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*Research Article*

**Between money and intimacy: Brideprice,  
marriage, and women's position in  
contemporary China**

**Yifeng Wan**

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## **Between money and intimacy: Brideprice, marriage, and women's position in contemporary China**

**Yifeng Wan<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

#### **BACKGROUND**

Brideprice – a transfer from the groom's to the bride's family as part of the marriage process – has been a prominent element of marriage and kinship systems in many societies. While brideprice has declined as many countries modernize, the amount of brideprice has increased in China.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

This study examines how the meanings attributed to brideprice payments at the time of marriage shape brideprice repayments at the time of divorce, focusing on two frames of brideprice: an interfamily compensation for female labor and fertility, and an intergenerational endowment for the newlyweds.

#### **METHODS**

This study uses a unique data set containing over 100,000 court decisions involving brideprice disputes to estimate fractional regression models.

#### **RESULTS**

Brideprice repayment ratios are consistently higher for brideprice as compensation than for brideprice as endowment. Brideprice repayment ratios are higher in cases where the bride has undergone an abortion or has childbearing experience, resides in a rural area, or ends an engagement without registering the marriage.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

These findings demonstrate that, unlike trends in many other societies, the traditional practice of brideprice in China has not declined. Instead, both the amounts involved in brideprice payments and the ratios of brideprice repayments upon dissolution have seen an increase. The intersection of brideprice type and rural/urban residence substantially shapes the repayment of brideprice upon a relationship's dissolution, whether through breakup or divorce.

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## **CONTRIBUTION**

This study presents new data on brideprice payments and repayments, demonstrating that the two types of brideprice parallel in contemporary China. It also contributes to our understanding of how various factors influence the outcomes of brideprice return in court proceedings.

## **1. Introduction**

In his influential book on international family change, Goode (1963) predicts that marriage transfers such as brideprice would decline and eventually disappear in developing societies as economic modernization and the nuclearization of the family proceeded. Although brideprice is still common throughout sub-Saharan Africa and many parts of Asia, it appears that the practice may have declined as many countries modernized (Anderson 2007; Chae, Agadjanian, and Hayford 2021; Lowes and Nunn 2018; Goody 1983; Boomgaard 2003). For example, in rural Mozambique, Chae, Agadjanian, and Hayford (2021) find that the prevalence of marriages involving brideprice has been declining over time. Not only are couples entering marriages without brideprice, but they are also experiencing the changing nature of brideprice marriages. The practice has been concentrated among the better-off, becoming a symbol of wealth and status in an increasingly unequal society. These findings parallel the patterns found in the United States, where marriage has become a marker of prestige and achievement, mainly achieved by those with more education (Cherlin 2004, 2020).

Although brideprice may have declined in many countries, the amount of brideprice has increased in China. Escalating brideprice in recent decades has attracted considerable interest in the media and ethnographic studies (Jiang, Zhang, and Sánchez-Barricarte 2015; Ye 2017, February 20; Minter 2018, September 28). What makes the Chinese case even more intriguing is that the practice remains widespread across the country despite the state's repeated criticisms and attacks. Furthermore, it is still a norm in China to return at least part of the brideprice after the breakup of a marriage (Zhang 2020). This norm exists even though scholars have long associated the return of brideprice upon divorce with detrimental effects on women's welfare, including happiness and reproductive autonomy, since the requirement of returning brideprice may prevent women from leaving bad marriages (Horne, Dodoo, and Dodoo 2013; Lowes and Nunn 2018; Dodoo, Horne, and Dodoo 2020). Therefore, China provides an interesting setting to explore the institution of brideprice and its implications for the treatment of women in the marriage market.

In this article, I will present new data on disputes over the return of brideprice in the context of divorce cases adjudicated in China. Drawing on the data, I will argue that

a newer form of brideprice has emerged, along with the persistence of traditional brideprice. Its appearance may help to explain why the practice endures in China. Specifically, I will make a distinction between the two types of brideprice. The first, and older, form is brideprice as compensation for the bride's labor and fertility. As a system of marriage payments, brideprice has long been regarded as compensation for the bride's productive and reproductive rights (Anderson 2007; Goody 1973; Freedman 1966; Comaroff and Scheuer 1980). The payment of brideprice transfers the rights from the bride's family to the groom's family. The second, emerging form is brideprice as endowment from parents on both sides to the newlyweds as a conjugal fund. Rather than simply seeing brideprice as a type of compensation, brideprice as endowment emphasizes the destination of the brideprice from the parents' generation to the newlyweds as a conjugal fund. Brideprice is thus not only a one-way flow of compensation between two families but also a way of intergenerational transfer that provides a material basis for the newlyweds.

Based on this conceptual framework, this study uses a unique data set of 104,596 court cases involving brideprice disputes to examine how the meanings attributed to brideprice payments at the time of marriage shape brideprice repayments at the time of divorce. Analyzing the brideprice data set, this study demonstrates that brideprice repayment ratios – the fraction of brideprice returned – are consistently higher for brideprice as compensation than for brideprice as endowment. This study also shows that brideprice repayment ratios are higher in cases where the bride has undergone an abortion or has childbearing experience, resides in a rural area, or ends an engagement without registering the marriage.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 The social meaning of brideprice**

Most of the theoretical and empirical research on brideprice has adopted an exchange perspective, viewing brideprice as the price of the bride. This perspective recognizes brideprice as a type of compensation that the bride's family receives for the cost of raising daughters and the loss of women as producers and reproducers. For economists, brideprice is an equilibrium outcome of the marriage market: If the bride has more advantages, the groom will pay a brideprice to the bride as compensation for her labor and fertility (Becker 1991; Zhang and Chan 1999). Anthropologists and sociologists further acknowledge the symbolic value of brideprice: an alliance and exchange between two kin groups through an affinal relationship (Goody 1973; Comaroff and Scheuer 1980). Families lose female members and their children when daughters marry out and gain them when they take in daughters-in-law. Brideprice as compensation validates the transfer of rights over women's labor and fertility between families.

Another line of literature views brideprice as endowment: a gift from parents on both sides to the newlyweds (Cohen 1976; Yan 1996; Fei 2012; Goody 1990). The bride's parents do not retain the majority of the brideprice after receiving it from the groom's parents.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the bride's parents transfer the brideprice to the newlywed couple as a conjugal fund to provide a material basis for the new household. Therefore, the social meaning of brideprice has been transformed. For brideprice as compensation, it functions as a means of interfamilial marital transfers; for brideprice as endowment, it serves as a form of intergenerational gift giving.

Research on brideprice in contemporary settings has been limited, but researchers need to distinguish and compare the two types of brideprice because such comparison will enrich our understanding of changing marriage and family systems. The meaning of brideprice as compensation is rooted in family systems emphasizing collectivism and kinship. With the declining importance of parental authority, increasing individualization of family relationships, and growing support for 'modern' family values, various theories have underlined the evolution of marriage from a component in a kinship institution to an individualized couple relationship (Goode 1963; Lesthaeghe 2010; Thornton 2013; Cherlin 2004, 2020). Consistent with the changes in marriage, research finds that brideprice has declined or even disappeared in many societies (Chae, Agadjanian, and Hayford 2021; Anderson 2007; Goody 1983).

Contrary to these findings, the amount of brideprice has increased in China. With increasing monetary income after the economic reforms in the 1980s, the amount of brideprice has increased across regions (Siu 1993; Wei and Jiang 2017; Wolf 1985; Jiang, Zhang, and Sánchez-Barricarte 2015). A nationally representative survey conducted in 2013 shows that the median brideprice increased by more than 4.5 times from the 1980s to the 2010s.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, 58 percent of the respondents paid brideprice for at least one child's marriage. For rural respondents, the percentage of parents paying for children's brideprice is even higher at 63 percent. However, the increasing brideprice does not imply that there are no changes in marriage toward a more individualized relationship in China. A more individualized interpretation of marriage is not reflected by a decline of brideprice but rather by transformation of brideprice from compensation to endowment.

