Demographic Transformation and Socio-Economic Development 8

Sharada Srinivasan
Shuzhuo Li *Editors*

Scarce Women and Surplus Men in China and India

Macro Demographics versus Local Dynamics

Springer

Demographic Transformation and Socio-Economic Development

Volume 8

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Editors
Sharada Srinivasan
University of Guelph
Guelph, Ontario, Canada

Shuzhuo Li
Institute for Population and Dev't Studi
Xi'an Jiaotong University
Xi'an, Shaanxi, China

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Preface

A three-year research project *Demographic Shifts and Gender in Asia: 'Scarce Women' and 'Surplus Men'* (2011–2014), led by Daniele Belanger of the University of Laval and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, examined the consequences of sex ratio imbalance in China, India and Vietnam. This research in turn inspired us to bring together other scholars who were trying to understand how the impacts of a male surplus and female scarcity unfold at the micro-level, in the form of an edited book. The editors of this book coordinated the India and China research, respectively.

Following a call for papers in 2014, 12 papers were invited. In preparation of the manuscript, a 3-day workshop with the contributors was held in the Netherlands in May 2015. The workshop was hosted by the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) and funded by the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). At the workshop, authors did not present their papers since all contributors read all the papers prior to the workshop. Rather each paper was discussed by an assigned discussant and then by the entire group. The workshop generated rich discussion on the issues around the scarce women-surplus men phenomena, the challenges of gathering high-quality data as well as relevant feedback for each author.

There is much scope and research needed to examine the impacts of scarce women and surplus men. This collection offers insights on one such aspect, namely, bride shortage and the prospects and strategies of single men in daughter deficit contexts in China and India.

We acknowledge the support from Daniele Belanger in initiating the edited collection. Thanks go to Yves Charbit and Dharmalingam Arunachalam, the editors of the Springer series in demographic change and socio-economic development, who provided encouraging, critical and practical feedback on various chapters. Thanks

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Guelph, ON, Canada — Sharada Srinivasan
Xi'an, China — Shuzhou Li

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Unifying Perspectives on Scarce Women and Surplus Men in China and India

Sharada Srinivasan and Shuzhuo Li

1.1 Introduction

Nearly a quarter of a century after Amartya Sen's (1990) essay on the missing women of Asia, China and India's demographic imbalance between men and women creates growing concerns about 'scarce women' and 'surplus men' and how the reconfiguration of local and national population structures will affect the future of societies in Asia and beyond. At the heart of the unfolding crisis is the crucial role of patrilineal and patrilocal heteronormative marriage in facilitating procreation, lineage continuity, old age care, access to women's sexual and domestic labour. The impetus for this edited book lies in the current inadequate understanding of dynamics at work in localities where demographic pyramids are slimmer on the female side, compared to the male side. Some existing accounts—particularly those from security studies—are fraught with unsupported hypotheses, unclear assumptions and sensationalistic accounts. There is an urgent need to examine, at the ground level, processes that are unfolding in communities.

This edited book contributes to the advancement of knowledge by first documenting how individuals and families experience, adapt and adjust to recent demographic shifts. Second, the chapters discuss how demographic change interacts with other concurrent processes of change with respect to economic development and globalization, gender, sexuality, generation, class, caste, marriage, families, notion of self, migration and work. The book includes case studies in selected communities of China and India conducted by experienced and emerging scholars from diverse

S. Srinivasan (✉)
University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, Canada
e-mail: sharada@uoguelph.ca

S. Li
Institute for Population and Dev't Studi, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China
e-mail: shzhli@xjtu.edu.cn

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disciplines. Chapters are based on original first-hand data collection as well as analysis of secondary data. A unique aspect is that all chapters offer micro-level analyses contextualized within larger processes of change with the aim of extending current understandings of the consequences of the demographic imbalance between men and women in China and India, particularly from a gender perspective.

1.2 Sex Ratio Imbalance[1] in China and India

A well-known demographic feature in many Asian countries including China and India is the higher proportion of men to women. In recent decades, the proximate cause of high sex ratios is sex selective abortion.[2] Both countries have a long history of daughter deficit emanating from a culture of strong son preference, daughter discrimination, and sex selection resulting in excessive male births and fewer female births. In a patrilineal/virilocal[3] context, underlying the practice of sex selection is a strong preference for sons for economic and socio-cultural reasons, with sons being more valued than daughters in many aspects of social life. In addition in the Indian context, there is a strong perception of daughters as an economic burden due to the practice of dowry and to the patrilineal context in which, upon marriage benefits accrue to her marital rather than her natal family. Both countries have witnessed a strong decline in fertility in the last three decades, which along with son preference and daughter aversion has had a bearing on the number and sex composition of children.

China has undergone rapid fertility decline during the past three decades. With the dramatic decline in fertility level, the sex ratio at birth (hereafter SRB) has been abnormally higher, from 107.2 (versus every 100 female births) in the 1982 census, to 116.9 in the 2000 census, and then further to 117.9 in the 2010 census. Figure 1.1 depicts how SRB has increased across China from 1982 to 2010 at the provincial level. The immediate reasons behind the rise in SRB are multifaceted. In the 1980s and early 1990s, concealment of female births was attributed as one of the main reasons (Zeng et al. 1993). Abandonment of baby girls, which was a neglected phenomenon in the discussion of rising SRB, has also contributed to the reported distortion of SRB (ibid.). Since the early 1980s with the availability of technology for prenatal sex selection the SRB has continued to rise, initially in rural areas, and then nationwide. Some people ascribe the rising SRB partly to China's one child policy, as without birth constraint, people can realize having a son by extra births (Chan et al. 2006;

[1] In this collection we refer to the disproportionate male to female sex ratio as high sex ratios or imbalance of sex ratio or sex ratio imbalance or daughter deficit.

[2] Female infanticide, neglect, abandonment and not registering female births were common in China until the 1980s, while in India female infanticide and neglect were common until even the 1990s. Excessive female infant mortality continues to account for a large number of missing girls especially in India. Since the 1980s, prenatal sex selection has increasingly been used to avoid unwanted female births (Chu 2001; Zeng et al. 1993).

[3] After marriage the woman lives with her husband and his family.

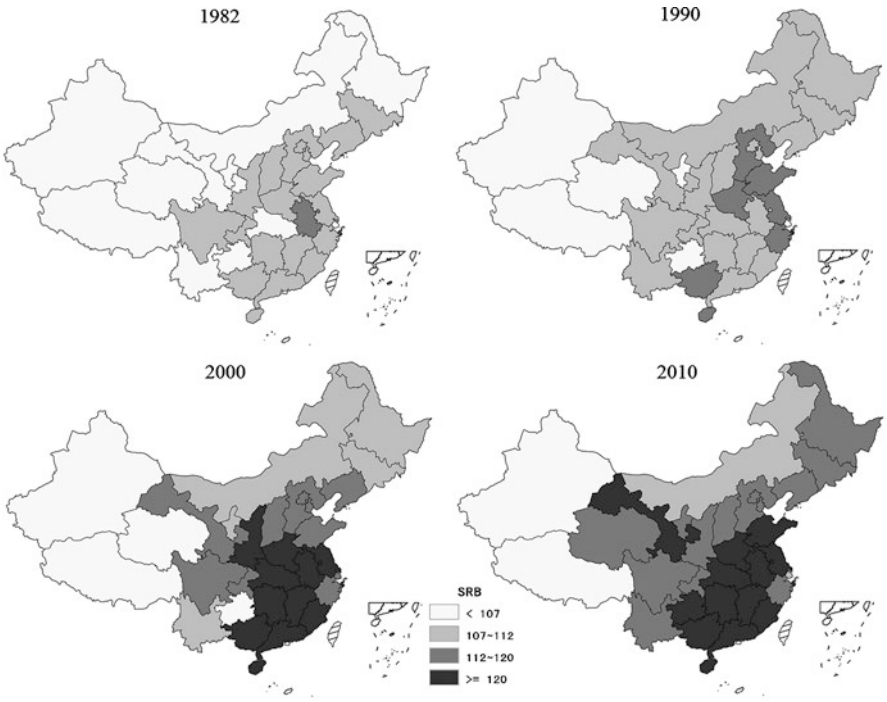

Fig. 1.1 SRB trend at provincial level in China

Zeng et al. 1993), others point out that the one child policy has exacerbated the sex ratio imbalance but son preference is the main cause of this imbalance (Loh and Remick 2015; Eklund 2011a).

While there are strong similarities in the practice of sex selection between China and India, there are also important differences. In China, daughter deficit is largely a rural phenomenon due to the reliance on sons for material support, continuity of family lineage, and compounded by the one child policy (Jiang et al. 2012).

Whereas in India, daughter deficit is higher in urban than in rural areas and is caused by son preference for material support and lineage but also by the perception of daughters as an economic burden most notably due to the practice of dowry (Srinivasan 2005). In the Indian context, the 0–6 (child) sex ratio[4] has increased

[4] In India, the child (0–6) sex ratio derived from the censuses is often used as a crucial source for measuring the intensity, temporal and spatial patterns of the different forms of daughter elimination. In addition estimates of excessive female infant and child mortality throws light on the nature and extent of post-birth daughter deficit. Increasingly however, much of the daughter deficit occurs before birth and hence the need for regular and reliable assessments of the sex ratio at birth (SRB). In the absence of adequate, reliable civil registration of births and deaths in India much of the estimates on SRB come from sample surveys like those from the Sample Registration System (SRS). The census operation in 2001 and 2011 collected data on births in the previous year, an approximation for the sex ratio at birth.

from 102.5 in 1961 to 108.8 in 2011 (Srinivasan and Bedi 2013; Premi 2001) (Tables 1.1 and 1.2). The 0–1 sex ratio according to the latest Census (2011) is 111 compared to 110.5 in 2001 (Rajan et al. 2015). Unlike China, urban 0–1 sex ratio and 0–6 sex ratio are higher than the rural ratios for the country as a whole and in most of the 29 states and nine union territories. While there are considerable regional differences in the incidence, intensity and duration, it is reasonable to conclude that over the last three decades high sex ratios have become a pan Indian phenomenon.[5]

There are large regional gaps in SRB among different provinces due to China's large size and localized birth control policy (Jiang et al. 2012). With more than three decades of higher than normal SRB, Bongaarts and Guilmoto (2015) show that the number of missing women in China has risen from 49.5 million in 2000 to 62.3 million in 2010, from 6.9% to 9.4%.[6] Jiang et al. (2012) depicted the trend of missing women during the twentieth century, and especially the past three decades from 1980 to 2010. While the intensity and extent of daughter deficit is not as severe in India as it is in China, in the north-western Indian states and union territories such as Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh, that have had a long history of excessively male sex ratios, the impacts are beginning to unfold.

An important consequence of the long standing sex ratio imbalance which has received attention is the unusually high numbers of men who are unable to find brides locally. Guilmoto (2012) estimates that the number of men who are likely to remain bachelors by 2055 will be about 15% in China and 10% in India if the sex ratio at birth returns to normal by 2020.

1.3 Approaches to Understanding Consequences of Scarce Women and Surplus Men

While sex selection is an extreme form of gender discrimination and its continued practice has important implications for women who are born and survive, the issue seems to attract more attention and is becoming urgent especially when a growing number of adult men are unable to find brides in patriarchal societies with strong son preference— a key source of male privilege— founded on heteronormative marriage. In threatening this heteronormative marriage norm as well as of the dominant masculinity it embodies,[7] bride shortage signals the weakening of male privilege, which partly explains the anxiety around it. Additionally, in China (and in India) families arrange marriages that are patri/virilocal to ensure continuation of

[5] Conventionally, much of the daughter shortfall in India has been accounted for by states such as Punjab, Haryana and Delhi in the north and Gujarat and Maharashtra in the west consistent with relatively lower levels of human development, and lower levels of women's autonomy and less women friendly kinship arrangements (Dyson and Moore 1983; Miller 1981; Sopher 1980; Visaria 1967).

[6] It was estimated that there were 40.9 million missing women in the 2000 census data, accounting for 6.7% of the expected female population (Klasen and Wink 2003).

[7] See Connell (1987) on the construction of hegemonic masculinity.

Table 1.1 Population sex ratio, 0–6 sex ratio, 0–1 sex ratio in India, 1901–2011 (Rajan et al. 2015)

Year	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
(1) Population sex ratio in India	102.9	103.7	104.7	105.3	105.8	105.7	106.3	107.5	107.1	107.9	107.2	106.4
(2) 0–6 sex ratio in India	–	–	–	–	–	–	102.5	103.7	104.0	105.8	107.9	108.8
(3) 0–6 sex ratio in urban India	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	107.0	110.4	110.5
(4) 0–6 sex ratio in rural India	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	105.5	107.1	108.3
(5) 0–1 sex ratio in India	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	110.5	111.2
(6) 0–1 sex ratio in urban India	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	110.6	112.0
(7) 0–1 sex ratio in rural India	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	110.4	111.0

Table 1.2 0–1 and 0–6 sex ratios, India, states and union territories, 2001 and 2011 (Rajan et al. 2015)

Country/States	(0–1)						(0–6)					
	2001			2011			2001			2011		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
India	110.5	110.4	110.6	111.2	111.0	112.0	107.9	107.1	110.4	108.8	108.3	110.5
Jammu & Kashmir	105.2	105.4	103.5	129.2	128.9	130.4	106.3	104.5	114.5	116.0	115.6	117.6
Himachal Pradesh	118.3	118.5	117.1	105.5	105.4	107.8	111.6	111.1	118.5	110.0	109.6	113.5
Punjab	127.1	127.2	126.4	118.6	119.2	117.8	125.3	125.2	125.6	118.2	118.5	117.4
Chandigarh	117.6	112.7	118.5	111.7	115.6	111.6	118.3	118.1	118.3	113.6	114.8	113.6
Uttarakhand	117.2	117.4	116.7	115.1	114.8	116.0	110.1	108.9	114.7	112.4	111.2	115.2
Haryana	127.2	127.4	126.6	121.4	121.2	121.4	122.1	121.5	123.8	119.9	119.8	120.2
Delhi	117.4	120.8	117.0	115.1	125.3	114.7	115.2	117.6	114.9	114.8	122.9	114.5
Rajasthan	115.7	115.1	118.9	111.2	111.5	110.3	110.0	109.4	112.7	112.6	112.1	114.4
Uttar Pradesh	111	111.2	109.4	112.4	111.9	114.8	109.2	108.6	112.4	110.9	110.4	112.9
Bihar	109.1	109.1	109.1	112.1	111.9	114.2	106.2	105.9	108.2	107.0	106.6	109.6
Sikkim	106.7	107.2	101.8	103.3	102.8	105.	103.8	103.5	108.5	104.5	103.7	107.1
Arunachal Pradesh	100.3	100.9	97.8	107.0	106.7	107.8	103.7	104.2	102.0	102.9	102.6	104.5
Nagaland	101.6	101.2	103.8	103.6	103.6	103.3	103.7	103.2	106.5	106.0	107.2	102.8
Manipur	102.5	103.2	99.9	110.5	112.9	105.5	104.5	104.6	104.1	107.5	108.3	105.4
Mizoram	100.6	102.2	98.6	103.5	105.0	101.8	103.7	103.6	103.8	103.1	103.5	102.7
Tripura	102.8	102.6	104.2	104.6	103.7	107.9	103.5	103.3	105.5	104.5	104.2	105.6
Meghalaya	104.4	104.5	103.6	102.2	101.9	104.4	102.8	102.8	103.2	103.1	102.9	104.8
Assam	105.5	105.8	101.8	107.5	107.4	108.9	103.6	103.4	106.0	104.0	103.7	105.9
West Bengal	102.6	103.3	99.3	106.7	106.2	108.5	104.2	103.8	105.5	104.6	104.3	105.6
Jharkhand	110.3	109.6	108.9	110.7	109.6	115.9	103.6	102.8	107.5	105.5	104.5	110.1
Orissa	107.8	108.1	104.9	109.9	109.5	112.6	104.9	104.7	107.2	106.3	105.7	109.5

Country/States	(0–1)						(0–6)					
	2001			2011			2001			2011		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
Chattisgarh	107.8	107.4	109.5	105.5	104.4	109.5	102.6	101.8	106.6	103.2	102.4	106.7
Madhya Pradesh	110.7	110.4	112.6	110.1	109.5	112.4	107.3	106.5	110.3	108.9	108.3	111.0
Gujarat	119.9	117.9	124.7	115.2	112.4	119.8	113.3	110.4	119.5	112.4	109.4	117.4
Daman and Diu	117.2	122.1	108.2	110.9	103.0	114.0	108.0	109.2	106.0	110.6	107.3	111.9
Dadar & Nagar Haveli	104.5	100.8	121.5	105.7	99.5	114.3	102.1	100.0	112.6	108.0	103.1	114.7
Maharashtra	114.0	114.8	112.5	116.0	117.5	114.0	109.5	109.2	110.1	111.9	112.4	111.2
Andhra Pradesh	105.2	105.7	103.3	108.2	108.1	108.6	104.0	103.8	104.7	106.5	106.3	107.0
Karnataka	106.8	107.4	105.5	108.5	108.2	108.7	105.7	105.4	106.4	105.5	105.3	105.7
Goa	108.6	105.5	111.7	110.1	112.4	108.8	106.6	105.0	108.2	106.2	105.8	106.4
Lakshadweep	103.7	111.4	133.1	116.6	106.4	119.8	104.3	100.1	111.1	109.8	109.8	109.8
Kerala	103.2	103.0	104.0	102.4	102.1	102.6	104.2	104.0	104.4	103.7	103.6	103.8
Tamil Nadu	107.0	108.8	104.2	107.1	108.3	105.6	106.2	107.2	104.7	106.0	106.8	105.0
Pondicherry	101.1	101.6	100.8	103.2	105.8	101.9	103.4	103.4	103.4	103.4	104.9	102.6
Andaman & Nichobar Islands	102.1	100.2	107.1	103.7	104.1	103.3	104.5	103.5	106.8	103.3	102.5	104.8

patrilineage, and care and support in old age in the absence of non-kinship based economic and social support (Eklund 2016b), which explains the material basis for the anxiety around bride shortage.

The implications of a large proportion of bachelors as a result of daughter deficit seem onerous. Existing literature predicts the consequences of daughter deficit along two lines: First, the alarmist scenario predicts that an underclass of surplus men will be forced into bachelorhood and are likely to be the source of violence and instability towards women and society at large. These men would engage in bride buying, trafficking and kidnapping, and in violent behavior especially towards women. Women would be rendered extremely vulnerable and insecure with restrictions on their freedom and greater dependence on men for protection (for example, Blanchet 2008; Hudson and den Boer 2004; Edlund 1999). Inspired by evolutionary socio-biology, this essentialist perspective presents men as dictated purely by their biology and women as passive victims. Some studies (Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2012) document escalating bride prices and potential for local violence in the competition for wives. In the last few years, academic and media attention have focused on the emergence of 'surplus' men, a group that will face difficulties getting married and being cared for in old age. Research from security studies single out 'surplus' men as an 'army of bachelors' as a safety threat for future world stability. Scenarios predict how sexually frustrated single men could bring about massive out-migration, a booming sex industry, and the spread of HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases (Attané et al. 2013; Yang et al. 2014; 2012a, b; Liu et al. 2012; Tucker et al. 2005; Hudson and den Boer 2004). Once in old age, single childless men are likely to face solitude and destitution without a spouse or an adult child to look after them. Other consequences that have not received as much attention in academic literature are particularly in the Chinese context the growing ageing population who will have no one to care for them— the "4:2:1" family—and the decline in working age population vital for high levels of economic growth.

> The UN estimates that by 2050 China will have about 440 million people over 60. The working-age population – those between 15 and 59 – fell by 3.71 million last year, a trend that is expected to continue (Phillips 2015).

In China, an estimated 40 million bachelors means 80 million older persons without grandchildren. The older generation's desire for grandchildren constitutes a major source of pressure for men (and women) to get married. At a symposium on Gender and Sustainable Social Development: Consequences and Public Policies, organized by the Institute for Population and Development Studies, Xi'an Jiaotong University in 2011, presentations by Zhen Li from the China Male Tongzhi Health Forum and Lisa Rofel (University of California) pointed out that the desire for grandchildren is one of the reasons why gay men and lesbian women are forced to marry (heteronormatively) (also Ifeng.com 2016; Eklund 2016a; this volume; Xing 2012) which is likely to exert additional strain on the already limited number of brides.

The second scenario predicts that the scarcity of women is likely to enhance their value (Edlund 1999; Samuelson 1985; Kumar 1983a, b); it sees an opportunity in the crisis leading to the breakdown in traditional barriers and rigid gender norms around

marriage such as increase in intercaste, dowryless marriages, bride price, more say for women in marriage, and in the long run a reworking of kinship norms (Porter 2016; Jiang et al. 2015; Larsen and Kaur 2013; McKenzie and Tullock 2012; Choo and Siow 2006; Das Gupta and Li 1999). The demographic opportunity thesis (Trent and South 2011; South and Trent 2010) similarly posits that the sex in shorter supply has advantage in terms of choice in mate selection. It would be predominantly men from lower strata (poor, less educated, geographically and economically backward regions) that would remain bachelors.[8] Edlund (1999) predicts that an important outcome of high sex ratios would be the sex stratification of society— with the upper social strata mainly producing sons and the lower strata daughters. This arising from a hypergamous situation (the most preferred marriage strategy), in which upper social strata men would not have a problem in finding brides since lower strata women would prefer to marry upwards. Edlund's hypothesis about women's say in mate selection in hypergamous contexts is similar to that of Guttentag and Secord (1983) who posited that in high sex ratio societies, women would have more choice in terms of mate selection. Guttentag and Secord however, differ in their prediction that women will be highly valued for their feminine roles; "single women for their beauty and glamour and married women for their roles as wives and mothers" (Guttentag and Secord 1983, p. 19). They foresaw that women would gain social mobility mostly through marriage in such societies. Indeed, one of the key themes underpinning the present collection is that the female deficit evident at the macro-level does not translate into more choice for women at the micro-level or male surplus does not automatically mean abundance of suitors at the local level.

