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Changes in Post-Marital Residence Rules in an Era of National Reform: The Urban to Rural Disjunction in Contemporary China

Michaela S. Clemens

Abstract: Alternatives to the traditional practice of patrilocal post-marital residence exist in modern day China and vary from urban to rural areas. Social and economic reforms that were instituted in post-Mao China had an influence on post-marital residence rules. These reforms include marriage laws, reproduction restrictions, the return to family farms, and greater access to employment. Government reforms had different impacts on urban and rural families, creating different family structures and compositions. Family customs, like post-marital residence, also diverged along rural and urban lines. In rural areas, patrilocality persists, but matrilocal marriage arrangements are increasing. In urban areas, a strong preference for neolocality is evident. There are also indications that patrilocal and matrilocal residence arrangements are becoming short-term transitions to neolocal residence. Using a collection of post-Mao literature, this paper examines the relationship between government policies and changes in urban and rural post-marital residence rules in contemporary China.

Introduction

Political and cultural transformations in China over the last century have revolutionized the basic unit of Chinese society – the family. What was once the archetype of strength and stability, the complex, patriarchal family of traditional China was deconstructed and re-formed under modern rule. Changes in family practices and customs followed. In this environment of social and economic change, modern Chinese families made new choices in post-marital residence practices. Different impacts of national policies on rural and urban families created two distinct patterns for residence choice: (1) a rural system

still dominated by patrilocality, but with a noticeable rise in matrilocal residence and (2) an urban system with a strong preference for neolocal residence and indications of transient patrilocal and matrilocal arrangements.

The theoretical basis for this study lies primarily in practice theory - which couples the motivations of actions with the complexities or strains of the situation (Ortner 2001). Cultural systems, like the social and economic systems in modern China, shape, guide, and even dictate behavior, such as where a couple chooses to reside after marriage (Ortner 2001). Changes in systems are, therefore, often reflected by changes in behavior. Scholars are aware of the affect of industrialization on family structures and customs (e.g. Pasternak 1968; Schnaiberg 1970; Sjoberg 1956). However, modernization alone cannot account for transformations in post-marital residence rules in China, nor can it duly explain the divergence of change from rural to urban areas. Ortner (2001) suggests that "change comes about when traditional strategies, which assume traditional patterns of relations, are deployed in relation to novel phenomena which do not respond to those strategies in traditional ways" (671). In China, the traditional strategy of patrilocality met with unprecedented social and economic reforms which prompted new strategies in post-marital residence.

The changes in residence customs that took place in 20th century China, particularly within the last 25 years, had to contend with a strong precedent of patrilocality set by hundreds of years of political, religious, and cultural ideology. While modernization is often heralded as a major proponent of cultural change (thus implying that change is somehow inevitable), a host of institutions and ideas evolved in the People's Republic of China that radically changed the way Chinese individuals view the family structure and residence customs. Beyond advancements in technology and education, a series of extraordinary reforms were instituted following the Communist Party victory in 1949, through the Cultural Revolution of the 1960-70's, and after the death of communist leader Mao Zedong in 1976 that directly and indirectly altered the way Chinese families function.

This paper reviews a collection of post-Mao literature that examines the relationship between social policies and changes in urban and rural Chinese family structure, in general, and post-marital residence, in particular. Many of the recent papers are based on first-hand ethnographic studies conducted in China by Chinese and Western researchers, despite China's previous reluctance toward Western researchers. Several terms are used in these sources to describe residence rules. *Patrilocal* (or *virilocal*) residence is defined as customary residence with the husband's family after marriage where

children are added to the paternal line. *Matrilocal* (or *uxorilocal*) *residence* is the customary residence with the wife's family after marriage and children are added to the maternal line. And, *neolocality* refers to the post-marital residence pattern where a couple establishes a new place of residence rather than living with either set of parents.