In a series of ethnographic work spanning 15 years in a northeastern Chinese village, Yan (1997, 2005, 2009, 1996) records the transformation of brideprice with growing youth autonomy. Young generations in Yan's studies did not abandon the custom

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<sup>2</sup> Some call it 'indirect dowry' or 'hidden dowry'. Dowry refers to payments made from the bride's family to the groom's family. China is an interesting case where brideprice and dowry coexist, and dowry is often subsidized through brideprice (McCreery 1976). Brideprice was obligatory and universal, whereas dowry was voluntary (Goody 1973).

<sup>3</sup> Calculated by the author using the 2013 wave of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) (N = 10,708). Brideprice amounts are adjusted for inflation to 2010s value by the author. CHARLS is a nationally representative survey of respondents 45 years and older. More information about the survey can be found at <https://charls.pku.edu.cn/en/About/About.CHARLS.htm>.

of brideprice; instead, they strategically transformed the old practice into a new form of intergenerational gift giving. In this process, Yan finds that young couples gained more independence in marriage negotiations about the financial arrangements of their own marriages, with a concomitant decline of parental authority. The bride and the groom actively participated in the bargaining of the brideprice and negotiated with their parents over the control of the brideprice, turning the bridewealth to the wealth of the bride. This transformation suggests the cultural and social adaptation of the brideprice institution. For many individuals, the social meaning of brideprice has changed from a marriage payment compensating the bride's parents to a resource flow from one generation to the next (Wolf 1985; Siu 1993; Zhang 2000).

Although parental authority and control have declined in brideprice as endowment, parents continue to be involved in children's marriage arrangements in China (Zhang and Sun 2014; Yeung and Hu 2016). The continuation of parental influence reflects the fact that marriage in China is not only a relationship between two individuals but also an affair between two families. Moreover, as I will show in the next section, there is another factor in this story: the state.

## **2.2 Brideprice repayment, law, and the state in China**

Brideprice has been a prominent feature of Chinese marriages for centuries (Watson and Ebrey 1991). But only in recent decades have brideprice and its repayment been a national concern. The institution of brideprice has been targeted by the socialist regime since it took power in 1949. For the regime, brideprice was a backward institution impeding socialist modernization; numerous ideological attacks and political campaigns against brideprice have characterized it as "feudal extravagance" and "buying and selling marriage" (Croll 1984). The 1950 Marriage Law, the first national law under the socialist regime and announced by Mao himself, prohibited "the exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriage" (Article 2). This statute appears in all follow-up versions of the Marriage Law and remains effective in the latest Civil Code of China. In recent years, the issue of brideprice has appeared in the "No.1 Central Document" three times, which is a key policy document jointly issued by the State Council – China's cabinet – and the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Policymakers at the top demand "special campaigns against most acute problems in key areas including high brideprice."

People bargain over brideprice payments before marriage, and they fall into disputes over brideprice repayments after the breakup of a marriage. Many of the disputes over brideprice repayments end up in court. In 2003, China's Supreme People's Court (SPC) stipulated that brideprice should be returned if (1) couples have not registered the marriage; (2) couples have registered the marriage but have not lived together; or (3) brideprice payments have caused the groom financial hardship in supporting himself (Supreme

People's Court 2020: Article 5).<sup>4</sup> Further in 2011, the SPC stated that if unmarried couples have lived together but have not registered the marriage, the court may determine whether the brideprice should be returned and the amount of return based on the duration of living together as a couple, the amount of brideprice, and local customs and traditions (Supreme People's Court 2011: No. 50). This rule gives judges unlimited judicial discretion in deciding brideprice repayment because decisions can be made according to local customs and conditions that vary.

Policy discourse on brideprice payments and legal rules governing brideprice repayments have created a set of internal contradictions. First, the law prohibits brideprice payments yet legalizes conditional brideprice repayments. By stating that "the exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriage shall be prohibited," lawmakers do not recognize or protect brideprice payments. This prohibition is grounded in an anti-commodification perspective of marriage and sexuality, which implies a preferred definition of marriage as an affective relationship based on love rather than a transactional relationship based on money (Meijer 1971; Engels 1972). In this regard, the law seeks to purge the transactional aspects of marriages. However, when disputes over brideprice payments arise, the law provides general guidelines as to whether and how brideprice should be returned based on whether the conditions of the brideprice – marriage and sexuality – are fulfilled. If the conditions are not fulfilled, including marriage registration and sexual intercourse, brideprice should be returned. Therefore, the legal status of brideprice remains ambiguous.

A related contradiction concerns the type of brideprice. The legal prohibition of brideprice is more closely aligned with brideprice as compensation, considering its symbolic nature as an exchange for women's labor and fertility between two families. A major concern with brideprice as compensation is that it may introduce coercion into the marriage transaction, therefore it is categorically problematic. By contrast, as a form of intergenerational gift giving, brideprice as endowment does not contradict the ideal form of marriage prescribed by the law. Instead, brideprice as endowment can be a source of economic empowerment. However, the judicial language never distinguishes different types of brideprice. As such, the current legal framework applies to both types of brideprice, although they represent different conceptions of marriage.

These contradictions in the law have implications for judicial decision-making on returning brideprice. Extant research on brideprice repayment in China points to judges' dilemma in the decision-making process: Judges reject the transactional aspect of marriage, claiming that it is not protected by the law and marriage should not be commodified; meanwhile, judges explicitly consider the "depreciation" of brides when they cohabit and have children with grooms over the marriage duration (Zhang 2020; Wu 2017; Li 2005). Furthermore, this dilemma is associated with different implications for grooms

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<sup>4</sup> The latter two conditions shall be based on divorce.



and brides. For grooms, although judges reject the contractual underpinning of bride-price payments, they are sympathetic to grooms' financial loss, especially in rural areas where brideprice is more common. Hence, partial repayments are often ordered. For brides, judges emphasize their nonfinancial loss: virginity, pregnancy, abortion, and decrease of value over a longer duration of marriage. To compensate for these nonfinancial loss, judges will deduct the proportion of brideprice repayment (Zhang 2020; Wu 2017; Li 2005). In short, these findings suggest the parallel of a strong anti-commodification rhetoric of marriage and a 'depreciation' argument of women's value in judicial decisions.

### **3. The brideprice data set**

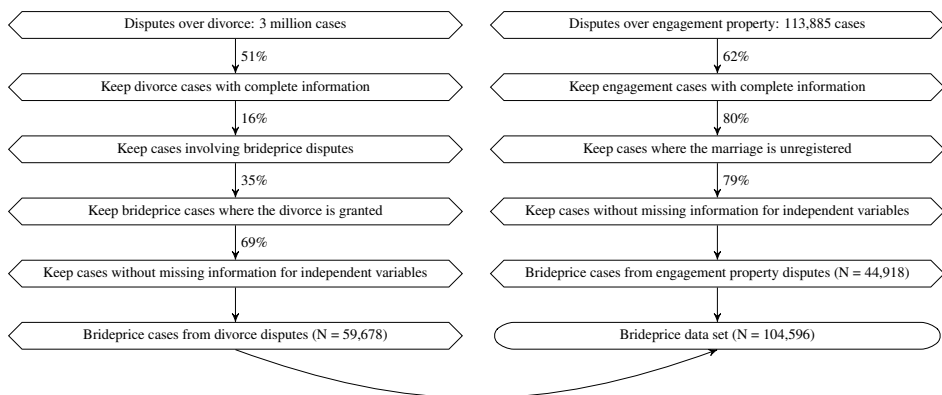
This study uses a data set of 104,596 court decisions involving disputes over brideprice between 2010 and 2021 in China. These court decisions come from two causes of action: disputes over divorce and disputes over engagement property. For brideprice cases from divorce disputes, petitioning for a divorce is the heart of the complaint that initiated the case, and returning brideprice is part of the divorce negotiation. For brideprice cases from engagement property disputes, the subject of the dispute is the property relationship (whether or not to return the brideprice) between the engaged parties rather than the dissolution of marriage (Cao 2008: 34–35). About 80% of the couples in engagement property disputes have lived together as husbands and wives without formally registering their marriages, whereas all couples in divorce disputes have registered their marriages.

