this topic. See, Cheung, Bianca Yin-Ki, "Disobedience in disguise: discourse analysis on "Wise wives and good mothers" under the collaborationist regime in Guangzhou (1940-1945)" Presentation at 2020 AAS-in Asia, online from Kobe, 2nd September 2020. An abstract is available at <https://scholars.ln.edu.hk/en/publications/disobedience-in-disguise-discourse-analysis-on-wise-wives-and-goo>.

female reader and the columnists agreed that women's economic independence would lessen the discrimination or render moot the necessity of remarriage.⁸³ After the initial exchange, a male reader offered his opinions on widow remarriage, affirming a widow's right to remarriage but that widow should only remarry out of necessity, poverty, or lack of family support. However, if a widow had children to support, she should not remarry if she could sustain a livelihood with her husband's family material and financial supports.⁸⁴

The war did not pause the ongoing trend of challenging notions and the definition of virginity and chastity in both Nationalist and Collaborationist south China. As both regimes aimed to reform Chinese society and marriage, they unwittingly expressed similar ideas in their public discourses about suppressing backward marriage customs of the people.

Taboos

The collaborationist press took an extremely progressive position in criticizing marriage taboos regarding legal but socially unacceptable behaviors such as same-surname marriage or intra-lineage endogamy. The intensity of social opprobrium

⁸³ This conversation appeared on April 30, 1942, May 1, May 3-4, and May 28-29, 1942. "Luofunu xinxiang: Heyu nushi wen guanyu nuzi zaijiao wenti" [Luofunu's column: Ms. He Yu asked about widow remarriage], *GDXB*, April 30, 1942. Then there was the columnist's response to Ms. He Yu on May 1. On May 3 and May 4, someone wrote to the columnist as Mr. Zhang Zhongtian. "Luofunu xinxiang: Dui shijie wenti de jianjie" [Luofunu's column: My thoughts on chastity and widow remarriage], *GDXB*, May 3-4, 1942. After the column posted Mr. Zhang's opinion, Ms. He Yu asked again, on May 28, titled: "He yu nushi zaitan: Funu zaijiao wenti" [Ms. He Yu asks again about widow remarriage], *GDXB*, May 28, 1942. And the love advice columnists responded to her the next day, on May 29. On June 9, 1942, the male questioner Zhongtian wrote that "I saw that you published my contribution on losing chastity (widow remarriage), but has yet to see your response, wonder what you think about my opinions on that?" See, Luofunu xinxiang: Zhongtian wen: Ze'ou wenti" [Luofunu's column: Mr. Zhongtian ask questions on spouse selections], *GDXB*, June 9, 1942.

⁸⁴ "Luofunu xinxiang: Dui shijie wenti de jianjie", *GDXB*, May 3-4, 1942.

depended on each taboo; for example, marrying a person belonging to a religious order was a taboo that could be easily circumvented. When a college-educated reader wrote to the collaborationist love advice column about marrying a flirtatious young Buddhist nun in June 1941, the columnist advised him to press onward in wooing her.⁸⁵ As long as he could arrange her secularization ritual, the column wrote, there would be no legal problem, but his family might oppose his marriage to an ex-nun. Nonetheless, the columnist wrote that a person with modern attitudes should care nothing about outdated rituals and etiquette.⁸⁶

Taboos involved lineages would encounter stronger resistance, and the press framed lineages as a source of backwardness and hindrance to marriage reform. Lineages were targeted as they often prohibited marriage between feuding lineages or same-surname marriage, both of which legal pairings but socially unacceptable. In one narrative that describes the marriage between a woman surnamed Meng and a man surnamed Lu, the social news editor praised her heroic efforts to overcome her lineage's demand to divorce her husband. Even when she and her father were expelled from her lineage, she did not relent.⁸⁷ In contrast to Meng's portrayal as a paragon of

⁸⁵ "Luofunu xinxiang: Yu chujiaoren lian'ai" [Luofunu's column: dating a person in a religious order], *GDXB*, June 11, 1941. In Guangzhou, there were establishments of nuns who moonlighted as escorts for the wealthy and leisure class, and the love advice columnist did describe the nun in question as "acting like a prostitute." For more information about nun-escorts, see Peng Jianxin, "Minguo guangzhou changji shu wang" [Prostitution in Republican Guangzhou] *Guangzhou wenshi* 53, accessible at http://www.gzzxws.gov.cn/gzws/gzws/ml/53/200809/t20080916_8037_1.htm.

⁸⁶ They use the term "lijiao" [Confucian etiquettes and rituals]. "Luofunu xinxiang: Yu chujiaoren lian'ai", *GDXB*, June 11, 1941. It was considered improper to marry a nun; even if she became an ex-nun, the marriage would still be considered by others as inappropriate.

⁸⁷ The expulsion of the woman was merely symbolic, for she would be a member of her husband's family and lineage after marriage anyway. However, the expulsion of her father from his lineage carried severe consequences, for he would lose access to the income from lineage properties, participation in ancestral worship, not to mention social relations with anyone within the lineage. In

a new generation that used the Civil Code to protect her legal right of free-choice marriage, lineage members were described as unreasonable and mired in their outdated ways. The same criticism of lineage was true over same-surname marriages. When a love advice columnist responded to a reader concerning marrying his same-surnamed girlfriend, the columnist indicated that if the potential spouse was not a close relative with the same great-great-grandfather, same-surname marriage was legal despite local resistance from parents or fellow lineage members.⁸⁸

Couples would face the most resistance when challenging the taboo of intra-lineage endogamy, a subset of same-surname marriage.⁸⁹ Rural inhabitants living in lineage-based villages vehemently opposed intra-lineage endogamy because it violated the logic of lineage exogamy, as intra-lineage endogamy could cause potential conflict within while forgoing the benefit of strengthening marital ties with other lineages.⁹⁰ To combat lineage influence on this taboo, the collaborationist press invoked the Civil Code, explaining that the Civil Code allowed same-surname endogamous marriage. Also, when readers wrote to love advice columns on same-

effect, he would have experienced social death. "Hao xianqi yuanlai shi shichou" [The good wife is from the archenemy], *GDXB*, February 5, 1942.

⁸⁸ The term columnists used was "wufu" [Five degrees of kinship]. For an in-depth discussion of who is in the "wufu," see David K. Jordan, "Wufu: The Traditional Chinese Mourning Categories," *China Related Resources* (Blog), July 15, 2020, <https://pages.ucsd.edu/~dkjordan/chin/MourningGrades.html>; "Luofunu xinxiang: tongxing jiehun" [Luofunu's column: same surname marriages], *GDXB*, May 29 and May 30, 1943.

⁸⁹ For example, see "Luofunu xinxiang: Yu tongcun tongxing nuzi jiehun" [Luofunu's column: marrying a woman within the same village and same surname], *GDXB*, July 15, 1941; "Luofunu xinxiang: Yu tongzu nuzi jiehun" [Luofunu's column: marrying a woman from the same lineage], *GDXB*, August 9, 1942. In both cases, the villains in the columns are "zongfa shehui" [Lineage society], "xiangli" [Local (lineage) codes], and "xiang ren" [rural residents].

⁹⁰ On the local observance of surname exogamy, see Rubie S. Watson, "Class Differences and Affinal Relations in South China," *Man* 16, no. 4 (1981): 593–615.

surname endogamy, the responding love advice columnist instructed the youth to rebel against parental and lineage opposition, declaring that “it is up to the youth to spearhead the replacement of backward customs with new practices,” and in this case, resist lineage influence.⁹¹ Nonetheless, the columnist was not naïve about lineage power in rural south China and suggested that challengers live elsewhere as rural people were resistant to changes in marriage customs despite the law.⁹²

The backing of the Civil Code had its limit, and the state supported challenging the taboo against consanguineous marriage pairing but not incest.⁹³ If the pairing was legal according to the Civil Code, love advice columnists suggested going forward with the marriage. Still, they argued that the couple ought to consider the impact of consanguine unions among cousins on future offspring.⁹⁴ The press expressed its condemnation of incest when a pregnant questioner inquired about possible legal pathways to marry her brother in 1942.⁹⁵ Unlike other columns of the

⁹¹ "Luofunu xinxiang: Yu tongzu nuzi jiehun" [Luofunu's column: marrying a woman from the same lineage], *GDXB*, August 9, 1942.

⁹² Here, the questioner was explicit about his relationship with this woman: she was a "fei qinfang" [A person who does not belong to the same branch within the lineage], which meant they had different genealogically lower apical ancestors but share a genealogically higher apical ancestor. That would also squarely place their relations far enough from the "wufu" that would have prohibited their marriage under the Civil Code. "Luofunu xinxiang: Yu tongcun tongxing nuzi jiehun" [Luofunu's column: marrying a woman within the same village and same surname], *GDXB*, July 15, 1941.

⁹³ In the first version of the Nationalist Civil Code (1930), article 983 cited that one could marry one's maternal cousin if they are in the same generation. Still, marriage between same-generation paternal cousins would be void. Regardless of law, consanguine marriages between maternal first cousins would be taboo and utterly unacceptable to those with "backward customs" in mind. In general, this was a marriage that was tolerated but not encouraged. On the reason why some kind of consanguine marriages were tolerated but others were not, see Zhaoxiong Qin, "Rethinking Cousin Marriage in Rural China," *Ethnology* 40, no. 4 (2001): 347–60.

⁹⁴ The pairing described in this article involves a man marrying his mother's brother's daughter (MBD). "Luofunu xinxiang gubiao jiehun" [Luofunu's column: marriage between maternal first cousin], *GDXB*, May 7, 1943.

⁹⁵ "Luofunu xinxiang: Yu baoxiong jiehun" [Luofunu's column: marrying one's brother], *GDXB*, April 19, 1942.

same series that demonized "ancient Confucian morals and etiquette," the same columnist said that the incest taboo was not to be challenged, and only those as uncivilized as animals would engage in incestuous marriage.⁹⁶ Although the collaborationist discourse implored its youth to take a stand against backward marriage customs by marrying monogamously, frugally, and bravely with same-surname partners, the collaborationist government did not intend to allow legally prohibited marriages that are contrary to the Civil Code.

Group Wedding Ceremonies, Sumptuary Laws, and Administrative Measures on Marriage

In the name of social reform and austerity for the modernizing yet struggling state, the Chinese government on both sides of the war deepened its regulation of marriage by limited wedding expenses with promotion of group wedding ceremonies, sumptuary laws, and administrative measures on marriage. Before the Japanese invasion, the Nationalist government had a long history of using group wedding ceremonies to demonstrate state support of frugal weddings. Group wedding ceremonies were often the first action in state regulation of marriage practices because they were voluntary, unlike other efforts that required rigorous and constant enforcement. Both the collaborationist and the Nationalist government attempted to revitalize group wedding ceremonies extend the practice to the countryside. Despite repeated advertisements and recurrent exhortations to urban or rural residents to increase participation, turnout remained low, and the people continued their way of

⁹⁶ Ibid.

marrying during the war. More coercive methods such as sumptuary laws and administrative measures as a means of controlling wedding expenses theoretically existed and newspapers published these regulations. Regarding the effects of formal state efforts to change marriage practices, there were few observable results on the ground, and there was minimal compliance to state-mandated austerity measures.

Group wedding ceremonies in collaborationist and Nationalist China

The collaborationist government advocated group wedding ceremonies as part of its attempt to preserve economic resources by discouraging extravagance in marriage arrangements and weddings. Less than a year after the Japanese invasion and well before establishing a national collaborationist government, in 1939, the collaborationist Guangzhou municipal authority organized a group wedding ceremony for youths in the city.⁹⁷ According to the acting Chief of the Civil Affairs Department of the Guangzhou Peace Maintenance Committee, group wedding ceremonies would allow couples to conduct frugal marriage ceremonies and attain marital happiness simultaneously.⁹⁸ Although this group wedding ceremony in 1939 was never held, two years later, the collaborationist local government successfully hosted another group wedding ceremony as part of an ongoing effort to control

⁹⁷ “Mínzhèng chū jùbān jítuán jièhūn, wèihūn qīngnián jiédàhuānxī” [The Civil Affairs Department is organizing a group wedding ceremony, and unmarried youths will be happy], *MSRB*, September 8, 1939.

⁹⁸ The municipal government was different from the initial "Peace-Maintenance Committee" in name only; functionally, the municipal government was the successor of the peace-maintenance committee. Many committee members became officials in the collaborationist municipal government in Guangzhou. For an explanation of the institution of the peace maintenance committee, see Timothy Brook, *Collaboration*, 47-54.

costs.⁹⁹ Despite the cost-saving advantages of group wedding ceremonies and the recurrent attempts by the state discourse to promote them, few couples signed up.¹⁰⁰ The recurring mandate to cut costs and be frugal in weddings was further reinforced in 1941 by the chief of the Social Services Department, who argued for a thorough reform of “backward” customs and an end to the waste of valuable resources on weddings in consideration of “present circumstances,” a time when frugality was needed.¹⁰¹

The collaborationist state press published a moralizing editorial to create a public discussion and increase participation in group wedding ceremonies.¹⁰² Noting that creeping inflation created hardship for youths to have a proper wedding ceremony and caused many couples to remain unmarried, the collaborationist municipal government declared that it was responsible for ensuring its inhabitants were married correctly. Furthermore, it argued that official backing by the government would make the austere and spartan group wedding ceremonies equally auspicious to the lively and noisy weddings preferred by social conservatives. This comparison between austere and noisy weddings implied that group wedding ceremonies were modern and progressive, and placed the collaborationist government

⁹⁹ “Shehui wenti gongkai yanjiu lan: Jituan jiehun” [Open editorial on social issues: group wedding ceremonies], *GDXB*, May 7, 1941.

¹⁰⁰ Only five pairs signed up for the 1941 group wedding ceremonies; see “Benshi shehui gongbu: Diyijie jituan jiehun xinren xingming” [Names of the couples in the first group wedding ceremonies as announced by the Social Services Department], *GDXB*, May 20, 1941.

¹⁰¹ “Shi shehuiju juban diyijie jituan jiehun” [The Social Services Department (of Guangzhou) is organizing the first group wedding ceremonies], *GDXB*, April 24, 1941.

¹⁰² “Shehui wenti gongkai yanjiu lan: jituan jiehun” [Public research forum on social questions: group wedding ceremonies], *GDXB*, May 7, 1941.

as the driver of improving Chinese society, one modern and stable marriage at a time.

Aside from local municipal initiatives, the collaborationist regime in Nanjing passed a national edict to promote group wedding ceremonies in both cities and the countryside. In the edict sent to each rural and suburban county under its control, the collaborationist government in Nanjing noted that marriage and entertainment costs were higher than before the war, therefore justifying a national campaign to imitate the thrifty practices of "friendly" Japan and promote a frugality culture.¹⁰³ All rural counties and municipalities were to organize group wedding ceremonies in public halls built for festive occasions and funerals to reduce wedding spending.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the collaborationist state suggested that tea parties should replace weddings and that gifts for the new couple should be no more than a few dollars per guest.¹⁰⁵

Records show that the suburban county bordering Guangzhou, Panyu, acknowledged the national edict on group wedding ceremonies and related suggestions on wedding practices. However, the Panyu county government treated the

¹⁰³ "Xunling xian 6011 hao ling quanqu zunzhao dierjie quanguo jiaoyu xingzheng huiyi gailiang xisu yaogang banli jubao" [Order County # 6011 [[Ordering the entire district to adopt the measure and the standard from the Second Plenum of the National Educational Executive Committee on Reforming Customs]] "Panyu Xiangzheng gongbao" [Panyu County Gazette], 20 (August 12, 1942).

¹⁰⁴ This edict came from the Second Plenum of the National Educational Executive Committee, and the order was transmitted to the provincial-level Department of Education. The rationale for marriage customs to be the purview of the Department of Education was because the collaborationist state deemed educational institutions should take charge of reforming customs. The organization in charge would be either the municipal department of education or each city would create a "minjiaoguan" [Civic education office] to organize group wedding ceremonies. For rural counties, the edict ordered that the educational institutions be in charge.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. The exact amount is not clearly defined since it said: "Yi yiyuan eryuan sanyuan weixian" [using one, two, or three yuan as the limit].

edict casually as it transmitted the edict further down to each district chief. Citing the lack of civil education office in each district to expand rural group wedding ceremonies, the county government gave no deadline and allowed district chiefs to implement the edict as they saw fit.¹⁰⁶

Compared to the collaborationist regime, the Nationalist government in south China extolled group wedding ceremonies with even more fervor, stressing their usefulness to the nation year after year, and had higher participation rate. Group wedding ceremonies aligned with the Nationalist discourse on reforming marriage customs as outlined in the descriptions of the advertisement of the first provincial group wedding ceremony in February 1940.¹⁰⁷ Participation in a group wedding ceremony required the couples to adhere to a set of minimum conditions, including the demands for free-choice marriage, parental approvals from both sides, monogamous marriage, and adherence to the Civil Code.¹⁰⁸ The government set the tone by focusing on a simple wedding, where each couple would have only ten guests, and tea-gatherings would replace wedding banquets, a step both the nationalist

¹⁰⁶ The response to this edict in the gazetteer was this: "Although we should follow this edict, but because there is no civil education office in our county; therefore, each district should be responsible for implementation. Each district should implement this order and be ready to submit a report when asked." Unfortunately, no record exists to trace the implementation of this edict in Panyu County, and its effect on rural counties remains unknown. It is also unknown if other rural counties under collaborationist control in south China implemented this edict from Nanjing. Considering that there was a war underway and that the collaborationist government in Guangdong had no direct land connection to Nanjing at the time, the incentive to follow Nanjing's directive was minimal.

¹⁰⁷ "Guangdong sheng diyijie jituan jiehun banfa" [Standards in the first provincial group wedding ceremonies in Guangdong], *Daguang Bao*, February 15, 1940.

¹⁰⁸ The text refers to Chapter 2, section 2 of the 1930 Civil Code, which is on marriage. The specific statutes are from Code 980 to 999, covering section on eligibility and permissibility to marry.

and collaborationist took in their intervention in wedding formats.

Similar to the collaborationist government's use of the controlled press, the Nationalist state newspapers vividly discussed the benefits of group wedding ceremonies to foster support for frugal weddings. In an editorial published in March 1941 about the first provincial group wedding ceremonies after the commencement of the war, it echoed the Nationalist discourse that group wedding ceremonies were essential to the mission of building a progressive society through reforming marriage customs.¹⁰⁹ Despite the national resistance and the war should take priority over the pursuit of familial happiness, the nationalist press advocated men of marriageable age and liable to conscription should marry as soon as possible.¹¹⁰ However, wartime marriage should adhere to the austerity movement and minimize any unnecessary expenses, and group wedding ceremonies was the perfect answer. Citing the fact that weddings in peacetime were prohibitive and costing the rich a few thousand Chinese yuan and up to a thousand yuan for the middle class, the editorial stated that such reckless spending was inappropriate during the war and must be stopped for the sake of the individual person involved in the wedding and the nation.

The Nationalist state intensified its intervention when participants in group wedding ceremonies were expected to voluntarily donate wedding gift money,

¹⁰⁹ "Xian jieduan zhong jituan jiehun de yiyi" [The meaning of group wedding ceremonies], *Daguanbao*, March 10, 1940.

¹¹⁰ There was no reason given for promoting men at the marriageable age and liable to conscription to get married as soon as possible. However, one could guess that a married man is more likely to fight for his new family and country, and also marriage would bring stability to the society and peace of mind for the soon-to-be soldier.

ostensibly to frontline soldiers.¹¹¹ Not only were group wedding ceremonies an avenue of reforming social customs, but they also reflected the desire of the resource-hungry Nationalist government to reach into the coffers of its citizens by reallocating wedding gifts into donations, and turning group wedding ceremonies into a perfect combination of patriotism, austerity, and social reform. The state discourse meticulously documented each donation amount to the yuan; for example, the first pair donated ten Chinese yuan, the second pair six, the third pair twenty, the fourth pair eighteen, the fifth and sixth pair each donated three yuan. These donations were collected by the committee organizing the group wedding ceremony.¹¹² The second provincial group wedding ceremony followed this practice of extracting donations from wedding gift money, totaling three hundred and thirty-four dollars.¹¹³ The diverting of wedding gift money from the intended recipients, most likely the parents of the couples, to public causes reflected the state vision of extracting as many resources as possible and reinforced the prewar goal of placing the nation as the

¹¹¹ “Tuanhun jisheng” [A recollection of the group wedding ceremony (in 1940)], *Daguang bao*, April 5, 1940.

¹¹² If taken in full faith as the sole wedding gifts received by the couple, these amounts would be absurdly low, especially considering that a middle-class wedding would cost up to a thousand yuan as suggested by the editorial published on March 10, 1940. Therefore, one could suspect that there was additional gift money given to the bride and the groom after the group wedding ceremonies took place.

¹¹³ The state discourse used “xinlang juxing xianjin” [The grooms held the donation], carrying a connotation that it was organized. The first pair gave 20 Chinese yuan, the second pair 4 yuan, the third pair 300 yuan, the last pair 10 yuan. Such anomaly of the third pair receiving and donating a high amount of wedding gift money was possibly tied to their provincial origin. The third pairs were both from Jiangsu Province. On the origin of each pair of couples, see “Zi jiang baogao canjia bensheng dierjie jituan jiehun yuanyang gongbu ruxia” [I hereby report the names of couples participating in the second provincial group wedding ceremonies], *Daguang bao*, October 11, 1940. On the actual donation amount, see “Qiyingshui jituanhun: Liangda dianli shengkuang” [A gathering of seniors and group wedding ceremonies: details of the two grand ceremonies], *Daguang bao*, October 16, 1940. This event took place on October 15, 1940, under the auspice of the Provincial Assembly Speaker Wu.

figurative head of all families in wedding ceremonies.¹¹⁴ However, this practice constituted a financial incentive to not participate in group wedding ceremonies.¹¹⁵

Nonetheless, the state's concern with marriage customs was not purely economic, as suggested by the requirement of pre-marital health examinations as a condition of acceptance in group wedding ceremonies. Couples in group wedding ceremonies needed to have certification by doctors that they were free of incurable diseases.¹¹⁶ Group wedding ceremonies were the perfect social laboratory for the nationalist state's goal of rejuvenating a modern nation with healthy families.

The Nationalist government also introduced group wedding ceremonies in rural south China, suggesting an expanded desire to regulate its people's marriages in the name of austerity and forming a nation with improved social customs and morals. Similar to the collaborationist outreach of reforming marriage customs in the countryside, the Nationalist discourse emphasized the urgent need for rural group wedding ceremonies to save labor, time, and costs, with an edict from the provincial authority instructing rural governments to promote group wedding ceremonies actively.¹¹⁷ An editorial from a Nationalist party newspaper found that past group

¹¹⁴ See Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953*, 85-89.

¹¹⁵ The names in the announcement from October 11, 1940, and the couple who married on October 15, 1940, did not match. Only two out of five pairs were from the original list.

¹¹⁶ "Jinnian jituan jiehun banfa dingding: Hunlifei guobi 500 yuan" [Standard for this year's (1944) group wedding ceremonies: fee will cost 500 Chinese yuan], *Chenbao*, September 11, 1944. This pre-marital health examination requirement was found only in the 1944 announcement for group wedding ceremonies, not in the regulations in the first provincial group wedding ceremonies in 1940. The requirement of pre-marital health examination by a state-approved doctor resurfaced again in early 1950 in Guangzhou. However, it was scrapped due to inadequate medical facilities and consideration of costs.

¹¹⁷ The provincial authority mentioned here is the "Guangdong sheng guomin jingshen zongdongyuan

wedding ceremonies had been restricted to cities and not organized in the countryside in the Siyi (Sze Yup) area, and it suggested group wedding ceremonies in an attempt to preserve the bankrupted rural economy by conserving all available resources to the resistance. Instead of spending thousands of Chinese yuan in a public ceremony, group wedding ceremonies would suffice.¹¹⁸

Two years after the initial proclamation from the Nationalist provincial government on expanding rural group ceremonies, there was some concrete proof that a group wedding ceremony occurred in the rural, “third-rate” Xinxing county on 17th November 1942.¹¹⁹ The report described the intricate details of the marriage, praising the event as auspicious yet frugal. Three couples from educational and business backgrounds married in a rural school hall, with young people, farm women, and local officials as attendees, followed by a tea-gathering after the ceremony. Additionally, it highlighted the difference between group wedding ceremonies and traditional weddings by stating that the attendees refrained from rowdy rituals with the brides, which was a mark of civility of group wedding ceremonies.

xiehui” [Committee on National Spiritual Mobilization in Guangdong Province], which requested the provincial government to enact an edict to reforming rural marriage customs. See “Qieshi tichang xiangcun jituan jiehun” [Earnestly encourages rural group wedding ceremonies], *Kaiping ribao*, February 2, 1940.

¹¹⁸ Siyi, or in Cantonese, Sze Yup (Four Counties), refers to the four counties of Enping, Kaiping, Xinhui, and Taishan, traditionally area of mass overseas emigration. Xinhui, the county closest to Guangzhou, is only 106 km southwest from Guangzhou, then the provincial capital of the collaborationist Guangdong.

¹¹⁹ The narrator himself used the term “third-rate county,” at the time referring to the most backward county in republican Guangdong, to possibly suggest that even the poorest county could organize group wedding ceremonies for its people. See “Jiali yifenglu: Xinxing jituan jiehun xieshi” [A note on changing social customs in the Xinxing County group wedding ceremonies], *Daguang bao*, December 5, 1942.

Noting the couples' background from the rural group ceremony in Xinxing, Guangdong, one could question the effectiveness of the nationalist discourse on reforming marriage customs and its reach to the rural population. While everyone in the county across social classes and occupations attended the ceremony, the couples worked in education or business, suggesting that the state's reach had yet to influence the entire rural society in south China. Those with more resources and educational background adhered to the Nationalist state discourse on reforms on marriage customs and austerity. Nonetheless, the article also reported on public enthusiasm toward the group wedding ceremonies, especially from younger men who commented on group wedding ceremonies as meaningful and dignified. The inclusion of young men's voices in support of group wedding ceremonies suggested the alignment of the interests of younger men in the countryside with the Nationalist state's goal of combining austerity with reforms of marriage customs.¹²⁰

As the goal of group wedding ceremonies was to promote austerity, the registration fees reflected that vision of enabling accessibility to frugal weddings. Unlike the collaborationist government, the nationalist government's ability to host group wedding ceremonies throughout the war allows a comparison of wedding costs in group marriage ceremonies to price indexes.¹²¹ Rampant inflation brought the fees

¹²⁰ Ibid. The words described chosen in the article were “You timian you youyiyi” [Dignified and meaningful]. One possibility for young men to be receptive to group wedding ceremonies was because men and their families were responsible to pay a hefty bride price to the bride's family, and group wedding ceremonies would save that spending, at least officially.

¹²¹ “Disanjie jituan jiehun” [Third (Provincial) group wedding ceremonies], *Daguang bao*, October 6, 1941; “Shaoshi shoujie jituan jiehun” [First Shaoguan municipal group wedding ceremonies], *Daguang bao*, October 8, 1942; “Shao dierjie jituan jiehun: Dingqi shuang shi juxing” [Second

for the weddings from ten Chinese yuan in 1940 to 500 Chinese yuan for the second Shaoguan municipal group wedding ceremonies in 1944, a fifty-fold increase.¹²² Despite the relatively high increase, however, five hundred Chinese yuan by 1944 was a third of a picul of white rice, or five catties of pork, which was an affordable amount compared to the wedding costs in disputes described in social news articles, and significantly much lower than the descriptions of wedding costs in the Nationalist critique of excessive bride price, dowry, and banquet spending.¹²³

Sumptuary laws and administrative measures

Beyond organizing voluntary group wedding ceremonies, each state also employed wartime sumptuary laws (laws regulating consumption) and administrative measures that controlled wedding formats and curbed excessive spending. Each government's first move on regulating people's wedding format was identical, which was encouraging the transition from wedding banquets to more frugal tea-gatherings.

Shaoguan municipal group wedding ceremonies will take place on the Double-Ten day], *Daguang bao*, March 3, 1944. There is no proof that the second municipal wedding ceremony took place.

¹²² “Guangdong sheng diyijie jituan jiehun banfa” [Standards in the first provincial group wedding ceremonies in Guangdong], *Daguang bao*, February 15, 1940; “Jinnian jituan jiehun banfa dingding: Hunlifei guobi 500 yuan” [Standard for this year's (1944) group wedding ceremonies: fee will cost 500 Chinese yuan], *Chenbao*, September 11, 1944.

¹²³ During the War of Resistance, nationalist newspapers published price indexes in Shaoguan. At first, it was weekly, and later it became more frequent. However, these were official prices, and the black market was presumably rampant. Only the official rate, as supplied by newspapers, will be used in this discussion. For price indexes in Shaoguan, in 1939-1940, see the series under “Shaoguan meizhou shangye hangqing” [Weekly price index in Shaoguan]. For example, a picul of “Youzhan mi” [White rice], was only 26 Chinese yuan on August 8, 1939, and the 10 Chinese yuan fee for group wedding ceremonies amounted to 38% of a picul of white rice. For the cost of living in Nationalist Guangdong during the war around 1944, see “Shenghuo zai zhaoqing” [Living cost in Xiaoqing], *Chenbao*, April 2, 1944. For price indexes around the time of the announcement in 1944, see “Shaoshi hangqing” [Price index in Shaoguan], *Chenbao*, September 11, 1944. Another comparison could be based on the price of the newspaper itself; in October 1939, *Daguang bao* cost four cents, or one yuan for a monthly subscription; in March 1944, *Daguang bao* cost 2 Chinese yuan per day, also a fifty-fold increase. A picul of rice is equal to 100 catties.

Furthermore, both states issued restrictions on the ingredients and the number of dishes to be served in wedding banquets. As the war progressed, the transition away from wedding banquets became mandatory in each government's sumptuary laws. Furthermore, both governments placed an upper limit on the value of a permissible gift in weddings, with the Nationalists taking more drastic steps by pushing wartime saving bonds as wedding gifts. Overall, Nationalist sumptuary laws had broader regulations of many components of weddings than their collaborationist counterparts, and the Nationalist government enforced its sumptuary laws with much more political will than the collaborationist government.

The Nationalist regime issued sumptuary laws earlier than the collaborationist state, and all parts of everyday life, including marriage customs and wedding rituals, were under the purview of state regulations. In 1942, the provincial nationalist government passed a sumptuary law on wartime austerity in Guangdong.¹²⁴ The law strictly limited the consumption of exotic food, encouraged the use of national products, and shortened hours of operation for restaurants and leisure establishments. While these demands indirectly affected wedding rituals by limiting the number of dishes and timing of wedding banquets, none was more intrusive than the regulations on wedding gifts.¹²⁵ Accessories such as mirrors, cloth or silk celebratory hanging

¹²⁴ “Zhanqu zhangguanbu gongbu yue zhanshi jieyue banfa” [Regulations on wartime austerity from the regional commander in Guangdong], *Daguang Bao*, July 1, 1942. A complete text of this sumptuary law is located in Academia Historica, Taipei, File 014-010601-0016, titled “Guangdong sheng zhanshi xianzhi yanhui, yinshi, fuyong, yule ji hunsang liyi zhanxing banfa [Interim wartime measures for restricting banquets, restaurants, clothing, entertainment, weddings, and funerals in Guangdong Province], October 1942.

¹²⁵ Wedding gifts are not the same as bride price or dowry. This sumptuary law did not mention bride price or dowry, only on the gifts given to the new couple or their family.

scrolls, or silver shields were deemed impermissible.¹²⁶ Instead, paper celebratory scrolls should be used to save resources.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the state established an upper limit of five Chinese yuan per person on cash gifts, and encouraged gift-givers to give wartime saving bonds instead.¹²⁸ There was no limit on the value of these saving bonds that could be given to the new couples.¹²⁹ Consequences of violating these clauses on excessive gift-giving ranged from a police reprimand for a mild offense to admonishment by the courts for repeated infractions. By 1944, the Nationalist state enacted a stricter sumptuary law that outright banned wedding gifts, with one exception: if they desperately needed the assistance and asked for money, cash gifts could be given.¹³⁰ Furthermore, it reiterated that wedding ceremonies should be as solemn and frugal as possible.

¹²⁶ "Xizhang" [a celebratory hanging scroll] is a large piece of cotton or silk cloth hanging scroll with auspicious and celebratory messages written on top. "Yindun" [Silver shield] was a popular celebratory gift in late Qing and Republican China where celebratory words, the names of the giver(s), and the recipients would be inscribed on a silver-plated shield-shaped plaque. For more information about the silver shield, see a blog (In Chinese) by Zhao Zhongquan, "Jieshao wo shoucang de liangjian yindun" [Introducing my two silver shields in my collection], Sohu (blog), last modified by March 15, 2016, <http://zzq1385.blog.sohu.com/140154756.html>.

¹²⁷ The regulations were clear about the distinction between the long, silk celebratory hanging scroll, and "xi lian" [Celebratory rhyming couplets, traditionally affixed vertically on doors or the side of the doorway]. Celebratory rhyming couplets are usually written on paper; therefore, this part of the regulation could be a redundant reinforcement of austerity in weddings.

¹²⁸ By the time this sumptuary law was promulgated in July 1942, five Chinese yuan could hardly purchase anything. The Shaoguan price index in April 1942 indicated that a picul of white rice cost 170 Chinese yuan, and 100 eggs per 400 yuan. Therefore, five Chinese yuan would only be able to buy one egg, which was an absurdly low amount for a cash gift and would not be socially or customarily acceptable. See, "Shaoshi zuori shangqing" [Yesterday's prices in Shaoguan], *Daguan Bao*, April 20, 1942.

¹²⁹ The wartime saving bonds in question are "Chuxu juan" [Saving bonds], which was a shorthand of the "Jieyue jianguo chuxu quan" [Frugal and national construction saving bonds], first available in 1939 with terms revised in 1943. Although they paid high interest, it was still drastically behind inflation at the time. Once bought, the principal of the saving bonds could not be withdrawn for a minimum of one year. See "Jieyue jianguo chuxu quan tiaoli deng" [Regulations on wartime saving bonds etcetera], file 015-020300-0104, Academia Historica, Taipei, 1939-1944.

¹³⁰ "Yue lixing zhanshi shenghuo ding shishi gangling" [Resolutely implementing the program for wartime daily life in Guangdong], *Daguan Bao*, April 9, 1944.

The state's appeal to gift wartime-saving bonds instead of cash gifts demonstrated financial incentives to regulate marriages and weddings. As the value and the type of wedding gifts had been previously uncontrolled, new sumptuary requirements on wedding gifts theoretically enabled the state to benefit, against the will and at the expense of the marrying individuals or the gift-givers. Rather than relying solely on people's patriotism to purchase wartime saving bonds that did not keep pace with inflation, the Nationalist sumptuary laws mandated that wedding expenses and gifts be incorporated into the national resistance. Like the state discourse of praising donation of wedding gift money by newly married couples in group wedding ceremonies, the strict limit on cash gifts compared with an unlimited purchase of wartime saving bonds was an incentive for people to turn their wedding money into transactions sanctioned and desired by the mobilizational and resource-hungry state. However, the gap between the Nationalist sumptuary laws and reality was immense, and the effectiveness of the law on converting wedding gifts cannot be accessed. Additionally, since the interest rate of the Nationalist wartime saving bonds averaged 7% per year in 1938 and 12% per annum, it was not competitive with the inflation rate.¹³¹ Therefore, it could be assumed that people knew wartime saving bonds were not sound investment, leading to a disincentive to not comply with this sumptuary law.

Collaborationist sumptuary laws

The collaborationist government was a late adopter of sumptuary laws

¹³¹ “Jieyue jianguo chuxu quan tiaoli deng”, file 015-020300-0104, Academia Historica, 1939-1944.

because they disrupted the political goal of building legitimacy by returning China back to normalcy. It was only in 1943, with the entry of the collaborationist state in the war against Britain and the United States, the government considered coercive methods such as sumptuary laws that controlled wedding formats and consumption.¹³² Austerity measures from Nanjing mandated government employees to replace wedding banquets with tea parties, and only with approval from superiors could they host an extremely simple banquet. Such feasts could have no more than eight dishes per table of ten, and luxury ingredients such as bird's nests, shark fins, bear paws, and abalone were banned. Furthermore, a person's rank determined the permissible amount of gift-giving at weddings. Reimbursement of the transportation costs to weddings was forbidden, while wedding participants were limited to friends and family members.¹³³ Although local governments in south China acknowledged the edict transmitted from Nanjing, no record survives of its ever being implemented among government employees on the ground.

There are scant surviving records of the collaborationist sumptuary laws that could help evaluate their success, nor did the collaborationist press publicize many cases of resistance to the sumptuary laws.¹³⁴ Also, as the war was ending, massive

¹³² Although the collaborationist government was already at war with the Nationalist regime in Chongqing, in the collaborationist lexicon, the Nationalist regime was merely a separatist and illegitimate entity called the "Chongqing government." Since the Western powers were legitimate enemies, entry into a war against the United States or Britain was a different matter. The collaborationist state officially declared war on the allies on January 9, 1943. Nothing changed on the ground other than shifting the narrative from the peace movement to wartime in the discourse aimed at the general population.

¹³³ "Zhanshi gongwuyuan yanhui ji songli xianzhi zhanxing banfa" [Interim wartime measures for restriction on banquets and gifts for Civil Servants], *MSRB*, December 15, 1943.

¹³⁴ One can assume that sumptuary law had little effect on local people, as was the collaborationist government was not powerful enough to reach into private life in urban and rural societies.

inflation and other wartime instability further inhibited the appetite for luxurious and extravagant wedding ceremonies, rendering the sumptuary laws irrelevant.

Nonetheless, in May 1945, a notable case of resisting state-enforced austerity challenged the conventional logic of suppressed desires for extravagant weddings during a period of hyperinflation. A local woman in a village in Panyu was found violating local austerity measures on weddings by sending excess gifts to her natal family, including dumplings, Chinese pastries, chicken, and pork.¹³⁵ The local militia seized the goods halfway, and the local woman in question gathered tens of women, mainly with the same married surname, to argue in the local village office, and smashed everything. To punish violators who openly defied the government's call for austerity, the village chief gathered armed militia to suppress the insurrection by hogtying and parading the women before demanding restitution.¹³⁶ Although this was one of the rare cases of publicized resistance against austerity, the organized action of local women in this incident exemplified the unpopularity of state-mandated austerity in the countryside.

Collaborationist administrative measures on marriage registration

The collaborationist government in south China differed from its Nationalist

¹³⁵ Although the newspaper did not say for what rule she had violated in the sumptuary and frugality measures, the products sent back to her natal place indicated that it was not a funeral. Instead, these food gifts were appropriate for the ritual of the initial visit of the new couple to the bride's natal family. "Weifan jieyue yuanze: Hanfu jiuzhong daoluan gongsuo" [Violating austerity measures: violent women gathered a crowd to disrupt the local office], *GDXB*, May 15, 1945.

¹³⁶ The motive of the collaborationist state actors to enforce sumptuary requirements was highly suspect. Confiscated goods could be divided up among government officials and local militia members, which incentivized additional and stricter enforcement of sumptuary laws for private gain rather than promoting austerity of a nation at war.

counterpart by issuing regulations on the process of a legal marriage. The collaborationist government required registration and premarital inquiries of whether the intended marriages were arranged or involving financial transactions. Although not required by the Nationalist Civil Code, the collaborationist government in Guangdong mandated *de jure* registrations and investigations of soon-to-be couples at a wedding registry under the Social Service Department.¹³⁷ According to a 1943 municipal guide for urban residents, marriage registration required the submission of a marriage petition to the registration branch fifteen days before the marriage, along with three four-inch bust shot photos of each spouse, at the cost of one yuan for the marriage petition processing fee and forty cents for the stamp tax.¹³⁸ Registration required a premarital investigation by a Registration Branch employee to ensure the legality of marriage and to post notice of intended marriage if there was an objection. A representative of the Registration Branch would then conduct a home visit to question the couples on their consent to the marriage, whether their parents approved, the location of the engagement, and witnesses.¹³⁹ The investigator would ask whether there was a bride price or any previous engagement with another person.¹⁴⁰ Once the

¹³⁷ The collaborationist Guangdong provincial government put its Social Service Department in charge of changing social customs within the province. In the principal city of Guangzhou, regulating marriage was the responsibility of its "Shehui ju" [Social Services Department]. "Guanyu chusheng siwang hunyin zhi zhuce dengji shixiang" [Matters related to birth, death, and marriage registration], "Guangzhou shi shehui tekan" [Special issue on the Society in Guangzhou], June 1941.

¹³⁸ See "Hunjia baogao shouxu" [reporting marriage procedures] in "Juzhu wenti" [A local guide on residing in Guangzhou], Guangzhou shi shehui ju [Guangzhou Municipal Government Social Services Department], 1943.

¹³⁹ No reason was given for the necessity of the existence of witnesses to an engagement. Still, witnesses could be questioned in case of cancellation of the engagement, a dispute about the bride price or dowry, or other arguments regarding the engagement.

¹⁴⁰ Bride prices were not illegal, but the collaborationist discourse generally vilified unaffordable bride prices.

investigator finished the home investigation, the government employee would personally sign the document in the couple's presence and report back to the Social Services Department.¹⁴¹ After a thorough review, a couple would be granted permission to marry and receive their registration. These requirements for marriage registration, at least according to official rules, were not negotiable. Failure to report changes in household registration, including marriages, to the local police station would result in a fine of ten yuan or ten days of administrative detention.¹⁴²

No record exists as to whether the collaborationist administrative regulations on marriage, such as de jure registration and premarital investigation, were implemented or followed by the people in Guangzhou, and numerous marriage announcements in newspapers suggest that compliance with this administrative measure was minimal.¹⁴³ Furthermore, sometimes even the collaborationist newspapers were not aware of this measure. In response to the question of legal procedures of marriage, the love advice columnist in the Japanese army-controlled newspapers answered that a store-bought marriage certificate would suffice, as long as said certificate included photos and signatures of the new couple, along with

¹⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 123-125.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 87.

¹⁴³ One example could be seen in a legal column. A woman wrote that all she had as proof of marriage was a paper signed by her husband and this was determined to be not legally enforceable. They did not go through the entire registration process, or else they would have had an enforceable marriage contract. There were also marriage announcements citing the time and date of engagements or marriages, but the collaborationist state was not involved in those announcements. See "Falu wenda" (Questions and answers on law), *GDXB*, June 17, 1941. In another "question and answer," the questioner asked if a marriage announcement by a lawyer would be sufficient. The response by the newspaper's lawyer was no, and that only when an open ceremony was conducted would a marriage be legal according to the Civil Code. "Falu wenda", *GDXB*, July 3, 1941.

signatures of witnesses and officiants.¹⁴⁴ This lack of coordination between the propaganda apparatus and the municipal government suggested that the collaborationist state was ineffectual in enforcing this piece of its agenda. The local population in south China had yet to become aware of administrative measures on premarital registration with the city government.

The collaborationist and the Nationalist group wedding ceremonies, sumptuary laws and administrative measures attempted to institutionalize control over marriage practices. Encroaching on previously unregulated areas of intimate lives such as wedding formats, costs, items used, and gifts, the two rival governments in south China used frugality as an excuse to align marriage reform with the overall goal of wartime austerity and national reconstruction, in effect binding people's lives to the priorities of the state. However, the lack of records on actual implementation makes it impossible to determine whether many state regulations and laws existed only on paper.

Marital Dispute Resolution during the War

A thorough examination of marital disputes resolution in collaborationist and Nationalist China indicates that residents selectively and voluntarily used multiple level of state authorities to intervene in their marital disputes during the war. State interventions began with mediation by the rural village office or urban district police, threatening legal action, securing official support, and seeking legal judgment at

¹⁴⁴ “Luofunu xinxiang: Jiehun zhengshu” [Luofunu’s column: marriage certificate], *GDXB*, June 16, 1944.

successive court levels. In both parts of south China, residents' litigiousness signified growing but rudimentary awareness of the Civil Code. However, their embrace of the Civil Code was voluntary, and many were able to escape the government's reach by ignoring its summons. Outside of the legal system, inhabitants used the court of public opinion or extrajudicial actions when legal intervention was not desired.

Some residents also retained cross-warzone marriage and familial ties. As neither government controlled the entirety of south China, stagnation in military frontier and weakly policed areas enabled movements in both directions. Residents disregarded political and military boundaries to obtain redress in their disputes that spanned across the wartime frontier.

State informal mediation

As suggested in the previous chapter on marriage regulation in pre-war Guangdong, a common precursor to official involvement was a disturbance that attracted police attention. Subsequently, the police brought the involved parties to the police station and attempted a mediation, and residents often solicited police assistance in their disputes. During the wartime period, both governments in wartime south China continued this practice of informal mediation. Also, social news articles in this period narrate a growing tendency among residents to bring in the police in their disputes and becoming more receptive of state involvement.

In rural areas, visiting the village office or the *baojia* chief was the first step in resolving villagers' marital disputes.¹⁴⁵ For instance, when a reader wrote to the

¹⁴⁵ A "baojia" was a communal self-defense organization that doubled as the basic administration level

collaborationist love advice column about his marital dispute over bride price and spousal abandonment in 1943, he inquired about the village office's right to intervene. The love advice columnist stated that the village office lacked legal authority to rule on judicial matters but could nonetheless mediate the dispute.¹⁴⁶ In Nationalist south China, a newspaper article described a dispute where the *baojia* chief acted as a mediator and a witness.¹⁴⁷

Urban residents sought and received informal mediation by the district police on matters involving money, breach of marriage promise, and concubinage. In collaborationist Guangzhou, descriptions of marital disputes in newspapers indicated the continuation of police mediations throughout the war years. Four months after the Japanese invasion in February 1939, a newspaper article described a quarrel between a bride's mother and the groom's mother over an unpaid bride price of eighty Chinese yuan. Local police took them to police headquarters to attempt mediation after they caused a scene on the street but expelled them to seek recourse with the court when mediation failed.¹⁴⁸ Disputants frequently visited the police station during the war, such as a dispute in 1941 over a breach of promise of marriage and another in June 1945 for lack of payment of bride price of five thousand yuan.¹⁴⁹ Together, these

in Republican China, and both the Nationalist and collaborationist had this system in place during the war.

¹⁴⁶“Luofunu xinxiang: a ming wen lihun” [Luofunu’s column: Ming asks about divorce], *GDXB*, February 9, 1943.

¹⁴⁷ “Youqi sitao” [A wife has absconded], *Daguang bao*, March 18, 1943.

¹⁴⁸ A high-ranking member of the police declared the dispute was a “sifa wenti” [legal issue], which meant the police had reached their limit in solving the problem and was telling the interested parties to go away or to the court. “Zhui pinjin qingjia bian yuanjia” [Seeking bride price caused good in-laws to turn into adversaries], *MSRB*, February 24, 1939.

¹⁴⁹ “Nanzi chonghun bei nu jia zhikong shi yunxing hunli” [A man’s accused of bigamy by his fiancée’s family, and agrees to a wedding], *MSRB*, March 7, 1941; “Ji jingfeng yu man langzhong” [A

police interventions suggested residents recognized the informal structure of the state in resolving their disputes, and there existed a modicum of municipal governance and social order in collaborationist south China.

Among residents in Nationalist south China, the same trend of voluntarily seeking police informal mediation in marital disputes applied. A wife in 1943 asked for police mediation to secure maintenance for her son and herself from her husband, who was making a lucrative living as a store clerk and was cohabiting with another woman.¹⁵⁰ In another instance, a male bureaucrat sought out police mediation and brought his girlfriend and her relatives to the police station over a four-thousand-yuan bride price dispute in 1944.¹⁵¹ These were only a few cases in wartime Nationalist Guangdong where residents sought police assistance, but it demonstrated that residents were aware of this avenue of redress, and that both men and women used this as a first step in legally resolving their problems.

Although local authorities had informal power to mediate marital disputes, a summons from the police headquarters would compel the disputant to appear or risk losing their job. In both collaborationist and Nationalist South China, mediation by a local authority was often enough to secure a settlement, and many marital disputes ended there. Further escalation required a substantial amount of money in legal fees, uncertain outcomes from the court, and time that many disputants could ill afford

hurrying wind met a slow doctor], *GDXB*, June 8, 1945.

¹⁵⁰ This story ended with the police planning a summon to all parties. “Zhuizong xunmi fuxu” [tracking a husband], *Chenbao*, 6th May 1943.

¹⁵¹ The article did not mention how this was resolved. “Tongchuang yimeng: Yige xiang suohui zengwu, yige xiang kuaishou lijin” [Having different priorities: one side wanted to recover gifts, the other to receive the bride price immediately], *Chenbao*, January 12, 1944.

before receiving relief.

Invoking the law and going to courts

After failed mediation, disputants during the wartime period could turn to the law and retain legal counsel. Regardless of how substantiated the dispute, citing the law was a strategic choice since a threat to sue was often enough to induce a negotiated resolution. Only when all settlement attempts failed would the formal process of court proceedings begin at the district court, and disputants could appeal to a higher court. Alternatively, many evaded the court by failing to appear.

Marital disputes reflected growing legal awareness among the population, even if the accusers were not fully aware of the Civil Code and the Criminal Code. For instance, in January 1941, a Mr. Zhou, in collaborationist Guangzhou, faced a legal impasse. He had impregnated his lover Miss Wu, whose father pressed for a wedding, but he was also married to another woman surnamed Yuan. Zhou offered to make Wu his "equal-status wife," but Yuan immediately accused Zhou of bigamy by arguing that the law did not recognize an "equal status wife."¹⁵² She would be satisfied if Wu became a concubine, but Wu refused, declaring that if she were not made an "equal status wife," she would accuse Zhou of "seductive rape."¹⁵³ Both of

¹⁵² According to Article 237 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of China, bigamy was a crime, and carried a punishment of no more than five years imprisonment.

¹⁵³ Better understood as adultery, as both sides consented to have premarital sex. This would be a crime under Article 239 of the Criminal Code and carried a penalty of no more than one year imprisonment. Additionally, as Mr. Zhou was already married, his marriage with Wu was fraudulent, and Article 238 decreed a punishment of no more than three years of imprisonment. Unlike bigamy (Article 237), the Criminal Code dictates that Article 238 and Article 239 can only be instituted upon a complaint by the victim according to Article 250. "Liang mei zheng fu" [two women are arguing over a husband], *GDXB*, April 18, 1941.

these women cited the law, but their legal knowledge was slightly flawed, as the Civil Code did not recognize "equal-status wife" or concubinage.¹⁵⁴

The Nationalist Civil Code also influenced disputes over bride prices. In a letter to the editor in a Nationalist newspaper published in November 1944, a man asked for advice on canceling his engagement and recovering the engagement money, totaling between four and five thousand yuan.¹⁵⁵ He characterized his fiancée as impatient and stubborn, so he no longer wished to marry her. The editor responded by notifying him that since his fiancée had done nothing wrong legally, he could not apply Article 976 of the Civil Code that codified specific conditions for nullifying the betrothal to cancel his engagement and recover the engagement money. The editor further advised him to negotiate an amicable settlement with his fiancée because she could sue for additional compensation, as he would be at fault for breaking the engagement.¹⁵⁶

Retaining legal counsel also indicated residents' acceptance and awareness of the law in urban and rural south China. In a dispute between a couple cohabiting in

¹⁵⁴ The newspaper article did not note how this quarrel was resolved between these two women. "Ping qi" [Equal-status wife] was a practice of having two wives where neither was superior to another. This practice was contrary to the Civil Code, in which Article 985 forbade any notion of a second marriage. On the question of concubines in the Civil Code, a woman could become a concubine, but she would be recognized only as a household member and not as a marriage partner of the husband. See Lisa Tran, *Concubines in Court: Marriage and Monogamy in Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield), 2015.

¹⁵⁵ The article noted the bride price in two hundred Chinese custom gold units. The custom gold unit was a Nationalist currency for paying customs duties, but by 1944, each custom gold unit was pegged to twenty Chinese yuan [fiat money]; hence the engagement price was about four to five thousand Chinese yuan.

¹⁵⁶ The article did not specify which article of the Civil Code could the faultless party claim compensation, but Articles 977, 978, and 979 of the 1930 Nationalist Civil Code describe the right of the person who was not at fault. "Chenbao xinxiang: Wo dasuan jiechu hunyue" [Chenbao's letterbox: I am considering reneging my marriage engagement], *Chenbao*, November 7, 1944.

February 1945, when the man's mother accused her son's fiancée of being a person of ill repute, the young woman hired a lawyer and sent a letter demanding they hold an immediate wedding ceremony or risk a court judgment. After receiving the letter, the man and his mother were unwilling to step into a legal quagmire and agreed that the man should marry the woman by March 1.¹⁵⁷ Likewise, rural women living near cities knew about the value of hiring a lawyer. In one case, a rural woman went to the city only to find her husband cohabiting with another woman. He violently drove her away when she argued at his workplace for spousal maintenance. She immediately retained a lawyer to press charges of spousal abandonment and bigamy, but the lawyer suggested sending a warning letter before any court action.¹⁵⁸ The rural wife could not possibly know everything about the law and the steps involved in a court case. Still, she was aware of these legal terms and of the possibility of using a lawyer to secure court-mandated maintenance.

In collaborationist Guangdong, female disputants occasionally received legal help from the provincial women's association, a government organization.¹⁵⁹ When an association member named Guo was publicly beaten by her husband, who favored his concubine, she first called the police, but police mediation failed. She hired a lawyer

¹⁵⁷ “Fufu xiangzheng quanwei mingfen” [A dispute among a couple over the recognition of a marriage], *GDXB*, February 19, 1945.

¹⁵⁸ The article noted that the husband also ignored the lawyer’s letter. “Wuwei xiangnu keqi, falu ziyou baozhang” [A village woman cannot be deceived, and the law protects her], *GDXB*, April 23, 1945.

¹⁵⁹ The provincial women's association was a powerful state-run organization in the collaborationist Guangdong provincial government. It retained legal counsel for members, and many women used legal assistance. See Liu Yueyin, “Seeking the Support of Women: Women’s Affairs in Guangzhou under the Wang Jingwei Regime,” M.Phil. thesis, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 2014, p. 50-52.

and filed abuse and assault charges at the Guangzhou district court, but her husband ignored the court summons. Guo then asked for assistance from the women's association, which ultimately compelled her husband to pay all medical and legal fees, living expenses, and a thousand yen of Japanese military currency, and Guo received the right to manage the household, including the concubine.¹⁶⁰

The court remained the ultimate legal authority in both collaborationist and Nationalist south China's marital disputes, and both sides used the same Civil and Criminal Codes and the same legal structure that predated the war.¹⁶¹ In the district court, the first level of the court system, many residents filed and resolved their marital cases.¹⁶² In 1943, a collaborationist district court sentenced a bigamous husband and his new wife to a sentence of three months of imprisonment for violating Article 237 of the Criminal Code. However, the judge suspended their sentences for two years according to Article 74 of the Criminal Code since both had family members to support and had never been sentenced before.¹⁶³ Although the war was coming to a close by April 1945, the collaborationist court remained functional, and a court granted divorce petitions to a woman who cited Article 1052 of the Civil Code (intolerable cruelty) against her husband, along with a compensation payment of one

¹⁶⁰ “Qiqi zhongqie you yinyou” [Reasons for favoring a concubine over a wife]; “Qiqi zhongqie an fengpinglangjing” [The settlement of the case of favoring a concubine over a wife], *GDXB*, June 29-30, 1943.

¹⁶¹ Republican China had a three-tiered court system: the district court, the circuit court, and the Supreme court in Nanjing. See, Margaret Kuo, *Intolerable Cruelty: Marriage, Law, and Society in Early Twentieth-Century China*, 2012, pp 78-82.

¹⁶² After the district court, a disputing party could appeal to the provincial circuit court, after which they could appeal to the supreme court if they wished. These appeals would be time-consuming.

¹⁶³ “Li Yuquan you pei'ou er chonghun” [Li Yuquan has a spouse and remarry], *GDXB*, August 28, 1943.

hundred thousand Collaborationist Reserve Currency yuan.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, residents in Nationalist south China lodged their disputes at the district court. For example, in 1943, a woman asked the court to cancel her betrothal by invoking the same Article 1052 of the Civil Code, as her fiancé had been missing for three years after he went to Hunan.¹⁶⁵

When disputants were unsatisfied with the legal ruling from district courts, in both collaborationist and Nationalist south China they could appeals to the provincial circuit court.¹⁶⁶ The war did not hinder this process, and many appealed their cases. Furthermore, newspaper articles indicated the theoretical availability of appealing to the collaborationist supreme court in Nanjing. There was one case involving a man who raped his fiancée before annulling the marriage that the supreme court remanded twice to the provincial circuit court for a new trial, in an unusual case that received the provincial women's association's legal support and unusual media attention.¹⁶⁷ In this case, the supreme court in Nanjing ordered a retrial by the provincial circuit court, which sentenced the fiancé to ten months' imprisonment.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ "Jiehun yi zai bian wu fuqi lequ" [No fun between a husband and wife after one year of marriage], *GDXB*, April 22, 1945.

¹⁶⁵ Article 976 (dissolving betrothal) would be applicable instead of Article 1052 (divorce), as they were not yet married. "Nianhua ru shishui qirong wu jiaqi" [Time is like passing water and a wedding date must be certain], *Chenbao*, April 26, 1943.

¹⁶⁶ The circuit court in Nationalist China was known as the fourth branch of the Provincial Circuit Court. One case of a woman appealed to the circuit court over a six-month imprisonment sentence for abscondment and remarrying without her husband's approval. "Beifu gajia you liyou" [There are reasons to remarry behind one's husband's back], *Chenbao*, December 4, 1943.

¹⁶⁷ "Gao yuan zuo gongshen li li lihun an" [The circuit court heard the divorce case between Li and Lei], *GDXB*, July 23, 1943; "Luofunu xinxiang: Baicailao wen hunbianan zhi yanjiu" [Luofunu's column: A cabbage bloke asked about research on marital disputes], *GDXB*, October 30, 1942; also, see Liu Yueyin, "Seeking the Support of Women: Women's Affairs in Guangzhou under the Wang Jingwei Regime," M.Phil. thesis, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 2014.

¹⁶⁸ A ten-month imprisonment was relatively harsh, considering that a bigamy case received a three-month sentence suspended for two years. "Luofunu xinxiang: Baicailao wen hunbianan zhi yanjiu"

A significant shortcoming of the wartime court system in Republican China was that residents could circumvent the court by absenting themselves. In a collaborationist newspaper, three successive articles over the same dispute exhibited this tendency. In the first article published on April 21, 1945, Liang accused her spendthrift husband Xu of beating her and living with another woman, and she went to a lawyer to seek legal help. Then, the newspaper reported on May 12 that Xu had again publicly assaulted Liang as he was incensed by the lawyer's letter. Subsequently, Liang asked the court to summon Liang. When Liang defied repetitive court summons, the district court filed a criminal charge against him on July 9, 1945, but the article did not suggest that he ever appeared.¹⁶⁹

The chain of appeals from the district court, the provincial circuit court, to the supreme court in Nanjing indicated that despite the war, legal infrastructure remained operational for dispute adjudication in collaborationist Guangdong until the end of the war. The same was true for residents in Nationalist south China, where they could appeal to the provincial circuit court.

Marital disputes without the law

Besides relying on codified law, residents also used the unofficial court of

[Luófūnǚ's column: A cabbage bloke asked about research on marital disputes], *GDXB*, October 30, 1942.

¹⁶⁹ A minor distinction in legal terms signified escalation: when the wife sued in court, the article noted the suit was an accusation, which required the complainant to sue. The state prosecutor took up the case and it became a criminal charge a month later. "Xu Shan ciren bushan qi jiaji lian afeng" [Xu Shan is not kind and abandoned his wife for A-Feng], *GDXB*, April 21, 1945; "Xu Shan oushang faqi an jianchashu zuori zhencha" [The criminal court began an investigation of Xu Shan assaulting his wife], *GDXB*, May 12, 1945; "Xu Shan shanghai faqi an jianchashu tiqi gongsu" [The court will file a criminal charge against Xu Shan for assaulting his wife], *GDXB*, July 9, 1945.

public opinion to resolve marital disputes. Collaborationist newspapers described many heart-wrenching conflicts in social news articles. The press was instrumental in shaping public opinion by publicly shaming the accused in these marital disputes. For example, in April 1941, an article describes an interview between the reporter and a distraught woman with two young children waiting outside a porridge kitchen. She told the reporter that her husband, a collaborationist bureaucrat, had divorced her even when she had previously supported him by selling all her jewelry. He gave her a one-time one-hundred-yuan separation payment as he married his new superior's daughter. Disgusted by his action, the social news editor printed his full name and faulted him for being a soulless careerist while publicly imploring him to realize his moral mistakes.¹⁷⁰ In a similar case, the press accused the husband of corruption and lack of virtue in his personal affairs.¹⁷¹

Extrajudicial action remained an option to resolve marital disputes. In December 1943, a reader wrote to a collaborationist love advice column for advice on “absolutely removing” (understood to mean murdering) his friend’s unchaste concubine. The columnist advised restraint by noting that a concubine was legally free to leave at will despite her moral depravity. Although the columnist called the impulse toward “absolute removal” of such a degenerate woman admirable, he nonetheless advised that the man should leave her to her degeneracy as the law

¹⁷⁰ “Cheng Shaolin rezhong gongming” [Cheng Shaolin is actively seeking fame], *GDXB*, April 10, 1941.

¹⁷¹ The commentator suggested that the husband was scum and caused a stain on the collaborationist bureaucracy. “Shehui duanping: Qiqi lianqie yu tanwu” [social commentary: abandoning a wife, loving a concubine, and corruption], *GDXB*, June 25, 1941.

forbade private killing.¹⁷²

Marital disputes across the wartime border

A special kind of marriage dispute and its resolution in wartime south China entailed crossing the warzone between collaborationist and Nationalist-held areas. Wartime borders in south China were permeable as mail continued to be delivered and residents moved in either direction for opportunities or family reunions.¹⁷³ However, some returnees' homecomings turned sour when they discovered that their spouses had remarried in their absence. Likewise, absconders took advantage of the war and moved to the other side. Newspapers reported on these cross-warzone marital disputes, and residents readily crossed warzones to pursue justice in their domestic affairs. These cross-warzone marital disputes challenge the notion of a region strictly demarcated by military lines with all ties severed and communication impossible. Instead, they indicate lingering connections across combat lines and suggest that despite the destructiveness of the war to local societies, some aspects of everyday life, such as marriage and family ties, carried on.

In a typical case of cross-warzone marriages, two women in Nationalist-held Shaoguan in 1943 asserted their status as the sole legitimate wife to a man surnamed

¹⁷² “Luofunu xinxiang: Qiuranke wen: Zuihou jueguan” [Luofunu’s column: A beard gallant asks: the ultimate decision], *GDXB*, December 29-31, 1943.

¹⁷³ The collaborationist municipal guidebook published in November 1941 mentioned that residents could send mail from Guangzhou to the Nationalist area via Hong Kong. “Xin guangzhou gailan” [A new overview to Guangzhou], Social Branch of Guangzhou Municipal government, 1941, p 33. After the invasion of Hong Kong in December 1941, mails to the Nationalist area continued. A news article noted the price increase for sending airmail to the collaborationist and Nationalist areas in late 1943. “Ji hepingqu nei hangkong youjian” [A guide on sending airmail to collaborationist (peaceful) zones], *GDXB*, December 2, 1943.

Zhou. The first woman surnamed Zeng testified that she was married to Zhou in her village in 1934. The other woman, a nurse surnamed Lai, claimed to have married Zhou in Guangzhou before the war, then moved to Hong Kong during the initial Japanese invasion, where they separated. She returned to collaborationist Guangzhou, then moved to Nationalist Shaoguan to be a nurse, only to find her husband living with Zeng and not paying her maintenance. In Zhou's testimony, he said he married Zeng in 1933, and Lai was a cohabiting mistress who knew his married status. Consequently, he contended that even though he reconnected with Lai in Hong Kong and Huizhou, he was not guilty of bigamy and spousal abandonment. As there was no concrete proof of marriage and contradicting testimonies by other witnesses, such as a *baojia* chief and a sergeant, the article ended by noting that the police decided to send the dispute to the court.¹⁷⁴

Disputes over spousal absconding were typical in social news articles about cross-warzone marriages. A man in November 1943 departed from Hong Kong to ask the Nationalist police in Shaoguan for permission to extradite his brother's wife to collaborationist Guangzhou.¹⁷⁵ A follow-up article describes her willingness to return to her husband in collaborationist Guangzhou, but the police denied the settlement attempt by citing that it was a criminal matter as she was accused of conspiring with

¹⁷⁴ “Fengcheng cunhu burang kanhu xiaojie: Shengyan wutiaojian laozhou you benxin” [A rural woman from Shunde does not yield to a nurse: Zhou claimed unconditionality and that he has conscience], *Chenbao*, July 3, 1943.

¹⁷⁵ Hong Kong was under Japanese control after December 1941, and it was about 136 kilometers from Guangzhou. From Guangzhou to Qingyuan, then under Nationalist rule, the distance was 77 kilometers. From Qingyuan to Shaoguan, a direct route would take 172 kilometers. On top of physical distance, wartime circumstances meant minimal transportation options, banditry on the road, and numerous military checkpoints along the route that made it an arduous journey.

another man to abandon her family.¹⁷⁶ Although the outcome of the dispute is unknown, their willingness to cross warzones revealed that residents disregarded political and military boundaries to obtain redress in their disputes that spanned the wartime frontier.

Cross-warzone marital disputes also showcased the conflict between publicly approved behavior and state laws. In a case where a husband who escaped to Hong Kong unintentionally committed bigamy when he stumbled upon his first wife and child in collaborationist Guangzhou after his remarriage, his second wife surnamed Chan demanded their expulsion from her household. However, when the husband decided to live with his first wife and child instead of acquiescing to his second wife, the social news editor noted that neighbors were lauding the husband for having a conscience, in contrast to the second wife who was legally right but morally uncompassionate. To further highlight her inconsiderate behavior, she hired a lawyer to accuse him of entering a fraudulent marriage after hearing her neighbors' opinions.¹⁷⁷ Even though the second wife was within her legal rights to do so, public opinion wanted her to accommodate her husband's family separated from him by military borders.

If the grand narrative of the Second Sino-Japanese War portrays stories of families separated by wartime frontlines, then cross-warzones marriage ties and

¹⁷⁶ “Furen henfu linglian xin jiating” [A wife hates her husband and forms a new family], *Chenbao*, November 29, 1943; “Linshi zhangfu an” [The case of a temporary husband], *Chenbao*, December 4, 1943.

¹⁷⁷ “Gebie shunian hou gurou anran fu guilai” [Reunion with lost wife and child], *GDXB*, December 21, 1943.

frequent movement in both directions between zones challenges that narrative by implying that familial separation was not absolute.

