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BIDS

## **Chinese Marriage Traditions: Exploring Contemporary Changes**

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## Abstract

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This thesis presents the transitions of Chinese people's marriage concepts from before 1949 up to 1978 and explores the new marriage concepts now. The analysis part includes the high rates of divorce, left-over women and the bride price in China. I will mainly discuss why nowadays Chinese people have difficulties getting married, especially Chinese men. This analysis is based on two main theories; one is social exchange and another one is marriage squeeze. The analysis is based on the expensive bride price and how important it is for Chinese people especially for Chinese women.

Key words: Chinese marriage, Gender inequality, social exchange, bride price

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## **Table of contents**

1 Introduction.....	5
1.1 Introduction to the area of research.....	5
1.2 Aim of the thesis.....	6
1.3 Limitations.....	7
1.4 Methods.....	7
1.5 Definition of Marriage.....	8
1.6 Structure of the thesis.....	8
2 Theoretical framework.....	10
3 Research Overview and Background.....	12
3.1 How Chinese people choose their marriage partners before and at present day .....	11
3.2 The transition from arranged marriage to love matches.....	14
3.3 How the marriage Law Changed .....	16
3.4 The increasing value of the bride price.....	17
4 Analysis.....	19
4.1 Left-over women.....	19
4.2 High rates of divorce .....	22
4.3 Dowry system.....	23
4.4 Bride price.....	24
4.5 Why bride price is getting more and more important?.....	27
5. Conclusion.....	34
Bibliography .....	37

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction to the area of research**

In this section I will discuss the area of research and give a brief introduction of Chinese marriage concepts, how the Chinese marriage concepts changed before 1978 and what the new concepts are after 1978. I will briefly discuss the main concepts which are changing in regards to Chinese marriage. Like the bride price which is the biggest change during the recent years.

Along with the many great social changes in China over the past 70 years; the dynamics of marriage have also undergone a significant change. Some of the Chinese people's attitudes in choosing their partners are changing, and their attitudes towards marriage are changing as well. Getting married for Chinese women is not just about ensuring daily life anymore (Zhu, 2012). It is not certain that a man will find a willing partner or be able to afford a marriage. There are many reasons for these changes and I will explore some of them in this paper.

As a result of opening up to the west and greater economic prosperity among its people; the Chinese way of selecting a suitable partner has changed; as well has the meaning of marriage which has changed away from the traditional Chinese marriage (Zhu, 2012).

The year 1978 can be seen as a turning point regarding this aspect. Before 1978 Chinese people's ideology was conservative about marriage; the main style of Chinese marriage was arranged marriage and when Chinese people chose their marriage partners they cared more about their marriage partners' political background. After 1978 the Chinese people's ideology started to be more liberal and showed that Chinese people started to accept love matches to choose their marriage partners, at the same time some of Chinese women began to concentrate more on their partners' economic conditions (Zhu, 2012; Lim, 2013).

As a result getting married in China is getting more expensive for Chinese men. The difference in the distribution of people of each sex also makes it increasingly hard for men to find a wife; there is a clear surplus of men in relation to women. According to the 2012-2013 marriage survey there are 11,959,000 Chinese men who are between 30 to 39 years old that are single now. And there are only 5,820,000 Chinese single women who are in the same age range (Marriage survey, 2012-2013). Like I mentioned before, some Chinese women care more about Chinese men's economic condition and this group of women is generally lower

educated. As an example it is of interest to a woman if a future husband owns a car or a property, as means of being able to provide for the bride price (Ibid, 2012-2013).

High divorce rates and left-over women in China are also of concern. These two phenomena are getting more attention in China; but since the phenomena are relatively new in China there is little research regarding this. High divorce rates are more common among people with high education because they tend to be more open to the idea of divorce and care more about the quality of their marriage. At the same time there is another group of people with high divorce rates, the poor. They get divorced mainly because of economic pressure on their marriage which affects their marriage quality. Some traditionalists wish to blame this increase in divorce rates on the transition from arranged marriages to marriages of free choice. It is also argued by the modernists that free choice marriage reflects a healthy progress in individual freedom, and an improved quality of life for partners in these, non-arranged marriages. Left-over women are mostly highly educated Chinese women within high social status and at the same time they have a progressive ideology about marriage concepts.

### **1.1 Aim of the thesis**

The aim of this thesis is to show what the new phenomena for marriage concepts are. This will be carried out by looking at left-over women, high rates of divorce and the increasing of bride price. The research overview and the background will show how Chinese concepts regarding marriage and the attitude towards it have changed since the year 1978. In the analysis part there will be analysis of how the bride price affects the Chinese people's attitudes toward marriage, and why the bride price is becoming more and more important.

In this thesis there are two main theories which are used to better understand the changing phenomena. One is social exchange and another one is marriage squeeze. The social exchange theory explains how Chinese people deal with each other in the marriage market. Women give men dowry and men give the bride price as an exchange. At the same time women have to give up some part of their career to take care of the family after they get married so the men need to use bride price as compensations. The marriage squeeze theory explains the imbalance in the sex ratio within the age groups studied. This is a reason why Chinese men have difficulties getting married. Some of Chinese people are forced to accept a partner which is not fit for them, which can affect the marriage quality and increase the rates of divorce.

Since the imbalance of the sex ration the Chinese men need to use high bride price to attract Chinese women and these are all the results for marriage squeeze.

The research questions are:

-How have Chinese people's marriage concepts changed since 1978?

-What are the new marriage phenomena?

I will answer these questions by first talking about the changes of Chinese marriage by exploring the way of choosing a partner, the change of marriage law and the increase of bride price. Then in the analysis I will use high rates of divorce and left-over women and the high bride price to show the new marriage phenomena.

### **1.3 limitations**

This thesis focuses on how Chinese marriage has changed from between 1949 to 1978 and after 1978 and what the new phenomena are; such as left-over women and the increasing of divorce rates. I will also discuss the high bride price since the bride price is not legally defined, but it is a common component of most marriage agreements.

When I discuss those transitions and new phenomena I also talk about some other aspects which are impossible to avoid. I will not use a lot of space to discuss them.

### **1.4 Methods**

This thesis method is based on the use of secondary sources. The secondary analysis of data is gathered by other researchers; at the same time it also can be collected by different institutions in the course of their business (Bryman, 2012: p. 311). There are different advantages for using secondary data. Secondary analysis can provide more time for analyzing and interpreting; in the meanwhile secondary data can offer high quality and extensive data, which

can save time and cost in primary analysis (Bryman, 2012: p. 312-313). Secondary data might provide new interpretations through the process of reanalysis (Bryman, 2012: p. 315). This thesis will use existing data and literature to analyze aspects of Chinese marriage through a theoretical framework of marriage squeeze and social exchange.

These thesis literatures which are used three types of secondary sources. The first type reference consists of academic books and articles from the fields of gender, marriage, sociology of family and social policy. The second type is using journals and news articles from international websites and Chinese news websites. Thirdly, I used official documents from the Chinese government as sources. Since this topic has not gotten a lot of attention from the Chinese government. I could not find a sufficient amount of official data; this made it difficult to compare official data and unofficial data. Since some of the Chinese literature can be considered not to be objective I have also used some English literature as comparison. The Chinese literature is translated to English by me. Because of the political nature of the topic, some sources may not be sufficiently reliable. In order to allow for this I have used various sources with different origins.

This thesis also uses the general literature about marriage which is not only about China, and I use them for giving the reader general and broader information about marriage. The secondary data has some limitations. First one needs some time to become familiar with the secondary data. (Bryman, 2012: p. 315). Second there is no control over data quality (Bryman, 2012: p. 316). For example this thesis uses the data from a marriage survey conducted by the Chinese government along with a dating site called “ShiJi JiaYuan” which is a commercial enterprise and this should be taken into account when interpreting the data. The data from “ShiJi JiaYuan” is used in the analysis part which shows how many percent of Chinese women are thinking bride price is important. In the analysis part I also use the official data from Chinese government, which is used for showing how the situation of Chinese women.