Figure 1 illustrates the process of constructing the brideprice data set from the two types of court decisions. From divorce cases with complete information, I kept cases with brideprice disputes that had been decided by the court. About one out of six divorce cases had brideprice disputes. After excluding cases with missing formation for independent variables, there are 59,678 brideprice cases from divorce disputes. From engagement property cases with complete information, I kept cases where the marriage was not formally registered with the state. After excluding cases with missing formation, there are 44,918 brideprice cases from engagement property disputes. In total, the brideprice data set includes 104,596 cases. Geographically, the brideprice data set includes cases from every province-level region in China except Tibet and Hainan.<sup>5</sup> As the first national data set on brideprice and its repayment, these cases provide a unique opportunity to examine the institution of brideprice and the legal process of brideprice repayment in China. The appendix includes an assessment of the representativeness of the brideprice cases.

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<sup>5</sup> I dropped cases from Tibet and Hainan because there were fewer than 100 cases.

**Figure 1: Constructing the brideprice data set**



Notes: Each court decision is uniquely identified by three parameters: a case number assigned by the court when the case is accepted, court name, and judgment date. A court decision with complete information is defined as a case without missing any of the following components: litigant information, litigants' statements, recognized facts, court statements, and litigation outcomes. For brideprice cases from engagement property disputes, about 20% of the cases involve formally registered marriages. Couples in these cases had settled their divorces outside the court system, and brideprice repayment was the only dispute in the court proceedings.

I collected the brideprice cases from two sources. The first source is China Judgments Online (CJO),<sup>6</sup> a website developed and maintained by the SPC as part of efforts to promote judicial transparency. All courts in China are responsible for uploading their court decisions to this central website.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the divorce judgments appearing on CJO were decreed after 2013, the year the website went online. To supplement CJO's cases, I also collected court decisions from PKUlaw (also known as ChinaLaw-Info). Developed in 1985 by Peking University Law School, PKUlaw is the oldest online legal database in China. Prior to the establishment of the CJO website, PKUlaw was also the most comprehensive database of legal cases in China. While CJO includes only judicial decisions uploaded by local courts at different levels, PKUlaw extends its collections by adding published cases. These cases are curated by the SPC or other local courts as 'guiding cases' and are collected in publications such as the SPC's official gazette and *People's Court Daily*. Court decisions involving disputes over brideprice from the two sources were collected, cleaned, and stripped of duplicates. About 15% of the cases from PKUlaw did not appear on the CJO website.

<sup>6</sup> As of November 2020, the CJO hosted over 100 million court decisions, including over 70 million civil cases, and has become the world's largest online database of judgment documents.

<sup>7</sup> Supreme People's Court, Provisions of the Supreme People's Court on the Issuance of Judgments on the Internet by the People's Courts (最高人民法院关于人民法院在互联网公布裁判文书的规定), available at <http://www.court.gov.cn/zixun-xiangqing-5867.html>.

## 4. Variables and methods

The technical challenge of computational text analysis is how to identify patterns from massive quantities of unstructured text (Grimmer and Stewart 2013; Molina and Garip 2019). Using the standardized document structure of Chinese court decisions, I first divide complete brideprice cases into sections with different elements, including litigant information, litigants' statements, recognized facts, court statements, and litigation outcomes. Second, I sample brideprice cases by region, and then I read and annotate a sample of the cases to build up prior knowledge about the text patterns. This step also helps build a vocabulary of brideprice keywords because linguistic expressions of brideprice terms tend to vary across regions that differ in dialects and marriage customs.<sup>8</sup> Last, I use regular expressions (or Regex<sup>9</sup>) to explore complex text patterns, extract relevant information, and parse this information into variable-based data.

*Brideprice repayment ratio.* The primary outcome variable is the fraction of brideprice returned. To construct this variable, I extract two pieces of information from the brideprice cases: the amount of brideprice paid by the groom or his family and the amount of brideprice returned as ordered by the court. Then the brideprice repayment ratio is the amount of brideprice ordered to return divided by the amount of brideprice paid by the groom's family. If the court ordered that the brideprice should not be returned, I assign the repayment ratio as 0. I extract the amount of brideprice and the amount of repayment based on the explicit mention of specific brideprice terms in Chinese. I construct regular expressions to match the numbers (Arabic numerals, Chinese numerals, or mixed Arabic-Chinese numerals) between the brideprice terms and yuan, the unit of the Chinese currency. When the two sides contest the actual amount of brideprice, the court will clarify the amount of brideprice in the section of recognized facts after evaluating evidence. For these cases, I extract information about the amount of brideprice from the section of recognized facts. Brideprice payments can take the form of money, jewelry, commodities, and major appliances. I extract only monetary brideprice payments and other payments that were converted to monetary values.

*Brideprice type.* To differentiate between brideprice as compensation and as endowment, I use a distinctive aspect of the Chinese judicial process in handling brideprice disputes. Specifically, when brideprice is received by family members of the bride, such as her parents, uncles, or brothers, courts typically mandate their inclusion as co-defendants alongside the bride. The SPC has stated, "In determining the defendant in a lawsuit involving brideprice, plaintiffs often regard the parents of the opposing party as

<sup>8</sup> For example, several variants of brideprice terms include 彩礼, 聘礼, 聘财, 聘金, 大包干.

<sup>9</sup> Regex is a powerful tool to find and match text patterns. As a simple example, to find cases adjudicated in 2008, we can search for a keyword 2008 through all cases. But if we want to find information about adjudication years from 2000 to 2019 for all cases, we need to search for keywords of all possible adjudication years and repeat the step 20 times for every case. This process can be simplified using a string Regex like 20[01][\d]{1}.

co-defendants, demanding that they bear joint liability. Since it is a common custom for parents to give and receive brideprice on behalf of their children, including the parents of the involved parties as co-defendants is considered appropriate” (Supreme People’s Court 2017, 2024). This approach is supplemented by examining the distribution of the brideprice as indicated in litigants’ statements and recognized facts. Cases where the bride’s parents are named as defendants or have received the majority of the brideprice are classified as instances of compensation, whereas those where the bride herself receives the majority are deemed endowment.<sup>10</sup>

*Rural or urban residence.* A variable of family residence indicates where families live, in rural or urban areas. This information does not equal their household registration status (or *hukou*), but the two should be highly correlated. I construct the variable of family residence in three ways. First, if a court decision indicates that the litigants are peasants or they are from a certain village in litigant information, I code the family residence variable as rural. Second, I differentiate rural and urban cases based on their specific keywords and expressions. For example, if a litigant provides a statement from the village committee as evidence, I code it as a rural case. If a similar statement is provided by a residents’ committee, then this is an urban case. Third, I use the location of the court to infer rural and urban cases. A court in a city district indicates an urban case while a court in a county indicates that it is more likely to be a rural case.