Projecting normalcy to legitimize its regime, the collaborationist state and its Japanese supporters in south China maintained the pre-war reformist public discourse on marriage customs, even as the Nationalist government, in retreat, quickly abandoned most of its marriage reforms during wartime in pursuit for austerity and strengthening the national resistance. The collaborationist regime redirected people's attention to peaceful pursuit of marital happiness, while the state discourse of promoting romance and newspapers descriptions of spousal quarrels together indicated that everyday life continued despite wartime occupation. Articles in the collaborationist press revealed a vibrant society full of dating, weddings, and marriage woes, in contrast to the Chinese state narrative of an occupied city where residents lived in fear and social life was suspended. Prewar marriage mediation and de-escalation methods remained the norm when dealing with marital disputes. Although the war had a profound effect on the financial fortunes, political loyalties, and physical security of south China residents, it did not hinder people's pursuit of private and familial interests, regardless of official efforts to promote austerity. In defiance of the state, intimate affairs crossed the political or military frontline, and interactions across occupied and nationalist zones were relatively frequent in south China during WWII. In effect, there was arguably a normal life during an abnormal time of war.

However, the collaborationist goal of distracting people's attention from the national resistance to the pursuit of reformed marital bliss in south China was ultimately a failure. Local marriage practices did not change, nor was the collaborationist government capable of reaching into people's intimate affairs in south China. Despite increasing legal awareness and selective invocation of the law by complainants in marriage disputes, people's interactions with the state suggest that they ignored state marriage regulation through absenting themselves or by crossing the permeable wartime frontline. Nonetheless, the failed attempt by the collaborationist government to legitimize itself by promoting marriage reform under occupation revealed that controlling marriage practices was a component of expanding state governance over the everyday lives, and wartime south China was no exception.

Furthermore, marriage regulations and the continuation of marriage practices during the war created implications for the immediate future and marriage reforms decades later. The war created many separated couples who remarried others in either collaborationist or Nationalist zones, and the end of the war came with the revelation of many new bigamous marriages in the Civil War period. Also, rival governments and their courts led to many divorce verdicts that were no longer enforceable because the judicial authority of the collaborationist court was considered invalid by the victor. Lastly, many of the ideas articulated in the collaborationist discourse were later incorporated into Socialist China's project of dismantling traditional marriage customs and practices.

Chapter 3

Marriage in South China during the Civil War

The love triangle of Mr. Liu, his wife surnamed Lin, and Mr. Song exemplifies how marriages were affected by the Second Sino-Japanese War.¹ Happily married in Guangzhou in 1937, Liu and Lin had a son together but lost contact during the war. Without news of her husband or financial support from him, Lin became a waitress in Shunde and married another man, Mr. Song, on the assumption that her husband was most likely dead. After the war, Liu reunited with Lin and they resumed their married life, until one day in 1947 when Song stormed into their residence and accused Liu of stealing his wife. Only then did Lin confess to her first husband that she had married Song during the war. This love triangle reached an amicable solution when Liu decided to forgive his wife and paid Song a settlement to compensate for the clothing Lin took from him and treated him to a lavish meal.² However, not all postwar reunions had a happy ending.

The end of Second Sino-Japanese War in August 1945 brought a hard-earned peace in south China, and social life resumed some of its prewar patterns. Discussions about ideal and proper husbands and wives reappeared in newspapers, along with columns on dating strategies and materialistic tendencies in courtship. As before and during the Second Sino-Japanese War, satires of and news articles about dating

¹ The author uses the term “Second Sino-Japanese War” to refer to the armed conflict between Japan and China that started in the 1930s. Others, especially those in China today, call this “the War of Resistance”

² “Luanli yuanyang duo hanshi” [Many tragedies with separated couples], *Daguang wanbao*, December 12, 1947.

behavior were common. Concurrently, the Nationalist government resumed its customs reforms. Regarding marriage dispute resolution between 1945 to 1949, people exhibited similar tendencies to seek police mediation and court adjudication, with some variations between the city and the countryside on resorting to extrajudicial punishment.

Despite the return to peace as reflected in people's pursuit of domestic happiness and tranquility, prolonged absences from home created awkward marriage arrangements comparable to the love triangle of Liu, Lin, and Song. When previously separated spouses returned home, often they found their spouses had remarried new partners. Serially bigamous marriages entered on the presumption of a dead or missing spouse required reconciliation or separation. Although bigamy was illegal under the Nationalist Civil Code and having two husbands was considered categorically unacceptable by others, the public was unusually sympathetic to everyone involved in these unorthodox arrangements. Social news articles refrained from assigning blame as they would have in other adultery cases.

This chapter looks at the returning to normalcy in the public discourse of dating and marriage and postwar resolutions of unorthodox wartime marriages in Guangdong from 1945 to 1949. During these four years of the Chinese Civil War, there was at first an immediate peace between August 1945 to late 1946, followed by a full-blown Civil War between the Communist and the Nationalist in China from 1947 to 1949. However, it was not until October 1949 when the People's Liberation Army brought the war to Guangdong. The chapter is divided into six sections:

resumption of peacetime discourse on dating and marriage despite the Civil War; Nationalist marriage custom reform; legal and extrajudicial resolutions of marriage disputes; resolving serial bigamy as the products of war; the discursive threat of Chinese women flirting with U.S. soldiers, and the first instance of noticeable border dynamics in influencing marriage practices via Hong Kong dollar in bride price and maintenance paid to wives in south China.

Resuming peacetime discourse on dating and marriage

Discussions about dating strategies, proper spousal behavior, and marriage as financial transactions returned promptly in postwar Guangdong newspapers. With the resumption of Nationalist control in Guangzhou, there was a pushback against the rhetoric of self-sacrifice for the nation and was replaced by a peacetime pursuit of love, marriage, and a harmonious family. Unlike in the Second Sino-Japanese War, when political objectives dominated the public discourse about courtship and marriage, the Civil War between the Nationalists and the Communists had no impact on what people thought dating and marriage ought to be, and military conflicts were treated as irrelevant to the pursuit of domestic bliss. For ordinary people, wartime hardships were over, and public media catering to their readership reflected this transition. Accordingly, rather than printing more articles advocating for a suspension of courtship, columnists were teaching the youth proper behavior in a relationship,³

³ “Lian'ai wu jiaokeshu” [No textbook on dating], *Daguang bao*, October 16, 1946.

how to kiss without worrying about germs,⁴ and characteristics of an ideal husband.⁵ In replies to letters to the editor, they provided advice on how to prevent husbands from playing too much mahjong at night,⁶ and instructions to wives about the harmfulness of nagging their husbands.⁷ The result was a public discourse on dating and marriage that appeared to inherit topics from collaborationist newspapers, rather than those typical of wartime Nationalist south China.

Aside from the perennial criticism of women who sold their love for money,⁸ commentators and satirists also pinpointed men's responsibility for reinforcing the exchange between money and love in men's personal advertisements. Within these advertisements, men discussed their monthly income, educational attainment, or notable positions in the government. In return, they sought beautiful women from a good background, and some even explicitly required unmarried virgins only.⁹ Other articles claimed these personal advertisements were insincere, arguing that these men were looking for long-term cohabitation arrangements rather than bona fide wives.¹⁰

⁴ "Qingnian nannumen keyi dadan huwen" [Young men and women can boldly kiss each other], *Daguanq bao*, August 31, 1946.

⁵ "Biaozhun zhangfu de xuanze" [How to choose a standard husband], *Daguanq bao*, 5th October 1946; "Lixiang zhangfu" [Ideal husband], *Daguanq bao*, October 19, 1946.

⁶ The gender dynamic in these articles about husbands playing mahjong all night long reverses the typical complaints from husbands about wives ignoring housework. The newspaper editor also included a petition to the government to enforce a gambling ban on behalf of housewives. "Duzhe xinxiang: Zenyang jiao zhangfu bucha maque" [Question from a reader: How to tell my husband to stop playing mahjong], *Daguanq bao*, September 21, 1946; "Duzhe xinxiang: You shi zhangfu cha maque de fannao" [Question from a reader: Another one about husband playing mahjong], *Daguanq bao*, 2nd October 1946; "Wei cujin jiating xingfu qing zhengfu qieshi jindu" [Please enforce gambling ban to foster domestic happiness], *Daguanq bao*, October 2, 1946.

⁷ "Buyao baoyuan nide zhangfu" [Do not nag your husband], *Daguanq bao*, November 23, 1946.

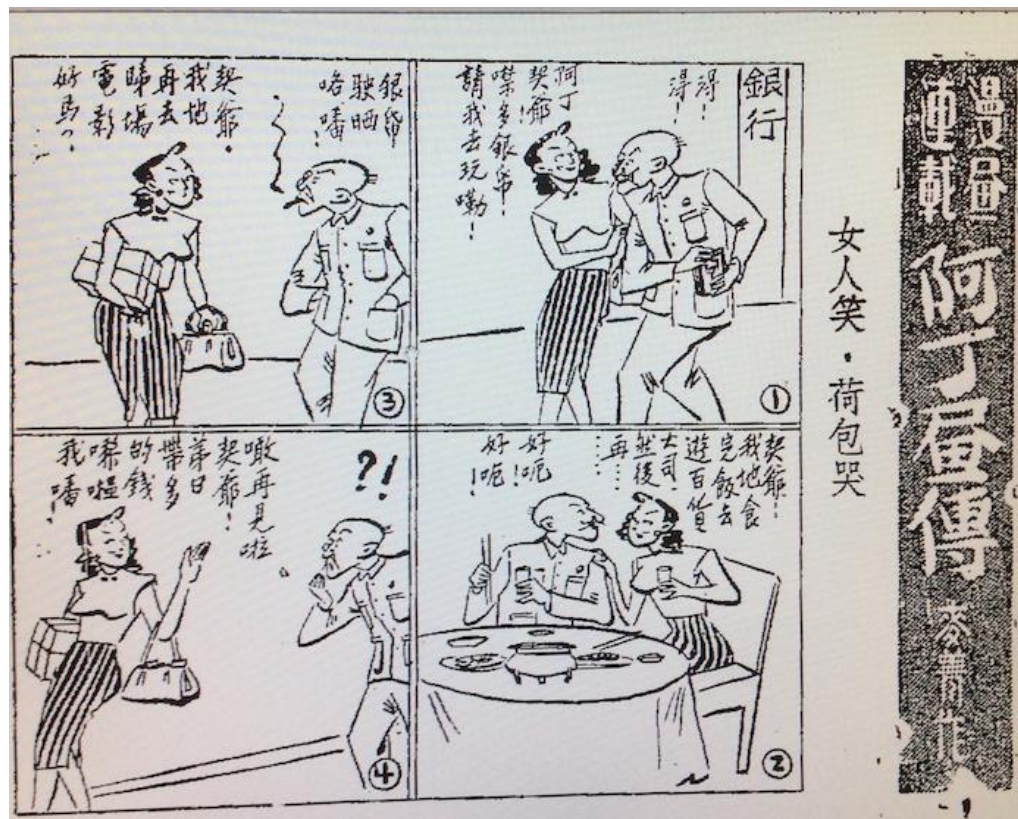
⁸ "Lian'ai yaoqian pian" [A discussion on the necessity of money in dating], *Daguanq wanbao*, September 24, 1947.

⁹ "Zhenghun dehua" [On personal advertisements], *Daguanq bao*, November 22, 1945.

¹⁰ "Zheng you: Shi xuyao qian" [Personal advertisement: required money], *Daguanq wanbao*, October 2, 1947.

While newspapers were decrying men's role in openly suggesting exchanging wealth for love, women were also ridiculed by comic illustrators for their obsession with material comfort while taking advantage of older men who compensated women for dating them, as this illustration suggests:¹¹

Figure 3: (Title: A woman laughs, and a wallet is crying")



In the comic above, a woman, euphemistically described as a "fictive daughter," accompanies her "fictive father" after he withdraws money from the bank. Her materialist tendency is immediately noticeable to the reader as she urges him to withdraw more silver coins to pay for her expenses of the day.¹² At a restaurant, she

¹¹ "Nuren xiao, hebao ku" [A woman laughs, and a wallet is crying], *Daguan wanbao*, May 10, 1948.

¹² A reader living in Guangzhou would notice that he is withdrawing silver coins and not fiat money.

tells him that she wishes to go to a department store. After a trip to the department store, with a large box in her hand, she wants to go to a cinema with him but immediately bids him goodbye upon learning that he has spent all his silver coins for the day. She requests that he bring more money for their next encounter. She is smartly dressed in clothes that reveal her figure, alluding to the "modern girl" trope in pre-war and wartime newspapers. The "fictive father" is quite old, and the artist illustrates how this man has fallen victim to her charms.¹³

As editors embraced post-WWII atomic mania in their coverage, they adopted "atomic love" to denigrate marriages or relationships that were entered and broken in haste. Many narratives about marital disputes described as "atomic love" or "atomic marriage" had no relationship to atoms or atomic energy, but "atomic" was a catchy title indicating editorial disapproval of transgressions in courtship and during marriage negotiations. Some of these transgressions in "atomic" marital disputes included couples engaging in premarital sex, men attempting to coerce their fiancées into sexual relations,¹⁴ stealing from an employer to fund one's wedding expense,¹⁵ or failing to uphold the engagement while simultaneously contracting to acquire a concubine.¹⁶ The same could be said for "atomic" marriage, such as a husband who

By May 1948, Nationalist fiat money was practically worthless, and restaurants preferred hard currencies such as silver coins instead. They refer to money as "silver bullion," which stood out as newspapers usually described money in Chinese yuan.

¹³ The language used in the comic is written Cantonese. "Nuren xiao, hebao ku."

¹⁴ "Yuanzi dinghun yuanzi lihun" [Atomic engagement and divorce], *Daguang wanbao*, September 13, 1947.

¹⁵ "Chentang gan haoshi, yuanzi lian'ai, yuanzi jiehun" [Ms. Chan made a deed: atomic love, atomic marriage], *Daguang wanbao*, April 23, 1947.

¹⁶ "Yuanzi lian'ai yuanzi xinwen" [Atomic love and atomic news], *Daguang wanbao*, September 6, 1947.

withdrew an adultery charge against his wife and her lover in the courtroom at the last minute. Instead, he yielded his wife to her lover, for he had failed to provide for his wife when he moved away.¹⁷ Atomic or not, a reader would know that such a qualifier was usually derogatory and reflected a conservative countercurrent against liberalization in dating among the youth.

In essence, newspapers in Guangdong during the Civil War switched to discussions about the petty conflicts between the sexes that would appear typical in a Republican municipal newspaper before 1937 or between 1938-1945 in collaborationist south China. Editorials, satires, and other forms of social commentary continued their longstanding criticism of materialistic dating practices and irresponsible marriage behavior for the entirety of the Civil War, without hindrance by the state. National politics, or military battle between the Communist “bandits” versus the Nationalist government, did not change the topics or narratives about marriage as it once did during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Nationalist marriage customs reforms and governance in the Civil War

The relationship between the Nationalist government and the people on marriage regulation and customs reform appeared to be the same passive relationship as before the war. The government's propaganda on reforming marriage customs fell on an unreceptive crowd, and people continued their daily lives. Before the onset of the Civil War, the victorious Nationalist government resumed its program of reforming marriage customs. However, attempts by the government only

¹⁷ “Yuanzi beixijù” [An atomic tragicomedy], *Daguang wanbao*, May 9, 1947.

encompassed the promotion of group wedding ceremonies, prevention of early marriage, and marriage registration.¹⁸ Group wedding ceremonies had been a mainstay in the rhetoric of improving Chinese marriage since the 1930s, and during the Civil War, it was no different. Although evidence indicates that group wedding ceremonies occurred in Guangdong, there was less fanfare in the reportage of such ceremonies, possibly because the populace was already familiar with this cost-saving practice.¹⁹ The drive to prevent early marriage, another perennial goal in reforming marriage customs, took on new meaning within the context of the Civil War. Instead of simply advocating that couples should marry early to repopulate the nation, the state proclamation and a follow-up article published two days later argued that early marriage could harm child development and create burdens for the nation.²⁰ Yet, during these four tumultuous years, the provincial government in Guangdong could only claim group wedding ceremonies as the only success, not unlike in other parts of China such as Shanghai.²¹

Complementary to the provincial government directive about preventing early marriages, commentators in Guangdong newspapers expressed opposition to late marriages. An article detailing reasons for this opposition reflected the postwar

¹⁸ “Gechu minjian louxi yizhi changdao liangsu” [Eradicate poor habits in society and encourage good customs], *Daguanq bao*, February 10, 1946.

¹⁹ “Jituan jiehun” [Group wedding ceremony], *Daguanq bao*, October 10, 1946. The actual group wedding ceremony occurred on 12th November 1946. “Jituan jiehun zuo wu longzhong xingli” [The group wedding ceremony proceeded solemnly yesterday], *Daguanq bao*, November 13, 1946.

²⁰ Ibid, also, see “Minzu baoyu zhengce de lilun he shiji” [Theory and practice on the policy of conserving the stock of the (Chinese) Nation], *Daguanq bao*, February 12, 1946.

²¹ In Glosser (2003) discussion of the statist (Nationalist) version of the nuclear family, she noted occurrences of group wedding ceremonies in Shanghai and Hangzhou after the war.

anxiety about repopulating China while encouraging people to settle down. The author discussed ongoing trends in which young people during the war had eschewed marriage to prioritize the national resistance and invoking economic instability and the unaffordability of married life. After the war has ended, they continued their rationale for delaying marriage. On the core issue of late marriage, the author argued it was based on a mismatch in mate choice, and she urged people to lower their unreasonable expectations when finding a spouse. For example, she claimed that educated women should not categorically reject physical laborers if the potential husbands were self-reliant. At the same time, wealthy men should consider marrying wise, kind women but not necessarily the prettiest or most educated.²² The advice to lower one's standards in spousal search indicated a pressing concern among commentators about late marriage. Many had suspended the pursuit of marriage in the name of the national resistance, the author observed, and the wartime Nationalist press advocated this position of no further delay.

On reforming Chinese marriages, newspapers in Guangdong from 1945 to 1949 also printed disapproving articles about marriage customs entrenched in rural or lineage societies. Bride teasing, a rowdy part of a Chinese wedding, generally had good intentions, yet it could set bad precedents for others to follow. When a bride in Shunde County was permanently blinded in one eye because groomsmen followed a village custom of pouring alcohol over her head to symbolize fertility, even the

²² “Women fandui wanhun!” [We oppose late marriage!], *Daguanq bao*, January 25, 1947.

villagers themselves thought these harmful wedding rites ought to be abolished.²³

There were also signs of popular acceptance of same-surname marriages, which had been resisted in the countryside. However, lineage influence could unexpectedly penetrate the city. A neighborhood watch (*baojia*) chief in Guangzhou became a newspaper sensation when he interfered in his neighbor's daughter's same-surname marriage. The chief, the neighbor, and the prospective husband all shared the Wu surname. When the neighbor failed to heed his opposition, the *baojia* chief gathered several thugs and violently assaulted his neighbor.²⁴ Typically, a *baojia* chief did not regulate his neighbors' marriage, and his only involvement would be serving as a first-level mediator when approached by involved parties. He did not have the power to stop a marriage negotiation, even if it was a same-surname marriage. In this instance of gathering thugs, presumably also of the Wu surname, to severely punish his neighbor, the chief was acting not as a local agent of the Nationalist government but rather as a manifestation of lineage power in enforcing an illegal marriage ban. Disgusted with lineage influence on entrenching marriage taboos, the editor noted in the article title: "on whose behalf was this *baojia* chief exercising his power?"²⁵

Up until the time when Nationalist governance in Guangdong crumbled in October 1949, there was no indication of whether these public discussions about

²³ "Wan xinniāng, wān xinniāng, wānchū xīn huāyāng" [Bride teasing leading to new situation], *Daguang bao*, December 24, 1946.

²⁴ "Helai jiazhang yān weifēng, tōngxīng jiēhūn shì tōngōu" [Why does a *baojia* chief have authority to assault someone over same-surname marriage], *Daguang wanbao*, December 28, 1947.

²⁵ "Helai jiazhang yān weifēng, tōngxīng jiēhūn shì tōngōu".

preventing early marriage, rejecting late marriage, or abolishing outdated precedents in wedding rites had impacts among the people. The provincial government was frail and did not have the political capability or will to expand beyond promoting group wedding ceremonies. At the same time, people in Guangdong saw few reasons to modernize their marriage practices and wedding rites.

Continuity in marital dispute resolution

There was remarkable continuity on marriage dispute resolution and people's interaction with the Civil Code from before, during, and after the Second Sino-Japanese War. During the Civil War period, disputants and litigants extended beyond the population of urban Guangzhou, as many rural and suburban villagers had marriage ties to someone in the city. Newspaper articles shown petitioners seeking legal solutions, either to secure a divorce or to compel a wife to return to the household. Following the tried-and-true process of marital dispute resolution in urban Republican China, the first step of state involvement during this time was a complaint at a police station, either filed by choice or because the police brought the involved parties there.²⁶ When mediation failed, the police would then advise them to file their grievance with the court, especially in matters such as consensual adultery,²⁷ concubinage,²⁸ and defamatory allegations of post-marital unchastity.²⁹

²⁶ “Qiren feifu” [It is not good fortunate to have two women in your life], *Daguan wanbao*, April 13, 1947.

²⁷ “Dengtuzi shiluan zhongqi” [A lecher having an illicit sexual relationship and abandon the woman at the end], *Daguan wanbao*, September 20, 1947.

²⁸ “Qiren wu haoguo” [No good consequences for a man with two women], *Daguan wanbao*, September 27, 1947.

²⁹ “Chunfeng liangdu pizhi buzhen” [Accused of being unchaste after having sexual intercourse twice], *Daguan wanbao*, October 1, 1948.

A retrospective look at Nationalist intervention in people's marriage disputes from 1930 to 1949 reveals the continuity of the divided labor between the police and the judiciary. A case arising from a minor quarrel over missing clothing highlighted the different functions of the police and the court in marriage disputes at this time. Beginning with a scathing letter written by the husband over missing clothing that eventually led to his wife's returning to her natal home, the husband sought police assistance in returning her to him. In the District police station of Fengyuan in Liwan District, Guangzhou, the police exercised their power and summoned both parties to a meeting.³⁰ After a failed mediation at the police station, the police instructed them to file lawsuits, and each spouse hired lawyers to petition their cases. In the courtroom, the judge attempted mediation once more before announcing a verdict,³¹ and his kind words were enough to reconcile both parties to try again as a married couple.³² In a Nationalist district court, a judge could approve or reject a divorce petition, or order financial compensation,³³ but judges did not always rule in women's favor, as exemplified by a judge who ignored evidence of physical abuse and threats to commit suicide when he ordered a woman to return to her husband.³⁴

Some women with solid cases decided to sidestep police mediation altogether

³⁰ The article did not indicate a date when this happened.

³¹ According to Articles 573 and 574 of the 1935 Code of Civil Procedure, the judge had the discretion to require mediation before sentencing.

³² “Faguan tiaochu pojing chongyuan” [A judge reconciled a couple who wished to separate], *Daguan bao*, October 19, 1946.

³³ A woman received six hundred thousand Chinese yuan out of her demand of a million Chinese yuan for compensation because her fiancé, refused to honor the engagement arranged by his parents. “Yanwu qingchun an” [A case about unfulfilled marriage engagement], *Daguan bao*, November 1, 1946.

³⁴ “Jiangshaoying fei shinu buzhun lihun” [Ms. Jiang is no longer a virgin, and her divorce petition is denied], *Daguan bao*, November 14, 1946.

and filed their lawsuits directly with the courts.³⁵ In turn, the court asked if they had sufficient cause to separate, such as a husband afflicted with mental illness or impotence.³⁶ Furthermore, courts needed to have proof of actual marriage, such as evidence of roast pork being sent to a bride's natal home or a marriage certificate,³⁷ since the Nationalist government had yet to actualize their professed goal of marriage registration.³⁸ Outside of the courtroom but still within the realm of law, women, including those from neighboring counties, went to the Provincial Women's Association to receive legal support by consulting an association lawyer for their next move.³⁹

As first-line mediators, the police became the first responders in settling

³⁵ The municipal police could allow divorce if both sides agreed, but the only legal recourse was a court order if one side disagreed.

³⁶ “Feicui qinhan nan dishou, qingchun shaofu qing lǐhun” [Green clothes are unable to withstand a cold bed and a young woman petitions for divorce], *Daguan wanbao*, May 6, 1947.

³⁷ “Youshengyouse de xinfu kongfuan” [A vivid lawsuit between a bride and her husband], *Daguan wanbao*, June 3, 1947.

³⁸ Despite the provincial Nationalist state claims that marriage registration was a goal in the marriage customs reform during the Civil War, there was no mention of this being implemented in Guangdong, nor did social news articles ever mention marriage being registered by the government. Hence, being a party to a legal marriage required proof. Not being able to provide proof of marriage like a marriage certificate meant the other party could argue that their relationship was only cohabitation and not a legally recognized marriage. If it was a cohabitation instead of a marriage, there was no need to go to court for separation, and the man was also not responsible for her maintenance.

³⁹ The provincial Women's Association was part of the national movement to promote the New Life Movement. During the war, it focused on raising orphans, fundraising for the resistance, and encouraging women production to contribute to the war. Its membership was a mixture of family relatives of Nationalist officials and CCP members. Not much is known about this association after 1947. Regarding the Association's work on marriage, the lawyer consulted, Teng Pak-nu, was a member of the Women's Association, and she was a daughter of a prominent *Tongmenhui* member. “Jiehun sanzai rengshi chunu” [Still a virgin after three years of marriage], *Daguan bao*, November 14, 1946. For more information about the Provincial Women's Association during the Second Sino-Japanese War, see, Xia Rong, “Sheng xin yun fu wei hui' yu zhanshi guangdong funu jie de kangri jiuwang gongzuo” [The Provincial New Movement Women's Committee' and the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Work of the Guangdong Women's Circle during the War], *Social Science in Guangdong* 6 (2004): 114–20. On the lineup of the Provincial Women's Association, see, Song Qinrong, “Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zong hui funu zhidao weiyuanhui yanjiu (1938-1946 nian)” [A study on the Women's Steering Committee of the New Life Movement Promotion Association (1938-1946)], (Ph.D. Dissertation, Fudan University, 2012), 280.

disputes. At the same time, courts overwhelmingly dealt with divorce petitions from urban and suburban women who were aware of the Nationalist Civil Code. During the Civil War, this hierarchy of government regulation of marriage did not change. People were accustomed to this method of selective engagement with the state about their disputes. The Civil Code, acknowledged by residents but only occasionally applied, was the ultimate arbiter. Yet, most disputes between 1945 to 1949 were resolved not solely by the Civil Code and the Criminal Code but by the police drawing on a mixture of legal codes and social expectations about marriage and proper spousal behavior.

Extrajudicial dispute resolution

In areas farther away from the Guangzhou metropole, there was more leeway to ignore the Civil Code and instead apply extrajudicial punishment according to local customs. Although people recognized the Civil Code and voluntarily sought police mediation or court adjudication of their disputes, acceptance of state authority varied between urban and rural areas. Compared to urban residents in Guangzhou, who were more likely to seek police intervention or file lawsuits, extrajudicial punishment remained highly visible in the Guangdong countryside during the Civil War. When encountering marital disputes that transgressed social mores such as intra-lineage adultery, villagers in Guangdong had different options. They could bring the case to the local police station and asked the police to imprison the perpetrators,⁴⁰ or pursue vigilante justice by drowning both adulterers to death in a pig basket. Other options

⁴⁰ “Qingyuan yi can'an” [A tragic case in Qingyuan], *Daguang bao*, April 12, 1949.

included exile,⁴¹ a severe financial punishment in rice and pork,⁴² or compensation as a condition of settlement in the presence of elders or the police.⁴³ In extreme cases, such as a murder committed in passion,⁴⁴ villagers who felt the victims deserved punishment feigned ignorance when questioned by the state, allowing the murderer to remain free despite the Criminal Code.⁴⁵

Rural people's preferences indicated their attitude toward state marriage regulations during the Civil War interlude. The law was one of many options for resolving marriage disputes, and rural residents could choose to adhere to laws or not. With marital disputes that villagers could not resolve, involved parties sought state intervention via police mediation but rarely court judgment. However, if the dispute affected only members within a rural community, then the Civil Code and the Criminal Code were likely ignored by those who favored a traditional and extrajudicial form of resolving marriage disputes. Theoretically available and applicable across all of China, the law was defeated by a public who chose to operate outside of legal codes, leaving local governments unable to change rural people's minds or behavior.

⁴¹ "Jianfu yinfu yinhuodefu" [The adulterers received a blessing in disguise], *Daguang wanbao*, June 3, 1946.

⁴² "Shusao ye tongjian, baigu jian zhuzhi" [An adultery between a brother and a sister-in-law, with the compensation price of rice and a pig to the whole village], *Daguang wanbao*, June 26, 1946.

⁴³ "Qingyuan yi can'an".

⁴⁴ Such as the husband murdering the cheating wife and her lover, but this mitigating circumstance was only valid if he killed both while catching them in the act. Article 286 of the 1928 Nationalist Criminal Code stipulated that a person committing homicide in passion should be sentenced to a minimum of one year's imprisonment but no more than seven years. In the current Criminal Code of the Republic of China, Article 273 discusses this condition as well.

⁴⁵ "Luanlun wuhui xielou" [A leaked immoral case], *Daguang bao*, May 30, 1949.

Marital disputes from war-induced unintentional bigamy

A contentious subset of marital disputes involved separated spouses returning home after the Japanese occupation. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, many lost contacts with their spouses and subsequently remarried for companionship, financial support, or both. Although south China had a fluid wartime frontline that allowed some crossing back and forth, not everyone in Guangdong took that option.⁴⁶ Consequently, men with stranded wives on one side married other women and stranded women who assumed their husbands had died remarried other men.⁴⁷ The post-war reunions became problematic when involved parties realized that they had committed bigamy, or in situations where the original husband desired his wife's return.⁴⁸

In the current historiography on war-induced serial bigamy, the “occupied wives” were wives who were left behind in occupied zones when their husbands moved to unoccupied parts of China, and “resistance wives” were women whom these husbands later married while away in Nationalist-controlled China.⁴⁹ However,

⁴⁶ The border in other occupied zones was not as airtight as no man's land, but it would be hard to imagine someone traveling back and forth between occupied coastal China and Nationalist Chongqing.

⁴⁷ Being married as a wife, or contracted as a concubine, had significant legal consequences for both parties involved. Assuming their wives were already dead, many men married other women as legitimate wives and underwent the official ceremony required by the Nationalist Civil Code. Therefore, the women who were married in this fashion expected that they were in monogamous marriages. There was no legal issue if they were contracted simply as concubines or mistresses, but the stranded wife in the occupied areas still could complain to the police station about the concubine or gathered a sympathetic crowd to barge into their hideout, because he contracted a concubine without her approval. The social convention in south China required a wife to assent to her husband contracting a concubine, and that the concubine must give due respect to the principal wife.

⁴⁸ Article 237 of the Criminal Code (Bigamy) does not require a complaint by the victim; Article 239 (adultery with a married person) did require a complaint by the victim before an investigation and trial will begin.

⁴⁹ Most existing research on “occupied wife” and “resistance wife” focuses on southwest China and Shanghai. Southwestern China became a focus because Chongqing was the national wartime capital,

the fluidity of the frontline between Nationalist China, collaborationist China, and British Hong Kong led to a few counterexamples to the narrative of stranded "occupied wives" and their husbands' "resistance wives." Instead, wives could be in collaborationist or Nationalist controlled areas while their husbands went into the other zone for work and lost contact afterward, and the movement of husband was not exclusively unidirectional from occupied zones to Free China. Therefore, an "occupied wife" did not necessarily a wife stranded in collaborationist Guangdong, and it was possible for a wife in Nationalist south China to have no contact with her husband who moved to area controlled by the collaborationist government, further complicating the definition of a "resistance wife" versus an "occupied wife".⁵⁰

and many men originally from eastern China moved with the government and remarried there. There was also more research on Shanghai because the Shanghai press published news stories of these domestic conflicts between the "occupied wife" and the "resistance wife" during the Civil War. Lü (1995) finds that the existence of these "puppet organizations" (marriages between a man and a woman he married while in Nationalist-controlled China, while leaving another woman behind in occupied zones) an issue that the public was already familiar with in southwestern China. In the post-war resolution of these marriages, the court had to account for social expectations of proper spousal behavior. Wu (2017) discusses the consumption of news about these marital disputes in Shanghai and suggests that the public discourse was fueled by dissatisfaction with official corruption, while the commercial press used "resistance wife" to attract the reader and maximize profit at the expense of public confidence about the Nationalist government. Another article by Xu and He (2020) suggests that the issue of "resistance wife" was a legal, social, and moral problem, while at the same time implying that only those who were high officials or making a profit from war-related speculation could afford to marry a "resistance wife." My finding, from newspapers after the war, contradicts this assumption by Xu and He. See Lü Fang-shang, "Ling yizhong wei zuzhi: Kangzhan shiqi hunyin yu jiating wenti chutan" [Another kind of 'Puppet Organization': An Initial Discussion of marriage and family problem in the war against Japan,] *Research on Women in Modern Chinese History* 3 (1995): 97–121; Junfan Wu, "Yuqing, xiaofei yu yingdui: Kangzhan shengli hou shanghai de "kangzhan furen" wenti" [Public Opinion, Consumption, and Response: 'Mrs. Anti-Japanese War' in Shanghai after the Victory of the Anti-Japanese War], *Journal of Historical Science*, no. 4 (2017); Feng Xu and Xiaoyi He, "Jiating de wei zuzhi: Kangzhan shiqi da houfang "kangzhan furen" wenti" [Family Pseudo-Organization: The 'Anti-Japanese Lady' Problem in the Home Front during the Anti-Japanese War,], *Journal of Xiangnan University* 41, no. 6 (December 2020).

⁵⁰ "Qianli xunfu fei menghuan, luyang qiezuo liangjia chun" [It was not a dream to reunite with one's husband over thousand miles, but he became a husband to two women], *Daguang wanbao*, April 24, 1948.

In Guangdong, most marital disputes resulting from wartime separations and the resulting bigamy concerned ordinary city-dwellers, and newspaper commentaries on their disputes were friendlier. There were usually three and possibly four involved parties in these marital disputes about bigamy because of wartime separations. First, there was the husband who lost contact with his wife due to wartime circumstances. Second, the wife was left behind in the occupied area, and was hence known as the "occupied wife" in the press. When the man who went to the Nationalist-controlled area remarried another woman, that woman he married in the Nationalist area was known as the "resistance wife" or the "Anti-Japanese Lady" in the press.⁵¹ Again, it was not necessary that the second wife be in a Nationalist-controlled area. Lastly, if the stranded wife in occupied south China decided to remarry, then the man she remarried became the "occupied husband." Most disputes were conflicts between the "occupied wife" and the "resistance wife." Still, there were also instances where the original husband returned home, only to find that his stranded wife had remarried or cohabited with an "occupied husband."

The legality of serial bigamy and informal resolutions

The Nationalist Civil Code forbade bigamy regardless of intentionality or circumstances, and people in bigamous marriages risked imprisonment if they could not settle with their legal spouses. Not all disputes resulted to lawsuit as informal mediation were much preferable and hassle-free than seeking formal resolution at the

⁵¹ In some academic literature, the term "Anti-Japanese Lady" is used, but the author prefers the translation "resistance wife."

court. Gender also played an important part because there existed additional paths of resolution for situations with multiple women married to a man than a woman engaging in serial bigamy with two living husbands.

When neither the "occupied wife" nor the "resistance wife" wished to yield, or if two husbands contest the legitimacy of their marriage to the same wife, they would seek police and court intervention. Wives refused to yield as each had assumed they had legally entered a monogamous marriage, while husbands would prove the legitimacy of their marriage by providing a proof of marriage, such as a marriage certificate. Outside of legal solution, however, was drastic differences in options available to disputants. Wives with two living husbands must live with either one, but husbands with an "occupied wife" and a "resistance wife" could try to get both women to live with him and be socially recognized "equal wives," or have one become a concubine. This was a preferred and informal outcome for men but not necessarily acceptable to women who did not want to share their husbands.

The terms "resistance wife" and "occupied wife" appeared in newspapers in Guangdong beginning in September 1946 when intellectuals transmitted the conversation from Shanghai, where many returned to previously occupied zones with women they had "married" in southwestern China. In Guangdong, there were two positions on this issue. One was that those advocating on behalf of the stranded "occupied wife" argued that husbands had a duty to be faithful to their stranded wives and took a textualist approach on the illegality of the "resistance wife." For example, an article penned by a woman lawyer suggested that "occupied wives" deserved

sympathy as they endured the burden of caring for their children and their husbands' parents while living under collaborationist control. Additionally, the Nationalist Civil Code and the Criminal Code left no room for compromise. Article 237 of the Criminal Code mandated a sentence of no more than five years imprisonment for both parties in bigamy, and Article 985 of the Civil Code outlawed bigamous marriages. Therefore, the only legal solutions were either an amicable reconciliation between the "occupied wife" and the "resistance wife," which would mean the "resistance wife" would have to become a concubine and a family member, or the "occupied wife" could divorce and marry another man if she wished.⁵² Other articles advocating on behalf of the "occupied wife" also emphasized similar points about the rigidity of the Civil Code on outlawing bigamy,⁵³ and that the "resistance wife" could not possibly be recognized as a wife.⁵⁴

In contrast to those who emphasized the inflexibility of legal codes, the other position seen most frequently in social news articles emphasized restoring domestic order with an androcentric perspective. In this view, the law could be cast aside if both women could come to terms. Although state laws were in theory paramount, the passive nature of the Nationalist judiciary meant that the government would not intervene unless a wife brought a complaint to its attention. Hence, there was a noticeable gap between legal marriage practices and socially accepted norms, and the

⁵² "Kangzhan furen de falu wenti" [The legal issue of the "resistance" wife], *Daguan bao*, September 28, 1946.

⁵³ "Yifu yiqi ti'an de neimu?" [The insider story about the legislation on monogamy?], *Daguan bao*, January 27, 1947.

⁵⁴ "Xianhua kangzhan furen" [Small talk on "resistance wife"], *Nu qingnian* [Young women], Vol 9, *Nu qingnian yuekan she*, November 29, 1946.

defenders of domestic order emphasized the latter. Additionally, proponents argued that no one was at fault since wartime circumstances and prolonged involuntary separations caused legitimate doubt about a spouse's survival. To justify men's marrying "resistance wives," formulaic descriptions about these marital disputes had three essential steps. First, a husband separated from his wife had no contact with her for years, and thought she was dead. Second, when he met an attractive woman, they made do during the war and developed feelings for each other, and she became his "resistance wife." The last step was at the postwar reunion where the husband pled for forgiveness from his "occupied wife" while professing that he could not abandon his "resistance wife" after years of living with her during the war. The story ended either when the "occupied wife" magnanimously accepted her husband's new woman,⁵⁵ or when he scolded her into numbed submission.⁵⁶ Rarely did she decide to set forth on her own.

The best outcome in these social news stories was when both women agreed to live harmoniously as "equal wives." A model case narrates the life story of a carpenter who successfully mediated between his two "wives." Before the war, he had a good relationship with his wife, but he was forcefully drafted for corvée labor by the Japanese army in Hong Kong and lost contact with her. She chose not to remarry and became a maid in collaborationist Guangzhou, while he escaped Japanese custody and became a cargo transporter in Nationalist south China. However, he

⁵⁵ "Qianli xunfu fei menghuan, luyang qiezu liangjia chun," *Daguan wanbao*, April 24, 1948.

⁵⁶ "Kangzhan furen guilai" [The return of a resistance wife], *Dongzhen xiangbao* 53, (Zhongshan county: Guangdong), July 11, 1948.

became penniless when the Japanese army conquered the town where he stored his merchandise and burned it. A local widow helped him start over, and eventually, she wanted to marry him, but he initially refused because of his existing marriage. They lived as husband and wife only after the widow agreed to become his concubine and swore that she would give his "occupied wife" her due respect. After the war, they went to Hong Kong to search for his "occupied wife," but only in 1947 did he find her in Guangzhou. At the reunion, his "occupied wife" was ecstatic at first but became jealous when she saw the "resistance wife." The carpenter explained how essential the "resistance wife" was in aiding his survival and that she only wanted to become a concubine. Upon hearing that, the "occupied wife" elevated the "resistance wife" from a concubine to an "equal wife," and everyone was envious that a carpenter could have two wives in harmony.⁵⁷ The story provided a perfect outcome in which the husband admitted his wrongdoing, the "resistance wife" gave due respect to the "occupied wife," and the "occupied wife" forgave her husband and treated the new woman as her sister and co-wife.

Unlike the conflict between an "occupied wife" and a "resistance wife," serial bigamy by a woman with two living husbands could never resolve so easily. When the original husband returned home and found his stranded wife remarried, the only possible solution was for her to remain married to either one of her husbands. However, in social news articles about unintentional bigamy, the press withheld the customary and moralistic commentary and instead suggesting that husbands should

⁵⁷ "Luanli liang yuanyang" [Separated couples], *Daguan wanbao*, October 5, 1947.

locate their stranded wives. If found, husbands should take their "occupied wives" back, such as in the returning husband in a social news article published on 23rd October 1947. Although the wife explained that it was the original husband's fault for not contacting her during the war, he still wanted her back, but the "occupied husband" refused to give up his wife, to whom he had already been married for one year. Subsequently, the original husband filed a complaint in court with his wedding certificate in hand.⁵⁸ Other examples also reinforced this idea of restoring domestic order when the original husband took back his "stranded wife" and paid her "occupied husband" as a suitable compensation for his trouble.⁵⁹ The best scenario was an amicable separation between the "occupied wife" and the man she remarried.⁶⁰ In these examples, social news editors emphasized the wartime exception of serial bigamy with two husbands. If the first husband reappeared, he should try to negotiate his wife's return to him.

Nonetheless, original husbands could choose whether to take their wives back from their wives' second marriages. As wartime circumstances prevented husbands from providing for their wives, some women preferred to stay with their second husbands, especially if a child had been born from the second marriage.⁶¹ It was the original husbands' imperative to choose, and they could choose to divorce their wives instead, especially if they failed to return in a timely matter.⁶² For example, a husband

⁵⁸ "Shuangshi yidiao" [Two arrows, one bird], *Daguan wanbao*, October 23, 1947.

⁵⁹ "Luanli yuanyang duo hanshi," *Daguan wanbao*, December 12, 1947.

⁶⁰ "Yuelao tai duoqing yuanyang cheng cuopei" [Cupid messed up and matched wrong couples], *Daguan wanbao*, December 20, 1947.

⁶¹ "Rang qi qiwen" [The strange news of yielding a wife], *Daguan wanbao*, May 5, 1948.

⁶² No reason was given in newspaper, but possibly because husbands did not like their wives that

conscripted to Hainan Island during the war could not return until January 1948, years after the cessation of hostilities in south China. By then, his wife had been remarried for a few years, and he decided to give up his wife by agreeing to a divorce by mutual consent in the police station nearby.⁶³

Serial bigamy was the product of a prolonged war that required amicable resolution during the Civil War. As wartime circumstances provided legitimate excuses for all to remarry, the public press in Guangdong was unusually tolerant and understanding of women who remarried without the consent of their living husbands. If monogamy and domestic order were restored by the end of settlements, then women's marriages to multiple men could be justified as due to wartime expediency and worthy of forgiveness. Similarly, "occupied wives" were supposed to forgive their husbands for marrying "resistance wives," and the "occupied wives" should welcome the new women as their sisters and equals, even when the law outright forbade such arrangement. The Nationalist state and its regulation were only one of the many options available for spouses to resolve their marital disputes. The Civil Code and the Criminal Code were convenient weapons for spouses who wished to uphold their rights in police stations and courts, but most would rather settle their disputes among themselves.⁶⁴ problems.

The Discursive Threat of Jeep Girls in Guangdong

much, or because they realized that their wives had already lost any passion toward them, and it would not be useless to rekindle past relations.

⁶³ "Lunxian furen lunxianle, guilairen jing buguilai" [The occupied wife is occupied, and the returnee (the original husband) has failed to return], *Daguang wanbao*, January 20, 1948.

⁶⁴ As with in other periods of Nationalist governance, the judicial system was slow, and hiring lawyers cost money. Informal mediation at the police station, however, was free.

Concurrent with descriptions of unintentional bigamy in social news articles, newspapers in Guangdong engaged in another conversation concerning Chinese women and their interactions with U.S. soldiers. In cities such as Chengdu, Beijing, and Shanghai, there was public sentiment against Chinese women known as “Jeep Girls” who were interacting with U.S. soldiers.⁶⁵ However, in Guangdong, the U.S. presence was minimal,⁶⁶ and newspaper columnists chose to compare “Jeep Girls” with “horizontal collaborators” who had consorted with Japanese soldiers during the Japanese occupation to shame them.⁶⁷ Columnists in Guangdong described “Jeep Girls” as wasteful and treacherous to their nation. In a satirical column, the writer praised “Jeep Girls” as career diplomats of China, and “heroes from the new world” fell in love with them as many “descendants of Amaterasu” once did.⁶⁸ The satirist suggested that “Jeep Girls” were switching their diet from “turnip to steaks and

⁶⁵ Existing research on “Jeep Girls” includes Cathcart (2008) and Fredman (2019). Cathcart focuses on the graphic descriptions of Jeep Girls and G.I.s and their demonization in Chinese newspapers. Fredman suggests that the discourse over “Jeep Girls” was about reclaiming Chinese sovereignty vis-à-vis women's bodies and showing how U.S. military sexual misbehavior contributed to the erosion of the US-Nationalist China relations. Adam Cathcart, “Atrocities, Insults, and ‘Jeep Girls’: Depictions of the U.S. Military in China, 1945-1949,” *Int J Comic Art* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 16.; Zach Fredman, “G.I.s and ‘Jeep Girls’: Sex and American Soldiers in Wartime China,” *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 13, no. 1 (2nd January 2019): 76–101.

⁶⁶ By the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the political geography was that Communist was more powerful in the north and northeast China, while the south was a Nationalist bastion. Guangzhou was liberated on October 15, 1949, 15 days after the establishment of the PRC.

⁶⁷ “Jipu nulang lizan” [An ode to jeep girls], *Daguang bao*, 18th January 1946. Regarding women who had sexual relations with Japanese soldiers, there was a letter to the editor condemning the Nationalist government's treatment of these women, who were labelled national traitors. Nonetheless, it is unthinkable that Chinese women would marry Japanese soldiers, not because love could not transcend national identities, but because Japanese soldiers were more likely to have sex with comfort women or resort to wartime rape rather than marrying them. Therefore, it is possible that commentators made up stories about Guangdong women marrying Japanese soldiers. “Guanyu jia rikou de huaji funu” [About Chinese women who married Japanese soldiers], *Daguang bao*, December 12, 1945.

⁶⁸ “Heroes of the new world” are U.S. soldiers, and “descendants of Amaterasu” refers to Japanese soldiers.

tomatoes" and that one should neglect past histories when on the path to prosperity.⁶⁹ In addition, the image of Chinese women on Jeeps led to accusing statements by the satirists that they were wasting critical resources such as imported gasoline that had to be flown into China from the Hump airlift. Even when the war has ended and transportation returned to normal, satirists suggested that gasoline had better use for national reconstruction than wasteful spending on "Jeep Girls".⁷⁰

If being framed as national traitors was not sufficient, the "Jeep Girls" were described in the press as a post-war version of prostitutes who mostly catered exclusively to foreigners. In Guangdong, there was a long history of a discriminated ethnic group, the Tanka who lived on boats, where their women had provided sex work to foreigners and named "saltwater girls" by the populace. However, compared to the "saltwater girls" who would be ashamed of their profession, a commentator accused "Jeep Girls" of having no qualms about their socialization with U.S. soldiers, even when other (Chinese) men viewed them as prostitutes. Regarding women who shamelessly flirted with G.I.s, an article on "Jeep Girls" could only satirize their progressiveness and liberal attitude toward gender relations.⁷¹

The accusation that Chinese women who consorted with U.S. soldiers were deserting their marriages with Chinese men is represented in an article, "lament of the

⁶⁹ "Turnip" is a Cantonese epithet to refer to a Japanese person during the Second Sino-Japanese War. When the article accuses women who once loved turnips and are switching to tomato and steaks, a quintessential western (American) dish, the reader would have been clear that these dishes were alluding to two groups of men.

⁷⁰ "Jipu nulang lizan". By the end of the war, gasoline no longer needed to be flown into China via the Hump airlift. The Hump airlift ended in November 1945.

⁷¹ "Cong xianshui mei shuodao jipu nulang" [From saltwater girl to jeep girl], *Daguang bao*, April 20, 1947.

abandoned wife," published in January 1947.⁷² On the surface, the lament was about a wife, age 35, whose husband mistreated her after eight years of war. At the same time, as her husband failed to reconstruct his home and sold off all his ancestral properties for alcohol, "brothers from the western side" were courting the wife, and she decided to abandon her husband. Beyond the superficial reading of a woman running off to her neighbor, the lament was an allusion to Chinese women and the Republic itself.⁷³ Without directly referring to "Jeep Girls," the text nonetheless incites male anxiety about their wives ditching Chinese husbands for western men.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, despite newspaper articles and public discourse about the sensational "Jeep Girls" socializing with U.S. soldiers,⁷⁵ this was merely a trope in the

⁷² However, in the actual poem, the wife abandoned the husband. The title is a pun on the stereotype of the tragedy of an abandoned woman.

⁷³ There are three different interpretations of the lament. The first, a literal interpretation, would be how a woman became disappointed by her good-for-nothing husband and ran off to her neighbor who lives on the west side of her house. A second interpretation would expand on and consider the abandoned woman in question to represent "Chinese women." The third interpretation, which is the most politically subversive, would interpret the woman in question as to the Republic of China, since the woman is indeed 35 years old, like the Republic of China, established in 1912. The neighboring brother who helped expel the enemy and send him back to Japan could be understood as the Communists, if this paper was aligned to CCP underground groups at the time. It could also be other allied countries. This lament required a great deal of understanding of Chinese classics and alluded to Han Dynasty *yuefu* poetry, Tang dynasty poems, and Song dynasty poems. A typical newspaper reader back in the 1930s and 1940s would be expected to know a few classical allusions, but a text like this was not for the everyday reader.

⁷⁴ "Qifu yin" [The lament of an abandoned woman], *Daguan bao*, January 7, 1947. Below is the entire lament in Chinese.

秦家有婦三十五，隨君度日實辛苦；金釵賣盡箱篋空，不意狂阻復來侮
我家良人弱無能，夜半棄家到孤嶺；孤嶺一去整八年，八年妾心如古井
鄰家兄弟鳴不平，一舉驅賊逃東瀛；贈君川資送君馬，良人才得歸故京
歸來不事理田園，更把田園換醇酒；往日廣廈今茅廬，醉問床頭金盡否
去年中秋始團圓，今年望月空長嘆；青田寂寂河水流，山河以非舊時面
西鄰兄弟憐妾苦，窺牆日日送秋波；夫也不良甘棄婦，妾非草木豈輕薄
而今鵲巢有鳩佔，從此良人無故居；桃花豈願逐流水，只怨東風自相殘

⁷⁵ A novel "jipu nulang" [Jeep Girls] was published in Hong Kong. Lu Dalu, *jipu nulang* (Hong Kong: Gangao shengli tushu she, 1946).

press and did not reflect the reality in Guangdong. Many of these articles about "Jeep Girls" coincided with a national controversy about U.S. soldiers' misbehavior in Shanghai and Beijing between 1946-1947.⁷⁶ In contrast, there was no mention of U.S. soldiers in Guangdong besides the few opinion columns. Unlike in areas of southwestern China such as Chongqing, U.S. presence in Guangdong began only after the Japanese surrender, and anti-U.S. sentiment had yet to reach a critical level. During the Chinese Civil War in Guangdong, "Jeep Girls" existed only as a symbolic entity in newspapers and in a popular mindset about what Chinese women ought not to do. As the Civil War progressed, the people quickly moved on to other everyday concerns such as their wages and livelihood, and quickly left their obsession of "Jeep Girls" behind.

The Hong Kong Dollar in marriage transactions as a manifestation of nascent border dynamics

As the Chinese Civil War commenced in the north in 1946, the economy experienced hyperinflation caused by repeated printing of Chinese yuan and falling confidence in the Nationalist government. Although south China was far from the frontline of the Civil War until the closing months in 1949, nationwide hyperinflation arising from economic and political instability in other parts of China severely affected everyday life in Guangdong. In response to hyperinflation, people in

⁷⁶ In December 1946, a rape case where a Chinese student, Shen Chong, was raped by a U.S. marine in Beijing made national news. Shaffer (2000) talks about the result of massive student protests in China, including Guangzhou, on calling for US troops withdrawal and criticizing the Nationalist Government; Fredman (2019) argues that although the historiography of Jeep Girls focuses on this case, the actual animosity between Chinese men and U.S. soldiers began beforehand. See, Robert Shaffer, "A Rape in Beijing, December 1946: GIs, Nationalist Protests, and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 1 (2000): 31–64.

Guangdong exhibited ingenuity by replacing the rapidly depreciating Chinese yuan with the stable Hong Kong dollar in major transactions, including bride price. Using the cost of a newspaper from 1945 to 1949 as an indicator, the value of the Chinese currencies depreciated dramatically during the Civil War.⁷⁷

Table 3.1 Cost of a daily newspaper as an index of currency depreciation, from 1945 to 1949

Time	Cost	Year-over-year	Compared to 1945
November 1945	40 yuan	N/A	1
October 1946	200 yuan	500%	5x
November 1947	3,000 yuan	1500%	75x
July 1948	200,000 yuan	N/A	5,000x
November 1948	1.5 Gold yuan (3M yuan = 1 Gold yuan)	2250%	112,500x
March 1949	400 Gold yuan	N/A	30,000,000x
April 1949	13,400 Gold yuan		1,005,000,000x
May 1949	0.4 Silver yuan, or 0.25 HKD (Silver yuan referred to a silver-based coin)	N/A	N/A
June 1949	0.5 Silver yuan or 0.25 HKD (500M Gold Yuan = 1 Silver Yuan)	Not relevant; depreciation of Chinese paper-based currency, and the populace shifted to using hard currency or foreign currency, despite their illegality as mandated by the retreating Nationalist government	
August 1949	0.7 Silver Yuan or 0.25 HKD		
14th October 1949 (Last day before Guangzhou's Liberation)	0.25 Silver Yuan Or 0.25HKD (but the newspaper prints 50% less content)		

The proximity with Hong Kong and existing close ties between Hong Kong and China became an unmitigable vulnerability for the Nationalist currency reform.

The Nationalist government was unable to prevent capital flight to Hong Kong.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Using the price of a newspaper as an index, prices increased five-fold between 1945 and 1946, fifteen-fold between 1946 and 1947, and five thousand-fold between 1947 and 1948. In 1949, people gave up using fiat money printed by the Nationalist government and reverted to silver coins or Hong Kong dollars. For a detailed calculation, see table 3.1.

⁷⁸ “Chaojia xiezi taogang” [Speculators taking money to Hong Kong], *Daguanq bao*, February 18, 1947; “Benshi lianri jinrong dongdang” [Days of financial turmoil in this city], *Daguanq bao*, April 24, 1947; “Jinrong dongdang wuli” [Financial turmoil], *Daguanq wanbao*, June 20, 1948; “Huazhong

Using alternative currencies such as the Hong Kong dollar or gold was not exclusive to south China,⁷⁹ but Guangdong was unique in having reliable access to the Hong Kong dollar and a legitimate need to trade in Hong Kong dollars.⁸⁰ Furthermore, although the state could attempt to control capital flight,⁸¹ the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) and other transportation options allowed frequent border crossings, leading to same-day or two-day smuggling and arbitrageurs who relied on the KCR.⁸² For the people of Guangdong, transactions in Hong Kong dollars allowed them to skirt the worst effects of hyperinflation, and soon large purchases and exchanges, including marriage costs, were denominated in HKD rather than in various depreciating Chinese currencies such as the fiat money, the gold yuan certificate, and the silver yuan certificate.

The first sign of use of the Hong Kong dollar in marriage negotiations began in January 1948. When a man sold his deceased father's house in urban Guangzhou with his mother's permission to prepare for his marriage transactions, he received a

jushi youzi taogang” [Capital flow from central China to Hong Kong], *Daguang wanbao*, September 9, 1948.

⁷⁹ Campbell and Tullock (1954) suggested that United States Dollars and Hong Kong dollars were stores of value in China, but most financial exchanges were still in Chinese currencies. See, Colin D. Campbell and Gordon C. Tullock, “Hyperinflation in China, 1937-49,” *Journal of Political Economy* 62, no. 3 (1954): 236–45.

⁸⁰ “Jinrong dongdang wuli ezhi zhixia” [Unable to control financial turmoil], *Daguang wanbao*, June 26, 1948.

⁸¹ “Yanmi guanzhi zijin taogang buzhun xingzhuang huikuan xianggang” [Strict controls of capital outflow to Hong Kong, and outbound wire transfers to Hong Kong are forbidden], *Daguang bao*, February 21, 1947. The next day, an article detailed the amount of gold and foreign currencies that people could export, which was two *liang* of gold and no more than USD 100 worth of foreign currencies. “Xiedai jinshipin chukou meiren bude yu erliang” [Forbidden to export more than two *liang* of gold jewelry], *Daguang bao*, February 22, 1947.

⁸² According to a newspaper citing statistics from the customs department, 73% of smuggling nationally in China was in south China. “Guangjiu lushang de zousi mimi” [The secret of smuggling on the Kowloon-Canton Railway], *Daguang wanbao*, April 6, 1948.

sizeable sum of forty thousand Hong Kong dollars. However, the man's younger brother demanded his share on the grounds that a mother should not sell the ancestral property to favor one son over another and that he could use the HKD for his marriage too.⁸³ As hyperinflation worsened, more instances of marriage transactions were denominated in Hong Kong dollars. In a typical dispute over marriage freedom in March 1948, a woman who lost her parents was unhappy with a marriage arranged by her sister-in-law for an offered bride price of one thousand Hong Kong dollars. Additionally, the potential groom agreed to pay the sister-in-law one hundred and fifty HKD monthly to cover her household expenses. By the time the potential bride objected to the marriage, her sister-in-law had already received more than three hundred HKD from the groom, along with a gold ring as an engagement gift. The dispute was unresolved at a police station, but the potential husband sent word that he would recoup his losses from the sister-in-law if the sister called off the engagement.⁸⁴ A similar case of infringing marriage freedom in May 1948 also denoted the use of 1,500 Hong Kong dollars as the bride price.⁸⁵

Like bride price, settlements of marriage disputes were also increasingly denominated in Hong Kong dollars by mid-1948.⁸⁶ Although there was a divorce

⁸³ “Jiehun fenjia” [Being married and dividing ancestral properties], *Daguan wanbao*, January 24, 1948.

⁸⁴ “Guyuan saojie” [Fate between sisters-in-law], *Daguan wanbao*, March 30, 1948.

⁸⁵ “Buyuan lihua ya haitang” [Do not desire an old man to crush a young girl], *Daguan wanbao*, May 23, 1948.

⁸⁶ A strictly numerical comparison of inflation in bride price during the Civil War is close to impossible for the period of hyperinflation, for a bride price contracted in November 1947 and paid in November 1948 would have drastic differences (22.5x) in purchasing power. Instead, bride prices mentioned in newspapers were denominated in how many *jin* of pork exchanged between family, or Hong Kong dollars.

settlement that cost a man 100 million Chinese yuan on 20th May,⁸⁷ newspapers also reported on other settlements in Hong Kong dollars, such as one news article when a man surnamed Feng compensated another man surnamed Wen 200 Hong Kong dollars to recoup his loss of tens of millions of Chinese yuan, an amount that Wen accused his ex-wife Liang who was now Feng's wife of stealing from him.⁸⁸

While the use of the Hong Kong dollar in marriage transactions was only one small part of coping with hyperinflation, it demonstrated heightened border dynamics and the uniqueness of south China. The use of HKD, a currency from a foreign entity, allowed people to continue their daily lives, including paying bride price or monthly maintenance. In contrast, those without access to HKD suffered the fullest effects of hyperinflation, and the bride price negotiated for a wedding would have much less financial value on the day of the wedding. However, this period of hyperinflation was also the beginning of the rupture of a once economically and culturally unified region. On the Hong Kong side of the border, the market was stable and experienced little inflation, but a massive currency depreciation caused by hyperinflation occurred on the Chinese side. The border and proximity with Hong Kong helped ordinary people survive and maintain some semblance of everyday life, including marriage, weddings, and monthly maintenance.

⁸⁷ “Fu ye wuqing fu yelan” [The husband is heartless, and the wife is indecent], *Daguang wanbao*, May 20, 1948.

⁸⁸ The article did not mention an exact number of how much money was lost by the man who at the end received the 200 Hong Kong dollars; it was “tens of millions”. “Wushui yinyuan qushi duo” [Amusing stories about temporary marriage], *Daguang wanbao*, May 24, 1948.

Ultimately, the period between 1945 to 1949 was too short for the crumbling Nationalist regime to perform any meaningful customs reforms, and marriage practices and marital conflict resolutions between 1945 and 1949 exhibited continuity with those before the war in 1937, apart from resolving wartime serial bigamy. With a short gap between the Japanese surrender in August 1945 and the Nationalist resumption of governance in Guangzhou a few months later, newspaper columnists once again offered guides on dating strategies, characteristics of ideal husbands, and satires on the role of money in dating. Complementary to the return to normality in social discourse and political order, social news articles during this period narrated marital disputes resolved by the police and the court, with varying degrees of compliance with state laws among the populace.

During these four years of peace in Guangdong, several unusual developments regarding marriage attracted public attention. First were marital disputes from unintentional bigamy committed by both men and women. When discussing conflicts about multiple spouses in the press, there emerged two distinct preferences in dispute resolution, one focusing on the law and the other on social and domestic harmony. However, even in cases of women simultaneously married to two husbands, the normally androcentric press was sympathetic to women who remarried during wartime while their husbands were alive. Secondly, there was public condemnation of Chinese women who were socializing with U.S. soldiers. Known as “Jeep Girls,” they incited further anxiety in Chinese men who criticized them as putting materialism before nationalism. Nonetheless, unlike the situation in other parts of China with

heavy U.S. presence, “Jeep Girls” existed only in the discursive space and vanished quickly in south China, when residents had to worry about hyperinflation and their livelihood.

The use of the Hong Kong dollar in marriage transactions in the final years of the Civil War highlighted regional adaptation and border dynamics that were unseen before. The proximity of Hong Kong and a long history of the circulation of HKD in south China allowed easy substitution for the Chinese yuan, indicating that residents were taking advantage of the border when they had lost faith in their territorial or national government. The border, which caused endless problems for the Nationalist state for enabling massive capital flight, allowed people to survive if they used foreign currency that was readily available. Marriage expenses could stay constant even when Chinese currencies were worthless, and transactions were conducted in a foreign currency even when everyone involved was on Chinese soil.

The newly arriving Communist regime had plans to fundamentally change people’s relationship to the state, including marriage regulation. Unlike the Nationalist government, which required only a publicly celebrated wedding attended by two witnesses and a marriage certificate that couples could purchase from any stationery store, the new order would be much more demanding and active in regulating marriage in south China.

Chapter 4

The Interventionist Socialist State and Local Response to the Marriage Laws

The beginning of the People's Republic of China (PRC) brought a drastic shift in the relationship between the state, society, and everyday life. Within a year of Guangdong's liberation, the People's Republic China state promulgated its Marriage Law of 1950. Although the language of this Marriage Law shares similarities with the Nationalist Civil Code, the PRC regulatory power and the PRC state's desire to create a new Chinese society led to an unprecedented enforcement of the state's marriage law. In contrast to the previous two decades of marriage regulations in South China under various regimes (warlord, collaborationist, and Nationalist) that relied on voluntary adoption and use of state regulations, adherence to the Marriage Law was mandatory under the PRC.

Throughout the first three decades of the PRC, enforcement of the Marriage Law led to unending conflicts over people's desire to marriage practices such as bride price, arranged or underage marriage, and the government mandate of ensuring affordable and free-choice marriage. In some cases, conflicts related to marriage issues led to suicides and homicides. Although these conflicts occurred across the PRC, south China had its own particularities of its sojourner society, overseas Chinese ties, lineage organizations, and the proximity with colonial Hong Kong.¹

¹ On the impacts of the Marriage Laws in other regions of China, see Neil J. Diamant, "Re-Examining the Impact of the 1950 Marriage Law: State Improvisation, Local Initiative and Rural Family Change," *The China Quarterly*, no. 161 (2000): 171–98.

Existing works on the 1950 Marriage Law such as the Kay Johnson (1983) discuss patrilocality and the political status of women, while Judith Stacey, and Margery Wolf have both discussed the conservative backtrack of the state on women's right after 1953 as the result of the state prioritizing male peasants' interests.² Diamant (2000) rightly pointed out the divergence of incentive in enforcing the marriage law between local cadres and higher level of officials in county-level and above, creating a situation where rural women took advantage of the different levels of the state to secure their right given in the Marriage Law.³ Besides the enforcement and consequences of the Marriage Law, Freedman (2006) examined the PRC state efforts on eliminating unwanted marriage customs using a civilizing discourse and resulting in limited success on changing behavior on the ground.⁴ A recent work by Cong (2016) discussed the interaction between local practices and the PRC's marriage regulations and customs reform in revolutionary base areas and the conflicts between local cadres and the peasants who resisted the call to allowing free-choice marriages.⁵

Building on these works on the impacts of the Marriage Law and the marriage customs reforms in PRC, I interpret the Marriage Law as not only a national law from

² Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985).

³ Neil J. Diamant, "Re-Examining the Impact of the 1950 Marriage Law: State Improvisation, Local Initiative and Rural Family Change," *The China Quarterly*, no. 161 (2000): 171–98.

⁴ Sara Friedman, *Intimate Politics: Marriage, the Market, and State Power in Southeastern China*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 265 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

⁵ Xiaoping Cong, *Marriage, Law and Gender in Revolutionary China, 1940–1960*, Cambridge Studies in the History of the People's Republic of China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)

above and enforced by local agents in the province, counties, and villages, but also as a continuation of a state exerting itself into the everyday lives of its people to modernizing Chinese society and increasing control of the Chinese family. Like its Nationalist predecessors that aimed to impart national politics into weddings,⁶ the PRC state went a step further by emphasizing class identities and socialist values to prevent “capitalistic” marriage customs and marriage between the politically trusted class and the unreliable class. Also, rather than focusing on the impacts of the Marriage Law vis-à-vis women’s access to divorces, I examine local resistance to the Marriage Law in other components of marriage regulations, such as registration, spousal preferences, marriage transactions, and wedding rituals.