A Brief History of Post-Marital Residence Rules in China

For several thousand years family structure and customs in China were dominated by Confucian ideology, which prescribed a natural order for families and a proper role for every member (Croll 1985; Ebrey 1993; Engel 1984). This organization stressed a son's obedience to his parents, the worship of patrilineal ancestors, and a wife's obligations to her husband's family. Female subordination was evident in the family structure. In her natal home, a woman obeys her father; after marriage, she serves her husband and is a perpetuator of his descent line; and after her husband's death, she obeys her son (Ebrey 1993; Han 2003).

A Tradition of Patrilocality

Patrilocality was fundamental in maintaining the traditional Chinese family structure. Traditionally, upon marriage, a daughter moves from her natal home into her husband's home - or more accurately her husband's parents' home. In this customary system, the father-son relationship is paramount and daughter-in-laws have the lowest status in the family (Tsui 1989). Patrilocality establishes a descent group of core males related by common male ancestors where wives are seen as outsiders (Pasternak et al. 1997). The strong preference for sons is obvious in a system of patrilocality and patrilineal descent where "sons perpetuate the patriline" and "daughters produce offspring for other families" (Han 2003). Wealth was passed down to sons through inheritance and to daughters in the form of a dowry upon marriage (Ebrey 1993; Goody 1976). In this system women achieve economic security and social status through marriage.

Until the 1930's large extended families were typical in both urban and rural China with several generations living in the same home (Tsui 1989). Typically, rural families had more children than families in urban areas. This trend continues today where at least 80 percent of contemporary Chinese people live and work in rural agricultural provinces (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Historically, Chinese families showed a greater preference for sons because sons "join the family labor force (daughters marry out), continue the patrilineage, and provide their parents with old age security" (Dalsimer & Nisonoff

1987). Every Chinese man was encouraged to have many sons to fulfill these familial obligations (Croll 1985). As parents relied solely on their sons to provide for them as they grew old, patrilocality strengthened gender differences in traditional China. This gender inequality proved to be a major barrier to change in residence customs over time.

The Matrilocal Alternative in Traditional China

Although patrilocality was dominant in traditional rural and urban China, a number of researchers cite matrilocality as an alternative form of residence that took place under specific conditions (e.g. Goody 1976; Han 2003; Li et al. 2000; Wolf 1985). Matrilocal residence occurred historically for two reasons: preservative or practical (Han 2003). When a family had no son, a son-in-law was called in for a daughter in order to preserve the family line. In this case, either the son-in-law or one of the grandsons would adopt the family surname (Li et al. 2000). Matrilocal residence also occurs when, for practical reasons, families with few sons require additional male labor (Han 2003). Families that marry sons out matrilocally generally had too many sons and too little land for inheritance (Pasternak et al. 1997). References to the historic practice of matrilocal marriage frequently note the stigmas and high costs associated with this alternative and, thus, the reasons why patrilocality continued to dominate (discussed further in the last section of this paper).

In pre-revolutionary China, the frequency of matrilocal marriages was dependent on time and regional circumstance. Patrilocality remained the dominant form of post-marital residence according to political and religious customs for most of China's long history. Following years of civil war in the early 20th century, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 brought about almost immediate mandates for change in marriage practices and family structures. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong, social and economic reforms were enacted that had important consequences on the dominance of patrilocality in Chinese families. After the death of the communist leader and the end of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970's, a new series of reforms were instituted. These post-Mao policies had some of the strongest effects on Chinese family structure and post-marital residence rules in both urban and rural areas.

Deconstructing Family Systems through Social Reforms

Since the creation of a classless socialist society in China was the primary focus of communism, the “success of the socialist revolution in China depends upon revolutionary change in the Chinese family” (Engel 1984). The destruction of imperial stratification greatly depended on the new government’s ability to shift wealth and power from patrilineal families into the hands of the collective *people*. Revolutionizing the Chinese family involved, first, the destruction of “the feudal marriage system” and, then, the reconstruction of a “new Democratic marriage system” (Croll 1981: 1). Patrilineage and patrilocal residence stood in direct opposition to communist ideals of economic and gender equality.