*Abortion and birth.* I use two variables to measure women’s reproductive experience. The first is had miscarriage or abortion, indicating whether a bride had a miscarriage or abortion experience during the marriage. The second is having children, indicating whether a couple had children at the time of breakup. I construct these two variables using information and expressions related to miscarriage, abortion, and the presence of children from the sections of litigants’ statements and recognized facts. The variables of abortion and birth experience speak to the commodification or depreciation thesis and assess if judges’ decisions regarding brideprice repayments will account for women’s nonfinancial loss – their potential as reproducers.

*Union or marriage duration.* Union or marriage duration in years measures the length of a relationship. For formally registered marriages in divorce disputes, I construct the variable of marriage duration as the year of divorce minus the year of marriage. The year of marriage is when a couple registered their marriage with civil authority. For unregistered unions in engagement disputes, I construct the variable of union duration as the year of breakup minus the year when a couple paid brideprice and had an engagement

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<sup>10</sup> I identified 1,829 brideprice cases in which the brideprice is shared between the bride and the bride’s parents. Overall, these ambiguous cases represent less than 2% of the brideprice data set. In 1,690 of these 1,829 cases (or 92%), the bride’s parents received the vast majority of the brideprice (more than 70%). I classified these cases as brideprice as compensation. In 134 cases, the bride received the vast majority of the brideprice, leading me to classify these as brideprice as endowment. In 5 cases, the brideprice was shared equally between the bride and her parents. I excluded these 5 cases from the analytical sample.

or wedding ceremony. In a small number of cases,<sup>11</sup> a brideprice has been paid yet a ceremony has not been held. Couples in these cases also have a short duration of cohabitation, if they live together at all. Grooms in these cases accuse the brides and their families of marital fraud, and judges usually grant a full refund of the brideprice. I drop these cases from the analytic sample. Union or marriage duration ranges between 1 and 10 years.

I include covariates in models to account for primary demographic and social factors that might be associated with brideprice repayment and confound the inference. These covariates include whether the groom initiates the breakup, the groom's claim of economic hardship, the bride's claim of domestic violence, and whether the brideprice is considered as large amount. For brideprice cases from divorce disputes, to account for the possibility that female plaintiffs have sacrificed property including brideprice in exchange for their husbands' consent to divorce (He 2021; Ng and He 2017), I include a variable indicating the defendant's consent to divorce to measure the potential trade-off between getting a divorce and returning more brideprice. The appendix includes details about the definitions of these covariates.

The analysis proceeds in two steps. I first present descriptive patterns of brideprice payments and their regional and rural/urban variations. Second, to account for the dependent variable of brideprice repayment ratio that is continuous over a bounded range (i.e., [0,1]), I use fractional regression models, a generalized linear model with a binomial distribution and a logit link (Papke and Wooldridge 1996; Wooldridge 2010). I conduct analysis separately for brideprice cases from engagement property disputes and divorce disputes. Regression models include interactions between brideprice type and other theoretical variables, namely, rural or urban residence, had miscarriage or abortion, and had children. Furthermore, I include fixed effects for province and adjudication year to account for heterogeneity across regions and time.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Descriptive findings: Variations of brideprice payments

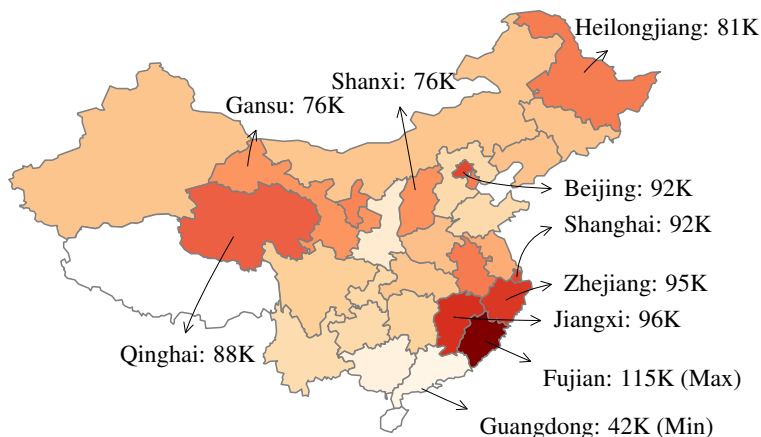
Figure 2 shows regional variations in the amount of brideprice. The coastal province of Fujian had the maximum median brideprice at 115,000 yuan, or 17,000 USD. By contrast, Fujian's neighboring province Guangdong had the lowest median brideprice at 42,000 yuan, or 6,200 USD. Meanwhile, inland and western provinces like Jiangxi and Gansu had relatively high brideprices. The magnitude of brideprice was sizeable in many regions, but the brideprice map did not seem to suggest that the level of economic development was either positively or negatively correlated with the amount of brideprice.

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<sup>11</sup> 460 cases are identified, accounting for less than 1% of the engagement cases.

These patterns may reflect different marriage customs across regions or different sex ratios in local marriage markets (Xiong 2022).

**Figure 2: Regional variations in brideprice payments**



*Source:* The brideprice data set compiled by the author.

*Notes:* This graph visualizes brideprice medians across provinces. The unit of brideprice is yuan. For each marriage year, the brideprice is adjusted for inflation to 2020 yuan. Then for each province, a median brideprice is calculated across years. Very few brideprice cases were recorded in Tibet and Hainan; these cases were removed from the analytic sample. The maximum and the minimum median brideprice are recorded in two neighboring provinces: Fujian (115,000 yuan, or 17,000 USD) and Guangdong (42,000 yuan, or 6,200 USD).

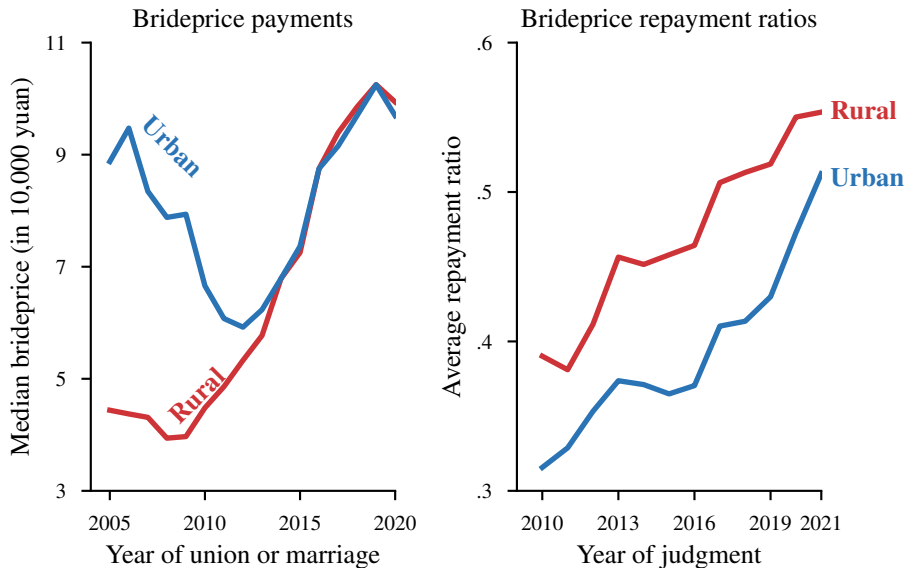
Figure 3 shows brideprice payments in rural and urban areas over the marriage years. In rural areas, brideprice payments steadily increased; in urban areas, brideprice payments first declined and then increased. For people married from 2013 to 2020, brideprice payments in rural and urban areas have converged. To put the payments in context,<sup>12</sup> for a rural man married in 2005, his family would need to pay a median brideprice amounting to 2.5 times the annual household income, or 8 times the per capita annual income. In 2020, the median brideprice in rural areas was more than 2 times as high as in 2005, while the brideprice to household income ratio decreased to around 2. After adjusting for inflation, urban residents paid a slightly higher amount of brideprice in 2020 compared to 2005, whereas the brideprice to household income ratio decreased from 1.9 to 0.8. Although rural and urban residents have started to pay a similar amount of brideprice in

<sup>12</sup> Data on per capita annual income, average household size comes from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbook 2021, and China Population Statistics Yearbook 2006.

recent years, rural residents have paid more brideprice relative to their household income, which probably reflects the scarcity of women in the countryside and their mobility.