### **1.5 Definition of marriage**

The book “Sociology of Family” (Zhu, 2012) defines marriage as a willing union of males and females and this union has the functions of having and raising children (Ibid, 2012). According to the social custom, marriage includes conjugal relation, affinity; at the same time both wife and husband have their rights, duties, freedoms and responsibilities (Ibid, 2012).

### **1.6 Structure of the thesis**



The first part of this thesis is the introduction which is divided into the area of research; aim of the thesis; limitations; methods; and definition of marriage. The second part is the theoretical framework which mainly consists of two theories; one is the “marriage squeeze” theory; and another is the “social exchange” theory. In the analysis part, the “marriage squeeze” will explain how since the one child policy has been carried out; the imbalance of sex ratio is getting more and more serious. Chinese men find it more difficult to get married at the same time some of the Chinese people have to lower their standards for marriage partners and get married to people who are not suitable for them which can cause divorce rates to increase in China. Chinese men find it difficult to get married now and one of the main reasons is the one child policy has created an imbalance in sex ratios with men outnumbering women nearly 2 to 1. So Chinese men use a high bride price to attract women while Chinese women use dowry to be as exchange and some of Chinese women would like to give up their career or work part time and pay more time on housework, they expect Chinese men can offer high bride price for them as compensation and ensure their future life.

The research overview part is about how Chinese people chose their partners both before 1978 and nowadays and the transition from old arranged marriage to the presently used free choice-marriage. Before 1978, Chinese partners met mainly through matchmakers but nowadays they are mostly free to choose their partners and find each other in different ways. For instance: they know each other from internet; their friends introduce them to each other. I will also describe how the Chinese marriage law has changed. At last I examine how the cost of bride price has been changed from before to now.

In the analysis part first I examine the “left-over women” in China which is talking about the women who are over 27 years old but are still single. Some of them are happy to be single and think they have a better life. Some of them want to get married but it is difficult for them to get married because of their high social status. This often leads to being refused by a lot of Chinese men. Afterward I discuss the high divorce rates, which in itself is a new phenomenon in China. As a growing economy, China has recently endured great social changes. Chinese people’s marriage concepts have also changed. We see an increase in the divorce rates. At last I talk about the social context and the traditional mechanisms of the “Dowry system”, “bride price”, and why some of Chinese women still think the bride price is important: This will be discussed from two different perspectives : 1) The one child policy and 2) women's social status.

The last part is the conclusion which will summarize the research overview; theoretical framework; and analysis.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **Social exchange and Marriage squeeze**

The theoretical framework consists of two marriage theories which include social exchange and marriage squeeze. I chose these two concepts because they will help us to understand why it is difficult for Chinese men to get married now and why the bride price is still important for getting married.

Blau's (1964) gave the ideas of social exchange theory. He concentrated on analyzing the basic process of social exchange. Blau's ideas of social exchange emphasized principle of reciprocity. According to Blau's analysis of the social exchange process, people will be attracted by rewards they can get from a relationship (Ritzer, 1996). During the exchange process everyone shows their abilities to generate rewards in order to attract other people who can, and would be willing to exchange with them. There is a competition in the social exchange; but since different people are within different levels of resources and qualities the people who have more assets have an inherently better position for social exchange in society. On the flip side, the people who have less, have lower exchange position (Ibid, 1996).

The activities of marriage can be regarded as the process of exchange, which includes economic capital exchange, human capital exchange and social capital exchange. During the exchange process, both bride's family and groom's family get something but they also lose something. The exchange is not only between the couples but also between the two families (Wang, 2012).

When couples get married they exchange their personal interests, education background, and family property, and when they find their marriage partners they often seek the person who has the similar or better exchange abilities, for example they seek the people have the similar or better income, similar family members' social status, similar careers, rights and so on. People got married, which is not only for finding the people can exchange their personal

interests or social status but also they want to extend their family status and power (Ibid, 2012).

The ideas of social exchange, for the groom's family, the groom give the bride price to bride's family, which is the process that groom's families use economic capital to exchange social capital; the groom's family gets the capital of labor force. For the bride's family, they give their daughter dowry, which is for keeping the family status at groom's family, bride's family give more dowries to groom family the bride's family status at groom's family is higher, and this behavior is using economic capital to exchange status capital. At the same time bride's family get the bride price as a compensation for lacking a labor force. After women get married with men, normally the women need to give up a part of their career and use some time for taking care of the family, so the husbands give the wives bride price as an exchange for compensation, at the same time the wives need the bride price to ensure their future life. All these behaviors are in accordance with Blaus' ideas of principle of reciprocity.

Within the context of a monogamist society, a marriage market with an imbalance of sex ratios leads to difficulties in finding marriage partners based on their own traditional preferences; marriage behaviors have great changes, this phenomenon is called "marriage squeeze" (Zhu, 2012; He, 2012).

Marriage squeeze is related to individual factors and social structure changes. The reasons of an emerging marriage squeeze are the imbalance of sex ratios, economic problems, and population movements. The imbalance of sex ratios is the main reason for the marriage squeeze; this helps to explain why there is an increasing amount of single people in China. Because of the numbers of males being much greater than the number of females, it is difficult for males to find a marriage partner. The traditional view of preferring sons also leads to marriage squeeze. The preference for a male child within the structure of the one child policy contributes to the imbalance of sex ratios (Zhu, 2012). If males outnumber the females then it is difficult for males to find their marriage partners. Some of the Chinese men use the paying of bride price in order to increase their status in the marriage market. In the modern day Chinese marriage market this is the situation (Ibid). The "Marriage squeeze" has different impacts on marriage. From the individual perspective marriage squeeze can force young people to have to lower their personal standards for choosing a spouse. They might have to find a marriage partners with whom they are not compatible. This situation may lead

to a considerable decrease in marriage quality, at the same time the rates of divorce may increase.

All these concepts will be used in the analysis part, in relation to why Chinese people have difficulties getting married and why the bride price is still important.

### **3. Research overview and background**

#### **3.1 How Chinese people choose their marriage partners between 1949 to 1978 and at present day (After 1978)**

This section examines how people chose their partners from 1949s to 1978s, when matchmakers were the main way to choose or find their marriage partners and how they choose their marriage partners now. It will examine what the marriage concepts both were before and now.

Before 1949 women matchmakers had an important role during the marriage process. Under the feudal etiquette women matchmakers were the necessary witnesses who controlled if the marriage was legal and was recognized by society. Since 1949 young people found their marriage partners in mainly three different ways. First, people meet each other on their own; second, people met each other through the women matchmakers; third, parents' arranged the marriage (Zhu, 2012).

Choosing a marriage partner is basic prerequisite for getting married and establishing families. The choice will directly affect the quality of the marriage and the patterns of the family (Ibid, 2012). The standards for choosing a spouse can mirror transitions of social economy and culture in a country (Ibid, 2012). According to Zhu, when people choose their marriage partners they always want to find a partner that can contribute to their statuses; perhaps one with a better education, or higher social status, or one who earns more money than oneself (Ibid, 2012). People also choose marriage partners who share their personal values. Personal values are influenced by age, society, cultural tradition, original class and social level, family background and personal education (Ibid, 2012).