The Introduction of Marriage Laws in China

Immediately following the Communist Revolution, the new Chinese government developed certain policies that specifically targeted family structures and marriage customs. Enacted in 1950, the Marriage Law was a bold move against the patriarchal family system and a concerted effort to create greater gender equality by giving women more economic autonomy and political independence (Croll 1983; Engel 1984). Some key aspects of the new policy were the abolishment of arranged marriages, concubinage, and polygyny (Davis & Harrell 1993). These reforms also gave women greater access to divorce and inheritance and attempted to reshape the family unit in a way that was more in line with national economic and social goals (Palmer 1995).

Early government efforts to alter marriage customs and family structure were often ineffectual and new policies were adopted in a continuous process of achieving national goals. Following the death of Mao Zedong, the successive leadership introduced a new set of family laws in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s that strengthened previous reforms and promoted new agendas like population reduction and gender equality (Engel 1984; Palmer 1995). The 1980 marriage law specifically addressed post-marital residence rules and included an alternative to patrilocality: “Article 8. After a marriage has been registered, the woman may become a member of the man’s family, or the man may become a member of the woman’s family, according to the agreed wishes of the two parties” (Engel 1984). The law was a clear effort to elevate the status of daughters in a family by giving them the opportunity to remain in their natal homes after marriage and support their parents in their old age. Even now, evidence of these goals can be

found throughout the country on large billboards as part of a national publicity campaign to promote fewer children and raise the status of girls. One recent article includes a picture of a billboard which reads, “There’s no difference between having a girl or a boy – girls can also continue the family line” (Hesketh et al. 2005).

China’s One-Child Family Policy

The post-Mao effort to limit population began with unofficial restrictions on family size in the early 1970’s; most notably, the “largely voluntary ‘late, long, and few’ policy, which called for later childbearing, greater spacing between children, and fewer children” (Hesketh et al. 2005). In 1979, these reproductive restrictions became a mandatory national policy known as the one-child family policy. This government reform garnered international criticism for strict control of reproductive rights and has been accused of promoting sex-selective abortions, female infanticide, and forced sterilizations. While the policy is a drastic measure to implement “small-family culture”, the enforcement of the one-child rule varies considerably especially from rural to urban areas (Hesketh et al. 2005). Compliance to and exceptions from the one-child rule are decided primarily by local officials, which creates ambiguity in the policy goals. However, certain general factors are important to understanding the relationship between the one-child policy and urban versus rural residence customs: (1) the policy is strictly enforced for urban residents, with few exceptions; (2) in rural areas, a second child is often permitted after five years if the first child is a girl; (3) in remote, less populated areas and rural areas with labor shortages, second children are permitted; and (4) a second child is permitted for rural couples where the husband has settled in the home of his wife’s parents (i.e. matrilineal residence) (Croll 1985; Davin 1985; Hesketh et al. 2005). Different applications of the one-child policy from rural to urban areas yield different outcomes in family sizes and composition.

Rural and Urban Demographics under the One-Child Policy

Now, a generation after the one-child policy was instituted, the diverging demography of rural and urban populations is evident. New research documents these results and can offer some clues to a parallel divergence in post-marital residence rules. The “demographic determinist” view is one theory used to explain changes in family structure and shifts away from patrilocality, where “smaller families

mean that there will be fewer brothers available to live with a surviving parent” (Lavelly & Ren 1992).

Results of the 2001 *National Planning and Reproductive Health Survey* show an expected decrease in China’s population, but also noticeably different rural to urban demographic outcomes. Largely due to the voluntary policy enacted from 1970 to 1979, the total fertility rate (the mean number of children born per woman) in China dropped from 5.9 to 2.9. From 1979, the year the one-child policy went into effect, a subsequent decline in fertility followed - from 2.9 to 1.7 in 2004. Since the one-child restriction is more lenient in rural areas, the 2004 total fertility rate shows regional variation “with a rate of 1.3 in urban areas and just under 2.0 in rural areas” (Hesketh et al. 2005). The data reveal a “distinct demographic pattern of urban families with predominantly one child and rural families with predominantly two children” (2005).