In addition to the brideprice inflation in recent years, Figure 3 shows a trend of rising brideprice repayment ratios in both rural and urban areas. From 2010 to 2021, the average repayment ratio in rural areas increased from around 0.4 to 0.55. In urban areas, the average repayment ratio increased from about 0.3 to 0.5. While the repayment ratio has been higher in rural areas than that in urban areas, the rural/urban gap in brideprice repayment ratios has narrowed. It is unclear why the average brideprice repayment ratio has increased over the years. A possible explanation for the rise could be the state's crackdown on brideprice payments.

**Figure 3: Brideprice payments and repayment ratios in rural and urban areas**



Source: The brideprice data set compiled by the author.

Notes: Subfigure (a) visualizes median brideprice payments in rural and urban areas, across union or marriage years (i.e., marriage cohorts). For each union/marriage year, the brideprice is adjusted for inflation to 2020 yuan. Subfigure (b) visualizes average brideprice repayment ratios in rural and urban areas across judgment years (i.e., the year when court decisions were made).

Table 1 reports the means of theoretical variables of interest. Overall, the average brideprice repayment ratio is around 0.43. Brideprice cases from engagement property disputes have a higher repayment ratio (0.52) than brideprice cases from divorce disputes

(0.37). A contrasting pattern emerges when examining brideprice type by judicial dispute: In over 70% of the brideprice cases from engagement property disputes, brideprice is a compensation, whereas in nearly 70% of the brideprice cases from divorce disputes, brideprice is an endowment.

Overall, the analytic sample consists of 54% rural cases and 46% urban cases. Brideprice cases in engagement property disputes have a higher share of rural cases, with nearly 70% of the cases located in rural areas. By contrast, nearly 60% of the brideprice cases in divorce disputes come from urban areas.

We can also find differences in abortion and birth experience between the two sources of brideprice cases. For brides in engagement property disputes, about 10% had miscarriage or abortion or had children at the time of breakup. For brides in divorce disputes, only 4% had miscarriage or abortion, yet more than half of them had children at the time of divorce. In addition, union duration in divorce disputes is longer than those in engagement property disputes.

**Table 1: Means of theoretical variables, overall and by type of dispute**

	All cases (N = 104,596)	Brideprice cases from	
		Engagement property disputes (N = 44,918)	Divorce disputes (N = 59,678)
Brideprice repayment ratio	.43	.52	.37
Brideprice type			
Brideprice as compensation	.49	.72	.32
Brideprice as endowment	.51	.28	.68
Rural areas	.54	.69	.42
Had miscarriage or abortion	.07	.11	.04
Had children	.37	.10	.58
Union or marriage duration in years	3.77	2.79	4.50

Source: The brideprice data set compiled by the author.

Notes: This table reports the means of major variables of interest. The appendix includes a complete version of descriptive statistics for all variables used in modeling.

## 5.2 Multivariate results

Table 2 reports the average predicted brideprice repayment ratios based on calculations from fractional regression models adjusting for covariates and fixed effects. Comparing results in Panel A for brideprice in engagement property disputes and Panel B for brideprice in divorce disputes, we know that brideprice repayment ratios in the former are higher than those in the latter, across all categories of brideprice type and residence area. These differences suggest that when brideprice repayment is the most important dispute,



a larger share of the brideprice needs to be returned compared to cases when brideprice repayment is part of the divorce negotiation.

The effect magnitude of rural/urban differences and brideprice type distinctions is considerable. For example, in Panel A of Table 2, the rural/urban difference in brideprice as compensation is .07, which is quite substantial given the 0–1 scale of repayment ratios. Considering the average repayment ratio is .43, a .07 increase on a base of .43 represents approximately a 16% increase relative to the overall mean repayment ratio. Similarly, the brideprice type difference in rural areas is  $-.06$ . This means that when brideprice is viewed as compensation, it is associated with a repayment ratio that is 14% lower than when it is viewed as endowment, relative to the overall average repayment ratio.

For brideprice cases from both sources, the type of brideprice and residence area make a difference for brideprice returning. Brideprice as compensation has a higher predicted repayment ratio than brideprice as endowment, in both rural and urban areas. Brideprice in rural areas has a higher predicted repayment ratio than brideprice in urban areas for both brideprice as compensation and brideprice as endowment. Therefore, we can infer that rural grooms will get the highest proportion of brideprice back after breakup when brideprice is viewed as compensation and when brideprice repayment is the most important issue in engagement property disputes. But still, for the group with the lowest predicted repayment ratio – brideprice as endowment in urban areas from divorce disputes – more than one-third of the brideprice needs to be repaid upon divorce.

Furthermore, the dimensional differences created by the intersection of brideprice type and rural/urban residence have a multiplicative effect on the repayment ratios. In the context of engagement property disputes, the predominance of cases in rural areas – nearly 70% – coupled with the fact that in more than 70% of these disputes, brideprice is viewed as compensation, amplifies the expected repayment ratios. With this convergence, the combined influence of residing in a rural area and viewing brideprice as compensation likely leads to a more pronounced expectation for brideprice repayment.

**Table 2: Average predicted repayment ratios: Brideprice type and rural/urban differences**

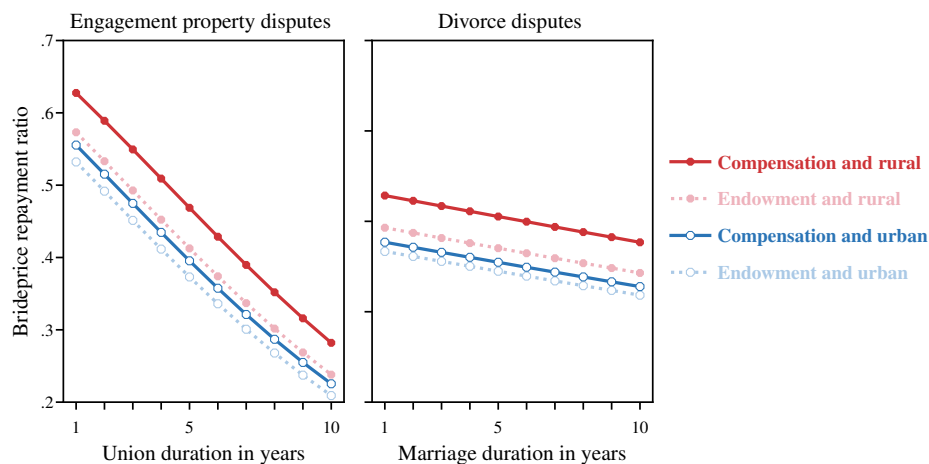
<b>Panel A: Brideprice in engagement property disputes (N = 44,918)</b>			
	Brideprice as endowment	Brideprice as compensation	Brideprice type differences
Overall	.49 (.48, .49)	.54 (.53, .54)	-.05 (-.05, -.04)
Rural	.50 (.50, .51)	.56 (.55, .56)	-.06 (-.06, -.05)
Urban	.46 (.45, .47)	.48 (.48, .49)	-.02 (-.03, -.01)
Rural/Urban differences	.04 (.03, .05)	.07 (.07, .08)	
<b>Panel B: Brideprice in divorce disputes (N = 59,678)</b>			
	Brideprice as endowment	Brideprice as compensation	Brideprice type differences
Overall	.36 (.36, .36)	.38 (.37, .38)	-.02 (-.03, -.02)
Rural	.37 (.37, .38)	.41 (.40, .41)	-.04 (-.04, -.03)
Urban	.35 (.34, .35)	.36 (.35, .36)	-.01 (-.02, -.00)
Rural/Urban differences	.03 (.02, .03)	.05 (.04, .06)	

Source: The brideprice data set compiled by the author.