During the feudalism “Shi Da Fu” class people who worked at government cared most about their marriage partners’ appearance (Zhu, 2012). Women cared more about their partners’ talent. In traditional society when farmers chose their marriage partners they first looked at the partners’ economic situation, and then they look at partners’ health condition (Ibid, 2012). Along with the changing of social policies, economic conditions, and overall social values, the standards for choosing a spouse are changing. In the 20th century, between the 1950s to the 1960s, when people chose their marriage partners, they first chose the people who made progress in politics or were party members or cadres (Ibid, 2012). During the ten-years internal chaos (1966s-1976s) people cared more about their partners’ families’ background and working class status, so the soldiers and workers became very popular (Ibid, 2012).

After China opened to the West, people started to care more about material conditions (Ibid, 2012). In the 1980s people’s educational background was more important, and the people who graduated from universities were more popular. Zhu (2012) showed Feldman talked about three different patterns for choosing marriage partners. First, there is no connection between social stratification and choosing marriage partners. Second, the relationship between social stratification and choosing marriage partners is interdependent. Third, when people choose their marriage partners they only choose the people who are in the same social stratum with them (Ibid, 2012). Zhu also showed Li claimed that in the traditional Chinese society people followed the third pattern to find their marriage partners (Ibid, 2012).

When the new marriage law started in 1981, in the urban areas of China, people found their marriage partners in two ways. First their relatives or friends were matchmakers and found a suitable person for them to meet and date; second young people found their partners by themselves without any help from others at all (Engle, 1984).

According to Engle there were not enough opportunities for people to meet eligible partners so they still relied on others to arrange meetings of eligible partners for them. The professional matchmakers still offered their service for the people who were seeking a partner during the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution (Ibid, 1984).

Nowadays, there are more opportunities to meet but people have a stressed life with often a large workload. This pressure from their work means that a lot of young Chinese people do not have the time or the opportunities to find a marriage partner. Zhang (2006) interviewed a working woman, Liang Yu, who is quoted as saying, “I am totally occupied with my work.

My only social contacts are my colleagues and former classmates. On the occasions they have introduced me to potential suitors the lack of common conversation topics has made it an embarrassing experience (Zhang, 2006).” Young Chinese are turning to dating websites to help them find their partners. Ironically, they are rejecting the suggestions of their parents to use a matrimonial agency. “Only complete failures in love would seek that kind of help” says Liang Yu. When the SNS (social networking service) BaiHe website was founded there were already 100 similar marriage-dating websites. 10,000 new members per day register at the BaiHe website and use this way of matching to find their marriage partners (Ibid, 2006).

Generally speaking this section showed the transition from old ways of seeking marriage partners to modern ways. Next section will continue to show how the arranged marriage transferred to love matches.

### **3.2 The transition from arranged marriage to love matches**

This section is talking about how the arranged marriage transformed to love matches. It will show how people's marriage concepts have changed from arranged marriage to love matches.

In 1962 Goode noted that throughout the world, the way mates are selected has been changing. The power of the parents diminished as young people took more of their lives in their own hands and rebelled against family arranged marriages and mates chosen by parents (Goode, 1963). China has been no exception. Traditional methods of arranged marriages began slowly to change in the 1930s, with that trend stagnating during the war years in the 1940's. After 1949 the Chinese Communists founded and promoted freedom in love matches as part of the Cultural Revolution and the criteria for a good match became political compatibility. The goal of the Party was to indoctrinate every citizen in the political ideology of socialism and communism and the desires of the family became secondary to the desires of the State. Men and women were meeting openly in the new workplaces and had a chance to get to know each other and fall in love. Contrary to old Chinese traditions where families wanted matches of social status compatibility, arranged between parents, it became almost patriotic for educated women to fall in love with and choose to marry a fellow worker (Huang, 1962). Huang follows a series of letters published by the magazine Women of China, 1959-1960, written by women in free choice, love matched marriages and the over 1000 public responses to them. 70% of the letters were positive to this new marriage dynamic (Ibid, 1962).

The Party ideals of equality of the sexes and the idea that women should work and need not to be dependent on men; this could be seen in the new inter-class marriages. Most often it was higher class women who married workers below their social status.

Due to structural modernization, cultural Westernization, and governmental pressure, arranged marriages are giving way to freedom of choice, or love matches. Young people are choosing their own mates, often, as their parents think, without much experience of life or dating. Xu and Whyte (1990) pointed out conflicts of attitudes between modernists and traditionalists (Xu, Whyte, 1990). Because the modern social opinion turned against arranged marriage the parents' influences were weakened in choosing partners for their children.

The idea was that since young people were less controlled by their families in their choosing of partners the result of the marriage would be happier. During the period of arranged marriage, people were stuck in a marriage with a person not of their own choosing. The marriage choice was basically focused on the families' social status, wealth, education or other criteria (Xu, Whyte, 1990). After the marriage they might find out their partners were not the people who they would love to marry but there was no way out. Xu and Whyte (1990) claimed the transition from arranged marriage to love matches should decrease the frequency of unhappy marriages in society (Ibid, 1990). Engel (1984) suggested, however that arranged marriage made concessions for free choice because when parents wanted to arrange a marriage for their children they talked to their children first. They know their children well and want success for them. Parents often think their children are young, inexperienced and blinded by love and romance (Engel, 1984).

Traditionalists from many parts of the world mention the freedom to oneself to choose a mate as a problem, which leads to high divorce rates in modern societies (Xu, Whyte, 2001). The traditionalists maintained that love-matches start with romance and not much thought about realities; like financial anxieties and child care burdens and so on which lead the marriage to decline romantically and affects relationships (Ibid, 2001). The arranged marriage trajectory is different. Because these partners do not know each other well or maybe not at all at the beginning there is no romantic sense and they have to accept their partners after the marriage the couples start to know each other and they find their common bonds. During this process, the couples experience the realities of life and maybe they never feel the romance as love matches but their love can be tested by time and family difficulties (Ibid, 2001). The traditionalist emphasized that in the long run the arranged marriage has a higher degree of

satisfaction than love matches (Ibid, 2001). Arranged marriage is criticized for unlikely matches. For example young women can be married to a man who is old and feeble. But the traditionalists argued these cases are not common and in arranged marriage it is easier to generate compatibility than in love matches (Ibid, 2001). The traditionalists said parents will think about happiness for their children, they know their children very well and have life experience so they are in a better position to judge their children's marriage (Ibid, 2001). Parents think their children are young and normally young people are blinded by love and romance. Arranged marriages were the main tradition in China for all classes for centuries (Ibid, 2001). Many Chinese couples got "blind marriage" which means their parents made decisions for them and they even did not know who they were going to marry until the wedding day. The arranged marriage system was attacked by the reformers and revolutionaries in the early decades of last century because it was thought to be the cause of personal misery and suicides. In 1949 freedom of mate choice was strongly promoted by the communists (Xu, Whyte, 1990).

This has all been information about before, but today the 2012-2013 marriage survey showed Chinese people found their partners focus more on "respect"; "love feeling"; "economic condition"; and "romance" (marriage survey, 2012-2013).

This section has showed how the arranged marriage changed to love matches in China and how the Chinese people changed their attitude from old to new marriage concepts.

### **3.3 How the marriage Law Changed**

This section talks about how the marriage law changed and with it Chinese people's marriage concepts have been also been altered. In the year 1950 the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China was established and this law took away the "arbitrary and compulsory feudal marriage system" and decreed that marriage should be based on a couples own willingness (Xu, Whyte, 1990). At the same time marriage registration offices were founded in places all over China to control if it was a voluntary marriage; this was done through interviewing couples. The marriage law was supported with propaganda from 1950 to 1953 all over China. In subsequent years the family as a production unit changed and the population was proletarian. Meanwhile industrialization and the spread of education led the transition from arranged to free choice marriages to be rapid (Ibid, 1990). The Marriage Law



of 1950 gave women the right to choose who they wanted to marry. But the 'Marriage Law' was finished by the political campaigns in 1953; according to this the state family change could not be accomplished through law (Diamant, 1997). In 1980 there was a new marriage law established and it went into effect in 1981 (Engel, 1984). In traditional China or before the revolution people got married which was a kind of contract between families not the individuals. In 1980 marriage law forbid "mercenary marriage" which means the bride price and dowry were not allowed to be paid when people got married. But in rural China people still paid bride price and this was still very popular. The dowries had gotten less and less. In the urban area the bride price was still as gift to the bride or her family but the dowry custom almost went extinct (Engel, 1984). Abducting women happened both in 1981 and 1982. And those women were sold as brides to the peasants in rural areas of China. This was totally opposite with the official ideal that young people could choose their marriage partners freely.