An assessment of the sex ratio at birth (the proportion of male live births to female live births) also shows regional variation from urban to rural areas in China. The data illustrate an overall increase in male to female births from 1.06 in 1979, to 1.11 in 1988, to 1.17 in 2001. These findings also demonstrate that sex ratios vary locally and by birth order. The sex ratio is higher for a first child born in urban areas (1.13) than in rural areas (1.05), see Table 1. The ratio climbs even further for second order children, with 1.30 in urban areas and 1.23 in rural areas (Hesketh et al. 2005).

Birth Order	In Urban Areas	In Rural Areas	Overall
First child	1.13	1.05	1.06
Second child	1.30	1.23	1.24
Third child	1.19	1.29	1.28
Fourth child or more	1.19	1.32	1.31
Average of all birth orders	1.16	1.15	1.15

Table 1. Ratio of Men to Women According to Birth Order in China, 1980 to 2001 (Hesketh et al. 2005)

Several factors could account for these figures: (1) stricter adherence to the one child rule in urban areas and a strong preference for sons overall would increase sex-selective abortions with the first pregnancy in urban areas and with the second and subsequent

pregnancies in rural areas, (2) non-registration of female births, and (3), very rarely, female infanticide and less aggressive medical treatment of sick female infants (Hesketh et al. 2005). However, the distorted sex ratio is not attributed solely to the one-child policy and researchers indicate that a high sex ratio occurred prior to the Communist Revolution in 1949.

Parents who believe that only a son will provide for them in their old age tend not to support or cooperate with the new one-child-per-family ideal and fertility control efforts, especially when they already have one child who is a daughter. To the extent that patrilocal residence customs continue to be practiced in contemporary China, parents will want sons as old age insurance and consider daughters of less value, and parents continue having children until they have a son or enough sons to provide for them in their old age (Engel 1984).

Long-standing cultural preferences for male heirs compete strongly with population controls and are tied directly to patrilocality. In an effort to further understand the discernable differences in demography from urban to rural areas, government incentives to follow the one-child policy also provide some answers.

Incentives and Disincentives of Social Reforms

The family-planning strategy outlined by the one-child policy relies not only on political persuasion and voluntary compliance, but on a system of economic rewards and sanctions (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Economic benefits to families with only-children include housing priorities, wage bonuses, extra work points, and additional maternity leave for mothers who pledge to have one child. Only children are entitled to free medical care, priority in nursery, school, and university enrollment, and priority in employment placement after graduation (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Parents of an only-child are entitled to a form of social security upon retirement (Croll 1985).

Researchers note, however, that many of these incentives “hold little appeal for rural families” and, thus, the incentives “have been more effective” for urban families (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Wage bonuses, work points, and maternity leave have little value to men and women working in rural areas on family farms. Housing priorities only apply to city dwellers where space is limited. And, free health care is often the only benefit that many rural children can take advantage of (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Because these incentives have failed to convince many rural families to limit family size, fertility rates appear consistently higher in rural areas. Local officials have resorted to more convincing incentives to limit rural populations.

Additional grain allotments, increased family plots, and job placement in industries are examples of more recent offerings to rural, one-child families (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987).

Punishments for not complying with the one-child rule can be severe and disproportionately affect rural families. These disincentives include “reductions in state grain allotments for second and third children, expropriation of family goods (such as television sets, bicycles, or sewing machines), taxes on overquota births, or reassignment to less fertile plots” (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Interviews with family-planning program managers, however, suggest that these penalties hold little sway with rural farmers whose labor source is their offspring. One such administrator “conceded that many peasant families in South China believe the potential labor productivity of sons can ultimately offset economic disincentives imposed by the government” (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987).