Notes: This table reports average predicted brideprice repayment ratios calculated from fractional regression models. 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. Panel A reports average predicted repayment ratios for brideprice cases from engagement property; Panel B reports average predicted repayment ratios for brideprice cases from divorce disputes. Results are subject to rounding errors.

Figure 4 shows consistent patterns of between- and within-brideprice type differences as those in Table 2 over the union or marriage duration. The difference between red lines indicates the difference in the repayment ratio between brideprice types in rural areas. The difference between blue lines indicates the difference in the repayment ratio between brideprice types in urban areas. The difference between solid lines is difference for brideprice as compensation. The difference between dash lines is difference for brideprice as endowment.

The first impression from Figure 4 is that as the relationship lasts longer, repayment ratios decline at a faster rate for brideprice in engagement disputes than those in divorce disputes. If brideprice represents the wife's productive and reproductive value, the clear difference in the repayment slope suggests that the wife's value declines faster when brideprice repayment is contested in engagement disputes. Little value remains after 10 years. Conversely, the wife's value declines more slowly in divorce disputes regardless of the type of brideprice.

**Figure 4: Repayment ratios over marriage duration**

Source: The brideprice data set compiled by the author.

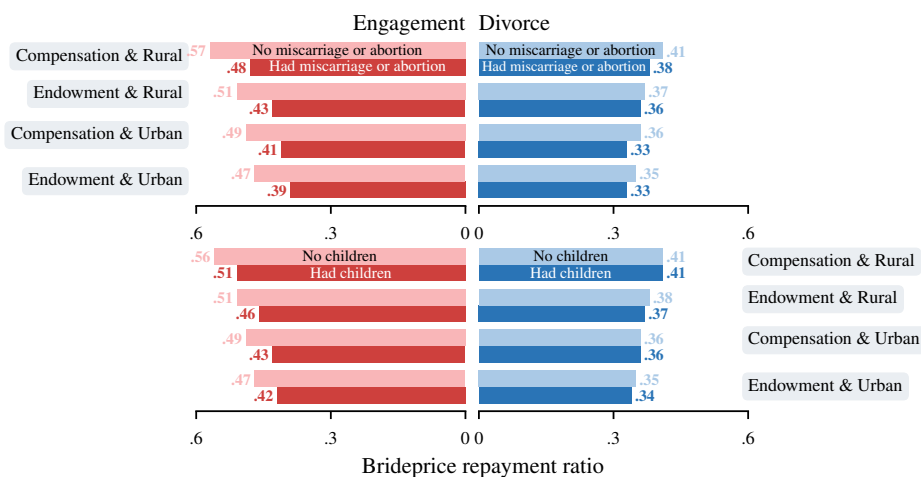
Note: This figure visualizes average predicted probabilities of brideprice repayment ratios over marriage duration, for brideprice cases in engagement property disputes and in divorce disputes.

Why might the difference in the time horizon of the wife's value exist? Longer union duration and the resulting lower repayment ratios imply the depreciation of women in the marriage market. All brideprice cases in divorce disputes involve formally registered marriages, whereas the brideprice cases in engagement disputes involve unregistered unions. For women in divorce disputes, remarriage after a separation is accompanied by a lower amount of brideprice and reduced expectations of a second husband (Huang 2012). For women in engagement disputes who are not legally married, a relatively short relationship may have a limited impact on her marriage prospects. In other words, these women may still enter the first marriage market after the end of the engagement rather than entering the remarriage market. As the relationship lasts longer, it looks more like a formal marriage, therefore her value approximates a 'real' divorced woman in the marriage market, depreciating quickly. The existence of the value system through brideprice and its repayment exemplifies a commodification view of women.

Figure 5 shows the effect of abortion and birth experience on brideprice repayment ratios, reconfirming a group hierarchy constructed by the type of brideprice and rural/urban residence. While abortion and childbearing experience decrease the predicted brideprice repayment ratios for brideprice from both sources, the effect of abortion and childbearing experience is more prominent for brideprice in engagement disputes than brideprice in divorce disputes. This differential effect suggests the importance of abortion and

birth experience on judges' repayment decisions and how the importance is heightened more in compensation cases than in endowment cases. This consideration points to the strong link between childbearing and marriage in Chinese family life (Yeung and Hu 2016). Women are expected to have children after entering marriage, and brideprice is viewed as compensation for their reproductive values. For women who have engaged but have not had an abortion or childbearing experience, the impact of the relationship on their fertility potential is limited. These women have a higher chance of entering the first marriage market, and therefore the brideprice repayment ratio for the previous relationship should be higher.

**Figure 5: Abortion, having children, and brideprice repayment ratios**



Source: The brideprice data set compiled by the author.

Notes: This figure visualizes the effects of having miscarriage or abortion experience and having children on the predicted probabilities of brideprice repayment ratios, for brideprice cases in engagement property disputes (in red) and in divorce disputes (in blue).

In summary, the findings on brideprice repayments show that abortion and childbearing experience depreciates a woman's value, and such depreciation is faster in engagement disputes than in divorce disputes. The depreciation view is more prominent when paying brideprice as compensation and in rural areas compared to brideprice as endowment in urban areas. More than 70% of the engagement cases involve brideprice as compensation. In these cases, women are treated more as a commodity, and their fertility potential is valued the most when forming and dissolving unions. Meanwhile, we have seen how the depreciation view of women is changing in urban China, where brideprice

as endowment is more popular and engagement disputes are less common. Therefore, the conceptualization of brideprice as compensation and brideprice as endowment suggests how women are treated differently in the changing family life in China.

## **6. Conclusions and discussion**

This study draws on a unique data set of court decisions involving brideprice disputes to examine how the meanings attributed to brideprice payments at the time of marriage shape brideprice repayments at the time of divorce. I explore brideprice within two frameworks: as interfamily compensation for female labor and fertility, and as an intergenerational endowment for the newlyweds. This study shows a consistent pattern of higher repayment ratios for brideprice as compensation than for brideprice as endowment. Moreover, the study finds that brideprice repayment ratios are higher in cases where the bride has undergone an abortion or has childbearing experience, resides in a rural area, or ends an engagement without registering the marriage. Contrary to trends in many other societies, the traditional practice of brideprice in China has not declined. Instead, both the amount of brideprice payments and the brideprice repayment ratios have increased.

The intersection of brideprice type and rural/urban residence substantially shapes the repayment of brideprice upon a relationship's dissolution, whether through breakup or divorce. In the traditional approach, brideprice serves as compensation for women's labor and fertility. In these contexts, women are often socially perceived more as commodities valued for their reproductive abilities, even though they are not the direct beneficiaries of the brideprice. This compensation-focused brideprice is more prevalent in engagements and rural settings. Judges in such cases generally order lower repayment ratios for women who have had children, miscarriages, or abortions in recognition of their potential loss of fertility. In contrast, the modern approach views brideprice as an endowment for the newlyweds, intended to establish a conjugal fund. This perspective is more common in divorce cases and urban environments, where women are typically required to repay a portion of the brideprice after divorce. Yet the repayment ratios for brideprice as endowment in divorce cases are usually lower, and the influence of factors such as abortion and childbearing on judicial decisions is less emphasized.