Regionality was important in the propagation of marriage customs in the PRC, and local interactions with the Marriage Law experienced visible divergence than other regions of China. In south China, the Marriage Law Campaign coincided with the land reform, and some counties were running both campaigns at the same time, resulting in competing resources and attention on marriage reform. As the active phase of the Marriage Law Campaign ended by mid-1950s, local factors such as lineage organizations, overseas ties, and cross border marriage with Hong Kong residents led to intransigence of marriage customs in this area. Also, in contrast to expanding state capabilities and government’s reach to local society, the ability of the government to stamp out unwanted marriage customs was deteriorating in this region,

⁶ See, Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953*, Asia-Local Studies/Global Themes 5 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

particularly in the Pearl River Delta where people had intimate contacts with and knowledge about the world outside of the PRC.

In this chapter, I argue that despite expanded state capabilities and repeated efforts to enforce the Marriage Law and cultivate legal awareness among the populace, residents were exceptionally resistant to marriage regulations. Contrary to the official rhetoric that declared success in eradicating unwanted marriage customs such as underage marriage and large bride prices, some practices such as materialistic spousal choice never disappeared, and the state had to accommodate others despite their legal prohibition. At the same time, this period exhibited the mismatch in interests between local governments and the national PRC state. Different government levels enforced the Marriage Law unevenly, and local state agents often ignored, misinterpreted, or even violated the rules they were supposed to uphold.

This chapter is subdivided into four sections: the beginning of compulsory state control of marriage in south China; the course of the publicity of the Marriage Law and its intensive campaign between 1950-1953; the aftermath of the Marriage Law from 1954-1966 that demonstrated the limits of the provincial government in suppressing “feudal” marriage customs; and spatial hypergamy in Guangdong that crossed ethnic, provincial, and a national border separating Hong Kong from China.

Introducing Compulsory Social Control

The People’s Liberation Army’s conquest of Guangzhou on October 15th, 1949, marked the establishment of a new regime that fundamentally changed social interactions in south China. The new government first addressed what it regarded as

social ills and bad elements left by the old society, including gambling and prostitution.⁷ Then it embarked on solidifying its control, in part through the Marriage Law of 1950. Like the Nationalist Civil Code, the Marriage Law of 1950 mandated monogamy, free-choice marriage, equal rights between men and women, the right to divorce, and established a minimum marriageable age.⁸ The Marriage Law also explicitly banned concubines, an issue that was sidestepped in the Civil Code, and forbade anyone to demand money from marriages.⁹

Initially, the promotion of the Marriage Law in Guangdong followed a template not unlike other regions of the PRC. The provincial state began by mandating registration and premarital examination, but the response from local people were mixed. A major contrast to the Nationalist Civil Code was the requirement of marriage registration in the 1950 Marriage Law of the PRC, placing the burden on new couples to submit to government inspection of age, marital status, and health if they wanted official recognition of their marriages.¹⁰

Within the requirement to officially register marriage was a premarital health inspection that was quickly scrapped in Guangdong. Since the 1950 Marriage Law

⁷ "Guangzhou shehui gaizao shilu" [The history of social transformation in Guangzhou], Guangdong Jingji Chubanshe, Guangzhou, 2011.

⁸ Article 1, Article 2, Article 3, and Article 4 of the 1950 Marriage Law of the PRC.

⁹ Article 2 forbade anyone using marriage as a reason to ask for money; the keyword in the text is "Suoqu" [Asking, demanding], which created ambiguity between demanding a bride price from the groom's or his family, and the voluntary act of giving a bride price as appreciating the bride's family for raising her daughter. Regarding the legality of concubines in the Nationalist Civil Code, see Lisa Tran, *Concubines in Court: Marriage and Monogamy in Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

¹⁰ For more about marriage registration as a state-building process in the PRC, see Neil J. Diamant, "Making Love 'Legible' in China: Politics and Society during the Enforcement of Civil Marriage Registration, 1950-66," *Politics & Society* 29, no. 3 (September 2001): 447-80.

forbade people with incurable diseases or impotence from marrying, a couple without a health certificate could not register their marriage. In Guangzhou, the municipal government created additional statutes that demanded health clearance from designated hospitals and clinics. The examination required blood tests and X-rays to screen for tuberculosis, sexually transmitted disease, mental illness, deformity of sex organs, and impotence. For the privilege of medical examination, new couples had to pay registration fees, examination fees, and recording fees.¹¹

Administrative inconsistencies between different government levels plagued the program to mandate premarital health examination in Guangzhou and other parts of Guangdong Province. From the beginning, the stated goal of universal premarital inspections suffered from inadequate facilities and uneven implementation. When Guangzhou's municipal government demanded premarital examinations as a prerequisite for marriage registration, inadequate testing facilities for sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis became a capacity bottleneck and a site of contention between the state and the people. In designated hospitals in urban Guangzhou, only a few could perform the desired Wassermann reaction test, while others relied on the time-consuming Kahn's reaction test.¹² Outside of urban Guangzhou, the gap between the state vision and capabilities was ever more prominent. Clinics lacked the essential equipment for analysis, such as microscopes

¹¹ "Guangzhou shi renmin zhengfu weisheng ju guanyu guangzhou renmin zhengfu shishi hunqian jiankang jiancha linshi guize de tonggao" [A public notice from the Guangzhou Department of Health on provisional rules about premarital health inspections], file 020-009-165-211-212, Guangdong Provincial Archive (hereby abbreviated as GPA), June 29, 1950.

¹² "Yinianlai zhixing hunyinfa de qingkuang" [The situation of enforcing the Marriage Law in the past year], *Guangzhou Shizheng*, vol 14 (1950), p.360-363.

or X-ray machines, and they could not even do Kahn's reaction tests. As a result, people were unhappy with the procedure that required a sustained waiting time and fees for a test result that could prevent them from marrying.¹³

Uneven enforcement of premarital health examinations also hampered the state's efforts in establishing the coercive social order it desired. A report from the provincial government to the Central-South regional authority noted that some counties did not make examination mandatory but instead tested only volunteers.¹⁴ Upon knowing that the examination was not required, new couples eschewed the examination. In rural areas, physical distance from the examination clinic also discouraged premarital health examination.¹⁵ The urban-rural gap in enforcing premarital examination was foreseen by bureaucrats early on when the municipal government of Guangzhou noted the impracticality of requiring rural and suburban women to submit to premarital health examination. Instead, the municipal government advised that requirement on these women be waived in deference to local customs.¹⁶

High popular resentment to this new premarital health inspection requirement was based on financial and cultural grounds. In internal work reports, cadres cited newspapers and reflection letters from residents who opposed the inspection from

¹³ "Baogao hunqian jiankang jiancha qingkuang" [Reporting on the premarital health inspection], file 317-1-16-117, GPA. September 17, 1953.

¹⁴ The Central South Greater Administrative Area was an early super-provincial political entity that encompasses Hubei, Hunan, Henan, Jiangxi, Guangdong, and Guangxi Province. This political entity was abolished in 1954, and each province directly reported to the central government after that.

¹⁵ "Baogao hunqian jiankang jiancha qingkuang".

¹⁶ "Yinianlai zhixing hunyinfa de qingkuang," *Guangzhou Shizheng*, vol 14 (1950), p.360-363.

financial and logistic standpoints. Firstly, this requirement intended to ensure healthy spouses was expensive and a new cost to a population unaccustomed to registration. Although the provincial government demanded a uniform price for the inspection, in reality, individual hospitals charged examinees differently, and bureaucrats attempted to correct irregularities in fees to no avail.¹⁷ Also, if examinees were discovered to be diseased, they also needed to pay for treatment, but not many could afford it.¹⁸ Subsequently, many residents questioned the utility of premarital health checks, for they were neither treated nor received the marriage certificate they desired.¹⁹ Aside from cost, there were also minor issues that created hesitancy to an examination. In one hospital, the cadre reported that people disliked male doctors performing premarital examination and preferred that only female doctors be employed in examination.²⁰

It was quite possible that people in south China also opposed this requirement on cultural grounds. Given the role of premarital and post-marital health examination before 1949, they had been closely associated with scandals or lawsuits over marital disputes. During the period of collaborationist and Nationalist rule, residents patronized doctors to cure syphilis, often after a night of purchased passion.

¹⁷ “Yinianlai zhixing hunyinfa de qingkuang”; “Guanyu shiming dui geyiyuan hunqian jiancha de yijian fanying yishi de tongzhi” [A notice on residents’ opinions on premarital health inspection offered by each hospital], file 020-009-187-145, GPA, September 2, 1950; “Baogao hunqian jiankang jiancha qingkuang.”

¹⁸ “Tongzhi zhanshi tingban hunqian jiankang jiancha gongzuo” [An announcement on temporarily suspending premarital health inspection], file 317-1-16-116, GPA, December 4, 1953.

¹⁹ “Yinianlai zhixing hunyinfa de qingkuang”; also, a letter to editor, written by “a person who could not marry”, reflected some grievances of this requirement on draining financial resources. “Hunqian jianyan shi weile shimin he houdai jiankang” [Premarital health examination is for the good of residents and descendants], *Lianhe bao*, September 21, 1952.

²⁰ “Yinianlai zhixing hunyinfa de qingkuang.”

Additionally, people demanded a doctor's examination to find faults in their spouses, such as male impotence, premarital sex, or vaginal anomalies that prevented consummation. Before 1949, a woman might be asked by her fiancé, his family, or the police on his behalf to undergo a virginity test as part of a dispute mediation over bride price or purity. Similarly, if a woman accused her fiancé or husband of an incurable disease and petitioned for a separation or divorce on those grounds, the court would ask the man in question to undergo a health test. These claims about women's impurity or men as disease carriers could be real or imagined, but because medical visits had acquired such negative connotations, a visit to a doctor was not a practice that people desired. Without considering the popular association of premarital health inspection with marriage disputes, PRC cadres reported that residents were unwilling to participate due to cost, time, or resistance to state regulations.

In response to the irregular enforcement, lack of capacity, and widespread resentment, the provincial government quietly dropped this requirement by December 1953. A provincial government directive to other administrative units claimed that premarital health examinations led to a "thought burden" in people; hence the government needed to suspend the requirement temporarily.²¹ However, the end of the requirement for premarital health examinations prefigured a repeated dynamic: coercive marriage regulations, local noncompliance, and state accommodation.

²¹ "Tongzhi zhanshi tingban hunqian jiankang jiancha gongzuo."

A south China variation in promoting the Marriage Law (1950-1953)

In addition to requiring marriage registration and premarital examinations, the promotion of the Marriage Law in Guangdong from 1950 to 1953 followed a national template in publicizing the law: government edicts, editorials to project authoritative viewpoints, and illustrated panels and comics for the less-educated population.²² The provincial government employed local cultural forms such as folk songs and reformed Cantonese opera to educate people about the illegality of arranged marriage, extortion of monetary wedding gifts, and concubinage, while promoting gender equality and equal responsibilities in managing the household.²³ Also, newspapers, now under the controlled of the PRC government, published curated letters to editors and transcribed oral testimonies from interviews with women to project authenticity about the Marriage Law's success in securing the freedom to marry, remarry, or

²² For example, the newspaper printed various announcement of the government, such as "Guangzhou shi renmin zhengfu guanyu jiancha hunyinfu zhixing qingkuang de zhishi" [Instruction of the Guangzhou Municipal Government on inspecting the implementation of the Marriage Law], *Lianhe bao*, November 1, 1951; There were "Sixiang xiaopin" [Short essays] that ran consecutively from January 29, 1953 to February 1, 1953, on various aspects of the Marriage Law in *Nanfang Ribao*, the Provincial Party newspaper. *Nanfang ribao* also printed "Illustrations of the Marriage Law," a set of illustrated panels explaining the Marriage Law drawn by the Provincial People's Artist Society, starting on January 25, 1953. Another illustrated story on widow remarriage titled "Yuanyang yin" [Silver of the Mandarin Ducks], which began on February 9, 1953.

²³ Jinzhi qiangpo baoban: Hunyinfu shichang zhiyi" [part 1 of 10 about the Marriage Law: forbidding arranged marriage], *Lianhe bao*, December 9, 1951; "Jinzhi maimai hunyin" [forbidding transactional marriage], *Lianhe bao*, December 10, 1951; "Jinzhi chonghun naqie" [prohibiting bigamy and concubinage], *Lianhe bao*, December 31, 1951. "Nannu quanli pingdeng" [gender equality], *Lianhe bao*, January 5, 1952; "Ping yueju: Jiehun" [commenting on Cantonese opera: a wedding], *Lianhe bao*, September 6, 1952. This new Cantonese opera premiered in August 1952, as an advertisement for this play indicated on August 25, 1952. For more information about the Provincial CCP's attempt to revolutionize Cantonese opera from 1949-1951, see, Zhong Libin. "1949 — 1951 Nian yueju 'xi gai', *Xiqu yanjiu* 2018 (04).

divorce.²⁴ As a genre, they praised cadres for intervening on women's behalf,²⁵ but also criticized cadres when they failed to prevent domestic cruelty and abuse, process divorce petitions, and register new couples according to the law.²⁶

Acknowledging that many cadres and the masses thought of the Marriage Law solely as a "women's law" or "divorce law" that favored young women at the expense of men,²⁷ the provincial press included testimonies of husbands and mothers-in-law who improved their behavior upon learning about the Marriage Law. Stories of men engaging in a mutual criticism session with their wives and beginning to treat their wives as equals, such as a male urban petty-bourgeois intellectual who studied the Marriage Law with his wife and began to respect his wife and allowed her to work outside of the house,²⁸ or testimonies from reformed rural husbands who worked cooperatively in the field with their wives and publicly vow to stop physically

²⁴ An earliest example appeared on June 24, 1950, reflections of a widow who used the Marriage Law to argue for her rights to remarry after nine years of widowhood. With the new Marriage Law of the PRC on her side, she stated that she finally dared to overcome her mother-in-law's objections, along with "unreasonable oppression from the old society." "Wo dule hunyinfā yihou" [After I read the Marriage Law], *Nanfang ribao*, June 24, 1950. Others in the same genre included a story about this former maid experienced both the Land Reform and the Marriage Law to change her life and have a free-choice marriage. "Bushì yǒu le hunyinfā wǒ nánng zìyǒu jiéhūn" [Without the Marriage Law I cannot have a free-choice marriage], *Lianhe bao*, October 18, 1951. Another article, published on January 27, 1953, followed a similar logic of meeting a suitable marriage partner and received land during the Land Reform. "Hunyinfā shì wǒ jiānlì le hémǔ xìngfú de jiāting" [the Marriage Law allowed me to create a harmonious family], *Nanfang ribao*, January 27, 1953.

²⁵ "Dūzhè lǎixīn: Fúgāng xiān rénmin zhèngfǔ yào zhōngshì guānchē zhìxíng hunyinfā de gōngzuò" [Reader's letter: the Fugang County People's Government must pay attention to the work of implementing the Marriage Law], *Nanfang ribao*, December 27, 1952.

²⁶ "Dūzhè lǎixīn zhūanyè: Qū xiāng zhèngfǔ yīng jiānjuū guānchē hunyinfā" [Reader's letter page: district and village governments must resolutely implement the Marriage Law], *Nanfang ribao*, February 2, 1953.

²⁷ "Xiāng wǔjiē hunyinfā de sixiāng dòuzhèng!" [Struggling against misunderstanding of the Marriage Law!], *Lianhe bao*, November 29, 1951.

²⁸ "Wǒ yīnggāi fāngqīlè fùquān" [I should abandon the patriarchy], *Lianhe bao*, November 29, 1951.

abusing them.²⁹ The mother-in-law had two types: the reformed and the model type. Reformed mothers-in-law were those who once abused their daughters-in-law but stopped upon self-reflection, such as a fictional account of a mother-in-law who quarreled with her daughter-in-law over trivial matters in a newspaper article. After some airing of grievances and self-criticisms at her son's urging, the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law resolved their differences and vowed to be at peace.³⁰ Mothers-in-law who labored their whole life for their sons, treated their daughters-in-law kindly, and ran a harmonious household as matriarchs became models.³¹

The provincial effort to publicize the Marriage Law in Guangdong also relied on model marriages that people could voluntarily form. With the help of the Marriage Law, rural women would meet their understanding and hardworking spouses while working together in the field, on lands recently distributed from the Land Reform. A model marriage publicized by the state press described the meeting between a female cadre from the third district of Xinhui and her future husband. Both poor peasants, they met on Labor Day of 1951, and as they began to work together, she discovered that he had a good work ethic. After a while, he offered to harvest for her, and they fell in love and married at the district government office in 1952.³² In the urban core of Guangzhou, the provincial capital, two types of model marriages appeared in the

²⁹ Pinnong guanjin shi ruhe zhuanbian guolai de" [How did poor peasant Guan Jin reform himself?], *Hunyinfu xuanchuan ziliao*, Guangzhou Women's Federation Education Department, 1953.

³⁰ "Poxi" [Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law], *Lianhe bao*, January 11, 1952.

³¹ "Mofan popo chen runsi" [The model mother-in-law Chen Runsi], *Hunyinfu xuanchuan ziliao*, Guangzhou Women's Federation Education Department, 1953.

³² "Xinren xinshi: Yi dui laodong xin fuqi" [a new model couple], *Nanfang ribao*, February 9, 1953.

press. First, marriage repaired by the Marriage Law. When a repentant husband decided to stop cohabiting with his mistress, he became a responsible father by paying for his son's expenses and returned to his wife after some official intervention from the district government and the masses.³³ The other kind of model marriage in urban Guangzhou shared similarities with rural model marriages, where the couples would meet at worksites or be introduced to fellow workers, vow to become productive citizens of the new regime in gratitude of the Marriage Law.³⁴

Within the national pattern of advertising model marriages as part of the publicity of the Marriage Law, their descriptions in Guangdong specifically addressed local factors such as lineage organizations and marriage taboos. In south China, lineage organization held tremendous influence in social and economic life, and there were taboos such as marriage between feuding lineages, or same-surname or intra-lineage marriages. Although the PRC's land reform eroded lineage control on land and their political power by redistributing land ownership and establishing alternative power structure such as peasant associations, the land reform did not freed the people from lineage influence in the domestic affairs such as spousal choice and marriage taboos. In descriptions of model marriage using the new Law, they functioned as an example for the people to abandon loyalty to their lineage organizations. For example, in one publicized model marriage, a woman overcame resistance from her

³³ "Youle renmin zhengfu youle hunyinfā" [With the People's Government and the Marriage Law], *Lianhe bao*, December 30, 1951.

³⁴ "Zai xin hunyinfā baohu xia" [Under the protection of the new Marriage Law], *Lianhe bao*, December 27, 1951.

parents and older villagers who harbored “feudal lineage ideas” against marriage between feuding lineages. Her success in triumphing over lineage influence to marry the man she chose led to cessation of this lineage-induced ban in the area.³⁵

Concurrent to the publicity of the Marriage Law in Guangdong was the signing of the Patriotic Pledge and the associated voluntary donation to the PRC state during the Korean War.³⁶ Families and individuals were encouraged or socially pressured to sign the Patriotic Pledge, which required them to affirm their patriotism by making an oath to be more productive at work, ensure harmonious relations between spouses and family members,³⁷ and donate to purchase “artilleries and planes” for the front. People’s marriage transactions such as bride prices were ripe for the taking, and newspapers printed stories of people who voluntarily donated money intended initially for wedding ceremonies.³⁸

This repurposing of wedding gifts and marital transactions by the PRC state continued its emerging pattern of expanding its reach into people’s marriages and linkage to national political priorities, not unlike the donation of wedding gifts in Nationalist group wedding ceremonies in wartime China (see Chapter 2). However, the reach of the PRC state was far more intrusive than the Nationalist state, due the

³⁵ “Ruguo meiyou hunyinfa, nalaizhedeui haofuqi?” [Without the Marriage Law, how could this good couple happen?], *Nanfang ribao*, February 10, 1953.

³⁶ The term in Chinese is “aiguo gongyue” 愛國公約, a pledge of patriotism signed by individuals or groups.

³⁷ Some examples in the newspapers about women who signed the Patriotic Pledge are: “Jieshao yige dianxing de aiguo gongyue” [Introducing a typical Patriotic Pledge], and “Yuxiuqu jinrong jie funu qieshi zhixing aiguo gongyue” [Women in Jinrong Street in Yuxiu District (Guangzhou) are implementing the Patriotic Pledge], *Lianhe bao*, June 11, 1951.

³⁸ “Jiehun zhunbei jin” [Money reserved for marriage], *Lianhe bao*, July 3, 1951.

stronger control of the local PRC state in the workplace, neighborhood organizations, and in the countryside than the ineffective wartime Nationalist regime.

However, the credibility of these stories of voluntary donation of funds prepared for marriage is suspect. For example, in one story published in July 1951 concerning a man who donated his entire fund of three hundred-plus silver coins prepared for marriage expenses, there were three improbable occurrences. First, his fiancée encouraged him to contribute more of his money, as she was donating five times her monthly wages for this campaign.³⁹ Her generosity defied conventional logic in marriage transactions since her natal family or she would benefit the most from that fund of money prepared for their marriage.⁴⁰ Second, the background of the protagonist is also questionable. What would motivate a man in his thirties with a fiancée in sight to be utterly selfless with his hard-earned store of silver coins, especially when he worried about his ability to fund his wedding? The third point that challenges the credibility of this story is the mention of a "mobilizational session" at work. This suggests that the state or its local agents exerted social pressure on people. In the story, others directly challenged the protagonist at the mobilizational session into donation, implying some element of coercion or social pressure in signing the

³⁹ In the story in "Jiehun zhunbei jin", the protagonist initially planned to donate one million [old] RMB. Still, his fiancée, who earned two dans of rice, was donating 1.2 million old RMB. A *dan* of rice cost 117000 old RMB, and if she was earning the financial equivalent of two *dan* of rice per month, which would be 234000 RMB, then she was approximately donating five months' worth of her wage. His entire hoard of money was worth four million-plus old RMB. The rice price came from the price index, "Meiri shiqing" [Daily market condition], *Lianhe bao*, August 15, 1951.

⁴⁰ The bride or her natal family would spend some money on hosting a wedding ceremony and banquet. At the same time, other parts would be given to her parents or her as bride price, where her parents could either return to the new couple as her dowry or pocket the money for other use.

Patriotic Pledge and the accompanying donation movement.⁴¹

If the Patriotic Pledge movement represented voluntarism and a productive use of marriage transaction, then the impact of the Pledge is not entirely clear in south China. In Guangzhou, the municipal Women's Federation found that many families signed the pledge pro forma without any follow-up action.⁴² Most likely, the Patriotic Pledge and the drive to channel marriage expenses into donations for the front was a product of a moment of war that dissipated once the frontline stabilized in Korea, as there was no more mention of the Pledge or channeling of bride price by 1953.

The publicity of the Marriage Law escalated into a full-blown national Marriage Law Campaign in 1953, and the Guangdong provincial government followed the national campaign by selecting pilot sites in Qujiang and Xinhui counties to assess the implementation of the law.⁴³ Designated work team members sent would convene cadres from the local peasants' associations, women's associations, youth leagues, and people's militia for training classes to spread public awareness of the Marriage Law.⁴⁴ The provincial government assessed the success and failure of the Marriage Law campaign based on reports from pilot sites.⁴⁵ In

⁴¹ "Jiehun zhunbei jin", *Lianhe bao*, July 3, 1951.

⁴² "Guangzhou shimin aiguo qingxu ri yi gaozhang" [Patriotic sentiment among Guangzhou residents is rising], *Lianhe bao*, October 18, 1951.

⁴³ Guangdong sheng 1953 nian guanche hunyinfa yundong qingkuang" [The situation on the Marriage Law Campaign in Guangdong in the year of 1953], file 237-1-1-055, GPA, April 15, 1953. In Qujiang county, there were three villages selected to be pilot sites. In Xinhui, there were two villages; hence there were multiple pilot sites from one county.

⁴⁴ "Shidian gongzuo zheng suibu zhankai" [Unfolding the Marriage Law in pilot sites], *Nanfang ribao*, January 25, 1953.

⁴⁵ These pilot sites were revisited by the provincial government and the Women's Federation in the 1960s to assess the Marriage Law's staying power after pulling out work teams. "Guangdong sheng

Qujiang, work team reported low participation rates among women cadres, and locals not protecting women's rights from domestic abuse or safeguarding their share of property after divorces. Patriarchal and lineage influence inhibited gender equality and political participation, as reported by a case where a woman who fought against her abusive husband was barred from joining the village's peasant association by other villagers.⁴⁶ Pilot sites in Xinhui shared similar problems of an unenthusiased population. Local marriage customs were slow to change, such that villagers continued to marry by proxy, widows remained unable to remarry, and none dared to ask for a divorce.⁴⁷ Similarly, local cadres hesitated to interact with the work team, while others missed training class using the excuse of prioritizing agricultural production.⁴⁸ Having a training class that ran from 7:30 AM to 9:30 PM for three days no doubt dampened cadres' enthusiasm, especially when they were also expected to build agricultural co-ops, dams, and to revise land redistribution from the earlier Land Reform campaign.⁴⁹ Lastly, some work teams were unable to find model couples with free-choice marriages and resorted to using harmonious couples from

qujiang xian wushi gongshe wushi dadui sange xiaodui de hunyin jiating qingkuang diaocha cailiao" [Investigative files on marriage and family in three production teams of Wushi Brigade, Wushi Commune in Qujiang County, Guangdong], file 233-1-94-38-47, GPA, June 1, 1962; "Shaoguan zhuanqu bufen diqu ji huaxian deng di xuanchuan guanche hunyinfa de qingkuang" [Propaganda and implementation of the Marriage Law in some areas of Shaoguan Prefecture and Hua county], file 233-1-127-74-87, GPA, May 25, 1966.

⁴⁶ "Qujiang shidian gongzuo" [Pilot sites in Qujiang], file 233-3-28-116-137, GPA, 1953.

⁴⁷ Marriage by proxy meant that in a wedding, a spouse, most likely a man, was not present in the wedding, and local customs would substitute his presence with a male chicken in front of his ancestral family tablets.

⁴⁸ "Shidian gongzuo zheng suibu zhankai," *Nanfang Ribao*, January 25, 1953.

⁴⁹ There was a movement to revisit the result of the Land Reform, as counties in Guangdong were undergoing follow-up surveys of the Land Reform. "Guanche hunyinfa yundong gongzuo yinggai zenyang rushou" [How to start a Marriage Law Campaign?], *Nanfang ribao*, February 1, 1953.

arranged marriages as examples, a move later admonished by the state as it wanted to emphasize the categorical difference between arranged marriage and free-choice marriage than promoting spousal harmony.⁵⁰

Overall, the promotion of the Marriage Law from 1950 to 1953 in south China experienced problems similar in other regions of the PRC, such as large increases in suicide or homicide, local cadres' "poor-peasant mentality" that favored men over women, and intervention by parents concerning the amount of bride price.⁵¹ As a response, the national PRC state instructed the government at lower levels to send work teams to investigate women's deaths,⁵² while reaffirming the necessity of purging of gender inequality and patriarchal thinking from society.⁵³ Also, to increase public awareness of suicide or homicide related to the Marriage Law, the press publicized judicial proceedings of homicide cases and number of cases related to

⁵⁰ "Xinhui xian shitou xiang guanche hunyinfā yundong shidian gongzuo de yixie jiaoxun" [Lessons from Marriage Law Campaign pilot site in Shitou Village in Xinhui County], *Nanfang ribao*, February 22, 1953.

⁵¹ There are a few entries about suicide cases related to marriage problems in *Neibu Cankao* (Internal References), an internal (confidential) news periodical. Some entries are quite explicit about the correlation between the implementation of the Marriage Law with increases in suicide cases, such as men who feared that their concubines or wives would leave them in Jiangxi and Chongqing, or men who committed suicide in Shanxi because they feared they would be publicly struggle during the Marriage Law Campaign in March 1953. See, "Jiangxi sheng yin hunyin wenti zisha he beishazhe ri yi zengduo" [Suicide and homicide cases relating to marriage problem are increasing in Jiangxi Province]; "Shanxi sheng gedi zai guanche hunyinfā yundong yue zhong lianxu fasheng zisha shijian" [Recurrent suicide cases in Shanxi Province during the Marriage Law Campaign month]; "Chongqing yin hunyin wenti zisha de qingkuang" [The situation of suicide cases related to marriage problem in Chongqing], *Neibu cankao*, March 30, 1953.

⁵² There was an article from the New China Agency on September 29, 1951. "Quanguo fulian deng wu tuanti fachu tongzhi" [A notice from five national-level associations including the All-China Women's Federation], *Lianhe bao*, October 3, 1951.

⁵³ "Weisheme yao zhankai guanche hunyinfā yundong" [Why do we need to implement the Marriage Law Campaign], *Nanfang ribao*, January 25, 1953.

marriage disputes.⁵⁴ At the beginning of the Marriage Law Campaign in 1953, the provincial government reported that from January to October of 1952, 366 people committed suicide or were murdered due to "incomplete implementation of the Marriage Law" in Guangdong Province.⁵⁵

Local conditions such as lineage influence in village societies in Guangdong worsened the intertwining problems of favoring male peasants over women and people committing suicide during the Marriage Law Campaign. On contributing to women committing suicide, lineage loyalty meant that local cadres were induced to ignore women's plight by denying a legal request to divorce or to render decision favorable toward fellow male lineage members. One publicized suicide case vividly demonstrates the connection between a woman's suicide, the role of local cadres, and lineage influence in south China. When a woman in Raoping County wanted to marry her boyfriend, who shared the same surname, they faced stiff resistance from fellow villagers, since same-surname homogamy was a major taboo in lineage societies that emphasized exogamy.⁵⁶ According to the Marriage Law, the couple's marriage would

⁵⁴ "Nanzun nubei fengjian sixiang yidu" [Lingering influence of the feudal thought of pro-male gender inequality], *Lianhe bao*, November 5, 1951; "Guangdong sheng renmin zhengfu fachu guanyu jiaqiang hunyinfa zhixing de zhishi" [directive from the Guangdong Provincial Government on strengthened enforcement of the Marriage Law], *Lianhe Bao*, November 26, 1951; "Kuoda xin hunyinfa xuanchuan jianjue guanche hunyinfa" [expanding the new Marriage Law and its implementation], *Lianhe bao*, November 27, 1951; "Benshi zhongdian jiancha hunyinfa chubu jieguo" [Inspection of the preliminary result of the Marriage Law in Guangzhou], *Lianhe bao*, December 2, 1951.

⁵⁵ "Quanguo da bufen diqu weineng zuohao guanche shixing hunyinfa" [Most areas in the country have not fully implemented the Marriage Law], *Nanfang ribao*, January 23, 1953.

⁵⁶ The location of this suicide was in 沈厝村, roughly translated as Shen's House Village. Hence it was likely that fellow villagers and the cadres from local peasant associations were also from the same surname of Shen and harbored this aversion to intra-lineage homogamy.

be legal as they were not closely related and only shared the same surname.⁵⁷ However, rather than protecting their right to marry, cadres from the peasant association objected to the marriage based on their “feudal thoughts” and transferred the case to a district-level work team member.⁵⁸ As an outsider, the work team member from the district would have served as an appeal. Not only did the work team member failed to intervene according to the Marriage Law, but he also denied the marriage application based on local lineage-based sentiments and organized a public struggle session against the couple. Emboldened by their local cadres’ actions, the masses looted her household, which drove her to commit suicide in despair.⁵⁹ Similar cases also blamed cadres for contributing increasing prevalence of suicide, as there were women who attempted suicide after their divorce petitions were denied by cadres despite having legal grounds and grievance.⁶⁰

Local cadres’ indifference toward protecting women's rights during the promotion of the Marriage Law (1950-1952) and the Marriage Law Campaign (1953) could be attributed to conflicting interests. On the one hand, the provincial party-state required cadres to implement and uphold the Marriage Law, which was not as popular as the land reform among poorer men. These men who praised the new regime for

⁵⁷ This issue of same-surname marriage was not only a rural problem in south China but was also evident in suburban villages near Guangzhou in 1951. “Benshi zhongdian jiancha hunyinfā chubu jieguo.”

⁵⁸ This issue of same-surname endogamy has already been discussed in south China by the collaborationist state during the Japanese occupation. Although at the surface this was an issue with same-surname marriage, but local opposition to this type of message was primarily due to village homogeneity.

⁵⁹ “Raoping xian pochū yitiaorenming lai” [A death in Raoping County], *Lianhe bao*, February 13, 1951.

⁶⁰ “Suqing fengjian canyu guanche hunyinfā,” *Lianhe bao*, 10th October 1951

dividing land nonetheless feared the departure of their wives.⁶¹ As many were married before the Marriage Law, a divorce would mean the loss of bride price and land allocated during the Land Reform, and then they might not be able to remarry.⁶² Local cadres were inclined to protect the interest of poorer men by denying women's rightful petitions to divorce,⁶³ or by requiring compensation from the women to their soon-to-be ex-husbands to ensure these husbands could marry someone else.⁶⁴ In a close-knit rural society such as a single-lineage village or multi-lineages village where cadres and the men were related, they would have even more incentive to keep their relatives or friends happy.

The rationale of economic exchange that led to cadres' favoritism can be seen in a complaint letter to the editor about local cadres in the sixth district of Shunde County. The letter describes a cadre from the village peasant's association who denied a woman's divorce petition, even though she had been abducted to the village and had poor marital relations with her husband. Although the law should have protected her right to divorce, the cadre denied her case by saying that "in the past, you married him because you were starving, and how could you divorce him when you are now well-fed from his grain?"⁶⁵ The result, was the rightful accusation that

⁶¹ "Fengjian canyu sixiang panju nongmin tounao" [Feudal remnants are still in peasants' thinking], *Lianhe bao*, November 24, 1951

⁶² "Danchun pin gunong guandian" [Simply poor hired peasant's viewpoint], *Lianhe bao*, October 10, 1951; "Fengjian canyu sixiang panju nongmin tounao".

⁶³ Cadres' opposition to marriage law was also visible in other parts of China. See, Johnson (1985), on cadre's misbehavior on protecting patriarchal rights over the Marriage Law nationwide.

⁶⁴ "Suqing fengjian canyu guanche hunyinfafa" [Purging feudal remnants to implement the Marriage Law], *Lianhe bao*, October 10, 1951; "Guangdong yinianlai tuixing hunyinfafa de qingkuang," *Lianhe bao*, October 9, and October 10, 1951.

⁶⁵ "Duzhe laixin zhuan: Qu xiang zhengfu ying jianju guanche hunyinfafa", *Nanfang ribao*, February

local cadres would ignore the law to protect men's interest over women's right given by the Marriage Law. Cadres, the state press contends, should consider gender on top of class background, as wives of these poorer men were also poor peasants, and cadres should equally protect their rights.⁶⁶ If poor male peasants deserved sympathy, then women who were also poor peasants warranted even more assistance from the state.

Knowing the root causes for cadres' favoritism of poorer men in these violation of the Marriage Law were bride price and the inability to pay one, the provincial state continued the long-standing tradition of criticizing extravagant wedding costs and marriage transactions in south China by calling marriage expenses unnecessary.⁶⁷ Newspapers meticulously noted items used in bride prices, such as wedding cakes, sugar, meat, roast pork, mosquito nets, shoes, and clothing, denominated in *jin* of wheat or RMB.⁶⁸ When the provincial Women's Federation sent out work-teams to the countryside, these work teams also lectured cadres about the legal ownership of the bride price or the or the engagement gift in case of dispute.⁶⁹ Although the training program did not provide any specific example, the logic of not retuning bride price or engagement gift when the engagement was called

2, 1953.

⁶⁶ "Yizhong sishi'erfei de xiangfa" [Specious thinking], *Nanfang ribao*, February 1, 1953.

⁶⁷ "Hunyin bushi maimai jiehun qike dingjia" [Marriage is not a transaction and cannot be priced], *Lianhe bao*, September 16, 1950; "Jiehun xuyao libing" [Marriage requires wedding cakes], *Lianhe Bao*, February 5, 1951; "Xin hunyin xin banfa" [New style marriage], *Lianhe bao*, October 7, 1951.

⁶⁸ "Guangzhou shehui gaizao shilu," p. 352; "Qujiang shidian gongzuo", file 233-3-28-116-137, GPA.

⁶⁹ "Xijiang diyijie jiangke jilu xin hunyinfa" [Record of the first lecture on the Marriage Law in Xijiang], file 233-2-19-75, GPA, 1952.

off was contrary to customary practice of returning them depending on one's fault.⁷⁰

Dowry, the reverse of bride price but considered equally wasteful by the new Chinese state, was also targeted in the press. However, during the Marriage Law Campaign in south China, dowry was only a periphery issue possibly because the core issue was men's inability to pay the bride price than parents giving too much to their daughters. Customarily, bride's parents would give a hefty amount of dowry goods and displayed them in the wedding procession, but this was unlikely for two reasons in 1953. Firstly, there was general poverty among the populace in south China. Second, those who traditionally provided a large dowry for display and social honor in Guangdong were the merchant and landlord class, and none would want to be associated with being rich or feudal. Although the official press fostered a narrative about a revolution in dowry that replaced unproductive goods such as a mirror, a well-decorated table, or fancy clothing with agricultural tools such as plows and rakes,⁷¹ in reality, parents were not able to give extravagant dowry because they could not afford it economically nor was it politically expedient.

⁷⁰ The issue of returning the engagement gift in the event of a premarital dispute between the couple was a subject in marital disputes during the Nationalist era. Customarily, the rightful owner of the engagement gift or the bride price rest on the party that was not at fault. If the man initiates the break-up, then he is not entitled to its return if the bride is faultless. Similarly, if the woman decides to renege the engagement, then customarily her family is expected to return the bride price or the engagement gift, or the equivalent value of said price. However, in the event when the woman is at fault for being unchaste or rumored to be a romantic and lost her virginity, then the man could still initiate to renege the engagement and asks for the return of the bride price or engagement gift or be compensated a similar value. The new policy advocated by these work teams completely changed that understanding of how bride price or engagement gift worked in local marriage negotiations and marital disputes resolution.

⁷¹ "Xin zhuanglian" [New trousseau], *Lianhe bao*, August 28, 1951.

Was there a correlation between the legal statutes or implementation of the law with cases of suicides and homicides in Guangdong? Did specific statutes or local enforcement of the Marriage Law contribute to the increases of these cases? Under Nationalist and collaborationist governance, there were also suicides and homicides from family disputes, although none were as prominently discussed as in the PRC newspapers in 1950-1953. It was reasonable for the press to emphasize these issues since the nascent PRC state proclaimed itself a champion of women's rights. However, large increases in suicide and homicide related to marriage disputes could also be consequences of uneven enforcement of the Law. Unlike the previous regime, the provincial state took an active interest in enforcing the marriage law via sent-down work teams, local cadres, and the court, rather than waiting passively and relying on people's voluntarism for legal adjudication. The result of the PRC's interventionist approach was a higher divorce rate; women initiated approximately from 75% to 95% of divorce cases in 1950-1952.⁷² As the provincial state was facilitating divorce for women who sought separation, and rural women petitioning their cases at higher level government to overcome denial by village cadres,⁷³ the threat of an unhappy wife departing from an impoverished man generated male anxiety and animosity toward the Marriage Law.⁷⁴

⁷² "Guanyu fengjian hunyin jiating wenti" [About feudal marriages and family problems], file 233-1-10-84, GPA.

⁷³ Neil J. Diamant, "Re-Examining the Impact of the 1950 Marriage Law: State Improvisation, Local Initiative and Rural Family Change."

⁷⁴ Diamant (2000) complicated this by differentiating between higher-up cadres who were supportive of the Marriage Law, and lower-level (village) cadres who tried to prevent divorce. Therefore, it is necessary to think about the class and status of the men in question; if the husband wanted to divorce

However, enabling women to divorce does not explain large increases in suicides and homicides in south China. Although impoverished husbands would lose their investment in the bride price their families had spent on procuring their soon-to-be ex-wives, men were also free to marry other women after their divorce. If local customs adhered to the Marriage Law that required free-choice marriage and abolished bride price in marriage negotiations, then divorced men could remarry, resulting in a slight loss of the initial bride price investment. In contrast, a dead wife could no longer be a productive or reproductive laborer for the household.

A possible factor leading to an increase of suicide was the recent distribution of land during the Land Reform. As the Marriage Law mandated women to depart with her premarital property (read: dowry) and an equitable distribution of property accrued during the marriage in a divorce,⁷⁵ women's de jure acquisition of distributed land from the Land Reform created an incentive for husbands and their patrilocal villages to prevent divorce proceedings, leading to further marital unhappiness and possible causes for suicide and homicide. Although the Nationalist Civil Code had also mandated the separation of property during divorce, in Republican China women

from an unhappy marriage and had the means to enter another marriage, then he would welcome the Marriage Law. However, if a man is already impoverished and would not be able to secure the bride price for another marriage, then he would object to the Marriage Law and the statutes that allowed the freedom to divorce.

⁷⁵ Articles 23-25 of the Marriage Law discussed the separation of property after divorce. Article 23 mandated that a woman's premarital property remained hers. Post-marital property should at first be divided by mutual agreement, but if no agreement exist, then the people's court would intervene and make a judgment based on the interest of the divorcing woman, any children from the marriage, and production. Article 24 was about mutual responsibility to debt incurred during the marriage, and Article 25 described the financially obligation to support a divorced spouse.

were often given maintenance or alimony.⁷⁶ Land, in contrast, remained in the hands of the patrilocal families, and the new Marriage Law of the PRC threatened male ownership of land. When women from the patrilineal villages divorced their husbands, land became important to the people and local cadres. For example, a local cadre illegally intervened in the right of a concubine who wished to separate from her husband, arguing that he would allow her separation only if she remarried another person from the same village to “keep the fertile land from outsiders,” as she had already received a share of the village land from the Land Reform.⁷⁷ In other instances, the state found that in one district in Jieyang County, 66 out of 90+ divorce cases ended in women deprived of their share of land distributed in the Land Reform. Also, among middle peasants, the state found that they categorically prohibited women from leaving with their land as they did not receive any new plot in the Land Reform. The denial of women’s fair share of land was encountered in more than one county, and the provincial government noted this problem could also be seen in other regions of the province.⁷⁸

Combining with the question over land ownership was the issue of securing a legal divorce. Whereas people could resolve marital disputes and reach divorce agreement informally among themselves in the Republican era, the new PRC state

⁷⁶ Articles 1056-1058 of the Nationalist Civil Code provided detail on dividing properties between spouses in the aftermath of a divorce.

⁷⁷ “Fengjian canyu sixiang panju nongmin tounao”, *Lianhe bao*, November 24, 1951. Although the concubine had no formal rights under the Marriage Law, the PRC government was not forcing concubines to divorce unless they wanted to.

⁷⁸ “Guangdong yinianlai tuixing hunyinfa de qingkuang” [Implementation of the Marriage Laws in the past year in Guangdong], *Lianhe bao*, November 9, 1951.

and its Marriage Law required official registration of marriage and divorce, hence lessening the possibility of unofficial settlements that would have prevented the separation of land from patrilocal households.⁷⁹

Without disregarding other major causes such as gender inequality and illegal intervention in marriage freedom,⁸⁰ women's right to separate property from her household, the possibly threat of divorce granted according to the Marriage Law, and marriage customs such as bride price together were all possible factors that induced desperate men to commit homicide or for local cadres to create insurmountable obstacles for women to petition for a divorce.

Local peculiarities in the Marriage Law publicity and campaign

Local peculiarities in Guangdong necessitated additional adjustments in the publicity, timing, and implantation of the Marriage Law. Preexisting local customs such as marriage resistance among women in the Pearl River Delta had created a subset of unmarried and celibate women, and the state needed to eliminate the local prejudice against their marriage.⁸¹ Besides local marriage customs, Guangdong also had a substantial boat-dwelling population historically discriminated against by land-

⁷⁹ A comprehensive description of marriage registration and the process of divorce could be found in Noboru Niida, "Land Reform and New Marriage Law in China," *The Developing Economies* 2, no. 1 (1964): 3–15.

⁸⁰ "Guangdong yinianlai tuixing hunyinfa de qingkuang", *Lianhe bao*, October 9 and October 10, 1951; "Qujiang shidian gongzuo", file 233-3-28-116-137, GPA.

⁸¹ There was a fine distinction between "Zishunu" 自梳女 [unmarried celibate women] and women who practiced post-marital natal residence, known as "Buluojia" 不落家. Women who stayed at natal home for a long period of time after the marriage were legally married, and the state was not concerned about those in terms of allowing them to marry someone. The state was concerned with the former group, those who have never married and desired one for themselves.

dwellers. These boat-dwellers had distinctive marriage customs that would violate the Marriage Law.

During the promotion of the Marriage Law, the Guangdong Provincial government followed the approach of preceding regimes in south China in suppressing the custom of marriage resistance. Stemming from a long history of women who vowed celibacy and became economically independent through employment in sericulture and later domestic services,⁸² articles in the provincial press indicated that these women were forced by feudal marriage practices such as the fear of an arranged marriage and the preference of marrying based on birth order, where the senior sibling must be married before her younger sibling. Additionally, publicity material conjured a narrative that these celibate women all desired marital happiness and should marry based on their free will.⁸³

There was considerable local sentiment against the marriage of these celibate women among the older generation and fellow “intransigent” and “backward” celibate women, and the promotion of the Marriage Law had to promote stories of women who overcame social pressure. Although none would challenge these women's right to marriage as they had never been legally married to another person,

⁸² Existing literature such as the works by Helen Siu and Janice Stockard have discussed the phenomenon and the decline of marriage resistance in the Pearl River Delta; for more information, see Helen F. Siu, “Where Were the Women?: Rethinking Marriage Resistance and Regional Culture in South China,” *Late Imperial China* 11, no. 2 (1990): 32–62; Janice E. Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860-1930* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989).

⁸³ “Zishunu ziyou jiehun” [Free choice marriage of a voluntarily celibate woman], *Hunyingfa xuanchuan ziliao*, Guangzhou Women's Federation Education Department, 1953; “Xinjiaoqu jiancha hunyingfa zhixing qingkuang” [Investigation of the implementation of the Marriage Law in Xinjiao District], *Lianhe bao*, December 6, 1951; “Wo buzuo zishunu le” [I will not be a voluntarily celibate woman anymore], *Lianhe bao*, January 6, 1952.

people ridiculed them for reneging on their celibacy vows. As many were already past their prime marriageable age, locals ridiculed them for thinking about marriage and marital happiness, with one suggesting that “you are already thirty-five, and it’s too old for thinking about marriage!”⁸⁴ To counter such animosity against these women, the PRC state provided a suitable match for them: the recently demobilized veterans who were newcomers to local societies.⁸⁵ In another example described in the provincial press, a woman in Guangzhou was forced by feudal customs to become a celibate woman, and had to suppress her feeling for her father’s apprentice for the past eight years. Only after attending a lecture about the Marriage Law in August 1951 did she gather the courage to marry.⁸⁶ The Marriage Law then became the last huddle before celibate women could liberate themselves from a life of loneliness and gave them a legal ground against condemnation and ridicule from “backward” people.

The boat-dwellers of south China required a different kind of state intervention in their marriage practices. Acknowledging their transient nature and differences from land-dwellers, the provincial government focused on education, persuasion, and erecting role models rather than strict enforcement of the law. It also delayed the implementation of the Marriage Law at times. Historically, south China had a sizeable boat-dwelling population (Tanka) that moored at piers, riverbanks, and fishing villages, and their marriage customs had been recorded in social surveys and

⁸⁴ “Zishunu ziyou jiehun.”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Wo buzuo zishunu le.”

investigations in the 1920s and 1930s.⁸⁷ The Tanka population suffered discrimination from land dwellers and were considered as members of another ethnic group. In Guangzhou, many Tanka engaged in prostitutions during Republican China and carried the reputation of being sexually casual. The discrimination against boat-dwellers also affected their marriage choice, for intermarriage between the boat-dwelling Dan with land-dwelling Han Cantonese were rare, although not an outright marriage taboo.⁸⁸ Boat-dwellers also had a reputation of being materialistic and demanding bride prices in their marriage negotiations, unlike the more established land-dwelling Han Cantonese, who offered a sizable dowry to gain social honor and avoid the reputation of “selling” their daughters.⁸⁹ Following in the footsteps of the Nationalist and the collaborationist press, which had consistently suggested that such discrimination of boat-dwellers by those who lived on land was wrong, the provincial PRC government sustained its narrative of equality between land-dwellers and boat-dwellers.⁹⁰

Boat-dwellers’ reception to the Marriage Law depended on access to state intervention, courts, and their self-interests. To those living on the riverbank of the

⁸⁷ “Shanwei xingang danmin de hunsu” [Marriage customs of the Dan People in Xingang, Shanwei], in Cun cui xue she and Zhongshan da xue (Guangzhou, China), eds., *Guangdong Feng Su Zhui Lu*, (Hong Kong: Chongwen Bookstore, 1972). This is a reprint of an article originally published in *Min Su Zhoukan* [Folk Studies Weekly], vol. 76.

⁸⁸ For example, see Chapter 2 where it described a marital dispute over unpaid bride price between the land-dwelling bureaucrat and his boat-dwelling fiancée and her relatives.

⁸⁹ Helen F. Siu, *Tracing China: A Forty-Year Ethnographic Journey* (Aberdeen: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 115-117.

⁹⁰ “Shuimianren yu anshangren tonghun bushou chixiao” [None shall ridicule the intermarriage between boat-dwellers and land-dwellers], *Lianhe bao*, September 19, 1950; Also, see, “Huiyi guangzhou jiefang chuqi zhujiang shuishang jumin de shenghuo” [Recalling the lives of boat-dwelling in the Pearl River during the initial period of liberation] in *Guangzhou wenshi*, vol 77. Guangzhou Chubanshe, 2013.

Pearl River in Guangzhou, the publicity about the Marriage Law was only a partial success. Some boat-dwelling women registered their marriage with the Zhujiang District government, while some widows used the Marriage Law to secure their remarriages. However, not unlike their land-dwelling counterparts, riverbank boat-dwellers ignored the Marriage Law when they refused premarital examinations, continued marriages arranged by parents, and demanded hefty bride prices.⁹¹ In a model case where a daughter overcame her greedy mother who arranged her marriage for the price of three ounces of gold, she resisted and introduced instead another man she wished to marry. This time, her mother demanded a bride price of one and a half million RMB, or about two ounces of gold.⁹² Intervening district cadres present on the daughter's behalf told her she could legally override her mother's wish.⁹³ This degree of state intervention required proximity to government and sympathetic cadres, an option more readily available for boat-dwellers working at the riverbanks of Guangzhou than their transient counterparts in fishing villages far away from the provincial capital.

The floating boat-dwellers elsewhere in Guangdong complied only minimally

⁹¹ The text mentioned that the bride price before the liberation was about three to five ounces of gold. After the liberation, parents still demanded on average 300,000-500,000 RMB, and seafood delicacies, pork, and wedding cakes. See, "Zhujiang shuishang renmin zhujian renshi hunyinfa" [The boat-dwelling population of the Pearl River is gradually learning about the Marriage Law]. *Lianhe bao*, October 5, 1951.

⁹² One troy ounce of gold in 1951 was worth 34.72 USD. For historic exchange rate between USD and gold, see "Historic Gold Prices" National Mining Association, last modified 2015, http://www.nma.org/pdf/g_prices.pdf.

According to the price index on September 23, 1952, the unified exchange rate from (old) RMB to USD was 22,270 RMB to 1 USD. Hence, 1,500,000 RMB equated to 63.755 USD, approximately 2 troy ounces of gold. "Hangqing" [List of prices], *Lianhe bao*, September 22, 1951.

⁹³ "Yonggan zhengqu hunyin ziyou yiding shengli" [A brave fight for the freedom to marry will certainly win], *Nanfang ribao*, January 1, 1952.

with the Marriage Law, and the provincial state could not induce them to obey. Their severe violation to the Marriage prompted the provincial state to instruct cadres about pausing the promotion of the law and instead educating them about gender equality. In addition to issues faced in Guangzhou such as resistance to premarital examination, demands for high bride price, and underage arranged marriage, the provincial Women's Federation found the problems of divorce and extramarital relationships among boat-dwellers troublesome. First, the liberal posture of the state on allowing women to petition for divorce backfired on male boat-dwellers, as some of their wives from land-dwelling villages immediately asked for and received permission to divorce upon receiving land from the Land Reform. This was the result of discrimination and the state noted that male boat-dwellers found this extremely offensive, and they blamed the state for not being considerate of their ethnic origin. Also, boat-dwellers were transient and had numerous lovers at different ports. Many male boat-dwellers had mistresses while female boat-dwellers also had lovers at different fishing villages and ports. Not only did they openly cohabit with their land-based lovers at times, but some also had multiple household registrations. Others did not register but lived as they were married.⁹⁴ Lastly, the PRC Marriage Law was defeated by the border with Hong Kong and Macau, as some boat-dwellers from

⁹⁴ The revelation in the archival document indicated that some boat-dwellers had multiple household registrations; how this was possible, the document did not elaborate, but one could suspect that the absence of a centralized database that would allow cross-checking. Instead, it was possible that they each registered at ports or counties that did not share information with each other. "Guanyu zai danmin diqu zanwu jinxing hunyinfaxuanchuan jiyoguan danmin hunyin jiufen chuli yijian de tongzhi" [A notice on withholding the Marriage Law Campaign and about resolving marital disputes involving the boat-dwelling people], file 237-1-3-001-010, GPA, July 21, 1953.

Yangjiang city left for Hong Kong or Macau and gave no economic support to their left-behind wives. Although the local government granted these left-behind wives' petitions to divorce, the state could not extract financial support for them, despite the Marriage Law mandating equal distribution of marital property and securing their economic livelihood after divorce.⁹⁵

As demonstrated by problems faced by some dependents of boat-dwellers, the border with Hong Kong created additional complexity in the enforcement of the Marriage Law. Despite the hardened border between Hong Kong and China, people continued to have extensive overseas and Hong Kong ties. Cross-border marriage, old and new, challenged how the Marriage Law could be received or implemented in the PRC. Many encountered a legal dilemma regarding their sojourning spouses in Hong Kong. As residents in Guangdong had enjoyed unrestricted access to Hong Kong during the Republican era, many had marriage partners living across the border, either temporarily or permanently. When existing spouses, primarily wives in the PRC, petitioned for divorces from their absentee husbands, divorce trials could proceed in absentia, and the state courts could unilaterally grant them their wishes. However, although the PRC state court could issue a ruling requiring maintenance or alimony as dictated by the Marriage Law, if their divorced ex-husbands had no property and stayed away from the PRC, these legal rulings from the court did not guarantee that maintenance or alimony would be forthcoming. Even the petitioners themselves

⁹⁵ The text mentioned Dongping 東平 and Zhapo 閘坡 in Yangjiang City that had this problem of male boat-dwellers who abandoned their wives in the PRC. Dongping is 123.1 nautical miles from Hong Kong, while Zhapo is 145.1 nautical miles from Central, Hong Kong.

conceded the difficulty of inducing their soon-to-be ex-husbands to return to the PRC, along with the constant fear of being cut off from maintenance they currently received from their husbands once they revealed their intentions.⁹⁶ The provincial press did not address what would happen if remittances were cut off, but a reader of the state propaganda would notice that divorcing from an unhappy marriage is associated with liberty and happiness brought by the party, and that women should not be dependent to others for their livelihood.

The economic power of Hong Kong also influenced the financial aspect of local marriage negotiations in the early PRC. During the hyperinflation period of the Civil War and the early PRC, the preferred currency of choice in bride price was at first hard metals, and later, Hong Kong Dollars (HKD).⁹⁷ Concurrent with the land reform and the publicity of the Marriage Law was a battle over currencies that aimed to eliminate the use of HKD in everyday life.⁹⁸ In marriage negotiations, the new PRC government attempted to replace the economic power of Hong Kong Dollars with the Renminbi, as descriptions of bride prices and other wedding expenses shifted to

⁹⁶ The pros and cons of seeking divorces could not be calculated purely on numerical terms, and emotional trauma often triumphed over financial stability. Also, the state was encouraging women to become independent at this time. propaganda. “Gongchandang dai laile xingfu bei yapo nuxing yao ziyou” [The Community Party brought happiness and the oppressed women need freedom], *Lianhe bao*, November 4, 1950.

⁹⁷ During the earliest PRC rule of Guangdong, newspaper articles described bride prices denoted in Hong Kong Dollars, such as one letter to the editor mentioning the bride price of one thousand five hundred Hong Kong dollars as demanded by his bride. One thousand five hundred Hong Kong Dollars was an astronomical and unbelievable amount in 1950, and more likely a fictional letter written by the newspapers to instruct the reader about the evil of marital transactions in marriage negotiations. “Hunyin bushi maimai jiehun qike dingjia” [marriage is not a transaction and cannot have a set price], *Lianhe bao*, September 16, 1950.

⁹⁸ For more information about currency reform in Guangdong in 1949-1951, see Ho-Chiu Leung, “The Anti-Hong Kong Campaign and the making of China's exchange rate regime,” chapter forthcoming.

RMB. By the conclusion of the Marriage Law Campaign, Hong Kong's economic power in south China had not dissipated, but a growing concern for the PRC as it gradually allowed more visitors and investors from Hong Kong in the mid-1950s.

Although the provincial state had constantly publicize and enforce the Marriage Law, it was challenging to secure sustained commitment on the ground. Local cadres were short-staffed and not interested in maintaining policies that they did not benefit from or cared little about. The early struggle of the provincial and local government in implementing the national Marriage Law not only marked the long-standing tug of war between the provincial government and its local agents, but also the beginning of growing violation or circumvention of the Marriage Law that went rampant in the mid-1950s to 1960s.

The aftermath of the Marriage Law Campaign in Guangdong

What were responses to Marriage Law in Guangdong, and their differences compared to other provinces before the Cultural Revolution? The conclusion of the Marriage Law Campaign in 1953 led to a few years of relaxed enforcement of the Marriage Law, and the provincial state left basic infrastructure for marriage registration and enforcement to the courts and local cadres. Satisfied with the progress made, in 1954 the provincial government reported to the central Ministry of Civil Affairs that it would shift to educating people on preventing hasty marriage and divorce.⁹⁹ Cases related to concubines would be resolved via mediation and not

⁹⁹ “Guangdong sheng 1954 nian shang bannian hunyin dengji gongzuo qingkuang baogao” [Situation report on marriage registration in the first half-year of 1954 in Guangdong Province], file 249-1-35-36,

criminalization if there was no abuse or abandonment.¹⁰⁰ Not much is known about marriage regulation in 1954-1955, as the state and its local agents shifted to agricultural collectivization. However, based on reports from the provincial Women's Federation's work teams sent in 1956-1957 and 1961-1966, people's responses to the Marriage Law in south China aligned closely to the national trend. Progress was made where concubinage was in steep decline as many concubines sought out, and free-choice marriage with parental involvement became more common.¹⁰¹

When the Guangdong provincial government sent work teams to assess the impacts of the Marriage Law in 1956-1957, they found enduring marriage customs previously suppressed in the earlier Marriage Law Campaign. Revisiting some of the first pilot sites of the Marriage Law Campaign in Xinhui county, along with new locales in Jieyang county and Mei county, work teams reported rampant violations of the Marriage Law not unlike those in other parts of the PRC.¹⁰² These included improper perspective on courtship and spousal choice, failure to register, and high-cost marriage transactions including bride prices. In work teams sent to different

GPA, September 2, 1954.

¹⁰⁰ “Zhuan zhongyang “guanyu zai hunyinfa gongbu hou chonghun naqie ruhe chuli de yijian de han” [Transmitting a document from the central government on how to solve bigamous cases or cases with concubines after the promulgation of the Marriage Law], file 235-1-114-116-120, GPA, January 15, 1954.

¹⁰¹ Concubinage became a peripheral issue for the provincial government. In a document stated in 1963, it mentioned bigamy and concubinage, but mentioned that “these issues have stopped” and bigamous marriage are tied to marriage fraud committed by women. This was no longer the case where a man had two wives, but problems with women illegally registering for marriage multiple times. “Guanyu dangqian zai hunyin jiating fangmian suo chuxian de zhuyao wenti” [Regarding current issues on family and marriage], file 233-1-103-88-93, GPA, December 17, 1963.

¹⁰² “Dui muqian hunyinfa guanchede zhongcunzai wenti de yijian” [Some comments on current issues regarding the Marriage Law], file 233-1-42-56-62, GPA, August 6, 1957.

counties in the early 1960s, they found that Great Leap Forward and the subsequent famine in 1959-1962 exacerbated these issues, and “capitalist” and materialistic orientation become paramount in spousal choice.¹⁰³

Throughout the mid 1950s and early 1960s, regional factors also distinguished marriage practices in Guangdong from other provinces, including the proximity of Hong Kong and its influence on the south China regional economy, and long-distance spatial hypergamy fostered by lopsided sex-ratio imbalances and gaps in economic development between regions in the province. External wealth in the form of resources and goods trickling in via Hong Kong elevated the cost of bride prices and led to inequality in the local marriage market in the Pearl River Delta and beyond, while long-distance marriages in eastern Guangdong relied on networks of informal and for-profit matchmakers that created breeding ground for transactional marriage, marriage fraud, and human trafficking.

In the PRC, the ideal socialist marriage began when couples courted extensively and shared progressive work ethics, but authorities in Guangdong found that many young people failed to take their dating and marriage responsibly. In a moralizing instruction with cultural workers in 1954, a provincial functionary discussed the right attitude toward courtship, such as open interactions with the opposite sex. At the same time, however, young employees should refrain from courtship and prioritize education and production if they have only recently entered

¹⁰³ “Shaoguan zhuanqu bufen diqu ji huaxian dengdi xuanchuan guanche hunyinfa de qingkuang.”

the workforce.¹⁰⁴ The provincial party newspaper in the 1960s echo this message where responses to several letters to editors advised that couples should take their time to learn about each other and be earnest about courtship.¹⁰⁵ Although the Marriage Law does not address dating, the state attempted to prevent people from abusing their free-choice in pursue of material benefits. For example, in a letter to the editor about a woman transferred her interest from her boyfriend to his best friend who possibly had better material conditions, the editor affirmed her freedom to choose but vehemently criticized her insincerity with courtship.¹⁰⁶

Correlated with the official accusation of improper notions of love was the pursuit of material benefits in courtship and spousal choice, which could be natural responses to the combination of the new Marriage Law, national movements to assign graduates for agricultural production,¹⁰⁷ and economic inequality between

¹⁰⁴ “Limén jiāng disīkè: yóuguān lián’ài, hūnyīn, jiāting de yīxiē wèntí” [Li Men’s lecture on dating, marriage and family], file 309-1-28-8, GPA, 1954.

¹⁰⁵ These were letters to editors or advice columns that one could ask any questions to the editor, or to complain about a specific cadre. The authenticity is questionable, as a Chinese scholar has once said to me that oftentimes newspapers editors would write the questions and answer to promote a certain policy. Compared to advice columns in Republican newspapers, I would agree with this scholar’s assertion, and that at best half of these letters to editors were from readers. I would also assert that while most of the rare complains about specific workplace, stores, or cadres were authentic, questions such as “how to suppress transactional marriage as a rural cadre” appeared forced.

¹⁰⁶ “Qiāo qiāngjiāo shì budaode xíngwéi” [Stealing another person’s significant other is an immoral act], *Nanfang ribao*, April 7, 1962; a follow up article with the by-line by the CCP Huaiji county committee: “Yíqīng biélián yě yīng shòudào zhìzè” [Moving to love another person should be criticized too], *Nanfang ribao*. April 24, 1962.

¹⁰⁷ The precise term used in state documents are 參加農業勞動 – which mean assigning primary school or secondary school graduate into agricultural production. For those from the countryside, it was 回鄉生產 – returning to the countryside. This was different than the movement to rusticate sent-down youth during the Cultural Revolution, which was known as 上山下鄉 (going up to the mountain and down to the countryside) “Zai sheng xuèdài huìyì yú nùxuéshēng dàibiào huìtān huì jìyào” [Minutes of the meeting with female student representatives during the provincial student representative conference], file 233-1-42-98-103, GPA, April 27, 1957.

occupations and household registration status. One group that received the state attention were students during a national campaign to assign primary and secondary school graduates to rural areas in 1956-1957. Urban graduates were mobilized to become pioneers in opening fields, while rural students were sent back to their counties of origin.¹⁰⁸ Despite official encouragement from the national press and the provincial government,¹⁰⁹ many parents pressured their children to find spouses as soon as possible.¹¹⁰ Male students' parents worried that their sons could not find willing brides once in the countryside, while parents advised their daughters to anchor themselves in the city by marrying someone with an urban occupation.¹¹¹ In a meeting with provincial female student representatives, representatives reported that some students in their respective areas were courting and marrying not for romantic

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Bernstein (1977) suggests that the movement to send urban students to farm and return students of rural origins was related to population pressure and few employment opportunities in the cities starting in the year 1956. However, he also noted that this was "broached" hesitantly at first, where only a few from cities would go; the priority of the state, Bernstein suggests, was to return students to their rural native place. See, Thomas P. Bernstein. *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

¹⁰⁹ In the meeting with provincial female student representatives, government officials were quite explicit in encouraging students to return to the countryside and work there, claiming that the countryside needed laborers. This was in response to an editorial from the People's Daily on April 8, 1957, to encourage secondary and primary school graduates to participate in agricultural production. See "Guanyu zhong xiaoxue biye sheng canyu nongye shengchan de qingkuang" [Regarding secondary and primary school graduates on participating in agricultural production], *People's Daily*, April 8, 1957; There was also a confidential news article that describes the plan for middle and high schoolers in Guangzhou to be sent to agricultural commune in Foshan, Gaoyao, and Shaoguan Administrative Area. *Neibu cankao*, July 11, 1957; Lastly, a year before this meeting with female students, there were already calls to transfer students to open up new farmland in nearby rural counties, as some student representatives mentioned in this meeting. "Zai sheng xuedai huiyi yu nuxuesheng daibiao huitan hui jiyao."

¹¹⁰ Although the provincial government was primarily focused on encouraging secondary school graduates to go or return to the countryside, in official document the state also included primary school students. The only possible explanation would be students who entered primary schools later in their life.

¹¹¹ "Youguan hunyinfa guanche zhixing qingkuang zai meixian, jieyang de diaocha huibao" [Investigation report on the implementation of the Marriage Law in Jieyang and Mei County], file 233-1-42-63-73, GPA, 1957.

feeling, but to marry anyone who offered the best economic prospect. They even said that some would divorce their PLA husbands if they were later demobilized to the countryside.¹¹²

The result of this materialistic trend in courtship among educated female students was noticeable to the state, and the Guangdong provincial Women's Federation in August 1957 reported that many educated female students were courting or marrying bureaucrats, cadres, and soldiers.¹¹³ It found that approximately 60% of secondary female students across the province, and in some graduating classes, 95% of students were in courtship or were already married.¹¹⁴ In response, the government decried both parties for harboring a materialistic perspective on courtship. Some flagrant examples of materialism included men using movie tickets or financial allowances to lure educated female students, and cadres or bureaucrats using official power to aid their courtship process. On the other hand, many educated female students saw these pursuits as an opportunity to improve their economic situation. For example, students from Guangzhou were said to be guilty of comparing their boyfriends or husbands based on their rank and wealth.¹¹⁵ Unresolved during 1957-1958, the issue of student's spousal choice flared up again in 1962-1963.