A major limitation of current approaches to understanding the implications of the sex ratio imbalance in countries such as China and India is demographic reductionism—the assumption that demographic processes are the sole determinants of how the situation unfolds. Following this is demographic determinism—that all behaviors in such contexts are viewed as responses to demographic processes such as high sex ratios. In addition, most existing research findings are based on projections at the macro-level using large scale quantitative data that tend to homogenize and may not accurately capture people's lived realities. In professing to offer predictions, (linear) models also tend to ignore other processes at play, human agency and resilience, as well as the adaptability of social systems.

1.4 Daughter Deficit and What Else?

In many ways the dominance of demographic reductionism and determinism echoes the long standing tension between economics and anthropology (and other social sciences) over what constitutes evidence/knowledge, quantitative versus qualitative

[8] This is consistent with the profile of most unmarried men who are experiencing a delay in marriage (Choudhry, Mishra this volume; Srinivasan 2015; Attané et al. 2013; Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2013; Jin et al. 2013; Li et al. 2010).

data, how to gather evidence and who can know—studying down versus studying up— issues which are central to feminist epistemologies (Kanbur 2002; Bardhan 1989; Harding 1987). The challenge is to effectively combine the insights from micro-level studies with macro-level projections to draw credible conclusions. Analytically this implies that theoretical insights from various disciplines are best-suited to facilitate a proper understanding (and to predict) of the ways demographic factors interact with socio-economic and cultural processes. The core of the problem is gender discrimination; analyses will have to address key elements shaping gender discrimination and the implications of the impacts of female deficit and male surplus at the very least for women's wellbeing, gender relations, patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities.

Methodologically, insights derived from people's lived realities that are embedded at the intersection of a number of processes and not just demographic factors complicate simplified polarised narratives emerging from analyses based on macro-level data and projections. Given the time lag with which the effects of daughter deficit unfold, micro-level studies that can provide rich details are imperative and urgent. We argue therefore that a bottom up approach that is attentive to contexts and lived realities is likely to offer a more nuanced understanding of how the effects of the demographic imbalance are unfolding and in combination with macro-level analyses can thus contribute to effective policy making. In terms of methods, ethnographic methods are likely best suited to gather data on lived realities (O'Reily 2004).

Rather than viewing changes in social life such as marriage as merely a reaction to high sex ratios, analyses from different disciplines suggest that many of the changes have occurred independent of or concurrent to the demographic issue under question. Specifically, since the late 1970s when sex selection has intensified in China and India, many important socio-economic and political changes have occurred which affect several of the issues that are under consideration with regard to high sex ratios. Here we outline some of the significant insights around two related issues—one, changes around men's economic roles, and two, women's empowerment—and what these mean for understanding patriarchy.

1.4.1 Educated and Unemployed

Over the last two decades, research on youth has focussed on youth's lived realities, especially that of male youth, and their agency. This has come at a time when young people constitute the demographic bulge in developing countries including China and India. With 64% of its population in the 15–34 age group by 2020 India is expected to be the youngest country while China's youth population was at its peak in 1985 (Rukmini and Sivaraman 2014; Shivakumar 2013). With the opening up of the economy in China and India, young people in the last few decades have experienced enormous mobility, greater sexual freedom, and exposure to global ideas around individualism, relationships and autonomy. Sexual diversity and rights is

another area which has seen increasing mobilisation in recent years, which in turn has challenged heteronormativity.

The thrust of development policies of many decades on urbanisation and education, and family aspirations has resulted in rising education, and rural to urban migration. Rising education has not been matched by growth in employment resulting in what Jeffrey (2010) describes as a class of "educated unemployed" who seem to be perpetually in "waithood", occupying the period of uncertainty between finishing school and waiting for a secure job which in turn delays the milestone of adulthood. In the Chinese context, in the decades after 1979 with the dismantling of collectivisation, ensuing rapid economic growth, and the global financial slump since 2008 have led to the emergence of a "new class of "three nothings" made up mostly of men with "no land, no work, no social security" (Walker, cited in Li 2009). While in earlier decades, many of these men in waithood may have been able to marry—another milestone of adulthood—at present their marriage prospects are weak in large measure due to changing expectations among women.

1.4.2 What Women Want

Globally, the thrust on women's development over the last five decades has led to significant gains in women's education, health, employment, mobility and bargaining power both within and outside the household. Women in many parts of the world are delaying and even rejecting marriage and child bearing for freedom from patriarchal obligations and gender division of labour. Men experience difficulty in finding brides even in regions without a demographic shortage of brides because women simply do not wish to marry or the characteristics they desire in prospective husbands have changed resulting in men who do not meet these criteria being priced out of marriage. Theoretically, the work around women's empowerment and bargaining throws light on the pathways by which education, employment, property ownership and income affect gender relations and women's bargaining position (Kabeer 2000a, b; Kandiyoti 1998; Agarwal 1997; Sen 1990; Kandiyoti 1988). Equally significant over the last several decades is the growing strength of feminist or gender politics which manifest in changes in public institutions, discourses, policies and laws at national and international levels. In recent years growing research on men and masculinities has allowed for a deconstruction of masculinities, and the link between patriarchy and masculinities in particular hegemonic masculinity, and what this means for gender relations, gender-based violence, and women's status (Chopra et al. 2004; Connell 1987).

In China and India, although there is considerable variation in the extent of gender discrimination, the nature of patriarchal constraints, and in the strategies deployed to address gender inequality, there is enough evidence to show the tremendous gains women have made even as gender inequality and discrimination persist. At the same time what we are witnessing in terms of women's empowerment and its implications for men is not unique to China and India. In contexts such as Japan,

Korea, US, Nordic countries, United Kingdom and the Balkans, a growing number of men are priced out of marriage markets due to women's changing expectations (see Yeoh et al. 2013; Bélanger 2010; Beck-Gernsheim 2011; Heikkilä and Yeoh 2011; *The Economist* 2011; Bourdieu 2008; Nakamatsu 2005; Constable 2003; Drezgić 2001). Clearly there is more to prolonged bachelorhood than the doomsday discourses around daughter deficit envisage.

1.5 Main Themes Emerging from the Present Collection and Contribution to Literature

The chapters in the present collection acknowledge that high sex ratios is a reality in much of China and India but depart from mainstream demographic literature in explaining the likely impact of daughter deficit by privileging the view from below and voices of individuals and families in this context. Below we highlight some of the main issues emerging from the collection.

1.5.1 Numbers and Meanings at the Local Level

In response to the high sex ratios, the first order of analysis thus far has typically focused on generating estimates of men who are unlikely to find local brides on the basis of the sex ratio at birth. The process of finding a bride does not have a finality that macro-level projections suggest. In field sites across China and India, age at marriage is increasing for both women and men. There is a tendency to (mis)interpret a delay in marriage as a negative effect of daughter deficit, while several benign factors such as the rise in the number of years men and women spend in school, and the need to find employment continue to delay marriage for both women and men (Kashyap et al. 2015; Lesthaeghe 2010; Oppenheimer 1988). From the age at which it is normal for marriages to take place, it takes several years before individual men and families give up on the idea of marriage; when it is clear to them that some men will be never-married. During this period, men and their families invest a lot of time, effort and money in finding a bride, locally or from outside the region. Hence the actual number of never-married men may be quite different from projected figures. A key message echoed throughout the book is the seeming disconnect between the macro- and micro-levels. An instance of this disconnect as discussed later, is in how families and individual men rationalise a delay in marriage as due to other factors and not necessarily daughter deficit.

Another key element is the temporal (time) framework within which to examine the effects of various processes—economic, socio-cultural and demographic—to draw out the effects of scarce women and surplus men. Both in the case of China and India, there appears to be a period of intensification of sex selection followed by

a period when the effects unfold. This means that even if sex selection were to completely stop at this very moment, bride shortage would continue for a long time to come. So while parts of China and India are beginning to witness a decline in sex ratio at birth, bride shortage and a decline in SRB would co-exist adding to the macro-micro disconnect discussed earlier.

While at the macro-level male surplus may appear at first blush factual and even value neutral, the interpretation and appropriation of these numbers are fraught with problems. Underlying much of the current scholarship on the implications of sex ratio imbalance are notions of essentialism, heteronormativity and marriage. In the specific social contexts, terms such as "involuntary" or "forced" bachelors are pejorative and imply that all men are heterosexual and *choose* to marry and they cannot help being unmarried or in prolonged bachelorhood. The use of the term "bare branches" to refer to older bachelors in the Chinese context is intended to invoke sympathy for the men who cannot marry and hence cannot bear children to ensure continuity of lineage. Interestingly, single men are simultaneously feared and sympathized. Much of the literature insist that female deficit would make men aggressive, engage in risky sexual behaviour and threaten the security of women and of society more generally, whereas the micro-level evidence reveal that most of the men bearing the brunt of the sex ratio imbalance do not fit this caricature. Chaudhry; Mishra; Li et al. and Zhang and Belanger in the present collection demonstrate that the men who are most affected by the sex ratio imbalance are often the most vulnerable lacking economic, social and political power that derives from hegemonic masculinity (also Srinivasan 2015).

Bachelors in general and young bachelors in particular have almost always not enjoyed a good reputation (Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2013; Hudson and den Boer 2004; Bucholtz 2002). In the high male sex ratio contexts across China and India, the dangers posed by young single men are frequently invoked or exaggerated to create moral panic[9] to, in turn allow for control of women by (senior) patriarchs. In the context of societal hierarchies, it is not just media but also the powerful, dominant actors at the community and other levels who engage in constructing and reproducing moral panic. Chaudhry, Eklund and Mishra highlight the deployment of this discursive power about the single men in the regions of their field research. The discourse around surplus men posing a threat to women and unleashing (sexual) violence is frequently invoked and reproduced by media, governments and NGOs as well as community members. In India in recent years, reports of sexual violence and more broadly violence against women have increased. Incidents such as the much publicised Delhi gang rape of 2012 are linked and used to trigger panic and to remind the public of the consequences of high male sex ratios.[10] While in both countries (in all societies for that matter) there has always been a small proportion of men

[9] Cohen (2011) first coined the term moral panic in 1972 to describe the exaggeration of societal reactions to youth behaviour by media which often seeks to divert attention from more pressing issues.

[10] Six men were accused of gang rape of which one was just under 18 years old. The other men were below 30 years of age and one of them was married. Most rapes in India are committed by men who are mostly married and are known to the victims.

(and women) who remain single, in the present times, the numbers of such men is distinctly high (Guilmoto 2015), which along with a growing awareness around sexual violence has turned the spotlight on unmarried men and sustains the discourse on the negative consequences of bachelorhood. In the absence of good quality empirical evidence, it is hard to tell how much of the panic is felt at the micro level and how much is manufactured through media and to some extent academia.

In both countries it is not uncommon for women to be blamed for the plight of bachelors—that it is women's education and freedom which is fuelling hypergamy, leaving out many of the surplus men who do not possess desirable marriageable characteristics. For example, the Chinese government invokes the discourse of the "left-over" women in an attempt to encourage women who are delaying marriage (and in turn reduce the number of "bare branches"). The construction of moral panic diverts attention from an interrogation of patriarchy itself—of son preference, virilocality and daughter aversion fuelling daughter elimination. Instead the focus—by invoking moral panic and sympathy— is on preserving and sustaining patriarchal privilege whose beneficiaries are mostly men.

1.5.2 Women's Empowerment and Daughter Preference

While "surplus" men blame women for their plight, has women's value gone up because of their deficit? Across the globe economic, social and cultural processes are resulting in changes in the institution of marriage, which includes a delay in marriage, questioning the need for marriage, as well as a delay in bearing children. In China, the age at first marriage for men rose from 23.57 in 1990 to 25.86 years in 2010, and rose from 22.02 to 23.89 years for women during the same period (Li and Wang 2014). In India, the median age of marriage for women increased from 18.2 in 2001 to 19.2 in 2011 while men's age at marriage increased from 22.6 to 23.5 between 2001 and 2011 (*The Hindu* 2016). The rise in age at marriage is predicted to continue in the coming decades (see also Kashyap et al. 2015). In large part this change is inspired by the gains women have made in various spheres. Local studies demonstrate that even in regions with acute daughter deficit several of these factors are at play (and interact with daughter deficit). This is effectively captured in Heyer in a south Indian community in this collection. In China, the shift in gender politics occurred parallel to the economic reforms in the late 1970s (Wang 2015). The idea of equality between men and women underlying socialist policies were replaced with traditional Confucian gender ideals. This brought about a shift in the workplace, whereby women were being moved from the factory back into the home. However an unexpected outcome of the one-child policy was the investment that parents began to make in their daughter's education, which along with a market economy has brought about increasing career opportunities for women.

Women prefer to marry men who are equal or higher in social status in a tight marriage market in a patrilineal context; in short, women's gains are further fuelling hypergamy. In spite of their scarcity then, practices like dowry in India are not about

to decline. Eklund in this collection argues that hypergamy is also fuelled by the increased expectation that women should marry hypergamously (because they now can) and that such an expectation further exacerbates the marriage squeeze for both women in the upper strata and men in the lower strata—the "left over" women and men. Here upper and lower strata can mean much more than economic status to include related characteristics such as (higher or lower) education, and (higher or lower) career or job prospects.

With shortage, it would seem that women would be in demand in the marriage market and that following the logic of scarcity leads to value, women would be experiencing not only less discrimination but they could also be in a better bargaining position. Would a continued daughter deficit lead to an imminent demise of patriarchy? In China and India we are witnessing the phenomenon of "left-over" women even as millions of men are becoming surplus to the marriage market. To a large extent, most women and men who would like to get married but are struggling to do so in some way do not meet the (local) marriage norms resulting in them being left out (left-over), a situation complicated by the demographic reality of fewer women and surplus men in these countries making for a tight marriage context. In a way both women and men are affected by the same set of marriage norms embedded deeply in hegemonic masculinity privileging traditional heteronormative gender roles and traditional gender characteristics in marriage. These women and men at the extremes struggling in marriage—surplus men and left over women—do not conform to dominant gender norms around masculinities and femininities. In an effort to find brides for the millions of bachelors the Chinese government's attempt to shame women who are delaying their marriage as "left-over" will clearly not result in marriage given that most women seek to marry upward while men seek women who are not of higher status. This is a key message in Eklund, and Zhang & Belanger.

The discussion highlights the relationship between patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity and how it is redefined and adapts to a changing reality. Patriarchy is not weakening but reconfiguring to sustain and reproduce itself in daughter deficit contexts. While there are instances of bride price in China and dowryless marriages in India, the stranglehold of heteronormative patriarchal marriages is not about to loosen given the continued practice of hypergamy and patrilocality—both continue to feed each other. While uxorilocality—where the husband moves in with the wife's family—could well be a marriage strategy, given the social stigma it entails, men may prefer bachelorhood to marriage (see Zhang & Belanger).

A relatively better bargaining position that many women are experiencing in marriage is accompanied by continued gender discrimination. Women have been making considerable gains in education and employment, but there is still a high level of gender discrimination that they deal with in every walk of life. This is well-documented. Over the last few decades there has been a concerted push at all levels for gender-sensitive, women-friendly policies and programs. Yet, violence against women continues (Cornwall et al. 2007). It might well be that awareness and reporting of violence have increased as might the incidence of violence. Macro-level narratives on scarce women and surplus men render women as victims of sexual violence and kidnapping who are likely to become more constrained and dependent

on male protection, but it is not clear to what extent the gender-based violence that we are currently witnessing is due to the scarce women- surplus men phenomena. It is likely a backlash that women are experiencing as they transgress traditional gender norms and challenge male authority threatening to undermine patriarchy. Indeed, daughter discrimination and the resulting elimination stem from the same patriarchal norms that lead to other forms of violence against women.

In China and India (Jiang et al. 2015; Srinivasan 2012; John et al. 2008; IIPS 1995, 2008) son preference is reported to be weakening and there is an increase in daughter-only families in some regions. Are these a response to the surplus men phenomenon? In some parts of India, the number of daughter-only families is on the rise. Heyer's (in this collection) research follows a rural community in south India over the last few decades to reveal that many families are content with only daughters and invest in their education and wellbeing. She documents instances of married daughters taking care of their parents. Son preference still persists in China, but couples, particularly younger couples, have shown less discrimination towards girls (Jiang et al. 2015). Fong (2002) argues that singleton daughters in China have benefited from parental investment and in turn care for their parents, which until now is one of the main factors for son preference especially in rural areas. Parents with only daughters reason that girls are responsible, affectionate and perform well in education and employment. Sons are increasingly beginning to be seen as not interested in education, or responsible, and even a burden in some regions.[11] In addition many parents are anxious about their future at the hands of a daughter-in-law (Huang et al. 2015). Many of these factors are unrelated to the surplus men phenomenon; that is, a preference for daughters is not necessarily an outcome of fewer women, or parents do not prefer daughters out of a realisation of the consequences of surplus men. But Eklund (2016a, b) in understanding how young adults reason around sex preference and fertility, identifies an emerging "son aversion" that is rooted in hypergamy and the burden on families of sons to provide housing and other commodities to attract a bride. In this context, having a daughter is seen as preferable due to lesser economic burden.

1.6 Dealing with Impacts of Scarce Women and Surplus Men

The impact of sex selection is delayed with most of it being reported typically when men in contexts of daughter deficit experience difficulties in finding brides. This usually takes about 20 years from the time of sex selection (at birth) when marriage prospects of particular age cohorts of men begin to be affected. Thus the effects of sex selection since the late 1970s have begun to unfold in the last 10–15 years and will continue for years to come. As likely as female deficit is, individual, family and

[11] For instance, in the Indian state of Punjab, a state with a very high level of daughter deficit, a growing number of young men are falling prey to drug addiction which leads many parents to regret having a son.

institutional level strategies are beginning to emerge to deal with its effects. Expectedly the focus is on the delay men are experiencing in marriage due to the imminent bride shortage. It is men with least desirable characteristics that lose out in the current/emerging marriage scenario even as many men with desirable characteristics are likely in great demand in marriage. Contrary to the assumption of a single marriage market in economics and demography, marriage markets are not homogeneous. Rather than a single marriage crisis experienced by all men as predicted at the macro-level, in reality the experiences of men with regard to bride shortage are diverse depending on their education, class, caste, assets and other traits (see for instance Eklund in this volume; Jeffery 2014). This in turn is likely to affect the responses to sex ratio imbalance as Chaudhry demonstrates in her in-depth village study in north India.

Micro-level analysis reveals that most men and their families in the initial stages of the daughter deficit crisis do not often associate the delay in marriage with daughter deficit (Srinivasan 2015); the delay is attributed to other factors[12] including men's own volition. But as the crisis progresses and as an increasing number of men in marriageable age cohorts remain single past the local marriageable age, the role of sex selection/daughter deficit becomes prominent as in China or in north western India. While unmarried men of older age cohort wait past the acceptable local marriageable age to find a bride in the usual way, a recurring point is that men of younger age cohorts begin the search for a bride earlier than the local average age at marriage. Strategies to find a bride have become diversified; many men do not rely only on their families to find a bride; and social norms governing marriage are becoming relatively flexible in the face of rising bachelorhood/number of never-married men. Marrying outside caste, ethnicity, and region, widows, divorcees is becoming increasingly (although reluctantly) acceptable to remaining single. Uxorilocality—men taking up residence with the wife's family post-marriage is also being reported (in China the government offers incentive for uxorilocality) although it is prevalent only in some places (Li 2007). Some local governments implement policies to encourage uxorilocality with an aim to improve gender equality, such as the men who marry in will enjoy the same or even more resources distributed by the village organization (Du et al. 2015; Eklund 2011b). The emerging marriage strategies are not without concerns, often leaving women and men in vulnerable, exploitative situations which indicate that institutional support has not kept pace with some of these changes (Zhang and Belanger, this collection; Srinivasan 2017; Kaur 2004).

At the level of institutions—formal governments, markets, and social norms—responses to daughter deficit and to their impacts have been slow or lacking. The implications for the economy in terms of the emerging shortage of human capital (of young women and men) are at a nascent stage in China. This shortage is mainly the result of the one child policy added to which is the inability of millions of men to marry

[12] For example, in the south Indian context, marriage delays are often attributed to problems in horoscope which are seen as beyond one's control.

and have children.[13] Interestingly, markets have tapped into the 'involuntary' bachelor crisis. Buying a house/apartment is seen as a good way of increasing marriage prospects, and many men and their families invest in buying or building houses before they start looking for a bride. This has kept the real estate markets booming (Hong Fincher 2014; Wei and Zhang 2011). Another example of markets exploiting the crisis is the sales pitch on "Singles Day" or Bachelor's Day on November 11. Along with the non-negotiability of heteronormative marriage, these measures exert pressure on unmarried men and their families creating a moral panic around bachelorhood.