In traditional Chinese society parents arranged a marriage for their children when they reached marriageable age. In some families parents betrothed their children a marriage partner when they were born. In 1950 the Chinese government no longer allowed the parents to betroth their children and published a minimum age of marriage, the marriage age for men was 20 and for women was 18 (Engel, 1984). In 1980 the marriage law changed the age for marriage, the marriage age for men was raised to 22, and women was raised to 20 (Ibid, 1984). The marriage laws and customs had forbidden many things. For example the marriage cannot be set up between relatives, or people who have the same family names; but it was allowed to be set up by cousins who had different surnames (Ibid, 1984). After the 1980 law, men and women who married could choose which families, either the man's or the woman's they wished to be a part of instead of women automatically becoming part of the man's family as before (Ibid, 1984).

This section showed how the marriage law changed in China mainly from 1950 marriage law to 1980 marriage law.

### **3.4 The increasing value of the Bride price**

The bride price is the money or goods such as houses or cars which are given to the bride's family by the groom or the groom's family. The emergence of the bride price custom has been traced back to 3000 BCE (Mulder, 1995). There were bride price customs among many of the

ancient civilizations. The Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Hebrew and Aztecs, Incas (Quala, 1988) all have some equivalent to the bride price. In China, the ideology of bride price is determined by several factors. It has been known to be changing over time and geographical location. This means that the social and financial functions of a bride price are changing as well. The change of bride price comes from changing economic conditions, social structures, and family characteristics (Anderson, 2007).

The bride price has been important for Chinese people. Jiang and Barricarte (2012) showed in the middle of the 1980s, in rural areas for Chinese families the marriage costs were several thousand Yuan or just over 10,000 Yuan RMB (Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). By the beginning of the 1990s, since the Chinese farmers got more incomes and their living standards were getting better, the average cost of marriage in rural areas rose to tens of thousands of Yuan RMB (Wu, Jin, 2007; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). The author Yan (2003) showed that he did research in 1998 in Xia Jia Chinese village about farmers' incomes situations. 381 households reported their incomes to the upper administrative unit; the annual net income per capita was 2700 Yuan, but there are doubts that this number is the truth, it may be even less (Yan, 2003; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). Mr Jiang and Barricarte (2012) showed if people do not think about inflation the bride price in northern Chinese village has increased by 140 times which is from 200 Yuan (US\$30) to 28,500 Yuan (US\$4,300) from the 1950s to the end of the 1990s (Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). According to the author Sun (2005) who did a field study in 2001 and 2002 in a mountainous village in the eastern part of Gansu Province, the bride price had increased 70 times over three decades (Ibid, 2012). Jiang and Barricarte (2012) showed some scholars suggested nowadays the bride price in China is a big support for the new couples to start their new families; but in some Chinese areas, especially some underdeveloped areas, the brides' families will keep the bride price and the brides' families get the benefits from the bride price (Ibid, 2012).

In modern day China bride price norm is not weakened rather it is more and more important for Chinese people. The article "for Chinese women, marriage depends on right 'bride price' showed Wang is a new bride and she told the author Lim she asked 68,888 RMB as bride price which is \$11,000 from her husband and this is just the half of bride price. At the same time her husband needs to borrow money to buy the apartment for her as bride price as well. A lot of Chinese men borrowed money for paying bride price as Wang's husband and they have no choice. Some even spend all their savings and they still cannot afford the bride price. The apartments can cost around 15 times the average of Chinese people's income (Lim, 2013).

Great new demands for apartments and cars have appeared in Chinese marriage market. Chinese women's demands for bride price lead the Chinese economic development to be fast (Fenby, 2011); The article "for Chinese women, marriage depends on right 'bride price' also showed Xiaobo Zhang a professor from Peking University said "rising sex ratios contribute to two percentage points of GDP growth"; the professor Zhang argued that 25 percent of economy growth came from the unbalance of sex ratios. He also found the families with a son need to work harder and double hours. At the same time the professor Shang-Jin Wei who is from Columbia University showed Chinese men pay bride price which is to attract a wife and this situation directly relates to 30 to 48 percent of estate appreciation in 35 cities in China (Lim, 2013).

This section showed how the bride price cost has been changed from 1980 to now.

The whole research overview and background part mainly shows the transition of the marriage attitude. Before people met their partners from a matchmaker and now people start to use webpage to meet each other. This part also describes how the marriage law was changed, and how the bride price costs has been increased.

#### **4. Analysis**

The imbalance of sex ratios is the main reason for the marriage squeeze, which directly affects Chinese people's marriage. Because of the numbers of males is much greater than the number of females, it is difficult for males to find a marriage partner, at the same time the competition is fierce in the marriage market, some Chinese males have to lower their standards for choosing their spouse, and after people get married they have to compromise, which have negative impacts for marriage quality and may lead to increase the divorce rates. In the analysis part I will talk about left-over women and high rates divorce imbalance of sex ratios to analyze the impacts of marriage squeeze.

##### **4.1 Left-over women**

This section is talking about a new aspect within the marriage market: "left over women". This is a new marriage phenomenon in China. I will mainly analyze why there is a small group of Chinese women that have this new marriage attitude.

Left-over women is a phenomenon that relates more to women who are highly educated and with high social status. In the traditional Chinese society, there were only very few unmarried

women (Zhu, 2012). But nowadays along with the social change Chinese women's attitudes are also changing. There is a small group of women who continue to be single now. These are women who are over 27 years old but they are still single now and they are happy to be single. During the last few decades there are more and more unmarried Chinese professional women and they are called "left over women" or "Sheng Nu". The BBC news special "China's leftover women, unmarried at 27" showed a Chinese single woman who is 29 years old and she works at Beijing radio newsroom. She is a very confident and amiable woman, she has a very good salary and her own apartment and she has an MA from a top university in China. But she has high pressures from Chinese media and her parents, just because she is still single now (Magistad, 2013). She said she is "happy to be single now and living alone, I can do whatever I like. I can hang out with my good friends whenever I like, and I love my job and I can do a lot of stuff all by myself" (Ibid, 2013). There are a lot Chinese women who have the same thinking. Why are they happy to stay single? In Chinese patriarchal structure there were "Discriminatory" and "controlling" behavior over women by their male suitors and partners was sit as a reason for women staying single and keeping out of the Chinese marriage market (To, 2013). Chinese women who are single are normally highly educated, with a good salary and a high social status. Blossfeld claimed that women with higher education can delay their marriage (Ibid, 2013).