¹¹² The quote in question is “怕勞動嫁大軍聽到轉業鬧離婚” [To avoid physical labor, marrying a soldier; if he is demobilized and reassigned then ask for a divorce], “Zai sheng xuedai huiyi yu nuxuesheng daibiao huitan hui jiyao.”

¹¹³ The state pressure on early marriage was primarily directed toward female students, and there were fewer mentions of male students marrying early to avoid agricultural labor. This was possibly caused by logic of marital hypergamy, where a man needed some financial stability before he could be considered by women as a good partner during the marriage search. This constraint did not apply to a woman, and she could marry as soon as she reached 18.

¹¹⁴ “Dui muqian hunyinfa guanhe zhong cunzai wenti de yijian.”

¹¹⁵ “Zai sheng xuedai huiyi yu nuxuesheng daibiao huitan hui jiyao.”

Although the main priority of the provincial government at the time was halting early courtship and marriage among students, the government remained vigilant in removing “capitalist thoughts” in their courtship and marriage, ordering those students who infringed rules on this matter be educated or dealt with.¹¹⁶

During the mid-1950s and 1960s, students in Guangdong were not the only group that were accused of harboring “capitalist tendencies” in spousal choice, and the same were true for rural and urban women.¹¹⁷ Around the same time that the provincial Women’s Federation investigated students who married strategically to stay in cities, it found that many rural and urban women were marrying for financial gain or social mobility. However, rural women received the brunt of the criticism in internal documents when compared to urban women.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Although the document did not specify how they were supposed to deal with these students, it was most likely prolonged lessons on thought education or expulsion. “Guanyu jiaqiang jiaoyu zhongxue he shifan xuesheng zhengque duidai lian'ai, hunyin wenti de jidian yijian” [Opinions on strengthening education for middle school and normal school students on correctly approaching love and marriage issues], file 314-1-230-22-23, GPA, April 30, 1963.

¹¹⁷ “Capitalism” (資本主義), “capitalist thoughts” (資產階級思想) were recurrently mentioned in many archival documents when describing bride price or materialistic spousal choice. For example, when describing the marital materialism in Xiangang commune, the document notes: “Young women are corrupted by capitalist thoughts and wanted to follow the lifestyle of the capitalist class in their marriage.” Capitalist thoughts as an evil ideology and corrupting agent to socialism was not new or unique in Guangdong and was common in PRC literature. However, the intensity of “capitalism” referred as explanation of social ill is suspect, and this could be explained by the fact that capitalism was real and alive in parts of Guangdong. In the Pearl River Delta, especially in the border region of Bao'an, people were painfully aware of the economic disparity between the socialist motherland and the capitalist colony. As many relatives in Hong Kong shipped food packets or sent remittances to their families in China, the proximity of Hong Kong no doubt contributed to the provincial government’s vigilance in clamping down “capitalist” behavior in the populace. See, “Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao” [A report regarding the situation on transactional marriages in Xiangang Commune], file 233-1-110-27-34, GPA, July 20, 1964.

¹¹⁸ This was no doubt related to the urban-rural income discrepancy. If one is to consider the marriage market between late 1950s and mid-1960s, urban women had opportunities offered by the state’s work units and were less desperate than rural women who wanted to marry into the city and avoid labor in the countryside. However, it was unlikely for an urban woman to marry into a rural household, and the

Decades of archival reports about spousal choice in south China show that rural women in Guangdong, not unlike other parts of China, ranked spousal choice by economically favored groups in the PRC such as cadres, soldiers, and factory workers.¹¹⁹ Those with limited economic opportunities such as peasants were considered unfavorable marriage partners, despite the state promise of improving livelihood via collectivized agriculture and their political loyalty to the new regime. When choosing a husband, the provincial Women's Federation in 1957 suggested that "women in many counties ranked their spousal choice by occupations" and often ignored personality, compatibility, or political orientation. In one ranking, factory workers were on top, followed by cadres, then merchants, with farmers at the bottom.¹²⁰ None wanted to stay in the countryside and farm or marry a male peasant; this became a source of significant grievances among rural men.¹²¹ Household registration status (*hukou*) mattered because urban *hukou* had access to state welfares and rations, while rural *hukou* holders had fewer benefits and needed to produce for their food in the field. The consequence of this ranking of potential spouses was that some rural

state was painfully aware of this mate preference. Therefore, rural women had much more to gain by becoming selective in their courtship, while urban women did not have much room to gain from marrying up since she was already at the apex. Another possibility for the differences in tone and attention spent was rural male anxiety in their inability to find a wife.

¹¹⁹ For example, an internal reference article mentions the unwillingness of rural women to marry rural men. In that article, women would marry anyone with an urban background (household registration), while harboring similar thought to rural women in Guangdong on a ranking of favorable spouse. The article contained a saying that "those who wear blue (cadre) have power, those who wear green (factory workers) have money, but if married to a person who wear yellow (PLA), then it will be the new year every day." Absent was the politically reliable poor and middle peasant, for no woman wanted to marry them. "Gongzi gaige hou jilin youxie guniang gengjia buyuanyi he nongcun qingnian jiehun" [After the wage reform, some women in Jilin became even more unwilling to marry rural men], *Neibu cankao*, January 3, 1957.

¹²⁰ "Dui muqian hunyinfa guanhe zhong cunzai wenti de yijian."

¹²¹ "Youguan hunyinfa guanhe zhixing qingkuang zai meixian, jieyang de diaocha huibao."

women would marry anyone with an urban background, while restless rural men had to rely on matchmakers to find willing brides and engage in speculation or crime to fund their marriage expenses.

Unlike women in other parts of China who placed PLA officers or soldiers as the best potential husbands, in parts of Guangdong women there could marry Hong Kong residents or their relatives for higher bride prices or an opportunity to legally leave the PRC. Marriage to a Hong Kong residents required extensive background check on the Hong Kong spouse and registration at the civil affairs department in China; hence, this was not a common phenomenon.¹²² However, cross-border marriages were viable enough that a regional ranking that put Hong Kong residents or visitors as most desirable above the PLA soldiers, followed by Overseas Chinese and then factory workers, with peasants at the bottom.¹²³

In the face of unequal access to resources, rural women exhibited heightened materialist tendencies in their spousal choice after the Great Leap Famine (1959-1961). In 1960, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) had originally instructed its provincial counterpart to commemorate the 10th year anniversary of the Marriage

¹²² If marriage was already difficult because the Hong Kong spouse would need background checks and a trip to China to register in person at either the groom or the bride's district or commune government, the spouse in China would also need an approval to join his or her spouse in Hong Kong. This exit permit approval process was subjected to delay and required approval from cadres from the production brigade level or above, although cadres were aware that separating family would often lead to wives in China complaining endlessly to the state about their marriages.

¹²³ "Dui muqian hunyinfu guanche zhong cunzai wenti de yijian". Another ranking, as recorded by the provincial Women's Federation a few years later, placed overseas Chinese as the most favored, followed by Hong Kong residents, then factory workers, and cadres, with the peasants at the bottom. (一僑，二港，三工，四幹，五農). "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

Law, but later decided to scrap that plan and informed the provincial Women's Federation to work with other government agencies on publicizing the positive changes in marriage practices after 1949.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, the provincial Women's Federation had already done sent work teams to investigate violation to the Marriage Law, and reports from the ground compiled in 1961 acknowledged the detrimental effects of "natural disasters" and "temporary difficulties of the past two years" on marriage practices.¹²⁵ For example, they found that younger women ran to the cities to survive, and capitalist thoughts in spousal choice ran rampant among the youth.¹²⁶ Citing lapsing compliance to the Marriage Law, the provincial government ordered a province-wide propaganda campaign and investigation by work teams jointly staffed by the provincial Higher People's Court, Department of Civil Affairs, Women's Federation, and the Youth League to thoroughly research violations on the ground.¹²⁷

As the government attempted to stabilize the rural work force and prevent further unauthorized movement to urban areas or to Hong Kong in early 1960s,¹²⁸ depictions of restless and materialistic rural women using marriage to avoid

¹²⁴ "Guanyu hunyin jiating xuanchuan wenti de tongzhi" [Notice regarding the publicity on the issue of marriage and family], file 233-1-76-70, GPA, April 14, 1960; a follow up notice circulated to subordinate level of Women's Federation in each district, county, municipality, and township was in an addendum to the first document, file 233-1-76-95-96, GPA, April 25, 1960.

¹²⁵ "Guangdong sheng renmin weiyuanhui guanyu jiuzheng weifan hunyinfā xiānxiàng de yijian" [Opinion of the Guangdong provincial government on correcting violations of the Marriage Law], 民六二字(81)號 (Department of Civil Affairs, 1962, Document 81), February 27, 1962.

¹²⁶ "Hunyin, jiating qingkuang yu wenti de fanying" [Reflections on issues on marriage and family], file 233-1-87-81, GPA, December 19, 1961.

¹²⁷ "Guǎngdōng xīng rénmin wěiyuánhui guānyú jiūzhèng wéifǎn hūnyīnfā xiànxīàng de yìjiàn".

¹²⁸ Guangdong experienced a spike of legal and illegal immigrant to Hong Kong during the Great Leap Famine. For more information about this episode of mass exodus to Hong Kong, see Chen, Bing'an. *Da tao Gang*. 2nd ed. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Open Page Publishing Co., Ltd., 2016.

agricultural labor resurfaced.¹²⁹ Two cases of rural women's marital behavior, the first based on a letter to an editor in the provincial party newspaper in 1962, and the second from a field report of women in a Xiangang Commune in Foshan County in 1964, exemplified marital materialism in south China during this time.

The first example concerns a rural woman whose fiancé was a young factory fitter in Shaoguan.¹³⁰ When he could not satisfy one of her marriage requisites, which was an immediate relocation to live with him in the city after their wedding, the fiancée annulled their engagement.¹³¹ The heartbroken man wrote to the editor of a provincial party newspaper about his mean ex-fiancée. The editor's response was naturally supportive of the spurned fitter, but the main message was the editorial condemnation of the rural ex-fiancée who wanted to escape agriculture labor by marriage. To reinforce the official line on limiting rural-to-urban migration, a month later the newspaper printed other readers' responses to the original letter, disparaging the ex-fiancée as a "lazy person who harbors capitalist thought and refuses to work in the countryside," while urging other youths in the new China to abandon these

¹²⁹ "Zenyang duidai henxin de guniang" [How to treat a cruel girl], *Nanfang ribao*, February 24, 1962.

¹³⁰ Shaoguan was the wartime provincial capital for the Nationalist during WW2. It was not as prosperous as Guangzhou, but nonetheless still a major city in northern Guangdong.

¹³¹ The author's colleague, Sarah Chang, has pointed out that this was no easy feat, as the woman would have to change her household registration into an urban one. Although the man's household registration status was also unknown, by virtue of being a fitter in a factory, he was entitled to receive ration in the city. In contrast, the would-be wife would receive no ration in the city as she carried a rural household registration, which would require the fitter to support her and himself on his sole income. Being a spouse to an urban person did not give automatic right to convert one's household registration status. For an in-depth examination of the household registration system and limited avenues of changing a rural household registration, see Chan, Kam Wing, and Li Zhang, "The Hukou System and Rural-Urban Migration in China: Processes and Changes." *The China Quarterly*, no. 160 (1999): 818–55.

thoughts.¹³²

The second example of rural women refusing to marry local men demonstrated women's strategies to maximize their economic potential via marriage. In a 1964 report originating in Kaiping county and relayed to the All-China Women's Federation, the provincial Women's Federation reported a major gender gap among the unmarried young people: 104 bachelors versus 3 unmarried women. Local cadres in Kaiping blamed women for their corrupted capitalistic thought and unwillingness to work in the countryside. One troublemaker, a 29-year-old surnamed Guan, serves as the negative role model in the report. Guan, a woman with overseas Chinese connections, had gone to Guangzhou multiple times to find a husband after her petition to marry a Hong Kong person was denied.¹³³ When cadres from her production brigade encouraged her to find a local spouse, she publicly proclaimed that "peasants have sun-darkened skins (from working in the field) and are ugly; they are not worthy of my beautiful self."¹³⁴ Such open discrimination against rural people

¹³² "Zenyang duidai henxin de guniang duhou" [How to treat a cruel girl, an afterthought], *Nanfang ribao*, March 20, 1962.

¹³³ This requires some explanations and guesses about the troublemaker. The document suggests that she did not have a marriage partner from Hong Kong when she applied, and she only wanted a permit to leave the village and find someone once there. Hence her petition to leave for Hong Kong was denied. Also, the distance between Xiangang Commune in Kaiping to Guangzhou is approximately 152 kilometers. This was not a journey taken lightly or easily, since long distance movement was restricted by the mid 1960s. One would have to find food and accommodation in an urban city, and her rural household status would not help. Considering that she wanted to meet potential husbands there, she would mostly likely need to stay for at least a few days. As she was travelling to Guangzhou on personal business (without a permit or an introduction letter from her work unit), she would also need to carry all supplies she will need for the journey, since she could not be resupplied once in Guangzhou. Also, where would she stay in Guangzhou? It was possible that her family as overseas workers provided extra resources, but the logistics of this complex travelling meant that how this woman went to Guangzhou and back multiple time remains a mystery.

¹³⁴ The author took the liberty of translating from "peeled bamboo shoots" to "beautiful self". The report from the Women's Federation noted peeled bamboo shoots is best understand as having "a

fostered enmity in her commune, although the document noted that Guan was not the only one who harbored such thoughts against rural men in her spousal choice.¹³⁵

Right before the onset of the Cultural Revolution, the Guangdong provincial Women's Federation reported worsening trends in materialistic spousal choice. The basis for spousal choice had moved beyond class status and occupations, instead encompassing other conditions that would influence post-marital financial well-being such as monthly incomes.¹³⁶ Not unlike urban youth's ranking of favorable spouses based on income in the 1970s,¹³⁷ rural women's criteria in spousal choice could be best expressed by a local ballad from Wushi Commune, Qujiang county: "ignore (those who earn) the 30s or 40s (RMB), negotiate with 50s or 60s; reluctantly marry the 70s or 80s, disregard age if 90s and 100s, and forcefully grab anyone who earns more than 100 yuan."¹³⁸ With the understanding that a ballad did not fully represent rural women's expectation, the average farmer would find himself in the "negotiation" category, while the average non-agricultural worker would be in the "forcefully grab" category. According to the Qujiang county gazetteer, an average

pretty white skin". "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

¹³⁵ Reports gathered by the provincial Women's Federation about other counties also documented this phenomenon of rural women refusing to marry rural men. For example, when the Provincial Women's Federation went back to 1953 Marriage Law Campaign pilot sites in Wushi Commune, they found the same issue of rural women trying to marry anyone other than to fellow peasants. "Guangdong sheng qujiang xian wushi gongshe wushi dadui sange xiaodui de hunyin jiating qingkuang diaocha cailiao" [Investigation material on marriage and family in three production teams in the Wushi Production Brigade in Wushi Commune in Qujiang county, Guangdong] file 233-1-94-38-47, GPA, June 1, 1962.

¹³⁶ "Shaoguan zhuanqu bufen diqu ji huaxian dengdi xuanchuan guanche hunyinfa de qingkuang".

¹³⁷ For more information about evolving spousal choice in the cities, see page 126 of Parish, William L., and Martin King Whyte. *Urban Life in Contemporary China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

¹³⁸ "Shaoguan zhuanqu bufen diqu ji huaxian dengdi xuanchuan guanche hunyinfa de qingkuang".

farmer received 53 yuan and 253.5kg of grain per year from his commune in 1962, while the average non-agricultural workers earned 506 yuan as wages in 1962; although 70% of the non-agricultural wages went into food consumption, there would still be 151.8 yuan as disposable cash, approximately tripled of the average peasant.¹³⁹ Besides incomes from work, women also considered circumstances such as being recipients of remittances, general wealth level of the potential husband's production team, their housing, and whether they had many siblings to support financially.¹⁴⁰

Despite years of intermittent efforts to persuade people to engage in courtship untainted by money, the Guangdong provincial government was unable to force people's obedience to its ideals. As the Marriage Law had mandated the freedom to choose one's spouse, the state could not infringe on people's spousal choice, even when that choice resulted in inequality in the local marriage market. Inadvertently the PRC state fueled materialism in courtship and marriage not only by giving people the

¹³⁹ In government food outlet, 50 kgs of premium rice cost 13.64 yuan in 1961 and the lowest quality of rice cost 10.45 yuan per 50 kg. Assuming price remained constant between 1961 and 1962, a non-farmer who consumed approximately 250kg of rice would cost this person between 52.25 to 68.2 yuan on grain alone. Peasant also raised pig, on average 0.54 head per agricultural household. The government purchased at a lower price of 60% of the meat, while 40% of the meat is reserved for private consumption, and the peasant had a choice of taking the meat as it or save it for pork coupon, which then give them a 5% discount when redeemed. The food standard between a peasant household was drastically different than a non-agricultural worker, for a factory worker would most likely be consuming better food than the rural counterpart. Qujiang Xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui. *Qujiang Xian zhi*. 1st ed. Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo di fang zhi cong shu. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1999.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Geography could possibly explain the difference in spousal choice between Hua County and Qujiang County. Since 1960, Hua County has been directly administrated as a rural county by the Guangzhou municipal government. Also, the numbers of sibling determined the size of the eventual inheritance from her husband's parents. A large number was seen as a minus, because the husband would inherit a smaller share when the parents passed.

freedom to marry, but also because materialistic spousal choice was one logical response to the urban-rural income gap created by the household registration system and other state economic policies in the 1950s and 1960s.

Enforcing marriage registration was every bit as difficult as instilling socialist values in people's spousal choice.¹⁴¹ Ineffective marriage registration had existed since the beginning of the publicity of the Marriage Law, and this was not different from other regions of China.¹⁴² Without dedicated cadres to register marriages, the many state campaigns required local governments to shift cadres' attention to the most recent campaign at hand, rendering marriage registration secondary to more pressing concerns such as political rectification or agricultural collectivization. When the Guangdong provincial Women's Federation in 1957 revisited this issue, it found that cadres in the Civil Affairs Department had not been properly trained about the Marriage Law.¹⁴³ Untrained cadres equated to sloppy registration and confusion about the difference between arranged marriage versus free-choice marriage. A few years later, in 1961, the provincial Women's Federation and the Civil Affairs Department reported a labor shortage of cadres dedicated to registration, and only 20-30% of

¹⁴¹ Usually in south China, a couple would first engage in courtship, then determine whether they were the perfect match to each other, followed by registration with the state, and the wedding would be last. Therefore, they would often be registered and be legally married before they would be considered socially married after the wedding ceremony.

¹⁴² Neil Diamant argues that the national PRC state had the goal of registering its people's marriage, but many deficiencies of the state including cadres who were uneducated about the Law and people who avoided the law during the Maoist era. Diamant, Neil J. "Making Love 'Legible' in China: Politics and Society during the Enforcement of Civil Marriage Registration, 1950-66" *Politics and Society* 29, no. 3 (September 2001): 447-80.

¹⁴³ "Dui muqian hunyinfu guanche zhong cunzai wenti de yijian."

cadres were educated about the Marriage Law.¹⁴⁴ Also, cadres at the production brigade and commune level did not verify the facts and readily gave permission to marry to all applicants, in some cases allowing women to marry even when they were too young.¹⁴⁵ Subsequently, the provincial government ordered allotment of cadres assigned to marriage registration, restricted registration at the commune level in the countryside and at the neighborhood committee in cities, and required couples to secure approval from their production brigade before applying.¹⁴⁶

However much the provincial government reinforced its bureaucracy between the 1950s and 1960s, the primary cause of incomplete registration was the minimum marriageable age stipulated in the Marriage Law. Among couples above the minimum marriageable age, most wanted legal recognition. For example, when the provincial state was promoting late marriage in 1963, along with an initial attempt to commence population control,¹⁴⁷ there was a rumor in Guangdong of a pending change to the Marriage Law that would raise the minimum marriageable age from 20 years old to 30 years old for men, and from 18 years old to 25 years old for women. In response,

¹⁴⁴ “Hunyun, jiating qingkuang yu wenti de fanying.” Another report in 1962 acknowledges the same problem of “cadres and the masses in some areas are still unaware of the Marriage Law,” from “Dangqian nongcun zhong youguan hunyun wenti de qingkuang zonghe.”

¹⁴⁵ Although the provincial Women’s Federation was admonishing local cadres for their sloppiness in premarital investigation, one could suspect that these cadres were either bribed or persuaded by the couples to turn a blind eye. “Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyun qingkuang de baogao.”

¹⁴⁶ “Guangdong sheng minzheng ting guanyu jiaqiang hunyun dengji gongzuo de tongzhi” [Circular notice on improving marriage registration from the department of Civil Affairs in Guangdong Province], in *Hunyun dengji gongzuo shouce* [Marriage Registration Guidebook], Department of Civil Affairs of Guangdong, 1962.

¹⁴⁷ “Huangruiqiu zai chenghai xian zhishu jiguan ganbu dahui guanyu jihua shengyu, jiezhishi shengyu he wanhun baogao jilu” [Huang Ruiqiu's report on family planning, birth control, and late marriage in a meeting with cadres from Chenghai County (in Guangdong)], file 233-2-268-110-118, GPA, November 22, 1963.

couples in Foshan city rushed to register even if they were not planning to live together immediately after the registration, and the order for large-size bed, a necessity in married life, increased by 400% year-over-year.¹⁴⁸ People desiring marriage below the minimum age, however, actively avoided registration, and cohabited before the legal formality was completed. Avoiding registration until reaching minimum marriageable age was not uncommon in the PRC,¹⁴⁹ and in Guangdong there were several counties where people did not register after their wedding banquets.¹⁵⁰ Often, the provincial Women's Federation noted that some parents marry their daughters early to alleviate financial difficulty, even when the bride price received were smaller compared to a legal marriage.¹⁵¹ Other factors contributing to early marriage include increasing agricultural labor and desiring grandsons.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ "Guanyu zhuyi suqing xiugai hunyinfa de yaoyan" [Regarding rectifying rumor about modifying the Marriage Law], file 233-1-103-79-84, GPA, October 10, 1963.

¹⁴⁹ Parish and Whyte (1978) suggest that in Maoist China, the social marriage with a celebration was more important than the legal marriage in the eyes of local people; people who married under the minimum marriageable age would marry privately and wait to register, or simply asked local cadres nicely with bribe to change the birthday or turn a blind eye. This phenomenon was not restricted to south China, as Yan (2003) and Diamant (2001) also report the role of cadres in facilitating early marriages. Furthermore, Diamant discusses at length why many would avoid the register in Beijing, Shanghai, and Yunnan, for reasons such as arranged marriages, the dislike of being asked about their private affairs, or because they have misreported their ages (because they were marrying before the minimum marriageable age). Regarding the situation of administrative failure in registering marriage in one Marriage Law Campaign pilot site revisited in 1960s, see "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

¹⁵⁰ Again, cadres were likely complicit in these socially recognized marriages; by virtue of being unregistered, these marriages did not alert the state. However, the possibility of hosting wedding banquets without being noticed by production team or brigade or neighborhood committee cadres was minimal. Wedding banquets required extensive preparation, a venue, and a crowd. "Shaoguan zhuanqu bufen diqu ji huaxian dengdi xuanchuan guanche hunyinfa de qingkuang."

¹⁵¹ "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

¹⁵² No indication whether this was more prevalent in Guangdong than in other provinces of the PRC. "Guanyu dangqian zai hunyin jiating fangmian suo chuxian de zhuyao wenti" [Regarding current major issues in marriage and family], file 233-1-103-88, GPA, December 17, 1963.

Between the end of the Marriage Law Campaign in 1953 and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the provincial state effort to educate people about the Marriage Law should not be discounted. Although bureaucratic inadequacy and unregistered marriage existed, people saw the benefit of legal recognition and would return to the state registrar once reaching the minimum marriageable age. However, in the grand project of reforming marriage customs, registration was not as hotly contested by people as another part of the Marriage Law: the banning of transactional marriage.¹⁵³

Transactional marriages: bride price and wedding expenses

Of all violations of the Marriage Law in Guangdong in the 1950s and 1960s, the provincial government was least effective in controlling transactional marriage. Financial exchanges included bride price, but also money spent in preparation of the marriage such as matchmaker fees or wedding banquet cost. (See Table 4.1) Although the provincial government proclaimed the suppression of bride price and extravagant wedding expenses during the Marriage Law Campaign in 1953, these practices remained fundamental to marriage negotiations, and by early 1960s bride price had become ubiquitous.¹⁵⁴ In 1957, the provincial Women's Federation found that costly wedding expenses were common and on average cost 100 RMB. There were also examples such as a collective member from Panyu county who spent 70 RMB on bride price, 60 *jin* of wedding cakes that were worth 50 RMB, 30 *jin* of roast pork, 5

¹⁵³ Article 2 of the 1950 PRC Marriage Law

¹⁵⁴ “Hunying, jiating qingkuang yu wenti de fanying.”

pairs of shoes, 14 pieces of clothing, as well as a wedding banquet costing 200 RMB.¹⁵⁵ By doing so, he exhausted his life savings and had to rely on loans from the collective.¹⁵⁶ Other examples included factory workers in Guangzhou insisted on wedding banquets to bring themselves social honor. For instance, a spinner asked for four pairs of high heels as part of the bride price, while her wedding banquet cost 324 RMB. Another worker spent 336 RMB for a twelve-table banquet.¹⁵⁷

A few years later in 1961, the provincial government conceded that transactional marriage had become the norm, and that bride price had risen, ranging from 150 to 750 RMB.¹⁵⁸ A survey of transactional marriage in 12 production brigades found an average bride price between 150-350 RMB, along with expenses such as 20 *jin* of Rice,¹⁵⁹ 20 *jin* of chicken, 30-50 *jin* of fish, 200-300 *jin* of vegetables,¹⁶⁰ 200-300 *jin* of tomatoes,¹⁶¹ cloth, and a banquet, with a grand total cost around 600-1000 RMB.¹⁶² Not only was bride price astronomical in new marriages,

¹⁵⁵ A *jin* is equivalent to 500g, so that was 30kg of wedding cakes and 15 kg of roast pork; Also, archival documents did not specify where these money came from, but one could guess this was a product of several years of saving by the groom, collective efforts by the groom's family, or remittance. Given that this collective member resided in Panyu County, this possibility is likely, although no concrete proof exists.

¹⁵⁶ "Muqian nongcun funu qunzhong de sixiang qingkuang" [Current thoughts among rural women], file 233-1-39-7-12, GPA, February 29, 1957.

¹⁵⁷ "Guanyu dangqian zhigong qunzhong sixiang dongxiang ji dui qian zhigong sixiang wenti de kanfa" [On the current ideological trends among workers and ideological works on workers], file 231-1-83-6-13, GPA, April 11, 1957.

¹⁵⁸ "Hunying, jiating qingkuang yu wenti de fanying."

¹⁵⁹ Parish and Whyte (1978) mention a black market for rice and grain that many peasants often relied on for their wedding preparations.

¹⁶⁰ Parish and Whyte (1978) found that peasants would rather farm vegetable than rice. Under the unified sale and purchase scheme by the PRC, the purchase price of rice was artificially low compared to what one could find in an international rice market. Vegetables, on the other hand, do not store well.

¹⁶¹ Equivalent to 10kg of rice, 10 kg of Chicken, 15-25kg of fish, 100-150 kg of vegetable, and 100-150kg of tomatoes.

¹⁶² These numbers of high bride prices during the Great Leap Forward and the subsequent famine seem

but the provincial Women's Federation also found that some married women demanded that their husbands compensate them with a "body price" or risk a sex strike.¹⁶³

Propaganda attempted to address transactional marriage by instructing people not to engage in behavior leading to excessive wedding expenses. According to the provincial party press, some gift-giving was tolerable if it was based on free-will and not as a precondition of marriage, and within a reasonable limit based on the groom's family's economic conditions.¹⁶⁴ Also, in the face of growing income from advancement in agricultural production, the editor instructed peasants to not be complacent and spend extra on wedding banquets.¹⁶⁵ Instead of a wedding banquet with "three birds and three meats,"¹⁶⁶ the editor instead advocated for a frugal tea ceremony as substitute. Without placing a strict cap on the possible amount spent on weddings, the editor suggested that couples should consider their economic

incredible. However, although cadres in the GLF exaggerated their agricultural harvests, they had no incentive to exaggerate the bride price in their area, since feudal marriage customs were problems and not results that they could boast about. How these people gathered these money and food during the famine years remained unknown, but it was possible that they received help from overseas. "Hunyin, jiating qingkuang yu wenti de fanying."

¹⁶³ The report did not mention how widespread was the bride price induced sex-strike, but it summarized it as "some women demanded compensation from their husband." Since there is no mention whether they received a bride price or not, an educated guess is that these married women felt they should worth more to their husbands. However, that created another question: where would the bride price go to? If it only benefits the married wife, then there would be no reason for her to do so, since the wealth would not leave the conjugal household. However, if the bride price would go to benefit the wife's family, then there would be some reasons for her to ask for it. "Dangqian nongcun zhong youguan hunyin wenti de qingkuang zonghe."

¹⁶⁴ "Baoban hunyin bu keneng jianli meiman jiating" [Arranged marriage will not lead to harmonious family], *Nanfang ribao*, February 27, 1962.

¹⁶⁵ As this article is published in 1962, it is hard to imagine who in rural south China had growing income during the Great Leap Forward and the subsequent famine.

¹⁶⁶ The three birds are: chicken, duck, and goose, while the three meats are pork, beef, and lamb.

conditions, along with the general economic well-being of the residing village, for a wedding ceremony that ignored either one would bring bad influence on others.

Nonetheless, the editor reminded readers that this issue could not be forced on individuals and the couples must decide whether they would have a banquet or not.¹⁶⁷

Despite official encouragement of frugal weddings and repeated investigations of transactional marriage, the provincial government was unable to secure local compliance as cadres were the most flagrant violators of the Marriage Law on bride prices and wedding expenses.¹⁶⁸ When a child daughter-in-law of a party secretary in a production brigade in Nanxiong County in 1961 married, he demanded a bride price of 287 RMB, along with 21 *jīn* of pork, 17 *jīn* of fish, 119 *jīn* of grain to secure his approval.¹⁶⁹ Even the Women's Federation chair was complicit in transactional marriage, as a women's chair in a local production brigade in Zhanjiang demanded a bride price of 300 yuan before she would marry in 1962.¹⁷⁰ Three hundred yuan was reasonable by local standards, but a Women's Federation chair was not supposed to be participating in the feudal custom of transactional marriage, for it was her job as an local agent of the state to suppress the same phenomenon.

Cadres were exceptionally problematic for the provincial state because they

¹⁶⁷ “Qing hunyan zhi zheng” [Debate on wedding ceremonies], *Nanfang ribao*, April 6, 1962.

¹⁶⁸ “Hunyin, jiating qingkuang yu wenti de fanying”; “Dangqian nongcun zhong youguan hunyin wenti de qingkuang zonghe.”

¹⁶⁹ This was most likely where he had a child daughter-in-law for his son but decided to let her marry someone else. In internal documents, the blame was on whoever that demanded the money; if the case appeared arranged, then the parents; if the marriage was based on free choice, then the materialistic bride would be blamed. However, this distinction is blurry when the document trails only mention that the engagement was called by the bride's family and without identifying the villain.

¹⁷⁰ “Dangqian nongcun zhong youguan hunyin wenti de qingkuang zonghe.”

served as bad role models to members of their commune, as they borrowed from the commune's public funds for wedding banquets. Some examples included a production brigade secretary in Nanxiong county who invited 330 attendees to his son's wedding banquet, on which he spent 1350 RMB, only to owe the commune 450 RMB after the wedding in 1962. Another brigade leader nearby borrowed from the commune 200 RMB and 100 *jin* of grain to supplement his 25-table wedding banquet., which in total required two pigs and 600 *jin* of grain.¹⁷¹ Unable to repay the money borrowed from the commune for the banquet, some cadres resorted to stealing. For example, in 1966 a male cadre in Yixing county spent 200 RMB for the bride price, along with pork, rice, clothing, jewelry, and a 20-table banquet that in total cost him 1200 RMB. To pay for his debt to the commune of 150 RMB, he stole 700 *jin* of commune grain.¹⁷²

Cadres' misbehavior extended to those who wanted to host a wedding ceremony after being married since they had not hosted a wedding banquet in the early 1950s, when they likely married during the publicity for the Marriage Law Campaign. The provincial Women's Federation considered these "after the fact" ceremonies troublesome not only because of the unavoidable banquets, but also the social obligation on others to provide a gift in kind. In one ceremony between a Women's Federation chair and a local hospital director in Yunan county, the entire hospital staff, and all cadres in the brigade each gave 5 RMB as a gift, while the

¹⁷¹ "Dangqian nongcun zhong youguan hunyin wenti de qingkuang zonghe."

¹⁷² "Shaoguan zhuanqu bufen diqu ji huaxian dengdi xuanchuan guanceè hunyinfa de qingkuang."

brigade secretary played the *suona* on their behalf and the commune leadership appeared to celebrate and partake in the feast.¹⁷³

With extra resources and access to the commune public account, cadres' participation in transactional marriage and luxurious wedding banquets did not temper "feudal marriage customs" as the provincial government expected cadres to act as role model. With cadres' complicity in allowing fellow commune members to host wedding banquets, the state's program to promote frugal weddings and eradicate transactional marriages had low chances of success.

How unaffordable were bride price and other wedding expenses during 1957-1966? Comparing documented marriage costs with tables of economic data during this period, the result suggests that while annual income stagnated, the cost of holding a wedding and marrying skyrocketed.¹⁷⁴ Although prices varied in different locations, an incomplete comparison of price goods using price index from Zhongshan county indicate that retail prices for commodities stagnated, apart from retail food prices during the Great Leap Famine. If the average bride price was around 100 RMB as the provincial Women's Federation established in 1957,¹⁷⁵ and assuming average income

¹⁷³ The *suona* is a high-pitch double-reed Chinese instrument. Often, the *suona* was played in a wedding ceremony to create a lively environment for the wedding to proceed. However, during the socialist era, playing the *suona* in a wedding ceremony was considered a faux pas but it was not outlawed. "Dangqian nongcun zhong youguan hunyin wenti de qingkuang zonghe."

¹⁷⁴ Income at this time was not purely based on wage, but by the degree of access to state welfare. Peasants did not derive income from an official wage, but from work points based on tasks completed and the annual harvest in the collectivized countryside. Standardized wages from urban jobs were relatively constant during the first 30 years of the PRC. Retail prices for grain were also stagnant according to Parish and Whyte (1978) in Guangdong.

¹⁷⁵ "Muqian nongcun funu qunzhong de sixiang qingkuang."

was similar between 1957 and 1963 across different counties, then the bride price was one fifth of the average annual income in Zhongshan, or one third of the average incomes for an agricultural worker. However, when combining a wedding banquet with the bride price, the total would cost an average male peasant one year of his income. Also, returning to the case of banquets hosted by factory workers who earned roughly 630 RMB per year, a 300 RMB banquet would be half of annual income.¹⁷⁶

As income grew slowly during the socialist era, a groom earning the average income would have to spend more than his yearly income on the bride price alone by the 1960s. If the grand total of wedding expenses, including the bride price, was around 600-1000 RMB for an average marriage in the 1960s, then the average peasant needed to save two to three years of his income, and between a year and a half for a factory worker. A bride price of 700 RMB in 1962 would require the average male peasant to conserve two years of his yearly income, without considering other expenses such as meat and grain that were scarce during the Great Leap Famine. Even a production team treasurer who earned the average income of 627 RMB in 1966 needed to save up for a year or two, since he spent 1200 RMB on his wedding, including the 200 RMB bride price.¹⁷⁷ For the average worker in

¹⁷⁶ In 1963, the average income for a worker in Zhongshan was 498 RMB per year, and for an average person employed in the agricultural sector, it was 330 RMB. An average worker employed in the factory made 628 RMB per year. From “Zhongshanshi xian quanmin suoyou zhi danwei zhigong nian pingjun gongzi tongji biao.” [Statistical table on the average income in Zhongshan city and county] in Zhongshan Municipal Gazetteer (Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 1997), 443.

¹⁷⁷ According to the statistical table, a person employed in the administration, institutions, and organizations earned the average income of 627 RMB in the year of 1967. To be generous with this person whose actual income is unknown beside his official position as a production team treasurer, the author has decided to categorize any cadre within this category of “administration and organizations.”

Guangdong, a groom would have to save about half a year of his income in 1957, which increased by 1966 to 18 months of income, suggesting a three folds increase of wedding expenses in less than ten years, during which China experienced agricultural collectivization, the Great Leap Famine, and several years of economic recovery.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the provincial government paid close attention to developments in bride price and wedding expenses. Not only was the increase quantifiable to bureaucrats and reported as a growing concern, but the provincial government also repeatedly emphasized safeguarding rural marriage for men and the detrimental effect of bride price. In many internal documents, women were the victims in marriages arranged by their parents who wanted to extract the maximum bride price. However, gradually the victims shifted from helpless brides to involuntary bachelors who could not afford the wedding expense. As women began to control their spousal choice, it became infeasible in internal documents to blame brides' parents solely for fostering materialism. Given the average income in rural Guangdong during the 1950s and 1960s, marriage expense was a heavy burden for grooms and their families, for it was nearly impossible for a groom to come up with the average bride price and wedding expense by himself. Therefore, repeated work teams sent by the provincial Women's Federation wanted to document and prevent further grievances among rural peasants about involuntary bachelorhood.

Furthermore, documents submitted by work teams were silent on dowry, even when

“Zhongshanshi xian quanmin suoyou zhi danwei zhigong nian pingjun gongzi tongji biao.”; the case of this specific cadre came from “Shaoguan zhuanqu bufen diqu ji huaxian dengdii xuanchuan guanche hunyinfa de qingkuang.”

dowry also constituted a transactional marriage.

The return of feudal customs: sedan chairs and marriage taboos

The lingering of other "feudal" marriage customs such as bridal sedan chairs or marriage taboos in the 1960s also indicated the ineffectiveness of the Marriage Law in Guangdong. From Song Dynasty onward, people used a bridal sedan chair to transport a bride from her natal home to her husband's household in a conspicuous wedding procession.¹⁷⁸ While the text of the Marriage Law is silent on bridal sedan chair and other wedding rites, official propaganda material during the promotion of the Marriage Law in the early 1950s associated bridal sedan chairs with feudal marriage and reactionary culture.¹⁷⁹ For instance, sedan chair was associated with arranged marriage, and reluctant brides forcibly escorted to a bridal sedan chair, in contrast to the ideal wedding of a free-choice marriage that specifically had no sedan chair.¹⁸⁰ In the first review of the impact of the Marriage Law in 1957, sedan chair as an issue was not mentioned in internal reports from work teams, but their use became a problem in the second province-wide review of the impact of the Marriage Law in

¹⁷⁸ The bridal sedan chair is different from a regular sedan chair because the bridal sedan chair was decorated in bright colors. The chair forms a central part of a long wedding procession that includes a bride's dowry. In contemporary China, a wedding motorcade has replaced the bridal sedan chair. However, the function is still the same in carrying to bride from her natal home to a wedding banquet or her husband's home. For more information about the history of bridal sedan chair in China, see, "Bridal sedan chair", *Baidu Baike*, last accessed November 20, 2021, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E8%8A%B1%E8%BD%BF/3278210>.

¹⁷⁹ For example, consider image 4.1, which is page 32 of "Hunyinfa tujie" [Illustrations of the Marriage Law], published by the Propaganda branch of the Central Guangdong District of Land Reform Committee, December 10, 1951. Also, see "Guanche hunyinfa yundong gongzuo yinggai zenyang rushou" [how to start a Marriage Law Campaign?], *Nanfang ribao*, February 1, 1953.

¹⁸⁰ "Ruguo meiyou hunyinfa, nalai zhedui haofuqi [Without the Marriage Law, how could this good couple happen?], *Nanfang ribao*, February 10, 1953.

Guangdong in conjunction with the 12th anniversary of the Law in 1962. The provincial Women's Federation found that sedan chairs had remained in use in the 1960s in Bao'an, Dongguan, Guanning, and Zengcheng counties.¹⁸¹ A detailed report indicates that there were seven sedan chairs available for rent in Xiangang commune, and each rental cost 9 RMB.¹⁸²

Image 4: The association of bridal sedan chairs with marriage in the old society



The continued use of bridal sedan chairs reflected people's reception of the regulatory and interventionist state in domestic and ritual affairs.¹⁸³ First, bridal sedan chairs were bulky and conspicuous objects, yet they survived years of material

¹⁸¹ Bao'an, Dongguan, Zengcheng, and Guanning are counties with substantial overseas or Hong Kong sojourners and migrants, although the document did not state this. "Guanyu dangqian zai hunyin jiating fangmian suo chuxian de zhuyao wenti."

¹⁸² "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuan de baogao."

¹⁸³ Bridal sedan chairs were not legally banned; hence the Marriage Law is not concerned.

hardship in south China without being dismantled for furniture or firewood. Not only were they intact during agricultural collectivization and the Great Leap Famine, but many peasants also continued to use them in wedding ceremonies, indicating they did not share the official view of the bridal sedan chair as a relic of the old society. If there was no demand for sedan chairs during the 1950s, then how could it be possible a matchmaker surnamed Szeto who charged two yuan per trip remained in the bridal transport business since 1952, as documented by official reports?¹⁸⁴ Also, given that the function of a bridal sedan chair was to transport the bride in a public wedding procession, the likelihood that village or brigade-level cadres who were ignorant of this was minimal. If there were seven sedan chairs that could be rented on demand in a commune, it would be hard to imagine a local cadre who did not hear of this. And yet, the practice of bridal sedan chair was discovered by the provincial Women's Federation only when it sent work teams to the field in 1962-1963, not by local cadres whose silence implied tolerance, if not acceptance to this custom.¹⁸⁵ As always, the provincial Women's Federation attributed to lapsed attention spent on reforming marriage customs, but it was more likely that the local people and cadres did not see bridal sedan chair as a critical issue that needed addressing. It is possible that bridal sedan chairs were insignificant in the grand scheme of reforming marriage customs, and only by a renewed mandate from the provincial government to purge "feudal marriage" did work teams decided to report on their existence.

¹⁸⁴ "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuan de baogao."

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Recurrent mentions of bridal sedan chairs as a nuisance in state documents indicate that they remained an element in Guangdong weddings. Internal reports from the provincial Women's Federation throughout the early and mid 1960s wrote that a local woman's committee chair have recently rented a bridal sedan chair for her wedding in 1962,¹⁸⁶ while an internal memorandum to communes in Kaiping county in 1964 instructed cadres to destroy all existing bridal sedan chairs, implying that they remained in use.¹⁸⁷ Although the government propaganda in 1950s had associated bridal sedan chairs with unwanted "feudal" marriages, their undying presence in the mid 1960s in the Guangdong countryside suggested that once the attention of the state shifted elsewhere, people would resume their marriage customs previously targeted by the provincial Women's Federation, and the government was unable to secure long-lasting changes in domestic ritual forms.

Aside from a failure to eradicate bridal sedan chairs, the provincial Women's Federation also found a few instances of infringement of marriage freedom based on lineage-based marriage taboos and aversion to same surname marriage. The PRC regime was not the first regime in south China on stopping these taboos, but even after a decade of implementing the Marriage Law, there were cases such as that of Lin Erdi, of Lin Village whose father refused to sanction her marriage to Zhou Daoyan of Zhou Village based on a historical feud between their villages. Only after intervention and education by the local Communist Party secretary were the couple

¹⁸⁶ "Dangqian nongcun zhong youguan hunyin wenti de qingkuang zonghe" [Summary of current marriage issues in the countryside], file 233-1-94-28-37, GPA, April 24, 1962.

¹⁸⁷ "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

able to sidestep parental objections and marry.¹⁸⁸ On parental aversion to same-surname village endogamy, cadres at the provincial Women's Federation suggested that this issue remained present, and one notorious example of a woman's suicide as a cautionary tale. In 1965, a woman surnamed Feng in Fogang county committed suicide after her parents opposed her marriage to a man with the same surname and from the same village, a classic example of aversion to same-surname village endogamy. Instead of allowing her to marry the man she wanted, they arranged for her to marry someone else, after which she decided to kill herself.¹⁸⁹ Possibly an one-off case, the provincial Women's Federation nonetheless saw parental opposition to same-surname endogamy a complicating factor in infringing their children's marriage freedom, even when the younger generation in the 1960s was warming up to marrying these once forbidden potential marriage partners.

Spatial hypergamy and cross-border marriage in south China

In the 1950s and 1960s, the marriage market in Guangdong differed from other parts of the PRC in its high prevalence of spatial hypergamy decades before the economic reform era.¹⁹⁰ Previous studies of rural marriage in south China by Parish and Whyte (1978) and Chan, Madsen, and Unger (1984) suggest that rural marriages

¹⁸⁸ "Guangdong sheng qujiang xian wushi gongshe wushi dadui sange xiaodui de hunyin jiating qingkang diaocha cailiao."

¹⁸⁹ "Shaoguan zhuanqū bufèn dìqū jī huaxian dengdì xuanchuan guanche hunyinfa de qingkuang".

¹⁹⁰ William Lavelly (1991) argues that household registration prevented most rural-urban and intra-rural movement. Still, rural women in Sichuan could marry into nearby counties that are more prosperous than their counties of origin. There were, however, brides from counties farther than 120 kilometers away, although these were fewer than most marriages (80%) that moved within the county boundary. Cindy C. Fan and Youqin Huang (1998) found that long-distance marriage was rare before the reform, suggesting that most rural marriages did not extend past a 25 kilometers radius based on results from a 1989 survey.

during the socialist era mainly were endogamous or within a short distance beyond the production brigade, since collectivization limited potential marriage partners to classmates, commune members, or fellow cadres or workers in political meetings or construction projects.¹⁹¹ Not necessarily exclusive to south China but unlike marriage in other regions of China where marital migration consisted of women marrying into neighboring counties, in Eastern Guangdong they married intra-provincially, inter-provincially, and across ethnolinguistic divisions; in the Pearl River Delta, they sometimes married across the national border, in matches with Hong Kong visitors.

Spatial hypergamy in Guangdong resulted from people coping with state regulation of marriage and economic policies while maximizing social mobility. Pull and push factors such as local sex ratio imbalance, networks of matchmakers, and economic inequality between regions all incentivized spatial hypergamy. These factors were present in long-distance marriages in eastern Guangdong and cross-border marriages in the Pearl River Delta. Although spatial hypergamy could also present in other provinces of China, Guangdong's proximity to a capitalist Hong Kong and a history of marriage between residents from Guangdong and Hong Kong before 1949 meant the population in China was already accustomed to such move. As

¹⁹¹ Investigating villages in Guangdong, Parish and Whyte (1978) and Chan, Madsen, and Unger (1984) independently contend that marriage during the Maoist era was a local affair. Villagers practiced endogamy for reasons such as deterioration of lineage power and marriage taboo (Parish and Whyte, 1978) or unfavorable status in the household registration system and comparative disadvantage in the marriage market (Chan, Madsen, and Unger, 1984). Opportunities for young people to mingle had expanded in local settings in education, political meeting, or construction projects that brought people from nearby production brigade together (Parish & Whyte, 1978), but at the same time reduced connection with areas beyond one's commune, hence fostering local or short-distance marriage during the Maoist era. On the other end of the PRC in Heilongjiang, Yan Yunxiang (2003) reported similar development in rural society and the economy that restricted potential spouses' range.

more women married overseas Chinese or Hong Kong visitors, there was a net-loss of potential brides for rural men, which incentivized them find substitute brides outside of their local area.¹⁹² Naturally, local, and provincial governments worried about long-distance spatial hypergamy because they regarded it as contributing to the perpetuation or resurrection of undesirable "feudal practices" while subjecting China to the ideological threat of capitalism from Hong Kong.¹⁹³

When the work teams from the provincial Women's Federation arrived in Jieyang and Mei County in 1957, cadres were astonished to find a phenomenon that they have not encountered before: long-distance marriages between Chaoshan and Xingmei, two regions in Eastern Guangdong.¹⁹⁴ These two regions represented two

¹⁹² The inter-regional and interprovincial version of spatial hypergamy was not exclusive to south China, for the factors contributing to intra-rural marriage could exist in other regions and provinces of China. However, they would need an existing network of matchmakers and noticeable economic differences between regions for long-distance marriage to materialize. If the standard of living between region A and region B was similar or only marginally better, brides were unlikely to move long-distance because they would lose support from their natal families. Additionally, Guangdong differed from the rest of the PRC because overseas Chinese and Hong Kong visitors were extremely financially attractive men for local women. Their presence and the option to marry out of the PRC disrupted the local marriage market by creating a net loss of potential brides available to rural men, compared to a relatively stable supply of brides in a region that did not witness out-migration. The existence of overseas Chinese and Hong Kong visitors in the marriage market also depressed the relative value a rural man without any overseas connection could offer, as incomes distributed by commune were insignificant compared to remittance overseas Chinese could receive, hence creating a greater demand for Chaoshan men to find substitute brides in Xingmei.

¹⁹³ A few documents talked about the need to counter capitalistic influence from Hong Kong. See, "Guanyu kaizhan yanhai diqu xuanchuan yundong de zhishi" [Instruction on launching a propaganda campaign in coastal (Guangdong) area], file 214-1-76-001-007, GPA, January 16, 1956; "Dui muqian hunyinfa guanche zhong cunzai wenti de yijian."

¹⁹⁴ In state documents, cadres noted that two factors contributed to this novel development of long-distance marriage. Firstly, there was a major famine in Chaoshan in 1943, and in a combination of son-preference, killed many female infants that would have been local brides by the late 1950s. The other external shock came in the Marriage Law, which allowed free-choice marriage for women. However, as many available brides were former child daughters-in-law, they needed to marry somewhere and created a new situation where a heightened sex ratio imbalance across two regions incentivized long-distance marriage. Cadres reporting in this situation implied this was a new development, for they did not cite any precedent about intermarriage between these two Han sub-groups.

separate communities: in Chaoshan, the Teochiu people dominated the coastal plain, and in Xingmei, the Hakka people lived in the mountainside. According to internal reports from the Women's Federation, four factors contributing to long-distance marriages between these two Han sub-groups: first of all, a severe sex ratio imbalance in Chaoshan stemming from a history of son-preference and female infanticide, versus an abundance of women in marriageable age in the Xingmei region; secondly, the economic disparity between the richer coastal Chaoshan and the mountainous Xingmei region; thirdly, province-wide materialist spousal choice, and lastly, networks of informal and professional matchmakers tying two ethnolinguistic communities together.¹⁹⁵

The hierarchy of desirable spouses determined by education, gender, and access to urban areas was the primary cause for the creation of long-distance marriages between Chaoshan and Xingmei regions. In 1957, men who had some education or opportunities to work in the cities would not marry local (read: rural) brides. At the same time, rural women were unwilling to marry local men and desired someone with better economic prospects, leaving rural men at the bottom of the hierarchy.¹⁹⁶ Local cadres, such as one Youth League secretary, complained bitterly

¹⁹⁵ The Hakka people dominate Xingmei, while the Teochew people, a Hoklo sub-group that speaks southern Min (unintelligible to Hakka or Cantonese), dominate Chaoshan. Without a common language, they would not be able to talk to each other. It would be more likely for a mixed couple to speak Cantonese to each other than the national language of Mandarin. However, their ability to speak Cantonese is already questionable since they would not need to speak it inside their respective county. See “Youguan hunyinfu guanche zhihang qingkuang zai meixian, jieyang de diaocha huibao” [An investigative report on the implementation of the Marriage Law in Mei County and Jieyang], file 233-1-42-63-73, GPA, 1957.

¹⁹⁶ “Youguan hunyinfu guanche zhihang qingkuang zai meixian, jieyang de diaocha huibao.” Also, Chaoshan was an area with a high sex ratio imbalance: one possible guess was that there were brothers

that women in his area considered that marriage to a soldier, a cadre, or an overseas Chinese would allow them to “eat well, dress well, and have no need to labor, whereas life after marrying a peasant would be bitter.”¹⁹⁷ In response to being rejected in the local marriage market, male peasants in Chaoshan participated in a long-distance bride importation scheme from Xingmei, where women of marriageable age were plentiful,¹⁹⁸ and where the cost of a bride price was lower than marrying a Chaoshan counterpart.¹⁹⁹ Considering the combination of economic disparity, sex ratio imbalances, and the hierarchy of desirable spouses, on paper Xingmei brides became attractive wives for desperate Chaoshan bachelors. However, without personally knowing women in Xingmei who were marriageable, Chaoshan men needed introductions and matchmaking, an activity that the government was quite weary for its association with arranged marriage.

In the Maoist era, matchmaking in the PRC was divided between informal and professional matchmakers, and the state treated them differently based on intent and profits. In Guangdong during the 1950s and 1960s, informal matchmaking relied on parents, relatives, friends, or neighbors. They were genuine in their desire to find matches and would only take a token fee after a successful pairing. In the context of

who could potentially stay in the village to take care of the parents. The document noted that “men with culture [education] or worked outside rarely come back to the countryside to find spouses.”

¹⁹⁷ “Youguan hunyinfa guanche zhihang qingkuang zai meixian, jieyang de diaocha huibao.”

¹⁹⁸ Xingmei region consists of Xingning City and Meizhou, while the Chaoshan region consists of Chaozhou, Shantou, Jieyang. The geographic distance between Jieyang to Meizhou is approximately 120 kilometers. The actual distance between specific counties might vary. The document mentioned that it took no more than two hours to travel by car between these two areas.

¹⁹⁹ “Youguan hunyinfa guanche zhihang qingkuang zai meixian, jieyang de diaocha huibao.”

long-distance marriages between men in Chaoshan and women in Xingmei, informal matchmakers relied extensively on Xingmei women who had already married into Chaoshan to spread awareness back home. The provincial government was not only tolerant of informal matchmaking,²⁰⁰ but commended informal matchmakers for preventing rural bachelorhood while noting that matches by relatives and friends often resulted in “normal family with good spousal relations.”²⁰¹ Moreover, the provincial Women's Federation implored local Youth Leagues and women's representative committees to foster informal matchmaking by organizing recreational activities on festival days and educating women who married out to Chaoshan about Teochew culture to help them adjust to their families.²⁰²

Professional matchmakers who plied their trades and made profit in Guangdong, however, were not appreciated. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the provincial government accused professional matchmakers of reinforcing feudal marriage customs by charging exorbitant fees, fostering high wedding expenses, and misleading Xingmei women by exaggerating their future husbands' economic

²⁰⁰ Parish and Whyte (1978) also discuss the role of informal matchmakers in contemporary rural and urban Kwantung, including "local women married out to other villages" serving as a conduit of information exchange government was not opposed to informal matchmaking. Parish and Whyte (1984) found that people generally accepted that introduction by friends, coworkers, or even workplace superior in urban areas. My finding agrees with their assertions.

²⁰¹ “Dui muqian hunyinfa guanche zhong cunzai wenti de yijian.”

²⁰² Ibid. No indication if this happened or not, but the formality and state support of matchmaking here is quite intriguing: on the one hand, this would be more formal than collective-organized basketball tournaments and movies mentioned in rural Heilongjiang as mentioned by Yan (2003), but this would be much less structured than marriage introduction bureaus and organized group outings in Shanghai, Tianjin, Beijing, and other cities in China during the reform era as discussed by Honig and Hershatter (1988). For more information about the marriage introduction bureau and state-organized matchmaking, See Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980's* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 85-87.

prospects.²⁰³ The provincial government accused professional matchmakers worsening rural grooms' financial burden by charging introduction and auxiliary fees regardless of success. The market rate for an introduction was one yuan, and at least five yuan for any successful match. Considering that an average peasant in Jieyang, a county in Chaoshan region, earned a combination of 40.97 yuan and received 250 kgs of rice, with the total as 81.7 yuan per year,²⁰⁴ even one yuan was 1/40 of his annual cash earning, and a successful introduction cost 1/8 of per year.²⁰⁵ Since the men were dependent on matchmakers to introduce women, provincial government officials alleged that many professional matchmakers intentionally introduced several undesirable women first. Only until they had extracted enough money from desperate men would they introduce suitable women.²⁰⁶ Once successful, matchmakers would charge another 10 yuan or more for their efforts.²⁰⁷ For the average male farmer in Chaoshan, the cost of introduction and the matchmakers alone, if there were a few

²⁰³ There are contradicting narratives on the relationship between the PRC state and professional matchmakers in academic studies of social life in China. Parish and Whyte (1978) find that while the government opposed them as feudal and capitalist and confiscated their earning during political campaigns, they were tolerated by local cadre and left alone. In contrast, Jack Chen (1973) observes that the government was supportive of professional matchmakers. Regarding the position of the provincial government on professional matchmakers in Chaoshan and Xingmei, see "Dui muqian hunyinfa guanche zhong cunzai wenti de yijian."

²⁰⁴ Jieyang County Gazetteer, (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing House, 1993), 115-116.

²⁰⁵ Peasants also received grain as his annual ration; theoretically they could sell it, but then they would have no food for the table. Therefore, A peasant's disposable income was different than his total income (40.97 yuan disposable, versus 81.7 yuan total). In contrast, the average worker's wage (someone in the factory, for example) was high, around 478 yuan per year, but workers did not receive grain and they would have to buy their food with their annual income.

²⁰⁶ This accusation did not make economic sense and reflected a sympathetic perspective to rural men. If a failed introduction earns one yuan and a successful match five yuan or more, and the time spent arranging a match is the same, why would a matchmaker waste her time arranging matches that are bound to fail? It would be more profitable and, in the matchmaker's, best interest to put successful matches with different men than extracting one yuan at a time from one or few clients.

²⁰⁷ "Youguan hunyinfa guanche zhihang qingkuang zai meixian, jieyang de diaocha huibao".

unsuccessful matches, a successful match, and matchmaker fees would have cost him at minimum twenty yuan, half of his annual disposable income. In addition, he would have to account for other considerable expenses associated with long-distance marriage, such as traveling cost, bride price, bridal goods, and furniture for the new household that added up to around 150 yuan.²⁰⁸ In provincial Women's Federation's working reports, cadres wrote that men in the Chaoshan region resorted to loans from rural credit cooperatives to afford their wedding expenses and took away available production funds from their collectives.²⁰⁹ Documents published in the 1960s expressed the same accusation of professional matchmaker contributing to higher marriage expenses.²¹⁰

Cadres wrote worryingly about the high divorce rate among long-distance marriages matched by matchmakers and its impact on rural stability.²¹¹ As products of strategic calculations based on spatial hypergamy and not mutual affection, long-distance marriages in Eastern Guangdong were especially prone to quick divorces. Although there were desperate bachelors in Chaoshan, in Xingmei there were women equally eager to escape poverty by hypergamy. Knowing this, professional matchmakers exaggerated the economic prosperity in the Chaoshan region and promised no agricultural work for women who married there. A rude awakening

²⁰⁸ "Hunyinfa zhixing qingkuang diaocha" [Investigation on the enforcement of the Marriage Law], file 233-1-42-51-55, GPA, February 28, 1957.

²⁰⁹ "Dui muqian hunyinfa guanche zhong cunzai wenti de yijian."

²¹⁰ "Guanyu dangqian zai hunyin jiating fangmian suo chuxian de zhuyao wenti."

²¹¹ Informal matchmakers had lower incentives to lie to future brides, especially they were or would be in the same social networks after the marriage. Professional matchmakers, however, had no qualms about lying to both sides of the match.

followed when the husbands' families instructed the married brides to work in the fields. Some women tried to induce a divorce by refusing all agricultural work and domestic chores, and by engaging in sex strikes to induce the husbands to divorce them as they realized their wives were unproductive and unpleasant to have around.²¹² Subsequently, local courts reported sizable increases in divorce petitions by unhappy wives, and legal conflicts with their husbands who adamantly refused. Local courts in Chaoshan region were in a bind because divorces had severe detrimental implications for rural men, especially within the context of long-distance marriages.²¹³ If the court granted the divorce, rural men from Chaoshan who spent a fortune in matchmaker fees, bride price, and other wedding expenses would have no more financial resources to attract another woman and would be destined to a life of involuntary bachelorhood. However, if the court categorically denied divorce petitions, it would nullify the right of divorce by the Marriage Law.

Criticism of professional matchmakers also included accusation of human trafficking in the process of arranging marriages.²¹⁴ Matchmaking differed from human trafficking based on whether the brides had the ability to reject matches, and whether matchmakers received the principal share if not all the bride prices. Although professional matchmaking was undesirable to the provincial government by incentivizing materialistic tendencies and elevating wedding cost, they were not

²¹² The state called them traffickers, but prospective brides were abducted and not kidnapped by matchmakers. "Muqian nongcun funu qunzhong de sixiang qingkuang."

²¹³ "Dui muqian hunyinfa guanche zhong cunzai wenti de yijian."

²¹⁴ The accused crime of human trafficking referred to matchmakers as the arrangers of marriage and not for being the middle person in a marriage arranged by parents.

human traffickers if they were only introducing prospective brides to men. However, when professional matchmakers outright purchased women from Xingmei and arranged to sell them to peasants in Chaoshan, they became wholesalers of brides while pocketing all of the bride price in return. A notorious matchmaker trafficked forty women and successfully sold seven for a total bride price of 488 yuan, and five others who averaged ninety yuan per person.²¹⁵ The pocketing of bride price by matchmakers plying their trade between Xingmei and Chaoshan was highly unusual in the PRC, because the bride or her parents usually benefited from the money received from the groom. However, considering the long distance between Chaoshan and Xingmei, it was likely that the matchmaker prepaid the brides' parents and bought the right to receive the bride price. The victims, of course, were the women sold, although they must have consented even if marriages were not based on mutual affection.

Although spatial hypergamy relieved marriage squeeze in both Chaoshan and Xingmei regions, it contributed to potential social unrest in the eyes of the provincial government. Low morale among rural men who felt hopeless about their marriage search hindered productivity, further impaired by traveling and spending large sums of money searching for brides. Also, in 1957-1958, unmarried women in Xingmei were leaving the area, and women already married also sought divorces to marry someone better.²¹⁶ The result was that people in each locale looked down on those

²¹⁵ “Youguan hunyinfa guanche zhihang qingkuang zai meixian, jieyang de diaocha huibao.”

²¹⁶ “Youguan hunyinfa guanche zhihang qingkuang zai meixian, jieyang de diaocha huibao.”

who participated in spatial hypergamy. However, the most concerning threat from long-distance spatial hypergamy in the eyes of provincial government officials was soured ethnic relations between the two marrying Han sub-groups. Since these two groups had different customs, gender norms regarding women's participation in the field,²¹⁷ and spoke different languages, cadres wrote about the possibility of rising ethnic discontent and regionalism from waves of divorces between these two groups of people.²¹⁸ As the issues spanned county lines and ethnic divisions, each county government blamed the others to tackle spatial hypergamy without taking responsibility.²¹⁹

The Great Leap Forward and the subsequent famine boosted interest in long-distance spatial hypergamy in south China. Within the context of preparing for the 13th anniversary of the Marriage Law,²²⁰ the provincial Women's Federation found that the long-distance marriages had spread to women in central Guangdong, the most prosperous region of the province. Furthermore, there was a new development in spatial hypergamy involving marriage fraud and inter-provincial bridal import

²¹⁷ Documents about spatial hypergamy between Chaoshan and Xingmei referred to “different gender norms” as one of many points of contention, but they did not specify. However, they did note that there was a general notion that women in Chaoshan did not work in the field, and instead did embroidery for sale, in contrast to women in Xingmei who were accustomed to working in agriculture and would like to escape from that life. Also, women in Chaoshan were secluded and prevented from venturing outside their households. For more information about women in Chaoshan, see, “Ziniang” [Women in Chaoshan dialect], *Baibu Baike*, last accessed November 22, 2021, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A7%BF%E5%A8%98/7321783>.

²¹⁸ This was not a positive term in the 1950s and 1960s. “Diyu zhuyi” (Regionalism) was politically sensitive because it would fuel separate identities or separatism. Bureaucrats in Guangdong were exceptionally wary of any talks of regional identity, localism, or the like.

²¹⁹ “Dui muqian hunyinfa guanhe zhong cunzai wenti de yijian.”

²²⁰ “Guanyu 1963 nian kaizhan xuanchuan guanhe hunyinfa huodong de lianhe tongzhi” [Joint notice on the promotion and implementation of the Marriage Law], file 233-3-103-62-63, GPA, January 4, 1963.

schemes.²²¹ The severity of marriage fraud depended on who was involved. For example, in Xiangang commune in Kaiping county, a woman's parents arranged for her to be married to four different men in Shunde, Jiangmen, and Zhongshan, reaping the bride price of 1200 yuan. Some professional matchmakers went on extended journeys with accomplice women and scammed men in Shunde and Zhongshan counties.²²² Colluding with matchmakers to scam men was not new in south China,²²³ and the provincial government found that some women were working with professional matchmakers to split the introduction fees and bride prices. Simultaneously engaged to multiple persons or entering an engagement with no intention of honoring it were both marriage frauds because they had one goal in mind, which was extracting as much money from unaware men desperate for wives. Of course, as with all marriage frauds, these women had no intention of marrying their victims, and the distance between their native places and those of their victims' allowed secrecy and avoided accountability for a time.²²⁴

A detailed report about interprovincial marriage in Jiaoling county in 1966 further demonstrate the challenge faced by local counties regarding spatial hypergamy and the roles of matchmakers in fostering transactional and arranged

²²¹ "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao"; "Guanyu jiaoling xian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao" [A report regarding transactional marriage in Jiaoling County], file 233-1-127-88-92, GPA, March 25, 1966.

²²² "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

²²³ In Republican Guangdong, this was a common occurrence where a matchmaker would work with a woman to scam an unsuspecting man. After the man paid the bride price and matchmaking fees, the recently married wife would vanish, and the matchmaker would proclaim her innocence. It was called "leaving a dove" [放白鴿] and was a recurrent subject in republican newspapers.