Governments in China and India have been slow to acknowledge, let alone respond to the scarce women-surplus men phenomena although in recent years efforts to prevent sex selection have been stepped up (See Guo et al. 2016; Li 2007 for China; UNFPA 2013; Sekher 2010 for India). An important area in which urgent attention is needed is related to cross-region marriages and to institutionalised measures to promote and protect the welfare of cross-region brides (Srinivasan 2017; Greenhalgh 2013; Yeoh et al. 2013). The All China Women's Federation has been the loudest proponent of the left over women discourse in China as a response to the growing number of single men. But this discourse could be counterproductive as it further fuels the norm of marriage (Eklund in this volume).

In the Indian context there is hardly as yet a concerted government response to the emerging crisis of surplus men while some measures are emerging from social institutions. One of the most noted responses is that of *khap panchayats*, or caste courts in the northwestern state of Haryana, which has one of the highest levels of daughter deficit in India and where bride shortage is evident. One of the largest *khap panchayats* recently allowed families to arrange marriages for their sons with cross-region brides if they cannot find a local bride (*The Hindu* 2014). Mishra in this collection notes the emergence of "unmarried men's associations" in Haryana. Given the variations across the country in the length and intensity of daughter deficit as well as the extent of civil society institutions, it is possible that there will be other spontaneous responses to the unfolding crisis in India.

A key factor in how responses to the scarce women-surplus men phenomena unfolds is what we broadly refer to as gender politics, which would include efforts to improve women's status, end gender discrimination, and attain gender equity. Gender politics in various forms will be crucial in continuing to highlight gender discrimination, violence against women, championing sexual freedoms, and in pressurizing institutions to protect and promote gender-sensitive policies, programs, and laws.

As the impacts of daughter deficit have begun to unfold, credible evidence based on high quality research is the need of the hour. Even if SRBs were to return to normal in the next few years, the effects of sex selection of the past will continue to affect individuals, families, and communities for years to come (Guilmoto in this volume). Macro-level doomsday scenarios are predicated on the assumption that people and communities are passive and are victims to broader demographic (and other processes) while we argue that individuals, families and communities are resilient and are grappling with the emerging effects of scarce women and surplus men. While the book offers some of the earliest, original micro-level evidence of

[13] In the Indian context this is not yet an issue as discussed earlier.

people's lived realities in such contexts, there are still large gaps in our knowledge and more research will be needed. The present collection showcases how people in diverse local contexts are dealing with bride shortage, challenging and adding richness to current understanding of the scarce women-surplus men phenomena. But there is a need to understand effects beyond bride shortage. Research is also needed in understanding how institutional (government, social norms) responses evolve. As this book demonstrates interdisciplinary research that is attentive to contexts and lived realities generate strong insights that can better direct macro-level large scale quantitative analysis. This in turn could assist to generate sound policies to support the efforts of individuals, families and communities in dealing with the reality of scarce women and surplus men. This is perhaps the key message emerging from the collection and also a timely one. By way of wrapping up the book, drawing from years of research on sex ratio imbalance, Guilmoto reiterates the need for (continuing) conversations between anthropologists and demographers.

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Chapter 2
Being 'Bare Branches': Demographic Imbalance, Marriage Exclusion and Masculinity in North India

Paro Mishra

2.1 Introduction

Traditionally marriage has been a near universal in India. However, over the years, a growing numerical deficit of women in the north and north-western part of India – particularly in states like Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh – is creating a male marriage squeeze whereby many men are finding it difficult to get married by the socially recognized marriageable age. This chapter focuses on the state of Haryana, which has a long history of high sex ratios (Table 2.1). In Haryana, while some men are opting for long-distance, cross-region marriages (See Mishra 2013; Ahlawat 2009; Kaur 2004), there are many others for whom getting married is becoming a daunting challenge. While the phenomenon has been documented earlier (Darling 1928; Kensington 1893), male marriage squeeze is becoming more critical in contemporary times accentuated by a continuing decline in the proportion of women. The anxieties around it are being reflected in frequent media reporting and rising scholarly attention to the subject (Kaur et al. 2015; Chowdhry 2011; Samaiyar and William 2010; Bhatt and Halli 1999;). Equally important are the emerging socio-political responses like formation of bachelor (*kunwara*) unions[1] (Masoodi 2014), khap panchayat's (customary caste council) decision to relax some marriage norms (Siwach 2014a) and emergence of electoral campaigns focusing on issues of brides in exchange for votes (Siwach 2014b).

[1] Single men in Haryana are forming unions like *Avivahit Purush Sangathan* (Unmarried Men's Association) and *Jind Kunwara* Union (Bachelor Union of Jind) to make bachelorhood a political agenda.

P. Mishra (✉)
Department of Sociology, Banasthali University, Vanasthali, Rajasthan, India
e-mail: paro.mishra@gmail.com

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Table 2.1 Overall sex ratio since 1901 for Haryana and the study districts (Rajput n.d.)

State/district	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Haryana	115.3	119.8	118.5	118.5	115.1	114.8	115.2	115.3	114.9	115.6	116.1	113.8
Sonipat	114.7	117.6	116.8	116.3	110.1	112.9	112.9	115.5	115.5	119.0	119.2	117.2
Hisar	.	.	.	.	.	114.8	115.5	116.4	116.4	117.2	117.5	114.8

Marriage squeeze is not just a function of demographic imbalance but is also a result of how marriage as an institution is socially, politically and economically constructed (Wei and Zang 2015; Eklund 2013). For Haryana particularly, in addition to stressing the role of demographic imbalance (Samaiyar and William 2010; Bhatt and Halli 1999) studies have documented the impact of strict marriage rules based on avoidance, changing status and aspirations of women, societal and economic transformation, and shifting match-making criteria in creating the present marriage squeeze (see Chowdhry 2007, 2011; Ahlawat 2009). This chapter takes a step further by moving away from the causes of marriage squeeze to documenting its consequences. It does so by focusing on the indispensability of marriage and procreation in defining masculinities and by laying bare the lived experiences of bachelorhood amongst men in rural north India.

Studies examining bachelorhood as a fall out of demographic imbalance have been criticised on two major grounds. Firstly, while scholars have identified a variety of consequences of surplus males (see for example Kaur 2013a), the propensity of surplus, unattached men to engage in violence and aggression has been one of the most stressed themes (see Edlund et al. 2007; Hudson and den Boer 2004). However, most of these studies are based on numerical projections and not on an in-depth micro-level enquiry (Greenhalgh 2013; Zhou et al. 2011), and have been critiqued for not taking into account the adaptive processes that may set in to mitigate the extreme effects of high sex ratios (Kochin and Knox 2012). The second criticism is that most of these studies tend to treat bachelors as a homogeneous category, overlooking differences based on age, caste, ownership/non-ownership of land, education levels and employment prospects. Studies have shown that enactment of masculinity by an educated, unemployed man is different from that of an uneducated, unemployed man (See Jeffery et al. 2010). Similarly, articulations of masculinities are not the same for dominant and lower caste men (See Chaudhary in this volume). These differences are manifest among bachelors affected by daughter deficit.

Positioned against this backdrop, this chapter claims its significance by using an in-depth ethnographic mode of enquiry as opposed to macro statistical approaches to understand the implications of bachelorhood in Haryana. It critiques the homogenized portrayal of bachelors as prone to violence and shows how their lived reality is far more complex and multi-dimensional. The narrative of violence only offers a partial picture and there exists a more common, less sensational and yet unexplored narrative of ambivalence and helplessness as characterizing the masculinity of these men; one in which they imagine themselves and are imagined by others as incomplete and leading a burdened existence. In doing so this chapter not only unravels the linkages that exist between marriage and sexuality but also maps out the implications that exclusion from marriage has on the sexuality of bachelor men in the Indian context.

The chapter is organised as follows. Section 2.2 discusses methodology for data collection and the profile of bachelors. Section 2.3 orients itself around theoretical frameworks to understand masculinities in India and establishes the linkages between marriage, procreation and sexuality in defining hegemonic masculinity in

North India. While Sect. 2.4 critiques the 'prone to violence' characterization of bachelors, Sects. 2.5 and 2.6 complicate the simplistic explanations of bachelorhood and examine the bearing that non-marriage has on the masculinity of these men. Section 2.7 outlines some of the new social strategies adopted by bachelors to overcome the stigma of bachelorhood and Sect. 2.8 offers some concluding remarks.

2.2 Study Area and Data Collection

The material on which this chapter is based was collected during fieldwork between August 2012 and December 2013 in five villages of two districts – Sonipat and Hisar – in the north Indian state of Haryana. The study villages are identified as A, B, C (in Sonipat) D and E (in Hisar). While Sonipat is located closer to the national capital New Delhi and shares border with Uttar Pradesh, Hisar is located in the interior and shares its border with Rajasthan (Fig. 2.1) but both the districts are affected by sex ratio imbalance (Table 2.1). These two districts were purposively chosen to make the sample heterogeneous in terms of the cohorts of incoming cross-region brides. While brides from Bihar, West Bengal and Assam are more commonly found in Sonipat district, in district Hisar, brides from Kerala and Maharshtra are more numerous. The cross-region brides in the larger study were approached through a snow-ball sampling method keeping in mind issues of sensitivity and anonymity. I was put in touch with the first cross-region bride in each village through

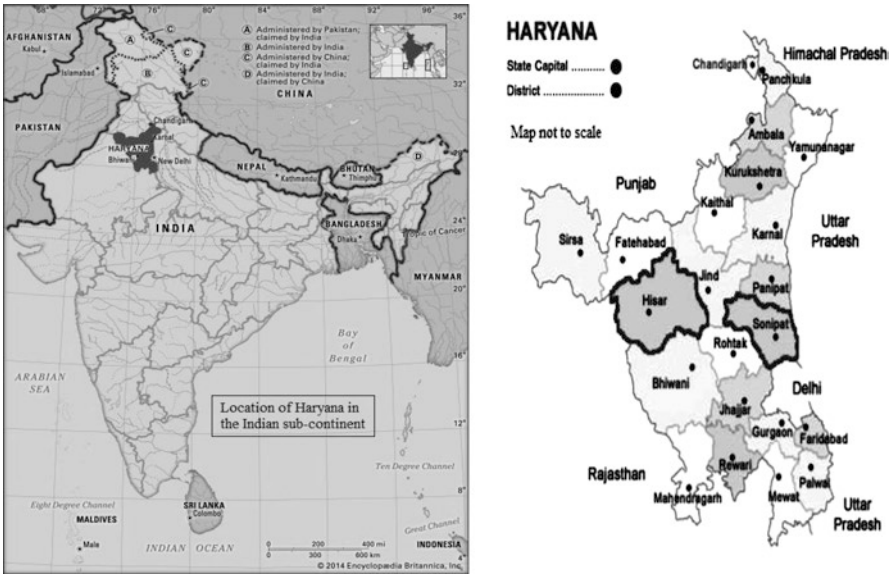

Fig. 2.1 Maps showing location of Haryana and the Study Districts (*outlined in bold*) and neighbouring regions (www.haryana.gov.in)

Table 2.2 Age, caste and living arrangements of never-married men

Age	27–30 years	31–40 years	41–50 years	>50 years
No. of men	33	29	13	12
%	37.9	33.3	14.9	13.7
Caste	**Scheduled Caste (SC)**	**Other Backward Classes (OBC)**	**Others**	
No. of men	29	18	40	
%	33.3	20.6	45.9	

the families that I stayed with and they introduced me to another one from their state and so on. My contact with brides from Assam was facilitated by a local female go-between who had arranged some of these marriages in the past. A survey to identify over-aged never-married men and their households was conducted in villages, C, D and E,[2] which provided basic socio-economic profile (caste, occupation, landholding and income) and family composition (age, gender and marital status). The survey covered 489, 373 and 502 in villages C, D and E respectively (the total number of households in these villages, according to the 2011 census is 510, 381 and 1052). It was during the survey that numerous cases of never-married men started emerging. The survey facilitated first contact with the families, which was then followed by interviews. I conducted the survey and interviews myself.

The survey sample consisted of 3107 men above the age of 18 years, out of which 146 (4.6%) were found to be never-married. For the purpose of this chapter, the age of 27 years is decided as the threshold for rural men based on conversations with the local populace on marriage age for men and women. Most people agreed that the wait for proposals for men starts at 21 years and nearly all agreed that beyond 27 years chances to get married locally decrease significantly and almost diminish by 35 years of age. The 27-year benchmark is much higher than the mean age at marriage for men, which stands at 23.3 years and 22.6 for Sonipat and Hisar respectively (IIPS 2010). Out of 146 men above the age of 18 years, 87 never-married men were over 27 years of age, which constitutes 2.8% of the total adult male sample of 3107 in the three villages. This figure is lower than the 2011 census figures for never-married men in the age group of 25–59 years, which stand at 3.4%, 7.3% and 6% for Haryana, Sonipat and Hisar. Tables 2.2 and 2.3 summarize the distribution of 87 never-married men according to age, caste, education, employment, landownership and residential arrangement. Eleven (12.6%) men in the study sample were physically challenged and three (3.4%) were mentally challenged.

Out of the 87 cases of never-married men, detailed interviews ranging 1.5–3 h were conducted with 34 men, 9 fathers, 14 mothers, 7 brothers and 11 sisters-in-law. The respondents consented to being interviewed based on the examination of research aim and the subsequent proposed use of data. Consent was conditional to safeguarding the identity of the respondents ensured through the use of pseudonyms

[2] Actual names of villages and respondents are not used.

Table 2.3 Distribution of never-married men according to education, land, occupation and living arrangement

Education	No education	Up to 5 years		8 years	10 years		Graduates
No. of men	25	41		13	5		3
%	28.7	47.1		14.9	5.7		3.4
Share in the family land	**Landless**	**0.25 Acre**		**0.5 Acre**	**0.6–2 Acres**		**2.1 Acres–3 Acres**
No. of men	44	16		22	4		1
%	50.5	34.0		25.2	4.5		1.1
Employment	**Unemployed**	**Small business owners**	**Private school teachers**	**Truck/auto rickshaw drivers**	**Factory workers**	**Agricultural daily-wage labourers**	**Farmers (both who till their own land and those who have taken land on lease)**
No. of men	18	8	2	6	12	27	14
%	20.6	9.1	2.2	6.8	13.7	31	16
Living arrangement	**Joint household (with parents and married brothers)**	**With both parents and unmarried siblings**	**With one parent (mother or father deceased)**	**With married brother**		**With married sister**	**Alone**
No. of men	20	17	32	11		1	6
%	22.9	19.5	36.7	12.6		1.1	6.8

in the chapter. Many of the respondents came to trust me to safeguard their privacy only after a number of meetings and over a period of time. Most of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the respondents; some interviews were conducted in the fields, at a local tea-shop, village *chaupal*[3] and in the *aanganwadi*[4] centre. The interviews were accompanied with detailed note taking and were later transcribed.

2.3 Existing Literature on Indian Masculinity

There is little consensus around the meaning of the term sexuality. For the purpose of this chapter, the term sexuality is used to connote all those processes of heterosexual masculinity that gather around this term. The attempt to conjoin sexuality and masculinity, while maintaining the focus on heterosexual contexts should only be understood as an analytical strategy and should not be interpreted as privileging or stressing heterosexuality. John and Nair (1998) argue that questions of male sexuality have rarely been a focus of scholarly analysis in India, except for celebrated instances of celibacy. While this contention is not completely wrong, as in the Indian context the ideal of 'celibate' has been explored in great detail (see Burghart 1983; Dumont 1980), masculinities are increasingly being analyzed vis-à-vis different social, political and spatial contexts such as work and community relationships (De Neve 2004), games and sports (Alter 1992), consumer culture and production of new spaces (Srivastava 2004) and popular culture (Gill 2012). However, there is a dearth of literature dealing with the theme of male sexuality as experienced within the bounds of heterosexual marriage. The limited literature that explores the relationship between masculinity and marriage in the Indian context includes contributions by Chowdhry (2011), Madan (1982), and Osella and Osella (2006). Near absence of discourse on men's sexuality and marriage in the Indian context is in sharp contrast to the presence of the overwhelming magnitude of literature dealing with the theme of female sexuality, though mostly within the framework of heteronormativity, domesticity, and the need to channelize female sexuality for maintaining caste boundaries, family and community honour (see Dube 2001; Jeffery and Jeffery 1996; Fruzetti 1993).

What we know of Indian men and their lives as married persons is mostly through the writings of feminist scholars and ethnographers engaged in laying bare women's worlds (Wadley 2008; Jeffery and Jeffery 1996; Fruzetti 1993). However, in most of the existing ethnographies, the idea of a 'man' as somebody who will marry a woman and become a good provider, a father, a husband (of whatever sort) is not interrogated (Osella and Osella 2006). As Srivastava contends:

[3] A designated public meeting space in the village used for making important decisions, socializing and sometimes also used as a marriage venue. Some *chaupals* can be owned, maintained and used only by specific caste groups.

[4] Courtyard shelter for children opened up under the Government of India's Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).

> Indeed, the stoic father, whose sexual activity remains confined to the imperatives of reproduction, and whose daily routine is one of unremitting frugality and discipline, is almost a stock figure of many twentieth century biographies. However, this sexual landscape- or rather a landscape where sexuality is an unspoken spectre- is only one of the many social topographies, and a fuller picture must include other, 'little' traditions, that are too frequently regarded as aberrations and not representative of an underlying 'truth'. (Srivastava 2004, p. 4)

It is towards these 'aberrations' or 'irregularities', as they are commonly perceived to be, that this chapter turns its focus. In a situation where many men are 'failing' to get married by the appropriate age, prolonged bachelorhood is becoming a growing concern. Do we know anything about the sexuality of those men who despite wanting to are unable to get married? Chopra et al. (2004, p. 2) argue that, "as compared to multiplicities of femininities, men in South Asian studies, emerge in a lesser and often two dimensional range – commonly they are householders, sometimes priests or renouncers; patrons or clients and almost always 'patriarchs'" (further, see Madan (1982); Dumont (1980)).

Moving away from these dominant and often repeated thematic positions in literature, this chapter seeks to divert attention towards another dimension of masculinity by focusing on those men who are neither renouncers nor householders, but occupy a somewhat liminal position between the two. This 'neither here nor there' location, as I will argue in the chapter, puts them in an ambivalent position vis-à-vis their masculinity. Failure to approximate the culturally sanctioned notion of 'manhood' or what Connell (1987) refers to as hegemonic or the socially dominant masculinity can be a source of great anxiety and apprehension, as the case of bachelors will reveal.

2.3.1 Hegemonic Masculinity in Rural North India: Linking Marriage and Sexuality

Masculinities are constructed differently in different cultures and specific types of hegemonic masculinity characterize gender regimes in particular regional and historical contexts (Connell 1987, p. 183). Hegemonic masculinity embodies the currently most honoured way of being a man and requires all men to position themselves in relation to it (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832). In the socio-cultural context of rural North India the form of masculinity that occupies a hegemonic status requires men to be in a heterosexual marriage, with son(s) and a capacity to earn income and look after their family. Chowdhry's (2011) rich account based on Haryanavi local proverbial illustrations around the relationship between masculinity, marriage, procreation, employment and education point towards this culturally sanctioned notion of manhood or hegemonic masculinity. However, notions of hegemonic masculinity do shift over time. While in the earlier period this hegemonic masculinity was intrinsically tied to agriculture (see Chopra 2004), particularly for the dominant land owning caste groups, today masculinity in rural North India is no

longer tied to agriculture but more generally towards a capacity to earn income (*kamai*) from urban secure jobs and provide for the family (*parivar ke liye*), both amongst the upper and lower caste groups (see Jeffery et al. 2010). But hegemonic masculinity in rural North India still remains intrinsically tied to marriage and producing a male offspring. Chowdhry contends that marriage and fertility are highly valued in rural India, both for women, as well as men and even after marriage a man is not considered a 'man' until he has had an offspring, especially a son[5] (Chowdhry 2011, p. 247). Why is marriage accorded a higher value? After all, what has sexuality got to do with marriage? Highlighting the important relationship between kinship, marriage and sexuality Osella and Osella (2006, p. 2) argue:

> While 'kinship' may not configure 'sexuality' in a North American gay men's leather bar, making 'sexuality' itself a valid stand-alone category of analysis, across South Asia it certainly does – indeed, it most energetically does, through the control of young people's access to sex and the institution of arranged marriage.

In India, marriages are customarily arranged by families and partners are chosen from within the caste or sub-caste, excluding certain categories of close kin taking into consideration notions of hypergamy, wealth and prestige. North India, particularly Haryana (and parts of Uttar Pradesh) have been known for their intolerance towards self-choice marriages, evident in the violence meted out to such couples by their families, community and the khap panchayats in the form of so called honour crimes (see Kaur 2010; Chowdhry 2007). In a social setup where self-choice marriages are facing strong resistance, non-marital cohabitation is as yet unthinkable. Strong community policing and strict moral codes mean that young couples can only legitimately come to cohabit together after tying the knot, mostly with the consent of parents and senior members in the family and community, thus making marriage imperative for any expression of sexuality.[6]

Additionally expectations placed by senior generations on younger generations of men regarding continuation of the family line also make marriage indispensible. Marriage being the most socially acceptable way of producing a legitimate offspring - as children born outside wedlock are considered to be illegitimate - is heralded as an essential rite of passage in a man's life. The metaphor of 'seed' and 'earth'/'field' in the Indian discourse around pregnancy puts the husband in a higher position in the procreative relationship (Dube 2001; Madan 1982). While childlessness in the Indian context has negative implications for women (See Donner 2008), having a child is also consequential for a man as it signifies his virility, masculinity and his ability to perpetuate the family, lineage and caste group. Exclusion from marriage also translates for most into exclusion from fatherhood. Failure to perpetuate the family can be a great source of anxiety for bachelors as we shall see in the later discussion.