The resilience of brideprice in both rural and urban China raises a critical question: Why has this traditional practice not been abandoned by Chinese families? The focus on the soaring brideprice amounts detracts from the underlying issue – the entrenched gender inequities confronting women. They are often sidelined in inheritance rights yet expected to uphold filial duties and bear the financial burden for their brothers' marriages. In addition to their unpaid domestic roles, women are also expected to contribute economically, a dual expectation that undermines their professional prospects, especially after marriage and childbirth. Urban women, while to some extent more privileged than their

rural counterparts, are not exempt from these challenges. These gender-based disparities are compounded by a legal system that inadequately protects women's marital rights, particularly concerning alimony and recognition of housewives' nonfinancial contributions in divorce settlements (Ng and He 2017; He 2021). Confronted with the uncertainties stemming from persistent gender biases in social norms and legal frameworks, women often turn to the tradition of brideprice as endowment as a safeguard, underscoring its continued relevance as a protective strategy amid systemic gender inequities.

Furthermore, this study shows the regulatory role of the state that is absent in many other contexts. The Chinese state views brideprice as an obstacle to men seeking marriage, discourages brideprice, yet never outlaws it (Siu 1993; Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2012). The rapid increase in brideprice has catalyzed a growing 'marriage crisis,' leaving excess men unable to afford the cost of getting married (Greenhalgh 2013). The official discourse has blamed women and their parents for being "materialistic" in marriage, arguing that their demand for high brideprice creates a financial burden on families with sons. Why does the state not outlaw brideprice? Considering the widespread acceptance and practice of brideprice, a brideprice ban can be fruitless. More importantly, in a competitive marriage market with a highly skewed sex ratio, the ability to pay brideprice makes men more 'marriageable' (Wei and Zhang 2011). If paying less brideprice reduces men's prospects in the marriage market, they may feel compelled to increase their payments to ensure they can get married. This is because marriage and fatherhood are still seen as fundamental to Chinese masculinity (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002; Raymo et al. 2015). As shown in a recent national survey, less than 4 percent of Chinese men across all birth cohorts prepared to be childless (Yu and Xie 2022).

When a marriage fails and the husband wants the brideprice back, the state has made it clear that the brideprice is subject to return, although the proportion of repayment varies. Because brideprice is expected to be returned upon divorce and women who receive brideprice as compensation need to return a higher proportion of the brideprice, the state puts a price on women's compliance with marital norms and traditional gender roles, which may deter them from leaving abusive marriages. We know from existing research that obtaining a divorce through the court system has been difficult for Chinese women (Michelson 2019, 2022; He 2021). The obligation of repaying brideprice adds to that difficulty. Therefore, the state's action on the issue of brideprice and its repayment may reinforce asymmetrical power relations between men and women (Zuo 2009). The story of brideprice repayments enhances our understanding of women's predicament in marriage in contemporary China.

This study is not without its limitations. The brideprice data set, compiled from court cases, primarily captures disputes that were resolved with legal intervention. This approach potentially omits a broader spectrum of brideprice disputes as many cases are settled before reaching the court. Families that resolve brideprice disputes through the court system might differ significantly from those that settle their disputes outside of

court, both in terms of family characteristics and the specifics of their disputes. Court cases document only what occurred in court yet provide little information about the dynamics and negotiations behind the scenes. Consequently, these cases cannot represent disputes that were resolved outside of the legal system. Moreover, in the temporal dimension, court cases cannot capture and address the changing selection of families who engage in the brideprice practice, a critical consideration given the evolving socioeconomic conditions and the potential decline in the number of families participating in this practice, influenced by advancements in female independence and gender equality. Given the limitations in the data, findings regarding brideprice payments and repayments should be interpreted with caution, particularly concerning their representativeness. Finally, with more qualitative and quantitative data on brideprice negotiation, future research could examine the broader social and economic impacts of brideprice practices on families and communities.

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## Appendix

### A1 Assessing representativeness of the brideprice cases

Table A-1 evaluates the representation of the divorce cases by presenting temporal and geographical variations. Over the years, the representation of online divorce cases in all divorce adjudications has increased, especially after the CJO website went online in 2013. From 2013 to 2019, online divorce cases collected in the database account for more than 80 percent of all divorce adjudications documented by official statistics. Prior literature has suggested considerable regional disparity in the compliance rate of uploading court decisions to the CJO website (Ahl and Sprick 2018; Tang and Liu 2019). The patterns in Table A-1 echo this finding. Regions such as Shanghai, Zhejiang, Henan, and Hunan tend to have better representation of online divorce cases than others. In Shanghai, all divorce adjudications since 2009 have been made online. For all province-level regions, at least three waves of online divorce cases represent more than half of the true population of divorce adjudications each year.

Unlike divorce cases, the state does not publish official statistics on the number of engagement property cases each year and by province. Therefore we are not able to assess the representativeness. The only information about the total number of engagement property cases comes from a letter from the SPC to the fifth plenary session of the twelfth National People's Congress. In the letter, the SPC mentions that the numbers of engagement property cases were 23,092 in 2014, 26,088 in 2015, and 24,545 in 2016 (Supreme People's Court 2017). The numbers of online brideprice cases from engagement property disputes in these three years are 16,446, 19,663, and 18,753. Accordingly, online engagement property cases account for 71%, 75%, and 76% of all engagement cases in the years of 2014, 2015, and 2016.

**Table A-1: Representativeness of online divorce cases in total adjudicated divorce cases by province, 2007 to 2019**

Region	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<i>Nationwide</i>			8	25	27	43	86	100	100	100	86	85	84
Shanghai	7	23	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Zhejiang	7	9	13	100	85	96	100	100	100	100	85	56	67
Henan			64	88	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Hunan			28	25	93	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Shaanxi			10	22	98	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Chongqing			10	12	14	17	38	100	100	100	94	94	79
Gansu				16	46	100	100	100	100	100	87	100	100
Hebei				5	31	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Fujian				9	7	8	36	100	100	97	92	65	47
Shanxi				6	6	10	36	100	100	100	91	95	92
Jilin			7			17	45	100	100	100	100	100	100
Guangdong					5	12	41	100	100	99	63	58	45
Anhui					12	22	74	100	100	100	84	81	84
Shandong					11	26	100	100	100	100	58	58	74
Jiangsu					10	47	100	100	100	100	36	41	41
Guangxi					9	43	79	100	100	100	77	74	69
Hainan					19	30	51	97	53	28	22	16	20
Hubei						13	55	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sichuan						13	67	100	100	100	100	89	80
Jiangxi							7	100	100	100	99	100	100
Ningxia							13	100	100	100	90	93	82
Liaoning							22	100	100	100	70	85	100
Tianjin							11	100	100	100	91	98	93
Beijing							45	100	100	55	36	100	100
Yunnan							5	100	100	100	100	100	93
Inner Mongolia							17	100	100	100	83	100	59
Heilongjiang							16	100	100	100	100	100	100
Qinghai							20	100	100	100	100	100	100
Guizhou							11	100	100	100	30	5	7
Tibet							100	100	100	100	73	85	100
Xinjiang							7	45	66	50	61	35	74

*Notes:* Percentage representation in cells. Percentage representation measures the representativeness of online divorce cases in the actual number of adjudicated divorce cases in a province each year. Percentage representation = number of online divorce cases / number of adjudicated divorces in total. Data on the total numbers of adjudicated divorce cases come from China Civil Affairs' Statistical Yearbook. Province-level aggregate data are available up to 2019. Cells are empty when percentage representation is smaller than 5. Percentages are subject to rounding errors.

## A2 Variable construction

The document structure of the court decisions is standardized, which enables efficient extraction of case information. I divide these documents into sections: basic information, litigants' statements, recognized facts, court statements, and litigation outcomes. The section of basic information includes the document title, the case number, and the characteristics of each litigant (e.g., gender, ethnicity). The section of litigants' statements includes the claims and reasons of the plaintiff as well as the arguments and defense of

the defendant. The section of recognized facts contains the facts and evidence recognized by the court. The section of court statements contains the court's justification and the legal principles applied. The last section of litigation outcomes contains adjudication outcomes, such as the amount of brideprice being returned. This section also includes the names of judges and adjudication dates.