²²⁴ "Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

marriages.²²⁵ Jiaoling, a mountainous county in the Xingmei region, had a history of exporting brides to Chaoshan during the 1950s. However, in 1966, the state found that the bride transfer scheme had extended to Fujian Province. As with spatial hypergamy between Chaoshan and Xingmei, men from Fujian used matchmakers and came with official introduction documents to marry.²²⁶ However, human traffickers were also active in forging papers and pretending to be husbands by completing registration, only to sell their supposed wives in Fujian afterward. Making matters worse was lax registration by local cadres who gave permission to marry without checking on age, if the marriage was arranged or not by matchmakers, or whether the marriage involved human trafficking.²²⁷

Within the same document, the provincial government also attributed long-distance marriage with growing acceptance of bride price. the Provincial Women's Federation found that while local marriage in Jiaoling County remained free of bride price, which was a dubious claim by itself, parents demanded bride price for long-distance marriages. Rather than viewing a financial transaction given by the groom to the bride's family as bride price, brides' parents rationalized this payment as fair compensation, which was valid considered that she would no longer be able to help with agricultural labor if married to faraway places.²²⁸ The validity of the claim that

²²⁵ The same document noted Xingning county and Mei County were having the same problem but did not elaborate. "Guanyu jiaoling xian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

²²⁶ The document mentions "Zhengshi zhengming" (正式證明), which could be a certified letter of his status or his intention to marry a woman from Jiaoling.

²²⁷ "Guanyu jiaoling xian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

²²⁸ Some context is needed to understand the local sentiment toward accepting bride prices for long-distance marriages. Women in Jiaoling county, Xingmei region of Guangdong, were primarily Hakka.

bride price was only relevant in long-distance marriage is suspect, and possible that cadres wanted to compound spatial hypergamy with transactional marriage to induce the provincial government to take action.

Furthermore, spatial hypergamy accentuated clashes between accepted social notions of marriage versus its legal definition. When three men from Fujian wanted to marry women in Xinbu commune in Jiaoling in 1966, they were first detained by the police as human traffickers and released only when they proved that they were genuine prospective grooms with official paperwork. After paying the bride price of 200-250 yuan for each woman, completed the wedding ceremony, and begun cohabitation with their new wives,²²⁹ the local government in Guangdong denied their request to return with their brides to Fujian. Citing the Marriage Law that these women had not attained the minimum marriageable age, the government forced these men to leave their “wives” behind, causing these women to complain daily at the commune office. Not only were the women causing a scene, but the local people were also dissatisfied with the government’s decision, since in their minds these women were already socially married, even they had not yet registered with the state as required by the Marriage Law. There was much disconnect between the social understanding of marriage and the legal definition of matrimony. The acceptance of transactional and underage marriages within the context of spatial hypergamy

Hakka women are known for their hardworking habits. A daughter married out to Fujian Province or Chaoshan region in Guangdong would equate to losing a productive farmer for her natal household. If the marriage is local, then at least the daughter could return and help with agricultural work.

²²⁹ Which meant they had already consummated their marriage even if not officially registered with the state. “Guanyu jiaoling xian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao.”

indicated people's flexible response to the Marriage Law.

In response to the problem of interprovincial spatial hypergamy, the Provincial Women's Federation first suggested another propaganda session on the Marriage Law to instill the value of free-choice, transactional-free marriage to the youths and cadres. Like other campaigns in the PRC, matchmakers, especially those who seduced women to separate from their husbands and remarry, or those that deceived young girls, should be arrested, and made as examples. Furthermore, the Guangdong Provincial Women's Federation also advised the government to collaborate with its Fujian counterpart to instruct their commune members to refrain from entering transactional marriage negotiations. Aiming to protect the interest of the "Poor and Middle Peasants," the provincial women's federation recommended governments to prevent transactional marriage across a long distance and human trafficking to safeguard local production.²³⁰ In the end, the provincial government had many goals in suppressing intra-rural spatial hypergamy. Undoubtedly, the government wanted to prevent transactional marriages and human trafficking and ensure young men a chance to marry locally, as rural women were unlikely to marry far without matchmakers. At the same time, by publicizing punishment to matchmakers who encouraged rural wives to leave their husbands, the provincial government wanted to stabilize marriages for rural husbands since they were already heavily disfavored in the hierarchy of desirable spouses. If rural men in the more

²³⁰ "Guanyu jiaoling xian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao."

affluent Chaoshan region or in the Fujian Province were slightly favorable to rural women, men in the poorer and mountainous region of Xingmei were doubly disadvantaged in the marriage squeeze as they participated in an interregional and interprovincial marriage market.

If long-distance spatial hypergamy between Chaoshan and Xingmei represented a regional solution to a marriage squeeze in Guangdong, cross-border marriage to Hong Kong visitors was another strategic choice for women in China. In the context of cross-border marriages in the 1950s and 1960s, these were hypergamous because of economic disparity between Hong Kong and China, and they involved exiting the PRC, the ultimate form of moving away for social mobility. Women in Guangdong pursued cross-border marriage because visitors from Hong Kong or those with ties to Hong Kong could be guaranteed a better standard of living than the average groom in China could provide. At the same time, there was a high sex ratio imbalance in Hong Kong which encouraged residents to look for wives in China, as they had been accustomed to do before 1949.²³¹ From 1949 to 1956, cross-border marriages had yet to become a noticeable phenomenon since the general trend of population movement was unidirectionally southward. The PRC also required a pre-rearranged single-entry permit limiting contacts between both sides, but cross-

²³¹ Before the war, Hong Kong was a male sojourner society with a high sex ratio imbalance where 100 women to 134.8 men in 1931; the sex ratio became 100:105.6 in 1961. There was no census between 1931 and 1961. Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong, "Sex Ratio of the Population," *Hong Kong Statistics 1947-1967*, pp.15. Also, according to the Hong Kong by-census of 2016, the sex ratio in 1961 for the age 15-24 was 121.1:100 and 116:100 for the age cohort between 25-44 years old. 2016 Hong Kong By-census. "Sex Ratio by age group, 1961-2016." Accessed 26th September 2021, <https://www.bycensus2016.gov.hk/en/Snapshot-01.html>.

border marriages continued.²³²

However, when the PRC relaxed the border control procedure for Hong Kong residents to visit their friends and relatives in China starting in 1956, men took advantage of this situation and engaged in cross-border marriage. Also, women on the PRC side of the border, particularly in the border zone region such as Bao'an (modern-day Shenzhen) and Dongguan, welcomed the opportunity to wed Hong Kong residents. For example, 11 Hong Kong visitors only spent 4 days in a village in Bao'an before they each found a bride, and a local ballad said that "It is better to marry a Hong Kong man, it does not matter if he is crippled; as long as he is rich, then one does not worry about clothes or food ever again."²³³ Such open praises for Hong Kong grooms and materialism by local women caused the provincial government to worry about potential ideological contamination from Hong Kong visitors on local societies in Guangdong. On the one hand, Hong Kong visitors were valuable economically as they brought overseas capital for investment and trade opportunities. Still, they also exposed people in China to materialism and accentuated

²³² From February 1951 to 1956, a Hong Kong resident who wanted to visit China required an entry permit applied to the local police station by relatives in the PRC. The state would then mail the single-entry permit to Hong Kong, and only after that would he be allowed entry. In 1956, the PRC state relaxed the requirement by allowing the application of the single-entry permit at the border, which was at the Luo Hu Port. "Huixiangzheng zhi bian ka jianzheng 59 nian lishi" [The Mainland Travel Permit for Hong Kong and Macao Residents changed from paper to a card: witnessing 59 years of history,] *Wen Wei Po*, February 9, 2010; Madokoro (2012) narrates the complex history of the fortification of the border and movement between Hong Kong and socialist China. For more information about border control, see Laura Madokoro, "Borders Transformed: Sovereign Concerns, Population Movements, and the Making of Territorial Frontiers in Hong Kong, 1949-1967," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2012), pp. 408-409.

²³³ Nan Zhaoxu, *Jiemi Shenzhen dang'an* [Behind the Old Files of Shenzhen] (Shenzhen: Haitian Publishing House, 2010), 93.

material differences between a socialist China and a capitalist Hong Kong.²³⁴

Rural women disgruntled by agricultural collectivization and the lack of economic opportunity considered marriage to Hong Kong as a means of avoiding a life of farming.²³⁵ In Taishan (Cantonese: Toishan), a county in the Pearl River Delta where residents traditionally had stronger ties to overseas and Hong Kong residents, local women preferred marriage to someone in Hong Kong rather than a local peasant.²³⁶ For example, a mother fiercely opposed her daughter's marriage to a local peasant and instead arranged for her daughter to marry a much older man in Hong Kong in 1956. Not only was this cross-border marriage problematic as the mother violated the Marriage Law by infringing her daughter's free choice in marriage, but the arranged marriage also contributed to material inequality back in Taishan. As the result of her daughter's arrangement, the mother received a remittance of \$100 Hong Kong dollars per month,²³⁷ and neighbors were openly envious and lauded her for benefiting from a good match.²³⁸

²³⁴ “Guanyu kaizhan yanhai diqu xuanchuan yundong de zhishi.”

²³⁵ The report also included women complaining about the lack of economic advancement in other Guangdong counties, the inequalities between peasants who grow their food, and those who relied on the state, such as cadres, soldiers, and workers. The general mood collected in this report about rural women's thoughts was that rural women detested staying put in the countryside. “Muqian nongcun funu qunzhong de sixiang qingkuang.”

²³⁶ People with overseas connections could receive remittances from overseas, such as extra rations and coupons for use. Friends and relatives could also mail goods back to them, subject to approval by the Chinese state.

²³⁷ 1 USD converted to 5.7143 HKD in 1956-1957. Before 1971, the official exchange rate in the PRC was 1USD to 2.4618 RMB, and this was under the strictest control by the PRC government. Therefore, 100 HKD = 43.08 RMB and a 43 RMB per month remittance were more than a month's wages in Guangdong. For historical exchange rates between USD and HKD, see Werner Antweiler, “Pacific Exchange Rate Service: Foreign Currency Unit per 1 U.S. Dollar, 1950-2018.” The University of British Columbia. Last modified 2019. <https://fx.sauder.ubc.ca/etc/USDpages.pdf>.

²³⁸ “Guanyu taishan qiaoshu qingkuang diaocha” [An investigation regarding overseas Chinese

In response to women's preference for marriage to Hong Kong men, the provincial government portrayed cross-border marriage as a political choice between capitalist lifestyles and loyalty to socialism. Similarly, the Women's Federation was primarily concerned with women who desired to marry a Hong Kong resident because they thought of Hong Kong as a place "full of gold where they could live comfortably." Within the backdrop of a massive illegal migration wave to Hong Kong in 1957, the provincial Women's Federation advised the provincial government to portray Hong Kong's capitalistic society's dark sides to deter women from marrying Hong Kong residents for money and comfort.²³⁹

Conditions in 1962 was like 1957 when the provincial Women's Federation reported on the same issues of cross-border marriage and women's desires to marry Hong Kong men.²⁴⁰ In the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward and its subsequent famine, there was another mass exodus of legal and illegal immigrants to Hong Kong. At the same time, women in the Pearl River Delta had to confront the state policy of repatriating part of the urban population to the countryside to increase agricultural production. From interviews with women in neighborhood committees in Foshan City, provincial Women's Federation cadres found that women with overseas relations or relations in Hong Kong, a typical family situation in the Pearl River Delta region, readily agreed with the state's policy to return people to their native place or

relatives in Taishan County], file 233-1-42-158-161, GPA, April 5, 1957.

²³⁹ "Dui muqian hunyinfa guanche zhong cunzai wenti de yijian."

²⁴⁰ For more information about the years of the mass exodus to Hong Kong (1957 and 1962), see Chen Bing'an, *Da tao Gang* [The Great Escape to Hong Kong], 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Open Page Publishing Co., Ltd., 2016).

to leave the cities, as long as that destination was Hong Kong or Macau.²⁴¹ Facing the prospect of severing their good lives in the city and being mobilized to go to the countryside, they demanded that the provincial government allow them to stay in urban Foshan or let them go to Hong Kong. Otherwise, they said, they would commit suicide on the nearby Zhongshan Bridge.²⁴² These urban women's requests indicated that women in the Pearl River Delta were aware of the inequality between China and Hong Kong. They could exercise an alternative to socialism to challenge state policies they deemed undesirable.

In counties located directly at the China-Hong Kong border, marriage ties with Hong Kong created additional difficulty for cadres in governing the populace and establishing social order. Bao'an, just one river away from Hong Kong, was a county whose residents customarily enjoyed unfettered Hong Kong access before 1950. In a document from the Women's Federation that discusses women's chronic absenteeism, smuggling, and illegal immigration to Hong Kong in 1962-1963, the Chinese government was frustrated with cross-border marriage ties, especially since women with husbands in Hong Kong were allowed limited rights to travel back and forth.²⁴³ Their movements accentuated inequality in local societies as they brought back superior products from Hong Kong and purchased extra goods with remittances,

²⁴¹ "Fushanshi zuzhi chengshi renmin zhiyuan nongye jiedao funu sixiang qingkuang" [The thoughts of neighborhood women in Foshan City during the movement to organize urban resident to support agriculture], file 233-1-93-25-29, GPA, May 24, 1962.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ "Dangqian funu qunzhong sixiang dongtai" [Current thought among women], file 233-2-267-12-19, GPA, March 6, 1963.

just as the provincial government was cracking down on illegal migration. Not only were these women able to boast about their lifestyle, but they also openly criticized the material inadequacy in their communes. Those without Hong Kong ties complained bitterly to the investigation teams about inequality; they too desired a chance to go to Hong Kong to acquire goods unavailable in China. Men appeared in documents about cross-border marriage in the form of husbands, fiancés, and escapees. In discussions of Hong Kong residents who returned to China for a bride, many were former PRC residents. Although some husbands or fiancés legally migrated to Hong Kong before 1950, others overstayed after receiving permission to visit Hong Kong or crossed the border illegally after 1951. These men with a Hong Kong residency provided a legal means for fiancées or wives to apply for an exit permit to join them, and the Bao'an county and Guangdong provincial government had a hard time denying their wives' requests to go to Hong Kong during times of massive illegal immigration in 1957-1957 and 1962-1963.²⁴⁴

Women who applied for the exit marriage permit or those receiving remittances demoralized others and caused labor problems in their communes. The

²⁴⁴ Ibid. Also, colonial Hong Kong had a complicated history with registering migrants or refugees from the PRC. The colonial government would expel escapees who did not have a local identity card back to China. Still, at other times they would register everyone in the colony and give them an identity card. The only distinction on those cards were those stamped with blank ink (permanent residents) and those with green inks (temporary residents) who were subjected to removal if they committed a crime. By 1974, the regulation changed to a "touch base policy" where a migrant from China could claim permanent residency and register for the ID card if he presented himself to the local authority south of Boundary Street. This street separated Kowloon from the leased New Territories. However, if the authority caught him at the frontier zone, he would be expelled back to China the next day. For more information about border control between the 1950s to 1970s, see Sam Wong, "Historical and Cultural Contexts of Mainland Chinese Migrants in Hong Kong," in *Exploring "Unseen" Social Capital in Community Participation*, Everyday Lives of Poor Mainland Chinese Migrants in Hong Kong (Amsterdam University Press, 2007), pp. 74-77.

provincial Women's Federation reported that as women intended to leave or were receiving remittances to buy food, their economic livelihood was independent of work points or collective labor.²⁴⁵ Absenteeism was a significant challenge to the local commune because it subverted its authority as the sole provider of food and resources. At the same time, marriage ties with and remittance from Hong Kong created a distinction between those who could afford a much better standard of living with no work and others who had to labor rigorously in the field, fueling desires to escape China altogether.

The Guangdong government was aware of the materialistic influence from Hong Kong and local women's recurrent comments on marrying someone from there. Subsequently, it launched political campaigns to stop the spread of Hong Kong's influence in China, and once again, cross-border marriages were politicized by the state. In a play written in 1962, "Before Marriage," the state dramatized the danger of this intimate connection. In the play, a woman surnamed Ho, surrounded by new furniture such as a sofa, bed, wardrobe, tables, and chairs purchased from her fiancé's remittance is about to go to the Guangzhou train station to pick up her fiancé Mr. Wong who is arriving from Hong Kong. He had been her neighbor before the Communist Revolution in 1949. However, she is interrupted by her ex-boyfriend Li, her childhood friend, and the hero of the story, and she explains for the final time why she must end her relationship with Li to marry Wong. The play portrays Mr. Wong

²⁴⁵ "Dangqian funu qunzhong sixiang dongtai." No mention of the population applied for an exit permit and received remittance in the document. However, this report from cadres in the women's federation came from five different communes and one production brigade. The problem's scale suggested that it was not a minor problem that affected only one or two communes in the border area.

fresh from the train. He immediately brings gifts to his fiancée and her mother, with items such as a box of fancy cloth, a gold bracelet, and a gold necklace, all unobtainable in socialist Guangzhou. The fiancée Miss Ho is mesmerized by material comfort and blinded to the fact that the Hong Kong man was an undercover Nationalist spy. At the end of the story, Miss Ho's dream of living in Hong Kong is shattered, and her childhood friends criticize her for abandoning socialist ideals for money.²⁴⁶

The phenomenon of women's preference in marrying Hong Kong residents extended beyond geographic regions and occupations. When following the national campaign to investigate cadres' misbehavior in 1965, the provincial government found that one sin many cadres committed was their desire to marry southward. Two female cadres, one of them already with ties with Hong Kong, somehow found boyfriends from Hong Kong and asked for exit permits. They vowed to keep trying until they landed in Hong Kong.²⁴⁷ If this were an average urban female worker or a rural female peasant expressing these thoughts of desiring a better life elsewhere, the state would be concerned but not particularly threatened; however, if cadres expressed capitalist tendencies and wished an out from the regime they were supposed to uphold, then it became an ideological weakness that required

²⁴⁶ "Jiehun zhiqian" [Before marriage] in *Baiyun shanxia yijia* [A family under the White Cloud Mountain], 1st ed (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe), 1962.

²⁴⁷ "Guanyu jieji douzheng zai ganbu de hunyin jiating wenti fangmian de fanying" [Reflection on cadres' issue on marriage and family in the context of class struggle], file 233-1-103-64-73, GPA, July 1965.

rectification.

The issues of cross-border marriage to the Chinese state were different from those caused by interregional spatial hypergamy in Eastern Guangdong. If the long-distance bride transfer arrangements fostered regionalism, ethnic discontent, and low morale among rural men in Xingmei and Chaoshan, then cross-border marriage between Hong Kong and China was more of an ideological threat to the socialist ordering of society. Intra-rural spatial hypergamy threatened the stability of rural marriages and created high bride prices, but the spread of materialism and capitalism was a fundamental threat to the socialist order. Although the numbers of cross-border marriages were far fewer than long-distance spatial hypergamy between Xingmei and Chaoshan, the idea that women could advance themselves via marrying Hong Kong residents and avoiding labor in a socialist country disturbed the Chinese state at various levels. Both were solutions that took advantage of demographic or economic inequalities in local marriage markets. Both resulted in fostering materialist inclinations in spousal choice and violations of the Marriage Law in Guangdong. However, whereas long-distance spatial hypergamy between two Han sub-groups could potentially exist in other provinces such as Fujian or Guangxi, cross-border marriage was realistically only available to women in Guangdong by geographic proximity, linguistic similarities, and historical connections across the national border.

Whereas the Marriage Law had a more robust or longer-lasting effect in other

regions of China, local marriage in south China during the mid-50s and 1960s indicated the state's failure in changing people's minds. Many marriage practices conventionally associated with the Economic Reform period (1978-2000), such as luxurious banquets, large bride prices, dowry, and materialistic spousal choice over political loyalty or class-based hierarchy, never went away in south China during the Mao years. Other suppressed customs such as hiring bridal sedan chairs, marriage taboos, and speculating in the black market to gather the requisite marriage funds,²⁴⁸ came back quickly in the 1960s in Guangdong, rather than in the late 1970s and 1980s as in other parts of China.²⁴⁹ Anemic popular support of the regulatory regime on marriage, along with numerous violations of the Marriage Law, meant that by the mid-1960s, the government sorely needed another intensive campaign to reinject socialist values into marriage practices. The second campaign, the PRC state delivered in the form of the Cultural Revolution, during which the discourse on marriage customs again became entangled with a national political movement.

Table 4.1: List of common wedding expenses in Guangdong before the Cultural Revolution

Type	Timing
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²⁴⁸ To pay the bride price, young men would occasionally speculate in underground business ventures (投機倒把). Speculation was a crime in a planned economy, but the PRC abolished “speculation” as a crime in 1997.

²⁴⁹ Extraneous costs included ceremonial tea fees, sedan chair rental, and “Five Flowers fees” (五花錢), paid to the matchmaker, the bride’s mom, bridesmaids, to people who block the bride’s door to prevent the best men and the groom from entering without a bribe (they could be bridesmaids or other relatives), and to the bride’s chaperone who will brush the bride’s hair during the ceremony. “Dangqian nongcun zhong youguan hunyin wenti de qingkuang zonghe”; “Guanyu diaocha xiangang gongshe dangqian maimai hunyin qingkuang de baogao”.

Matchmaker Fee	Introduction
Bride Price	Negotiation
Bridal goods (clothes, shoes, jewelry)	
Chinese wedding cakes	Banquet
Meats (pork, chicken, goose, fish)	
Rice and grains	
Tea money	Ceremony
Wedding gifts	Attending wedding ceremonies

Chapter 5

Unending Marriage Reform Campaign

This chapter reassesses the state commitment to women's liberation and marriage reform in Guangdong from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution to the years of transition toward economic reform (1966-1980). During this period, and primarily from 1972 to 1978, the Guangdong provincial government investigated and suppressed people's marriage practices in response to national directives. At the same time, the provincial Women's Federation promoted the state vision of simple and socialist weddings by publicizing stories of role models who married freely, frugally, and without marriage transactions. All these campaigns occurred at a time when enthusiasm for revolutionary activism was waning during the second half of the Cultural Revolution and when socialism was being transformed in the early reform era. These were attempts to reassert control over peoples' everyday life, just as the PRC government tried to do during the early 1950s marriage law promotions and propaganda campaign.

My examination of marriage customs and its reform reveals that a strict periodization according to national politics is not helpful in understanding local social changes. While the conventional periodization of the Cultural Revolution is roughly divided into two halves, the first characterized by factional struggles and the mass movements to rusticate educated youth from 1966 to 1971, and the second characterized by the growing public apathy toward political ideology after the Death of Lin Biao and the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign from 1972 to 1976,

this chapter approaches the same period by tracing continuities in social policies on reforming marriage customs that began in 1972 and persisted into the economic reform era. The timeline of these policies and local initiatives did not correspond with the conventional timeline of radical politics. When the country experienced the highest revolutionary fervor during the first half of the Cultural Revolution and countless youth were rusticated in 1967-1969, the state retreated in the realm of marriage. In contrast, in the second half of the Cultural Revolution, the provincial government, especially the Women's Federation, fervently embraced the national directive of criticizing Confucian patriarchy and attempted to counter "feudal" marriage customs of transactional marriages, arranged marriages, and backward wedding rituals during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign. After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the immediate halting of the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign, the provincial government used the same efforts, methodology, and objectives as before to entrench socialist marriage values during the early reform era.

What could this new timeline of revolutionary social policies on marriage and everyday life, interdependent with national political events, reveal about the capability of the PRC government to regulate people's social lives at the provincial, county, and the commune level? My analysis, based on archival sources primarily from the Provincial Women's Federation, concurs with scholars such as Parish and Whyte (1978) and Johnson (1983) that the state propaganda campaign to Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius in 1974-1975 did not result in any meaningful changes

among the people.¹ However, the timing of the provincial Women's Federation's program during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign represented a major attempt by the PRC state in the Maoist period to address the growing concern about the rising cost of marriage transactions after the Marriage Law Campaign in 1953, as well as to exert influence on the grassroots level of society as socialism waned. The impact of the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign lasted longer than has been recognized, as the continuation of anti-Confucian programs from 1974 into the early reform era exhibited the resiliency of government reform and its efforts in shoring up people's compliance with the Marriage Law.

After a brief explanation of the documentary gap between the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and 1972, this chapter evaluates the work of Guangdong Provincial Women's Federation before and during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign from 1973-1975, a time when the Women's Federation examined ongoing trends of marriage customs in the Guangdong countryside. Building on preexisting local investigations and following a directive from the provincial Party Committee, in late 1974 the provincial Women's Federation commenced a press campaign to suppress bride price, arranged marriages, and other undesirable wedding rituals, dispatching work team cadres to both rural and urban areas. The resulting campaign used methods similar to those of the Marriage Law Campaign of 1953, but with the key objective of eliminating the ongoing trend of

¹ William L. Parish and Martin King Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 160-161; Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 201.

high-cost marriage transactions and wasteful wedding rituals that the government claimed had resurfaced in Guangdong since the late 1950s. As Guangdong was in a border region with extensive contacts with Hong Kong and the rest of the world, regional factors contributed to variation in spousal preference, bride price, and non-compliance with the Marriage Law. In line with the national campaign of Criticizing Lin and Confucius for their corruptive influence on society, the provincial government described the countryside of Guangdong as experiencing a revival of feudal marriage customs, but this rhetoric of resurgence was politically constructed to justify rapid action despite extensive records of identical problems faced by work teams since 1953.

The second section of this chapter analyzes the continuation of marriage reforms that extended past the transition years to the early economic reform era. Despite the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution, government propaganda on marriage after 1976 had priorities identical to those during the Cultural Revolution, minus the explicit language of anti-Confucianism. Known as the movement to “entrench socialist values in resolving marriage issues,”² marriage reform during the transitional years occurred at a time when the government was facing public disillusionment with socialism caused by growing inequality, inefficient resource distribution, and gradual relaxation of its control on the economy. The chapter ends with a brief description of local concerns about marriage as discussed during the

² This was coined by the head of the All-China Women’s Federation, Kang Keqing, in one recorded speech to Xinhua News Agency. Kang Keqing, “Yaoyong shehui zhuyi sixiang chuli hao hunyin jiating wenti” [Dealing with Marriage and Family Problems with Socialist Thought], *People’s Daily*, December 27, 1978.

revision process of the Marriage Law in 1980. The extension of Cultural Revolution era policies reveals bureaucratic inertia to address social issues, and the tendency of the state to intervene intensively in people's marriage customs lingered into the reform era.

The documentary gap on marriage practices, 1967-1971

In the second half of 1966, revolutionary activities disrupted the government bureaucracy. Records about the deeds of government became spotty, and reform of marriage customs was shelved as the Provincial Women's Federation, the principal government agency responsible for regulating marriage practices, was suspended following the disbandment of the All-China Women's Federation in 1966.³ Consequently, material on marriage between 1966 to 1971 is limited.⁴ Not much is known about general marriage practices of the populace during this period, aside from a few published stories in the *Peoples' Daily* about rejecting bride price in 1970,⁵ and anecdotes about the period collected after the fact in reports prepared by the Provincial Women's Federation in 1972-1973 after it resumed operation. These reports document the continued existence of bride price and wedding expenses during this period,⁶ as well as some local attempts to contain luxurious wedding feasts by

³ Kay Ann Johnson (1983), *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, 181.

⁴ It is possible that the provincial archive has meticulous records about what happened during those hectic years but are unavailable to researchers. As the People's Republic of China is becoming increasingly sensitive toward its history, it is unlikely that scholars will have access to these records anytime soon, if they exist.

⁵ Li Bingkui (2015) finds that the *People Daily* published stories about rejecting bride price in 1970, where he suggests that the national government was at the promotion stage of encouraging new-style weddings. See, Li Bingkui, Li Bingkui, *Kuanglan yu qianliu: Zhongguo qingnian di ding lian yu hunyin, 1966-1976* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2015), 145.

⁶ There was a report about a landlord in Qingyuan who asked for 340 yuan, as well as a former inmate who arranged his 15 years old daughter to marry a man for the bride price of 999 yuan, paid in

means of cadre intervention and persuasive education.⁷ In conjunction with emphasizing class struggle, these documents from the Women's Federation accentuated the misdeeds of landlords and ex-convicts who perpetuated feudal marriage customs with the peasants as victims.

(Re)Investigating marriage customs to Criticize Lin and Confucius

The association of marriage customs reform with class struggle from 1972 intensified during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign in the latter part of the Cultural Revolution. A political campaign initiated by the upper echelon of the Communist Party aiming to revolutionize Chinese culture via attacking Confucianism and criticizing political enemies between 1973 and 1976,⁸ the nation-wide campaign led to a rapid expansion of sources available on marriage customs.⁹ Guangdong was no exception, and while other components of the provincial government prioritized uncovering and attacking imagined or framed political enemies, the Women's Federation focused on investigating and suppressing manifestations of Confucianism in Chinese marriage. Bride price, a perennial enemy in state campaigns to reform marriage customs, as well as parental infringement of marriage freedom, trading one's sister to a family in exchange for a daughter-in-law, and other wedding rituals

installments. "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha" [Investigation on transactional marriages in Mingjing Commune in Yingde County], file 233-3-12-203, GPA, January 6, 1973.

⁷ "Pojiu lixin yifeng yisu" [Disrupt the old, establish the new and change the customs], file 233-3-17-138-140, GPA, March 1973.

⁸ The political dimension of Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius is outside the purview of this dissertation. For more information about what happened politically during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign in Guangdong, see, "Guangzhou 'wuchan jieji wenhua dageming' dashiji", *Wenge yu dangdai shi yanjiu wang*, last modified May 3, 2013, <https://difangwenge.org/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=17506>.

⁹ Kay Ann Johnson (1983), *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, 194-197.

were categorized as symptoms of Confucian patriarchy in Guangdong.¹⁰ Initially, local Women's Federation cadres had begun their ad hoc efforts to suppress rising bride prices and unwanted wedding rituals in 1972,¹¹ while the provincial Women's Federation dispatched work teams to Yingde, Dongguan, Zhanjiang, and other counties in Northern Guangdong to understand local conditions, and such teams were later sent across the province. What they found were gross violations of the Marriage Law that had been left unchecked since the state last attempted to intervene in the late 1960s, such as unaffordable marriage transactions,¹² arranged marriages, materialistic spousal choice, and illegal strategies of financing marriage.¹³

In response to investigations from work teams dispatched to the countryside, the provincial government and the Women's Federation ordered comprehensive propaganda and thought education campaigns in September 1974. In a directive known as Document 55 transmitted to all administrative units, the provincial party committee set the tone of treating marriage customs as an important issue during the

¹⁰ "Pi zhuan "zai pilin pikong yundong zhong kaizhan fandui baoban, maimai hunyin de baogao" [On circulating a report on opposing arranged and transactional marriage in the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign], file 296-A2.2-21-79, GPA, September 12, 1974.

¹¹ Such as in Gaoyao County, where the local Women's Federation claimed that 1871 women in the commune canceled their ghost marriage after their local efforts, and 1211 out of 1290 women of marriageable age vowed to have late marriage. While superficially spectacular, these results were untenable because there was no enforcement mechanism and only demonstrated social coercion at play. Other examples include a claim by a commune in Lianjiang county that said "the whole commune had rejected Bride Price, and 119 pairs or about 70% of marriage had no wedding banquet and did not invite any wedding guests. See, "Henpi "keji fuli" da cha huichao fubi, shixing pojiulixin"; "Pi zhuan "zai pilin pikong yundong zhong kaizhan fandui baoban, maimai hunyin de baogao."

¹² William L. Parish and Martin King Whyte (1978) has also found similar phenomenon.

¹³ "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha"; "Pojiu lixin yifeng yisu"; "Guanyu huangpo gongshe hunyin wenti shang jieji douzheng de diaocha baogao" [Investigative report on class struggle in the marriage question in Huangbo Commune], file 233-3-12-175-195, GPA, April 15, 1973; "Dangqian nongcun jieji douzheng zai funu fangmian de fanying-jianbao" [A short reflection on class conflict regarding women in the current countryside], file 233-3-12-102-103, GPA, November 7, 1973.

Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign, and ordered all local party organs to promote the Marriage Law actively. The provincial government focused on countering materialist tendencies among the people in their marriage and required local party committees to find model couples who rejected arranged marriages and marriage transactions or hosted frugal wedding ceremonies. Furthermore, officials and cadres need to act as role models for the people when dealing with their own or their children's marriages.¹⁴

In publicizing the campaign, the Women's Federation had to account for local factors that made materialistic decisions in marriage ever more attractive to women in Guangdong. Compared to other regions of the PRC, there was visible economic inequality in the region that made a pursuit of bride price and improved post-marital economic conditions even more appealing.¹⁵ Proximity to the outside world and networks of Overseas Chinese and Hong Kong residents with relatives in Guangdong led to wealth coming into receiving households in the form of remittances and packages that included foodstuffs and clothes, at a time of material insufficiency and stagnant economic growth. Additionally, cross-border marriages between Guangdong

¹⁴ "Pi zhuan "zai pilin pikong yundong zhong kaizhan fandui baoban, maimai hunyin de baogao."

¹⁵ Parish and Whyte (1978) contend that a rise of bride price in Guangdong was related to an increasing mobilization of rural women's labor, and that bride prices were higher in low consumption villages compared to peasants in high consumption (richer) villages because a woman's worth increased from her productivity. Parish and Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China*, 186-192. In contrast, Helen Siu (1993) suggests that it was not women's increased participation in labor, but that an increased bride price would be paid by an upwardly mobile person seeking to gain a bride of good background, social prestige, and personal network. Helen F. Siu, "Reconstituting Dowry and Bride Price in South China," in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, ed. Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell, Studies on China 17 (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1993), 182. The present study is less concerned with why bride price increased, instead focusing on how the people and the provincial government responded to the growing cost.

and Hong Kong led to higher bride prices and wedding expenses, due to the presence of significantly wealthier men than the rest in the marriage market in south China.

Aside from the economic issue of growing bride prices, the provincial Women's Federation had to account for lineage organizations and their influence over wedding rituals and marriage taboos, and their opposition to uxorilocal marriages when the state encouraged husbands to live with their wives' families in 1975-1976.¹⁶

Governments at the administrative and county levels complied with the provincial directive by incorporating formulaic "lessons learned" from earlier local investigations, such as a typical response from the government of Foshan Administrative Area. The Foshan government proposed a synchronized mobilizational campaign to counteract "feudal customs," followed by a crackdown on human traffickers and suppression of lineage influence in weddings, reeducation of cadres and the masses about the Marriage Law, publicizing model marriages of those who eschewed luxurious weddings, and requiring cadres to serve as exemplars.¹⁷ Other counties such as Bao'an had a similar approach.¹⁸

The provincial press also lauded model marriages and couples conducting new-style weddings. On 3rd January 1975, *Guangzhou Daily*, the party newspaper of the Guangzhou Municipal government, dedicated a half-page to marriage issues, with two model stories and an accompanying editorial on rejecting luxurious wedding

¹⁶ State promotion of uxorilocal marriage will be explored later in this chapter, as the propaganda extended past 1976.

¹⁷ "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao."

¹⁸ "Guanyu zai pi lin pi kong yundong zhong kaizhan fandui baoban maimai hunyin de qingshi baogao."

banquets and bride price. The first story, titled "This wedding ceremony is aptly done," describes a father who resisted social pressure to host a luxurious wedding feast for his son after some thought work by his brigade leader. He informed his future daughter-in-law's family about his decision to hold an austere wedding. They supported his decision by giving the bride an empty rice jar with the auspicious word "ever plentiful" as a wedding gift.¹⁹ In rejecting the futile pursuit of traditional and capitalist "social honor," the newspaper praised this father for leading a wedding appropriate for the poor and middle peasants.²⁰ In the second story, a woman refused to demand a bride price for herself and did not hold a banquet. On the day of her new-style wedding, Youth League and Party cadres gave the new couple two scythes, two hoes, straw hats, and a copy of the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, and the new couple vowed to participate in the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign and bring down feudalism via their labor.²¹ These two stories exemplified pioneers who rejected traditional marriage customs and overcame social pressure to conform. However, a keen reader would notice that there were signs of resistance toward "new-style weddings." In the first story, the bride's family gave her an empty rice jar, possibly to express their displeasure, as they could not openly reject the groom's father's proposal which had received official backing from his brigade chief. In the second story, the bride's mother backed off from demanding that her future son-in-

¹⁹ This is abnormal: usually, they would have included rice in the rice jar, but in this situation, the bride's family only gave her an empty rice jar.

²⁰ "Zhege hunshi ban de hao" [This wedding is well done], *Guangzhou ribao*, January 3, 1975.

²¹ "Saochu kongmeng zhidao nanzunnubei liudu" [Removing the baneful influence of Confucius and Mencius on gender inequality], *Guangzhou ribao*, January 3, 1975.

law pay a bride price only when public opinion was against her. In both stories, the obstinate parents eventually assented to new-style weddings, but this required a great deal of intervention and peer pressure by others.

Alongside the two model stories was an editorial about the meaning of conducting new-style, frugal weddings within the context of class struggle and the revolution. Dispelling peasants' rationale for bride price and wedding feasts, such as improved economic standards that justified additional spending on festive occasions and the necessity of maintaining social honor and lineage relations, the editor argued that peasants ought to see this as a struggle between the proletariat and the capitalists, and that luxurious wedding feasts were a venue for the capitalists to corrupt the people. The editorial further proclaimed that the poor and middle peasants should not have social relations with class enemies and that peasants should stand fast on the side of socialism. Citing Mao, the editorial ended with an appeal to remain steadfast in the struggle against the "Four Olds" and to treat weddings as an ideological battleground between socialism and capitalism.²²

On the ground, county-level Women's Federations adopted radical policies, public pacts, and proclamations that banned transactional marriages overnight.²³ A commune in Lechang County responded to ongoing transactional and arranged marriages by demanding free-choice marriage for everyone, and prohibiting bride price, wedding banquets, or being guests or giving wedding gifts. In Daling commune

²² "Hunshi bixu xin ban" [Wedding must be conducted in the new style], *Guangzhou ribao*, January 3, 1975.

²³ "Jianjue ba fandui fengjian maimai hunyin de douzheng jinxing daodi" [Resolutely continue the struggle against feudal and transactional marriage], file C10-1-0017-053, SZMA, April 25, 1975.

in Dongguan, the collective announced a categorical ban on demanding bride price, arranging marriages, engaging in transactional marriages, or taking child daughters-in-law. At the same time, it aimed to promote gender equality, marriage freedom, late marriage, and uxorilocal marriages in its commune.²⁴ The policies adopted by local counties during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign were not too different from other parts of the PRC, although the root cause of arranged and transactional marriages was visible economic inequality, and high bride prices were the consequence of people maximizing their chance to secure wealth for their daughters and themselves.

Talking points prepared by the provincial government contained several examples of manifestos and communal pacts for cadres as references. In these manifestos and communal pacts, unmarried or recently married couples proclaimed their support for upholding marriage freedom, hosting frugal wedding ceremonies, and criticizing Lin and Confucius through concrete actions.²⁵ Another manifesto from a production brigade in Enping County echoed similar themes of reading Mao's work to criticize Confucianism and promote compliance with the Marriage Law. However, unlike the first manifesto, this was supposedly signed by every unmarried youth in the production brigade who all agreed to reject transactional and arranged marriage and adhere to the official call for late marriage. The most progressive of all examples was a pact between all brigade members in Chao'an county. They mandated that none

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. The title for this manifesto was "A manifesto on establishing new marriage customs by newly married couples in Longwood Commune of Zijin County."

would arrange a marriage nor ask for bride price or dowry. Also, they would all reject superstitions by refraining from divining an auspicious date for a wedding and would not consider the birthdays of the couples to see if they were compatible. Lastly, they all agreed that there would be no wedding banquet, no wedding gifts, and that all future weddings would be hosted by brigade or team cadres where the couple would affirm their love for each other and collective production.²⁶

The official propaganda criticizing Confucius in marriage issues had the goal of reversing the lowering marriage cost but lacked enforcement mechanisms to sustain the movement. Likewise, manifestos and communal pacts recorded by cadres from the Women's Federation seem implausible. What was the likelihood that everyone in the commune all agreed to reject bride price, especially when it would only take one bad-faith bride's family to begin to demand bride price once more? Furthermore, considering that rituals such as worshipping ancestors and conspicuous consumption at the wedding were becoming more common, how would an edict or command of the local or provincial government be able to halt this, if the event occurred outside the purview of the state, and that cadres who were invited also benefited from wedding banquets? Absent persistently strong pressure from above, interventions were bound to fail, because the government was unable to oversee this aspect of everyday life.

²⁶ Ibid. This communal pact was titled "A public pact of establishing new marriage customs in Jilin Brigade, Fengtang Commune of Chao'an County."

Rising Bride Prices in the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign

Aside from conducting state propaganda, the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign gave the provincial Women's Association a mandate to prevent further rises in bride prices. Not only were bride prices much higher than in 1966, but there was also a correlation between bride price and arranged marriage, where arranged marriages almost always had a price tag. The consequences of high bride prices were heightened male dissatisfaction in the countryside, growing materialist tendencies, and illegal solutions to marriage financing. Although the issues of dissatisfaction and corruption in relation to paying the bride price were already known to the Women's Federation before the Cultural Revolution, these issues were exacerbated by rising marriage expenses.

A widespread complaint about bride price at this time was the financial burden placed on men and their families. As shown in Table 5.1 and Table 5.2A, the average income per person per year was minuscule compared to the rapid rise in bride price and other forms of wedding expense, resulting in a significantly costlier marriage than before the Cultural Revolution.

Table 5.1 Selected data on the average income in RMB per year, 1967-1976

Place	1965-1967	1970-1971	1976-1977	Type of Income	Source
Shaoguan (Northern Guangdong)	576 yuan		627 yuan	Average worker	Shaoguan Municipal Gazetteer, 2001

	63.34 yuan + 231.4 kg ration	78.16 yuan + between 200- 250 kg ration	70.69 yuan + between 200- 250 kg ration	Average peasant	Shaoguan Municipal Gazetteer, 2001 ²⁷
Xingning (Eastern Guangdong)	51.17 yuan + unspecified amount of ration		47.57 yuan + ration	Average peasant	Xingning County Gazetteer, 1992 ²⁸
Jieyang (Eastern Guangdong)	541 yuan	542 yuan	587 yuan	Average worker	Jieyang County Gazetteer, 1993
	64.6 yuan + 248 kg ration	57.72 yuan + 163 kg ration	65.98 yuan + 179 kg ration	Average peasant	Jieyang County Gazetteer, 1993 ²⁹
Zhongshan (Central)	529 yuan	524 yuan	590 yuan	Average worker	Zhongshan Municipal Gazetteer ³⁰

²⁷ Shaoguan Municipal Gazetteer, 2001.

²⁸ Xingning County Gazetteer (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing Press, 1992).

²⁹ Jieyang County Gazetteer (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing Press, 1993).

³⁰ "Zhongshan shixian quanmin suoyouzhi danwei zhigong nian pingjun gongzi tongji biao"
[Statistical table on the average income in Zhongshan city and county] in Zhongshan Municipal
Gazetteer. 1997

Table 5.2A Bride Prices from selected data in Guangdong, 1967-1976

Place	Year	Bride Price	Accompanying Bridal Goods	Sources
Provincial average	1966-1967	100 to 200 yuan	N/A	See Chapter 4 ³¹
Zhanjiang (Western Guangdong)	1972-1973	300 to 500 yuan, with outlier 1000 yuan or more		³²
Fengkai (Northern Guangdong)	1973	300 yuan (demanded by a Women's Federation cadre), later dropped to 260 yuan	40kg pork	³³
Zhongshan	1973-1974	300 to 500 yuan was the average, although provincial documents noted some parents charged 700 yuan, and a few demanded 1000 yuan		³⁴
	1974	500 yuan (demanded by a cadre)		³⁵
	1974	700 yuan (demanded by a	250 kg ration, a	³⁶

³¹ See chapter four on the rise of bride price in Guangdong between 1949 to 1966.

³² "Guanyu huangpo gongshe hunyin wenti shang jieji douzheng de diaocha baogao".

³³ "Fanying zai funu wenti shang de "sijiu" huichao de qingkuang de zonghe" [A synthesis of the resurgence of the "Four Olds" as manifested in women's issue], file 233-3-26-188, GPA, May 16, 1974.

³⁴ "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao" [On transmitting a report from Zhongshan County Party Committee on the resurgence of feudal marriage in Dongfeng Commune], file 233-3-26-176, GPA, September 16, 1974.

³⁵ "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao".

³⁶ "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de

		production brigade committee)	bicycle, a sewing machine, some clothing	
Guangzhou (Provincial Capital)	1974	100 to 200 yuan was described as minimal; 300 to 500 yuan was the average, and a few were more than 1000 yuan	Pork, Wedding Cakes, Clothing	³⁷
Conghua (governed by Guangzhou)	1974	390 yuan		³⁸
	1974	800 yuan	200 yuan for wedding feast	³⁹
Zhaoqing (Central Guangdong)	1974	300 to 500 yuan	Demands for bridal goods	⁴⁰
Yunfu (a county in Zhaoqing)	1974	500 yuan	200 kg ration, 100 yuan worth of fish, 300 yuan worth of pork	⁴¹
	1974	670 yuan	150 kg ration, 1500 kg cement, labor for a five-room house.	
Gaoyao (a part	1974	360 yuan	a pair of earrings and a	⁴²

diaocha baogao.”

³⁷ “Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao” [Comprehensive material on arranged and transactional marriage in Guangzhou], file 233-3-26-136, GPA, November 1974.

³⁸ “Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao.”

³⁹ Ibid. Unlike the former example, there was no calculation on how Ms. Ho’s father established the bride price of 800 yuan, and the document only wrote that “he calculated the bride price based on years of her life.”

⁴⁰ “Fanying zai funu wenti shang de “sijiu” huichao de qingkuang de zonghe.”

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Henpi “kejifuli” dacha huichao fubi, shixing pojiulixin” [Severely criticize “restricting the self and

of Zhaoqing)			golden bracelet, a brick house, a bicycle, a radio set, 12 sets of clothes, wedding candies and cakes	
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Table 5.2B: Bride price by gradient of women's perceived quality⁴³

Place	Year	Bride Price	Accompanying Bridal Goods	Sources
Panyu County	1974	700 to 800 yuan ("first class" bride) 500 to 600 yuan ("second class" bride) 400 to 500 yuan ("third class" bride)	100 kg bridal cake, ⁴⁴ 15-20 kg meat, 12 sets of clothes, jewelry ("first class" bride) Unspecified amount of meat and wedding cakes ("second and third-class" bride)	⁴⁵
Xinfen County	1973	800 yuan ("first		⁴⁶

restoring rites" and to investigate the restoration of feudalism while implementing the new (custom)], file 233-3-18-171, GPA, April 1974.

⁴³ Subjective perception of women's quality based on her appearance, marriage history, health, and age. Provincial government did not specify how a bride price was calculated, but generally a younger, prettier, and healthier woman could demand a higher bride price than an older and sickly counterpart.

⁴⁴ Although the document writes "bridal cakes", Chinese bridal cakes are smaller and are given to guests. They bear no similarities to the multi-tiered wedding cakes in western weddings.

⁴⁵ "Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao" [On transmitting a report from district Women's Federation "A situation report about the resurgence of feudal marriages in the countryside], file 233-3-26-174, GPA, April 13, 1974.

⁴⁶ "Dangqian nongcun jieji douzheng zai funu fangmian de fanying-jianbao."

(Northeastern Guangdong)		class") 400 yuan ("second class") 200 yuan ("third class")		
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Many peasants reported to the state that they would consider marriage only when they had acquired at minimum 800 yuan.⁴⁷ If they could not do so, they would reluctantly join the group of involuntary bachelors, which was not favored by the government and seen as a stability risk.⁴⁸ As a result, families went into debt to pay the combined bride price and wedding expenses, and the Women's Federation cadres indicated that the debt burden from paying bride prices was interfering with peasants' desire to participate in important political tasks. Frustrated by the high bride price they faced, male peasants reported to work teams that "being heavily in debt from marriage, how could we focus on learning from Dazhai Commune?"⁴⁹ Since Dazhai was the national agricultural model for emulation during the Cultural Revolution, this statement revealed to the provincial government that the marriage burden was inhibiting political consciousness and local agricultural production.

Besides the cash component of the bride price, work teams across the

⁴⁷ "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao."

⁴⁸ "Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao".

⁴⁹ "Great debt" (大債) is the Cantonese homonym of Dazhai (大寨), a model of collectivized agriculture that Mao Zedong stressed for all other communes to learn from in the "Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture" campaign. "Jieji douzheng zai hunyin wenti shang de fanying" [Reflections on class conflicts on marriage], file 233-3-18-187, GPA, April 1974.

province also reported increased spending on consumables such as pork, cake, grain, and alcohol, and major purchases such as bicycles, radios, and sewing machines.⁵⁰ In Zhaoqing, an area northwest of Guangzhou, a bride's family further demanded building materials such as lumber and cement,⁵¹ along with the labor to build a house.⁵² The demand for building material indicated the true purpose and ultimate beneficiary of the bride price. While foodstuff and alcohol could be used during wedding feasts, and household goods such as clothes, bicycles, radios, and sewing machines could be returned to the married couple as dowry,⁵³ the demand for housing contradicted the logic of patrilocality common in south China. Since the bride's family was not responsible for her post-marital residence, and her parents were unlikely to need a new house at their stage of life, the material could only be used for people unmentioned in official documents: her brothers, who required the infusion of cash and resources to augment their attractiveness in the south China marriage market.⁵⁴

In investigations of rural marriage customs in the context of countering

⁵⁰ "Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biaoqian de zonghe cailiao"; Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao." Document did not say who would ultimately benefit from these purchases, but they mentioned that brides demand them before assenting to marriage, hence they were part of the bride price.

⁵¹ "Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao."

⁵² "Fanying zai funu wenti shang de "siji" huichao de qingkuang de zonghe."

⁵³ In an indirect dowry system, as discussed by Parish and Whyte (1978), some of these items would be given to the bride as "bride price" and returned as dowry; others were consumed or distributed to wedding participants and relatives.

⁵⁴ In the document, it cites that "she demanded 670 yuan, 300 *jin* of grain, 3000 *jin* of cement, as well as the labor that they had to build a five-room house on her behalf, before she allows her daughter to marry." If this was a house meant for her daughter, she would not need to ask for cement and construction labor, because it was expected that her husband's family would provide housing for her. Therefore, the mother's demand for cement and the labor to build a house implied that someone else other than the daughter or the mother would benefit from the five-room new house built by her son-in-law's family labor.

Confucian influences in Guangdong, exposing cadres' misdeeds remained a priority for the provincial government. When cadres participated in transactional marriages by demanding bride price either as bride's parents or as future wives, work teams found that fellow commune members could claim they were following the example of their cadres and rendering state efforts ineffective.⁵⁵ The masses reserved the harshest criticism for cadres belonging to the Women's Federation. Since the Women's Federation was the principal state organization suppressing transactional marriage, cadres who asked for bride price were violating the very laws they were supposed to uphold. In Fengkai County, a commune-level women's representative surnamed Li refused to marry a man she chose because he could not afford the full bride price of two hundred and sixty yuan. The bride price she demanded was not unreasonable in comparison to the average bride price in Guangdong in the early 1970s, but she set a bad example for others. The PRC state could not demand that people stop engaging in transactional marriage if peasants could simply say, as one Women's Federation report on "feudal" marriage practices put it: "How could they educate us (commune member) on marriage customs if the local women's representative was demanding bride price and engaging in transactional marriage herself?"⁵⁶

Arranged Marriage and the Market Mechanics of Bride Price

While free choice marriages with some parental involvement were becoming

⁵⁵ "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao."

⁵⁶ The quote is "If the women's representative takes the lead in engaging in transactional marriage, how could she be fit to educate the masses?" (婦聯主任帶頭搞買賣婚姻，如何能教育群眾?) "Fanying zai funu wenti shang de "sijiu" huichao de qingkuang de zonghe."

more popular in Guangdong,⁵⁷ the provincial Women's Federation during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign described a rural society where people remained shackled to arranged marriages as the result of marriage transactions and parental interference over their children's exercise of marriage freedom.⁵⁸ Arranged marriage represented patriarchy and suppression of women's rights by their parents and siblings, but also the commodification of women, two features of "Confucianism" that the Women's Association aimed to reverse. The logic of economic transactions behind arranged marriage were the exchange of a daughter for financial gain which could then be used to fund her brother's marriage expenses. This option for financing a son's marriage had existed in the 1950s and 1960s, but skyrocketing bride price and other marriage expenses made this an even more attractive proposition to brides' parents, precisely at a time when the youth were becoming more autonomous in their spousal choice in the 1970s.⁵⁹ Alternatively, parents could substitute barter for bride price by arranging for their daughters to marry the other family's brothers in nominally transaction-free marriages.

The main obstacle to eliminating arranged marriages was that brides' families

⁵⁷ Parish and Whyte (1978), *Village and Family in Contemporary China*, 169. Parental involvement remained involved and assented to their children's marriages. A better explanation of free-choice marriages in China in the 1970s is by Kay Ann Johnson (1983), where she describes the "semi-arranged" marriages in China. See, Johnson (1983), 208. In other parts of China, Yan Yunxiang (2003), wrote about "matches by introduction" in rural Heilongjiang. See, Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003), 58-61.

⁵⁸ For example, see "Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao", and "Fanying zai funu wenti shang de "sijiu" huichao de qingkuang de zonghe." By itself, arranged marriage was an easily identifiable "feudal custom," and almost all documents about marriage customs in the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign contained a section about arranged and transactional marriage.

⁵⁹ Regarding youth autonomy in dating, See, Yan (2003).

could benefit from an infusion of financial resources in the form of high bride prices. Work team cadres reported that parental opposition to free-choice marriage became strongest when there was an association of free-choice marriage with marriages that would not bring in bride price or that were socially odious, such as same-surname endogamy.⁶⁰ In reality, many free-choice marriages also involved a bride price, and brides' parents were willing to let their daughters marry the men they desired if the families could achieve financial gain equivalent to that in an arranged marriage.

Cadres were meticulous in detailing the market dynamics of bride price, as bride price depended on a perceived value of women, as well as the value of the marriage. First and foremost, there were simple methods of demanding a bride price based on age,⁶¹ where one mother in Wushi brigade of Conghua County calculated her daughter's bride price based on five cents per day of a bride's life.⁶² Other examples include a same-surname marriage in semi-rural Liantang commune near Guangzhou, where the bride's father demanded a bride price based on a calculation of the bride's age.⁶³ This simple method represented a symbolic equivalency of repaying the bride's family's resources invested in raising the daughter.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ "Guanyu huangpo gongshe hunyin wenti shang jieji douzheng de diaocha baogao."

⁶¹ Documents often used this term: "按斤論價" [setting a price based on the weight], although there was not a recorded example about a woman's weight as a metric. In contrast, her age was often used to calculate the bride price.

⁶² "Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biaoqian de zonghe cailiao."

⁶³ Ibid. Unlike the former example, there was no calculation on how Ms. Ho's father established the bride price of 800 yuan, and the document only wrote that "he calculated the bride price based on years of her life."

⁶⁴ People were also unwilling to spend a large bride price on a woman whom the people considered to be "too old", although state documents did not specify at what age would women be considered that. Nonetheless, this was a precursor to the problem of "old maids" and their difficulties in the national marriage market as described by Honig and Hershatler (1988). For how the state in the 1980s attempted to resolve this issue, See, Emily Honig and Gail Hershatler, *Personal Voices: Chinese*

Other metrics such as appearance, health, and youth also determined the optimal bride price for a woman in the marriage market in the early to mid-1970s. According to state documents from the Women's Federation, education and productivity bore no relevance to the valuation of a woman, which was based on the market demand for younger women with high reproductive potential. Compared to an older bride or a bride who was remarrying or physically ill, the parents of a more youthful, healthier bride could set a higher bride price.⁶⁵ Understandably, the provincial government considered the valuation of women based on age, physical beauty, and previous marriage status a clear sign of ongoing commodification of women in the Guangdong countryside.

Bride price was also determined by the desirability of the marriage from the perspective of the bride's family and the groom's income potential. In general, hypergamous marriages had lower bride prices, as the brides' parents deemed the social mobility worth the short-term loss of the bride price.⁶⁶ Marriage to People's Liberation Army (PLA) officers or soldiers had little to no bride price, because they were seen as partners with stable income, state benefits, and prestige, although rural women often complained about the near impossibility of marrying a member of the

Women in the 1980's (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 104-110.

⁶⁵ The document did not elaborate the criteria in determining a woman's bride price beside the general guideline of "grading a woman based on quality". See, "Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao"; "Dangqian nongcun jieji douzheng zai funu fangmian de fanying-jianbao."

⁶⁶ Li Bingkui, (2003) found this phenomenon to be true in Guangdong and elsewhere in China such as in Shandong Province. See, Li Bingkui, *Kuanglan yu qianliu: Zhongguo qingnian di xing lian yu hunyin, 1966-1976*, p.133-142, 151.

PLA. The same was true of cadres or factory workers.⁶⁷ In Guangdong, remittances and the possibility of cross-border marriages had an outsized influence on determining who would make the best husband.⁶⁸ A phrase by local women in Foshan demonstrated their preferences in spousal choice: "Unable to marry a party secretary, a cadre has his attitude; a worker is poor, and marrying a peasant means physical exhaustion. However, a fisherman is not a bad match, and a son of an Overseas Chinese would be the best."⁶⁹

What does this preference for marrying PLA soldiers, party secretaries, fishers, and Overseas Chinese during the Cultural Revolution reveal about the setting of bride prices and people's perception of the Marriage Law in Guangdong in the early to mid-1970s? Compared to the hierarchy of potential spouses before the Cultural Revolution, as discussed in Chapter 4,⁷⁰ these preferences in the early to mid-1970s indicated mate preferences continued to be based on material benefit.⁷¹ Nationally, PLA soldiers and Party secretaries were attractive grooms despite their low legal wages, as the stability of the PLA and access to resources of political power

⁶⁷ ““Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian “guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao.”

⁶⁸ While present income as a worker or a peasant was a fixed low amount during the Cultural Revolution, remittances were not, and people with overseas connections derived income from their occupation in China and remittances from their relatives. The possibility of cross-border marriage was doubly rewarding because one spouse could either send remittance back to China or bring the other spouse to Hong Kong and work there instead, where wages and much higher than in China during the early 1970s.

⁶⁹ My translation cannot do justice to the original quote: 「嫁書記嫁不起，嫁幹部要受氣，嫁工人不夠皮，嫁農民做都死，嫁漁民麻麻地，最好嫁個華僑仔」 “Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian “guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao.”

⁷⁰ See chapter four on the hierarchy of potential spouses in south China.

⁷¹ Men had other considerations, primarily if classified as "landlords" or "rich peasants," that marked their political unreliability and blocked paths to social advancements, which were demerits in the marriage market.

for party secretaries translated to predictable future income. However, local women's preference for fishermen and overseas Chinese was a south China phenomenon. Fishermen in the Pearl River Delta, especially those closer to Hong Kong, had outsized income because they could sell their catch in Hong Kong and earned Hong Kong dollars while remaining registered as PRC residents. The "overseas Chinese" population which included their relatives, and returnees, offered the largest bride prices because they received remittances.⁷² They became preferred grooms as their future earnings depended not just on the low income from working in the commune but also remittances that allowed access to goods otherwise unavailable to others.⁷³ Although their political status depended on various campaigns at the time, such as during the Cultural Revolution when overseas ties were politically suspicious,⁷⁴ their superior status in the marriage market was seldom challenged.

Work teams also found that men reverted to the practice of reciprocal exchange of their sisters as brides, a custom that predated the PRC.⁷⁵ However, it was in the context of the Cultural Revolution that exchange marriage became a salient

⁷² Parish and Whyte (1978), *Village and Family in Contemporary China*, 185. In official documents, they will only say "overseas Chinese" (華僑), although they were many categories of "overseas Chinese". The key, however, was their access to remittances.

⁷³ There are conflicting narratives about income from remittances during the Cultural Revolution. Allegedly, stores catering to overseas Chinese were closed during the Cultural Revolution, but stories included in documents indicate the continuation of overseas Chinese remittance, and their relatives continued to use remittance to obtain goods unavailable to others without hard currencies. "Qiaohui quan waihui quan zhuanzhe qi de jue dai shuangjiao" [Overseas Chinese coupons and Foreign Exchange Currency certificate were the peerless double during the economic transitional period], *Guangzhou ribao*, November 13, 2014.

⁷⁴ Shelly Chan, *Diaspora's Homeland: Modern China in the Age of Global Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 182.

⁷⁵ Zhang Weiguo, "Class Categories and Marriage Patterns in Rural China in the Mao Era," *Modern China* 39, no. 4 (2013).

concern for the provincial government, unlike in the 1950s and 1960s.⁷⁶ Exchanging sisters as brides without their consent represented a desperate and high-risk strategy for peasants who could not compete with preferred groups of grooms. It was perceived by state bureaucrats as the most visible form of oppressing women by the patriarchal and Confucian family. Complications arose when a woman on either side refused the arrangement and cited the Marriage Law's provision of marriage freedom.⁷⁷ In that situation, cadres found that the brothers whose marital happiness depended on the trade reacted most violently.⁷⁸ This was a risky endeavor for all parties involved because it was illegal and because the women whose personal happiness was being sacrificed for their brothers had the most incentive to resist. As commodities in an equal exchange of two or more women, the exchanged sisters were unlikely to receive a bride price, nor were they marrying husbands they personally desired.⁷⁹

Examples recorded by the provincial Women's Federation of exchanging marriages all accentuated the role of forceful brothers over their unwilling sisters.⁸⁰ In a typical example, a cadre wrote about the dispute between Liang, his sister, and the

⁷⁶ In archival documents about marriage customs of the people between 1953-1966, cadres wrote in-depth about other unwanted practices such as arranged marriage, but not about exchanging sisters as brides.

⁷⁷ "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha."

⁷⁸ "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao."

⁷⁹ Li Bingkui (2015) found that most exchanges happened between families of bad class backgrounds, and it was usually an exchange on behalf of the sons who had a hard time attracting women to marry them. On the other hand, women belonging to the "Landlord", or "Rich Peasant" classification could change their class background when marrying into a different family.

⁸⁰ When cadres wrote about brothers who attempted to intimidate their sisters, their parents were absent in the state narrative, but usually they would have supported their sons over their daughters.

man she wanted to marry surnamed Lung in Huangpu Commune in Zhanjiang. Unable to afford a bride price, Liang wanted to marry his sister to another man in an exchange arrangement, but she wanted to marry Lung instead. Liang refused and severely beat her, but his principal reason for his vehement opposition was his inability to fund a bride price: "if you are married to Lung, then what about me?"⁸¹ If she married the man she wanted, then he would not be able to fulfill his end of the exchange and would remain unmarried.⁸² In Yunfu county, the provincial Women's Federation reported on a "Muddled Wang" who conspired with another man in a nearby brigade to marry each other's sisters.⁸³ After Wang's sister married the other man, the other man's sister refused to marry Wang by citing the Marriage Law, resulting in a breach of contract. As a result, Wang gathered a crowd and forcefully took his sister home from her husband.⁸⁴ From the perspective of Wang, his action was rational because the other party failed to honor their contract; hence he was able to gather a crowd and forcefully take her home. However, his action was an inherent violation of the Marriage Law.

What could these exchanges of sisters reveal about the marriage market in Guangdong during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign? In a typical arranged marriage, the daughter was a valuable commodity traded for a bride price.

⁸¹ "Guanyu huangpu gongshe hunyin wenti shang jieji douzheng de diaocha baogao."

⁸² The document from the Provincial Women's Federation did not say why the bride's family would not get a bride price, but it is implied that the sister's boyfriend would not be able pay the money needed for the brother to marry.

⁸³ His name was 黃槽仔, which indicated that he is known to be muddled or mentally disabled. His parents are not mentioned in the text.

⁸⁴ "Fanying zai funu wenti shang de "sijiu" huichao de qingkuang de zonghe."

The buyer's family paid a bride price, and the seller received a financial gain that enabled them to become the buyer in another similar transaction. A pact to exchange sisters operated similarly, but they turned to barter because the buyer could not afford enough bride price to attract a willing seller. In Guangdong, the marriage market was a seller's market, and both sides sacrificed their daughters' or sisters' marriage freedom to ensure the brothers could marry. If bride price and marriage expenses had been minimal or attainable with standard strategies of saving for a few years, and if incomes were substantially higher than the minimum nominal growth during the early 1970s,⁸⁵ then there would have been no need for exchanging sisters. Hence the rising frequency of this phenomenon when bride price and household income level did not match.

Marriage Financing

High bride prices led to additional legal and social problems when the provincial Women's Federation found a high correlation between marriage financing and illegal money-making. Unable to save enough money for the bride price, some resorted to ingenious solutions such as corruption, appropriating funds destined for the commune from sideline businesses, engaging in illegal private small-time ventures, or relying on alternative financing schemes to secure the required sum.

Work teams reported widespread corruption and self-enriching behavior in communes in relation to marriage financing. Committing crimes to pay bride prices had already occurred before the Cultural Revolution when cadres "borrowed" on

⁸⁵ Nominal growth is not the same as real growth.

average 100-200 yuan from public funds to pay for the wedding feast, but “borrowing” implied an eventual repayment. In contrast, during the second half of the Cultural Revolution, “borrowing” became stealing, and the value of stolen funds increased to thousands of yuan. Those with access to the collective funds and ledgers, such as brigade and team leaders and accountants, were prone to corruption. For example, state reports wrote that an accountant in Guangzhou surnamed Wang stole 1700 yuan from his production team,⁸⁶ while another former accountant in Zhongshan county stole 1600 yuan from his team’s public ledger.⁸⁷

Corruption extended to commune members and marriage expenses were key to their motivation. Although commune members did not have access to the public ledger, many pursued personal profits above what would be good for the collective. Reports across the province found commune members slacking on farming communal land and refusing to attend meetings. Instead, they worked on endeavors that benefited them individually, such as sideline production, private land reclamation, and petty trade, to finance their bride prices. As investigation team cadres described it, bride price corroded the collective work ethos when local cadres and commune members withheld profits earned from sideline production and instead used the money to fund their wedding expenses.⁸⁸ Although communes allowed sideline production, members were supposed to remit a large portion of the profit back to the commune. The act of withholding profit suggested that some commune members

⁸⁶ “Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao.”

⁸⁷ “Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan “dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao.”

⁸⁸ “Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha.”

were resolving the problem of marriage financing by stealing from the larger collective, as profits were meant to be distributed to everyone by the end of the accounting year.

Peasants also resorted to high-interest loans to finance their or their sons' marriages. As reported in an internal document about marriage issues and class conflict produced in 1973, a loan of 78 yuan required a payment of 100 yuan in six months, with 22 yuan as interest and a yearly interest rate of 56.41%. Another loan with the principal of 100 yuan required 130 yuan in six months and had an annual interest rate of 60%.⁸⁹ Such high-interest rates indicated desperation by commune members to fund the bride price required to marry, and yet raises another question: who in Guangdong had private capital available for loaning large amounts of money during the Cultural Revolution? Could this be related to remittance received from abroad or Hong Kong? Unfortunately, documents available in the provincial archives do not identify the lender, and the existence of these loans could only demonstrate some degree of usurious activities that peasants relied on to finance their marriage.⁹⁰

Peasants' difficulty with marriage financing also led them to form *hui*, a type of "rotating saving and credit association" (ROSCA) outlawed in the PRC but with a

⁸⁹ Interest calculate rate by $r = (1/t) \times (A/P - 1)$, where r is the interest rate, t is time, A is the total amount, and P is the loan's principal. "Guanyu huangpo gongshe hunyin wenti shang jieji douzheng de diaocha baogao."