[5] A popular saying goes, "*beta hua jub janiye, jeeb pota kele baar,*" which translates to "you can claim to have a son only when a grandson plays in your doorway" (Chowdhry 2011, p. 247).

[6] This does not mean that people do not engage in sexual acts outside marriage.

2.4 Bachelors as *'Çhade'*: The Discourse of Violence and the Missing Dimension of Age

Like their Chinese counterparts who are referred to as *guang guner* meaning bare branches, over-aged bachelors in Haryana are referred to as *'çhade'* – a term that not only refers to bare branches of a family tree that will not yield any fruit (offspring) but also to clubs or sticks thereby hinting at the propensity of these men towards physical and sexual violence. The following conversation on the rising number of bachelors with the *Sarpanch* (elected head of village council), Satpal Singh (SS), male, 48 years old, Chauhan caste is particularly illuminating.

SS: Haryana's rising number of bachelors has become a nuisance for girls and their parents. People are afraid of sending their daughters outside home. You can see in buses, colleges and in the streets how these bare branches (*chade*) behave like uncontrolled bull (*chutta sand*) ready to attack anyone. They have brought a bad name to Haryana.

Author (A): Do married men also eve-tease[7] or is it only bachelors?

SS: Only bachelors do so. Married men have means to satiate their hunger (*bhook*, implying sexual needs). Those who lack means lust after other women. (Field notes, September 2012)

The sexuality of bachelors is being constructed as 'predatory' in contrast to the 'channelized' sexuality of a married man whose sexual needs are implied to be met within the heterosexual normative marriage by his wife (referred to as 'means' (*sadhan*)). In her seminal essay 'Thinking Sex', Rubin (1984) argues that sexuality is organized into systems of power that reward some individuals and activities while suppressing others. This 'sex hierarchy', regards as 'natural' and 'good' sexuality which is heterosexual, monogamous, procreative and same generation over homosexual, promiscuous, unmarried or sadomasochistic sex which are perceived as forms of 'bad, abnormal or damned' sexuality. Those practising the former, Rubin (1984) argues are rewarded with respectability and legality while the latter suffer disrepute and criminality. On similar lines, in the above case, bachelor's sexuality is being constructed as violent and dangerous by comparing them to an out of control bull (*chutta saand*) that is prone to attacking anyone who comes in the way. They are seen as constituting a direct danger to the community and to women in particular (Osella and Osella 2006). Scholars working on Haryana argue that the unemployed, bachelor men often enact "masculinity" in public spaces by joining hands with village elders in carrying out their violent *diktats*[8] on couples choosing self-choice marriages or marriages that flout traditional norms (Chowdhry 2007). Exercise of power then is equated with manhood. However, such a characterization, as I pointed out earlier wipes off the age specific differences in the category of bachelors. While the above assertion may hold relevance for younger bachelors, most of the older bachelors in my study, especially those in their late 40s and 50s were quite aloof and

[7] A euphemism used in India to refer to public sexual harassment and molestation of women by men.

[8] An order or a decree imposed by those in power; in this context the local caste councils known as *khap panchayats*.

withdrawn, not just from the society at large but also within their own families. This behaviour is more starkly visible in cases of those men who have completely given up on their hope to get married. While some of them go out for work, they carefully avoid male spaces like the *baithak* (the outermost room in the house) and the *chaupal,* which are mostly used by men for community meetings, for playing cards or for a round of smoke. Older bachelors mostly stay inside the house, sometimes in their own room (if they have one), other times in the common room that they share with others (parents or younger unmarried brothers). Anita, 50, from chauhan caste laments how in the past 27 years of her marriage she has seen her younger bachelor brother-in-law, Rajesh, 47, transform from an extremely jovial (*maskhara*), talkative (*baatooni*) person to a very quiet (*shant*) and angry (*gussail*) personality, so much so that he always remains lonely and the children fear going near him.[9] Similar findings on withdrawal from family and society are reported by a study on bachelors in China (see Hesketh et al. 2011, p. 1376). However, this is not the case for those younger men who are still optimistic about finding a spouse, even if it means forgoing dowry and bringing in a cross-region wife. However, doing so necessitates connections and substantial expenses, which is not an easy option given the economic situation of many of these bachelors.

2.5 Crisis of Bachelorhood

Scholars have noted a delay in adulthood for men who fail to assume the breadwinner role in their families (Jeffery 2010; Osella and Osella 2006; Parry 2005). Similarly in North India, where marriage is seen as bestowing social adulthood on individuals, bachelors experience a prolongation of youth as they are not yet incorporated in to the domesticities attached with a householder's life. Srinivasan (2015) reports similar findings for bachelors from the Kongu Vellala Gounder community of Tamil Nadu. Bachelors are often seen as immature, foolish and incapable of making sound judgements (Chowdhry 2011; Kaur 2008) and their views are not sought on important family matters, as the case study discussed below highlights.

> The youngest of four children (3 brothers and 1 sister), Baldev is 34 and has only 8 years of education and no independent source of earning. Five acres of family land is jointly tilled by the father and 3 sons though the eldest son, Ramesh and his family have separated (*niyara*) from the joint household. Ramesh also works part time at a shoe factory in Sonipat City, 11 kms away. While Baldev's sister is married, he and his parents live jointly with his other married brother Kamlesh who runs a small general store from the house.
>
> During one of my visits, Baldev's mother confided that despite waiting for the past 8–9 years, no marriage proposal has come for Baldev as he is unemployed and his share in the family property is too small (a little more than 1.5 acre) to attract proposals. A little later Kamlesh (K) walks in and informs us that the field looks beautiful dotted with red and yellow and this season they have sown marigold and rose flowers (in addition to wheat) in two

[9] A study in China notes higher depression and aggression scores for never married men than their married counterparts (Zhou et al. 2011).

acres of the five. The conversation that followed this seemingly non-interesting detail highlighted Baldev's (B) position in the family.

B: There will not be much profit in it, wheat was alright.
K: He does not know anything. The flowers get a good value in Delhi's wholesale flower market. They are in great demand in the wedding season. (*Turning towards me*) You might be aware, you are from Delhi.
B: Half of it will get destroyed in transportation and they will not get a good price. If only someone pays attention to what I say! Forget listening to me, no one even bothered to ask, after all it is my land too but no one asked me, they did all on their own.

On enquiring whether Baldev knew about the decision to plant flowers he said, "Yes, I got to know but only after the fertilizers, seeds and pesticides had all been purchased." Both his brother and mother were a little surprised at Baldev's sudden outburst but his brother immediately covered up the situation by saying it was the decision of family elders (*badon ka faisla*) and that anyways he (Baldev) has other troubles (*aur pareshaniyan*) to take care of so they did not bother him. But at this point Baldev's frustration was all out. He felt offended that his views were not sought on a very important family matter. At the mention of these 'other troubles', Baldev remarked, "whatever those troubles are, they are outside my control but at least I can exercise control over cropping decisions."

These other troubles were matters of marriage which Baldev said were beyond his control, a concern also vocalized by many other respondents in different contexts as discussed in the later part of the chapter. Baldev was clearly upset about his exclusion from cropping decisions and believed that his opinion should have been sought on matters related to land but his family did not value his opinion much. On the one hand, the decision was justified in terms of being '*badon ka faisla*' (decision of senior/elder men) – by stressing the importance hat comes with age and patriarchal hierarchy-- on the other hand, it also conveyed Baldev's non-recognition as an adult by his own family despite his chronological age. In several meetings after this, Baldev narrated various incidents where his opinion was not sought- those related to agriculture, purchasing a motor-cycle and regarding gifts to be made to his sister's family on the birth of her son.

On asking what he thought was the reason behind this behavior, he said, "because they are elders they exert control over me. As of now they shoulder my responsibility but when I will have my own household, it will change." Thus even in Baldev's own opinion his lower position in the family was linked to his bachelor status. Similar problems were voiced by other respondents in the study. Men like Baldev thus experience a liminal position in society where they are neither considered boys nor men. Kaur (2008) notes that sometimes bachelor men may not be accommodated in the main-dwelling but in the place used to keep cattle *(gher* or *haveli)*. (Field notes, January 2013)

At this point it is also important to mention that land, employment and being able-bodied are important factors in accommodating bachelor men in the joint household. While bachelors can separate (*niyara*) from the joint family and claim their share in the family land, they mostly refrain from doing so as separation also entails managing the household and involvement in so called feminine domestic chores in the absence of a wife, which as the next section highlights is seen as problematic (See Wadley (2008) on how separation in joint families is always 'couple oriented'). Kaur (2008, p. 113) argues that a bachelor's well-being in the Punjab-Haryana region is "dependent on how much land he stood to inherit and who among the other brothers coveted his share of the land and thus consented to take care of

him". Sometimes older women take care of the bachelor brother-in-law in the hope that her son(s) can inherit his share of the land along with the father's. I also came across two cases where women deliberately prevented their brother-in-law's marriage by spreading false rumours about them thereby warding off any chances of land division after their marriage. Thus in addition to bachelor's personal traits, sometimes conflicting interest of family members may also shape marriage prospects of bachelor men. Out of six cases of bachelors living alone in my sample, three were physically challenged and were abandoned by their married brothers as they neither owned land nor were able to provide any financial contribution to the family. Their survival is entirely contingent on the food and limited care offered by some families in the villages who took pity (*daya*) on them. The other three were also forced to leave their families in old age and were often spotted wandering in the village. In one case however an unemployed bachelor who was a graduate and had lost both his legs in a road accident was well taken care off in the joint household. During the time of my fieldwork he was preparing for entrance examinations for a banking job and his family was hopeful that once he gets a government job (*sarkari naukri)* through the 'Physically Handicapped' (PH) quota he will find a suitable match.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 832) contend that "hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative". Similarly bachelors in this study approximated standards of hegemonic masculinity to varying degrees. Those living with their aging parents were found to be in an ambivalent position with respect to hegemonic masculinity: while some of them conform by dint of their capability to earn and take care of their aging parents and hence pass as 'good sons', their involvement in the socially constructed 'feminine' domestic tasks like cooking and cleaning challenged their adherence to the ideal.

> A Jat[10] by caste, Kuldeep aged 44, lives with his 65-year-old mother in a small one room house and cultivates two acres of land. His two younger brothers have migrated to cities after their marriages with women from Kerala. Kuldeep attributed his brothers' choice of cross-region spouses as emanating from his own failure to find a spouse locally. With little education, no employment and a small piece of land among three brothers, Kuldeep was never deemed to be a 'worthy' match in the local context but he could never convince himself to seek cross-region marriage as he believed it would take immense time, energy and patience to train a culturally dissimilar spouse in the local mores. In the absence of any other woman in the household, Kuldeep is now solely responsible for taking care of his old mother who suffers from rheumatoid arthiritis (*gathiya bai*) and is unable to work. Kuldeep's mother is all praise for him as unlike his other 'self-interested' (*matlabi)* brothers who left her, he takes care of her in addition to his work on the field and other household chores like cooking, cleaning and doing the dishes. When I visited them for the first time, Kuldeep was chopping vegetables for dinner but left them as soon as he saw me walking in. Though for his mother Kuldeep is the only source of support (*sahara*), she find his involvement in the domestic sphere problematic as she identifies it as women's work (*aurtaan k kaam*) and agrees that had he been married the household tasks would have been taken care of by his wife. Every now and then she insists he get a bride from afar *(dur te le aa)* but he

[10] Dominant caste in Haryana in terms of numerical strength, land-ownership and political power.

> does not agree to it. The greatest fear that she has is that in his old age there will be no one to take care of him, a concern also vocalized by other respondents in my study. (Field notes, August 2013)

It was found that amongst all the family members the mothers of bachelors are most keen to get their sons married, as the incoming daughter-in-law relieves them from the domestic chores. In patriarchal Haryana where gender norms are deeply entrenched, men are expected to be active in the public sphere while women are still tied to the domesticities of the private sphere despite their increasing education levels and employment. Kuldeep's case (and a few others like him) is in that sense an aberration and begs the question: does bachelors involvement in domestic chores emasculate them? Existing literature on men involved in traditionally feminine tasks argues that despite engagement in feminine activities men are able to claim hegemonic masculinity by framing their work within the logic of income generation, a breadwinner role, and procurement of assets through income (Nare 2011; Connell 2002). Kuldeep's case however is different from these men, as in his case (and in other similar stories), there is little opportunity to fall back on this kind of a discourse primarily because this is unpaid work in one's own house in the absence of a wife. Thus while in his role as a dutiful son, Kuldeep is partially successful in approximating hegemonic masculinity, his bachelorhood and involvement in domestic work make his claims to the status difficult.

2.6 *Bojh* and *Majbur*: Perception of Bachelors

As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, bachelorhood is not a new phenomenon in the north and north-western parts of India but the anxieties around it were limited in the past as the society and the family had several mechanism to take care of bachelors – fraternal polyandry (Kaur 2008; Pettigrew 1979); sending away bachelors to army and religious *deras* (camps or settlements) (Hershman 1981); inter-caste marriages of jat men with lower caste women (Mishra 2013; Darling 1928); and the practice of leviratic marriages (*karewa*) or marriage of a widow with the deceased husband's married or bachelor brothers (Chowdhry 2007). However, over the years many changes have occurred. While *karewa* reportedly continues to be practised, the rigidities that crept in during the colonial period have led to a decline in inter-caste marriages (see Chowdhry 2007 for details). Polyandry is being dismissed as an old custom (*bahut purana rivaaj*) and monogamous marriages are being emphasized through idioms like *pavitra rishta* (pious relationship) and *saat janmo ka bandhan* (a tie that lasts for seven lives). This shift also signals a weakening of agnatic bonds and strengthening of conjugal relations (Kaur 2008; Hershman 1981; Pettigrew 1979). Staying single is not seen as an option and people stress that now everyone wants to get married (*ab har koi shadi karna chahta hai*) (See Chaudhry in this volume). These changes in the society are having a significant

impact on the position of rural bachelors whose numbers are increasing in contemporary times.

While earlier bachelors were incorporated in the joint household there is a decreasing preference for the same today. In joint and supplemented nuclear families where they live with their married brothers bachelors are referred to as burden (*bojh*). Older women mostly complain about being burdened with shouldering responsibility of an extra member – sometimes behind the back and other times openly. While taking care of parents-in-law is justified in terms of notions of filial piety, care (*dekh-bhaal*) and responsibility (*jimmewari*) though there are material benefits like inheritance attached to it, taking care of bachelor brother-in-law is always framed as a burden, more so if he does not own any land, is unemployed or physically or mentally disabled. An *aanganwadi* worker, Kamlesh, aged 35, while discussing her brother-in-law Vijay's marriage prospects remarked, "If he gets married there will be less burden on me" (*usta byah ho jave to mara bojh kam hove*). On asking "what kind of burden?" she explained:

> Both of expenditure and of work. He earns INR 4000 (USD65) per month but only contributes INR 1000 (USD14) towards household expenses, which is not even enough to buy a month's grocery! He saves the rest in his bank account *(khate ma jama kare sae)*… Though both me and my husband earn, yet we can not send our children to expensive private school and are forced to enrol them in a government one. When there are more people naturally there is more expenditure too. Also, his work … As of now I do all his work – right from cooking for him to packing his lunch to washing and ironing his clothes … he does not even wash his own underwear. By the end of the day I am too tired. (Field notes, February 2013)

Thus, for Kamlesh, shouldering Vijay's material and financial responsibility is a great source of burden that takes a toll not only on her but also on her children's education. Kaur (2008) notes that the demographically small-sized modern family has less time, space and resources for those outside its immediate circle.

The idiom of *bojh* was also evoked by parents with bachelor sons but in an altogether different context. For them the burden is of the failure to successfully dispense with their moral responsibility of getting their sons married. In India, there exists an implicit inter-generational contract whereby parents look after their children and get them married at appropriate ages (Kaur 2013b) and in turn expect to be looked after by their children in old age; looking after in this context extends to both emotional as well as material support (Kabeer 2000). Non-marriage of sons is often perceived as a personal failure by parents. Elderly parents of bachelors often described how painful it was to see other boys in the community getting married and people playing with their grandchildren while they endlessly wait for proposals to come by for their aging sons. It is interesting to see how the idiom of *bojh*, that was earlier used to refer to unmarried women in Indian households (Patel 2010; Dube 2001), is now being actively evoked for bachelors as well. However, there are important fundamental differences in the meanings attributed to this term when being used for unmarried women and men. In the context of the former, the burden is primarily of finding her a suitable match, arranging socially expected dowry, and protecting her chastity for the sake of family's honour; for the latter the burden is not just economic but also of shouldering everyday tasks and responsibility of the

man who does not have a wife to take care of him. The perception of men as burden also runs counter to the definition of hegemonic masculinity that characterizes gender regimes in North India in which men are expected to shoulder the responsibility of the entire family in their roles as providers, bread-winners, and protectors rather than being themselves dependent on others.

In juxtaposition to the way in which the bachelors are perceived as burden by others, the bachelors view themselves as *majbur* (helpless or lacking control). Being '*majbur*' was a recurring theme in the narratives of bachelors as they tried to attribute their bachelor status to external factors over which they had little control. Recall how Baldev had retorted by saying, "Whatever those troubles are, they aren't in my control but at least I can exercise control over cropping decisions (*jo hai so hai pareshaani, vo mare byot k baahar sae, par yo to mare 'control' me sae ki khet ma k ugaan sae*)", when his brother said that he has other problems to take care of. The key factor to which *majburi* (sense of duress) was attributed was poverty (*garibi*) expressed as not having resources in terms of land or salaried employment. Some also expressed helplessness in the face of a growing deficit of women as Lakhan, bachelor at 49 years, remarked, "how can one get married when people are not allowing daughters to be born? (*je log ladki paida hi na karein to kaise ho shadi)"*. Their experiences echo the claims made by various theorists that marriage, in addition to its logical link to relations of reproduction and kinship organization, is also intimately and inevitably connected to social and economic hierarchies of education, political standing, employment and earning prospects (Wei and Zhang 2015; Chowdhry 2007; Gould and Paserman 2003). The socio-economic characteristics of never-married men in my sample, as discussed in the third section, reveal their lower educational levels and limited earning prospects, which put them in a disadvantaged position in the local marriage market. Oppressed by these inequalities the men felt they could do little to change it and thus referred to themselves as *'majbur'* (helpless).

Interestingly, the idiom of *majburi* has also echoed in many other ethnographic studies particularly in the voice of female subjects who are in certain disadvantaged positions, for instance surrogate mothers (Majumdar 2015) and urban poor women (Grover 2011). In this study however, the term echoes in voices of male subjects who see their bachelor state as being completely out of control. While Grover (2011) interprets urban poor women's *majburi* as a strategy to forge new alliances and enter into new relationships, for the bachelor men in this study, the trope of *majburi* becomes a pragmatic way of distancing themselves from being responsible for their non-marriage. It enabled them to place the blame of their bachelor status on larger structural factors such as poverty, lack of education or employment opportunities and fewer women rather than on their own less favourable position as a suitable groom.

Majburi or helplessness was also experienced in many other situations, mostly in relation to the behavior of family members and sometimes also outsiders. Some bachelors reported that many times they have to put up with something wrong in the household and cannot voice their opinion against it. Jagpal, aged 31 from goldsmith (*sunar)* caste reported that once he scolded his elder brother's nine-year-old son for

hitting a fellow student in school and was immediately rebuked by his sister-in-law who said, "when you will have your sons, scold them *(jib tere balak honve tab une daatiyo)*". Others complained about how everything they say or do is inevitably linked to their bachelor status. Mahesh, a jat aged 39 recalled how on one occasion he bought sweets home to which his mother reacted by saying God knows when that day will come when she will distribute sweets in the village. He said:

> The feeling is very stifling. Is it my fault if parents only want to give their daughters to landed and to those with government jobs (*sarkari naukri*)? At times I shout at her (mother) for constantly nagging me but at other times I feel sorry for her. You see, she is getting old and yet has to do all the work on her own … I feel I have failed as a son by not being able to bring her a daughter-in-law.

The anxiety and sense of failure of not living up to parents' expectations, of not being able to bring in a daughter-in-law who can look after them, of denying them the joy of having grandchildren and not being able to continue the family line was vocalized by those respondents who felt that now they stand no chance of getting married.