Economic theory on marriage union formation suggests that working women with economic independence get married less often (e.g. Becker, 1981). Empirical research also shows that there are a lot of employed married women who suffer with the responsibility for the household labor and this influences unmarried women with high education and economic independence to be unwilling to marry (Liefbroer and Corijn 1999; Tsuya and Mason 1995). Becker argues that in the gender division of labor, men should be in the role of earning the money and supporting their families; women should be in the role of taking care of home and bringing up the children. But when the role of women and men are interchangeable or are similar, economic incentives will lead to a decrease in marriages. Becker's economic independence theory implies that the attractiveness of marriage is less for the women who are in a better economic status in all societies. In one way, many Chinese "left-over women" are happy to be single and this is a life style which they choose by themselves. But on the other side, there is another part of the group of single women who would like to be married but they are rejected by the Chinese men. One reason for Chinese men rejecting the women is the men are uncomfortable with the women's careers and achievements according to the findings of

Sandy To who is a sociologist from Hong Kong University (Simpson and Lacey, 2013). Dr To found that those single women have difficulties in finding their marriage partners because of constraints of the conservative, and patriarchal society in China (To, 2013). 50 women were interviewed who were all educated to degree level and half of them had gotten masters. These women reflected that men were against them because they are highly educated people with good jobs, which mean the women cannot put a lot of time on housework. A lot of Chinese men expect their wives to put more time on family instead of their jobs. Some Chinese men think women with better pay and higher education and good jobs are not easy to control (Ibid, 2013). Dr To found out that some Chinese men still keep the view of “male superior norms” as the reason for refusing professional women in the marriage market (Ibid, 2013). There are a lot of Chinese men who would not like to get married with a woman who has a better social status than them, because they are afraid after they get married they will lose their family status (XinJunShi, 2012). From the individual perspective, since some Chinese women are economically independent they do not need to rely on men to support their life. Before there was a sentence in China “women married men who were just for assuring their lives”. Because before in China a lot of people were very poor and they even did not have enough food to eat so the Chinese women just looked for men who were in better economic conditions and Chinese women used this way to change their life.

Along with the industrialization and modernization, some Chinese women got higher education and better careers, which made them more confident and they desired to be treated as equal to men in society. Some Chinese women’s economy is prospering and independent which leads them to arrange and enjoy their own life. In the traditional model of Chinese marriage, marriage was the most important thing for Chinese women’s whole life; nowadays for modern Chinese women the traditional model of Chinese marriage is not fit for them anymore and this is not the life that they want. The meaning of marriage has been changed from before when it was just about assuring lives. Nowadays, marriage is not that important for modern Chinese women. Qian(2010) did research about women’s conditions for getting married. The research showed Chinese women’s requirements for choosing their marriage partners mainly concerned Chinese men’s economic condition which means that the standards of choosing a spouse tend to be pragmatic. At the same time some of Chinese women request their partners to have high accomplishments and these conditions showed some of the Chinese women’s marriage standards are increasing (Shen, 2010). The 2009 marriage report showed 40 percent of Chinese women recognized their standards for choosing marriage partners are

high but they do not want to lower their standards (Ibid, 2010). So there are still a big group of women who are single and are looking for the partners who reach their standards. Modern Chinese women's standards of choosing their partners show the characteristic of "similar match" and "exchange of resource" (Ibid, 2010). These mean higher social statuses of Chinese women want to find men who have a similar social status to them. A lot of Chinese women think if a man cannot reach their standards they would like to choose to be single and this is a kind of life style (Ibid, 2010). These mean the left-over women are with better social status and good jobs and salaries and they think only the people who have the similar social status and education background can be well matched with them.

So left-over women showed there is a small group of Chinese women who are more independent and they are living in a new way and this is a new attitude for marriage in China.

#### **4.2 High rates of divorce**

The presently high divorce rates among married Chinese people are a result of the socioeconomic changes that China has undergone the latest decades. Since Chinese people's concepts about marriage have changed a lot; there are an increasing amount of Chinese couples who are not satisfied with their marriage; the rates of divorce have increased a lot in recent years. The data showed there were 2.87 million Chinese couples divorced in 2012, and the divorce rates have increased by 7.65 percent from year 2011 to 2012 (2013, FlorCruz, international business times). The increase of divorce is higher than the increase of marriage. "Family is a social cell that builds up on the base of money, once the necessary physical condition loses, the family will be easier to break up" (Ren, 2010).

Why has the divorce rate increased in China? From Macro-economic factors, China's GDP has been increasing a lot. But Chinese people's saving rates are not increasing as fast as the GDP. If comparing Chinese saving rates and GDP, it shows Chinese GDP is increasing at a rate of about 10 percent every year (Ibid, 2010). A lot of Chinese people are not satisfied with their income. The Chinese populations' incomes are not increasing a lot. The Chinese people's income is not able to keep up with the CPI. This means that in many cases there is a real income decline; and this puts a big pressure on the Chinese families (Ren, 2010; Xi 2010). Cherlin (2005) showed divorce is increasing more among the lower income families than among families with high incomes (Cherlin, 2005). Poor families lack financial resources and this can lead to stress and conflicts. Dealing with the responsibilities of caring for children and old people on top of suffering from unemployment; accumulating debts, poor housing and

so on; can lead to high pressure that can cause couples to decide to divorce (Ooms, Wilson, 2004; Ren 2010).

High divorce rate is also influenced by culture and custom. A lot of researches showed that the Chinese women who got married before 18 years of age have higher divorce rates than women who got married after the age of 20. The arranged marriage divorce rate is 2.5 times the rate of non-arranged marriage (Ren, 2010). Urban areas have divorce rates that are higher than rural areas (Ibid, 2010). Women who have children have lower divorce rates than women who do not have children (Ren, 2010; Xi, 2010). Son-preference is also a main reason for divorce. Women who give birth to sons have lower divorce rates than women who gave birth to girls, or who have no children (Ren, 2010). In the traditional Chinese culture, the women's families statuses are much lower than men's; men have the central position in the family (Ibid, 2010). When Chinese men are not happy because of high pressure, domestic violence may occur. Modern day Chinese women can decide to divorce from their husbands (Ibid, 2010). In modern China a lot of Chinese women are financially independent. As stated above they have their own incomes, higher education, and careers and they are not dependent on their men anymore. But at the same time they spend more time on their careers than their families, and their husbands may be reluctant to accept this. This is also one of the reasons a lot of couples decide to divorce (Zhou, 2011; Ren 2010; Nakra, 2012). If couples are stressed this also increases the risk of divorce (Bodenman, 1997; Conger, Ruter, Elder, 1999). In China there are a lot of couples who are rich, have well-paying jobs; but they are always stressed at their jobs. Seeing how they feel they do not have time to take care of their families they often divorce.

The high rates of divorce showed that Chinese people have new expectations and concepts regarding marriage. They have set higher demands about the quality of their marriage.

### **4.3 Dowry system**

Dowry is a gift, which is given to groom's family from bride or bride's family. Dowry size can affect the wives influence in the household decisions which include how much household money women can spend, how husbands spend the time for chores and how wives can spend the time for leisure.

In much of rural China, brides' families prepare the dowries for their daughters which can ensure their daughters will not get maltreatment from her in-laws. Dowries normally represent

inheritance from the women's family but are given at the time of marriage in the form of dowry with the hope of ensuring her future (Brown, 2005). In China, the operation of the dowry system is obscured by customary terminology, but clear in the ethnographic record." The wealthy families paid the dowries straightly. The middle status families got a bride price from the grooms' families then they paid all the bride price back to the grooms' families in the form of dowries. So actually this is a kind of marriage transaction. The low status families got the bride price from grooms' families then the brides' families kept some of the bride price and then used some of the bride price as dowry to grooms' family. "Dowry purchases for the bride's family the assurance of greater reproductive success through their marrying female." So it means the dowry purchases is intended to help the bride's family to ensure having grandchildren (Dickemann, 1979).

Goody and Tambiah think dowry is connected with social stratification; the women are limited by the dowry to the roles of housewife and mother, and concentrate on chastity as a female virtue. Goody suggested dowry is a kind of inheritance. There is another view which is opposite with Goody and Tambiah's idea. The dowry and inheritance are totally different. Women get the inheritance which they have the right to use in whatever way they want, but the dowry form shows women's rights are limited as their status is obviously lower than men. The trousseau should belong to brides' personal property, but normally the dowry was not given to the bride herself, instead the bride's husband's family gets the dowry. Only few brides can get their personal ownership of the dowry (McCreery, 1976). There is another dowry mechanism which is that the dowry can measure the brides' personal qualities. Examples of these are education and family economic situation and so on (Zhang, Chan, 1999). So dowry is as an exchange to give to the groom's family.