⁹⁰ This observation contradicts the existing notion of the rural south China countryside as economically depressed and poor during socialism. For usurious loans to exist, it must mean the existence of private capital outside of the state banking institutions and a group of people who happened to have excess in their households available to loan. If people were barely scraping by in their daily lives, who among the commune had this amount of money to loan out to others? An educated guess would be those receiving remittance, overseas Chinese returnees, or relatives of Hong Kong residents.

long history in China.⁹¹ Commune members participating in *hui* contributed grain, soybeans, or rice, and whoever pledged the best interest rate received the pooled resource for that turn.⁹² Whether a person was chosen by lot, by roll of dice, or by secret bidding, he would be able to use that money to fund his bride price, although he would need to contribute back to the *hui* for the rest of its duration.⁹³ The provincial government, fearing a growing capitalistic profit-seeking mindset among the people and economic crimes, viewed *hui* as a method of illegal fundraising.⁹⁴

Another coping strategy visible in the 1970s was combining underage engagements with a plan of multi-year financing of the bride price. While underage marriage remained a persistent issue, it was uncommon for the bride price to be paid in multi-year installments during the 1950s and 1960s. However, during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign, work team cadres reported that some parents arranged marriages early for their preteen or teenage children, explicitly for the purpose of paying down the bride price over several years.⁹⁵ This strategy had happened in Guangdong before the 1949 revolution,⁹⁶ but extended engagements

⁹¹ See, Tsai (2000), for the history of *hui* in pre-revolutionary China and after the economic reform. On ROSCAs during the Cultural Revolution, Tsai only provides a brief discussion of its uses in rural and urban China. In rural China, she suggests ROSCAs paid for ceremonial expenses, while work unit ROSCAs were for emergency or buying expensive consumer goods. Kellee S. Tsai, "Banquet Banking: Gender and Rotating Savings and Credit Associations in South China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 161 (2000): 142–70.

⁹² "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha."

⁹³ Reports from the Provincial Women's Federation did not specify if interest was involved. ROSCAs can be a forced saving club where a person is chosen by lot or by dice to receive the whole amount, or, in the case of *hui* in Guangdong, secret bidding where the winner was those who offered the highest interest. Tsai (2000) discussed *Biaohui* (bidding ROSCAs), but whether these were *biaohui* during the Cultural Revolution is unknown.

⁹⁴ "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha."

⁹⁵ "Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao."

⁹⁶ Multi-year payment of the bride price was also discussed in the collaborationist press.

were not the norm in the early PRC, and most bride prices were paid in a single installment as part of a wedding. However, when dealing with significant expenses that required extensive saving, multi-year financing allowed sons from poorer families an opportunity to marry, but with the uncertainty that their underage fiancées could sue to have the illegally arranged engagement revoked, or that the state could intervene when politics prompted stronger regulations of domestic life.

Wedding Rituals and Auxiliary Costs

The financial cost of marriage also included costs incurred from auxiliary wedding rituals such as hiring bridal transport and divining for auspicious wedding dates, and these rituals concerned state authorities when some became associated with superstitions. During the early to mid-1970s, cadres focused on the cost, the people who made money from wedding rituals, and superstitions. Like bride price and luxurious wedding feasts, the government considered auxiliary wedding rituals frivolous and a factor leading to high marriage expenses. There were many auxiliary wedding fees, as exhibited in Table 5.3. Not every item was present in every wedding, but the table demonstrates the financial cost of these weddings and the burden they placed on grooms' families.

Table 5.3 Auxiliary Wedding Costs in Guangdong

	Cost	Source
Clothing Fee	12 to 32 yuan	97
“Ginger” Fee ⁹⁸	12 to 36 yuan	

⁹⁷ “Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha.”

⁹⁸ This is the direct translation of (薑頭錢) – to symbolize the repayment of ginger consumed by the

Bridal transport	12 to 26 yuan, or hiring a car (Guangzhou), or organizing a bicycle convoy	99
Red envelopes	1.2 yuan for close relatives (younger siblings) 0.36 yuan for wedding accompaniers	100
Matchmaker fee, average	30 to 80 yuan	101
Diviner	1 yuan	102
Bride's chaperone (optional)	Unknown, but it was good practice to give her red envelope(s) as well as inviting her to the wedding feast	

The Women's Federation noted that auxiliary wedding rituals were prevalent across the entire province, and there was a financial demand of red envelopes for every part of the wedding.¹⁰³ Even after the wedding ceremony and on a bride's first return to her natal family, the newlyweds had to give the bride's unmarried younger siblings red envelopes, with the money coming from the groom's family.¹⁰⁴ Individually insignificant, red envelopes and other costs compounded men's already difficult path to funding their marriages. Although wedding attendants would also produce cash gifts in return, they would not offset the high cost of red envelopes, the

bride's mother when she gave birth to the bride.

⁹⁹ "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha"; on bicycle convoy, "Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao"; "Guangzhou shi pi lin pi kong yundong qingkuang."

¹⁰⁰ "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha"; Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao."

¹⁰¹ "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha"; "Guangzhou shi pi lin pi kong yundong qingkuang."

¹⁰² "Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao."

¹⁰³ "Jieji douzheng zai hunyin wenti shang de fanying."

¹⁰⁴ Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao."

wedding banquet, and other auxiliary expenses.¹⁰⁵

Aside from the cost, the Women's Federation also cited wastage and lost collective productivity when discussing auxiliary wedding rituals. When both sides of a wedding recruited numerous groomsmen and bridesmaids and invited many guests, wedding feasts would have many tables served.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, the long lists of attendants and guests participating in wedding feasts meant lost productivity, and work team cadres lamented the lost potential labor from attendees who would otherwise be working in the fields.¹⁰⁷ This view of lost productivity, however, was not shared by local cadres who would also be attending the wedding feast.¹⁰⁸ In addition to lost productivity for everyone involved, the indirect cost of wedding rituals could stem from newlyweds who compared and demonstrated their wealth, with some near Guangzhou engaging in conspicuous consumption by renting cars to cruise Guangzhou to celebrate.¹⁰⁹ In other counties, people organized bicycle convoys to accompany the bride on the wedding day, with an entourage that in one case extended to 1 kilometer.¹¹⁰ Although cars and bicycle convoys substituted for the

¹⁰⁵ Parish and Whyte (1978), 256.

¹⁰⁶ The Chinese terms for these groomsmen and bridesmaid are “案兄弟” and “群姐妹”, or, brother-friends, or sister-friends. “Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao.”

¹⁰⁷ “Guanyu zai pi lin pi kong yundong zhong kaizhan fandui baoban maimai hunyin de qingshi baogao” [A request for instructions on commencing a movement against arranged and transactional marriages in the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign], file C10-1-0057-059, Shenzhen Municipal Archive (SZMA), January 16, 1975; “Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao.”

¹⁰⁸ “Guangzhou shi pi lin pi kong yundong qingkuang” [The situation of Criticize Lin and Confucius in Guangzhou], file 233-2-25-38, GPA, March 23, 1974.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. There was an example of a couple who rent seven cars and cruised from their village to the Zhujiang River Bridge in Guangzhou. The Zhujiang River was a recent addition to the city, completed in the 1960s.

¹¹⁰ “Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao”; “Guangzhou shi pi lin pi kong yundong qingkuang.”

bridal sedan chair, cadres noted that they led to unwanted competition over who could afford the most extravagant wedding entourages, and the commune lost a day's labor from everyone involved.¹¹¹

Matchmakers, diviners, and bride's chaperones

Within the context of reversing the resurgence of "feudal marriage practices" during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign, the provincial Women's Federation and its local counterparts wrote about people who profited from auxiliary wedding rituals. These included matchmakers, but new additions appeared in documents about diviners and bride's chaperones. While all three groups catered to newlyweds and their families by providing specific services that were unwanted from the official perspective, the government reserved the most condemnation and concern for professional matchmakers and diviners.

Matchmakers, a perennial problem symbolizing arranged marriage, were accused by cadres of exacting high fees for their services and engaging in marriage fraud. Matchmakers demanded red envelopes every time they introduced a woman to a man, and a more substantial fee when the match succeeded.¹¹² From other reports in 1973-1975, there was a discrepancy in average matchmaker fees, ranging from 30 yuan¹¹³ to 80 yuan in Guangzhou.¹¹⁴ Matchmaker fees added to growing marriage expenses, but the provincial Women's Federation also worried about the emergence of full-time professional matchmakers who lived entirely on their services while

¹¹¹ "Guangzhou shi pi lin pi kong yundong qingkuang."

¹¹² "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha."

¹¹³ Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao."

¹¹⁴ "Guangzhou shi pi lin pi kong yundong qingkuang."

eschewing honest work in agriculture.¹¹⁵

The government also linked professional matchmakers with human trafficking and marriage fraud. An ongoing problem since the 1950s, matchmakers organized women in different counties to meet with potential husbands. However, this allowed matchmakers to extract food and money from men. In a document produced in April 1974, cadres noted that in a commune in Fogang County, 13 matchmakers brought more than 30 women under false names to nearby Hua County, Conghua County, and Qingyuan County and swindled men with the excuse of making introductions. Among the women brought to other counties, some engaged in prostitution. In a nearby commune of Fogang County, a matchmaker became a prostitute and at the same time defrauded 68 people via matchmaking and made 250 yuan for herself.¹¹⁶ In the peri-urban area of Guangzhou, cadres wrote that every commune had matchmakers, and a local commune had 23 professional matchmakers who made their living from their trade. The danger of matchmakers depended on their financial acumen and services provided; in the previous cases of a prostitute-matchmaker who defrauded others, the average victim lost 3.67 yuan. If 3.67 yuan per person was a small sum, there were other examples of matchmakers who caused much financial harm, as well as extending their geographic reach beyond their local bases of operation. A matchmaker in Conghua County defrauded peasants of more than a thousand yuan by introducing 20 women to men in eight different counties. On average, she cheated

¹¹⁵ “Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao.”

¹¹⁶ “Jieji douzheng zai hunyin wenti shang de fanying.”

each person out of 50 yuan, which was close to a half of an average peasant's income per year. In another commune in Guangzhou, cadres wrote that 26 local men had been defrauded by matchmakers, and collectively they lost more than 5000 yuan with an average of 192 yuan per person.¹¹⁷ While 3 yuan was a manageable matchmaker fee to an average peasant in Guangdong, 192 yuan was an enormous sum of about 1.5 years of annual income per person. The provincial Women's Federation's opposed to matchmakers both on ideological grounds of perpetuating arranged marriage, and on economic grounds of fostering financial disaster among men and their families.

The second group of people who profited from auxiliary wedding rituals was diviners. Known as charlatans or fortune-tellers in state documents, they made their living from divining the best date for weddings using the grooms and brides' birth charts and birth years.¹¹⁸ However, unlike the Women's Federation criticisms of matchmakers who worsened the existing high wedding costs, diviner consultation fees were only 1 yuan.¹¹⁹ While this was a purely ritualistic affair with insignificant cost, the provincial government paid attention to it in the mid-1970s because it was widespread across the province and was associated with religiosity among the people; also, there was a mandate from the national level of government to report and suppress feudal customs on the ground.

Unlike matchmakers and diviners, bride's chaperones, a recent addition to the ranks of people who made money from auxiliary wedding rituals during the Criticize

¹¹⁷ "Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao."

¹¹⁸ "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha."

¹¹⁹ "Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao."

Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign, could not make a living from their role. A bride's chaperone was not a full-time profession,¹²⁰ and often a senior relative would perform this role. A bride's chaperone was usually an older woman who had good fortune in her life, such as having many children and grandchildren, harmonious spousal relations, and many generations living under the same roof.¹²¹ On the wedding day, the bride's chaperone would prepare the bride by combing her hair, serve as the master of ceremonies,¹²² and set up the nuptial bed by placing mandarin oranges, seeds of Oriental Arborvitae,¹²³ and pomegranate seeds on the bed to symbolize the bride's future fertility.¹²⁴

The bride's chaperone was also responsible for maintaining an auspicious ambiance during the wedding by saying lucky phrases, but cadres took offense at her role of embodying a superstitious soothsayer when she uttered "all future children will become CCP or Youth League members," echoing Confucian thinking about raising sons to become scholar-officials. Nonetheless, some phrases were revolutionized, and the bride's chaperone's wish for the groom, "the young master purchasing land to have tenant-farmers," was replaced by "Chairman Mao reforming land for everyone to farm" in a wedding ceremony in the mid-1970s, indicating

¹²⁰ "Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biao xian de zonghe cailiao"; "Jieji douzheng zai hunyin wenti shang de fanying."

¹²¹ This was called "Hao ming ren" 好命人 [A person with good fortune]. "Fanying zai funu wenti shang de 'sijiu' huichao de qingkuang de zonghe". Parish and Whyte (1978) have also discussed this type of bride's accompanier, although they claim that this custom was on the wane. *Village and Family in Contemporary China*, 256-259.

¹²² "Fanying zai funu wenti shang de 'sijiu' huichao de qingkuang de zonghe."

¹²³ A traditional Chinese medicine ingredient, in Chinese this is 柏子, a homonym of [百子], one hundred sons.

¹²⁴ "Jieji douzheng zai hunyin wenti shang de fanying". All of these are auspicious food that are homonym to having more sons.

adaptations of feudal tradition.¹²⁵

Regarding the cost of a bride's chaperone, there was no mention of her payment in state documents of the time, although she would likely receive food in the wedding feast and red envelopes as tokens of appreciation. On the surface, bride's chaperones were harmless to everyone involved in the wedding, but the position of the Provincial Women's Federation in the mid-1970s demanded that wedding rituals related to the "Four Olds" must be eradicated, and that included the practice of having bride's chaperones who augmented "blessings" to the newlyweds.

These profiteers or service providers of auxiliary wedding rituals revealed that people did not heed the state's commands to comply with the state Marriage Law and celebrate a frugal and superstition-free wedding. The Chinese state wished to purge professions such as matchmakers and diviners from society. They had provided services to weddings long before 1949 but were supposedly suppressed by the government after 1953. While that was not true, as exhibited by matchmakers in long distance marriages in the late 1950s and early 1960s, their recurrent appearance in internal reports in the 1970s reflected two critical matters: the likely possibility of local cadres turning a blind eye to these activities and allowing them to flourish until discovered by work teams sent from above, and the need for their services to pair couples in the countryside.

Marriage by proxy and ghost marriage

¹²⁵ "Guanyu si jiu xianxiang yishi xing tai jieji douzheng" [Regarding ideological and class conflict on the manifestation of the Four Olds], File 233-3-25-157, GPA, May 30, 1974.

Other customs discovered by work teams included marriage by proxy and ghost marriage, two practices that were thought to have been eradicated by the government. During the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign, work teams cited these unorthodox marriage practices as signs of a gradual return to “feudal” traditions in the Guangdong countryside. Historically, marriage by proxy happened when a groom was unable to attend his wedding due to illness or extended sojourning, and a male chicken served as a proxy to symbolize his presence. In the first two decades of the PRC, the issue of marriage by proxy disappeared from archival documents, suggesting either that marriage by proxy had subsided, or that the party was unconcerned about this custom. Furthermore, the PRC state required both parties to register in the presence of a cadre to legitimize their marriages, hence any marriage by proxy would not be legally recognized. Therefore, when the provincial Women’s Federation sent work teams to the countryside to investigate Confucian influence in the Chinese family, it was surprising for cadres to find cases of people “marrying” a chicken.¹²⁶ In their reports about marriage customs, work teams found two peculiar customs contributing to people’s decision to marry by proxy. First, people occasionally conducted weddings with proxies because they wanted to marry on auspicious days even when one partner could not be present.¹²⁷ The other was ghost marriage, where a chicken was the proxy in either a union between two dead people or between a living and a deceased person.¹²⁸ In reporting these unusual

¹²⁶ “Marrying” is qualified because this would never be considered legal.

¹²⁷ “Fanying zai funu wenti shang de “sijiu” huichao de qingkuang de zonghe.”

¹²⁸ Ghost marriage is a “marriage” by proxy because the deceased would require a substitute to take his or her place.

marriages by proxy, the objective of the Women's Federation was not only to document violations of the Marriage Law but also to show that the people were in great need of intervention by the state to reform their wedding rituals.

The problem of people conducting weddings with proxies became ever more concerning to the Women's Federation when its cadres and party members were named participants. In a report about "manifestations of class conflicts in marriage practices" in 1974, the Federation noted that a women's vice chair in a production brigade in Shunde used a chicken for her wedding because her husband, a member of the PLA, could not be present on the auspicious wedding date.¹²⁹ This was antithetical to the expected role of a Women's Federation cadre in her commune, and cadres wrote that when politically reliable classes chose to marry with a chicken, they exemplified the perpetuation of feudal customs among the people.

Ghost marriage, or wedding ceremonies with the dead, would always need a proxy as a medium for the deceased partner. A traditional custom meant to give the dead person a complete family, this practice was a known issue to the Women's Federation even back in the Marriage Law Campaign of 1953.¹³⁰ Over the years in the 1950s and 1960s, ghost marriage was a practice briefly mentioned in reports but never a significant concern to the government. However, this changed during the Cultural Revolution and especially during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign when the national and provincial government aimed to abolish the "Four

¹²⁹ "Jieji douzheng zai hunyin wenti shang de fanying."

¹³⁰ See, Janice Stockard (1989) on her discussion of ghost marriages in Guangdong during the Republican era. Janice E. Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860-1930* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989).

Olds” and “Confucianism.” In the eyes of those responsible for reforming marriage customs, infrequent occurrences of ghost marriage demonstrated local sensitivities to the need for a completed family that predated the Communist revolution.¹³¹ In a report from Foshan, cadres wrote about several instances of ghost marriage, the cost of such marriages, and the class composition of participants. Financially, matchmakers needed to be paid, and there was a ritual of exchanging food and money between the groom and the bride’s side, as in a marriage of the living. In one marriage, cadres noted that the responsible matchmaker received red envelopes, pork, and chicken while giving bread and rice to the groom’s family to symbolize the dead daughter’s departure to her marital home.¹³² The financial exchanges involved in ghost marriage indicated a material cost to the people for perpetuating a custom that cadres perceived as “feudal” and unnecessary.¹³³

Official criticism of ghost marriages was stronger if living people were involved. When a man in a suburban county of Guangzhou “married” a female chicken as a stand-in for a woman who committed suicide after her parents intervened in their same-surname relationship, cadres vilified her parents for “rejecting the marriage while alive, and only after death they allowed the wedding.”¹³⁴ Not only were cadres noting the futility of said “marriages,” but they also disparaged the superstitious attitude among people about the need to have a family for the dead,

¹³¹ A completed family is a family with a married couple, and some parents thought that their deceased offspring should have one even after their death.

¹³² “Guanyu si jiu xianxiang yishi xing tai jieji douzheng.”

¹³³ The Communist Party is atheist; hence the official position has no space for ghost or ghost marriage.

¹³⁴ “Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biaoqian de zonghe cailiao.”

along with their rejection of same-surname marriage. In another case reported by the Women's Federation about ghost marriage between the living and the dead, an unmarried 71-year-old woman "married" a chicken that represented a man who had been dead for ten-plus years for the explicit purpose of being married to another family.¹³⁵ The inclusion of a 71 year old participating in a ghost marriage in cadres' reports reflected the degree of superstitious thought in the countryside, and that women advanced in age still succumbed to feudal customs.¹³⁶

Cadres paid special attention to the class identities of both families involved in ghost marriages. When a poor peasant surnamed Yang in Foshan engaged in a ghost marriage with a family of a fugitive landlord, cadres accused him of "confusing class identities";¹³⁷ likewise, when an urban resident surnamed Jiang arranged for his recently deceased daughter to "marry" another dead person belonging to a bad class background, class disloyalty compounded the condemnation of the living parents who participated in these "weddings."¹³⁸ Work team cadres used ghost marriages to showcase people's failure to uphold class loyalty and segregate themselves from

¹³⁵ The document noted that this 71 years old women "married" a dead man for the purpose of gaining a family. The Chinese term is "Finding a household" (找一個門口), and historically unmarried daughters could not be buried in their natal families' tomb. "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao."

¹³⁶ Her nickname (姑婆嬌) meant that she was never married. In the document, cadres did not mention an economic reason for her behavior.

¹³⁷ It was unclear if it was himself or his child who was marrying a deceased person. However, another identifying attribute such as "a veteran of Land Reform" would signify that he was already quite old by 1974. This was also in the same paragraph in the document that specifically describes ghost marriages between two deceased people.

¹³⁸ The term used in the document was 脫帽四類份子, which indicated that this family came from people with bad class background such as landlord, rich peasants, counterrevolutionary, or those who were just deemed "bad", and was recently politically rehabilitated. See, "Guanyu si jiu xianxiang yishi xing tai jieji douzheng."

association with an undesirable class, even when this association was posthumous. Hence, cadres aimed to construct a narrative that a ghost marriage between two dead spouses reflected not only the staying power of feudal customs, but also an attack on class struggle and class solidarity.

Any assessment of proxy and ghost marriages in the mid-1970s needs to consider the political atmosphere of the time when the Provincial Women's Federation was keen to find any evidence of "restoration of feudalism in marriage." It is likely that these practices, harmless compared to arranged marriages or high bride prices, were included in official reports because they were unusual. However, what could be concluded from these few and rare marriage cases by proxy was the entrenchment of local sensitivities about marriage and family that predated the PRC, and the fact that decades of education of the Marriage Law and associated custom reforms had failed to elicit complete acceptance of the law. These wedding rituals likely had been issues back in the 1950s and 1960s, but the political atmosphere of the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign meant the government had an agenda in bringing these customs to light to show state efforts at work.

Lineage subversion of class solidarity via wedding rituals and banquets

Aside from the cost and the service providers of auxiliary wedding rituals, the provincial government was alarmed by resurgent lineage identity in weddings, a uniquely south China issue. The Guangdong government had spent decades suppressing lineage influence in marriage dating back to 1953 and remained vigilant about a possible expansion of lineage power. Between the Marriage Law Campaign

of 1953 and the Cultural Revolution, government concern about this issue focused on lineage-based marriage taboos and not on the role of lineages in weddings. However, within the context of the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign and the mandate to suppress Confucian patriarchy, reaffirmation of lineage loyalty in wedding rituals became a new target.¹³⁹ In the eyes of work team cadres who wrote about marriage practices, the ritual of paying respect to ancestors, and intermingling of wedding guests across class lines, represented a return to lineage loyalty that allowed class enemies to confuse class identity and subvert class politics.¹⁴⁰

In contrast to Parish and Whyte's (1978) study of rural weddings in Guangdong that suggests lineage played a minuscule part in weddings,¹⁴¹ government documents during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign described a society where the people continued to manifest lineage loyalty and identity in wedding rituals. In a 1973 investigation in a production brigade in Dongguan, cadres accused some people of emphasizing lineage relations in their social interactions, where "those from the same lineage are close as family," instead of staying close to people of the same revolutionary classes.¹⁴² In response to lineage influence in wedding feasts, cadres stressed the difference between normal social interactions with relatives and participating in clan-based relationships.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ The "Four Olds" were old ideas, old culture, old habits, and old customs. Throughout the Cultural Revolution, the national government attempted to remove these from Chinese society.

¹⁴⁰ For example, a rich peasant hosted a 30-table banquet and invited 230 people to attend; in addition to accusing her of wastefulness, work team members also criticized her for confusing class lines and corrupting cadres. "Jieji douzheng zai hunyin wenti shang de fanying."

¹⁴¹ Parish and Whyte (1978), *Village and Family in Contemporary China*, 259.

¹⁴² "Pojiu lixin yifeng yisu."

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Also vilifying lineage in wedding rituals, the provincial Women's Federation associated the ritual of worshipping heaven, the earth, and ancestors with reactionary culture and suppression of women's rights.¹⁴⁴ In a Women's Federation report in 1974, a work team in Foshan wrote about the ritual of the bride kneeling and serving tea to the groom's lineage elders regardless of their class identities. In return for this gesture, she received ritual red envelope money and acknowledgment of her status as a new member of the groom's family and lineage. Cadres specifically noted that these were distant relatives, and that the ritual was not a normal part of paying respect to family elders.¹⁴⁵

When everyone partook in food and drinks in wedding feasts, work team cadres wrote that class enemies such as landlords and rich peasants thrived socially as hosts or attendees, and that undermined class solidarity. When hosting their children's weddings, landlords invited everyone in their villages based on their shared lineage connection. A woman landlord in Yingde County, for instance, invited twenty-three households to her son's wedding and spread the subversive idea that "as long as one shares the same surname and same patrilineal descent, one is part of the same family regardless of behavior."¹⁴⁶ Aside from hosting, class enemies were also present as honored guests at poor peasants' wedding banquets when people from politically reliable backgrounds invited their lineage kin.¹⁴⁷ Instead of treating people from bad

¹⁴⁴ "Mingjing gongshe maimai hunyin de qingkuang diaocha."

¹⁴⁵ The report mentions "外三代," which means relatives who shared a set of great-grandparents. According to the Marriage Law, people in this category are considered distant relatives and legally marriageable. "Guanyu si jiu xianxiang yishi xing tai jieji douzheng."

¹⁴⁶ "Dangqian nongcun jieji douzheng zai funu fangmian de fanying-jianbao."

¹⁴⁷ "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de

class backgrounds with suspicion and excluding them from social events, there was an example of poor peasants inviting a landlord's concubine in Nanhai County to join the table of respected and honored guests.¹⁴⁸ Local cadres themselves were not immune to this trend of "cultivating lineage relations," as exemplified by a Party member and production team leader in Sanshui county who invited rich peasants, landlords, and counterrevolutionaries to his wedding banquet.¹⁴⁹

Despite the official rhetoric on lineage influence and its use by class enemies to corrupt others, wedding feasts hosted by class enemies were no different from those hosted by poor peasants. For example, a "rich peasant" surnamed Kwan hosted a 15-table banquet for her son's wedding and invited 120 people in the production brigade. The list of attendees included other poor and middle peasants, her production team leader who was a Party member, the captain of the militia, and a women's representative in her commune.¹⁵⁰

Why was the Provincial Women's Federation suddenly concerned about lineage influence in wedding rituals and the class identities of attendees? The national political campaign to criticize Confucius was one possible cause, as lineage represented the Confucian element of the "Four Olds" that needed to be changed. Not

diaocha baogao."

¹⁴⁸ "Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao." This file was an appendix to another document of the same name, file 233-3-26-174, GPA. The first document from April 1974 was a detailed report from the work team sent to a production brigade in Nanhai county. The second document was a general assessment of feudal marriages in the Foshan Administrative District by the district Women's Federation.

¹⁴⁹ Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao."

¹⁵⁰ "Guanyu zhuanfa zhongshan xianwei pi zhuan "dongfeng gongshe fengjian hunyin huichao de diaocha baogao."

only did wedding banquets contradict the rarely followed model of frugal “new-style weddings,” but they also were opportunities to blur the distinction between the politically reliable and the unreliable population. At the same time, it was unlikely that commune members would socially ostracize their relatives who had bad class identities, especially when they lived and worked alongside them. It was possible that commune members did not see the ritualistic space of sharing food and affirming kinship ties as a battleground of class struggle, and that attendees went to wedding feasts without viewing them as manifestations of Confucianism or a corruption of the socialist ethos.

Cross-border marriage during the Cultural Revolution

A major point in the provincial propaganda aimed at fostering people’s compliance with the Marriage Law during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign was the persistent issue of cross-border marriages between people from the PRC and the British colony of Hong Kong. From the 1950s onward, women in south China could aspire to marry a returnee or a Hong Kong visitor, seen as the best potential husbands to guarantee a future livelihood. Accordingly, brides’ families would adjust their demanded bride price, knowing that the grooms could afford a higher amount. Aware of the potential harm of cross-border marriages and their impact on local marriage markets, the provincial government had attempted many propaganda campaigns against them during the 1960s to no avail, and people across political classes continued to desire marriages with people from south of the Hong Kong - PRC border. From 1966 to 1972, when the Women’s Federation was

suspended, documents discussing cross-border marriage apparently were no longer generated.¹⁵¹ Mentions of cross-border marriage and its effects in the Guangdong marriage market reappeared in a surge of documents dated from 1973 and after. In these documents, provincial authorities instructed local governments to standardize their marriage registration procedures and required people from Hong Kong who temporarily returned to China for marriage to register at the county level, rather than at the decentralized commune level.¹⁵² Aside from the standardization of registries indicating a growing number of cross-border marriages, however, cross-border marriage also gave cadres a good explanation for the “resurgence of feudal customs” and the ever-growing number of marriage transactions in the province. This was similar to the situation in the 1950s and 1960s, when it was politically expedient for cadres to associate cross-border marriage with capitalist influence and higher bride prices.

The provincial Women's Federation claimed that cross-border marriages with Hong Kong residents or returnees from Hong Kong contributed to a "restoration" of pre-revolutionary wedding rituals and practices, such as equating money with mate choice and bride price in marriage negotiations.¹⁵³ Also, Women's Federation cadres

¹⁵¹ The Guangdong Provincial Women's Federation was suspended from 1967-1972.

¹⁵² Unmentioned in the document was the need to verify marital status for both spouses to avoid potential bigamy, a process that would be better facilitated at a higher level of administration than at the commune level. “Guanyu guo wai huaqiao he gang'ao tongbao linshi huiguo banli dengji jiehun shouxu wenti de tongzhi” [Notice regarding marriage registration with overseas Chinese and Hong Kong-Macau compatriots who temporarily returned to China to marry], file 249-A1.3-51-139, GPA, July 16, 1973.

¹⁵³ Cadres used the word “fujiu” 復舊 [restoring the old] to describe the resurrection of marriage customs from the past, although, in reality, they never disappeared even during the 1950s and 1960s.

noted that people were more likely to marry someone from Hong Kong during periods of economic hardship, especially when they were richer than their PRC counterparts and hosted extravagant wedding feasts.¹⁵⁴ There were also accusations by the Women's Federation that the capitalistic influence of Hong Kong and material inequality between both places caused marriages with significant age gaps or polygyny. In one example, cadres declared money to be the primary motivation for an instance in Kaiping County, in which a young woman, aged 22, was determined to marry a Hong Kong returnee, aged 51, even though he allegedly had three wives in Hong Kong and her local commune refused to register this marriage.¹⁵⁵ Materialism incentivized women to marry men from Hong Kong or their relatives, and goods or money transferred between the groom's family and the bride's family became the sweetener for such marriages despite large age gaps or polygyny.¹⁵⁶

The state explicitly pinpointed influence from Hong Kong as a catalyst for marital materialism and large wedding expenses. In one wedding feast in Zhuhai County, the groom spent more than four thousand yuan and invited 200-plus attendees, including the brigade party secretary, all cadres, and commune members.

¹⁵⁴ "Shuitou dadui hunyin fujiu de qinkuang" [The situation of restoring feudal marriages in Shuitou Production Brigade], file 233-3-18-199-202, GPA, April 1974.

¹⁵⁵ The Hong Kong returnee couldn't have three wives; he could have a wife and two concubines in Hong Kong, since the marriage reform ordinance recognized existing polygynous relationships with concubines, but none could contract additional concubines after 7th October 1971. See, Laws of Hong Kong, Marriage Reform Ordinance, Chapter 178; "Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian "guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao."

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. The document does not say whether the match was initiated by the woman herself or by her parents. However, there was no mention of her family influencing the marriage. The state was also worried about the rise of bride price and dowry at this period, rather than marriage freedom. It had a term "Bianxiang maimai hunyin" 變相買賣婚姻 [Disguised transactional marriage] to describe a wedding where the bride asked for a high bride price as a prerequisite for marriage, or she would refuse the match.

Envious of the grand scale of the wedding feast, others in the commune openly said: “If married to a man like him, even a cripple could eat without labor.”¹⁵⁷ In urban Guangzhou, the local Women’s Federation found that people were pursuing “capitalist” priorities in marriage searches, and women there thought that overseas Chinese men, or men from Hong Kong and Macau, would make rich husbands.¹⁵⁸ While it was likely that a man from Macau or Hong Kong was wealthier than a person living in the PRC, what made cross-border marriage threatening to social order was its encouragement of hypergamy, as well as its exacerbation of the astronomical marriage costs among rural men who were already disadvantaged in the hierarchy of favorable potential spouses.

The Chinese state was aware that cross-border marriage was becoming more popular, and that additional propaganda about “capitalistic and decadent influence” from Hong Kong would not work on people who had experienced the material benefits of overseas and Hong Kong connections. Instead of suppressing cross-border marriages as it once did, the Provincial Civil Affairs Department strengthened its regulations and streamlined registration procedures. Also, the state was deliberating whether to allow or deny a groom who had previously escaped to temporarily return to China for marriage.¹⁵⁹ Bureaucrats in charge of marriage registration were understandably skeptical of these Hong Kong men's claims of being single, asking for

¹⁵⁷ Guanyu zhuanfa diqu fulian “guanyu dangqian nongcun hunyin fujiu de qingkuang baogao.”

¹⁵⁸ “Guangzhou diqu baoban maimai hunyin gezhong biaoqian de zonghe cailiao.”

¹⁵⁹ “Guanyu zhengqiu dui huaqiao, gang’ao tongbao jiehun dengji ji ge wenti de han” [Letters on questions regarding marriage registration for overseas Chinese and Hong Kong-Macau compatriots], file 249-A1.4-37-54, GPA, February 1, 1976.

notarized documents that confirmed a man's bachelorhood to prevent bigamy or marriage fraud. Nonetheless, other than repeating the caution against corrosive capitalist influence on the youth, the provincial government in the 1970s allowed cross-border marriages to proceed, dealt with the consequences of heightened capitalist mindset among the populace, and most likely enjoyed the benefits of the hard currency accompanying these marriages and subsequent remittances for local economic development.

While the national government stressed political loyalty and adherence to collectivization and socialism, the provincial government found the peasantry concerned not with politics but with making enough money to pay their bride price for themselves or their sons. The Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign gave space for the resurrected Provincial Women's Federation and other agencies to investigate and suppress marriage customs that had recently become popular in the Guangdong countryside, but in practice did not resolve problems that had persisted since the Marriage Law promotion and campaign in 1953. Contrary to narratives created by state agencies about a recent revival of "feudal" marriage practices in the early 1970s, bride price and other marriage transactions remained relevant throughout the late 1950s and 1960s and escalated significantly during the Cultural Revolution as income remained stagnant or grew only slightly. Auxiliary wedding rituals and their purveyors had also appeared in internal reports since the 1960s. Still, it was only in the context of the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign that authorities paid significant attention to investigating and suppressing them. Although the government

had tried to promote compliance with the Marriage Law by educating the masses about socialist values in marriage negotiations and spousal choice, their efforts failed when the people decided to pursue material benefits to fund the bride price, or when they realized they could ignore state directives on austere weddings and rituals.

Proximity to Hong Kong, a perennial issue for the provincial government in Guangdong, made eradicating "feudal" marriage practices ever more difficult when people chose those with connection to Hong Kong and withdrew from the socialist economy and the regime altogether.

Entrenching socialist values in marriage during transition to economic reform

The Cultural Revolution ended with the death of Chairman Mao and the overthrow of a group of power holders known as the “Gang of Four”, but in its wake the Guangdong provincial government attempted another “cultural revolution” in marriage customs. Instead of a sharp break at 1976, the official end of the Cultural Revolution, social policies in Guangdong took on a different timeline from national political events.¹⁶⁰ During the four years of transition from Maoist policies to economic reform from 1976 to 1980,¹⁶¹ the provincial Women’s Federation retained the priorities, methods, and narratives of the marriage reforms that began during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign, at a time of growing popular doubts

¹⁶⁰ Politically this period from 1976 to early 1980 is known as “Bolun Fanzheng” 撥亂反正 [Resolving Chaos and returning to normality] in official chronology of event that predated the economic reform. During this period, there were attempts to continue Maoist policies under the Chairman Hua’s “Two-Whatevers” dictum, but gradually Chairman Hua Guofeng lost to Deng Xiaoping.

¹⁶¹ The transition to economic reform varied in differed by regions. In south China, particularly Guangdong, political resistance to reform was overcame earlier than other regions. In official historiography, the economic reform begun in 1978, although locally in Guangdong reformist policies had already taken hold.

about the socialist orientation of economy and society. Even as people were becoming disillusioned with Maoism as a political ideology and centralized collectivization as an economic tenet, the provincial government via its Women's Federation attempted to reinforce socialism by intervening in marriage practices once more.

During the years of transition from the Cultural Revolution to early economic reform, Guangdong was perfectly suited for social and economic transformation. Existing relationships with the Overseas Chinese population and economic ties with Hong Kong injected commercial capital that could quickly be mobilized for development.¹⁶² State-sanctioned agricultural export contracts with Hong Kong gave rural communes in the Pearl River Delta income that was otherwise unavailable.¹⁶³ Additionally, the people received remittances and food packages throughout the socialist period with brief interruptions.¹⁶⁴ Locally, there was also faster economic growth than during the Cultural Revolution, notably rising income per person,¹⁶⁵ and both sanctioned and unsanctioned liberalization in economic policies known as the

¹⁶² See Peter E. Hamilton (2021) for established economic ties between cross-border traders from Hong Kong (kuaishuang) and entities in China during the Cultural Revolution. Peter E. Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong: Transpacific Networks and a New History of Globalization*, Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

¹⁶³ Elizabeth Johnson and Graham Johnson, *Walking on Two Legs: Rural Development in South China* / (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1976).

¹⁶⁴ Parish and Whyte (1976) noted that remittances greatly boosted village prosperity, but at the cost of reducing cadre's political influence. At the same time, there was a large population whose partial income depended on remittance, an income source that were additional to the product of their labor in the PRC. See Parish and Whyte (1976), 26-27.

¹⁶⁵ Growth was uneven, but in some county such as in Kaiping county, the average income per person rose from 219 yuan in 1975, to 291 yuan in 1978, 319 yuan in 1979, and 383 yuan in 1980. See, Kaiping County Gazetteer, 311.

household responsibility system.¹⁶⁶

As south China and the PRC itself was shifting toward the household responsibility system, the national state continued to desire control over social policies. Marriage reform saw continuity between the Cultural Revolution and the transitional years to reform, and one of the visible indicators of continuity was the promotion of uxorilocal marriage. Originally intended to demonstrate criticism and action against Confucianism during the Cultural Revolution, the promotion of uxorilocal marriage lasted until 1978, the year when the language of explicit opposition to Confucian influences appeared for the last time.¹⁶⁷ Even then, the provincial Women's Federation adhered to the national movement of encouraging uxorilocal marriages to disrupt the practice of post-marital patrilocal residence.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ The 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in December 1978 is usually marked as the beginning of the economic reform, and state gazetteers often noted that the plenum gave opening for experimentation in decollectivizing agricultural production. See, Shaoguan Municipal Gazetteer, p.498; Qujiang County Gazetteer, p.203. However, there were also unsanctioned experiments of household responsibility system in Guangdong before 1978, such as in Haikang County in 1977. See, "Tui hang jiating lian chan chengbao zeren zhi" [Carry out the household responsibility system], last modified February 4th, 2008, <http://www.reformdata.org/2008/0204/13958.shtml>.

¹⁶⁷ Even in September 1976, provincial Women's Federation was still going with the Criticize Lin, and Criticize Confucius campaign; however, after Lin and Confucius, there was a line about Criticizing Deng (Deng Xiaoping).

"Huai ji xian xingfu gongshe zhaokai nan dao nu jia jiehun luohu zuotan jiyao" [Minutes of a meeting on uxorilocal marriage in Xingfu commune of Huaiji County], file 317-1-250-138, GPA, October 4, 1976. The document is originally created in September 1976.

¹⁶⁸ Kay Ann Johnson (1983) noted that there was also a movement to promote matrilocal marriages during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius Campaign. See, Kay Ann Johnson *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, 201. Also see Elisabeth Croll, *The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China*, Contemporary China Institute Publications (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Uxorilocal marriages remain an unconventional arrangement and regarded as inferior; historically, only the most desperate bachelor would agree to marry in this fashion. For more information about uxorilocal marriage in south China, see, Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975); James L. Watson, "Killing the Ancestor, Power and Piety in the Cantonese Ancestral Cult," in *Village Life in Hong Kong: Politics, Gender, and Ritual in the New Territories* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004).

According to the Women's Federation, successful cases of uxori-local marriages came from husbands who overcame criticisms from their relatives for "forgetting their ancestors" and "willingly becoming a slave to the wife's family."¹⁶⁹ When one orphan agreed to marry uxori-locally in 1976, his uncle threatened to expel him from his lineage, but according to a Women's Federation work report, he persuaded his uncle and in the end his uncle supported his marriage.¹⁷⁰ In another case in the same year, local cadres introduced a man surnamed Guo to marry uxori-locally to a woman surnamed Wen of the same production team. Not only was he well-treated by his in-laws, but he was also elected the production team accountant.¹⁷¹ In their plan to bolster uxori-local marriages in the province, provincial bureaucrats recommended holding yearly meetings among the couple, their parents, and others in their communes, as well as organizing two additional promotional efforts during the New Year and Lunar New Year holidays of 1977.¹⁷²

In addition to model stories, state propaganda posters in late 1976 promoted the benefits of uxori-local marriages, and they served to demonstrate a continued struggle against Confucian patriarchy. It also served to encourage compliance with nascent birth-planning policies, where family with only daughters would have a ritual successor and be disinclined to have additional sons.¹⁷³ The effectiveness of these

¹⁶⁹ "Huai ji xian xingfu gongshe zhaokai nan dao nu jia jiehun luohu zuotan jiyao."

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ The late 1970s was a time when the government paid attention to population growth, and the state was beginning to implement birth planning. While the PRC only enforced the One Child Policy starting in 1978, the state was cognizant of the need for male labor and the cultural value placed on a male heir in the countryside, and families with daughters would try to give birth to sons. "Nan dao nu

posters is questionable, and post-marital residence remained heavily patrilocal afterward.¹⁷⁴

Despite the government's proclaimed success at encouraging uxrilocal marriages to challenge patrilocality, close reading of state discourse during the transitional years reveals the specific conditions needed for uxrilocal marriages to be appealing to the population. In the case of an uxrilocal marriage between two members of the same production team, there would be little opposition, because both families worked together, and the son could attend to his parents as well as his in-laws. In practice, such an uxrilocal marriage made no difference in work arrangement or finances, while maintaining the social obligations expected of a son. In the other model stories intended to support uxrilocal marriage, orphans were used because they did not have filial obligations to their parents. Although their lineal relatives might complain about the shame borne by their families and lineages from these marriages, their influence over the prospective husbands was limited because they would not care enough to fund the high bride price required in a typical marriage negotiation. Despite official encouragement in 1975-1976, by 1978 this issue was mentioned once more within the plan to "promote socialist values in marriage" and ceased to appear in official discourse afterward, possibly suggesting failure in

jia jiehun luohu shehui zhuyi xinsheng shiwu" [Uxrilocal marriage: a new custom of socialism], printed by Birth Planning Bureau of the Guangdong Revolutionary Committee, August 1976. Last accessed, April 1st, 2022, <https://book.kongfz.com/1809/36616018388/>

¹⁷⁴ According to Lavelly and Ren (1992), patrilocality in Guangdong was consistently between 70 to 80% of marriages, and the rest were mostly neolocal marriages. Only 4% of marriage were uxrilocal from 1955 to 1985 in Guangdong. See, William Lavelly and Xinhua Ren, "Patrilocality and Early Marital Co-Residence in Rural China, 1955-85," *The China Quarterly*, no. 130 (1992): 378-91.

encouraging this custom to take hold among the general public.¹⁷⁵

The provincial government's changed language regarding the reform of marriage customs occurred at a time when socialist ideology was under siege in Guangdong. During the transitional years, profound changes regarding wages, prices, and employment led many in the province to question the benefits of socialism. In Guangzhou, complaints about insufficient guaranteed food rations,¹⁷⁶ doubling of prices without a corresponding rise in income, and a lack of housing as the rusticated population returned to the city all led to public discontent and doubt in the official account of prosperity under socialism. At the same time, people commented derisively about material insufficiency and inflation, assistance from Hong Kong helping to alleviate rising prices in China,¹⁷⁷ as well as better economic standards and opportunities in Hong Kong compared to Guangdong.¹⁷⁸ In this context of declining enthusiasm for socialism and its superiority over capitalism, the provincial government's reiteration of socialist marriage practices and rejection of "feudal" practices such as child daughters-in-law, sister exchanges, and underage and unregistered marriages could be seen as a last-ditch attempt by the state to exert

¹⁷⁵ "Guanyu jindong xuanchuan yong shehui zhuyi sixiang chuli hunyin wenti de jihua" [A plan to publicize using socialist thought to resolve marriage issues in this winter], file 233-3-66-75-79, GPA, November 5, 1978.

¹⁷⁶ Insufficiency in food rations was not the same as lack of food available for purchase. Documents noted that non-staple food purchased by coupons, such as subsidized fish and meat, had disappeared, while food based on market price and bargaining was abundant but unaffordable to most, especially if their income did not match inflation.

¹⁷⁷ "The southward window" was a widely understood euphemism to describe connections to Hong Kong. "Youguan dui shichang jiage de qingkuang fanying" [On reflections about prices in markets], file 233-3-81-47, GPA, March 27, 1979. It is noteworthy that this document was transmitted to the provincial propaganda radio station unit.

¹⁷⁸ "Dangqian funu ganbu, qunzhong yixie sixiang qingkuang fanying" [Reflection on questions about ideology among female cadres and the masses], file 233-3-93-20, GPA, June 26, 1979.

influence on people's everyday life.

Compared to the autonomous conduct of the provincial Women's Federation during the Cultural Revolution, there was more communication from and coordination with the national level during the transitional years, in addition to provincial initiatives. Nonetheless, both periods saw the provincial Women's Federation focusing on marriage transactions, which presented worsening obstacles to people entering marriages at the time. In May 1978, a joint working group including the Women's Federation, the Department of Civil Affairs, provincial courts, the Youth League, and the Family Planning Bureau discussed best practices to promote legal education and suppress transactional marriages.¹⁷⁹ Documents from these meetings reveal the high cost of bride prices and other forms of marriage transactions. Marriage transactions ranged from 300 to 500 yuan at the low end to more than a thousand yuan at the high end. As the average rural income in 1978 was 193.25 yuan per person per year, while an average urbanite earned 436.88 yuan, a bride price of 300 to 500 yuan would require a year or more of income for an average peasant. A thousand dollar bride price at the high end would require several years of savings.¹⁸⁰

In one noted example, cadres from Heyuan county wrote that in their local communes, there were seven hurdles one must overcome before marriage: initial introduction, the inspection of the groom's family's economic conditions, betrothal, confirmation, bride price, wedding banquet, and the matchmaker's fee, altogether

¹⁷⁹ “Guanyu zhaokai quan sheng fazhi jiaoyu fandui fengjian baoban maimai hunyin xianchang huiyi de fu han” [A reply on commencing the province-wide meeting on legal education and opposing feudal and transactional marriages], file 233-3-71-111, GPA, May 9, 1978.

¹⁸⁰ See Guangdong Provincial Gazetteer: Economic Overview, 1992, 453.

costing more than a thousand yuan. On a wider scheme of non-compliance with the Marriage Law, the state found that transactional marriage was also present among those working in the bureaucracy.¹⁸¹ Local investigations in 1977 provided details on the ubiquity of transactional marriages: grooms generally paid a bride price of between 400-1000 yuan. In Lianjiang county in 1977, a work team reported that 75% of registered couples were in transactional marriages, as were 52.4% of all registered couples in Haikang County (Leizhou).¹⁸² Items in bride prices included not only a cash component but also commodities such as bicycles, wristwatches, sewing machines, and radios, in both urban Guangzhou and in rural communes of Liangjiang in Western Guangdong.¹⁸³

The provincial Women's Federation blamed transactional marriage for creating a large population of unmarried rural men,¹⁸⁴ as well as incentivizing many to commit crimes to fund the bride price via illegal logging, speculation, corruption, and thievery.¹⁸⁵ Not too different from reports during the Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius campaign, examples after 1976 followed the formulaic progression of a person induced to commit a crime to fund an astronomical bride price. A commune member in Xiangang commune of Gaoyang county stole and sold the production

¹⁸¹ "Xuexi "zhejiang ribao" jian jue fandui maimai hunyin qingkuang fanying" [Reflection after reading Zhejiang Daily's article on opposing transactional marriages], file 233-3-84-92, GPA, August 4, 1978.

¹⁸² "Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti [Acute issues on marriage in the province], file 233-3-60-50, GPA, November 23, 1978.

¹⁸³ "Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti"; "Guanyu maimai hunyin qingkuang de diaocha baogao" [Investigation report on the situation about transactional marriages], file 233-3-84-65, GPA, 1978.

¹⁸⁴ "Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti."

¹⁸⁵ "Xuexi "zhejiang ribao" jian jue fandui maimai hunyin qingkuang fanying."

brigade's cattle to pay for his bride price of 700 yuan; he was subsequently arrested and publicly criticized by his fellow commune members.¹⁸⁶ Just as there were *hui* during the Cultural Revolution to fund marriage expenses, local reports from Liangzhou county reported about ROSCAs funded by young men who pooled their resources with a yearly contribution of 200 yuan per person per year to fund two payouts per year.¹⁸⁷ Apart from leading to financial crime such as corruption, commodity speculation, or illegal capital accumulation by ROSCAs, quarrels over bride price or reneged betrothals led to physical violence such as kidnapping or assault.¹⁸⁸

In the same documents discussing rising bride prices and their association with crime were mentions of sister exchanges, child daughters-in-law, and underage betrothals in parts of the province during the late 1970s. Although the actual number of such cases in the entire province in a year is unknown since authorities could only count cases found by work teams, these practices nonetheless reveal the limits of past government reforms of marriage customs. Regarding sister exchanges, the Provincial Women's Federation found 61 cases in four selected communes in Qingyuan, Yangshan, and Yingde counties, of which 16 cases involved party members and local cadres.¹⁸⁹ In Lianjiang County there were 397 cases.¹⁹⁰ Though child daughters-in-

¹⁸⁶ This crime led to many questions: How could a man steal a commune's tilling cow and not expect to get caught? Who would be the potential buyer for this cow?

¹⁸⁷ "Guanyu maimai hunyin qingkuang de diaocha baogao."

¹⁸⁸ "Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti."

¹⁸⁹ No specific dates given by the document. "Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti."

¹⁹⁰ Again, no date given by the document, except that it said, "now we have lots of sister exchanges." An educated guess would be from 1974 to 1978. "Guanyu maimai hunyin qingkuang de diaocha

law had been outlawed since the 1950 Marriage Law, the provincial Women's Federation found them in communes in Lufeng county in Eastern Guangdong and Nanxiong county in Northern Guangdong, but did not elaborate aside from stating that some refused to marry and sought state legal assistance.¹⁹¹ The provincial Women's Federation had more information about underage betrothal, the precursor to arranged marriages. An incomplete count in Haikang county from 1974 to November 1978 found 3,112 people who were already engaged between the ages of 5-17, with the rate as high as 11% of youth in Yangjia commune in Haikang already engaged to others while under the legal minimum marriageable age.¹⁹² In Jinshui commune of Liangjiang County,¹⁹³ 5% of local youth were betrothed while underage from 1977 to 1978, but the rate rose to 20% in a nearby production brigade of Baisha commune. In most early betrothals, the future groom's family was required to pay the bride price of between 200 and 400 yuan.¹⁹⁴ Both the bride's and the groom's parents benefited from early betrothal, at the cost of sacrificing the bride's marriage freedom: the bride's parents received an infusion of cash, while the groom's parents could receive a bride without paying the bride price.

The desire to suppress underage betrothals, the exchange of sisters, and child daughters-in-law was possibly due to their use in maneuvering around high marriage transaction costs at the price of sacrificing marriage freedom and violating the

baogao.”

¹⁹¹ “Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti.”

¹⁹² “Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti.”

¹⁹³ The name of this commune was deciphered by the author's estimate.

¹⁹⁴ “Guanyu maimai hunyin qingkuang de diaocha baogao.”

Marriage Law. Moreover, these practices could create disputes in situations where paid bride price was not returned in the case of annulments. The state was bound to enforce the Marriage Law, which outlawed all three practices, yet remained wary of leaving rural men who had already spent bride prices or engagement money with no resources for future marriage prospects.

Compounding rural anxiety over high bride prices was the threat of runaway or trafficked wives,¹⁹⁵ an issue that existed in China before 1949.¹⁹⁶ Although the provincial government had consistently accused professional matchmakers of charging high fees, human trafficking, and marriage fraud, after the Cultural Revolution the government recognized two new problems: women's complicity in marriage fraud, and runaway wives enticed by matchmakers. In 1976-1977, reports from Lianjiang County revealed that there were 398 professional matchmakers, and that they had trafficked 1256 women from other counties, of whom 384 were married women.¹⁹⁷ In Longchuan County, eight peasants wrote to the Provincial Women's Federation for assistance in finding their vanished wives. In these documents, the state included stories of men searching all over to find their runaway wives, as well as husbands burdened with domestic chores after their wives' departure. Not knowing

¹⁹⁵ Based on documents from the provincial archive, it is impossible to know if these married women were trafficked with their consent or against their will. However, given the strict control of population movement of the time, it would be difficult to move a woman against her will over long distance, and certainly not across provinces.

¹⁹⁶ For scholarship on runaway wives in China before 1949, see Zhao Ma, *Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes, and Survival Tactics in Wartime Beijing, 1937-1949* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015); Johanna S. Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

¹⁹⁷ "Guanyu maimai hunyin qingkuang de diaocha baogao".

what to do, these husbands held their infants and tried to find milk, and some were driven to insanity or committed suicide.¹⁹⁸

Although cadres cited stories of runaway wives and subsequent unregistered marriages, the prevalence of these practices remains in question, considering the difficulty of long-distance migration as constrained by the food rations that were linked to the household registration system. State documents do not provide answers on how women procured food and where they went beyond a cryptic description of “in some parts of the province,”¹⁹⁹ but the mere thought of wives who could abscond from their husbands and remarry, perhaps desiring to escape unhappy marriages or to find better and possibly wealthier men elsewhere, was troublesome enough for a government that had long encountered involuntary bachelorhood and materialist spousal choice in the countryside.

Aside from runaway wives who committed bigamy outside their counties, the Women’s Federation also reported on a greater share of women who were complicit in committing marriage fraud.²⁰⁰ Although the Women’s Federation had long associated professional matchmakers with defrauding men over introduction fees, the

¹⁹⁸ The idea of a husband holding an infant in search for his wife evoked a trope portraying “modern girl” back in the 1930s. In the context of the 1970s, cadres were pandering to the similar sentiment of irresponsible women who possibly left their husbands for greener pastures. There was no indication in the document that this was a novel or an ongoing problem, although previous reports from the Women’s Federation had not mentioned husbands going around the province to find their wives. “Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti.”

¹⁹⁹ The exact term used in internal report is “有的地方出現重婚”, which does not give detail about where and how this practice took place.

²⁰⁰ During the Mao era, marriage frauds often occurred when men tried to cheat women into marrying them by exaggerating their economic conditions, and the state recorded a few cases where women were cheated by men. See “Xielinlin de jiaoxun” [Bloody lessons], file 233-3-84-90, GPA, April 25, 1978.

object of criticism had shifted to the “brides” themselves who used marriages or engagements to defraud honest men of their goods and money.²⁰¹ Some examples included a woman surnamed Lin from Yatang commune of Lianjiang County, who had scammed dozens of men in Liangzhou, Zhanjiang, and even in Hainan Island over the previous ten years with fake engagements, receiving more than 500 yuan.²⁰² In Qingyuan county, the Women’s Federation noted that 12 out of 14 young women in a single production team were engaging in marriage fraud in other counties, with a notable example of one woman who scammed more than a thousand dollars in less than year by engaging in multiple instances of marriage fraud.²⁰³

In addition to their day-to-day business of making matches, matchmakers also contributed to long-distance bride import schemes and human trafficking. Just as they had done in the late 1950s, matchmakers in eastern Guangdong exported brides to Fujian, Anhui, Zhejiang, and Jiangxi province, as well as intra-provincially to Lufeng and Puning counties during the years of economic reform. At the same time, in Wuchuan County of western Guangdong, there were wives from other provinces who acted as matchmakers by utilizing their relatives and native-place connections to import brides. For example, the provincial government found that a Sichuanese wife of a demobilized PLA soldier introduced more than 50 women from Sichuan to local men and received 400 to 600 yuan per successful match from each groom’s family

²⁰¹ Documents from the Women’s Federation only mentioned that women went elsewhere to commit marriage fraud. However, in marriage fraud, the women would run away if a bride price had been paid. The key objective was to extract financial resources from their victims. For marriage fraud to work, the perpetrator and the victim must not have known each other before the scam.

²⁰² “Guanyu maimai hunyin qingkuang de diaocha baogao.”

²⁰³ “Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti.”

starting in 1975. In a nearby commune with a similar situation, a wife from Sichuan and her brother brought 8 women to Guangdong and received approximately three thousand yuan for their trouble.²⁰⁴ The financial exploitation of prospective grooms by matchmakers, as well as by women who engaged in marriage fraud themselves, was a lucrative venture, for an average peasant in the province earned between 90 yuan to 110 yuan per year, and between 250 kg to 300 kg of rations per year in 1978.²⁰⁵ With one successful match, a matchmaker in a long-distance bride import scheme could earn the equivalent of the income distributed to a commune member per year. Likewise, for women who engaged in marriage fraud themselves, earning a thousand yuan a year was vastly more lucrative than working in the commune's fields.

Acting on reports of people's violations of the Marriage Law and the high cost of weddings at the grassroots level, in 1978 the provincial government embarked again on a propaganda campaign aiming to resolve local violations of the Marriage Law, as well as to encourage late marriage and uxori-local marriages. The substance, methods, and goals of this province-wide campaign were identical to the campaign that began in 1974, except for removing Lin Biao and Confucius from official material. Action plans followed the formula of advocating stronger actions by the Party, better coordination between all government organs that dealt with marriage issues,²⁰⁶ a massive propaganda campaign to discuss the difference between arranged

²⁰⁴ “Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti.”

²⁰⁵ Shaoguan Municipal Gazetteer, 2001.

²⁰⁶ This would include the Women's Federation, the Youth League, the People's Court, the Department of Civil Affairs, and occasionally the Propaganda Department at all administrative levels. The

marriage and free choice marriage, recurrent promotions of good role models, and judicial punishment of human traffickers.²⁰⁷

Provincial initiatives on suppressing transactional marriages were later incorporated into a national press campaign following a directive from the All-China Women's Federation in November 1978 to "promote the use of socialist thought in resolving marriage issues this winter."²⁰⁸ Acknowledging the order from above, provincial cadres planned for another promotional campaign. Provincial newspapers and radio stations would broadcast editorials and commentaries from Xinhua's *People's Daily* and the *Red Flags* on "applying socialist thinking in marriage," while the Department of Culture would supplement public broadcasting by producing slide films for projection, and literary and artistic works to raise awareness.²⁰⁹ On the ground, local governments would publicize role models who "use socialist thinking in marriage negotiations and issues," couples who held simple wedding ceremonies, parents who supported free-choice marriages, or people who voluntarily complied with state policies on late marriage and birth planning. Among grassroots organizations, most likely at the commune or brigade level,²¹⁰ local cadres would

Women's Federation was usually the main agency in charge of all marriage affairs except marital registration, which was the purview of the Department of Civil Affairs.

²⁰⁷ "Xuexi 'zhejiang ribao' jian jue fandui maimai hunyin qingkuang fanying."

²⁰⁸ "Guanyu jindong xuanchuan yong shehui zhuyi sixiang chuli hunyin wenti de jihua." Also, according to China Women's News, the official paper of the All-China Women's Federation, there were media campaigns in the national press and in official newspapers in 28 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions from December 1978 to February 1979. See, Jia Yinmin and Hu Kaiji, "Gaige kaifang chuqi zhengfu li tui hunyin zizhu de liang da jucuo" [Two major measures taken by the government to promote the autonomy of marriage in the early stage of reform and opening up], China Women's News, June 20, 2017.

²⁰⁹ These usually included plays, folk songs, or posters.

²¹⁰ This meant commune or production brigade level, although the word used in the document was "grassroot organization".

hold panel discussions and home visits to do meticulous thought work, as well as delivering public verdicts on human traffickers to showcase the sanctity of the Marriage Law. Lastly, the provincial government recommended pilot sites to gain first-hand experience as well as sending additional teams to areas with severe problems with transactional marriage or arranged marriages.²¹¹

On January 20th, 1979, the head of the provincial Women's Federation, Fang Lan, spoke on the provincial radio station to commune members and cadres regarding the adverse effects of marriage and family problems. Claiming that the rural population had returned to transactional marriages, arranged marriages, and holding wasteful wedding feasts by spending thousands of dollars, all of which contributed to the revival of "feudal superstitions" and domestic disharmony that prevented the youth from contributing to socialism, she urged the youth to apply socialist thinking in marriage and holding a correct perspective on love based on a shared political orientation and attitude toward labor, and not on materialist considerations of money or occupation.²¹² Her message that that money could not buy genuine love was a familiar one. Aside from the emphasis on a harmonious family for the sake of socialist modernization, neither the priorities nor the rhetoric differed from that used during the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, her message ignored the fact that marriages in the 1950s and 1960s still contained bride price or were arranged by parents, and that these issues had been endemic in Guangdong except in the briefest

²¹¹ "Guanyu jindong xuanchuan yong shehui zhuyi sixiang chuli hunyin wenti de jihua."

²¹² The speech is recorded in "Hunyin, jiating wenti xuanchuan dongtai (4)", *Funu gongzuo Zengkan*, January 20, 1979. The magazine supplement containing this speech is most likely an internal publication for the Women's Federation, file 233-3-84-32, GPA, January 20, 1979.

moments of intensive state interventions. It did, however, demonstrate that materialist influence was becoming ever more important in people's marriage search and negotiations, and that the people turned a deaf ear to past promotions on transaction-free marriage.

Parallel to provincial investigative reports and its promotional campaign, there were instances of counties adopting locally determined rules to strengthen compliance with the Marriage Law, and to encourage late marriage as a component of the national family planning policy.²¹³ Local policies often focused on marriage registration because this was one aspect over which the state had absolute control, and restricting registration to allocated dates nullified the feudal custom of divining an auspicious date for the wedding. At the same time, if the local government could compel group wedding registration and ceremonies, then wedding costs could be saved for economic production. However, overzealous ad hoc policies led to growing public backlash and evasion while revealing the limits of decrees and official interventions. In Nanhai County, women were required to undergo premarital virginity testing before marriage registration; any non-virgin had to be publicly criticized in her work unit, and pregnant women had to undergo abortion before being permitted to register.²¹⁴ In other parts of the province, registration was restricted to holidays such as March 8th, May 1st, and October 1st to coordinate group wedding

²¹³ See, Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005), on the history of PRC birth planning policies in the 1970s. Susan Greenhalgh, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005), 75-92.

²¹⁴ Documents did not relate this ad-hoc policy with birth planning. It was more of a question of morality than about birth-planning.

ceremonies before the newlyweds could live together.²¹⁵ Restrictions over marriage registration to specific days were unpopular because they disrupted the legitimization of marriages, as the registration and wedding often happened on different dates.²¹⁶

Another example from a commune in Bao'an demonstrates the tug-of-war between the people and the local governments regarding marriage practices and state intervention. The commune enacted supplementary rules to restrict marriage registration to five holidays a year and the requirement to have austere tea wedding ceremonies on the same date. Although commune members were willing to register, they divined other days for the wedding, which defeated the purposes of mandating registration, removing the "feudal" ritual of divination, and holding austere, "new-style" weddings. Therefore, the commune announced that from March 1977 onward, all marriage registration would take place on the 25th of each month, and wedding ceremonies would occur on the same day. Couples who wished to register had to undergo premarital health examinations on the 24th of each month. Violation of this communal decree would result in public criticism of the couple, and a refusal by the production team to process the transferal of household registration.²¹⁷ The telling cause of low compliance was the requirement for registration and weddings to occur

²¹⁵ "Wo sheng hunyin lingyu shang cunzai de ji ge tuchu wenti."

²¹⁶ There had been a distinction between legal recognition of marriage and social recognition of marriage in China. A legal marriage was one that conferred legal protections after registration with cadres and signing of marriage certificates, while a social recognition of marriage was one in which the couple's community viewed the couple as newly married after a wedding ceremony or banquet. Usually, there was a time gap between marriage registration with the state and a wedding ceremony celebrated among family, relatives, or neighbors. For a detailed description about the differences between these two forms of recognition of marriages, see Honig and Hershatter (1988), 138-139.

²¹⁷ "Yu hunshi xin ban de buchong guiding" [Supplementary provision on promoting new-style weddings], file C10-1-0044-053, SZMA, January 20, 1977.

on the same day. The issue was not with marriage registration, as people were willing to comply, but with the divination of the wedding date and the wedding feast that occurred afterward, which then defeated the purpose of having same-day registration for promoting austere wedding ceremonies.

Not much is known about the lasting impact of this short provincial campaign that extended into January 1979. A concluding report on “implementing the Provincial Government Document 116” in February 1979 described the campaign as ineffective and recommended a temporary pause. Despite the four work teams that held panels with the masses and cadres at production brigades and received reports from local branches of the Women’s Federation, the promotional campaign encountered much administrative indifference. Among several municipal and county authorities, as well as in some mining work units, bureaucrats planned no action besides a perfunctory mention and withheld the directive from lower-level authorities under their control. In a few locales, such as Maoming, the municipal Party committee ignored the directive and left the Women’s Federation alone in running the campaign. Their attitude reflected a general trend among sub-provincial bureaucrats who saw this as an issue that only concerned the Women’s Federation and the People’s Court. Subsequently, they cited a packed schedule at the end of the year and provided no support.²¹⁸ On the ground, county women’s representatives were also unwilling to promote this campaign, citing their preoccupation with other matters. At the end, the report suggested that additional steps were required, and recommended

²¹⁸ This referred to the lunar calendar.

postponing the investigation of transactional marriages and focusing on revising the Marriage Law.²¹⁹

Why were the provincial Women's Federation and the government so adamant in suppressing "feudal" marriage customs despite repeated failures in the past? Politically, the national Women's Federation had just concluded its 4th National Women's Congress, hence there was a need to follow up with concrete actions on the ground.²²⁰ However, provincially, and locally, these issues of "feudal" marriage customs had persisted, and the demands for bride price had been steadily increasing since the temporary state intervention of the Marriage Law Campaign in 1953. It is possible that by the late 1970s the people had accepted bride price and wedding rituals as part of marriage negotiations and weddings, and that what was considered "feudal" by the state was seen as normal. Additionally, there was strong bureaucratic inertia against any campaign on marriage customs by 1978, and sub-provincial cadres preferred to focus on more concrete matters related to socialist modernization, also known as economic reform.²²¹ Nonetheless, repeated attempts and failures could also

²¹⁹ "Guanyu xuanchuan guanche shengwei 116 hao wenjian qingkuang zonghe" [A comprehensive report on the promotion and implementation of the Provincial Committee Document 116], file 233-3-84-39, GPA, February 6, 1979. The local press had not reported on the revision of the Marriage Law in 1979.