2.7 The 'New' Social Strategies of Bachelors

This section outlines some of the new social strategies adopted by bachelors to overcome the stigma of bachelorhood. One such strategy is opting for dowry-less cross-region marriages (Chaudhary and Mohan Chaudhry and Mohan 2011; Kaur 2004). While earlier studies have documented that these were mostly secondary[11] marriages of older men (see Kaur 2004), recent studies note the growing popularity of these marriages even amongst younger (bachelor) men who have sensed the gravity of the problem in getting married and are not willing to delay marriage by waiting for local marriage proposals (Kaur 2015; Mishra 2013; Chaudhry and Mohan 2011). Here, I only wish to highlight the possibility of cross-region marriages as an option for bachelors and do not intend to undertake a detailed discussion of the same as they have received relatively more attention in the context of bride shortage in Haryana (see Mishra 2013; Mukherjee 2013; Ahlawat 2009; Kaur 2004). Many of the relatively younger men in my study cited cross-region marriage as an option if they cannot find a local bride. However most of them realize that it is not easy. While some were averse to the idea of a culturally different spouse as we saw in Kuldeep's case, others were not in a position to fund these marriages given their economic situation.

Withdrawal, as mentioned earlier was another strategy adopted by older men. Most of the older bachelors preferred to spend their time alone and did not mingle much with people around them. On probing the reasons for this behaviour many

[11] In the sociological literature a man or a woman's first marriage is referred to as the primary marriage. Any subsequent marriages are considered secondary and do not enjoy the same status as the first.

said that they did not have much in common with others and thus have nothing to talk about. Some younger bachelors, in order to avoid gossip (*bekar ki baatein*) stayed away from the village for a certain time span. In cases documented in this study the period ranged from 1 week to 2 months. Some men would accompany their friends who were truck drivers on their long trips. A Kerala cross-region bride's younger bachelor brother-in-law described these as "fun trips that do not involve any significant expenditure (*bina maal-pani k ghoomna firna bhi aur badhiya mauj masti bhi ho jave)*". It is interesting to see that while his own brother is a truck driver, he never goes for these trips with him. It is always with a friend that he plans such outings. Although it was not openly acknowledged, there is a possibility that such fun trips facilitated these men's access to sexual intimacy with sex workers, something that could not be engaged in the local context. Others visited their sister's place (*behen ke sasre*) or their mother's natal family (*nani ke dhore*) to avoid the public gaze. Spatially escaping the village was thus a useful strategy for some bachelor men to avoid speculative and judgmental behavior (see also Kaur 2013a). Moving permanently away from the village/house was also another strategy, albeit a rare one. In one case, a bachelor man from *kumhar* (potter) caste permanently left his own family in Jind district and settled with his married sister and brother-in-law in Sonipat in order to escape his married brother and sister-in-law's taunts. However, this option may not be available to all as there is a great deal of shame attached to being dependent on married sisters.[12]

2.8 Concluding Remarks

The hegemonic status that marriage enjoys in the Indian context often makes us miss out on the spaces marginalized by this institution. This chapter focused on those men who are marginalized in the marriage market due to demographic imbalance and socio-economic inequalities central to the process of matchmaking. While the dominant narrative based on macro-level projections in demographic literature on bachelor 'surplus' men nearly always portrays them as violent and a threat to the stability of social order, this chapter based on micro level, in-depth analysis, critiqued the homogenized account of bachelors as being prone to violence and showed how differences of age, physical or mental health, land and income shape their predicament. Thus landed, bachelors are more likely to be accommodated in the joint household as opposed to landless men. Similarly, unemployed/landless bachelors with physical disability are more likely to be disowned than their able-bodied counterparts who can in some ways contribute to the household economy. In terms of age, while older bachelors were found to distance themselves from social life, the same wasn't true for younger bachelors who were still hopeful about marriage even

[12] Normatively it is the woman's brother who is her refuge and protector after her husband. See Wadley (2008) for a detailed account of the relationship between a married woman and her brother in North India.

if it meant bringing in a cross-region spouse. However, in a social context where heterosexual marriage and procreation is seen as bestowing a respectable social status on men, the inability of these men to approximate the cultural notions of manhood challenges their masculinity. While some of them strategize to overcome the stigma of bachelorhood by various means, a sense of ambivalence and helplessness marks their masculinity. Prolonged bachelorhood often makes them either too dependent on others or propels them towards 'womanly' tasks thus removing the possibilities of approximating hegemonic masculinity.

North India's long standing preference for sons over daughters is beginning to affect men's marriage prospects. In India, where old age support is mostly provided within the family by adult children,[13] the poor marriage prospects of men with little education, poor job prospects and limited land is likely to have grave consequences for their personal well-being as they age. While efforts to normalize the sex ratio are likely to benefit society, in the long run, there is an urgent need for the state to step in through social support schemes like health insurance and residential care arrangements for the betterment of the elderly bachelors.

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[13] Though the concept of old-age homes has made inroads into cities it is not very popular and is almost entirely unthinkable in the rural context.

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Chapter 3
Household Division, Intra-generational Inequality and Marriage Prospects of Single Men in Multi-son Families in Rural China

Y. Li, W.D. Li, and S.Z. Li

3.1 Introduction

In China, a large group of single men is receiving extensive scholarly attention from researchers interested in why these men remain single in a society where marriage is the social norm. The macro-perspective views the shortage of women as the cause of the inability of single men to marry (Ebenstein and Sharygin 2009). Given the imbalance in local marriage markets, long-distance migration for marriage plays an important role in adjusting the distribution of women, as female migration for marriage has happened far more frequently than male migration in China. The 4th and 5th national population censuses show that interprovincial movement of the female population has increased 2.5 times from 1990 to 2000, whereas the number of males moving across provinces has grown by only 1.85 times. There is a reduced risk of failure to marry for men who live in provinces with an influx of female migrants. For men living in provinces where there is an out-migration of females, the opposite may be true. In addition, women tend to migrate from central and western China to the eastern regions. From a geographical perspective, the villages that lose women

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Y. Li (✉)
Xi'an Polytechnic University, Xi'an, China
e-mail: leeyaan@126.com

W.D. Li
Shaanxi Nomal University, Xi'an, China
e-mail: lwd@snnu.edu.cn

S.Z. Li
Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, China
e-mail: shzhli@xjtu.edu.cn

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to other provinces are said to be less developed, poor, backward and remote (Zhang and Zhong 2005). Poor health such as disabilities and chronic diseases, less education, low social status and low income may contribute to the difficulties men face in finding a mate (Das Gupta et al. 2010; He 2010). From a family institution perspective, children's mating opportunities depend on their family's economic status, as it is viewed as the parents' duty to pay for their son's marriage (Sun 2005). Therefore the household's economic status has become one of the main obstacles for a son to marry, especially since the 1990s as the costs associated with marriage have risen rapidly and enormously. Yan (2005) analyzed bride price in a northern Chinese village from the 1980s to the 1990s and found that the cost had increased tenfold. The expenses for a wedding, including a betrothal gift and setting up a new household, amount to more than CNY100,000 (USD17,000), a sum which would take parents about 10 years to earn (Gui and Yu 2010).

Whether from the perspective of the individual, family or community, factors related to poverty are frequently used by researchers to describe the reasons for men's failure to marry (Das Gupta et al. 2010; Gui and Yu 2010; He 2010; Zhang and Zhong 2005). However, this explanation falls short in capturing how these factors come together to contribute to the failure to marry. Factors affecting whether or not a man may find a spouse may include social events (such as the social classes classification in the Chinese countryside beginning in the 1950s), national policy, population structure, geographical location, family structure, competition between family members and family events (such as household division). Brothers from the same household may have vastly different life trajectories based on their birth order, even though they are of the same low socioeconomic status and were raised in the same community. Due to the high cost of marriage, men from a large family with multiple sons will face competition upon marriageable age for the limited resources available in their family. In a multi-son family, traditional Chinese custom in most areas is to give the first married son priority over the assets available to him through household division, and the rule of wedding is that the younger should respect the older and follow the birth order (Ban 1940). The eldest son carries the obligation to perpetuate family lineage. As a result, household division, which transfers the property of the stem family to married sons, usually the eldest one, might have a significant impact on those sons who are unmarried. This chapter will focus on household division as an important family event in analyzing and understanding single men's lives. This will be done within societal, spatial and temporal, family and individual contexts to capture the situation of men who are unable to marry. Through in-depth analysis using qualitative methods, we will explore the mechanisms underlying poverty, which seemingly presents the biggest obstacle for men who wish to be married. In the following section, the practice of household division is introduced based on a review of the literature. Household division is central to understanding the situation of single men in multi-son families in rural China. Section 3.3 then discusses data collection including information on field sites and a profile of single men as evident from the interviews. Section 3.4 examines how the marriage prospects of single men are affected by household division, loss of parent(s) and their living arrangements. Section 3.5 concludes.

3.2 Household Division

Family property is inherited through household division, a custom in traditional China that was institutionalized through policy implemented by the central government in order to break apart large influential families into smaller ones that would pose less of a threat to the regime (Jiao and Zhang 2008). Household division in rural China has been a common practice throughout Chinese history (Wang 2010a). Why do the Chinese give up the ideal of a united family? The most frequently cited reason in the research on this topic is that of sons contending for family property (Fei 2001; Freedman 1965). Economic independence is seen as an urgent need for the married son, and family property is a key component of this much-sought independence (Fei 2001; Freedman1965). Although in well-off families the father wields a high degree of power in holding the family together, in families experiencing poverty, the father may be less able to exercise his authority and household division is more likely to occur (Wang 2008; Freedman 1965).

Davis and Harrell (1993) argues that sons are eager to be independent of other family members and live their own life. Additionally, the bride can contribute to household division through her status as an outsider, which motivates her to establish a uterine family within the larger household, in which she is the centre (Wolf 1972). In the past, household division happened mostly because of family conflict; however, household division has become common since the 1980s when one of the sons gets married, and has gradually become customary practice. Why did this change happen? Yan (1998) noted that the concept of personal property has shifted with a change in the way a family accumulates wealth. China's economic transformation in recent decades has increased the possibility for a family to rapidly accumulate large amounts of wealth, and sons desire to control their own wealth outside of their parents' influence. Household division also reveals new characteristics. Firstly, household division happens earlier. Previously, household division occurred once the father lost his patriarchal authority after his contribution to the family wealth decreased, especially when his contribution is less than that of his son(s), or at his death; however, this division is now occurring immediately after the son is married. Secondly, rather than a one-time practice, family property is divided by brothers multiple times, which means that the property is divided in instalments by each of the sons upon marriage and when sons become independent from the stem family one by one. These practices are rapidly creating nuclear families in China (Wang 2003, Wang 2010a; Yan 1998; Cohen 1992).

Fei (2001) asserts that household division is one of the most important processes through which parents pass property on to the next generation. Although separate cooking is usually regarded as a basic symbol for household division, most scholars qualify it through the division of property, separate dwellings and living independently (Ma 1999; Cohen 1976; Lin 1947). Common sense indicates the core marker for household division is property separation, including means of production, consumption goods, and savings and investment such as land, livestock, farming machinery, cereal and cash. Property may be divided more than once. One-time

property division is common upon death of parents. Multiple divisions occur in serial household division, which prevails in contemporary society where each son takes his section of family property after a wedding. In most instances, each son has the right to obtain from the united family a portion of the means of production and some consumption goods to maintain his new family after he is married (Wang 2003; Fei 2001). Yan (1998) argues that livestock, agricultural machinery and bank savings are excluded from serial family division.

The new couple may take only the land that is assigned to them by the government, along with the rations and belongings obtained through marriage, such as the house, furniture, clothing and jewelry. Therefore, the new couple is likely to ask for more valuable betrothal gifts as a "seed fund" for the development of their new family. As a result, property separation not only exhausts the united family's property but also makes it more difficult for the family to accumulate wealth, as the means of production is divided and decreased, and the sons who perform the labour are reduced one by one. Clearly this would be unfavourable for the son who is married later, especially when the united family is indebted because of a previous (son's) wedding. The debts are paid back mainly by parents and unmarried sons, creating inequality between sons who are married and those who are not (Wang 2010a; Yan 1998). Moreover, unmarried sons living and working in a different city will send home remittances, which are often used for the wedding of an older brother or redistributed through household division. Their earnings should have contributed to their own marriage, but being lower in the birth order may deprive them of this opportunity, and they have to wait until the family earns enough money to pay for their betrothal gifts and wedding.

Household division occurs not only at the economic level but also through the transfer of family authority between generations. After household division occurs, the father's power to intervene in situations where his married son sells off or redistributes property is diminished. The father can no longer require his married son(s) to bear the burden of the unmarried son's weddings and related debts. As a matter of fact, escaping from the younger brother's wedding expenses is also one of the reasons for the first-married son to desire independence from the united family (Wang 2010b; Freedmen 1965). Once married, the independent son would not contribute economically to the united family, and the financial resources for an unmarried son's wedding would shrink significantly. However, household division will not completely sever the economic link between parents and children. Prevailing family norms embedded in Confucian culture across China dictate that sons support their elderly parents. This duty is expected of all sons, regardless of their marital status, or even if they live separately from their parents (Shiga 2013; Fei 2001; Ma 1999). Unmarried sons generally live with their parents and the expectation is that if one of the parents passes away, that son would no longer leave but would support the surviving parent by living with him or her (Fei 2001).

It is clear from the discussion so far that household division may cause inequality among sons. Firstly, married sons may take away part of the family wealth and leave debts behind; secondly, married sons will not contribute economically to the united family after they live independently; thirdly, the custom that unmarried sons live

with their parents and are expected to care for them can be viewed as a burden for unmarried sons. These practices further contribute to the difficulty faced by unmarried sons in a multi-son family in their search for a spouse.

In this study, the household division made by a family is the main focus. Specifically, the chapter investigates the role that household division plays in single men's failure to marry.

3.3 Data

The chapter is based on data collected in two sites that are both Han nationality settlements and have similar traditional family culture involving the custom of household division. The single men in this chapter were 28 years old or older at the time of the interview, and were born before the implementation of strict family planning policy in 1978. Therefore, most of them are from families with multi-sons with married brothers, which in turn allows us to examine the effects of household division on marriage prospects of single brothers. As per the "Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China" (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China 1981) which came into effect in 1981, age of marriage for men is 22 years or older. But rural men usually get married at a younger age than the stipulation. A village administrator said "…men [who get married] older than 22 or 23 are very few…" His son, at the age of 20, had already married and has a 2-year-old child.

> …after graduating from junior high school [the Chinese government stipulates a nine-year compulsory education], they find nothing to do at home if they don't continue receiving higher education, so their parents seek to find them mates with the result that most of them get married very early. The better the family economic status is, the more opportunities there are for them to find a good wife and the earlier they get married.

For men older than 25 years, it becomes difficult to find a bride. Therefore, we set 28 as the upper age limit for the single men in this study.

The chapter is based on interviews conducted in two counties in the northwest and southeast of China in 2012 (see Fig. 3.1).[1] Because of the gap in economic development, people are migrating primarily from the west and northwest to the east and southeast for work and marriage. The northwestern village selected is located in Shaanxi province and the southeastern village in a coastal province, Jiangsu. These two places are quite different in their economic development. Jiangsu is covered partly by the Yangtze River Delta, and GDP per capita of Jiangsu in 2011 was CNY61022.20 (USD9447.92) and CNY33196.28 (USD5139.70) for Shaanxi. Both locations have a high sex ratio at birth; in Shaanxi province mass female outflow prevails, and in Jiangsu province there is a high female inflow for work or marriage.

[1] Field work for this chapter and for the chapter by Zhang and Belanger was conducted in Baijia and Lijia. Both chapters are based on research funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Fig. 3.1 Locations of two fieldwork sites (BaiduMap (2013))

Baijia is located in Zhashui county, Shangluo City, Shaanxi province – a 90-min drive from Xi'an City (capital of Shaanxi province)—and from where many unmarried women migrate for work. The number of single men in Baijia is much larger than the average in the 364 villages involved in a previous nationwide survey[2] of single men. We asked one of the first author's students, who comes from Baijia, to help facilitate the research there by introducing us to the villagers. Lijia is located in Feng county, Xuzhou City, Jiangsu province, and has a large number of women coming in for marriage. A local colleague introduced us to this village and its residents. According to the 6th national population census (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010), the sex ratios of unmarried males to females beyond 15 years of age are 168 for Baijia and 132 for Lijia, and sex ratios at birth in the two provinces are beyond the normal range.

The respondents (see Table 3.1) at the two sites include single men, their family members, married males and females, unmarried females and the village chief. Table 3.1 presents two sets of respondents. Direct collection covers all respondents we directly interviewed. Second-hand collection refers to those whom respondents told us about, and we also noted down their stories. A semi-structured interview outline was used to explore the cause and consequences of failure to marry and to collect information including basic data on an individual and his family, the impact

[2]The survey was conducted by authors and their team in 2009, which covered single men from more than 350 villages all over the country. The survey covered the number of single men in a village, their age, health status and other factors.

Table 3.1 Interview respondents in two sites

	Baijia	Lijia	Total
Older (>28 years) single men[a]	9	16	25
Young (<28 years) single men	1	2	3
Divorced men	4	2	6
Families of older single men	4	10	14
Married men	7	8	15
Married women	10	11	21
Migrant bride		9	9
Parents-in-law of the married women	8	7	15
Young single women	6	8	14
Administrators	2	4	6
Matchmaker		1	
Total	51	78	129

[a]Only seven of the nine respondents in Baijia and 10 of the 16 in Lijia we interviewed directly. For the remaining information was provided by someone else other than the older single men

of failure to marry on single men and their families, their strategies to cope with failure to marry, others' attitudes toward them, evaluation of their failure to marry, and married people's marriage experience.

3.4 Profile of Single Men

The socioeconomic status of rural single men plays an important role in their possibility of marriage (Das Gupta et al. 2010; He 2010). Most single male respondents are in good health, but almost all of them have completed only primary school education or lower, and five out of 18 are illiterate. The annual income of most single men is less than CNY10,000 and some below CNY5000 against a rural per capita yearly net income in Jiangsu province in 2011 of CNY10,805 and CNY9490 for the city where Lijia is located. We may conclude that the socioeconomic status of interviewed single men as evidenced in their education, economic and health status is similar to that found in previous studies (Das Gupta et al. 2010; He 2010). This chapter highlights other factors that are likely to cause a delay in marriage for men.

Table 3.2 shows single men's birth order and the time period when they were 22 years old, which is the legal age for marrying according to the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Table 3.2 shows that 72% of single men reached the age of 22 before 1992. Birth order does not necessarily determine the likelihood of staying single. However, the youngest and the middle sons may have a higher risk of failing to marry, and they accounted for 64% of single men while the eldest sons accounted for only eight per cent of those still single.

Although we conducted interviews with seven single men who were the only son in the family, the analysis focuses on single men from multi-son families. While

Table 3.2 Birth order of single men and year at age 22

Year at 22	Number	Birth order among single men	Number
Total	25	Total	25
Before 1984	7 (28)	Only one son	7 (28)
1985–1992	11 (44)	The youngest	6 (24)
After 1993	7 (28)	The middle	10 (40)
		The eldest	2 (8)

Figures in parentheses are percentages

China has had a very strict one-child family planning policy since the 1980s, the family planning policy in China is diverse across regional, demographic and geographical distributions (Attane 2002; Short and Zhai 1998). Only 35.4% of the population must follow the very strict one-child policy,[3] while the rest may have more than one child. As a result, a national policy fertility rate[4] could have reached 1.47 children per couple at the end of the 1990s (Gu et al. 2007). The 6th national population census in 2010 showed that women in the age group 15–64 have on average 1.33 children who survive. The average number of surviving children for women at 35–39 is 1.51, 1.67 for 40–44 and 1.82 for 45–49. For women under 40, it is possible to have more children as China has relaxed its fertility policy since 2014, which now allows couples to have two children, as long as one of the parents comes from a one-child family. For women 40–44, we estimate that roughly 70% have two children; the average of 1.67 can be reached if we include only one-child and two-children families into account (three or more children families are very few). In the sixth census 10% sample of households, there are more than 5.89 million women in the age group 40–44 years.[5] Contrary to what the one-child policy might suggest, there are and will be many multi-son families.

Family economic status is regarded as an important factor affecting an individual's opportunities to get married (Sun 2005). Parents in poor physical condition may become net consumers rather than earners of family fortunes. Table 3.3 shows single men's family structure and their parents' health status before they were 30. Most single male respondents were from multi-son families. Families with two or more sons accounted for 72%, and those with three or more accounted for 36%. For nearly half of single men, either one or both of their parents had died before they were 30 years old, implying that a parent's death may have strongly affected a son's marriage prospects.

[3] The one-child policy applies strictly to those living in urban and rural areas of Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing, Jiangsu and Sichuan.

[4] Based on the provincial fertility policy, the researchers estimated fertility levels that would be obtained locally if all married couples had births at the levels permitted by local policy. This is referred to as "policy fertility."

[5] The sixth Census sampled 10% of the households to fill out the complete information form involving about 9.55% of whole population (number of those in the complete form/the total population).

Table 3.3 Number of sons and parents' health status before single men were 30 years of age

Number of sons	Number	Parents' health	Number
Total	25	Total	19[a]
One Son	7 (28)	Good	9 (47.5)
Two Sons	9 (36)	Poor	1 (5)
Three Sons	4 (16)	One or Both Dead	9 (47.5)
More than Four Sons	5 (20)		

Figures in parentheses are percentages
[a]The total does not add up to 25 because of missing information

Table 3.4 Dwelling pattern and employment of single men after age 30

Dwelling pattern after 30	Number	Single men living with parents	Number
Total	22	Total	15[a]
Live alone	2 (9)	Farming	3 (20)
Take turns to co-reside with parents	2 (9)	Part-time job near home	8 (53)
Live with parents	18 (82)	Work out of county	4 (27)

Figures in parentheses are percentages
[a]The total does not add up to 25 because of missing information

Table 3.4 shows that 81% of single men in this study, lived with one or both parents. They worked near their home rather than far away. Although further exploration is needed to learn why they did not migrate for work, possible reasons are that they were unwilling or unable to do so, or needed to support their aging parents.