#### **4.4 Bride price**

This section analyzes why bride price has changed. It also explains what the mechanisms for bride price are.

From the aspect of social status, people often choose their marriage partners who have a similar social status as themselves. This means that for example: A-classed people tend to choose their marriage partners who are also from A-class (Zhu, 2012). Muder (1995) showed in this respect, the bride price is also a kind of measurement which represents the woman's



personal value. This means women who are educated, or from top-class families, deserve the high quality bride price, and women who are uneducated or from poor families only get a lower quality bride price (Mulder, 1995).

In historical China, people thought that a bride price was a part of what a complete marriage should include. “China is a typical patrilineal society with a patrilocal marriage system.” Since the Zhou Dynasty, bride price is a necessary thing for Chinese marriage (Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). Paying the bride price means women and men are formally engaged, and without the bride price the marriage does not count (Hicks, Gwynne, 1994; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). Ebrey (1993) showed this ideology is still very popular in modern China, especially in Chinese rural areas where bride price is widely accepted (Ebrey, 1993). In traditional agricultural societies, the bride price is very important because women play an important role in agricultural production. Boserup (1970) stated that the bride price is extremely important in the agricultural societies, because women are important laborers as well. In traditional Chinese ideology, bride price is recognized as compensation to the bride’s parents for raising up their daughters and when they get married they need to move to the groom’s family so the bride’s family will lack a labor force member (Mulder, 1995).

Bride price is also influenced by cultural value in China. In a lot of areas, the payment of a bride price is widely accepted, especially in those areas where matrilineal systems and patrilocal marriage are dominant. In China after people get married the brides will move to their husbands’ families and their husbands pay bride price to the brides’ families for compensation, because the brides’ families will lack a labor force (Good, 1973; Harrell, Dickey, 1985; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012).

As mentioned above, the bride price is changing through time and throughout different areas and is sharply influenced by different economic or social reasons (Anders, 2007). Since there are more men than women, the bride price is getting more and more prevalent in China. This is because women think the quality of bride price is a relevant measurement for selecting men (Caldwell, Reddy, 1983; Chen, 2004; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). In Chinese urban Areas, there is a surplus of women, and thus competition for the existing wives to be. This factor can increase the cost of marriage for men. Women have advantages since there are many more men than women, so women have more choices in choosing partners (Ibid, 2012).

In Chinese rural areas, the economic factors are also very important for women. They recognize the quality of bride price as an important measurement for choosing men as well.

Under this measurement, Chinese men try to enhance their possibilities in the marriage market by increasing the quality of bride price, because women are most likely to choose a marriage partner who can support a high quality bride price (Becker, 1991; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). In many places, although the burden of bride prices is getting increasingly heavier for males and their families, they still have to accept this because the bride price has already become a prerequisite for men to get marriage partners (Mo, 2005; Yan, 2005; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012).

With the rapid economic development, the household property owned by both urban and rural people in China has increased steadily. Under this situation, the cost of marriage has been getting much higher and the bride price is the main cost of the marriage. The bride price is a very heavy burden for Chinese young people (Zhang, 2006; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). Nowadays, whether or not a Chinese man can find a wife depends on the man's family's financial situation, since normally the groom cannot afford such expensive bride prices by themselves. Engel (1984) showed a lot of families run into debt because of heavy bride price but at the same time he claimed the fact was the sons got married which could bring in another laborer and earner for the families.

One main reason why men do not get married is poverty. After the People's Republic of China was founded there were many movements against the feudal convention of bride prices (Parish, Whyte, 1978; Croll, 1981; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). However, the culture of bride price still firmly exists in China. Women want to get higher quality of bride price, not only because of the economic development, but also the growth of women's social status; so men's families need to increase the value of the bride price as well. This tradition shows the bride price does not only still exist but also has gone through big changes (Yan, 2005; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). Nowadays the bride price consists of money and goods in China (Yan, 2005; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). In general the form of the bride price has similar standards but different areas or economic conditions might create differences (Anderson, 2007).

A bride price consists of two parts. One part is a formal part and another part is informal. The formal bride price is given to the bride at the formal engagement ceremony, which is like some money in a red bag or a ring (Jiang, Barricarte, 2012). The formal bride price is larger than the informal part, and it is given to the bride by the groom or his family, this means they are formally engaged (Ibid, 2012). The informal bride price is not considered as part of the formal bride price and this informal part is not necessary to give to brides. But if the groom or

his family decides to give the informal bride price to the bride they normally give it to the bride before or after the engagement ceremony (He, 2006; Jiang, Barricarte, 2012).

Some scholars suggested that nowadays the bride price in China provides support for couples to start their new families (Jiang and Barricarte, 2012). However, in some Chinese areas, especially some underdeveloped areas, the brides' families will keep the bride price and the brides' families get the benefits from the bride price. The parents of brides want to use the bride price to provide for them when aging, because their daughters will stay in their husbands' homes in the future (Ibid, 2012).

Like I mentioned above the bride price today is expected to consist of houses, cars and money. The marriage concepts survey 2012-2013 showed 52 percent of Chinese women think houses are necessary for getting married (2012-2013 Chinese marriage survey). But the houses are the biggest burdens for Chinese men. According to "Global property guide" (2012), the house price in China in July 2012 of 100 cities in China rose by 0.33% to CNY8, 717 which is US\$1,377 per square meter. I will take three main cities in China in 2013 as example. First in Beijing the house price rose at least 10 percent and some areas in Beijing rose 30 percent; the average of house price in Beijing is 37787 RMB per square meter which is 6138.95US\$ (Jin, 2013). Second in Shang Hai, the average of house price is 23000 RMB sq.m which is 3736.63 US \$ (Jiang, Cao, Lu, 2013). Third in Guang Zhou, the average house price is 16817 RMB sq.m which is 2732.12 US \$ (Zhang, 2013). International labor organization (ILO) did a survey for main land of Chinese people in 2012 and found the average income in main land China is 4134 RMB per month and 53742 RMB per year which is 656US\$ per month and 7872 US\$ per year (ILO, 2012).

Recently, houses have become a new prerequisite for Chinese marriage. As the data showed above, we can see there is a big gap between the price of house and the income of Chinese people.

This section showed what the bride price's mechanisms are, along with the economic development in China how much the bride price has been increased and the rapid of increasing bride price is a new marriage phenomenon in recent years. (rewrite the sentence)

#### **4.5 Why bride price is getting more and more important**

Like I showed the bride price is so expensive in China and it has put heavier pressures on young people. However, over half of Chinese women insist that the bride price is necessary for them (Marriage survey, 2012-2013). I am going to analyze why many still think bride price is still important from two different perspectives. First from the “one child” policy, second by looking at the general increase in women’s social status.

According to the 2012-2013 Chinese marriage survey, males to females’ ratio are 206:100. By the year 2020 there will be 24 million men who cannot find their marriage partners (2012-2013 Chinese marriage survey; Zhang, An, Yu, 2012). To understand this situation, we need to trace back to the one child policy.

In 1949 when Chinese Communism was just set up there were about 540 million people in China. After three decades, China grew to be more than 800 million people (Ebenstein, 2010). The increasing of the population from 1950s to 1970s was exceptional and this result attracted global concern. China was unable to escape “Malthusian collapse” which means unchecked population meant the food supply couldn’t satisfy population growth and there was a massive famine ((Ebenstein, 2010). The Chinese government established one child policy in 1979. From historical and cultural perspectives, some of Chinese parents prefer to have sons rather than daughters which are a traditional custom in Chinese society (Ebenstein, 2010; Li, Yi, Zhang, 2011).