Since the adoption and enforcement of reproductive restrictions, however, the proportion of no-son families in rural China has increased as a result of sustained low fertility (Li et al. 2003). These limits to family size are in direct opposition to the patrilineal, extended family model long-held as the ideal traditional family. The traditional model continues to shape beliefs about family structure and residence rules in contemporary rural China: “for many people, especially the older generation, a large multigenerational household is still regarded as an ideal, as it symbolizes wealth, harmony between family members, and the filial piety of the young for the old” (Tsui 1989).

Social policies and specifically the one-child rule offer some clues to post-marital residence choices in contemporary China. The demographic results of these policies indicate modern patterns of urban families with one child and a strong son preference and rural families with two children and a similar preference for sons. Patrilocality and the distorted sex-ratio seem to present a reciprocal relationship. When sons remain at home after marriage and take care of their aging parents, son preference persists and families with only sons or many sons trend toward patrilocality. However, fewer children and fewer sons, in particular, begin to alter family decisions on residence. Alternatives that were once discounted as inferior now become viable options. Government policies have attempted to disrupt the son-preference/patrilocal pattern by sanctioning matrilocal residence and promoting the ability of daughters to maintain family lineage and provide for their parents.

Fertility and high-sex ratios alone cannot fully explain why a rural or urban family decides to deviate from the patrilocality tradition.

Economic policies that came about at the same time as social reforms did not specifically target marriage or family structure, but contributed to changes in residence practices in rural and urban China over time.

The Influence of Agricultural and Economic Reforms

The Communist Revolution in China brought about a number of changes in access to economic resources and how people earn a living. This reorganization, like social reforms, impacted family structures and customs. The new reforms were based on the “unselfish, collectivist orientation emphasized by the Communist Party” and were in direct contrast to “traditional familism, which calls for self-sacrifice for parents and ancestors” (Tsui 1989). Economic factors that predominantly affect decisions of post-marital residence in rural and urban areas are individuals’ access to employment, the issue of old age security, and the distribution of wealth within family units.

Economic Opportunities and Organization

Urban families differ from rural families in economic organization in contemporary China and this affects residence patterns after marriage (Wolf 1985). Married sons and daughters have different access to employment in rural and urban areas and ideas about wealth are shaped by government policies. Early communist reforms and economic development strategies, such as the Great Leap Forward (1958 to 1960) pushed gender equality in the workforce and subsequently saw a great number of women entering rural and urban labor roles for the first time (Croll 1983; Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987).

In rural areas, ideas of gender equality fell short as men were promoted to higher paying jobs in dam building, irrigation, and reforestation - leaving field work to rural women (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Patriarchal systems were maintained even with the adoption of agricultural communes. Women became workers in the field, in addition to the home, and men were agricultural supervisors and heads of households. Since males had greater access to and control over economic and agricultural resources, preferences for sons continued and patrilocality continued.

In the mid- 1970’s, as government planners were reassessing population controls they adopted new agricultural policies with the goal of increasing rural productivity. The new policies dissolved collective farms and restored agricultural production to the pre-revolutionary family unit (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987; Lavelly & Ren 1992). Under the new “family responsibility system”, communally owned farms were

divided into family owned plots for cultivation. Production quotas allowed families to keep surpluses and instituted penalties for shortages. A subsequent increase in agricultural production meant that families could afford more children and more offspring, in turn, would provide more labor. The restoration of family farming units, therefore, seemed to be in direct opposition to social policies that limit the number of children in the family (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987).

While the return to the traditional family economic organization reinforced patrilocal and patrilineal systems in the countryside, many rural women were given new employment alternatives through another economic policy. Coinciding with the dissolution of collective farms, the government promoted additional strategies to increase "domestic sideline production" in rural households (Croll 1983: 30). These sideline activities were targeted for export and included animal husbandry, cultivation of fruits and wild plants, handicraft industries like lace making, basket weaving, sewing, and knitting (Croll 1983; Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Many of the production activities were undertaken by female members of rural households and the economic opportunities resulted in a marked increase in household income (Croll 1983). With greater economic opportunities in rural areas, the potential to change traditional family customs increased. Lavelly and Ren (1992) found that, while agricultural reforms in rural Taiwan increased extended families, new family structures arose where family labor was divided between agriculture and industry. They say, "this new version of the complex household is a far more co-operative and egalitarian organization than the traditional patriarchal grand family" (Lavelly & Ren 1992). New economic organization in rural Chinese families opened the door for new patterns of post-marital residence.