3.5 Intra-generational Inequality Among Single Men

3.5.1 Family Events and Failure to Marry

An individual's life is always framed by society, history, culture and institutions (Neugarten 1996; Elder 1975). The age at which a man should marry is also decided by (in)formal rules. Those who do not marry at the time in their life that society deems normal are less likely in turn to find a bride and may be forced to remain single, especially under a demographic female deficit. This section discusses a number of events that may hinder the family in finding a wife for a son(s). The early death of one or both parents can play a deciding role in the marriage fate of rural males. Table 3.3 shows that nearly 50% of single men experienced the early death of one or both parents by the time they were 30. How does the early death of parent(s) influence single men's marriage prospects and life? The socioeconomic environment holds clues to understanding the impact of a parent's early death.

Before the 1990s, a centrally planned economy had lasted 30 years in China's rural areas. On the one hand, the Chinese government fixed farmers to their birth-

place by the household registration system, the procurement system and the material quota system. On the other hand, the government transferred the residual value from agricultural domain to industrial domain, and from rural to urban, through a price differential between agricultural and industrial products, resulting in long-term low productivity and economic lag in rural China. Although the land-contract responsibility system encouraged peasants' enthusiasm for production and improved agriculture productivity after the policy of reform and opening was implemented in 1978, the household registration system still limited the migration of rural labourers. Rural people had few sources of income except land. Agricultural taxes further increased a farmer's burden. Under these circumstances, the loss of one or both parents meant that a source of labour was lost, heavily affecting the family's production capabilities.

Our interviews offered evidence that the early death of an adult labourer not only reduces the family's income directly but could also have continuous negative effects on the family. Dong, 80 years old, told us her story:

> I have six children: three boys, three girls. When I was 40, my husband passed away. At that time, the children were very young, the youngest was no more than 10 years old and the eldest was nearly 18. I raised them alone, and I had to beg for meals when there was nothing to eat.

The early death of her husband not only involved Dong's family in an economic predicament, but it also affected her son's marriage opportunities. Although son(s) may fail to marry even in a family with both parents still living, the death of a primary source of labour/income in a family can rapidly and significantly worsen their financial situation, leading to a reduced capacity to bargain in the marriage market. Therefore, a young man who has lost one or both parents will be more likely to involuntarily stay single throughout his whole life.

> Because our family was very poor, we were looked down on by others. The eldest son had dated several girls, but it was not until nearly 26 years of age that he got married. My second son still has not married. The village leader asked: "Why didn't you buy a wife from other places?" It would cost a lot of money to buy a wife, and I could not afford it. Two women from other places paid a visit to us, but both were not willing to marry my son after the visit. Because we were too poor, it was still useless though a new house was built. You may see the situation of our family (which is really bad). I am useless; my son has a painful leg; we are poor, and no one is willing to marry my son. My husband went away when I was 40, but now I am 80 years old.

Dong's experience shows us that both the timing of death and the death of one or both parents can have a significant influence on a son's marriage prospects.

The idea of "marrying-up," or hypergamy, under which women tend to marry men with superior socioeconomic status, is a rule in Chinese society (Davin 2005; Fan and Li 2002). Young women in many impoverished, remote rural areas in the west would like to marry young men in the economically developed countryside in the east (Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2012). As a result, men in impoverished rural areas with low socioeconomic status are vulnerable to becoming victims under a marriage squeeze. Men from poor families are more likely to fail in the marriage market.

The 70-year-old Mrs. Zhao has two unmarried sons who are 39 and 42 years old, respectively. Her experience offers further evidence about how the early death of a parent may affect the family's economic situation and men's marriage prospects:

> I have two sons and my husband died early, when they were still young. At that time, my eldest son was 17 years old and the younger around 15 years. Both of them only received two years of education in primary school. When their father died, they dropped out of school. My husband suffered cerebral thrombus and we asked for a loan from the rural bank in order to cure him. However, he still died, and we had to pay off the loan and interest.

A Chinese saying, "God closes a door, but unfortunately forgets to open a window for you," aptly describes Mrs. Zhao's compounding difficulties. Mrs. Zhao described the influence of the social environment on her life:

> My family was too poor, and I could not build a new house. As you can see, my house [that was a mud house, about 60 square metres] collapsed last year because of heavy rain. Now it is a one-floor brick house with two bedrooms and a sitting room, about 60 square metres. Getting married would cost a lot of money in addition to building a new house, and we did not have an opportunity to work outside. At that time, there were few people moving out for work, and we just did part-time job in local construction sites, earning CNY10 a day. At that time, building a house would cost CNY1,000. If there is no new house, getting married is impossible.

During the early period after reform and opening policy[6] were coming into effect in 1978, market reforms were experimental and limited to four special economic zones and 14 coastal cities, which hindered uniform employment opportunities. Non-farming employment was not common at that time. Therefore, Mrs. Zhao and her sons were able to find only temporary, low-salary employment near their home. However, with more reform and opening, coastal provinces created more and more job opportunities, which encouraged a large number of rural people to migrate for jobs in cities. Personal characteristics and family conditions may limit whether or not the son can migrate for a job. Mrs. Zhao's son told us of his experience:

> I found a job nearby after I quit from the primary school at grade two, at that time I did physical labour and earned only CNY 5 a day. [When asked why he did not go to a big city for a job, he said] I have no house, no money and no skill. I only have two years of education and I can only earn a little money. Even if I migrate to a big city, I cannot afford to buy a house. What's more, daily consumption is relatively high in cities. If I go to work in southern China I would not find a job because I am too old and useless, and they need young people in their 20s with some skills.

3.5.2 Household Division and Failure to Marry

Most of the study's single male respondents (72%) come from families with more than one son. Sixty-four per cent are the second son or the youngest (see Table 3.3). In order to study the relationship between family structure and failure to marry, we

[6] The reforms launched in 1978 were a key turning point in China's economic development from planned economy to market economy.

Table 3.5 Birth order of single men in complete and incomplete families

Complete families	Number	Incomplete families	Number
Total	6	Total	7
The eldest	1 (17)	The eldest	1 (14)
The middle	1 (17)	The middle	3 (43)
The youngest	4 (66)	The youngest	3 (43)

Notes: Figures in parentheses are percentages. The single men in this sample are in good health, and there are two or more sons in the family

singled out incomplete families (one or both of the parents of multi-son families died before the single men were 30). Table 3.5 shows that the youngest son may be more likely to stay single in both complete and incomplete families, while the risk of failure to marry may be expanded to the middle son in incomplete families.

This table shows that the middle or younger sons in a poor rural family may be more likely to encounter difficulties in getting married, which is then compounded by the practice of household division.

The practice of household division among poor families can lead to two outcomes. In the first, the united family's accumulated wealth is transferred to the son's new family through betrothal gifts, through the wedding itself and through items needed to establish a new household. Additionally, part of the property, including land, rations, farming tools, house, furniture, jewelry and savings are transferred to the son and his new wife. In the second outcome, the parents' duty to raise their son is seen as completed once he is married. Part of this duty includes providing financial support, which ends once he weds. Married sons seldom contribute financially to the marriage of their unmarried brothers (Wang 2003). Therefore, a kind of inequality may exist among sons, and as the economic capability of rural multi-son families weakens with the independence of sons one by one, those sons still unmarried are likely to have limited resources to back them in potential marriage opportunities.

Mrs. Song, nearly 70 years old, told us her story:

> I have three [married] daughters and two sons. The eldest and the third are sons. My husband died early and we were poor. The eldest son got married at the age of 27, and the younger could not get married and is now 44 years old. Our house has three rooms in total, only one room for each son [a house with several rooms is a necessity for men to marry]. This is because we are poor and my husband died too early. I had no ability to help him find a wife.

Mr. Liao is the youngest of five sons of a family with seven children, healthy but unmarried. He said:

I have many siblings. Beginning from the eldest, my parents tried to find wives for sons one by one. When it was my turn, the family left nothing economically… my father died at 64 years old [before his father died, household division had already been practised because he told us he conducted the funeral of his father by himself], I lived with my mom and two younger sisters until my 40s while I had less opportunities to find a wife. After the wedding, the married brother and his small family start a new life, with property such as house, furniture and farming tools passed on

from his parental family. For families living in poverty, while the property passed on to the newly married son is significant, in terms of its monetary value it is quite small. The new couple begins to focus on accumulating their own property and raising their own children rather than contributing wealth to an unmarried brother's marriage.

Mrs. Song comments:

> After my eldest son got married, he put forward to separate from the family as there were always conflicts between him and his younger brother. We have only three stone-made rooms, and I live in the central one, and the two brothers lived in the other two rooms.

Although Confucianism stresses love and respect between brothers, there is also an old Chinese saying, "Even brothers keep careful accounts".[7] Once he marries and lives independently, the older married brother has no financial responsibility to support his younger brother with respect to his marriage. Even if the older brother wishes to help, he may lack the ability since he has his own new family with children and additional financial burden. When asked whether the oldest and first married son would help his unmarried brother to find a spouse, Mrs. Song replied:

> He would like to do so, but he could not afford it. My grandson [her older son's child] is going to middle high school and a granddaughter is still studying in the senior high school, which burdens my son heavily. His family is also not well off.

Mr. Nei is the youngest of a family with one brother and two sisters. He has lived alone since 1972 when his parents passed away. Excerpts from the interview:

Mr. Nei: …parents lived with me [at that time], later they were gone and life was very hard afterwards.
Interviewer: You were very young in 1972 [he was 27 years old]. But you had brothers and sisters….
Mr. Nei: Yes, but they all were married and involved in their own families.
Interviewer: Why did your parents not live with your brother?
Mr.Nei: He had several kids and also lived a hard life, even worse than me.

We may conclude that his married brother escaped the responsibility to take care of parents, let alone helping him with getting married.

Mrs. Song further demonstrated the constraints imposed by the social environment:

> It was not a good setting at that time [for rural men to save enough money and find a wife, meaning that there were few ways to earn money in the past]. He stayed at home as a farmer in the past. In recent years, national policy encourages farmers to transfer cultivated land to forestry, less farming work makes it possible for him to take non-farm jobs away from the village [and has a chance to earn more money and get to know more women].

Mr. Nei has the same complaint about the lack of opportunities when he was young.

[7] The saying means financial matters should be settled clearly even among brothers or good friends and clarifying property and responsibility between two parties can lead to long-term relationship.

> If there were opportunities for me to migrate for job at that time, I might have married. You see, nowadays young men can seek a good job outside, know more girls and bring girlfriend even if they also come from families of poverty and cannot offer a house. I am so envious of them.

In short, the first married son has priority in receiving part of the parental family's property through the practice of household division. However, he makes limited economic contribution to his parental family and younger brothers' marriage. Unfavourable family events, such as the death of a parent, worsen the situation. Moreover, before China's shift to a market economy, there were fewer opportunities for single brothers to migrate and find non-agricultural jobs.

3.5.3 Family Institution, Failure to Marry and Resource Deprivation

The above analysis showed that single men's failure to marry is associated with significant historical events, family structure and life events. Caspi and Roberts (2001) believe that an individual's failure to switch roles successfully at appropriate times not only creates difficulties but also may hinder his future development. Below, we discuss how failure to marry and family institutions affect single men's career and life, and how inequality between married and unmarried sons occurs.

Household division is an institutional arrangement to guarantee that the family line carries on in rural households, especially in multi-son families (Gao 2006). Therefore, household division is prevalent in rural multi-son families. Parents will reside with unmarried children, while married sons live separately. Mrs. Zhang is 39 years old, and her husband is the third in a family of four sons. He married at the age of 29. She told us the dwelling pattern of her in-law's family before her marriage:

> His two elder brothers lived separately from the stem family after they got married; at that time we had not married yet, and my husband lived with his elderly parents and his younger brother, but his two married elder brothers never took care of their parents or two younger brothers after the family divided.

The experience of Mrs. Lei's husband also provides information on the situation of unmarried men after older married brothers live independently:

> The elder brother lived separately after he got married, at that time my husband was still in middle school. His elder brother did not want to share the load of the united family—take care of his elderly parents and younger brothers. He lived with his new family, leaving his blind mother, my husband and the younger brothers behind.

Household division is prevalent in the two communities where we conducted our study. Although parents are more likely to live with the youngest married son or take turns living with all sons after they all get married, the most popular co-dwelling pattern is that of parents living with the unmarried sons after the married sons have left the stem family to live with their new family. The interview shows that 81% of

single men live with one or both of their parents (see Table 3.5). Also, as illustrated in the interview excerpts in Sect. 3.5.2, parents usually live with their unmarried sons after the family practises household division. However, this co-dwelling pattern can impact the sharing of support duties among brothers.

As shown above, household division can fragment the united family's property. With limited family resources, multi-son families usually exert all that the family has to match each son one by one, and start to accumulate money for the marriage of the next son after one son is married and lives independently. However, for those sons who remain unmarried for a long period of time, living with their parents becomes accepted as the norm. Although the arrangement is to some extent beneficial to the unmarried sons when parents are still healthy, these unmarried men gradually take on a major caring role as their parents age. But taking on care responsibilities for parents that are socially constructed as feminine could lead to the perception of unmarried men as less masculine.

Forty-eight-year-old Mr. Liu is still unmarried. His elder brother is married and went to live separately from Liu and his parents after the wedding. Since then, Liu has been living with and taking care of his parents. His father died 3 years ago, and Liu continues to live with his senior mother who is nearly 80 years old. He detailed some of what is involved in his mother's care:

> I have the duty to care for my mother, and recently she does not feel well because her leg has become swollen. If she was feeling well enough, I would go out to work. Besides, I want to earn some money to pay for my mother's medical fees…. My mother is growing older and older and I cannot go too far, thus I work around my hometown. Sometimes I go to work in the morning and come back to see her during the break, and go back to work in the afternoon.

Because Liu looks after his mother, his elder brother works in places far away from their hometown.

> Both my elder brother and sister-in-law are working outside, and my nephew, who is 17 years old, dropped out of school and is also working outside. My elder brother may start looking for a wife for his son, which is not a small sum of money. Money is still a big problem.

Although looking after senior parents can affect single men's work arrangement, there are exceptions under some circumstances. We found that some single men in multiple-children families still have chances to find a comparatively high-salary job in the city, but the financial support they give to their parents is still more than that of their married brothers.

Mr. Lu, 49 years old, is the third of eight children. He has four brothers and three sisters. He lives with his 80-year-old parents as well as an unmarried younger brother. As his parents can care for themselves, he can work outside his village for a long period of time. All his married brothers support his parents, but he and his unmarried younger brother take on the majority of the financial burden.

> Now my brothers and I take care of our parents together. Usually I come back in the farming season for farm work, and then I work outside when there is not much work in the village. My married brothers also give our parents money, but my younger brother and I give more

> to them. The two elder brothers give our parents less support because they burden themselves with their own family, building houses and finding wives for their sons, and they are short of money. Compared to them, my younger brother and I have lesser burden in this respect.

Based on the above cases, it seems that single men's living patterns may lead them to give more support to their parents financially and in daily life. In many instances especially with elderly parents, single men have to give up migrating for work and uxorilocal marriage as they are tasked with looking after their parents. Liu spoke about a missed marriage opportunity:

> In the early years, someone introduced me to a girl from Qinghai province [which was ranked No. 30 among 31 provinces in China in 2014] whose brother-in-law was working in Yangzhou [a city located in eastern China, close to Shanghai]. She paid me a visit, but thought that my family was too poor and did not agree to marry me here. However, she wanted me to follow her to go to her hometown, but I gave up. I couldn't leave my senior mother alone.

But as Zhang & Belanger (this volume) show, caring for parents is not the only reason that men may not prefer uxorilocal marriage.

The living arrangement of unmarried sons enables them to give more support than their married brothers to their parents in daily life. What contributes to making this arrangement—a pattern of responsibility-sharing between married and unmarried sons for parents' elderly care? We discuss below how the arrangement is accepted and taken for granted by families and the community.

Getting married symbolizes adulthood. A married man means not only a new branch of the family line but also a new role as husband and father. With marriage, the married man is treated by his family members and villagers as an adult with the responsibility to provide for his new family. The Chinese situate themselves in relational networks and identify themselves by their relationship with another person: so-and-so's son, so-and-so's husband, so-and-so's father. Single men have fewer identities than their married counterparts. The most frequently used one might be so-and-so's son who, due to his single status, will always be viewed as a child. A single man never grows up to be a man, loses his identity and is always treated from the perspective of an individual but is expected at the same time to take on the responsibility of feeding a family or caring for their well-being. Although unmarried sons live with their parents and are members of a family, they lack a clear identity or role in the family (see also Mishra in this volume). A 50-year-old village leader commented on married and single men as follows:

> Single men are not pitiful as they are alone and only need to feed themselves. They can find a job, earning at least CNY 80 a day and CNY 800 if they work for 10 days, which can support them for a few months. The whole family is not hungry if he is full. Under a hat is a home [means they can go anywhere with nothing to care about]. What's more, they are free of pressure. But for us [the married men], it is quite different because we need to feed a big family, such as sons, grandsons and daughters-in-law.

In the opinion of most villagers, single men are responsible only for feeding themselves, whereas married men are responsible for supporting a family. Thus, it is reasonable that single men should and are able to have more responsibility to care

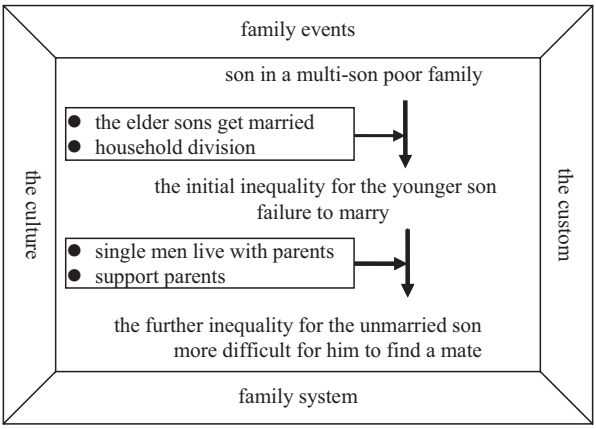

Fig. 3.2 Diagram depicting the continuing impact of household division on men's marriage prospects in rural areas

for their parents. The case of Mr. Lu also illustrates that marriage as a symbol of becoming an adult is widely acknowledged. Single men generally accept that they are not viewed as an adult by their family or community and that their married brothers are tasked with lesser responsibility in those same eyes when it comes to caring for their aging parents.

Summarizing the above analysis, Fig. 3.2 shows that the youngest son in a multi-son family might face inequality in sharing family resources with his older brothers. Furthermore the inequality might happen more than once. Misfortunes, such as the death of a parent, may worsen the economic situation of the household as competition between sons for household resources becomes stiffer. The son who marries will likely have advantages over others in receiving a share of the family property and contributing less to his parents' care.

3.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter argued that failing to marry is decided not only by a demographic scarcity of brides but also by structural and systematic factors relating to the family and society. At the same time, failure to marry can impose cumulative negative effects on single men. Using qualitative interview data from two rural counties, this chapter examined the macro social environment, family structure at the meso-level, and personal characteristics at the micro-level vis-à-vis men's marriage prospects. It demonstrated the continuing impact of household division on men's marriage prospects in rural areas and found a vicious cycle unfavourable for the unmarried younger sons in a multi-son family.

In our study, younger sons were comparatively more disadvantaged, but Tao (2011) found that in some rural areas of southwest China, those commonly single

were in fact the eldest sons. He noted that the eldest son carried the largest part of the duty among all sons to support the whole family and, as a result, lacked access to marriage until other siblings are married. However, he may miss the time to match with a suitable woman, and the family may not be able to afford a bride for him, especially if their resources are already limited (Tao 2011). Tao conducted his survey in a southwestern village with a different regional culture governing parents' responsibility for their sons' marriage and the eldest son's responsibility for the family. The local custom relating to family intergenerational relationships does not hold parents responsible for their sons' marriage; it is mainly up to the son himself. The eldest son has to bear part of the family burden, which translates into fewer women wanting to marry the eldest son in a multi-son family. That is why 58.1% of 105 single men were the eldest son in Tao's study. Our research found that parents carry the obligation to ensure the marriage of their sons and that marriage occurs according to the sons' birth order, with eldest sons having priority over the others. The more general point is that not all sons are treated equally or are equally entitled to family property and family effort and resources to marry.

As discussed previously, the financial costs associated with marriage have increased alongside rapid economic growth and overall societal transformation stemming from the policy of reform and opening. The development of a market economy has strengthened the significance of money in all respects of social life, with marriage and family being no exception. Economic status has become a key part of the decision-making process when women and their parents evaluate prospective grooms or sons-in-law. In a society with intensifying economic polarization, marriage acts as a mechanism by which women can improve their socioeconomic status and gain security. As a result, women try their best to marry men who are of a higher economic status, or gain as much property as possible from their husband's family through betrothal gifts. Yan (2005) found that bride price has increased 10 times between the 1980s and 1990s, but rural per capita net income was CNY191.3 in 1980, CNY686.3 in 1990 and CNY2253.4 in 2000, suggesting that the income of farmers grew far more slowly than the expected expenses for a wife, which is part of the current predicament faced by multi-son families.