There are two main reasons for this son-preference. First is the special Chinese cultural reason which is that the boys could represent the heir of the whole family, the girls were thought to stay with other families after their marriages, and girls’ names will not appear on the family trees. Secondly, the traditional economic reason, China has been an agricultural society for a long time, and boys can take on more farm responsibilities in the production sector (Ma, 2002). In China females are discriminated against even before birth. There was a permit which allowed women to accept technologies to do selective abortion and this practice lead to a big sex-ratio imbalance (Ebenstein, 2010; Eklund, 2011; Frank, 2011).

There is no doubt that the one child policy has helped China in controlling the population growth. From an economic perspective, it also helped Chinese people improve the standard of living (Nakra, 2012). From the year 1987 to 1992, Deng Xiao Ping was the leader of China and he strongly emphasized that controlling population would be a big help for transforming economic modernization and changing the traditional agrarian economy to an industrial economy in mainland China (Vogel, 2011; Nakra 2012). During the years 1979 to 2010

China's economic growth was amazingly fast (Vogel, 2011; Nakra 2012). China is the second-largest economy and the economic growth is 10% per year (Nakra 2012). The World Investment Report (2010) stated that the Chinese economy will reach the number-one position in the world by the year 2020 (Vogel, 2011; Nakra 2012).

A large demographic of literature reports show that along with the socioeconomic development, the ideal of son preference is still strong (Murphy, Tao, Lu, 2011). Some researchers stated that the son-preference is affected by the socioeconomic conditions, this because China still has a huge agricultural sector (Guilmoto, 2005; Michelson, 2010; Zheng et al, 2009). On the economic perspective, the deployment of urbanization has led to a lot of Chinese parents to have a large financial strain on their lifestyle, this because of the price increases. This makes the bride price more expensive as well (Attané 2009; Banister 2004; Michelson 2010). From the population perspective, for 2012 to 2013 the marriage survey showed that for every 100 women in the group (what group?), there are now 206 men. The sex ratio imbalance is getting more and more serious which leads to a big competition in the marriage market (Li, Yi, Zhang, 2011; Zhang, An, Yu, 2012). Poston and Glover (2005) suggested if the situation of sex ratio imbalance does not change, the marriage prospects for the next generation of Chinese men will be dreadful (Poston, Glover, 2005; Ebenstein, 2010).

Economists have stated that if there is an excess demand on something it will lead to price increases (Frank, 2011). This model can apply to the Chinese sex-ratio imbalance as well because there is an excess demand for brides which makes better terms for women. The evidence shows that nowadays in China Chinese young women are more careful in choosing their own partners and parents with a daughter are more careful in choosing partners for their daughters. Chinese women have more choices when it comes to choose a partner (Ibid, 2011). Gender imbalance makes for big competitions among men in the marriage market, which makes Chinese parents with a son more likely to buy a house as bride price to increase their sons' relative status in the marriage market and to increase their sons' attractiveness for marriage. Meanwhile, this marriage competition leads to rising house prices in China. So the parents need to save money in order to be able to buy a house for their sons, which lead to a high savings rate in China (Zhang, Guo, Yu 2012 P19-36).

A survey by the China Center for International Economic Exchanges showed rising housing prices are out of households' capacities (Zhang, An, Yu, 2012). Evidence showed that the gender imbalance leads to the bitter contest for marriage. A lot of people choose to

buy houses for their marriage, which lead to the increase of house prices. Since houses are one of the most important things in the bride price, and the houses are also the goods which can show people's status in the Chinese marriage market. The wealthy families are willing to pay more money for the houses and use this to increase their status in the Chinese marriage market. Parents with a girl have high requirements for the potential bridegroom, and normally men must have a house to marry a woman. Zhang and An and Yu (2012) showed this is a necessary condition (Ibid, 2012).

A recent survey shows “only 18 percent of parents with a girl would like to let their daughters marry a man without a house (Chong Qing Evening News, 2010).” This phenomenon is referred to as the “mother-in law” economy. It shows investing in houses and savings for buying the houses are the two popular ways for the men to compete in nowadays marriage market. So if the men are poor and cannot afford the bride price they cannot find marriage partners; or it is difficult for them to find their marriage partners (Zhang, An, Yu, 2012). As data mentioned above, the prices of houses are very high in China, but women still think buying houses is necessary. This is because a house for many Chinese women means home and home means a sense of security. Chinese women's social statues are still not very high which makes Chinese women lack this sense of security; so Chinese women need to ask for houses as bride price from Chinese men to satisfy the sense of security (Xiao, 2011; house Shang Du, 2012).

It is very important to explain the reason of requiring the bride price by talking about the social status of Chinese women. Next, I am going to introduce the changes in the status of Chinese women from different perspectives. I will analyze from historical and labor market perspectives.

From women's historical perspective in China, for thousands of years, Chinese women were ignored in their political, economic, and social position in society. Confucian ideology professed female inferiority and separation of sexes. Women were kept out of formal education and participation in policy-making, the military and other activities in public spheres (Wang, 2006). Chinese women's places were basically in the household, acting as mothers, wives, and daughters. So at that time Chinese women did not work and the main goal of their life was to marry a good man who had better family conditions (Ibid, 2006).

After 1949 when Chinese communists set up, historians used Marxist theory. Marxism emphasized a focus on economic structure and class struggle and ignored gender difference

and ethnic distinctions (Wang, 2006). But there was no doubt that after Chinese communism was set up there was a constitutional law to effect the society to create a good social environment for women.

When Chinese communism was founded economic production was combined with ideological reforms; both the view of new economic programs and communist ideals emphasized women should join in the production and women should be financially independent (KIT, Man, 1997). But when Chinese economy was in recession and there were not enough job opportunities, China began to go back to emphasize the traditional values and women were convinced to stay at home, and go back to their household roles (Ibid, 1997).

According to the one child policy, women's status is higher only in the marriage market; this does not mean that women's personal social status is improved. There are different ways for measuring women's social status. For example one can look at educational and job opportunities, social policies, economy and politics and so on. According to The Executive Report of the 3rd Survey on the status of Chinese women in 2011, women's education levels for ages 18 to 64 years is on average 8.8 years of education which is an increase of 2.7 years from the year 2000. In the whole country Chinese Women who have a high school or higher education total 33.7 percent and in this group 54.2 percent women are from cities and 18.2 percent women are from rural areas (Women's Federation; 2011).

From a labor market perspective, data shows that Chinese women who are between 18 and 64 years old have an overall employment rate of 71.1 percent. 60.8 percent of women from the cities are employed and 82 percent from rural areas are employed. Women, who are from towns, only earn 67.3 percent of what men earn. From the social security perspective, it showed 73.3 percent of women from cities have social security and 87.6 percent have medical security. In rural areas only 31.1 percent of women have social security. On family life, 72.7 percent of married women undertake more housework than their husbands; and 63.2 percent of married women need to take care of their children during the day time (Ibid, 2011).

As the data showed above, Chinese women's social and economic status has positively changed since 1949. However, women still cannot earn as much as men for the same jobs.

Sometimes traditional and cultural views will also affect women's own opinions. Some suggest that no matter how much legal planning there is for political, economic, and cultural

equality between men and women in China, there is still a big difference between legal ideals and the real situation (KIT, Man, 1997).

Miller and Razavi (1998) showed that women can be divided into three different roles: 1-social production, 2-social capital, and 3-financial capital. There are two categories, one is working for family which is unpaid and another one is paid employment (Miller, Razavi, 1998). Women's unpaid work is not seen as production, this is just seen as kind of women's responsibilities (Gomez, 2000; Messias et al., 1997b).