²²⁰ In a speech to participants of the 4th National Congress of Chinese Women, Kang Keqing mentioned that they must purge the poisonous influence of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, as well as to reverse the revival of the "Four Olds" and to establish new marriage customs. See, "Xin shiqi zhongguo funu yundong de chonggao renwu" [The noble task of the Chinese women's movement in the new era], the All-China Women's Federation, last modified March 18th, 2016, https://www.women.org.cn/art/2016/3/18/art_47_13023.html

²²¹ Although campaigns about the Marriage Law or marriage customs had been viewed by the provincial government as within the domain of the Women's Federation, in the past campaigns of 1953, 1957, 1962, the provincial Department of Civil Affairs and the People's Court were involved in it. This time in 1978, the Women's Federation was slightly critical of other agencies of their inactions.

demonstrate the government's resolve to strengthen socialism by exerting state control in people's everyday lives.

Learning from their failure to encourage the people to resolve marriage negotiations and related issues with socialist thinking, the Provincial Women's Federation switched to compiling requested input on revisions of the Marriage Law from 1979 to 1980. Prompted by a directive from the All-China Women's Federation to provide suggestions about the upcoming changes to the Marriage Law,²²² the provincial Women's Federation compiled comments from lower-level branches of the Federation, as well as cadres in other departments and the masses. These compiled comments represented grassroots concerns about the letter and the implementation of the Marriage Law, as well as people's reactions to state regulation of their marriages.²²³ Most suggestions revolved around transactional marriages, minimum marriageable age, birth planning, and overzealous promotion of late marriage in local communities. Some suggested the marriage law should require new-style weddings and reject wasteful wedding expenses, while others called for elimination of local policies regarding late marriages. According to the provincial Women's Federation, these had led to unregistered marriages and births, and cadres gave no rations to either the mother or the child.²²⁴

Additional informational exchange between the county, provincial, and

²²² "Zaidu xiugai hunyinfa zhiqiu yijian tongzhi" [A notice of soliciting advice for the revision of the Marriage Law], file 233-3-81-273, GPA, November 13, 1978.

²²³ "Youguan xiugai hunyinfa de qingkuang zonghe" [A summary on revising the Marriage Law], file 233-3-66-80, GPA, 1978.

²²⁴ "Youguan xiugai hunyinfa de qingkuang zonghe."

national level of the Women's Federation demonstrated the mismatch in understanding compliance with the Marriage Law between local cadres, provincial bureaucrats, and their leaders in Beijing. When the Office of Revising the Marriage Law, headed by the Chairwoman of the Women's Federation, sent a directive for a second draft and invited another round of suggestions in March 1979, the Guangdong Provincial Women's Federation duly instructed its local branches to provide ideas, with consultation from government agencies such as the courts that were also involved with the Marriage Law.²²⁵ The subsequent report compiled by the provincial Women's Federation revealed severe disagreements between the national leaders from Beijing who provided the draft of the Marriage Law and local cadres whose opinions were grounded in observations in the field. Disagreements included the removal of the phrase "prohibiting child daughters-in-law" as the higher-ups believed that this was already included in "prohibiting arranged marriages," whereas local cadres noted that the practice of child daughters-in-law remained prevalent in at least four counties of Guangdong. Therefore, local cadres wrote that the Marriage Law should continue mentioning the legal ban on child daughters-in-law. Additionally, local cadres wrote that some child daughters-in-law wished to stay in their existing families due to better economic conditions, hence technically they could not be considered forced into marrying their future husbands.²²⁶

²²⁵ "Fa 'hunyingfa cao'an' zhiqiu yijian tongzhi" [A notice on soliciting commentary on the draft of the Marriage Law], file 233-3-81-271, GPA, March 3, 1979.

²²⁶ The document cited Shaoguan, Mei County, Huiyang County, Shantou, and noted that in other places, this was a severe issue. "Xiugai hunyingfa yijian bao quanguo fulian" [Reporting to the All-China Women's Federation about opinions on revising the Marriage Law], file 233-3-81-294, GPA, March 15, 1979.

Another point of contention between Beijing and local cadres concerned the classification of transactional marriages. The ACWF recognized the difficulty of distinguishing gift-giving in disguised transactional marriages versus gifts given by free will and suggested treating voluntary financial exaction as an “ideological education issue” and not a legal one.²²⁷ On this point, the provincial Women’s Federation and the provincial people’s court agreed. However, local cadres wrote that the Marriage Law should also distinguish clearly between feudal marriages and capitalist marriages.²²⁸ Cadres from the Guangzhou municipal court complained about couples who married for money and goods, as well as those who hastily divorced because they were fickle with their affections. They said that the masses were especially outraged by womanizers who destroyed other people’s marital happiness, or others who abused their spouses to secure a divorce. Blaming these on capitalism, cadres wrote that the revised Marriage Law should outlaw “capitalist” marriages as well, no doubt a direct influence of proximity to Hong Kong.²²⁹

The last major disagreement involved the right for either spouse to join their spouse’s household registration according to the national government’s regulation on household registration and internal migration.²³⁰ Although legally sound, this was extremely controversial among cadres in Guangdong as household registration was

²²⁷ “Zhonghua renmin gongheguo hunyin jiating fa cao’an “zhiqu yijian gao” [Soliciting comments on the Draft of the Marriage Law of the PRC], file 233-3-81-275, GPA, February 26, 1979.

²²⁸ The term in Chinese is 資本主義的婚姻家庭關係 [capitalist marriage and family relationship].

²²⁹ “Xiugai hunyinfa yijian bao quanguo fulian.”

²³⁰ See Chapter 4 on the desirability of an urban household registration and the near impossibility for a person to convert to an urban household by marriage during the Maoist and the early economic reform periods. “Zhonghua renmin gongheguo hunyin jiating fa cao’an “zhiqu yijian gao.”

tied to rations. Cadres wrote that rural women who married men with urban household registration could not change to their husbands' households, yet at the same time were not given work and rations by their brigade on account of their marriages to outsiders. Subsequently, some cadres recommended that women who had married into an urban household could continue to draw on rations in their natal commune. However, cadres in rural villages who were closer to towns and cities, and were generally wealthier than most, reacted strongly to this suggestion as well, arguing that "if women marry in and none marry out, we cannot secure our food in the future." The provincial Women's Federation argued in principle that people (read: women) should be allowed to move to their spouse's household, but that local cadres in richer communes had cause to oppose this move on economic grounds.²³¹ No longer believing in the socialist egalitarian vision, these cadres participated in a zero-sum game holding on dearly to their relative economic advantage. The concern over diluting rations was only one of many phenomena in the transitional years that revealed the intersections between people's marriages and the nascent economic reform. As some were becoming richer than others, marrying up became more important than before, and the state's vision of transaction-free marriage gradually lost appeal among the populace.

In the end, years of intensive regulation of marriage could not eradicate bride price, arranged marriage, or even early marriage among the populace. The second movement of a long history of Chinese state intervention in people's marriage

²³¹ "Xiugai hunyinfa yijian bao quanguo fulian."

between 1972 and 1980 in Guangdong was ineffective in suppressing marriage expenses or in fostering long-lasting changes. Strict regulations or active campaigns by the government led to no visible positive results on the ground. At the same time, bride price, a perennial enemy in official discourse, had to be accommodated and tolerated, for it was rising uncontrollably while fulfilling the economic logic of exchanging women's labor for wealth. Unique regional dynamics and close connections with Hong Kong contributed to materialistic spousal choice as people observed economic inequality in their lives, as well as the possibility of marrying beyond the borders of the PRC.

Although the promotional campaigns during the years of transition to economic reform foundered, nonetheless they demonstrated a continuity in PRC social policies that stemmed from the Cultural Revolution as exhibited by their shared objectives, methods, and narrative. Campaigns aiming to enforce transaction-free marriages and simple weddings failed because the state vision of marriage and weddings did not resonate with people's economic interests, as well as the social expectation of a respectable wedding. The provincial government and the Women's Federation could broadcast socialist ideals of free-choice marriage with no money involved, but the people saw the opposite in local cadres' behavior and were aware of the financial benefit of demanding a high bride price for their families. Given the lack of sustained political will from above and indifference at the grassroots level, repeated government attempts to regulate the most intimate aspects of people's everyday lives were at best a partial success.

Chapter 6

Colonial Governance of Marriage in Post-war Hong Kong

At about the same time that the PRC attempted to modernize marriage practices and govern people's marriages, the British colonial government in postwar Hong Kong undertook a similar project and had better success. Although both the Hong Kong and Chinese governments in Guangdong shared the same goal of reforming marriage for their Chinese residents, different relationships between the government and the people, and diverging visions and methods of reform, resulted in noticeable distinctions between the two places. Marriage reforms in Hong Kong and China both aimed to mandate registered monogamous marriages, as well as eliminating child daughters-in-law and underage marriages. However, compared to the intensive interventionist Chinese regime that aimed to suppress marriage transactions and "feudal customs" to modernize the Chinese family and transform society, the colonial government in Hong Kong was more modest in its objectives, adopting a passive approach to securing public compliance from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s. Bride prices and dowries, perennial concerns of Chinese regimes since the 1930s, were not considered relevant by the colonial authorities conducting marriage reform.¹ The issue of marriage between Han sub-groups, which caused

¹ As the government was not concerned about bride price in Hong Kong, there were not detailed statistics about marriage transactions in urban Hong Kong. However, some details were collected by James Hayes (1983) on marriages that took place on in 1950s. In the three examples provided by Hayes, one of them was a child daughter-in-law, and her bride price was on the low side of 100 HKD. A second woman's family received 300 HKD, while a third women's family received 1200 HKD as her bride price. See James Hayes, *The Rural Communities of Hong Kong: Studies and Themes* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1983, 227-230.

subregional animosity in Guangdong, was also not important to the colonial government, which grouped them all together under the category of “Chinese marriages.”² Likewise, class identity, materialistic spousal choice, residency, or wedding rituals, all of which were important sites of ideological struggle during the Cultural Revolution in south China, were non-factors in Hong Kong as the colonial government was unconcerned with their effects in marriage.³ If the marriage was monogamous, registered, and satisfied the minimum age requirement, the colonial government would not intervene any further.⁴ Newlyweds disappeared from colonial records unless they returned as parties in marriage disputes and court cases.

This chapter discusses the governance of marriage in rural and urban colonial Hong Kong to suggest that Hong Kong was an example of an alternative model of regulating everyday life, a contrast to the intensive interventionist model of the PRC. The divergence in marriage governance across the border suggests that minimalist interventions led to better compliance with state laws in the domestic and intimate domains of life.

There has been substantial scholarship on the standardization of marriage law

² Salaff (1976) noted that marriages were primarily endogamous among ethno-linguistic division. See Janet Salaff, “The Status of Unmarried Hong Kong Women and the Social Factors Contributing to Their Delayed Marriage,” *Population Studies* 30, no. 3 (November 1976): 391–412.

³ Ibid. Salaff reported that marriage for women in Hong Kong in the 1970s was ideally hypergamous, but women working in the factories often married fellow skilled workers. Regarding spousal choice, David Podmore and David Chaney (1974) found that the local youth in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s believed that love should be the basis of marriage, and they believed in free-choice marriage. See David Podmore and David Chaney, “Family Norms in a Rapidly Industrializing Society: Hong Kong,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 36, no. 2 (May 1974): 400–407.

⁴ The minimum legal marriage age with parental consent in Hong Kong has been 16 since 1947. See Marriage Ordinance, 1947 edition, section 15. In current law, this statute is moved to the Marriage Ordinance, 2019 edition, section 13.

in Hong Kong,⁵ but a key question remains as to how the colonial government controlled Chinese marriage in rural and urban Hong Kong while internal discussions were ongoing for more than two decades. Scholarly works on rural authority and mediation such as Huge D.R. Baker (1968, 1979) and David Faure (1986) suggest that there was a general aversion to involving government authority in lineage villages in the New Territories.⁶ Scholarship and records by colonial bureaucrats provide information on the role of District Officers who served as the government representatives in the New Territories (Coates, 1987; Hayes, 1983, 2006, 2017; Wilson, 1983),⁷ but still cannot answer the following question: if and when a dispute

⁵ Leonard Pegg (1986) wrote about the changes in legal language. Anthony Lau Wing-Kai (1996) researched the coexistence of Chinese and British laws as well as newspaper reception of marriage reforms. Recent research, by Max W.L. Wong (2020) has described the internal deliberations within the colonial government and consultation with external organizations on reforming Chinese marriages, resulting in the Marriage Reform Ordinance in 1971. On customary law in the New Territories, Edward Haydon (1995) and James Hayes (2016) discussed the application of customary law in the New Territories. Regarding the gradual transition from customary laws to codified law, Joseph Man-Kit Cho (2013) described the critical role of civic-minded organizations such as the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong, while Ding Jie (2014) wrote about local newspapers in sections catering to women and families that promoted monogamy and the happy family ideology. See Leonard Pegg, *Family Law in Hong Kong* (Singapore: Butterworths, 1986); Edwin Haydon, "Chinese Customary Law in Hong Kong's New Territories: Some Legal Premises," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 35 (1995); Wing-Kai Anthony Lau, "Banquets and Bouquets: Social and Legal Marriage in Colonial Hong Kong 1841-1994" (M.Phil. Thesis, Hong Kong, The University of Hong Kong, 1996); Joseph Man-Kit Cho, "Mapping the Sexual Landscape: A Study of the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (1950s - 1980s)" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2013); Ding Jie, *"Huaqiao ribao" yu Xianggang Huaren shehui, 1925-1995*, 1st ed. (Hong Kong: Joint Pub. (H.K.) Co., 2014); James Hayes, "Chinese Customary Law Revisited," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 56 (2016): 111–32; Max W. L. Wong, *Chinese Marriage and Social Change: The Legal Abolition of Concubinage in Hong Kong* (Singapore: Springer, 2020).

⁶ Hugh D.R. Baker, *A Chinese Lineage Village: Sheung Shui* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1968); *Chinese Family and Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); David Faure, *The Structure of Chinese Rural Society: Lineage and Village in the Eastern New Territories, Hong Kong*, (Hong Kong; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁷ Austin Coates, *Myself a Mandarin: Memoirs of a Special Magistrate* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1987); James Hayes, *The Rural Communities of Hong Kong: Studies and Themes* (Hong Kong ; Oxford University Press, 1983); *The Great Difference: Hong Kong's New Territories and Its People, 1898-2004* (Hong Kong: University Press, 2006); "Family Cases from Shek Pik, Lantau, New Territories of Hong Kong," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 57 (2017): 206–25; B. D. Wilson, "Notes on Some Chinese Customs in the New Territories," *Journal of the Hong*

reached outside the lineage villages, at what point did the state become involved, and on whose initiative?

Likewise in urban Hong Kong, there are studies of neighborhood associations serving as intermediaries between the people and the colonial government,⁸ but what role did these intermediaries and the government play in resolving people's marriage disputes? Furthermore, as Hong Kong is located next to the People's Republic of China and many residents moved across the border, how did a British court in urban Hong Kong adjudicate marriages celebrated in Republican China and the PRC? These questions reflect on the relationship between the colonial government and people's compliance with the government's authority over their domestic life.

After a brief discussion of recognized marriage types in the colony and the enactment of the Marriage Reform Ordinance, this chapter focuses on four dimensions of marriage governance and the evolution of state regulatory structures: dispute mediation, adjudication of spousal maintenance, verification of the marital status of emigrants, and registration of marriage. An amalgamation of informal and formal dispute resolution entailed participation by the government and intermediary organizations in rural and urban Hong Kong. The chapter also assesses the process taken by the government to foster marriage registration before and after the passage of the Marriage Reform Ordinance in 1970. The combination of marriage governance and reform that prioritize voluntary compliance resulted in a lighter-handed and more

Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society 23 (1983): 41–61.

⁸ Aline K. Wong, *The Kaifong Associations and the Society of Hong Kong*, (Taipei: Orient Cultural Service, 1972); Eliza W. Y. Lee, "Nonprofit Development in Hong Kong: The Case of a Statist–Corporatist Regime," *Voluntas (Manchester, England)* 16, no. 1 (2005): 51–68.

successful model of regulating Chinese marriage by a passive and colonial regime, in contrast to the intensive interventionist program conducted by the Guangdong provincial government during the PRC period.

Legal marriage types and the Marriage Reform Ordinance

Hong Kong was a part of an integrated south China region that shared a regional marriage market and marriage practices, as people and goods move freely across the Hong Kong–China border. Restriction of cross-border movement starting at the end of the Chinese Civil War in October 1949 and the strengthening of the Hong Kong - China border by the PRC in 1950-1951 created a split of the regional marriage market into two. But in the mid-1950s, tenuous cross-border marriage and family ties allowed mutual influences on each other's marriage market.

However, what made Hong Kong distinct from China was the multitude of legally recognized types of marriage in Hong Kong, and differences in how the government pursued marriage reform and governance. Unlike the PRC state, which replaced the Nationalist Civil Code with its Marriage Law beginning in 1950, the British colonial government in postwar Hong Kong had to reform marriage by harmonizing four types of Chinese marriage in the colony.⁹ The multiplicity of recognized marriage types required the colonial government to settle and adjudicate marriage disputes based on local understanding of Chinese marriage customs, Chinese marriage laws, or British legal codes. Of the four types of marriage

⁹ Dating back to a proclamation in 1841 by Charles Elliot, the first administrator of the colony, who promised that Her Majesty's Government would respect local laws and customs for the Chinese population, marriage was one of the few areas of life where Chinese residents had a choice between British and Chinese laws. See Proclamation to the Chinese Inhabitants of Hong Kong, 1841.

recognized in Hong Kong, the easiest for the colonial government to control was the “Registry Marriage,” formed according to British laws and dissolvable in courts. However, strict statutes limiting divorces made “Registry Marriage” unpopular among Chinese residents,¹⁰ and Chinese residents chose to celebrate their marriages according to other legally recognized types. Rural New Territories villagers and fishermen commonly celebrated their marriages under “Chinese Law and Custom” based on the Great Qing Legal Code, though the Qing Dynasty had been overthrown in 1911.¹¹ The consequence of “Chinese Law and Custom” based on the Qing Code was the lingering influence of the Qing Code in marriages involving concubines, a constant source of problems for colonial bureaucrats wishing to enforce monogamy or when intervening in marital disputes. Chinese in urban Hong Kong tended to conduct their marriages according to the Nationalist Civil Code of 1930.¹² Finally, refugees and migrants from the PRC often had marriages celebrated according to the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China of 1950.

Efforts to reform and standardize Chinese marriage began in late 1947 and lasted until the Marriage Reform Ordinance in 1971. Reasserting civilian control after the Japanese occupation, the colonial government in 1947 sought a new governing

¹⁰ “Divorce Ordinance (1964 edition),” HKRS 47-1-58. Causes for divorce were adultery, insanity, cruelty, and desertion. The ordinance was repealed and replaced by the Matrimonial Cause Ordinance in 1967. The government, especially the registrar general as stated in a letter to the Colonial Secretary on July 25, 1968, was aware that marriages conducted in wedding registries could only be dissolved by legal decrees of the Court, and not by mutual consent as most Chinese residents would prefer it.

“Chinese Customary Marriage,” HKRS 634-1-23.

¹¹ “Chinese Law and Custom” is the vocabulary used in the colonial bureaucracy to describe Chinese marriages not celebrated in accordance with the Nationalist Civil Code, the Marriage Law of the PRC, or British law.

¹² In colonial bureaucratic convention, this type of marriage was known as Chinese Modern Marriage.

relationship with the colonized in Hong Kong to rebuild its legitimacy, and one avenue it pursued was to address questions regarding Chinese customary marriages. The resulting Strickland Committee Report in 1950-1951 was the earliest serious study of Chinese marriage by the government. However, after the shelving of the Strickland Report in 1956,¹³ the colonial government took an extended period to formulate policy papers on Chinese marriages and waited for trends in local marriage practices to shift toward registration.¹⁴ Only in 1969 did the government plan for and passed a Marriage Reform Ordinance that requiring registering monogamous marriages, at the same time accepting ex post facto registration of existing customary marriages.¹⁵ Until the Marriage Reform Ordinance became relevant in 1971, the colonial government was prone to criticism from others such as the UN and Britain for recognizing concubinage under "Chinese Law and Custom."¹⁶ The Marriage Reform Ordinance of 1971 protected existing customary marriages that were potentially polygynous and gave legal rights to concubines but prohibited any future non-monogamous marriage in the colony.¹⁷ Unlike the Marriage Law of the PRC, the

¹³ Max W.L. Wong, "The Origins of the Strickland Report and the Search for the Chinese Customary Law and Custom in Hong Kong," in *Chinese Marriage and Social Change: The Legal Abolition of Concubinage in Hong Kong*, ed. Max W.L. Wong (Singapore: Springer, 2020), 97–137.

¹⁴ Hong Kong Attorney General, *The McDouall-Heenan Report, 1965* (Hong Kong: J.R. Lee, acting Govt. printer, 1967). There was also a confidential telegram sent from the colonial secretariat in Hong Kong to the Secretary of State on March 11, 1957, that the colonial government was doing nothing to abolish concubinage. Furthermore, the colonial government believed that concubinage would be best eliminated by education and shift in public opinion and not by legislative measure. "Chinese Marriages: 1957 Petitions by Women's Organizations," HKRS 410-1-8.

¹⁵ Max W.L. Wong, "The Marriage Reform Ordinance 1971 and Its Aftermath," in *Chinese Marriage and Social Change: The Legal Abolition of Concubinage in Hong Kong*, ed. Max W.L. Wong (Singapore: Springer, 2020), 181–211.

¹⁶ Wing-Kai Anthony Lau, "Banquets and Bouquets: Social and Legal Marriage in Colonial Hong Kong 1841-1994" (M.Phil. Thesis, Hong Kong, The University of Hong Kong, 1996), 123-124.

¹⁷ Marriage Reform Ordinance (Cap.178), Articles 4-5.

Marriage Reform Ordinance resolved specific issues of concubinage and standardized legally recognized marriage types, and did not induce systematic changes in marriage customs among the people.

Structure of marriage dispute resolution in the New Territories

The colonial government had ruled the New Territories with minimal intrusion, aside from the addition of the colonial police, the District Offices, and establishment of a tri-level advisory structure consisting of village representatives, rural committees, and the Heung Yee Kuk, the statutory advisory council of the New Territories.¹⁸ On marriage dispute resolution, the colonial government was remarkably similar to the reactive Nationalist state before 1949, waiting for disputes to appear requiring official attention, including family cases such as petitions for divorce, financial maintenance, or custody battles. A compilation of marriage disputes from 1952 to 1959¹⁹ makes it possible to evaluate the reach of the colonial government into family life by tracing the intricate structures involved in dispute resolution. The marriage and family dispute resolution structure reveals the extent of colonial governance and the distribution of responsibilities among the state and quasi-state organizations, while demonstrating people's acceptance of government control over their marriages.

¹⁸ In the rest of this chapter, they will be abbreviated as V.R. for village representative, R.C. for the rural committee, and the HYK for Heung Yee Kuk, following colonial bureaucratic convention. For the roles that the V.R., R.C., and HYK played on behalf of the colonial government in the New Territories, see Ian Scott, "Administering the New Towns of Hong Kong," *Asian Survey* 22, no. 7 (1982): 665; James L. Watson, "Rural Society: Hong Kong's New Territories," *The China Quarterly*, no. 95 (1983): 487–488.

¹⁹ "Family Disputes," Hong Kong Government Records Service (hereafter known as HKRS), 118-1-91.

In the rural New Territories, inhabitants generally exercised their option to choose “Chinese Law and Custom” and a governing protocol. Under this protocol, plaintiffs first resorted to internal mediation by village elders or Chinese organizations, followed by involving the British magistrate and his Chinese staff at the District Office. By the time a dispute arrived at the desk of the District Officer,²⁰ it had likely already been heard by a Chinese intermediary such as a village representative or a rural committee and was accompanied by their referral letters. Marriage cases, as recorded by the government, arrived in three ways: direct petitions from a plaintiff,²¹ referral from village representatives or a rural committee, or police reports. Plaintiffs who came to the District Office were primarily women complaining about their husbands and wanting an authoritative figure to give a stern lecture to them,²² seeking court-ordered financial support from their husbands,²³ or applying for divorces.²⁴ Cases referred by police stationed in the outlying New Territories had both male and female plaintiffs, although in cases of physical abuse, many women went directly to the colonial police for relief and skipped the village-based Chinese

²⁰ James Hayes (1996) noted that a Special Class Clerical Officer usually mediated family disputes cases and was the DO’s right-hand man. While the Clerical Officer often heard cases and summarized the proceeding for the District Officer, it was the District Officer’s signature and decision that made anything official. See James Hayes, *Friends and Teachers: Hong Kong and Its People 1953-87* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), 15.

²¹ For example, there was a case where a couple went to District Office Yuen Long and asked for a hearing from the magistrate. “Ji gu mingyuan” [Banging on the official drum to claim innocence], *Wah Kiu Yat Po* (hereafter *WKYP*), August 10, 1957.

²² Coates (1987) mentions that disputants often brought cases to district officers because they needed an outsider to give the parties a talking-to. For example, in Case 5 of 1953 in HKRS 118-1-91, the plaintiff specifically asked the District Officer to give one.

²³ This was known as “maintenance” in colonial documents and was generally understood as payments from husbands to wives to enable the latter’s economic livelihood. If there were children involved, the maintenance could be more.

²⁴ Such as Case 18 of 1953, HKRS 118-1-91.

organizations.²⁵ In contrast, the majority of cases referred from local organizations such as village representatives or rural committees had a tendency to privilege the claims of male plaintiffs,²⁶ although they would also protect women's welfare when husbands failed to uphold the traditional duty of providing for their wives and children.²⁷

The colonial police had a diminished role in marriage disputes, as the police limited themselves to taking in cases and referred them to the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs (SCA),²⁸ which would nominally pass the case to the District Commissioner, New Territories (DCNT), ending at the District Offices.²⁹ Occasionally, the respondents would be remanded by the police if the case involved severe physical abuse, such as Case 4 of 1953, which involved an acid attack.³⁰ The colonial police also served as the executive arm of the District Office, such that when respondents refused to attend the district office summons, the district office would dispatch police to secure their presence.³¹

Select cases from the 1950s reveal people's acceptance of the state regulatory

²⁵ Case 13 of 1951; Case 22 of 1951, Case 4 of 1953, Case 6 of 1953, Case 15 of 1953, HKRS 118-1-91.

²⁶ In Case 58 of 1955, HKRS 118-1-91, the rural committee explicitly asked the District Office to intervene to protect village norms and cast her out from her married family.

²⁷ Case 62 of 1955, Cases 73 and 74 of 1958, and HKRS 118-1-91 are prime examples in which rural committees intervened at the behest of women.

²⁸ The Secretariat for Chinese Affairs (SCA) was renamed the Secretariat for Home Affairs (SHA) in 1969 and became the Home Affairs Department (HAD) in 1973.

²⁹ This was a formality: although the police would refer to the SCA, the administrative process would often go straight to the district officers. However, cases 6, 8, and 9 of 1953 all involved the process of police writing a report to the SCA, which then transferred the case to the DCNT. These cases were subsequently resolved by the District Office.

³⁰ Case 4 of 1953, HKRS 118-1-91.

³¹ Case 56 of 1955, HKRS 118-1-91.

power as exercised by the rural committees, the police, and the District Office, while simultaneously demonstrating a continued reliance on their village representatives as first responders. When a marriage dispute could not be resolved by informal mediation by village representatives, the case would then exit the boundary of a local village and involve higher administrative agencies in the New Territories. Disputes resulting from physical abuse or foul play might start at a police station, but eventually, all cases found their way to the District Officer's court. For the involved parties in marriage disputes, a ruling from the District Office was the conclusion of one's search for justice. However, below the surface, the District Office often relied on other government agencies to help it arrive at a ruling.

A typical case of bigamy and marriage fraud, Case 28 of 1952, represents the general steps taken as a dispute moved from informal mediation to formal judgment by the District Office. The case started when a husband accused his mother-in-law and wife at the Sai Kung Police Station on October 7, 1952, saying that his mother-in-law had conspired with his wife to marry the wife to another man for a financial reward, most likely another bride price. Accompanying his accusation was a letter from the chairman of the Sai Kung Rural Committee that explained his prior failed mediation because both women were, in the chairmen's word, "unreasonable." The chairman also commented that these women were likely committing marriage fraud, and he petitioned police sergeant Laurel to uphold village mores and proceed fairly "according to village custom." The subsequent police report indicated that "all parties concerned [were] invited to Station" and that "the two females, the wife, and her

mother, have been very difficult" before the attending police referred the case to the District Office, South (DOS) for additional processing. The case lingered until the District Officer discovered that the point of contention was not bigamy or her remarriage to another man, but rather the bride price that the first husband had paid, for which he wanted compensation. An inquiry with the first husband's Village Representative reaffirmed that people thought "the first husband has spent much money in his marriage." In the end, the District Office adjudicated a token payment to the first husband at the Sai Kung Police Station, with the police as an impartial witness over the payment.³²

Case 30 of 1952, provided a slightly different trajectory of marriage dispute resolution when V.R.s of two different villages attempted a mediation over a wife who refused to return to her husband after a natal home visit.³³ After a second attempt by the Sai Kung Rural Committee was equally futile, the chairman of the Sai Kung Rural Committee petitioned the District Office to preserve morality and severely punish the wife. The chairman was astute enough to include the fact that the marriage was not arranged and that she was not physically abused by her husband.³⁴ Together, these two cases demonstrate a chain of mediation starting with the V.R. and moving

³² Case 28 of 1952, HKRS 118-1-91. The reason why the District Office chose the police instead of the local rural committee to serve as a witness is unknown. However, the involvement of monetary payment between parties and public perception of the police as a part of the colonial government could be one possibility.

³³ This was not the same as women in the 1930s who had extended stays at their natal home after spending a few days with their husbands without consummation. In this case, the husband and wife had been living together for a while, and she wanted to divorce him, which the District Officer granted after returning some of the bride price to her husband.

³⁴ Case 30 of 1952, HKRS 118-1-91.

on to the R.C. Only when all else failed would a marriage dispute reach the District Office. In contrast to the role of the rural committee, the colonial police were only transmitters of cases to the District Office and a witness to the full settlement adjudicated from above. However, people understood that filing a complaint at the police station would begin the process of official intervention that could lead to the District Office, and female plaintiffs tended to take advantage of this.

The importance of rural committees and the public trust in them as a means of marriage dispute resolution is also demonstrated by the District Office's actions. The District Office rarely ruled against a rural committee's "suggestion," as conveyed in accompanying letters from the rural committees to the District Office. Although a District Officer or his staff could and did overrule the village elders or representatives who might have ulterior interests in a case,³⁵ compiled cases indicated that the District Office typically followed the recommendation of the referring rural committee. A letter from the referring rural committee in case 58 of 1955 reveals the priorities of rural committees in marriage dispute resolution and their role as the paragon of public and traditional virtues in the postwar New Territories.

Case 58 of 1955 was an extraordinary adultery case that extended past the boundary of the New Territories and into urban Hong Kong. Suing the respondent who was the wife of an overseas sojourner who had kept up regular remittances,³⁶ four plaintiffs, including the local V.R., two of the three sons of the respondent, and

³⁵ Austin Coates, *Myself a Mandarin: Memoirs of a Special Magistrate*, 26-27.

³⁶ This portion was considered important as his remittances demonstrated fulfilling his duty toward his family.

the respondent's sister-in-law, reported that the wife had fled their village to the Shum Shui Po district of Hong Kong. This case was highly unusual because the local Village Representative was the principal plaintiff, contrary to a V.R.'s usual role as the local peacemaker. An accompanying letter from the Tai O Rural Committee explained that the wife had absconded with family wealth and became pregnant while her husband had been away from Hong Kong for eight years. As the adultery case created a huge public uproar, the rural committee asked the District Office South (DOS) for a permanent exclusion order of the adulterous wife from the village and a legal recognition of her three sons' estrangement from their mother. In an unusual suggestion, the Tai O Rural Committee directly implored the District Office to "please rule according to villagers' opinions."³⁷

The mediation process of Case 58 of 1955 exhibited the government's reach and the role of the District Office as the foci of administrative power. Typically, the District Office would arrange medical evaluations to validate plaintiffs' claim of physical injuries. In this case, the District Office, in cooperation with the health authority in the New Territories, arranged for the respondent to submit to a medical examination in Kowloon Hospital to ascertain whether she had recently delivered a child. She refused to attend the examination arranged by the Health Department at the behest of the District Office; hence the Office ordered her to stay away from her village, as desired by local villagers and the Tai O Rural Committee.³⁸ As the

³⁷ Case 58 of 1955, HKRS 118-1-91.

³⁸ Case 58 of 1955, HKRS 118-1-91.

government representatives in the rural New Territories, District Offices were responsible for most affairs, and they could use their authority to solicit cooperation from other departments in resolving domestic disputes.

In contrast to the legal power allocated to District Offices, the rural committees only had informal power despite their immense influence over the local population. When a respondent failed to make himself available to a mediation conference hosted by the rural committee, it could only write in the referral letter to the District Office that the respondent had contemptuously ignored its authority.³⁹ Likewise, rural committees were averse to issuing divorce settlements. While they were willing to witness and settle separation by mutual consent, they categorically refused to grant any petition of divorce if contested. Instead, they wrote sympathetically about a woman's plight in their referral letter to the District Officer and asked for a direct solution.⁴⁰

An order by the District Office was often enough to quell marital disputes, but some cases required coordination with other government agencies. In situations

³⁹ The District Office worked exceptionally fast on this case, possibly because the Tsun (sic) Wan Rural Committee urged the District Office to reach a "quick resolution over this immoral dispute." Upon receiving the case on May 20, the District Office immediately summoned the husband accused of bigamy and spousal abandonment to appear the next day. Unlike an invitation from the R.C. to discuss marriage issues, ignoring a summons from the District Office had legal implications. There were four hearings until the case was settled on May 28, 1958, and the senior staff of the District Office handling this case settled the case in the plaintiff's favor before leaving some stern warning to the respondent over periodic payments as a part of the settlement. Case 74 of 1958, HKRS 118-1-91. On a side note, it just happened that the Chairman of Tsun Wan Rural Committee was also the acting Chairman of the HYK; hence his request received a higher priority than others.

⁴⁰ The phrasing by the Tsun Wan Rural committee chairman was that "It appears that the woman is suffering mentally (from this marriage), but we have no right to grant a divorce; hence we will refer this case to you." The senior staff at the District Office secured an irrevocable separation document from both plaintiff and the respondent, and the case was amicably settled. Case 63 of 1955, HKRS 118-1-91.

where the settlement involved child custody or welfare, or when parties claimed their cases based on a contested understanding of "Chinese laws and customs," the District Office would report to the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs (SCA) for confirmation,⁴¹ and to the Social Welfare Office for safeguarding the welfare of children.⁴² Rarely did a marriage dispute reach the apex of the vertical administrative order of the SCA or horizontally to the Social Welfare Office (SWO), but it was within the power of the District Officers to escalate the case at their discretion.

The documentary trail did not necessarily end with a settlement at the District Office. While most cases ended without further intervention by the colonial government, judgments given to involved parties such as a cooling-off period between bickering couples, or periodic maintenance payments from husbands to their wives, required occasional follow-up. In situations where money needed to change hands, the colonial government often had its staff witnesses the transactions,⁴³ but it also relied on rural committees to serve as impartial witnesses of transactions.⁴⁴ Outside of the state or the local self-governing and advisory structure, district officers could order a wage garnishment by instructing an employer to pay the wife directly from her husband's wage.⁴⁵ In short, the District Office in the 1950s was the one-stop

⁴¹ Case 11 of 1953, HKRS 118-1-91.

⁴² Case 21 of 1952; Case 35 of 1954, HKRS 118-1-91.

⁴³ In extreme cases such as case 78 of 1959, where a respondent disregarded the order of the District Office and assaulted his wife again, the district officer would require the husband to pay the District Office directly, which then forwarded the money to his wife via her rural committee or her village representative.

⁴⁴ In case 28 of 1953, the district officer recommended that either a village representative or a rural committee member be present in matters involving payment between the plaintiff and the respondent.

⁴⁵ Case 18, 23, and 27 of 1953 mentioned that the employers would give the plaintiffs their husbands' wages directly, in effect wage garnishment under the order of the District Office.

shop where disputants, particularly women in the New Territories, sought state intervention in marital disputes. As the administrative nexus in the New Territories, District Office had vast legal powers to regulate marriage and constituted the early post-war colonial marriage governance in rural Hong Kong.

By the end of the 1950s, the District Office had gradually transferred more responsibilities in mediating marriage disputes to the rural committees.⁴⁶ such as in case 73 of 1958, where the Tai O Rural Committee reported that it had initially resolved a mediation dispute; only when the disputants came back three months later was the case transferred to the District Office. However, despite a lessening role in mediating disputes, the District Office remained the legal authority in settling marriage quarrels in the New Territories, and people continued to expect the District Office to serve as the authoritative adjudicator of disputes in the 1950s.

Although the documentary trail of marriage dispute resolution by District Officers ended after 1959, and the District Officer's jurisdiction ended in 1961 under the New Territories Ordinance,⁴⁷ marriage disputes throughout the 1950s in the New Territories indicate growing popular acceptance of the colonial government and the synergy of the state with the Chinese intermediaries in governing the people. During

⁴⁶ No specific reason was given or recorded in colonial documents, but one possible explanation was that District Offices were becoming overworked with other matters such as village clearances and other rural projects. Also, there were signs of Rural Committees resolving marriages, even as late as 1962; in the Journal of the Cheung Chau Rural Committee, New Territories (1961-1964), the Cheung Chau RC resolved two family disputes in 1961, and one dispute in 1962. Granted the document did not say what kind of family disputes they were, but one of the two cases in 1961 involved a man and a woman with a different surname, which was a sign of a marriage dispute. "Collection of Papers by Dr. James Hayes regarding Land, Customs and Fung Shui in the New Territories," HKMS 178-1-20.

⁴⁷ Edwin Haydon, 1995, 1-41.

this period, plaintiffs could choose two mutually inclusive paths of conflict mediation, one informal and handled by village representatives and rural committees, and the other a formal process starting with a police file and concluding at the District Office. If the informal process ran its course without a satisfactory solution, plaintiffs could rejoin the formal structure to have their cases heard, knowing that a judgment from the District Office was attainable and impartial. At the same time, the colonial government was keen to devolve its power back to rural committees to handle marriage dispute cases, in contrast to the Chinese state across the border that was becoming more interventionist in people's marriages. The two systems worked in tandem, and the people relied on the dual-track system of village representatives, rural committees, the police, and the District Offices to resolve their differences, even when the backbone of "Chinese law and custom" relied on a contested understanding of laws of the defunct Qing Dynasty and evolving customs. They welcomed interventions outside their villages and expected the police and the District Office to be there when needed. Women plaintiffs whose interests might be impeded by their male-centric village representatives benefited the most from seeking government assistance, as they knew that an accusation at the police station or the District Office could lead to better resolution, since the government had the legal power to compel appearance, order wage garnishment, or to secure petitions of divorce that would not otherwise be available.

Marriage mediation and adjudication in urban Hong Kong

Marriage governance in postwar urban Hong Kong depended primarily on

mediation and rarely on law. Marriage regulation consisted of a similar configuration of informal mediation by Chinese organizations and official mediation by the colonial government, in addition to the court that had limited utility for couples in Chinese marriages. Replacing village representatives and rural committees were neighborhood mutual aid organizations formed by Chinese notables known as Kaifong Associations hearing residents' disputes.⁴⁸ Likewise, the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs (SCA) played a role similar to that of the District Officers of the New Territories but lacked their magisterial power. The SCA could only mediate and advise on marriage disputes, and if the couples could not reach an agreement, petitions over spousal maintenance required judicial orders from the colonial court. Although theoretically available to all, many Chinese residents of urban Hong Kong avoided the court, as most celebrated their "Chinese Modern Marriages" according to the Nationalist Civil Code,⁴⁹ and their marriage was already recognized by the colonial government.⁵⁰ Since their marriage allowed greater flexibility of divorce by mutual consent, Hong Kong courts provided no relief aside from ordering spousal and child support from reluctant husbands.⁵¹

⁴⁸ These organizations currently exist in Hong Kong.

⁴⁹ In a document submitted by the Acting Attorney-General to the Colonial Secretary on February 17, 1960, he wrote that "there are probably still more Chinese Modern Marriages contracted every year in Hong Kong than any other kinds of marriages." See "Chinese Customary Marriages: Loose Minutes," HKRS 634-1-24. This sentiment that "Chinese Modern Marriage" was still practiced in Hong Kong could also be corroborated by another letter submitted to the SCA by a writer Mr. K.S. Lo on April 26, 1961, responding to the colonial government's invitation for public comment on reforming Chinese marriages. Lo writes of Chinese Modern Marriages that "this form of marriage is widely practiced by Chinese living in urban areas of Hong Kong and Kowloon." "Chinese Customary Marriages," HKRS 634-1-21.

⁵⁰ The colonial government recognized "Chinese Modern Marriages" under *lex loci celebrationis*, as well as divorce by mutual consent in Chinese Modern Marriage.

⁵¹ These marriages are identical to legal marriages in Republican China.

The Secretariat for Chinese Affairs (SCA) had a long history of interacting with the Chinese population, including mediating marriage disputes.⁵² As it was the sole agency managing the Chinese population, other agencies of the colonial government habitually deferred to the SCA in matters involving the Chinese such as marriage customs and regulations. Likewise, Chinese urban residents preferred the SCA to settle their domestic cases, a role that the SCA took as a time-honored service for the people, a testimony of public trust, and a method of building relationships with the population.⁵³ The SCA settled marriage disputes by consensus among parties to reach an amicable settlement. Once settled, the parties drew up to three copies of the agreement, signed it on premises outside the SCA, and had two persons witness it.⁵⁴ Afterward, two of the three copies were stamped at the stamp office and given to each side in the dispute,⁵⁵ and the third copy was attached to the corresponding SCA files.⁵⁶ Additionally, although the SCA lacked the legal power to issue a summons or verdict, it could mobilize the Social Welfare Office to intervene in cases involving

⁵² One example of the SCA's long history with the Chinese population was its association with the Po Leung Kuk (PLK), an organization helping women and orphans. The PLK wrote, "Frequently, the Kuk would investigate and protect the victims, while the Secretariat would deliver sentences and determine the fate of the victims." Po Leung Kuk Museum. 2016. "Po Leung Memories – Secretary for Chinese Affairs." Facebook, September 30, 2016.

<https://www.facebook.com/poleungkukmuseum/posts/667764776707019:0>.

⁵³ The Annual Department Report of the SCA (hereafter abbreviated as ADRSCA) for 1946 has a section called "Family Welfare," which continued to appear in subsequent years. In the 1963/1964 ADRSCA, the SCA attributed its popularity partly to the fact that "the ordinary man in the street's general confidence in the SCA and the Kaifong Association has certainly shown no signs of decreasing." See ADRSCA 1946/1947, 1963/1964. Also see James Hayes, *Friends and Teachers: Hong Kong and Its People 1953-87* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), 81 n.20.

⁵⁴ Memo from City District Officer (Mong Kok) to Mediation Officer, August 8, 1973. "Legislation concerning Marriage Reform and Divorce," HKRS 439-3-1.

⁵⁵ A stamp office differs from a postal office, and a government revenue stamp officiates a document.

⁵⁶ Letter from the Director of Home Affairs to the Attorney General, October 9, 1973. "Chinese Marriage: general correspondence concerning... [sic]," HKRS 439-3-2.

children's welfare.⁵⁷ It was uncommon for Chinese residents to ignore the SCA since many depended on the SCA's goodwill to secure help from the government.⁵⁸

As in the New Territories, the colonial government relied heavily on informal Chinese intermediaries to help settle marital disputes.⁵⁹ This was true mainly since the SCA depended not on British Law or the colonial judiciary but on officers who were experienced in life and knowledgeable about Chinese marriage customs. Although staff in the Traditional Section of the SCA had an intricate understanding of "Chinese Law and Custom,"⁶⁰ the sheer number of cases meant that the SCA needed Kaifong Associations to relieve the burden starting in 1958.⁶¹ The colonial government cultivated these associations by deputizing them to provide welfare and serve as intermediaries between the government and the people.⁶² The dyad structure

⁵⁷ ADRSCA, 1954/1955, paragraph 72.

⁵⁸ A former SCA head, Denis Bray, wrote that the SCA "was the place to which ordinary people went if they sought any form of assistance from the remote government." By the time Denis Bray became the chief official in charge of the Chinese population in Hong Kong, the SCA had been renamed the Secretariat for Home Affairs (SHA). Denis Bray, *Hong Kong Metamorphosis*, 37.

⁵⁹ Outsourcing dispute mediation had a long history in colonial Hong Kong. On the relationship between the Po Leung Kuk and the SCA before WWII, see Angelina S. Chin, *Bound to Emancipate: Working Women and Urban Citizenship in Early Twentieth-Century China and Hong Kong* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012). Other Chinese agencies included the Tung Hwa Hospital and the Man Mo Temple to resolve civil disputes among Chinese residents. See Elizabeth Sinn, *Power and Charity: a Chinese Merchant Elite in Colonial Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ The head of the Traditional Section, Mr. Lai Ko-nin, was renowned for his knowledge of Chinese customs among the SCA/SHA/HAD. Colonial officials in the SHA specifically asked him to provide training to junior staff and said that problematic cases should be referred to him at the SHA headquarters. See memo from City District Officer (Eastern) to Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs, April 18, 1969, and the SHA Department Circular 3/69, August 19, 1969. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1. He was also cited as the Mediation Officer of the SCA in the bulletin of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. "College Reports," *Bulletin of the Chinese University Hong Kong* 3, no.9 (1967): 6, accessed July 15, 2022, https://www.iso.cuhk.edu.hk/images/publication/archive/bulletin/1967v3_09/html5/4/#zoom=z.

⁶¹ Memo from ASHA to all City District Officers, March 18, 1969. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1.

⁶² James Hayes, *Friends and Teachers: Hong Kong and Its People 1953-87* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), 90-91.

of marriage dispute resolution functioned when the SCA initially sent liaison officers to Kaifong Associations and gradually transferred cases and responsibilities to them.⁶³ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, mediation by thirteen Kaifong Associations relieved the colonial government of approximately half of the transferred cases from the SCA (See Table 6.1).⁶⁴

Table 6.1 Selected data on family dispute cases heard

Fiscal Year	Case handled by SCA	Case handled by Kaifong Associations	Source
1946/1947	781	N/A	65
1947/1948	1,355		
1948/1949	1,293		
1949/1950	1,521		
1950/1951	1,630		
1951/1952	1,942		
1952/1953	2,105		
1953/1954	1,658		
1954/1955	2,205		66
1955/1956	1,700+		67
1956/1957	N/A		68
1957/1958	1,849 + 1,743(to be transferred to Kaifong Associations)		
1958/1959	100s per month		69
1959/1960	592	1,626	70
1960/1961		2,461	71
1961/1962		2,811	72
1962/1963		2,840	73

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ ADRSCA often gave the total number of cases the SCA and local Kaifong Associations heard. Specific quarterly numbers are available for three years from 1962 to 1964 in "Marriage: Family Disputes," HKRS 70-1-168.

⁶⁵ ADRSCA 1953-1954, paragraph 74.

⁶⁶ ADRSCA 1954-1955, paragraph 85.

⁶⁷ ADRSCA 1955-1956.

⁶⁸ According to ADRSCA 1957-1958, the 1,743 cases were registered in February/March of 1958, and the SCA was deciding which Kaifong Associations could help with mediating cases.

⁶⁹ ADRSCA 1958-1959 mentions that on average 100 cases were heard per month, but each month there were 200 new cases awaiting advice from the SCA.

⁷⁰ ADRSCA, 1959-1960, paragraph 22.

⁷¹ ADRSCA, 1960-1961, paragraph 25.

⁷² ADRSCA, 1961-1962, paragraph 24.

⁷³ ADRSCA, 1962-1963, paragraph 23. While the ADRSCA only gave the total number, there were also press releases that give indications that the Kaifong had taken most of the work. From October to

1963/1964	3,370		74
1964/1965	3,001		75
1965/1966	3,548		
1966/1967	2,419	1,702	76
1967/1968	2,982	1,234	77
1968/1969	4421		78

Scant records about the mediation of marriage disputes by Kaifong

Associations survive to the present. However, documentary fragments from the Mongkok Kaifong Association from 1959 to 1963 provide an example of the early years of state-sponsored informal mediation. As in the SCA, mediation at the Mongkok Kaifong Association used no law, focused on reconciliation, and discouraged separation. Mediation occurred weekly on Tuesdays from 2 pm to 4 pm, and there were six members on the family dispute arbitration board in 1959-1960, later expanded to fourteen members in 1962-1963. Although documents mentioned no specific cases, the Mongkok Kaifong leadership noted that most cases involved women complaining about lack of spousal maintenance or physically abuse by their husbands. When necessary, the Kaifong Association followed up with home visits.⁷⁹

Like the lack of records from various Kaifong Associations, the SCA provided

December 1962, the SCA resolved 357 cases, while Kaifong Associations handled 494 cases. Likewise, from January to March of 1963, the SCA resolved 263 cases and the Kaifong Associations mediated 411 cases. "Marriage: Family Disputes," HKRS 70-1-168.

⁷⁴ ADRSCA, 1963-1964, paragraph 22. Just as the number with 1962/1963, a press release by the SCA demonstrated that from the second quarter of 1963, the SCA resolved 342 family disputes and the Kaifong Associations 527 cases; in the third quarter, SCA heard 396 cases and the Kaifong Associations 600 cases. In the fourth quarter, the SCA handled 345 cases, and Kaifong Associations resolved 551 cases. In the first quarter of 1964, SCA received 609 cases, and more than half were transferred to local Kaifong Associations to handle. "Marriage: Family Disputes," HKRS 70-1-168.

⁷⁵ 928 cases out of the SCA handled cases were transferred to Kaifong Associations. ADRSCA, 1964-1966, paragraph 38.

⁷⁶ ADRSCA, 1966-1967, paragraph 51.

⁷⁷ ADRSCA, 1967-1968, paragraph 51.

⁷⁸ "G.I.S Press: Marriage: Family Disputes/Divorces," HKRS 70-7-17-1.

⁷⁹ "City and New Territories Administration: General Correspondence Files," HKRS 570-1-4 (116).

few details aside from the numbers of cases (See Table 6.1), causes for disputes, and genders of complainants. Again, insufficient spousal maintenance from husbands was the primary cause that contributed to approximately 90% of cases, with the remainder over abuse, desertion, adultery, and quarrels over children.⁸⁰ Most cases, more than 85%, were from women. Also, the combination of the Kaifong – SCA mediation mechanism had an impressive success rate. The SCA generally referred to the court for possible legal remedies only 3% to 11% of total cases. (See Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: SCA Data on types and causes of disputes and gender of complainants⁸¹

Time	Causes	Gender	Percentage of cases advised to go to court
Fiscal Year (FY) 1960/1961	50% insufficient maintenance 33% cruelty 17% adultery, quarrels over mother-in-law and children	80% women 10% men 10% joint complaints	N/A, but 80% settled amicably
FY 1961/1962	70% maintenance	92% women	1%
October - December 1962	25% cruelty 5% desertion	4% men 4% jointly	4%
January - March 1963	90% maintenance 10% assault, cruelty, desertion, adultery	92% women 6% men 2% jointly	2%
April – June 1963		91% women 5% men 4% jointly	3%
July – September 1963		89% women 6% men 5% jointly	4%
October – December 1963		94% women 4% men 2% jointly	4%
January - March 1964	90% maintenance	91% women	N/A
April - June 1964		90% women	4%
July - September 1964		N/A	4% advised to court 2% outstanding cases
October - December		89% women	5% advised to court

⁸⁰ "Marriage: Family Disputes," HKRS 70-1-168.

⁸¹ "Marriage: Family Disputes," HKRS 70-1-168; ADRSCA 1960-1961, 1961-1962, 1966-1967, and 1967-1968.

1964			2% outstanding
January - March 1965	Mostly maintenance	91% women	5% advised to court 2% outstanding
FY 1966/1967	85% maintenance	86% women 9% men 5% jointly	10% advised to court
FY 1967/1968	Mostly maintenance	N/A	11% advised to court

The ratio of women as primary complainants and recorded causes for disputes indicates that the Kaifong Association - SCA dyad was an institution for women to voice their discontent against their husbands. While the colonial government did not explain why men often avoided the use of the Kaifong Association – SCA dyad, the primary reason was that men would not ask for spousal maintenance, which constituted the majority of mediated cases. Low rates of unresolvable cases throughout the 1950s and 1960s also signify the effectiveness of governing people's marriages without the court.

While the dyad structure of Kaifong Associations and the SCA was successful in resolving marriage disputes from 1958 to the mid-1960s, signs of unraveling appeared in the late 1960s. Although Kaifong Associations had taken over approximately half of the cases, an assessment of their effectiveness in 1969 showed unevenness. Some remained excellent in mediating marriage disputes, while others delegated mediation to whoever was on duty, often a clerk without lived experience or understanding of the difficulties of married life. Changing functions of Kaifong Associations from providing welfare to fostering political support for the government after the 1967 riots, as well as a gradual decline in respect for community elders,

made young people less likely to come to Kaifong Associations.⁸² Subsequently, when people sought a respected neutral mediator, junior staff at their local Kaifong Association could not fill that role, and people turned to the SHA for what they perceived as a better hearing.⁸³ Furthermore, there were questions among colonial bureaucrats on whether Kaifong Associations should continue to hear family disputes,⁸⁴ and the SHA later decided in August 1969 that it would continue referring cases only when the recipient Kaifong Associations were willing to help, while most cases would be resolved within the SHA.⁸⁵ With that, the informal component of the dyad was no more, and Kaifong Associations exited the scene in colonial marriage governance.

The formal mediation of Chinese marriages by the SCA was also experiencing seismic shifts between the late 1960s and the early 1970s. In response to the 1967 leftist riots, one of many policies developed by the colonial government was the introduction of City District Offices that emulated the District Offices in the New Territories to foster a closer relationship between the government and the people.⁸⁶ The expanded bureaucracy of the SCA was a mixed blessing for marriage governance.⁸⁷ Although additional manpower allowed the government to reconsider and possibly expand its role in providing formal marriage mediations, the creation of

⁸² Memo from CDO (Eastern) to ASHA, April 18, 1969. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1.

⁸³ Memo from ASHA to CDOs, March 18, 1969. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1.

⁸⁴ Memo from ASHA to CDOs, March 18, 1969. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1.

⁸⁵ Secretariat for Home Affairs Department Circular 3/69, August 19, 1969. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1.

⁸⁶ John M. Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong*, Critical Issues in History (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 159.

⁸⁷ James Hayes, *Friends and Teachers: Hong Kong and Its People 1953-87*, 196.

new City District Offices brought the government a crushing load of family disputes.⁸⁸ While it was a tradition for the SHA to serve the people by hearing cases, City District Offices had newly minted officers who lacked experience in resolving cases of domestic discord, unlike established officers in the New Territories. Furthermore, there had been persistent complaints within SHA that mediation took up sizable portion of working hours, and officers' time could be better spent on administration, with one CDO writing that "listening to quarreling couples is a tedious and time-consuming business."⁸⁹ As a result of reassessments in the late 1960s and early 1970s, stopgap measures within the SHA focused on transferring complex cases to the Mediation Office at the SHA Headquarters,⁹⁰ and establishing family arbitration panels in individual City District Offices that provided a low-rank staff member as secretary to give an aura of formality despite their extralegal operation.⁹¹

The expansion of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) that branched off

⁸⁸ There are several possible reasons why there were crushing number of cases arrived in the City District Offices. First was the expansion of government services in local areas, which meant cases that would have been heard by the SHA Headquarter on the Hong Kong Island were diverted to the local CDOs. Second was that people were more likely to seek the state's attention if help was nearby. Memo from CDO Sham Shui Po on March 27, 1969, reported that there were 8 case in December 1968, and 11 cases each in January and December 1969. Another memo from CDO Yau Ma Tei on April 3, 1969, reported 10 cases in January 1969, 3 cases in February, and 26 cases in March of the same year. An outlier was in CDO (Western), where the district officer on April 17, 1969, reported 64 family cases in January 1969, 53 in February, and 69 cases in March 1969. There was no observable trend of increases. In these memos, CDOs noted how many cases were handled by their local liaison officers. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1.

⁸⁹ This was one reason the SCA offloaded marriage dispute mediation to the Kaifong Associations in the late 1950s. Memo from CDO (Eastern) to ASHA, April 18, 1969. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1.

⁹⁰ Secretariat for Home Affairs Department Circular 3/69, August 19, 1969. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1.

⁹¹ Memo from City District Commissioner to City District Officers in Kowloon, October 6, 1973. "Family Cases (Policy)," HKRS 570-3-1.

from the SCA gradually replaced the “formal” mediation by the SHA between late 1960s to the mid 1970s.⁹² As the SWD employed professional social workers instead of administrative and executive officers in the SHA, there was consensus that the SWD would gradually take responsibility for handling marriage disputes. However, the SWD could not handle all cases at once,⁹³ and was perceived by Chinese residents as lacking authority when witnessing agreements of separation by mutual consent and facilitating maintenance payments.⁹⁴ Therefore, from 1969 to 1975, the SHA continued to mediate marriage disputes but steadily sent cases to the SWD. In April 1975, the renamed Home Affairs Department (HAD) reached the end of its involvement in mediating family disputes by directing all marriage disputes to the SWD, except in cases of the dissolution of unregistered customary marriages by mutual consent, which were dealt with by the Mediation Office of the HAD.⁹⁵ Although irreconcilable cases were transferred back to the Mediation Office for the execution of divorce,⁹⁶ by the mid-1970s, Chinese marriages in urban Hong Kong were finally fully controllable by British colonial institutions.

Mediation of marriage disputes in urban Hong Kong demonstrated a peculiar arrangement wherein the state governed without relying on legal codes. Apart from

⁹² Renaming of the Social Welfare Office as the Social Welfare Department happened in 1958. Undated document on family case work, “Marriage Reform Ordinance,” HKRS 570-3-14.

⁹³ Memo from Director of Social Welfare to Secretary for Home Affairs, December 29, 1969, “Family Cases (Policy),” HKRS 570-3-1.

⁹⁴ This means an official with authority respected by both disputants; a social worker from the SWD could hardly inspire a sense of authority, in contrast to the all-powerful SHA officials in each district.

⁹⁵ With the passage of the Marriage Reform Ordinance, divorce for cause of registered and validated Chinese customary marriages could be resolved by the court, and divorce by mutual consent could be processed by the mediation office of the HAD.

⁹⁶ “Broken marriages on the increase,” *South China Morning Post*, July 2, 1975.

"Registry Marriage," which was fully dissolvable by the colonial judiciary, Chinese marriages in urban Hong Kong depended on the dyad structure of informal and formal mediators. As with the informal-formal mediation structure in the New Territories, the SCA waited for disputants to seek it out and relied on inhabitants' trust in the government as impartial mediators. The emphasis on mediation and reliance on informal intermediaries suggests that a government could gradually expand its reach into everyday life as people became accustomed to and voluntarily accepted state authority.

Adjudication of Spousal Maintenance Lawsuits

Aside from informal mediation by Chinese intermediaries and official mediation by the SCA, the colonial judiciary system was available for women to file for spousal maintenance or child support under the Separation and Maintenance Orders Ordinance, while men used the same law for separation.⁹⁷ Although the Kaifong Association – SCA dyad structure successfully mediated more than 90% of disputes, some were irreconcilable when husbands adamantly refused to pay or when wives asked for amounts beyond their husbands' capacity. In such cases, the SCA advised disputing parties to seek judgments from the court, and newspapers from 1946 to the early 1970s revealed many instances of lawsuits over maintenance after

⁹⁷ Spousal maintenance applied to wives who lived separately but remained legally married. Newspapers make no distinction between husbands or ex-husbands and used the term "husband" (丈夫). Also, the Separation and Maintenance Orders Ordinance allowed women to claim maintenance under Article 3(e) to secure financial support, while husbands could apply for a magistrate order if their wives were habitual drunkards or persistently cruel to their children, under Article 4. In reality, there were two factors that stopped husbands from suing in court under this clause: husbands were primary breadwinners at this time, and they could just live separately from their undutiful wives.

failed mediation by the SCA.⁹⁸ Magistrate courts on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon allowed litigants to bring forward their cases. The introduction of District Courts in 1953 expanded access to legal adjudication.⁹⁹ Adjudication over maintenance was consistent and well-documented. At the same time, printed legal proceedings and testimonies in newspaper articles revealed that the colonial judiciary was taking account of two sets of laws, one British and another Chinese. Tasked to uphold British laws, the court also had to consider “Chinese Law and Custom” in fact-finding to ascertain whether a woman was worthy of spousal support.

In lawsuits over spousal maintenance in postwar Hong Kong, there were several consistent trends and outcomes throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.¹⁰⁰ First, women were predominantly petitioners and men defendants. Second, they sued for a court order to establish new spousal maintenance,¹⁰¹ increase existing

⁹⁸ Examples of prior SCA involvement include “Liang zong yiqi an nufang huo shengsu” [Women won two abandonment cases], *Kung Sheung Daily News* (hereafter abbreviated as *KSDN*), August 13, 1946; “Suo shanyang fei jiufen fufu dangjie dajia” [A couple fought on the street in their dispute over spousal maintenance], *KSDN*, February 25, 1949; “Yi zong qingsong mifan guansi” [A simple maintenance case], *KSDN*, August 21, 1954.

⁹⁹ Michael Ng, Albert Chen, and Christopher Munn, “Legal System and Administration of Justice in Colonial Hong Kong,” in *Hong Kong History: New Perspectives*, ed. Wang Gangwu (Hong Kong: Joint Pub. (H.K.) Co., 2016).

¹⁰⁰ Newspaper records of marital disputes over spousal maintenance after the early 1970s were not as detailed as before, and many articles discussing spousal maintenance concerned celebrities rather than ordinary people.

¹⁰¹ Examples include “Huang Enrong bei kong an panjue” [The verdict on Huang Enrong], *KSDN*, January 28, 1951. In the case of Huang, an accountant, the court found him guilty of physically abusing his wife and fined him 100 HKD, as well as ordering him to pay 1,040 HKD per month to his wife for her and their children's maintenance. In another case, “Fuqi shi he ji” [Disharmony between a couple], *Kung Sheung Evening News* (hereafter abbreviated as *KSEN*), July 9, 1957, the court awarded a wife with four minor children 850 HKD per month, out of her husband's monthly wage of 1350 HKD.

maintenance,¹⁰² or enforce non-payment.¹⁰³ The awardable maintenance was subjected to a statutory maximum, which was raised in 1948 from thirty HKD per week for the wife to two hundred and fifty HKD per week, as well as from ten HKD to thirty HKD per week per child.¹⁰⁴ Third, the court had generally awarded approximately half of husbands' incomes to their wives, and many lawsuits concerned contested or hidden income.¹⁰⁵ The court required parties to prove their income, but a loophole existed if the husband engaged in irregular day labor and had no assets worthy of sequestration. When a husband was proven destitute or unemployed, the court would temporarily decrease the maintenance payable to his wife or children,¹⁰⁶ or award a symbolic one HKD per month until his circumstances

¹⁰² See, for example, "Qizi shanyang fei buzu zai su zhu fating" [A wife went to court again for petitioning increase in spousal maintenance], *KSEN*, February 20, 1948. In this case, the judge denied her petition, and the maintenance remained at 40 HKD per month. In another case, a wife petitioned the court to raise the awarded spousal maintenance because she heard that her husband received a raise from 200 HKD to 800 HKD per month. The court mandated a maintenance order of 320 HKD per month, even when the raise was after the couple had separated and he claimed to have incurred an \$8,000 debt. "Faguan pan an shuo huanzhai ye yao yang qi" [The judge ruled that the debtor must also provide spousal maintenance], *WKYP*, August 18, 1955.

¹⁰³ Examples include "Jin chen yizong zhui tao shanyangfei an" [A lawsuit over non-payment of spousal maintenance], *KSEN*, October 29, 1954. In another case, a court initially awarded the wife 130 HKD per month, but the husband did not pay her. She came back to the court, which raised her monthly spousal maintenance to 250 HKD per month, but she remained unsatisfied and threatened to abandon her four children on the street outside the courthouse. The husband decided to appease her by raising the spousal maintenance and child support to 300 HKD per month. "Mifan guansi jiating beiju" [A maintenance lawsuit as a domestic tragedy], *KSDN*, June 14, 1956.

¹⁰⁴ "Lihun zhe zhuyi shanyangfei tigao" [Pay attention to increases in spousal maintenance if contemplating divorce], *KSEN*, July 28, 1948. The actual statute is in Article 5 of the Separation and Maintenance Orders Ordinance, 1948 edition.

¹⁰⁵ "Faguan pan an shuo huanzhai ye yao yang qi"; In another example, a husband claimed that he only made 120 HKD per month, while his separated wife alleged that he made on average 500 to 600 HKD per month but was hiding his income to support another woman. The court awarded the wife maintenance of 100 HKD per month. "San ge bo qinglang yao fu shanyangfei" [Three heartless husbands must pay spousal maintenance], *WKYP*, February 8, 1961.

¹⁰⁶ "Chenzhishen yi shiye wu ru xi wei liyou" [Chen Zhishen cited unemployment as a reason], *WKYP*, September 30, 1957.

improved.¹⁰⁷ Fourth, if judges found women lacking in wifely virtue, they would receive no spousal maintenance.¹⁰⁸ Last, the court could order new maintenance orders or increases, or compel defendants to pay arrears of maintenance. With petitioner approval, the court could also sentence defendants to debtors' prison in cases of non-payment.¹⁰⁹ Still, the threat of imprisonment or sequestration of business assets often induced husbands to present the required sum immediately, such as in a 1959 lawsuit where the husband claimed that he had no money, but immediately paid the full 750 HKD in arrears when the judge threatened to close down his business.¹¹⁰ The court could order bailiffs to search the defendant's person for money when necessary.¹¹¹ The press noted that actual incarceration in debtors' prison was rare.¹¹²

Although the court had jurisdiction over spousal maintenance in all forms of

¹⁰⁷ "Mei yue yiyuan shanyangfei" [One HKD per month of spousal maintenance], *Ta Kung Pao* (hereafter abbreviated as *TKP*), June 29, 1960; "Wu nu yinan shenqing lihun huozhun" [Five women and a man received permission to divorce], *KSDN*, January 30, 1971. In this article, three women received the symbolic spousal maintenance of one HKD per month.