The Chinese government has already removed the restriction on the second birth in all families since 2016 with the result that the number of multi-children families may increase. Today, young men have relatively more opportunities to find jobs in wealthier areas and meet young women, which indeed is the marriage strategy used by many single men. However, brides may leave when they learn the real situation of their husbands' families. Therefore, the adaptation of brides to local life is vital in settling the marriage of single men.

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Chapter 4
'Who Said I Was a Forced Bachelor?' Single Men's Voices and Strategies in Rural China

Kun Zhang and Danièle Bélanger

4.1 Introduction

The period 1980–2005 resulted in a new demographic structure with an unequal number of young men and women in China and India (Guilmoto 2010, 2009; Attané 2006). The year 2000 marked a turning point because the first cohorts of young men born in the sex-selection era (since 1980) reached adulthood (20–30 years of age) (Poston and Zhang 2009). For China, estimates of 'surplus men' who will not be able to find a wife vary between 27 and 30 million for men born between 1985 and 2005. For some provinces, up to 20% of men aged 30–39 years will be single around 2030, with proportions climbing to 50% by 2050 (Das Gupta 2010; Das Gupta et al. 2009).

Based on qualitative fieldwork[1] conducted in 2012 in two rural communities in Shannxi and Jiangsu provinces of China, the chapter examines single men's agency in dealing with the difficulty in marrying. In doing so it addresses many of the shortcomings of the current negative narrative on single men in China. Section 4.2 reviews scholarship on Chinese rural single men who encounter difficulties to marry, and provides context on the rural marriage market and its linked flows of labour migration. Section 4.3 then discusses the use of qualitative methods including the rationale of fieldwork location, interviews with research participants, and data analysis method. Section 4.4 elaborates on mate selection criteria of semi-arranged matchmaking and how it is featuring the current rural marriage market. In

[1] Fieldwork was carried out in the same locations as for the study presented in Chap. 3. Both studies were part of the same research project.

K. Zhang (✉)
The Metrick System, Toronto, ON, Canada M6B 3W7
e-mail: shimonlyzk@gmail.com

D. Bélanger
Université Laval, Quebec City, QC, Canada
e-mail: daniele.belanger@ggr.ulaval.ca

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Sect. 4.5 we examine the spouse-seeking strategies of single men and how gender relations unfold; we particularly address how single men's agency is differentiated between the old and young generations. We also investigate how uxorilocality as an objection/alternative towards patrilocal marriage is interpreted and practised in the context whereby the magnitude of female deficit differs. Section 4.6 concludes that with diverse spouse-seeking strategies single men are not passive victims, but rather active agents of their lives by opting for either marriage or singlehood.

4.2 Context and Approach

Because the desirability of marriage remains high in patriarchal Chinese society, people who remain single beyond socially defined marriageable ages are likely to face social sanctions against non-marriage. They are portrayed as being isolated from family and social life (Keith 2004). Existing literature on single men who encounter difficulties in marrying spans a wide range of themes. There are three themes that are most relevant to this study: single men's socio-psychological health, marital strategies, and the dynamics between labour migration and marriage markets.

First, many studies observe that single men experience bachelorhood as a great stress and have a profound sense of low self-esteem, failure, loneliness, and depression (Zhou et al. 2011, 2013; Wei et al. 2008). These afflictive feelings are heightened by a sense of irredeemable obligations toward aging parents given their anticipated low likelihood of getting married and continuing family patrilineal lines (Li and Li 2008). In the local community, single men are often marginalized on social occasions and stigmatized by married residents as being "lazy, drunken, and pitiable" (Zhou et al. 2011, p. 1425). Sense of failure, stigma, and exclusion may lead some to substance abuse, sexual deprivation and potentially violent behaviour (Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2012; Li et al. 2010; Li and Li 2008).

Second, existing research outlines the strategies bachelors employ to achieve marriage. Wealth accumulation strategies come first. Single men may elect to become migrant workers outside home villages to increase their income and, subsequently, build new houses in anticipation of future marriages (Wei et al. 2008). In the eyes of local women and their parents, a man's investment in housing is an indispensable attribute for marriageability. Increasing opportunities to meet potential brides through matchmaking is another strategy (Li and Li 2008); family members, especially parents, are often engaged in this process. Single men in border provinces (such as Yunnan and Guangxi) may have access to foreign women, such as Vietnamese women, and, thereafter, achieve transnational marriages (Attané 2013; Grillot 2010). A recent study finds that inter-provincial marriages in Central China have been a feasible alternative for single men who experience difficulties finding local brides, and documents the emergence of marital strategy adjustments in responding to the marriage squeeze affecting local men (Liu et al. 2014).

Third, the phenomenal flows of labour migrants from rural to urban areas make the picture of rural marriages and family relations more complex. Labour migration has provided migrants with an enlarged social space and more opportunities to meet

potential spouses outside their home villages (Fan and Li 2002, p. 624–625). However, the marriage market across rural and urban areas is far from boundary-free—a rural man is likely to experience difficulties to find an urban bride (Tian 2009; Cui 2007). Spatial hierarchy, economic differentials, and gender stratification play a significant role in segmenting the marriage market. Given China's household registration system and associated access to social rights, individuals with an urban registration hold a higher value on the marriage market than individuals with a rural registration. Moreover, within rural areas, locations that are more isolated from public services hold the lowest value. To these locations, are also associated socioeconomic differentials that further segment the marriage markets.

As the flows and motives of marriage migration are intertwined with labour migration (Bossen 2007; Davin 2005), marriage can be an intentional or unintentional outcome from labour migration; male and female migrant workers are exposed to distinct scenarios. It is more readily possible for female migrant workers to achieve hypergamy, higher status marriages by marrying into relatively prosperous villages during or after labour migration (Davin 1999, 2007; Fan and Huang 1998). Labour migration may result in fewer women in sending communities. It is difficult for men on the bottom social rung to seek local brides to marry by the socially acceptable age (Jia 2008), and few are confident about achieving marriage through labour migration. However, for men who are financially able, permanent migration to desirable locations serves as a solution to this dilemma. For example, Su (2011) finds that many rural men in a village in Henan purchase apartments in a prosperous neighbouring county in order to acquire urban registration, which, in turn, significantly increases their standing in the marriage market. However, the practice of male marriage migration is rarely observed in other rural areas in China.

Amidst this negative portrayal of the phenomenon of rising numbers of single men in China, scholars (Greenhalgh 2013; Attané 2012, 2013) agree that little is known concerning how local communities adapt to the new demographic structure and how family relations unfold in this context. One methodological preference that limits the scope of current research is the tendency to use psychological and social-psychological approaches to examine individual sentiments, losing connections with family dynamics of single men and wider social context. There remains a lack of examination with respect to the martial agency of single men and its relationship with gender relations and the local marriage market. How do single men demonstrate agency in trying to find a wife? How do families redefine the norms of a good spouse and the meaning of a good marriage?

To address these questions we draw from feminist literature that conceptualizes women's agency in terms of the inherent instability of gender norms and the consequent possibilities for resistance, subversion and the emancipatory remodeling of identity' (McNay 2013, p. 2). Feminists privilege women's agency given that women are embedded within unequal and often oppressive patriarchal gender (power) relations. In the context of our study, single men who are considered to be no longer marriageable as per local social norms are marginalized for failing to live up to one of the most important requirements of heteronormative hegemonic masculinity underlying patriarchy (see in this volume, Chaudhry and Mishra on this aspect in the Indian context). Rendered vulnerable in the context of local gender relations, many

single men actively seek to engage, contest or redefine their gendered identity. This is in contrast to their portrayal as passive victims in the mainstream literature. They exert agency by improving their standing on the marriage market and in actively seeking brides. In sum, similar to women's agency, single men's agency can involve exercising choice, passive resistances, and failure of actions (Palriwala and Uberoi 2008). Empirically, we analyze how men exert agency.

4.3 Data

4.3.1 Study Locations

In 2012, we conducted fieldwork in two rural towns—Baijia and Lijia—between June and August. Baijia is located in Zhashui County, Shaanxi Province in Northwestern China, and Lijia is located in Feng County, Xuzhou City, Jiangsu Province in Eastern China (Please see map in Li et al. in this volume). We selected Baijia because of its high proportion of single men in some of its governed villages (Jin et al. 2010). The proportion of bachelors in Chang village, for example, is 2.6%; whereas, the average proportion of bachelors in 169 villages in West China is only 0.45%. The sex ratio of unmarried adults in Zhashui is 1.68, (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010) and the sex ratio at birth (males to females) in Shaanxi has been highly skewed for decades, rising from 109.13 in 1982 to 115.68 in 2010 (Zhang 2011; Tian 1994). Located 148 km from the capital city of Xi'an, Baijia is a close-ended town surrounded by mountains with altitudes over 2000 m. It governs 21 administrative villages, scattered in valleys and on top of mountains. Due to the mountainous landscape, the transportation system is underdeveloped. The centre of the town has only one main road featuring stores providing basic needs, such as retail, clothing, and banking. Itinerant vendors come to town every other week for livestock trading. The local economy relies on small-scale businesses, such as iron mining and traditional medicine processing. It is ranked as one of the most impoverished towns in Zhashui (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010).

The reason for choosing Lijia was twofold. First, the rates of bachelorhood are high, with a sex ratio of unmarried adults reaching 132 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010); second, the extent of female marriage migration into Lijia between 1980s and 1990s is significant (Fan and Huang 1998). This county also has significantly higher rates of interprovincial migrants than the rest of the province (Fan and Huang 1998, p. 242). Lijia is adjacent to three provinces (Anhui, Henan, and Shandong). Positioned in a floodplain and only 10 km from Feng, the town is densely populated with 100,000 people (by the end of 2008), almost nine times greater than the population of Baijia. Wood processing has been booming in the past three decades, which brings employment opportunities for the locals. There are 16 villages in the town, specializing in techniques such as making and painting door frames. The economic centre of South Jiangsu draws a great amount of labour from

the surrounding villages of Lijia. Northeast and Central China are also favourable destinations for labour migration. Forty percent of the labour force in Lijia migrated for work in 2003 (The Statistics Bureau of Feng County 2004). Migrant workers concentrate in architecture, transportation, wood processing, and garment industries.

The purpose of selecting two towns is to compare how the similarly high rates of bachelorhood would manifest differently, with respect to distinct marital norms, migration patterns, and economic disparities. Facing the same difficulty in marrying, how agency among single men develops can be shaped by their local societal dynamics.

4.3.2 The Fieldwork

Using a multi-perspective approach we conducted 59 in-depth interviews with single men—young and old, their family members, married men (including those that did not have a spouse at the time of interviews), married women, mothers-in-law of married women, and young unmarried women. We refer to 'single men' as unmarried men over the age of 28, which, in the eyes of locals, is an old age to marry.[2] All the single men in our study (N = 22) are from multiple-child families (Table 4.1). Most respondents were born before or towards the beginning of the introduction of the one-child policy in 1978. For those born in the early 1980s (when the one-child policy was introduced), they are most likely to have a sibling given that unlike urban families, rural families were allowed to have two children. Conducting interviews with currently married and previously married men who share common experiences with single men constitutes an important methodological aspect of this study; it is useful to study the life stories of men who were once considered disadvantaged in the marriage market and who eventually married. Pseudonyms for communities and study participants are used in this chapter.

The average age of single men interviewed is 47 years (Table 4.1). More than half of them reached the legal marriageable age of 22 between 1985 and 2000. Six suffer from chronic health problems and a few are disabled, either physically or mentally. The majority of single men we interviewed work as migrant workers, peasants, or a combination of both. Single men who seek local job opportunities may also take primary charge of farm work. Those who work in municipal counties or neighbouring cities (within 30 km) are able to return home every 2–3 months; whereas, those who work in cities (over 150 km away), such as Shanghai and Xi'an, only return home once or twice a year.

An accountant from one of the villages in Baijia worked with us as a liaison throughout the fieldwork. She assisted in identifying, contacting, and establishing trust with

[2] The average age at marriage for men in Baijia and Lijia is 22–25 according to liaisons who have been working in the local governments. This is lower than 26.7, the average age at marriage for men for China as a whole (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2012).

Table 4.1 Characteristics of single men

Characteristics		
Age Groups	30–45	11
	46–54	8
	56+	3
Year at the Age of 22	Before 1984	7
	1985–2000	13
	After 2000	2
Health Condition	Healthy	10
	Chronic diseases	6
	Physical disability	4
	Mental disability	2
Birth Order	1	3
	2	11
	3	5
	4-7	3
Siblings[a]	Average number of siblings	3
Living Arrangement	Co-residence with parents	16
	Living alone	6
Job Characteristics	Local short-term worker and/or peasant	11
	Medium-term migrant worker within 30 km	2
	Long-distance migrant worker over 150 km	7
	Retired	2

[a]Deceased siblings are not included

potential interviewees. In the field, we encountered great difficulties in finding single men. Most of them, especially those in the thirties, were absent from their hometowns and working in other places. Many bachelors who lived in remote mountains were difficult to reach due to the lack of transportation. In Lijia, three cadres working at the village, town, and county levels assisted us in identifying and contacting potential participants in advance, as well as arranging transportation across villages.

Three interviewers[3] conducted in-depth interviews in Mandarin Chinese. The interview guide was devoted to covering themes of dating/courting strategies, marriage experiences, domestic division of labour, and family relations. Questions were expanded for the single men's family members to delve into the pressure experienced when single sons failed to marry. All the interviews were audio-taped and conducted in natural, everyday settings, such as participants' homes and public spaces. All the interviews were transcribed in Mandarin in their entirety after the fieldwork. We used the Nvivo software program to assist the organizing, indexing,

[3]The interviews were conducted by the first author of this chapter, as well as a researcher and a doctoral student from IPDS (Population and Development Studies of Xi'an Jiaotong University).

and retrieving the narratives in Chinese. The data were then coded, and core concepts and main themes emerged through the analysis.

4.4 Mobility, Location and Gendered Opportunities for Marriage

With the booming economic development and labour migration, the rural marriage market has changed in recent decades. Compared to a few decades back, young people now have much more autonomy regarding intimate relations and marriage. However, in both Baijia and Lijia, semi-arranged matchmaking (or third-party introductions) for the purpose of marriage continue to exist. Different from arranged marriage (which means a person marries someone he/she does not know until after the wedding, under the arrangement of parents), semi-arranged matchmaking is marital introductions by matchmakers or relatives; whether this introduction leads to marriage depends on the willingness of the two individuals. A popular practice for male migrant workers is to seek a wife in their workplace in the city. A sizeable proportion of male migrants also seek local spouses when they return home temporarily, which is the most effective way of getting to know local women. This practice is more prevalent in Lijia, where there is a greater magnitude of labour migration and the demands for local wives are greater than in Baijia.

In Baijia, housing and residential location are central considerations in matching. For rural residents, it is a tradition to have a brand new house prepared upon marriage. An ordinary new house is a two-story concrete structure that costs about CYN 80–100, 000 (USD12,900–16,100), which is unaffordable for poor families. Being unable to provide a decent house for their partner is the main reason that men do not marry. Housing is considered very important; according to several interviewees, some families start saving money for their single sons when they are young, (also see Wei and Zhang 2009).

A man's likelihood to attract a wife largely depends on geographic location. Encircled by mountains, Baijia has limited land on which to build. We observe downward economic conditions along this spatial hierarchy: county, central town, plain areas in villages, valleys, and top of mountains. If a woman intends to live at a better place (a city instead of a village) after marriage, her spouse is expected to provide housing at a preferred location. However, rural men can rarely establish themselves away from their home community due to higher living expense in an upscale location. The courtship experience of Jin, a 40-year-old man who got married in his thirties, illustrates the salient rural-urban gap of 'marital capability'. He had been working in a printing house in Xi'an after graduating from a vocational school in 1994. He had been longing to marry an urban girl and settle down in the city. He said:

> I had relationships with two girls both of whom asked me to buy a house in Xi'an. But it was not that easy to do. For one of the girls, I was in a relationship with her for three years, but we broke up in the end. She required me to buy a house in Xi'an.

Realizing that he could not afford a house in the capital city, he gave up hope of seeking a spouse outside and went back to his hometown in a rural area. However, it was not easy to bring a girlfriend to settle down in his hometown either. Jin revealed, with a tone of helplessness, "they [urban girls] are not willing to come over because they regard us as *shanliren"* (a derogatory term used to refer to people who live in backward mountain). Due to a less favourable socio-economic status, rural men suffer discrimination. While women have relatively more bargaining power in this particular scenario, there is little room for rural men to negotiate better terms for themselves. Sometimes they are introduced to women with relatively poor attributes.

Traditionally, marriage in rural China has been a gendered production of patriarchal systems that empowers men over women. Marriage practices are mostly male-dominated and male-identified (Johnson 2005). For the most part, a wife leaves her natal family and moves in with her husband's family (patrilocality) after wedding. A man as breadwinner is expected to pay bride price and provide housing for marriage. A married woman is usually in a position to prioritize and fulfill her husband's needs—typically, to give birth to a son, and therefore to carry along the husband's family lineage (patrilineality). However, gender relations have been largely shaped with the effort of nationwide gender equality campaign in modern China, and furthermore, with a decreasing number of marriageable girls. In a case when a man is less favourable on the marriage market—as in the case of Jin—a woman is conferred with gendered power to negotiate material benefits by treating new house ownership and suitable residential location as indispensable requirements of marriage. If they are not satisfied with the local marriage market, they can choose to migrate through marriage to achieve upward mobility. By contrast, single men, who are of low social status with little financial warrant, are less mobile and less capable of competing with urban men in marriage. Li et al. in this volume paint a poignant picture of the odds against single men especially from multi-son families in this region.

In this context whereby women may migrate where they can find the best possible spouse and men are rooted and expected to provide housing, what strategies do poorer single men use to improve their marital attributes and achieve marriages? How is agency demonstrated among single men in pursuing a potential wife? How does agency differ among single men from different generations with distinct marriage norms?

4.5 Strategies for Seeking Spouses

Men's marriage strategies depend on various societal and personal factors. Birth cohort has a significant effect on how rural single men seek spouses. Men born in the 1960–1970s and 1970s–1980s were exposed to distinct social constructions of gender, sexuality, and marriage norms. The former, who are now in their 40s–50s, tend to recognize third-party introductions by matchmakers and acquaintances as a prescription for seeking a spouse. The latter, who are now in their 30s-early 40s, prefer approaches that are more proactive and straightforward.

4.5.1 The Old Generation: Conventional and Alternative Approaches to Marriage

Many single men, young or old, expect their future wives to be 'domesticated,' 'filial,' and 'easy to get along with.' A potential bride should know how to deal with household affairs and be filial towards her parents-in-law. These attributes reflect single men's expectation for marriage: a desire for a stable conjugal life and a secure late life for aging parents. Given past failed matchmaking experiences, single men, especially the older ones, are well aware of their disadvantaged position in the marriage market. Many of them define themselves as having 'poor attributes' and 'little hope'. Rather than proactively seeking spouses like the younger generation of single men, the older generation of single men develop less straightforward, and sometimes, compromising approaches to achieve marriage, or to simply stay single as a way to maintain a life.

As noted earlier, housing is a critical attribute in the marriage transaction. Some single men endeavour to make money and build a house in order to survive matchmaking and achieve marriage ultimately. Liao, a 39-year-old single man who had been turned down numerous times due to poverty, is among them. He was doing house renovations on construction sites with a poor income of 70 yuan per day. At the time of the interview, he was making every effort to save money in order to build a house, along with his single older brother. He showed a strong desire and a great amount of pressure in pursuit of a better life.

Interviewer: Does your brother talk to you when he gets upset?
Liao: Yes. We talk about economic difficulties in our family. [We are] striving to make money, building a house, and finding wives. He said we should pull our money together and ask our parents to keep it. Then use the money to build a house.
Interviewer: Do you have sleep problems?
Liao: I do. My brain keeps thinking about making money, pulling money together and helping each other build a house. One of us has to get married. I hate myself for being incapable. I am already a man over 30 years old, yet I failed to find a wife; there is great pressure.

Among married men we interviewed, Luo achieved marriage by working hard and striving for a career. When he was a young adult, Luo failed to enter college and did not have a decent job afterwards. He had gone through five matchmakings in his 20s, but none of them worked out. Since then, he felt neither confidence nor hope when thinking about marriage. However, Luo's life and marriage prospects turned the corner when he started working in a minefield. He told us how he began pursuing a career and was recognized by his superior as a considerable match for her niece. He recalled:

> I felt I had something to do. It was harsh and sometimes hazardous in the beginning. I had to purchase materials from Xi'an. I became a technician soon. I was spirited up. I gradually picked up my confidence for marriage. Later on, my boss, who is her [his wife's] aunt,

> thought I was honest, loyal, and long-headed. So she introduced her niece to me. We got along well. [Luo eventually got married to this woman at the age of 31]

Another strategy to find a wife is to seek women who are divorced or widowed; however, for some men, raising a child—the 'product' of a divorced/widowed mother's prior marriage—is believed to be pointless and burdensome, especially when it is a boy. This is because in such cases, the man must treat the boy as a biological son and build a house for his future marriage, which can be a major financial burden. Some single men we interviewed did not mind raising the children of 'someone else', but they did show reluctance at accepting an infertile woman. The hope of marrying and fathering children to continue the family line persists.