After 1949 China, the government decided to improve the women's job opportunities and they used a complicated system to arrange employment. Women's economic life was controlled by the government. Moreover the state law did not ensure women's possession of property and housing, and the government did not give enough freedom for women's mobility (KIT, Man, 1997). For example in rural areas of China women had to stay at home and they could not go outside to work because they needed to keep their property rights for the land on behalf of their households. At the same time women in rural areas needed to undertake work, like farming, cooking, taking care of children and maintaining the home working well (Ibid, 1997).

During 1949 to 1997 there were over 40 percent of Chinese women workers in the whole working population; but there were very low rates of professional women workers (Ibid, 1997). For example the authors Kit and Man did interviews in the rural areas of China; they found that the men would not like to teach women about technical knowledge in farming because the men thought women were not smart enough to learn (Ibid, 1997). Both urban and rural women in China struggled between their working and families lives, and at the same time they needed to keep their traditional role of femininity. The socialist view said women's conception of femininity was an obstacle for women, when participating in economic activity (Ibid, 1997).

The Chinese website "21 centuries economic report" shows why Chinese people are more concerned about their partners' economic conditions. The author Tang thinks that because there is a lack of social welfare in China; women need to think about their life security after they get married (Tang 2012). For example after women have their babies they might lose their jobs or because they need to take care of babies they can only work part time. Under these conditions women need to think about their lives. If they do not have good social welfare the only way to solve this problem is to marry men that are well off (Ibid, 2012).



In China there are still some women who are fired without any reason after they become pregnant or have given birth (Zhu, 2009). The social analysis showed that official policies were published for protecting women from bad working conditions, but many industries did not hire women as a result (KIT, Man, 1997). For example in China there is an equal work and equal pay slogan; but actually most employers want to employ men (Ibid, 1997). This is because they think men have more abilities to do the work than women. Also they will not need to pay for maternal leave and welfare (KIT, Man, 1997; CountryWatch, 2012).

In recent years, women's status in labor market has improved significantly. But still, in China every woman who is a wife or mother has certain disadvantages in the job market. Women who are mothers or wives put more time on their housework than their husbands and married women over 30 do not easily find jobs because the leaders of enterprise are afraid the women will have babies. This has a bad influence for working women (Zhang, 2011). Evidence showed that women's careers would end after they had children. Then women will get into low status jobs, and accept part-time jobs, and undertake a lot of housework for their families. When men entered marriage they decreased their time on housework, for women it is the opposite (Gupta, 1999).

Although women and men might share the house chores, women get much more negative effects from house chores than men. Yu showed that when women get married it is difficult for them to balance their family housework and jobs (Yu, 2001; Zhang, Hannum, Wang, 2008). Because women work harder for their jobs, at same time, they work hard on housework. Women also keep the role of childbearing and house workers (Tsuya and Bumpass 2004; Zhang, Hannum, Wang, 2008). Parsons and Bales suggested "childbearing demanded that woman play an expressive role within the home and left the instrumental leadership in the occupational system to men" (Parsons, Bales 1956; Treas, Lippe, ChloeTai, 2011).

Shu (2005) suggested urban women who are married are more likely to end their job careers. They are also more likely to change their jobs because of the family situation, and they do not like to try career-advancing job changes (Zhang, Hannum, Wang, 2008). Married women go outside to work which can increase their happiness; this through increasing their incomes, making new social networks and showing their personal values (Treas, Lippe, ChloeTai, 2011). According to the 2012-2013 Chinese marriage survey there are 32 percent of Chinese women who start to stay at home and take care of the housework; this after they get married,

or have children, and they do not have any financial resources. They have to rely on their husbands (Marriage survey, 2012-2013).

So according to what I showed about Chinese women's social status; Chinese women ask bride price because it is a kind of way for them to ensure their social stability after marriage. This is necessary because of the lack of social security and the increased challenges they face due to being women in this society.

In general the analysis part has discussed what the new marriage phenomena are and what elements led to the emergence of the new marriage phenomena. I also have discussed how bride price has changed and why the bride price still exists in present day China.

## **5. Conclusion**

In this paper I have introduced the change of Chinese marriage during the research overview. Then I discussed how this change impacts the relationships between men and women in the analysis.

The evidence shows that the dynamic of Chinese marriage is changing over time and from area to area. The change is influenced by social conditions, economic structure and family characteristics. Before, people met their marriage partners through the match makers. Today, people use the internet to seek their marriage partners. There has been a transition from arranged marriage to those of free choice. At the beginning Chinese women often got married just for sustenance but now they have much higher requirements, and expectations regarding their marriage partners. In traditional Chinese society Chinese women relied entirely on their husbands and so if they did not get married they could not live a normal life by any means. Over time, when choosing a spouse, Chinese men started to focus more on their partners' appearance and the Chinese women started to focus more on the men's talents, socioeconomic situation, and social status.

The major change of the marriage dynamic has generated different impacts on various perspectives, and some new phenomena have occurred. Like "left-over women" which showed there is a rather small group of Chinese women who have good jobs and salary, and a high social status. They are happy to be single and in greater control of their own lives. Like I said this is new phenomenon and there is no exact answer about whether "left-over women" is

good or not, but at least we can see some Chinese women are becoming independent and they have more freedom to make decisions regarding their own lives. Before Chinese women were afraid to divorce their husbands because they did not know if they could survive on their own. Now Chinese women are more independent, and women start to think about the quality of their marriage. These days when Chinese people are not happy with their marriage they could choose to divorce. In one way, this is a good sign because people are getting increasingly more independent. Marriage is not their whole life; and people know how to judge their marriage. This ultimately increases the rate of divorce in present day China.

The impacts of these changes have made modern marriages, in China, much more difficult than before. I have used the “social exchange” theory and the “marriage squeeze” theory to discuss the difficulties of marriage for many Chinese people.

I used the marriage squeeze theory to introduce the difficulties from different perspectives. First I talked about the gender imbalance in China. The one child policy is a big reason for the imbalance of sex ratios. The gender imbalance has led to the marriage squeeze, this because the numbers of men vastly outnumber the number of women. So Chinese women have a better position in the marriage market which leads Chinese men to have to pay bride price (houses or cars) to attract Chinese women and this is an idea of social exchange. Since some Chinese people find it difficult to get married some of them have to find a partner who is not fit for them then it showed the high rates of divorce in China.

Besides high imbalance of sex ratio, the bride price has become another heavy pressure on the Chinese family. I used social exchange to explain why Chinese men pay bride price to the brides’ families. First the bride’s families give the dowry to the groom’s family as an exchange at the same time for keeping the bride’s family status at groom’s family. After the couple get married the brides move to their husbands’ families the brides’ families will lose the labor force the wife represented, and the bride price is compensation for this. After Chinese women get married they may have difficulties finding jobs or some of Chinese women have to give up a part of their career and Chinese men need to use bride price to compensate their wives and ensure their wives future life.

Even though the bride price has come to put a lot of pressure on many Chinese families, women continue to ask for it. I discussed the need of the bride price to Chinese women from women’s social status in China and it shows Chinese women improved their social statues a lot from before. But when comparing with men there is still a large gap. Like I showed there

are still some Chinese women who are fired after they get married or they have kids without any reasons. So they have to get a kind of insurance or welfare from their husbands in the form of a bride price.

However there is no single reason as to why women still do ask for bride price and why it is important for the Chinese people. The imbalance between the genders, as well as women's social statuses could be reasons for this.

Social changes and development in China have changed some of Chinese people's marriage concepts a lot. Like left-over women and high rates of divorce and increasing the values of bride price. But there is no proof to show if those new marriage phenomena are good. I recommend that this topic be further studied.

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