Revolutionary and post-Mao economic reforms created different employment opportunities in urban areas. Since the establishment of communism, China's urban economy was dominated by "small street or neighbourhood factories which are based on low capital investment, are labour intensive and are collectively owned by the workers" (Croll 1983: 47). The influx of women into the urban labor force provided the first opportunities for many women to gain employment outside of their homes. Education opportunities were greater for girls in urban areas and allowed many women to acquire production and service roles traditionally held by men. More recently urban individuals have been encouraged by the government to establish private enterprises in manufacturing and providing services (Croll 1983). This entrepreneurial motivation has translated into a new sense of economic independence for younger men and women. In an

examination of Chinese urban family structure, Tsui (1989) found “an increasingly individualistic attitude toward life has developed among young people” which is evident in “a growing interest in material comfort and individual conjugal units.” Tsui’s observations clearly convey how economic transformations in urban areas foster a shift toward neolocal residence patterns.

Old Age Security as a Factor in Post-Marital Residence Rules

Traditionally and today, a primary economic concern for both urban and rural families in China and a strong motivation for patrilocality is the issue of old age security. Although the government has repeatedly attempted to address the issue, economic planners have yet to devise an effective system:

In 1980, only 19 percent of the total work force was eligible for retirement benefits; in the countryside, less than half a million out of a total rural population of 800 million were receiving pensions in 1981. Unless adequate old-age security is universally provided, the elderly in China will remain dependent on their children for financial and social support. Even though the welfare system, Five Guarantees (food, clothing, shelter, child care, and burial), is available in rural areas for retirees who have no close relatives, the system is not regarded as a desirable alternative because the economic support is minimal and the loss of face is great. (Hong 1987)

This critical concern for old age security reinforces patrilocality and reliance on sons for economic support, especially in rural areas. Although patrilocality still dominates, the increasing trend of matrilocal marriages in rural China may indicate a growing reliance on daughters for old age security rather than acceptance of government welfare. A key government decree that supports this trend was the move to give daughters equal rights of inheritance. Where, historically, daughters had no rights to family property or wealth and dowries were often only symbolic, this reform gave rural and urban daughters more power within and outside of the family unit (Watson & Ebrey 1991).

Wealth Distribution within Rural and Urban Families

In many rural families, male heads of households sign contracts for agricultural plots and control family wealth (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Even the sideline activities of women that contribute to household income are regulated by men. Within these families,

parents invest in their children so that they are taken care of in old age. The economic productivity of younger individuals, married or not, helps support elderly relatives who have limited means of generating personal income in rural areas, but contribute to family welfare through activities such as childcare. Social reforms that limit family size are seen as threats to the economic security of older Chinese who rely on their children and grandchildren. In spite of increases in agricultural production, strict family planning laws weaken the system of extended families and can reduce the patrilineal network to direct lineal kin (Hong 1987). The one-child policy creates a “1-2-4” family structure where, before marriage, a single child may be economically supporting two parents and four grandparents. Under these circumstances, neolocal residence, either before or after marriage, is a rare option in rural areas.

Place of Residence	Percentage
Neolocal	48.33 (2,414)
Patrilocal	40.02 (2,003)
Matrilocal	9.69 (485)
Other	2.06 (103)
Total	100 (5,005)

Table 2. Place of Residence Right After Marriage (Tsui 1989: 745)