In addition to the main variables of interest, I construct the following covariates: the sex of the person who initiates breakup/plaintiff, the defendant's consent to divorce, the groom's claim of economic hardship, the bride's claim of domestic violence, and whether the brideprice is considered as large amount.

For divorce cases, I construct the variable of plaintiff sex in three steps. First, direct mention of female or male plaintiffs in the section of basic information. Second, gender-specific topics in litigants' statements, such as brideprice, dowry, wife's natal family (娘家), and husband's family (婆家). Third, if a court decision includes a plaintiff's first name and last name, I infer the gender based on the first name. All plaintiffs in engagement cases are male. For engagement cases, I construct the variable of who initiates breakup using information from litigants' statements. In these statements, brides and grooms would discuss how their relationships evolved and who wanted the breakup. In rural customs, if the groom initiates the breakup, then the brideprice should not be returned. Many litigants mentioned this informal rule in their statements. However, outcomes in court are the opposite. When the groom initiates the breakup, the repayment ratio is higher.

The variable of defendant's consent to divorce comes from defendants' statements, using expressions such as 'I agree to divorce' or 'I disagree to divorce.' This variable applies only to divorce cases because getting a divorce is not the subject of the disputes in engagement cases. Groom's claim of economic hardship and bride's claim of domestic violence come from information in litigants' statements. Claim of economic hardship is identified using keywords and phrases such as 生活困难, 陷入贫困, and 经济困难 (economic difficulties). For domestic violence, keywords and phrases used include explicit mention of domestic violence (家庭暴力) or implicit mention of physical or verbal abuse such as 殴打, 打骂, and 拳打脚踢. Police reports or medical records related to domestic violence are also used as indications.

The amount of brideprice varies across regions and years, and therefore it is difficult to set an absolute standard for 'high brideprice.' To determine 'large-amount brideprice,' I use information from court statements in which judges explain how they come to their decisions. If a judge cites the amount of brideprice as a reason for deciding the percentage of repayment, I code it as 'large-amount brideprice.' Indeed, local judges are familiar with local contexts and marriage markets. Some judges even specify the ranges of 'local market price' in their decisions.

Table A-2 presents descriptive statistics for all variables used in brideprice cases from engagement disputes and divorce disputes.



**Table A-2: Means of variables, overall and by judicial dispute**

	All cases (N = 104,596)	Brideprice cases from	
		Engagement property disputes (N = 44,918)	Divorce disputes (N = 59,678)
Brideprice repayment ratio	.43	.52	.37
Brideprice type			
Brideprice as compensation	.49	.72	.32
Brideprice as endowment	.51	.28	.68
Rural areas	.54	.69	.42
Had miscarriage or abortion	.07	.11	.04
Had children	.37	.10	.58
Marriage duration in years	3.77	2.79	4.50
Groom initiates breakup / Male plaintiff	.35	.24	.43
Groom's claim of economic hardship	.08	.11	.06
Bride's claim of domestic violence	.30	.14	.42
Brideprice considered as large amount	.08	.14	.04
Defendant's consent to divorce	.48	n.a.	.48

*Source:* The brideprice data set compiled by the author.

*Note:* This table reports means of major variables of interest.

### A3 Average marginal effects of brideprice repayments

Table A-3 reports average marginal effects of brideprice repayments calculated from fractional regression models without interaction terms between brideprice type and other major explanatory variables.

**Table A-3: Average marginal effects on brideprice repayment ratios calculated from fractional regression models without interaction terms**

	Engagement property disputes (N = 44,918)	Divorce disputes (N = 59,678)
Brideprice type (Ref: brideprice as endowment)		
Brideprice as compensation	0.04 (.04, .05)	0.02 (.02, .03)
Rural	0.06 (.06, .07)	0.03 (.03, .04)
Had miscarriage or abortion	-0.08 (-.09, -.07)	-0.02 (-.03, -.01)
Had children	-0.05 (-.06, -.05)	-0.01 (-.01, -.00)
Union or marriage duration in years	-0.04 (-.04, -.04)	-0.01 (-.01, -.00)
Groom initiates breakup	0.04 (.04, .05)	-0.01 (-.01, -.01)
Groom's claim of economic hardship	-0.01 (-.02, .00)	-0.00 (-.01, .01)
Bride's claim of domestic violence	-0.01 (-.02, .00)	0.00 (-.00, .01)
Brideprice considered as large amount	-0.01 (-.01, .00)	0.05 (.04, .06)
Defendant's consent to divorce		0.02 (.01, .02)
Province and year FE	Yes	Yes
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.01

Note: 95% confidence intervals in parentheses.

Table A-4 reports average marginal effects of brideprice repayments calculated from fractional regression models with interaction terms between brideprice type and other major explanatory variables.

**Table A-4: Average marginal effects on brideprice repayment ratios calculated from fractional regression models with interaction terms**

	Engagement property disputes (N = 44,918)	Divorce disputes (N = 59,678)
Brideprice type (Ref: brideprice as endowment)		
Brideprice as compensation	0.05 (.04, .05)	0.02 (.02, .03)
Rural	0.06 (.06, .07)	0.03 (.03, .04)
Had miscarriage or abortion	-0.08 (-.09, -.07)	-0.02 (-.03, -.01)
Had children	-0.05 (-.06, -.04)	-0.01 (-.01, -.00)
Union or marriage duration in years	-0.04 (-.04, -.04)	-0.01 (-.01, -.00)
Groom initiates breakup	0.04 (.04, .05)	-0.01 (-.01, -.01)
Groom's claim of economic hardship	-0.01 (-.02, .00)	-0.00 (-.01, .01)
Bride's claim of domestic violence	-0.01 (-.01, .00)	0.00 (-.00, .01)
Brideprice considered as large amount	-0.01 (-.01, .00)	0.05 (.04, .06)
Defendant's consent to divorce		0.02 (.01, .02)
Province and year FE	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.02	0.01

*Notes:* 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. Regression models in this table include interaction terms between brideprice type and the following variables: rural or urban residence, had miscarriage or abortion, and had children.

#### A4 Robustness to a representative sample

Table A-5 presents the average marginal effects of brideprice repayments using data from the years of 2014, 2015, and 2016. We can find robust results in Table A-5 compared with analysis using complete samples in Table A-4.

**Table A-5: Average marginal effects on brideprice repayment ratios calculated from fractional regression models, using cases from 2014, 2015, and 2016**

	Engagement property disputes (N = 20,247)	Divorce disputes (N = 47,908)
Brideprice type (Ref: brideprice as endowment)		
Brideprice as compensation	0.04 (.03, .05)	0.02 (.02, .03)
Rural	0.07 (.06, .08)	0.03 (.03, .04)
Had miscarriage or abortion	-0.09 (-.10, -.08)	-0.02 (-.03, -.01)
Had children	-0.06 (-.08, -.04)	-0.01 (-.01, -.00)
Marriage duration in years	-0.04 (-.05, -.04)	-0.01 (-.01, -.00)
Groom initiates breakup	0.04 (.03, .05)	-0.01 (-.02, -.01)
Groom's claim of economic hardship	0.02 (.01, .04)	0.00 (-.01, .01)
Bride's claim of domestic violence	0.00 (-.01, .01)	-0.00 (-.01, .01)
Brideprice considered as large amount	-0.01 (-.02, .01)	0.05 (.04, .07)
Defendant's consent to divorce		0.01 (.01, .02)
Province and year FE	Yes	Yes
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.01

Notes: 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. This table uses cases only from the years 2014, 2015, and 2016.