¹⁰⁸ "Zhangfu ruyu qi bu tanjian" [A wife refused to visit after her husband's imprisonment (unrelated to arrears in spousal maintenance)], *WKYP*, November 11, 1960. In another case in December 1960, the judge denied spousal maintenance to a petitioner because she ran away from home and earned more than her husband. "Zhinü piao kong fa shi" [A female weaver sues a hair stylist], *WKYP*, December 24, 1960.

¹⁰⁹ Debtor prison is still extant for rare cases in Hong Kong. See Article 68 of the Magistrate Ordinance of Hong Kong, 2021 edition.

¹¹⁰ "Jiqian shanyang fei burong dilai" [Arrears in spousal maintenance are not forgiven], *WKYP*, January 7, 1959. In another case where the judge threatened imprisonment, the husband who originally claimed to be unable to pay 75 HKD immediately paid in court. "Zhang Zhongxian laijiao shanyangfei" [Zhang Zhongxian finally pays spousal maintenance], *WKYP*, May 20, 1961. A few months later, the newspaper reported that another man who had the money to pay was compelled to do so after his wife petitioned the judge to sentence him to imprisonment. "Nanzi qian qi mifan wen zuolao ji shi jing" [A husband who owes his wife spousal maintenance feared imprisonment], *WKYP*, September 2, 1961.

¹¹¹ The court physically searched a husband and found five HKD on his person and gave that to his wife, to whom he owed 110 HKD. "Wang ya wu jiqian shanyangfei" [Wang Yawu recurrently owed spousal maintenance], *WKYP*, January 16, 1966.

¹¹² The newspaper article said: "It was extremely rare for people to go to prison due to spousal maintenance, and the Kowloon Magistracy added two cases of that yesterday." "Jidu shao you zhi mifan guansi" [Extremely rare lawsuits over spousal maintenance], *WKYP*, February 27, 1959.

marriages in Hong Kong, judges referred to "Chinese Law and Custom" to define "marriage" and "married women" when the status of the women as wives or concubines was unclear. Since the Separation and Maintenance Orders Ordinance only granted protection to married women and children,¹¹³ outcomes of lawsuits depended on whether the court determined women to be legitimate wives, concubines, or mistresses.¹¹⁴ When petitioners claimed they were legally married under "Chinese Law and Custom," defendants would argue that the petitioners were mistresses and that a formal marriage ceremony had not occurred,¹¹⁵ and judges would invite expert witnesses of varying legal backgrounds for fact-finding on the "Three Letters and Six Ceremonies" of Chinese customary marriages.¹¹⁶ One notable example was a lawsuit on spousal maintenance in 1959 involving a famous Cantonese actor. The court summoned the Assistant Secretary for Chinese Affairs to testify whether serving tea to a man's parents was tantamount to a formal marriage

¹¹³ According to Article 2a of the Separation and Maintenance Orders Ordinance, 1948 edition, only the "Kit-fat" or the "Tin-Fong" wife was applicable. A "Kit-fat" wife is the first wife, and the Tin-Fong wife is a woman whom the husband married after the Kit-Fat wife has died or, rarely, divorced. Concubines were not granted protection and could not claim spousal maintenance until the Marriage Reform Ordinance in 1971 and the subsequent amendment of the Separation and Maintenance Orders Ordinance. See Leonard Pegg, "Chinese Marriage, Concubinage and Divorce in Contemporary Hong Kong," *Hong Kong Law Journal* 5 (1975): 4-38.

¹¹⁴ "Hefa de hunyin xu san dian zhengming" [Three methods to prove a legitimate marriage], *WKYP*, March 9, 1959. In this case, the court denied spousal maintenance to the woman but awarded 90 HKD per month to her two children.

¹¹⁵ "Mifan guansi he duo!" [So many lawsuits over spousal maintenance!], *KSEN*, April 18, 1958.

¹¹⁶ The court invited an expert on Chinese law, Mr. Chan, to explain the three letters and six rites in Chinese customary marriages. "Nanzi ting shang bu ren qi" [A man refused to recognize his wife in court], *KSEN*, December 15, 1954. In another case in November 1959, Kao Chun-Hsiang, a judge and a lawyer who practiced in Republican China, was invited by the petitioner's lawyer to testify. He claimed that a marriage is legal if the couple has completed rites such as worshipping the ancestors and serving tea to parents and relatives and if two witnesses are present. Kao is referring to the Nationalist Civil Code and not the "Chinese Law and Custom" stemming from the Qing Code, as the Qing Code does not require witnesses. "Huanglijuan piao kong zhang ying suo shanyangfei an" [A spousal maintenance lawsuit between Huang Lijuan and Cheung Ying], *WKYP*, November 4, 1959.

ceremony. With experience handling more than eight thousand marriage disputes, the ASCA Paul K.C. Tsui answered negatively.¹¹⁷ Subsequently, the court deemed the petitioner ineligible for spousal maintenance.¹¹⁸ The reliance on expert witnesses of "Chinese Law and Custom" revealed a peculiarity where rulings were based on established British law and Chinese legal codes and customs, even when the colonial court was tasked to maintain the Queen's peace over her Chinese subjects.

The inclusion of "Chinese Modern Marriage" based on the Nationalist Civil Code complicated marriage governance in urban areas. Unlike "Chinese Law and Custom," enshrined in the colony by Charles Elliot's proclamation in 1841, the Nationalist Civil Code had no such protected status. The result was that the government *de facto* recognized "Chinese Modern Marriages" in Hong Kong but without a legal resolution mechanism except for mandating spousal maintenance and child support.¹¹⁹

Nonetheless, the combination of Kaifong Associations and the SCA as mediators enabled people to separate from unhappy marriages by mutual consent and left only the most intractable cases of spousal maintenance and child support to the colonial court. The court operated according to British legal statutes to award maintenance and compel husbands' payments. Still, judges had to account for

¹¹⁷ While the newspaper did not specify how many years Paul K.C. Tsui had been in government service, Paul K.C. Tsui's autobiography notes that he became the District Officer, South, in 1950-1951. See Paul K.C. Tsui, *My Life and My Encounter*, (Vancouver, 1990) part 19.

¹¹⁸ Although the judge ruled that he had no power to mandate spousal maintenance, he admonished the husband to support their children. "Zhen cha bingfei hefa jiehun yishi" [Serving tea is not a legal marriage ceremony], *KSDN*, January 9, 1959.

¹¹⁹ Regarding the ability to receive spousal maintenance, there was no distinction between a woman who was legally separated from her husband, or a woman legally divorced from her husband.

"Chinese Law and Custom" in their considerations, which was an additional abnormality when a court referred to a British set and a Chinese set of law. Overall, the combination of mediation and adjudication in Hong Kong enabled the government to regulate four types of recognized marriages in the colony, as well as to provide avenues for Chinese residents in Hong Kong to resolve their marriage disputes informally, formally, or legally in courts.

International Verification Requests and “Foreign Marriages”

Marriage governance also involved verifying marital status, but Chinese customary marriages were hard to confirm as they were unregistered and had no paper trail. The problem intensified when inhabitants of Hong Kong married according to "Chinese Law and Custom" before emigrating overseas,¹²⁰ and requests to verify men's marital status came from foreign entities such as consulates and lawyers. Understandably, foreign entities were less knowledgeable about wedding rites and marriage practices in the New Territories than bureaucrats in Hong Kong, and letters exchanged between Europe and Hong Kong reveal the investigative arm of colonial marriage regulators. The Secretariat for Chinese Affairs handled legal questions and clarified Chinese marriage customs, while District Officers ascertained the marital status of the inquired subject to prevent bigamy or marriage fraud.¹²¹

¹²⁰ While there are not systemic data on how international marriage by New Territories men who moved overseas influenced the local marriage market in Hong Kong, there is an anecdotal story by Valerie Garrett (1980) discussing a Hakka wedding in Hong Kong, in which the groom returned to Sai Kung to find a bride arranged by matchmaker. Valerie Garrett, "A Hakka Wedding in Hong Kong, May 1979," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20 (1980): 125–28.

¹²¹ "Registration of Marriage: Application for Assistance in the...," HKRS 1075-4-256. The archival file recorded government correspondence between 1963 to 1968 by the District Officer, Taipo regarding marriage status verification.

Aside from verification requests over potential bigamy from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands,¹²² colonial marriage governance was also influenced by China, as the exodus of migrants from the PRC created confusion in settling marriage disputes in the colony. While the colonial government recognized the Marriage Law of the PRC as valid and marriages contracted in the PRC as legitimate foreign marriages, the sheer number of refugees and lack of paperwork at times made determining marital status difficult.

In 1956, the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs created a guide for government agencies on indicators of valid Chinese marriages in Hong Kong. The issue of which legal code governed a marriage was necessary because a Chinese customary marriage was potentially polygynous and without documents. Stemming from the need to ascertain the marital status of Chinese police officers who claimed marriage according to “Chinese Law and Custom,”¹²³ this guide later became foundational when the government responded to international verification requests, of which there were many as New Territories men who emigrated and married women abroad.¹²⁴ The guide noted specific hallmarks of customary marriages such as the employment of a matchmaker, exchange of horoscopes, transportation of the bride, a wedding feast, and witnesses of the wedding who were often family members of the groom.

¹²² Cheung, Siu-Keung, *Guanzhi xinjie: Di Quan, Fu Quan Yu Zhu Quan*, (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book (Hong Kong), 2016), 72-73. While there was no mention of why the Netherlands was exceptionally popular, Cheung mentioned that the lack of economic opportunities in the New Territories pushed many villagers to work as chefs in Chinese restaurants in Europe, and that there were existing networks of New Territories villagers already in Holland and the UK.

¹²³ Minute #1 from SCA to the Colonial Secretary, January 5, 1956. “Proof of Chinese Customary Marriage by Government Officers,” HKRS 163-1-2964.

¹²⁴ Minute #9, March 4, 1968. “Chinese Customary Marriage,” HKRS 634-1-23.

For marriages concluded according to the Marriage Law of the PRC, the government would demand a marriage certificate by a PRC government as proof.¹²⁵

The colonial government fielded requests for verification of marital status from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands to enable wives to join their husbands, or to allow single men abroad to marry women overseas.¹²⁶ Trouble began when New Territories villagers sworn to be married when first arriving in Europe to benefit from income-tax allowance,¹²⁷ and later wanted to either bring women from Hong Kong as wives or marry local women in the U.K. or the Netherlands. While bringing one's wife to Europe necessitated verification for immigration purposes,¹²⁸ the latter situation led to concerns about potential bigamy and its legal consequences in the courts.¹²⁹ Since most verification requests were about New Territories villagers, the Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong appointed the SCA as the primary responsible government agency in the mid-1950s.¹³⁰ As cases accumulated, requiring

¹²⁵ Minute #1 from SCA to the Colonial Secretary, January 5, 1956. "Proof of Chinese Customary Marriage by Government Officers," HKRS 163-1-2964.

¹²⁶ Cheung, Siu-Keung, *Guanzhi xinjie: Di Quan, Fu Quan Yu Zhu Quan*, (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book (Hong Kong), 2016), 72. Also, in a memo sent from the Director of Immigration to the Colonial Secretary dated June 22, 1965, about a meeting between the HYK and the Director of Immigration, the Director of Immigration wrote that HYK members were exclusively interested in knowing about passports and emigration to Britain, but not about illegal immigrants or entry policy that directly affected the New Territories. "Immigration Liaison with Kaifong Associations," HKRS 41-2-527.

¹²⁷ Minute #6, September 29, 1965. "Registration of Marriage: Application for Assistance in the...," HKRS 1075-4-256.

¹²⁸ Memo from DO Tai Po to Registrar-General reveals that a marriage certificate is needed before the husband in the U.K. can apply for his wife to join him. October 16, 1968. "Registration of Marriage: Application for Assistance in the...," HKRS 1075-4-256.

¹²⁹ Memo from DCNT to SCA, July 3, 1964. "Chinese Customary Marriage," HKRS 634-1-22.

¹³⁰ The Colonial Secretary was the second most senior member of the Administration. Also, this rule of routing all inquiries to SCA was not absolute; there is a letter dated August 28, 1964, from a Reverend S.Y. Lee to the DCNT J.T. Wakefield asking a government authority to write to the court in London about Chinese customary marriage. However, S.Y. Lee had previously served as a pastor in Hong Kong and had only arrived in London recently. Hence it is likely that he knew the ways of the New Territories. "Chinese Customary Marriage," HKRS 634-1-22.

inconvenient long-distance travel between New Territories villages and Hong Kong Island, where the SCA Headquarters was located, in 1964 the SCA asked the New Territories Administration to take care of the practical component of verifying marital status. Under the new arrangement, District Officers consulted Village Representatives on local marriage customs and secured testimony from parties of interest and any witnesses to the wedding.¹³¹

The whole investigative arm of the colonial marriage regulatory regime is visible in response to inquiries from abroad, such as requests to verify men's marital status from the Dutch Consulate or a law firm in Amsterdam.¹³² Often, the first step was a search at office of the Registrar-General to ascertain that the marriage in doubt was not a "Registry Marriage,"¹³³ for the colonial government would have a record if a "Registry Marriage" conforming to British law had occurred. The next agency involved was the SCA, which would try to locate any records and transfer the case to a District Officer if none was found.¹³⁴ The SCA also liaised with international entities after District Officers reported their findings back to it. Once assigned by the

¹³¹ Letter from SCA to DCNT, June 18, 1964. "Chinese Customary Marriage," HKRS 634-1-22.

¹³² Consul-in-Charge Dr. M.J. Meijer's letter to the SCA, September 8, 1965. "Registration of Marriage: Application for Assistance in the...", HKRS 1075-4-256. Dr. M.J. Meijer (Marinus Johan Meijer) was a sinologist who later published *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People's Republic*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University, 1971). On Dr. M.J. Meijer's career in the Dutch Foreign Service, see Barend ter Haar, "Chinese Studies in the Netherlands," in *Between the Dutch East Indies and Philology (1919–1974)* (Brill, 2014), 91-93.

¹³³ The letter between the Consul-in-Charge to the SCA mentioned that the Registrar-General was unable to provide conclusive prove. September 8, 1965 "Registration of Marriage: Application for Assistance in the...", HKRS 1075-4-256; Attachment from the Marriage Registry, November 24, 1965. "Certification of Marriage," HKRS 1075-4-257. Both were originally from the records of the District Office, Tai Po.

¹³⁴ Minute #5, September 1965. "Registration of Marriage: Application for Assistance in the...", HKRS 1075-4-256.

SCA, the District Officer corralled related parties to give testimony, such as in a routine case concerning a Mr. Lee residing in the Netherlands in 1965. A liaison officer from the District Office, Tai Po, went to Lee's village and secured written assurances from the V.R. and other villagers that Lee had never been married.¹³⁵ Subsequently, the SCA verified his unmarried status to the Dutch consulate. In other verification requests, District Offices used a similar procedure of questioning the V.R., villagers, and witnesses to ascertain proper adherence to Chinese customary wedding rites.¹³⁶ During questioning, the District Officer provided interpreters, and witnesses signed declarations.¹³⁷

Verification requests demonstrate that the real upholder of “Chinese Law and Custom” in postwar Hong Kong was the colonial bureaucracy, which insisted on rigid categorization of marriages, rather than the people who were married according to “Chinese Law and Custom.” It was the colonial bureaucracy that insisted on following the Great Qing Legal Code when verifying marital status. In two separate requests from the Netherlands to verify the marriage status of two men both surnamed Tang,¹³⁸ officials were adamant in ensuring that marriages were in full compliance with “Chinese Law and Custom.” When an Amsterdam law firm requested verification of the marital status of its client, Mr. K.S. Tang in 1966, the District

¹³⁵ Minute #6, September 29, 1965. “Registration of Marriage: Application for Assistance in the...,” HKRS 1075-4-256.

¹³⁶ Minutes #3-5, April 9, 1959. “Certification of Marriage,” HKRS 1075-4-257.

¹³⁷ Such as statements of T.S. Wong and C.K. Liu, with the signature of the sworn interpreter Y.F. Chann, December 10, 1962. “Certification of Marriage,” HKRS 1075-4-257.

¹³⁸ It was not a coincidence that both shared the Tang surname; the Tang is one of the Five Great Clans of the New Territories. To avoid confusion between the two Tang men, I have provided an abbreviation of their given names.

Office in Tai Po ran a detailed investigation by asking village representatives and elders from K.S. Tang's village to prove that his marriage was proper according to local marriage rites. After many long-distance trips between Tang's village and the District Office, the District Office responded to the SCA in the affirmative, subsequently informing Amsterdam of the marriage's validity.¹³⁹ In a 1965 inquiry from the Dutch Consulate about a Mr. S.K. Tang, who wished to marry a pregnant Dutch woman in Rotterdam, SCA officials created complications by strictly adhering to the Qing Code. Instead of accepting a unilateral divorce declaration from his alleged "wife", SCA officials argued that a wife has no such right under the Qing Code as only the husband can unilaterally divorce her.¹⁴⁰ It did not matter to the SCA that she was brought into his household as a child daughter-in-law. In SCA's reply to the Consul General of the Netherlands, SCA officials recommend that Tang divorce her because of her inability to bear him a son, a white lie but a legitimate excuse to divorce one's wife under the Qing Code. Mr. S.K. Tang promptly followed this recommendation and sent her a letter of divorce via the Consulate General of the Netherlands, after which the District Office finally interviewed the alleged "wife."¹⁴¹ She refused to sign the letter of divorce from Mr. S.K. Tang and claimed that she had

¹³⁹ Letter from Peter Ng for the SCA to J.O. de Rijke, Esq, April 26, 1966. "Certification of Marriage," HKRS 1075-4-257.

¹⁴⁰ A memo between K.Y. Leung for the SCA to District Officer Tai Po. August 23, 1965. "Chinese Customary Marriages," HKRS 634-1-22.

¹⁴¹ Mr. S. K. Tang wrote a letter of divorce to his alleged "wife" in Chinese. In the letter, he claims that his mother has arranged this marriage for him, and that he is forced by circumstances to separate from her. This letter was attached to the second letter from the Consul General of the Netherlands to SCA, and the Consul asked the SCA to formally bring this letter to his "wife" to see whether she would reject the divorce or acquiesce to it. October 8, 1965. "Chinese Customary Marriages," HKRS 634-1-22.

never been married to him but was ready to have no further ties with her “husband”.¹⁴² The two cases of the Tangs demonstrate a clash of priorities between the government and the people. On the one hand, villagers in both cases attested to the validity of marriage customs in question but did not care if men abroad married other women.¹⁴³ On the other hand, the colonial government focused on the process of the formation of these marriages, leading it to rely on the fine points of the Qing Code to prevent possible cases of bigamy overseas.

Compared to the government's attention to customary marriages and the fielding of verification requests from abroad, the colonial government was unwilling to intervene in "foreign" marriages celebrated in China before or after the passage of the Marriage Law of the PRC. The colonial government focused on the legal aspects of marriage of “foreign” marriage, as there were two distinct issues, the first was about recent migrants arriving from China,¹⁴⁴ and the other concerned resolution of marriage disputes when one party or both were married according to the Marriage Law of the PRC. On relationships formed by the recent migrants, the SCA noted that many women who were principal wives from Shanghai had unwittingly entered bigamous marriages.¹⁴⁵ When they and their children arrived in Hong Kong to meet

¹⁴² Letter from District Officer, Tai Po to SCA. October 27, 1965; letter from the SCA to the Consul General of Netherlands, October 30, 1965. “Chinese Customary Marriages,” HKRS 634-1-22.

¹⁴³ Minutes #24 and #26, April 22, 1966. “Certification of Marriage,” HKRS 1075-4-257; “Chinese Customary Marriages,” HKRS 634-1-22.

¹⁴⁴ Immigration from China contributed to a sex-ratio imbalance where there were more men than women, creating a marriage squeeze that had consequences for local spousal choice. However, the colonial government was unconcerned with how people formed their marriages as long as they were monogamous and registered. On the population pressure that favored women over men in the marriage market, see Janet Salaff, “The Status of Unmarried Hong Kong Women and the Social Factors Contributing to Their Delayed Marriage,” p.398.

¹⁴⁵ Coates (1987) has also remarked that new migrants tended to form transient cohabitation

their sojourning husbands, their husbands had married other women in the colony without their consent.¹⁴⁶ Colonial records pointed out that these husbands have “been in Hong Kong for six or seven years only,”¹⁴⁷ following the departure of Shanghai capitalists to Hong Kong as the result of the Chinese Civil War. The resolution of this unwitting bigamy depended on what these wives wanted from their husbands. If the wives only wanted financial maintenance for themselves and their children, they could petition the magistrate court, as the colonial government recognized marriages from China as valid foreign marriages.¹⁴⁸ However, if they desired divorce, then the timing of their wedding mattered greatly. If married under the Nationalist Civil Code in China before 1950, the SCA would advise them to sign divorce papers outside the SCA's building. However, if married by the Marriage Law of the PRC, the SCA would refuse to help and instead advise them to return to a People's Court in China.¹⁴⁹ While this was perfectly rational in the minds of British colonial bureaucrats,

arrangements. However, since these were not proper marriages, their dissolution was easy. A paper signed by both parties not to intervene in each other's life, witnessed by a neutral party, would be sufficient.

¹⁴⁶ A wife could consent to her husband contracting another woman as a concubine, but he could not simultaneously have two wives. Without the wife's prior consent, the concubine could not be legally acquired by her husband according to "Chinese Law and Custom." Instead, she would be treated like a mistress and deprived of the legal rights afforded to a concubine.

¹⁴⁷ Internal statistic report to the SCA, dated July 9, 1957. "Chinese Marriages: Reactions to Strickland Committee Report," HKRS 684-2-4.

¹⁴⁸ Page 20 of a draft attached to a memo from the Ag. Attorney General to the Colonial Secretary, dated February 17, 1960. "Chinese Customary Marriage: Loose Minutes," HKRS 634-1-24.

¹⁴⁹ Internal statistic report to the SCA, dated July 9, 1957. "Chinese Marriages: Reactions to Strickland Committee Report," HKRS 684-2-4. However, according to the Divorce Ordinance (Chapter 179) repealed in 1967, marriages conducted according to the Marriage Law of the PRC would be a "civil equivalent of a Christian marriage," as statute two noted that a civil equivalent would "imply a formal ceremony recognized by the law of the place where the union was contracted as involving the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others." The Marriage Law of the PRC (absorbed into the Civil Code of the PRC in 2021) mandated monogamy. Hence it would be appropriate for the Supreme Court of Hong Kong to make a decree of dissolution of marriages. "Divorce Ordinance (1964 edition)," HKRS 47-1-58.

migrants who escaped to Hong Kong were unlikely to return to China to resolve their marital affairs.

The insistence that migrants return to the PRC for a proper divorce was only one of many unsolvable problems for the colonial government as more migrants arrived in Hong Kong. As PRC marriages were *de jure* registered marriages and monogamous, the colonial government was not concerned about potential bigamy or polygyny, and the existing combination of informal and formal mediators enabled disputants to seek resolutions. However, when one or both parties claiming to be married in the PRC filed for divorce in Hong Kong in order to marry another person in the colony, the colonial government could not ascertain that a marriage or divorce had occurred in the PRC if neither party could provide the required official certificate. As the border between Hong Kong and China was tightly controlled and many escaped from China to migrate to Hong Kong, there were also questions about intransigent spouses who refused to return to China to face a divorce judgment in a People's Court.¹⁵⁰ The colonial government was relatively silent on many points regarding regulating marriages of migrants coming from the PRC, compared to volumes on customary marriage and "Chinese Modern Marriage" that conformed to the Nationalist Civil Code and took place in Hong Kong. In the case of regulating marriage according to the PRC Marriage Law in Hong Kong, "foreign marriages" was the end of discussion among government officials.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Dr. Vermier Chiu to Solicitor General, September 17, 1954. "Chinese Marriages: Reactions to Strickland Committee Report," HKRS 684-2-4.

Marriage verification requests from Europe and problems with China revealed the passive nature of marriage regulation in Hong Kong. Usually dormant until verification requests arrived at the government's attention, investigations focused on proving whether marriages had occurred with testimonies from others, primarily co-lineage members of the husbands. At the same time, bureaucratic insistence on administrative procedures, categorization of Chinese marriages, and compliance with "Chinese Law and Custom" reinforced the application of the Qing Code despite the people's willingness to dispense with the Qing Code and separate from their spouses. Also, in reaction to migrants from China and the potential ramification of the Marriage Law of the PRC, the colonial government decided to accept marriages from the PRC as valid but required parties married in the PRC to return to China for securing a divorce. The goal of the colonial government was to ensure legitimate marriages and prevent bigamy, not necessarily to change marriage customs.

Compared to the work teams dispatched by the Provincial Women's Federation in documenting marriage practices of people in the PRC, the work by the District Office and the SCA in investigating details of marriage of specific villagers in Hong Kong appeared to be meager. Unlike work teams in the PRC that had an active agenda from above and publicized model marriages in conjunction with state campaigns on suppressing unwanted "feudal" marriage customs, investigators by the District Office and the SCA in Hong Kong restricting themselves to resolving the status of specific marriages and answering international entities before closing cases. Furthermore, they were disinclined to criticize local marriage customs and did

nothing against them aside from confirming with locals that these practices were socially accepted.

Although verification request in Hong Kong was one occasion in marriage governance when the government actively sought information, it echoed the passive *modus operandi* of intervention only on demand. Furthermore, these investigations show the great difference between marriage reform in Hong Kong and the PRC. Whereas the PRC national and provincial government adopted an ambitious goal of abolishing transactional and arranged marriage, colonial intervention was restricted to preventing bigamy and spousal abandonment, while allowing arranged marriages with child daughters-in-law to be recognized as legitimate in Hong Kong and abroad.

Promoting Marriage Registration

Marriage registration was initially the weakest component of colonial marriage governance, but the government did significant work to induce registration. Unlike in the PRC, where registration was compulsory, the colonial government could not compel registration except for "Registry Marriage," and until the Marriage Reform Ordinance came into effect on October 7, 1971,¹⁵¹ the Chinese population could choose to marry according to "Chinese Law and Custom" or the Nationalist Civil Code, neither requiring registration with the colonial regime. Wishing to diminish the number of unregistered marriages in the context of standardizing Chinese marriages over two decades, the government facilitated marriage registration

¹⁵¹ The day the Marriage Reform Ordinance came into effect was chosen by a fortune-teller who consulted the *Tung Shing*, a Chinese divination guide and almanac. See Denis Bray, *Hong Kong Metamorphosis*, 142.

by creating sub-registries, expanding full-time registries in populated parts of the New Territories, and keeping registration fees nominal.

The colonial government mandated registration for "Registry Marriage" and desired its Chinese inhabitants to follow the same process. In a registry marriage, a couple wishing to marry would arrive at a marriage registry to announce their intention,¹⁵² and the registrar on duty would record standard biographic information such as names, marital status, profession, age, dwelling, and, if applicable, consent received on a "notice of marriage."¹⁵³ If one of the marriage partners was as young as 21 years old, the parent or the guardian needed to provide consent.¹⁵⁴ When young British soldiers wished to marry, the colonial government also required approval from their commanding officers.¹⁵⁵ After posting banns at the marriage registrar and waiting for any potential objection or retraction, couples would return to the marriage registry, and their marriage became official upon receiving the marriage certificate.¹⁵⁶ The records of marriage notices allowed retrieval for occasions such as verification requests and petitions for maintenance or divorce.

The core guideline of the colonial government on marriage registration was

¹⁵² Before 1956, only one marriage registry existed in Hong Kong, located on Hong Kong Island.

¹⁵³ Marriage Notice Book, HKRS 272-1-7. This file recorded "Registry Marriages" that occurred in 1947.

¹⁵⁴ With parental consent, the minimum legal marriage age is 16 in Hong Kong and has not changed since 1947. See Marriage Ordinance, 1947 edition, section 15. In current law, this statute is moved to the Marriage Ordinance, 2019 edition, section 13.

¹⁵⁵ Marriage Notice Book, HKRS 272-1-136. Although the British Armed Forces did provide approval, in private correspondence they deemed mixed marriage between British men and Chinese women undesirable. See Letters from Brigadier D. Peel Yates to DCNT, January 5, 1956. "Chinese Customary Marriages," HKRS 634-1-31.

¹⁵⁶ Couples could also choose to celebrate their marriage in public places of worship such as churches, and marriage notices often had their dates of celebration at Christian churches written after the fact.

that gradual inducement was superior to compulsion by legal decree. Hence, bureaucrats focused on facilitating "Registry Marriage" accessible to all without coercion or mandate. Initially, in the early 1950s, there was a lack of interest since people perceived "registry marriage" as less flexible than other forms of marriage and preferred customary marriage. The government strategy was a slow expansion of marriage registries following local demand. In August 1956, the Registrar-General opened up the second marriage registry of Hong Kong in urban Kowloon but left the New Territories without service.¹⁵⁷ When the Registrar-General inquired about setting up mobile marriage sub-registries in resettlement estates in urban areas in 1960-1961, the plan was shelved when resettlement bureaucrats reported that settlers would prefer to marry customarily and existing facilities were sufficient.¹⁵⁸ Aside from increasing accessibility by expanding physical locations, there was also accommodation in languages in 1960 as registrars became bilingual instead of conducting business exclusively in English. Chinese dialects other than Cantonese would have designated translators depending on need.¹⁵⁹

Colonial bureaucrats were more enthusiastic about establishing sub-registries in the New Territories than expanding sub-registries in urban Hong Kong. Notwithstanding the low demand in the New Territories, as well as a sparser population density,¹⁶⁰ there was a consensus among bureaucrats that villagers should

¹⁵⁷ Memo from the Registrar-General to the DCNT, January 13, 1959. "Marriage: General," HKRS 177-1-15.

¹⁵⁸ Minute #4, August 8, 1961. "Chinese Marriage in Hong Kong," HKRS 524-4-3.

¹⁵⁹ "Xianggang hunyin zhuce xin yi ye gai yong huayu zhenghun" [A new chapter in marriage registration in Hong Kong by using Chinese during the ceremony], *WKYP*, January 23, 1960.

¹⁶⁰ "Xinjie si hunyin zhuce shu youqing nannu dengji bu duo" [Four marriage registries in the New

be able to standardize their marriage either by new or post-marriage registration. However, conflicting opinions on local Chinese sensitivities complicated the enterprise of creating sub-registries. On one end was the New Territories Administration, which had the closest ties with villagers and was mindful of their preference for "lucky days" for marriage.¹⁶¹ They recommended that the government consult with experts and the lunar almanac to open sub-registries on "common lucky days" or face underutilization.¹⁶² On the other end was the Registrar-General running on the Gregorian calendar and arguing that inauspicious days would have no effect. Instead, since people who married according to Chinese customs could post-register, the Registrar-General suggested that people would have the benefit of marrying customarily on lucky days and obtaining a proper marriage certificate whenever their local sub-registries were open.¹⁶³ Ultimately, the Registrar-General prevailed over the New Territories Administration, and sub-registries were opened once per week or twice per month.¹⁶⁴ These sub-registries represented the first attempt by the government to regulate marriages in the New Territories. Initially rarely utilized, sub-registries reduced the physical distance needed by villagers to register their marriage if desired, as well as offering an alternative to customary marriage that would be

Territories but not many couples registered], *WKYP*, May 2, 1960.

¹⁶¹ In the PRC, there was also the custom of divining for an auspicious date. See chapter 5 on the provincial government's struggle against diviners in Guangdong.

¹⁶² Memos from District Officer Yuen Long to the DCNT, December 29, 1958; memos from the DCNT to the Registrar General, January 8, 1959. The lunar almanac referred to is the *Tung Shing*. "Marriage: General," HKRS 177-1-15.

¹⁶³ Memo from the Registrar-General to the DCNT, January 13, 1959. "Marriage: General," HKRS 177-1-15.

¹⁶⁴ Transcribed copy of *Wah Kiu Man Po* on marriage registries, March 31 (years not given). "Marriage: General," HKRS 177-1-15.

unregistered and outside of the control of the state.

Partnership with Kaifong Associations and Rural Committees also reflected the colonial government's patient approach to marriage registration and governance.¹⁶⁵ The government used their offices *gratis* to rapidly expand the reach of the Registrar-General while building up demand for marriage registration. After the Registrar-General had sufficiently developed its capability in the New Territories, it was finally ready to act on long-standing complaints about the lack of marriage registration in remote parts of the New Territories, such as Sai Kung.¹⁶⁶ However, using the offices of Kaifong Associations and Rural Committee was a stopgap measure, and the government gradually transformed part-time sub-registries into full-time registries when sufficient demand developed.¹⁶⁷

By the late 1960s, the imminent passage of the Marriage Reform Ordinance created pressure to expand registration capacity rapidly. Internal correspondence between the Registrar-General and the Colonial Secretariat over details of floor plans and staff hiring revealed that the government spared no effort to ensure seamless registrations. One bureaucrat wrote that "a delay in the enactment of this important

¹⁶⁵ "Dangju jihua zai shaojiwan she hunyin zhuce dengji chu" [The government is planning on creating a marriage sub-registrar in Shau Kei Wan], *WKYP*, January 8, 1960. Six partnerships can be found in "Banli hunyin zhuce jigou kuozhan" [Expansion of marriage sub-registrar], *WKYP*, October 6, 1960.

¹⁶⁶ Memo from District Officer, Sai Kung to DCNT, May 2, 1962, in "Marriage: General," HKRS 177-1-15; "Xigong xin sheli hunyin zhuce chu" [New marriage sub-registrar in Sai Kung], *WKYP*, February 7, 1964.

¹⁶⁷ Yuen Long and Tai Po were market towns in the New Territories before the colonial government transformed them into satellite towns. The changes from part-time to full-time registrar occurred in 1962 for Yuen Long and 1963 for Tai Po. See circular letter from the DCNT to rural committee chairmen, April 16, 1962. "Marriage: General," HKRS 177-1-15; "Dabu hunyin zhucechu jin juxing qiyong dianli" [The Tai Po Marriage Registrar had an opening ceremony today], *WKYP*, July 12, 1963.

bill is politically unacceptable."¹⁶⁸ Most marriages that needed to be registered ex post facto were in the New Territories, so the government partnered with Rural Committees to provide access. Some registries near population centers were open full-time such as in the case of Sheung Shui R.C. and Tuen Mun R.C., while others were twice weekly as in Fanling R.C. or twice per month in R.C.s located in outlying islands of Hong Kong.¹⁶⁹ After the initial rush of high demand and complaints over long lines in 1971-1972,¹⁷⁰ ensuring access to marriage registration ceased to become a government concern. Although compulsory marriage registration waited for more than two decades, the government's philosophy of passively encouraging voluntary registration and facilitating access resulted in long-lasting changes among the governed.

The successful resolution of marriage registration led to government's concerns over registration fees. Before mandatory registration, the people saw fees as an optional expense in Chinese customary marriage or "Chinese Modern Marriages." However, a statutory requirement for registration meant excessive fees would deter the poorer class from registering their marriages.¹⁷¹ In reality, marriage registration fees in Hong Kong were minimal until June 1974, three years after the passage of the Marriage Reform Ordinance. According to the 1947 edition of the Marriage Ordinance (cap.181), a notice of marriage was free, a certificate of notice cost one

¹⁶⁸ Minute #3, December 4, 1969. "Accommodation for Marriage Registries," HKRS 2000-7-12.

¹⁶⁹ "Bianli xinjie gequ jumin" [To accommodate residents in various districts of the New Territories], WKYP, September 11, 1971.

¹⁷⁰ "Town Talk CDO (Sham Shiu (sic) Po)," HKRS 413-1-9. The archive files cover period from 1970-1974.

¹⁷¹ Minute #12, June 9, 1966. "Chinese Marriage in Hong Kong," HKRS 524-4-3.

HKD, and a marriage ceremony cost ten HKD.¹⁷² Therefore, a couple could marry by spending only eleven or twelve HKD.¹⁷³ Except for a small additional charge of one HKD for a notice of marriage in 1960, the fees remained unchanged, and Chinese newspapers praised the affordability of “Registry Marriage” at twelve HKD per marriage.¹⁷⁴ Subsequently, when commentary from the public accused the government of contributing to high marriage costs, colonial bureaucrats pointed out that the standard marriage fee was only twelve HKD, a paltry sum compared to the banquets that usually accompanied wedding ceremonies.¹⁷⁵

Nonetheless, the colonial government was aware that public goodwill toward the Marriage Reform Ordinance would evaporate rapidly if the government charged an exorbitant fee for registration. The first proposal to increase marriage registration fees in 1969 was deferred in consideration of the reception of the Marriage Reform Ordinance. In 1972, the Colonial Secretariat inquired again of the SHA about the possibility of making marriage registries financially self-sufficient by hiking marriage registration fees to forty-five HKD, an increase of 450%.¹⁷⁶ Despite internal polls among SHA officials that relayed popular resistance against rising marriage registration fees over a recently mandated process,¹⁷⁷ the SHA gave the go-ahead if the public received an advance explanation and some concessions in return. In

¹⁷² Marriage Ordinance, 1947 edition, second schedule.

¹⁷³ Depending on whether the intending parties desired one or two copies of the certificate of notice.

¹⁷⁴ “Jiehun shouxu tan” [A discussion of marriage procedures], *WKYP*, December 31, 1960.

¹⁷⁵ Memo from the Assistant Secretary of SHA on March 25, 1971. “Marriage,” HKRS 582-1-1.

¹⁷⁶ Memo from the Assistant Secretary of SHA on July 25, 1972. “Marriage,” HKRS 582-1-1.

¹⁷⁷ Memo from City District Commissioner of SHA to Assistant Secretary of SHA on August 3, 1972. “Marriage,” HKRS 582-1-1.

exchange for raising the registration fees, the SHA recommended lifting the ban on wedding photography on official premises.¹⁷⁸ Twelve HKD was easily affordable in 1971; forty-five HKD was also within reach of ordinary workers in Hong Kong.¹⁷⁹ While registration fees and their increases appeared marginal compared to the enterprise of encouraging and mandating marriage registration, the government kept fees affordable and consistently removed any obstacle to marriage registration in Hong Kong.

Colonial Hong Kong and the PRC adopted contrasting methods of marriage registration. While the end goal was identical—to strengthen registration and make marriage legible to the state--¹⁸⁰ colonial Hong Kong provided a successful counterexample to the intensive interventionist model of the PRC. Instead of requiring registration by decree when people were unready or unwilling to register, the colonial government facilitated access to registration by creating mobile and full-time registries while keeping fees inexpensive. Rather than establishing registries from the onset, the colonial government responded to demand and expanded geographically with assistance from Rural Committees and Kaifong Associations. Resources from these quasi-official organizations allowed the government to invest

¹⁷⁸ Memo from the Secretary for Home Affairs to the Colonial Secretary on August 25, 1972. "Marriage," HKRS 582-1-1.

¹⁷⁹ In 1947, a "registry marriage" would have cost thirty catties of rice (0.4 HKD/catty). In 1971, twelve HKD would buy approximately six catties of rice (1.67 HKD/catty). Even when the cost was raised to forty-five HKD, and using the 1971 price, it would have been 27 catties of rice. "Consumer Prices in Hong Kong," Hong Kong Memory, accessed July 7, 2022, https://www.hkmemory.hk/MHK/collections/hkcurrenecy/currency_consumer/index.html.

¹⁸⁰ On making marriage legible to the PRC state, see Neil J. Diamant, "Making Love 'Legible' in China: Politics and Society during the Enforcement of Civil Marriage Registration, 1950-66," *Politics & Society* 29, no. 3 (September 2001): 447–80.

minimally in the beginning while having dedicated and experienced staff. Furthermore, the colonial government waited for people to take the initiative to register their marriages and did not require approval from their employers, unlike the situation in the PRC. Gradually, this passive and enabling approach prevailed as Chinese residents warmed up to the affordability of "Registry Marriage" and desired the legal benefits of British law.¹⁸¹ By the time the Marriage Reform Ordinance became effective, marriage registrars were readily available for urban residents and rural villagers,¹⁸² and most marriages were already conforming to the requirements of "Registry Marriage."¹⁸³ The mission to promote marriage registration was a success in Hong Kong.

Marriage governance in colonial Hong Kong depended on the interwoven structures of informal and formal mediation that allowed spouses to seek resolution in a situation where the colonial judiciary had limited jurisdiction over many forms of legally recognized Chinese marriages. The dyads of Rural Committees - District Offices in rural New Territories, and Kaifong Associations - Secretariat for Chinese Affairs, exemplified the colonial governing ethos that "less is more" when regulating marriage. Not inclined to lead in encouraging changes in marriage customs, the

¹⁸¹ Denis Bray remarked that many women realized the benefit of Registry Marriage in the difficulty of getting divorced from their husbands under British law. Denis Bray, *Hong Kong Metamorphosis*, 141.

¹⁸² Denis Bray, *Hong Kong Metamorphosis*, 141.

¹⁸³ Wing-Kai Anthony Lau compiled the total numbers of registered marriages from 1946 to 1975, and the table on page 128 revealed an astronomical rise in registered marriages starting in the 1960s. Wing-Kai Anthony Lau, "Banquets and Bouquets: Social and Legal Marriage in Colonial Hong Kong 1841-1994" (M.Phil. Thesis, Hong Kong, The University of Hong Kong, 1996), 128.

government adopted a passive approach and was willing to let people, primarily women plaintiffs, seek state intervention when desired. The same passivity over marriage customs also manifested when verifying people's marital status and dealing with marriages celebrated in China. The need to categorize Chinese marriages into one of the four legally recognized types led to a peculiar side-effect of relying on "laws and customs" that recognized concubinage and had become outdated by the 1960s.

Preferring to let the people modernize their marriage customs by themselves, the colonial government and its marriage reform only asked its people to be monogamous, to attain the minimum marriage age, and to register with the state. Unlike other components of regulating marriage in Hong Kong, the colonial government actively facilitated marriage registration. As the colonial government was unwilling to intervene in the cost of weddings other than the mandated registration fees, its limited goals in reforming marriage encountered minimum resistance among the people, compared to its PRC counterpart, which tried to suppress marriage transactions and materialistic spousal choice.

Conclusion

The publication in 2022 of the national “bride price map” on the internet generated laments on Zhihu, a Chinese version of Quora that the state was unable to help bachelors who became involuntarily celibate due to the high cost of marriage.¹ The high bride prices depicted on the map (Figure 7.1) suggests that the people have long ignored the message of transaction-free marriage, and the government cannot reduce bride prices. Yet, in recent years the Chinese state has shown signs of echoing its past by intervening in marriage customs again. Not only did the state ban marriage transactions in the latest Civil Code of the PRC (2021),² but provincial authorities across China established price ceilings on bride prices and limited wedding banquet expenses.³ Just as in past campaigns from the 1930s to the 1970s that aimed to modernize Chinese marriage by regulation and reform, it is uncertain whether the latest state efforts will successfully regulate everyday life or meet with noncompliance by those who maintain a separate sphere of private life away from state micromanagement.

¹ “Quanguo caili diaocha: Da bufen diqu jiawei gao you defang “ling lijn” [A national survey of bride prices: some places have none], People’s Daily Overseas Edition, February 20, 2017, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0220/c1001-29092464.html>; “2022 Jiehun caili yilanbiao, kuai kan ni qu de qi xifu bu?” [The latest map on bride price Is available, see if you could afford a wife?], Zhihu, last accessed November 10, 2022, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/468640036>.

² Article 1042 of the Civil Code of the People’s Republic of China (2021) prohibited “the exaction of money or other property by way of marriage”.

³ “Guojia chushou guankong, caili zhengce laile” [The state regulates bride price by implementing a policy], *Netease*, April 3, 2022, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/H409TG4T0552ZIP6.html>; “Caili bu chao 3 wan! Yi di guanfang fawen” [The bride price cannot exceed 30,000 yuan], *Shangguan xinwen*, May 25, 2022, <https://web.shobserver.com/wx/detail.do?id=490533>; Also see paragraph 15 of the “Action Plan on Rural Reconstruction” published by the Central Government on May 23, 2022. “Zhonggong zhongyang bangong ting guowuyuan bangong ting yinfu “xiangcun jianshe xingdong shishi fang’an” (Joint issue of the Action Plan on Rural Reconstruction by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council General Office), accessed August 1, 2022, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-05/23/content_5691881.htm

Figure 7.1. National Bride Price in China, 2022 edition



Between the 1930s and the 1980s, four different regimes in the region of South China each tried to regulate marriage and conduct marriage customs reform. In Guangdong Province, three governments with opposing political goals—the Nationalist and the collaborationist governments in Republican China and the Communist government in the PRC—each advocated reducing marriage expenses, promoting free-choice marriage and frugal weddings, and cultivating compliance with the law. Each government followed a similar model in which the state initiated and implemented marriage reforms and governance that resulted in state interventions in everyday life. By the late 1970s, the Chinese state had inserted itself into many aspects of domestic life, promoting class-based spousal choice, prohibiting feudal

wedding rituals such as matchmaking and divination, and proactively resolving marital quarrels. Over time, the degree of state regulation of marriage customs expanded in proportion to government influence at the grassroots level of urban and rural societies.

In Republican Guangdong, under the Nationalist and collaborationist regimes, the state prioritized providing legal education and promoting voluntary adoption of better practices. At the provincial, municipal, and county level of government, the state organized group wedding ceremonies and enacted policies for frugal weddings. In wartime, each regime also passed sumptuary laws, but they largely failed to have actual effects. Lacking the ability to monitor all marriage transactions and weddings, the Nationalist and the collaborationist governments relied on people's adherence to state propaganda to reduce spending on marriage transactions and weddings.

Weak state influence at the grassroots level meant that there was leeway in the enforcement of the law. While the judiciary system continued to exist from the 1930s to 1949, and both the Nationalist government and the collaborationist government used the same Civil Code and Criminal Code, the lack of firm control and the passive approach of the police allowed people to use the law strategically. When threatening legal actions in premarital and marital disputes, disputants invoked the law, but defendants in lawsuits escaped justice by running away or absenting themselves from the court. Wartime conditions during the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1938 to 1945 and the subsequent Civil War further disrupted marriage governance by creating illegal marriage arrangements such as bigamy and polyandry, which heightened the

conflict between legal codes and social mores.

In short, the Nationalist and the collaborationist regimes in the Republican era had the intention and plans to reform marriage but could not exert oversight over rural marriage customs or secure compliance with the law. The 1930s and the 1940s established the foundation of an interventionist state by promoting frugal weddings with the civil education bureau, mediating and adjudicating in marriage disputes, passing sumptuary laws, and expanding awareness of the Civil Code in the countryside. Still, wartime circumstances and the instability that followed meant that marriage governance remained highly dependent on voluntary compliance and not compulsion.

The PRC government that succeeded these two regimes was more hands-on with respect to implementing marriage reform and regulation. Although sharing the same top-down approach as earlier states-- leading the people in adopting better marriage practices--the PRC differed from its predecessors in Guangdong in its ability to control the countryside and its stronger political will to compel compliance with its Marriage Law of the PRC. From 1950 to 1953, the publicity about the Marriage Law and the Marriage Law Campaign saw a substantial effort to facilitate divorce, abolish concubinage and arranged marriages, and promote model marriages that minimized bride prices and wedding spending. By dispatching work teams from the provincial Women's Federation and incorporating local agents of the state, the provincial government had brief successes in compelling people's compliance with the law. Nonetheless, by the late 1950s, previously suppressed customs quickly

returned to cities and rural communes in Guangdong. The ensuing decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw a similar approach to conducting reforms of social customs. Despite the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the provincial government retained the same interventionist posture to advocate for free-choice marriage, elimination of marriage transactions and countering of materialistic spousal choices during the transitional years to the early reform era.

Marriage governance in the PRC narrowed the leeway to circumvent marriage laws. The establishment of the Household Registration System and the distribution of rations associated with it meant that mobility was highly restricted. At the same time, Party cadres at the village, commune, brigade, or production team level of administration were supposed to oversee local marriage practices. Nonetheless, cadre behavior and people's selective noncompliance with the Marriage Law remained the weakest link in marriage governance in Guangdong. Local cadres turned a blind eye to the state's call for frugal marriage and wedding, with some demanding bride prices and holding luxurious wedding banquets themselves. Among the people, many women or their families continued their existing "feudal" marriage practices as much as possible. They ignored the prohibition on marriage transactions, such as bride prices, and attempted to engage in hypergamy. Also, men with means such as the relatives of Overseas Chinese or visitors from Hong Kong benefited in the competition for a spouse by offering a higher bride price or a prospect with better access to economic resources or opportunities.

Coupled with unequal access to resources based on occupations, by the late

1970s, the rising cost of marriage transactions and wedding expenses had become unaffordable to many men.

Across the border from Guangdong, the colonial government in postwar Hong Kong had also attempted to govern Chinese marriages and passed a limited reform of marriage customs. Comparing marriage reforms in Hong Kong and the PRC reveals three fundamental differences in their approach to law, the scope of reform, and how the state governs marriages. These differences contributed to colonial Hong Kong's passive approach to regulating marriage, and paradoxically led to better compliance with state laws.

The approach to marriage law and its application dictated the degrees of official intervention in reforming marriage practices. In colonial Hong Kong, standardizing marriage was the end goal of reform and not a method to induce changes. Cognizant of the government's limited reach into local society and the requirement to recognize "Chinese Law and Custom," colonial bureaucrats knew that enacting a law would be ineffective when the people were not ready to accept it. As a result, the government adopted a passive posture and waited for the popularity of unwanted customs to decline gradually. After more than two decades of preparation and facilitation of monogamy, the passage and enactment of the Marriage Reform Ordinance stood as the centerpiece of colonial legal reform of marriage. The Marriage Reform Ordinance achieved its mission by preventing new polygynous marriage, at a time when concubinage as a practice was in decline among the population. Hence, the passive yet patient approach achieved the original goal of

marriage reform in Hong Kong.

In contrast, the PRC national and provincial governments in Guangdong saw the law as the template and the means to induce further reform. If the Hong Kong government bided its time, the PRC national, provincial, and county authorities saw themselves as the revolutionary vanguard in molding new marriage practices among the people. The Marriage Law contained objectives that required extensive work of legal education and persuasion among the people, as well as active interventions that occurred periodically after the conclusion of the Marriage Law Campaign in 1953. As marriage customs needed to be within the legal bounds of statutes of the Marriage Law, the provincial government conducted additional campaigns coordinated by the Provincial Women's Federation to create compliance with the Marriage Law in the late 1950s, early 1960s, and the mid-1970s. In short, the Marriage Law was a means to reach the goal of reforming marriage practice. Although the PRC state did not expect customs to change overnight, it aimed to accelerate the transition through campaigns and top-down interventions in people's marriages. Provincial authorities ordered cadres to sway the people to comply with the law, regardless of acceptability and practicality on the ground.

The second difference between state marriage practices in the PRC and in Hong Kong was the scope of marriage reform. Marriage reform in colonial Hong Kong was limited to marriage registration and monogamy, and the government concentrated on encouraging the people to register. Except for expanding marriage registries across the territory and keeping registration fees minimal, the government

did not interfere with marriage transactions or wedding rituals, nor did it prevent people from engaging in arranged marriages or utilizing the service of matchmakers. Furthermore, unlike the PRC government, it did not intervene in how people chose their spouses and their considerations during spousal searches. The colonial government did not envision a transformation of marriage, except for a select few practices that interfered with standardization and governance.

Across the border, the Chinese state had been instructing the people on marriage practices. Although the PRC was not the first Chinese state committed to making marriage affordable and promoting free-choice monogamy, it was the first national government to have the capability to actualize its goals, unlike the Nationalist or the collaborationist regime. In Guangdong, the provincial government and the Women's Federation overhauled marriage customs by mandating marriage registration and banning concubinage, bigamy, child daughters-in-law, and arranged marriages. Not limiting itself to prohibiting arranged marriage and polygyny, the state proscribed sedan chairs and divination for auspicious dates and attempted to influence people's spousal searches by emphasizing political loyalty over economic considerations. The most ambitious goal of the reform was the total rejection of bride price, dowry, or other forms of marriage transactions to keep marriage affordable.

Unlike the relative ease of expanding marriage registries in urban Hong Kong and the rural New Territories, the broad mandate of PRC marriage reform made implementation difficult and unsustainable. Although the PRC state had unprecedented influence in the countryside, suppression of preexisting marriage

customs considered undesirable by the state required persistent efforts to stamp out "feudal influence." At the same time, keeping marriage affordable was unachievable by propaganda or political campaigns alone, as the actual cause of rising marriage transaction costs was unequal access to resources and strategic spousal choice. In Guangdong, the issue of inequality was made worse by the large population of overseas Chinese and their relatives who received remittances, and the proximity to colonial Hong Kong brought in visitors who competed with local peasants in the same marriage market. Similarly, although the provincial Women's Federation had advocated transaction-free marriage by publicizing stories of model couples, the demand for bride prices returned to south China immediately after the Marriage Law Campaign in 1953 because state efforts to suppress bride prices were transitory and inconsistent, and that there were financial advantages in demanding them. By the 1980s, three decades of persuasive education by the provincial Women's Federation had instructed women to select their spouses based on personality and political orientation. Still, the state could not prevent people from choosing their spouses based on present and future economic prospects. Overall, the provincial government had better success in fostering compliance with the law on marriage registration and encouraging free-choice marriage. Still, the Marriage Law was the wrong tool to convince the public to change marriage customs tied to complex financial calculations. The Marriage Law and the provincial Women's Federation could not address the issue of economic inequalities, and their mandate to ban marriage transactions and materialistic spousal choices fell on deaf ears.

The third difference between the PRC and Hong Kong government initiatives was marriage governance. On the surface, marriage governance was similar across the Hong Kong – China border as both contained mediation, adjudication, verification, and registration components. The PRC had a more straightforward structure with a uniform legal code. The Department of Civil Affairs and its rural cadres were responsible for registration and verification. Mediation took place informally at the Residents' Committees or by village-level mediators,⁴ followed by interventions from the local Women's Federation before one last attempt by the People's Court.⁵ When parties failed to reach an agreement, the People's Court adjudicated by issuing divorce judgments or rejecting the petitions. Despite the soundness of this basic structure of marriage governance, there were persistent issues with unregistered marriages, insufficient registration, ad hoc local policies, and conflicting loyalty of grassroots-level cadres.

The Hong Kong colonial government focused more on mediating disputes and delegating caseloads to informal quasi-state organizations, referring to state institutions only when necessary. Mediation occurred within the dyads of informal-formal structures in rural New Territories and urban Hong Kong, enabling Chinese inhabitants to resolve their disputes without a legal code. Except for "Registry Marriage," British law was relevant to Chinese marriages only in lawsuits concerning spousal maintenance and child support. Generally, the government preferred people

⁴ Neil Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 157-158, 204-206.

⁵ Neil Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family*, 213; Linda Wong, "Family Reform through Divorce Law in the PRC," *UCLA Pacific Basin Law Journal* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1982): 265-284.

to initiate their own cases except when others asked the state to investigate marital statuses in response to verification requests. These investigations had different priorities from investigations by dispatched work teams in the PRC since the colonial government was concerned with clarifying the interested persons' marital status, not with challenging the marriage customs of the locale. The only component of marriage governance on which the colonial government did much public work was facilitating registration. In Hong Kong, colonial officials incorporated informal organizations to help expand the government's registration capacity. Nonetheless, the colonial expansion of marriage registration was minuscule compared to the efforts of by the Guangdong provincial government. Overall, colonial marriage governance was "lawless" yet orderly, allowing the people to seek the state's control over their marriage voluntarily.

In Hong Kong, marriage became a settled issue as marriages were either newly registered or post-registered by the mid- to late 1970s.⁶ The invisible hand of the colonial government had completed its task, and the government returned to its laissez-faire approach until the handover of Hong Kong to the PRC. In the PRC, however, the visible hand of the state had no success in curtailing the rise of marriage transactions, and the Women's Federation was assigned to work on a different

⁶ The discussion of LGBT marriage in Hong Kong is outside the scope of this dissertation. In 2014, the High Court of Hong Kong allowed transgender persons to marry, but as of August 2022, homosexual marriage remained unrecognized. See John Nguyet Erni, "Marriage Rights for Transgender People in Hong Kong," in *Wives, Husbands, and Lovers: Marriage and Sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Urban China*, eds. Deborah Davis and Sara Friedman (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 189-216.

national goal: controlling the optimal fertility of its people.⁷ As the PRC entered a market economy, the market for preferable spouses became more materialistic,⁸ leaving many grumbling involuntary bachelors yearning for state intervention to lower the cost of marriage transactions.⁹

The tug of war between the implementation and enforcement of marriage regulations and people's response to the law reveals that the Chinese state had failed to alter private life to conform with its ideals. The resiliency of marriage practices targeted by state campaigns indicates that the interventionist and compulsory approach adopted by the Chinese state was ineffective overall. Even during the maximum control of economic relations and political power at the grassroots from the 1950s to the 1970s, the PRC state could not compel its people to obey the government's wishes on their most intimate domain of social life, marriage. The role of local cadres deserves a special mention, for their ability to misinterpret the Marriage Law or turn a blind eye made consistent enforcement of marriage laws difficult. The failure of the state to prohibit marriage transactions was especially prominent among Guangdong residents who were aware of an alternative way of life

⁷ On state policies controlling fertility with the "One Child Policy," see Susan Greenhalgh, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁸ Quanbao Jiang and Jesús J. Sánchez-Barricarte, "Bride Price in China: The Obstacle to 'Bare Branches' Seeking Marriage," *The History of the Family* 17, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 2–15; Jing Li and Jun Li, "Bride Price and Household Income: Evidence from Rural China," *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy* 0, no. 0 (June 21, 2021): 1–20.

⁹ Ryan Woo, "Afford Me Not: Soaring Bride Prices in China Should Be Curbed, Says Parliament Delegate," *Reuters*, March 12, 2019, sec. Emerging Markets, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-rural-marriage-idUSKBN1QT19Q>; Alex Lew, "Bargaining for Love — The Sky-High 'Bride Price' in China | by Alex Lew | Oriental Review | Medium," March 7, 2022, *Oriental Review* (blog), accessed August 1, 2022, <https://medium.com/orientalreview/bargaining-for-love-the-sky-high-bride-price-in-china-a80dcf724452>.

because of their proximity to Hong Kong, and who knew that some of their comrades benefited more than others from the outside world. Economic inequality caused by the urban-rural divide and the influx of remittance and goods into Guangdong made spousal choices more materialistic and further away from the state vision of free-choice marriage without bride price and wedding banquets. As economic inequality increased and conviction in an egalitarian society decreased, the people refused to listen to the government in rejecting bride prices and materialist orientation in spousal choice. Arguably, the interventionist state lost to people's natural tendency to optimize their social mobility through marriage, and the pursuit of capital to attain domestic happiness was a helping hand in the demise of socialism in the PRC.¹⁰

In contrast, the passive approach by the colonial government in Hong Kong worked to achieve its mission of reforming Chinese marriages. With limited objectives for intervention in its people's customs and an emphasis on voluntary adaptation, marriage reform and regulation in Hong Kong demonstrates that a toned-down and patient version of an interventionist state effectively created long-term changes in everyday life. Rather than forcing the people to conform to the laws and priorities of the state, it facilitated the reform and allow the people to make their choice when attempting to regulate domestic and private life.

Using the model of an interventionist state, the focus on the longstanding relationship between the state and its people, and the mismatch between intention and

¹⁰ I am referring to socialist politics and economic relations under the rule of Chairman Mao and not the "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" that followed in the reform era.

policy implementation on the ground, can lead to new questions for historians regarding the effectiveness of governance in Republican China and the PRC under socialism. How successful was the state in controlling, influencing, and revolutionizing everyday life? Whereas the PRC state had overhauled economic relations in the early 1950s and the 1980s, other aspects of social life, such as marriage, remained stubbornly "feudal" and eluded control. The conventional wisdom was that during the socialist era (the 1950s to 1970s) the state had the greatest ability to influence social life, with such influence tapering off during the reform era of the 1980s. In that case, the failure of the state to control marriage customs and people's responses to marriage laws suggest that the Communist revolution did not result in a revolution of marriage culture.

Likewise, policymakers interested in China could also use five decades' worth of popular interactions with the interventionist state to ask the following: Where are the limits of state involvement in and regulation of customs and social relations? Could official involvement be beneficial, but overextending state power would become counterproductive? These questions are especially relevant to the present, as the Chinese state has been returning to the interventionist state with the aid of "Big Data." In its current mission to control bride prices and wedding expenses, the PRC government has an unprecedented level of reach into everyday life. Still, it is likely to run into the same problem where the enforcement of marriage regulation is inconsistent, and its message on frugal marriages is ineffective in persuading people to abandon materialist tendencies in their spousal search.

Appendix I

An explanation of the myriad of currencies in Guangdong during the Second Sino-Japanese War is needed to understand reported bride prices' monetary value. Before the Japanese invasion in October 1938, Guangdong was undergoing a currency reform of converting the provincially printed *Haojuan*, backed by the silver standard, to the Nationalist fiat money *Fabi*, its value backed by the faith of the Nationalist government.¹ In Nationalist Guangdong, *Fabi* remained the denomination unit. Later, the Nationalist government pegged another currency, the Chinese custom gold unit (CGU), at twenty *Fabi* to one CGU. Denominations were more complicated in the collaborationist area. In 1939, the Japanese occupiers printed military notes backed solely by force. Initially, they set an exchange rate of one military note to two Nationalist fiat money and one military note to three *Haojuan*.¹ The Japanese army allowed Nationalist fiat money and provincial *Haojuan* to circulate but demanded its military notes in official transactions. Later, the occupiers successively established more unfavorable exchange rates. In July 1942, the collaborationist government introduced its own Central Reserve Bank yuan, pegged to one hundred Central Reserve Bank yuan to eighteen Japanese military notes, while forcing local inhabitants to convert their Nationalist fiat money to the collaborationist Central Reserve Bank yuan at a two to one ratio. In April 1943, the Japanese military took its note out of circulation. After the war, the victorious Nationalist government established an exchange rate of twenty thousand CRB yuan to one Nationalist fiat money yuan. (See Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Exchange Rates in collaborationist South China

Date	Nationalist Fiat Money (<i>Fabi</i>)	Provincial Silver (<i>Haojuan</i>)	Japanese Military Notes (<i>Junpiao</i>)	Collaborationist Central Reserve Bank (CRB)	Note
1936 Official	100	144			
1936 Unofficial	100	133			
October 1938	200	300	100		Rate set by occupiers
February 1939	120	158	100		
May 1940	150	220	100		
August 1941	324	516	100		
March 1942	570		100		
July 1942	1111.2		100	555.6	100 CRB to 18 Military Notes, 1 CRB = 2 <i>Fabi</i>
November 1945	100		Stopped Circulation in April 1943 ¹	20000	Postwar exchange rate

Using the price per picul of rice as an approximate indicator of wartime inflation, in October 1938, rice cost 6.153 Japanese military notes per picul. During the initial occupation period, inflation was manageable but became uncontrollable starting in 1943. By the end of the war in August 1945, the price per picul was 20,000 CRB yuan, or 3600 Japanese military notes when using the official exchange rate of 100 CRB to 18 Japanese military notes. Compared to the beginning of the occupation, rice prices increased by 58,508% at the end of the Japanese occupation. (See Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Inflation in Collaborationist South China, cost per picul of rice

Date	Price per picul of rice (100 <i>jin</i>)	Inflation compared to October 1938
August 1937	10 <i>Fabi</i>	0.81
October 1938 (occupation)	6.153 Japanese Military Notes	1
February 1939	14 JP	2.27
September 1939	20.5 JP	3.33
March 1940	37.5 JP	6.09
May 1940	49.33 JP	8.01
October 1941	40 JP	6.5
June 1942	43.5 JP	7.06
February 1943	200-305 CRB	8.92
April 1944	1800 CRB	52.65
October 1944	8400 CRB	245.72
December 1944	16500 CRB	482.69

August 1945	20000 CRB	585.08
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Figure 2.3. The monetary value of bride price in rice per picul in collaborationist Guangdong

Date	Price	Currency	Picul of Rice	Notes
Spring 1938	100+	Nationalist Fiat Money	7.14	Pre-occupation
September 1938	80	Nationalist Fiat Money	6	Pre-occupation;
Unknown, but before the occupation	1000	Nationalist Fiat Money	100	Marriage between two affluent families
January 1939	50	Unknown	Unknown	The bride price was 50 yuan, of which 18 yuan was engagement money; the man also gave a set of clothes and a pair of leather shoes at the cost of 11 yuan
March 1939	160	Provincial <i>Haojuan</i>	7.2 minimum	Besides a bride price of 160 <i>haojuan</i> , there were also wedding cakes, a

				roast pig, and a red envelope of 5 <i>Fabi</i> .
Sometime in 1939	80	Japanese Military notes	4	For a concubine
February 1940	12	Japanese Military notes	1/3	the registration fee for a group wedding ceremony
May 1940	20	Japanese Military notes	1/2	
April 1941	8	Japanese Military notes	1/2	the registration fee for a group wedding ceremony
May 1941	60	Japanese Military notes	1.5	
June 1945	5000	Collaborationist Central Reserve Bank Coupon	1/4	

In Nationalist Guangdong, the cost of rice increased by 14,700% from late 1937 to late 1944. (See Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4 Inflation in Nationalist Guangdong, cost per picul of rice

Date	Price in <i>Fabi</i>	Notes

August 1937	10	Pre-war price
March 1941	57	
January 1942	90	
September 1942	230	
January 1943	384	
March 1943	319	official intervention
April 1944	1500-2000	
October 1944	1470	Decreased due to official intervention

Figure 2.5. Bride price per picul of rice in Wartime Nationalist Guangdong

Date	Price	Picul of Rice	Note
January 1943	3000+	7.81-8	
August 1943	1800	N/A	A bowl of cooked rice cost 3 yuan = 600 bowls of cooked rice
October 1943	1700	N/A	
November 1943	4000	4	Based on lunar month calculation
February 1944	About 30000	15-20	A wealthy man spent this amount for an educated woman to be his concubine. Considered excessive by others

March 1944	384000	192-256	Uxorilocal: the price was one <i>jin</i> of gold. The woman is desperate to find a groom, and her father owned a jewelry shop.
September 1944	500	1/3	For a group wedding ceremony
September 1944	3000	2.25	For a concubine
November 1944	4000-5000	3-4	200+ Chinese Gold Custom Unit = 4000-5000 Yuan

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