Reproduction restrictions do not pose the same problems of old age security in cities where “the economic dependence of the parent on the child has been gradually diminishing in urban China” (Tsui 1989). The *Five-City Survey* conducted in 1982 examined family structures in the five largest cities in China. The results “showed that 50% of urban people aged 60 to 80 were either gainfully employed or receiving a retirement pension” (Tsui 1989). In urban areas, seniority and longevity in wage distribution create intergenerational differences in wealth and contribute to financial dependence of the young on the old (Tsui 1989). With strict enforcement of the one-child rule in cities, the 1-2-4 system is creating an urban culture of “little emperors” and “little empresses”. Tsui (1989) reports that young married couples often live with their parents (patrilocally or matrilocally) for a period of time or live in their own residence (neolocally) and receive financial support from their parents. With specific regard to post-marital residence, the survey data show a steady increase in matrilocality since

the 1940's and a dramatic shift toward neolocal residence in contemporary urban China, see Table 2 (Tsui 1989).

Furthermore, several researchers indicate that, while patrilocality is still common (and dominant) in many urban areas, its persistence as a long-term residence strategy is much more in question. Lavelly and Ren (1992) address this issue: "the substantial decline in the length of co-residence indicates that patrilocal marriage may be on its way to becoming a ritual interlude rather than a long-term commitment." It is common practice for couples to receive free room and board in their parents' house after marriage, but this situation is "likely to be temporary if we consider the growing aspiration for privacy among the young in urban China" (Tsui 1989). This form of transient residence would not be limited to patrilocality. In an increasing number of cases, urban couples are deciding to live with the wife's parents, matrilocally, even for a short period of time for economic considerations (Tsui 1989).

Constraints to Change in Post-marital Residence Rules

Economic dependence and independence are strong motivators for deciding to reside matrilocally or neolocally. As factors like these encourage change from traditional residence rules, other factors can be powerful constraints. Marriage customs like residence rules do not exist as isolated entities, but depend on a complex cultural system to constantly reinforce and maintain their function in a society. When examined from a demographic or economic perspective, practicality seems to dictate an easy transition from traditional customs. However, following hundreds of years of traditional residence practices throughout China, a number of beliefs have evolved that preserve the patrilocal, patrilineal family system.

Female Sexuality and Sex Taboos

One of the strongest obstacles to change in traditional post-marital residence is overcoming long held beliefs about female sexuality and family dynamics. Taboos on sexuality and reproduction uphold patriarchal family structures and seem to be more dominant in rural areas. In rural north China, Han (2003) examined a cultural taboo referred to locally as *Bufafang* - which forbids women to have sexual intercourse in their natal home. *Bufafang* is described as a belief that, "from the parents' point of view, a daughter's (married or not) sexuality in the natal home brings bad luck to sons, especially to those sons who live together with the parents" (Han 2003).

The sex taboo is often less about female sexual purity and more about propriety in where to have sex and the importance of maintaining male dominated households. If an unmarried daughter has sex with her boyfriend in her natal home it is considered Bufafang, but if that same act takes place in the boyfriend's home, the sex taboo does not apply, even though premarital sex is strongly discouraged (Han 2003). This taboo extends to daughters after marriage and parents are vigilant in heeding off bad luck for their sons.

Other taboos related to childbirth also reinforce patrilocal post-marital residence. In many farming communities, the cultural idea persists that women should not deliver babies in their natal homes (Han 2003). The practice of confinement after childbirth also restricts a woman to her husband's home. Since the child is part of her husband's patriline and not the responsibility of her natal home, breaking these taboos are believed to bring harm to her natal home (Han 2003). The persistence of these taboos and cultural beliefs, predominantly in rural areas, prove to be powerful constraints to many Chinese families in deviating from patrilocality.

The Stigma of Matrilocal Marriage

In addition to specific local taboos about post-marital residence, the widespread view of matrilocal marriage as inferior and secondary endures in contemporary China and can prevent its increase as an alternative to patrilocality. Wolf (1985) found that in traditional south China "a man contemplating an uxori-local marriage for a daughter had to get permission from his brothers and from his lineage, and both were prone to say no" (199). Families were reluctant to see wealth, property, and power passed out of direct descent. Matrilocal marriages were considered secondary choices under disgraceful circumstances and families involved lost a measure of respect in their communities (Han 2003). The difficulties in arranging and residing in a matrilocal marriage extended beyond the family unit to the son-in-law. The called-in son-in-law suffered serious criticism and was often considered inferior to other married men, in spite of the fact that most marriages at the time were arranged and completely out of his hands (Han 2003; Pasternak et al. 1997).

Even as family structures and compositions are changed by social and economic forces, patrilocality remains "overwhelmingly dominant in contemporary rural China" (Li et al. 2003). Matrilocal residence still carries high stigmas for families and long-standing patterns of patrilineage are difficult to change. Wolf (1985) explains the continued preference for patrilocality:

The reasons rural women prefer to live with their sons are quite simple. Only women who have failed to produce sons live with their daughters, and they are considered to be living on charity (unless, as only rarely happens, their daughter married-in a husband). Even a woman who despises her daughter-in-law and has little affection for her son will still live with them rather than a beloved daughter. A daughter's house is someone else's house and a daughter belongs to someone else's family. (223)

Son preference is equal, if not stronger, in urban families who are more restricted to the one-child rule, as evident in the higher sex-ratios, see Table 1. However, matrilocal residence is higher in urban areas and seems to carry fewer stigmas (Lavelly & Ren 1992; Tsui 1989).

Urban Constraints to Change in Post-Marital Residence Rules

In large cities, certain traditions coupled with environmental conditions promote patrilocality. Urban children that take care of their parents according to traditional custom are expected to live at the latter's house (Tsui 1989). Often in urban China, a child takes over a parent's job after the parent retires and, in many cases, they "have to live with the parents because they usually cannot get a room assignment while their parents live in a company house" (Tsui 1989). So, even where individuals have their own income, neolocality can be prevented by sheer lack of housing. This constraint to residence change in urban areas appears to be more a consequence of industrialization and less a product of tradition.

Conclusion

In rural China today, patrilocality remains the dominant form of post-marital residence. In many rural provinces, studies suggest that "the chances that a bride will reside with her husband's parents...after marriage has remained stable or even risen since 1950" (Lavelly & Ren 1992). However, the pressures of social and economic reform are becoming evident in post-marital residence choices. A rise in matrilocality in rural areas indicates a shift in residence customs to deal with low family sizes and high sex ratios.

While constraints to the practice of matrilocality are seen more in rural areas, recent research shows that the power of sex taboos in many of these local regions is weakening. Han's (2003) research of Bufafang in rural north China demonstrates this change: "in all cases of concern about Bufafang, the daughters/sisters seemed unaware of

Bufafang and its potential danger, suggesting that Bufafang may be fading away among the younger generation.” As taboos and beliefs that enforce patrilocal residence lessen, rural families with few sons or only daughters may decide to live matrilocally to continue the family line and ensure old age security. The increasing necessity of alternatives to patrilocal residence indicates a change that is more often contingent and based on individual family circumstances and not a general institutional trend toward matrilocality (Li et al. 2003).

Changes in post-marital residence in urban China during the same time period involve equally complicated determinants and motivations. Notions of modernization, westernization, and industrialization offer only simple explanations to the rise of neolocal residence in cities and do not address the complexity of factors that have contributed to this change over the last century (Pasternak 1968). Greater access to personal income and higher education coupled with lower fertility have created an urban culture of only children who prefer to live on their own or only briefly with their parents after marriage.

The post-marital residence decision in urban China is not so easily equated with other industrialized nations, however. Despite the country's rapid globalization of a number of its institutions, many family customs and practices remain, in an etic perspective, entrenched in tradition. In contemporary China, the strong pressure to marry is tied to the belief that Chinese young people do not achieve adult status until marriage. Those that stay single can be forced into “crowded, same-sex dormitories maintained for young unmarrieds at some worksites” (Dalsimer & Nisonoff 1987). Considering this scenario, residence choice should be considered not only as a practice *post*-marriage, but as an influence on the decision to marry at all. Future research in this area should take advantage of China's increasing move out of isolationism and incorporate growing access to the Chinese perspectives on changes within their own culture.

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