Many men may accept divorcees/widows as marriage partners, but they will reject undesirable introductions (that is, to physically or mentally disabled women, as shown in the following case of Wang) and prefer to remain single, if necessary, to circumvent risks and therefore maintain affordable lives. Sun, a single, 48-year-old man, exhibited a great resistance to marital introductions. He is a migrant worker in Feng, earning only 100 *yuan* per day. He lives with his 80-year-old father and his family is extremely poor. According to his married sister, Sun's singlehood was related to his poverty. She recalled:

> When he was young, I introduced some girls to him. But he was not willing. He told me he was not going to marry and asked me to introduce for his younger brother instead. He didn't want to delay his brother's marriage because of him. He was just unwilling. I am out of strategies. I think there are two reasons why he remains single. One is due to family strains, poverty, you know. The other is that he cannot even raise himself. In the end, he no longer thinks of marriage as he becomes older.

Many single men we interviewed had been introduced to mentally or physically disabled women who were incapable of taking care of themselves. Wang, a 39-year-old single man, had been introduced to women with disabilities twice. When talking about the reasons for rejecting such introductions, he said:

> I want to find someone normal. I don't care if she looks pretty or not. It is fine to me as long as she is not dumb and is able to take care of me when I get old. I did not go for matchmaking [after the two failed introductions] because I am aware of (poor) attributes. But I don't want to be introduced to a woman whose brain has problems.

The above narratives and segments of dialogues were from single men or married men with difficulties who were born in the early 1960s to mid-1970s. Men of this birth cohort reached marriageable ages in the early 1980s–1990s, during which time semi-arranged matchmaking was prevalent in the rural marriage market. Single men from this generation do not approach potential wives directly. They exhibit agency in various forms and directions. Improving crucial attributes, such as housing and job stability, increases their chances of attracting a single woman. To some degree, accepting their single status increases financial security, since their economic condition would likely prevent them from supporting another person.

4.5.2 The Young Generation: Spouse-Seeking on Motorcycles

With the drastic economic and social revolutions initiated by the Reform and Open Policy,[4] cohorts born in the 1980s witnessed the beginning of a diverse and less conservative social environment concerning gender relations. The spouse-seeking experience of Xu (24 years old, born in 1988) provides an excellent illustration of the younger generation's active involvement in marriage. Xu had been married for 6 months before we interviewed him. He was not, however, content with his new wife and regretted his rushed decision to marry a girl whom he had dated for only 3 months (usually at least 1 year of dating before tying the knot would be the local norm). When talking about his hasty marriage, he said:

> I feel it has been hard to find a wife. I was stressed out. I used to have a girlfriend [when he was 23], but her parents didn't agree on our marriage. She and I were engaged though. She was really young at that time [20 years old]. Her father asked me for 30,000 *yuan* [of bride price]. Where can I get 30,000? In the end … I did not get her parents' approval. It did not work out. We broke up. I was heavily discussed by villagers. They said, 'how can this boy get married?' I was thinking about finding a random person to get married. Later on, I met her [his wife] in a few months.

Xu's monthly income of 1000 *yuan,* earned working in a brick factory located in a city 120 km northwest of his hometown, was far from sufficient to make ends meet. Besides being upset about the expensive bride price his parents were unable to pay, he was concerned about the scarcity of women in the villages—they had become 'as precious as gold' (*Jingui*). Every time he returned to his hometown, he had to face the embarrassing question raised by folks—"why are you still unmarried?" The pressure on him was so great that he thought he would likely become an abandoned old man.

Limited resources from parents, a shortage of marriageable girls, and the overwhelming public gaze had heightened Xu's sense of anxiety about getting married. He was inspired to take action; in 2010, Xu and his single friends came up with the strategy of seeking spouses from the valley by riding on motorcycles on a daily basis. Once they found suitable women, they would search in their network to see if there was an acquaintance willing to serve as intermediary to approach the woman's family. Relatives are usually the best to approach, so Xu and his friends would buy gifts with a value of around 100 *yuan* for the targeted relative to show their appreciation and make their request. If a relative agreed to act as an introducer, the targeted woman would receive a visit and be informed of one of the men's intentions. Afterwards, the man would visit the woman in person and bring gifts. Unfortunately, this strategy did not always succeed as expected. In many cases, the women would immediately return the gifts, leaving the men embarrassed. Xu admitted that the

[4] The revolutionary Reform and Open Policy was initiated in 1979, aiming at transiting China's economy from a command economy to a socialist market economy system. The economic reforms were a huge success that fundamentally reconstructed China's economy and achieved rapid nationwide development in the following three decades. The expansion of private economy has also transformed individual lifestyles, marriage ideologies, gender relations etc. See Guthrie (2012) for discussion on the impact of 1979 reform on Chinese society.

success rate was actually low, especially for his friends. But luckily, it was through this strategy that he met his first girlfriend (the one who broke up with him because of parental disapproval). Recalling his courtship experience, Xu said:

> It was midnight and I was still at her home. I was negotiating with them [her parents], but they were not willing. It was almost 1 a.m. when I rode back. It was so dark and I was scared. But what can I do? I have to tolerate. In the end, her family disapproved. I felt heartbroken. I really tried hard, but it ended in breaking up. (Sigh) Life is really pointless. I was thinking I should get married at an earlier time in order to relieve my parents and prevent folks from gossiping about me …

Although Xu failed to get married using his motorcycle strategy, the active agency he exhibited is in stark contrast to that of men born in the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than sitting and waiting for parents or relatives to make introductions, Xu and his peers took the initiative to approach women, by pooling their resources and utilizing social capital (e.g. relative network). As in semi-arranged matchmaking, an introducer is employed as an intermediary. Xu's matchmaking on motorcycles differed in that it was self-arranged and driven by the young men's autonomy. Xu's creative strategy of using his motorcycle to seek a wife reveals how young adults in his cohort make marital decisions independently as social actors and demonstrate agency in seeking spouses in a flexible manner. With individual constraints (low income, limited family resources) and extra-personal hindrances (overly high bride price, women migrating for work), single men develop variations of spouse-seeking strategies and make the best of what the situations offer.

4.5.3 Uxorilocal Marriage: An Alternative?

In both fieldwork sites, patrilocality is the predominant marriage arrangement. Uxorilocality, in contrast to patrilocality, requires that the groom live with the bride's family after marriage and change his surname to that of his bride's. The groom is referred to as a "called-in son-in-law (上门女婿, *Shangmen Nvxu*)". Once he 'marries in', he is expected to serve as a surrogate male heir, fulfil his obligations, carry out rituals, and care for his elderly parents-in-law. In Baijia, uxorilocality is a well-accepted strategy to achieve marriage while it is strongly rejected in Lijia. This salient difference is linked to geographic features, local historical migration patterns, and sex ratio imbalance.[5] Baijia's (Northwestern China) mountainous landscape and less developed economy is primarily a place of out-migration. Local women prefer marrying out, and non-local women in pursuit of hypergamous marriage are not attracted to this locality. Female out-migration further heightens the increasing sex ratio,

[5] For some female deficit communities, local government may encourage uxorilocality as a solution to men's marriage difficulties, which may positively change how people perceive uxorilocal marriage as a stigmatized or unfilial practice (See Li et al. 2006). However, this is not the case for Baijia or Lijia.

leaving fewer women in Baijia. These altogether create favourable conditions for the acceptance of uxorilocality for men in Baijia who cannot find a local woman.

In contrast Lijia (East China) is an attractive town with a plain landscape and relatively prosperous economy. It generated an inflow of female marriage migration in the 1980s and 1990s. In the current marriage market, local women tend to marry locally and non-local brides are brought in by local men through labour migration. As shown below, these different migration patterns and resulting demographic structures contribute in shaping marital norms with respect to uxorilocality as an option for men and women. In fact in Lijia, in the course of the fieldwork we did not meet any uxorilocal groom and we felt strong resistance against uxorilocality among respondents. According to them, in uxorilocal marriages, the husband is inferior in the wife's family and faces discrimination from other villagers. One case was reported to us. We sum up his story based on various narratives.

Li, an attractive single man from a poor family, married uxorilocally with a girl from a five-daughter family in a neighbouring village. Among the five sisters, four 'married out', and only Li's wife 'called in' a groom. Li and their children took the wife's last name, Qiao. This marriage ensured the continuity of the wife's family line. A local cadre explained how Li resisted uxorilocality and suffered from its stigma:

> When a mother-in-law dies, the heir is ordered to smash a basin [by the beginning of the funeral ritual]. When Li's mother-in-law died, he was asked to do so. But he refused. He also did not agree to direct the way to the funeral when asked. The uncle and other relatives from the mother-in-law's side were unpleasant. They said to Li, "Once you were called in as an uxorilocal groom, just like a son, you have to smash the basin. If you do not do it, we are going to beat you." Later on, the onlookers started persuading him, said, "Please do it. If your uncle's family is not beating you, then we are going to beat you." He did it in the end. There was no way out of it with so many people around. Rural people are fond of hustle and bustle occasions. It was basically people in the entire village over there watching if he smashed or not.

There was another time when someone in Li's family got sick and needed his signature [for hospitalization]. He put his original last name 'Li' on the form and was found out by [his wife's] fifth sister. The sister walked right away and had been unhappy all the way home.

The goal of Li's wife's family is to carry on the lineage symbolized by the woman's father's last name. To his in-laws, Li represents a symbolic male body who could carry on rituals. Li's entering into uxorilocal marriage is no indication that he accepts his identity as a "called-in son-in-law", nor the symbolic and practical role of a legitimized heir. Li is faced with the negative and derogatory reactions of onlookers, including his natal family members. The local cadre in Li's hometown in Lijia provided a testimony to demonstrate the general negative attitude towards these marriages:

> Nowadays girls in South Jiangsu[6] are not happy to marry out because of their good attributes. They are calling in our local boys as uxorilocal grooms. But few of the boys are willing to go. They are likely to be underpowered (*shouqi*) and discriminated…[Because] you have to take your cue from the girl's family.

[6] An economically advanced area that represents one of the leading economic interregional bodies in China, including fast-developing cities such as Shanghai, Nanjing and Wuxi.

When asked about their willingness to practise uxorilocal marriage, many single men in Lijia rejected it vigorously. Besides the pressure and stigma against uxorilocality, men want to have an heir with their own surname and be responsible for their parents in old age. Liao (aged 39) explained why he categorically refuses uxorilocality:

> I am filial to my parents…I don't have any offspring here. My kids would be named after their last name if I move to live with them. I have to live in someone else's home [if I enter uxorilocality]. You can get along with them under good situations. If the parents are bad tempered, it is not easy to get along. Also, there is no freedom staying at another's home; there is nothing better than my own.

For the majority of locals, patrilocality legitimizes and reproduces male-privileged gender relations, while uxorilocal marriage is considered a transgression of the patrilineal kinship system. For instance, in Liao's view, the wife's house cannot be a proper 'home' under uxorilocal residence, nor are her family members considered 'family'. Another thing to note is that, without any hesitation, Liao equates uxorilocality to a practice against filial piety. He prioritizes taking care of his parents in his plan to marry. This is also the case for some other bachelors in Lijia. If necessary, they would stay single in order to provide support to their parents. As mentioned earlier, one of the most important criteria for a potential wife is that she be domesticated and filial towards her parents-in-law. Some bachelors claimed that they would rather stay single than marry a wife who lacked parental respect. Others would choose to stay in their hometowns and be geographically close to their parents, instead of working in another province and coming home occasionally.

In contrast to Lijia, uxorilocality in Baijia is more acceptable. People speak about this type of marriage with a neutral tone. Single men over 30 years of age who live in strikingly poor valleys are most likely to resort to uxorilocal marriage. A woman's parents may call in an uxorilocal groom when the daughter is older, divorced, or widowed. Interestingly, uxorilocality is generally attractive for a man because it offers a man upward mobility through marriage; men thus expect better economic conditions on the wife's side upon marriage.

Hua is a 50-year-old single man who has had two failed childless uxorilocal marriages. He married his first wife when he was 21 years old and lived at his wife's house, located 400 km north of his hometown in Baijia. His wife and her family members treated him well; however, he left his wife after 18 months because she was ill with leukaemia. He returned to his hometown, started working in many places across the country, and stayed single for the next 24 years. Four years prior to the interview, he married his second wife, who was good-looking and from a well-off family. He married and moved to her place, located 38 km from his hometown. Although the couple got along well, his relationship with his mother-in-law became increasingly tense as time went by. He had been attempting to run away, but did not succeed until last year when he was invited to a relative's wedding feast. He said:

> Before me, my mother-in-law called in four uxorilocal grooms, among which two ran away and two died. There were two things that I frown upon. First, she stole things from neighbours. Her behaviour is what I hate most. It is not decent at all. Second, she was fond of poking her nose into my business. She was never content with the food and clothes that I bought for her. Wherever I went, she had an eye on me. There were people of hers watching

> me all day long. I was followed when I was working in mountains or visiting my relatives. She had been monitoring me. I tried to run away twice, but was blocked by her people. I saw through this mother-in-law after two years. I left in the third year [of marriage].

After all the marital disturbances in the first half of Hua's life, surprisingly, he remains optimistic and determined about marrying again:

> I am not frustrated. This is my fate. I cannot blame this and blame that. I am still confident about finding a wife and forming a family [either patrilocally or uxorilocally]. Although I am in my fifties, I don't think I am old. If I am in my sixties, I will give up. There's no point in getting married at such an old age. People will laugh at me.

Some single men laugh at Hua because, at the age of 50, he still dreams of finding a wife. Hua asserts confidently that they are all wrong in terms of life value. Other bachelors might regard forming a family burdensome or unaffordable, but Hua believes that 'sharing brings happiness.' Based on this motto, he attempts to keep a positive attitude towards married life in the near future. At the time of the interview, Hua was planning to make money in order to migrate south for marriage, possibly to Yunnan. In Baijia, we did not come across instances of rural men migrating, especially inter-provincially or long distances, for marriage. Hua's story counters the negative stereotypes of single men as being incapable, distressed, or suppressed. Some single men may view their singlehood more positively and migrate to tackle marriage difficulties.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter contributes to an understanding of rural single men's agency in pursuing marriage, or remaining single in China, and how their strategies are deployed within a severely constrained marriage market and its recent changes. The analysis showed how agency manifests itself when men resist the label of 'forced bachelor' by remaining active on the marriage market or when they contest the absolute necessity of marrying by refusing potential marriages that they deem undesirable. Applying the feminist inspired notion of agency here showed how men resist, contest and emancipate themselves from assigned gendered identities that can marginalize them.

The evidence presented challenges the stereotype of single men as passive victims of a tight marriage market. Single men's agency observed in their strategies differed in two ways. First, birth cohorts or generations matter. Men interviewed reached the age at marriage in different periods of China's recent history. We documented more pro-active strategies and greater self-involvement among younger men than among older men. Given the upcoming even tighter marriage market expected in China, we are likely to witness a wider array of strategies deployed by young men seeking to marry including the use of migration and social media. Second, our comparative two-community fieldwork sheds light on structural factors linked to geography, local economy and migration patterns in shaping marital strategies. The comparison of Baijia and Lijia showed how, in turn, these factors impact local norms with respect to legitimate marital options and men's likelihood of marrying versus remaining single.

We analysed uxorilocal marriages to show the importance of these relationships. The contrast in the acceptability of uxorilocal marriage in Baijia and Lijia provided evidence of how gender is related to the changing social environment (Donato et al. 2006). The prevalence of uxorilocality among single men in Baijia indicates that gender relations can be shaped by the changing dynamics in the local marriage market. Some single men adapt to these changes by redefining uxorilocality as an alternative marriage strategy. In sum, geographical location and migration patterns lead to various marital strategies. Staying single, however, may be used as a strategy to avoid non-desirable marriages and maintain a certain quality of life. Single men are thus active agents of their lives by opting for either marriage or singlehood.

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Chapter 5
"Now It Is Difficult to Get Married": Contextualising Cross-Regional Marriage and Bachelorhood in a North Indian Village

Shruti Chaudhry

5.1 Introduction

Writing on Punjab in 1925, Malcolm Darling (1928), a British official, stated: "The bachelor's life is not a happy one" stressing that marriage was not only "a religious duty", but also an "economic necessity" in peasant societies (p. 58). In his work on the Pandits (Brahmans) of rural Kashmir in the late 1950s, Madan stated that begetting sons was not the only reason to seek a wife. "The gratification of sexual desire, the mutual love of spouses, and the joy and comfort of domestic life" also made marriage "a highly desired state of existence for a man". Bachelors were "pitied" in Pandit society, he wrote (2002, p. 89). In the Indian countryside, Kaur (2008) writes that bachelors are marginalised "they are referred to as *bechārā* [one without food or resources]" (p. 113). What this points to is the role of marriage in social reproduction of families and communities, fulfilment of sexual needs, inheritance, rights and status, labour and provision of care and confirming social status. In India, as in most of South Asia, marriage as an institution holds "hegemonic sway". Marriage thus "excludes; it marginalises those who fall outside its parameters or never enter it" (Palriwala and Kaur 2014, p. 5).

In the contemporary context, in China and India (particularly in the north) alike bachelorhood has emerged as a growing concern (see also Mishra this volume; for a discussion on South India see Srinivasan 2015). Much of this concern has been articulated in terms of bachelorhood being a consequence of the inability of some men to marry due to a "marriage squeeze", that is, a shortage of marriageable women, which in turn is a result of a sex ratio imbalance with demographers predicting that in future an even more significant proportion of men will fail to marry (Guilmoto 2012).

S. Chaudhry (✉)
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
e-mail: schaudh2@exseed.ed.ac.uk

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Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a village ("Barampur" is used as a pseudonym) in Baghpat district in western Uttar Pradesh (UP), this paper attempts to explain the growing concern regarding the inability of some men to marry within the context of a sex ratio imbalance in this region by focusing on two caste groups – Jats (dominant caste) and Chamars (Scheduled caste – the official designation in the Indian Constitution for ex-untouchable castes also referred to as Dalit). "*Ab shādī hone mein pareshānī hai"* [Now it is difficult to get married], was one of the most often repeated statements in the village. According to the 2001 Census data for Baghpat district (rural), the mean age at marriage for men was 20.25 and for women 17.6 (C – Series: Social and Cultural Tables). In Barampur, an unmarried man below the age of 30 years is referred to as *kuwārā* [marriageable]. Once he reaches the age of 35 years, he is considered to have passed the 'appropriate' age for marriage and the term *randwā* is used to indicate his never-married status. The terms *malāng* [translated as "chronic bachelor"] and *chharā* are used in neighbouring Haryana and Punjab respectively (Kaur 2013, p. 40). In China, the term "bare branches" is used to connote a single man who fails to get married (Eklund this volume).

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 5.2 discusses the demographic context of the research, while Sect. 5.3 provides a description of the field site and methods. Section 5.4 explores the multiple masculinities operating in the study context. Section 5.5 discusses the link between unemployment and difficulties in marrying for Jat men and Sect. 5.6 addresses Jat men's responses to such difficulties. Section 5.7 considers the considerable challenges Chamar brick-kiln workers face in finding wives, while Sect. 5.8 presents the approaches these men employ in the face of multiple challenges. Section 5.9 analyses the relationship between bachelorhood and marginalised masculinities. Finally Sect. 5.10 posits that while men are engaging in diverse strategies to overcome difficulties in finding brides, this should not detract attention from the ongoing son preference and daughter aversion that causes the sex ratio imbalance.

5.2 The Demographic Context: Sex Ratios and Marriageability

Baghpat district was created in 1997; prior to this it was a *tehsil* [administrative division] of Meerut district. In this region, sex ratio imbalance has been a matter of concern since the nineteenth century when the British campaigned against infanticide (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997, p. 230–231). The reasons for sex ratio imbalance have been well documented in the literature (e.g. John et al. 2009; Agarwal and Unisa 2007; Miller 1997). Insights from Barampur shed light on the persistent sex ratio imbalance in the district. In the study village, the necessity of a son was felt across castes. What existed was not only son preference but also daughter aversion – "the growing unwantedness of daughters – the idea that they can be dispensed with" (John et al. 2009, p. 18). Son preference and daughter aversion were much

stronger among the Jats as compared to the Chamars. Jat informants admitted to going in for pre-natal sex selection even though they were aware of the PCPNDT Act, 2003 that banned pre-natal sex determination in India. They also cited instances of female neglect and lack of medical attention given to female infants and young girls. Jat informants claimed that they could not recall incidents of infanticide (prior to pre-natal sex selection) in this part of UP even though earlier studies note that infanticide was historically prevalent among the Jats of western UP (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Pradhan 1961). Barampur Jats attributed growing bachelorhood to "*larkī kī kamī*" [a shortage of women].

Caste-wise data, last available for the 1931 Census, shows an overall sex ratio (number of males per 100 females) of 104.5 and 128.9 among the Chamars and Jats respectively with the sex ratios for 0–6 years being 98.9 for the Chamars and 106.6 for the Jats (Census of the United Province of Agra and Oudh 1933). Writing in 1920, Briggs stated that female infanticide was not practiced by the Chamars, although female infants were neglected and were more subject to plague and malaria (p. 45). Moving to 70 years later, according to the 2001 Census the sex ratios in the 0–6 age group for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) was 114.6 with the sex ratios for all ages being 118.9 and 115.6 in the 2001 and 2011 censuses respectively. The sex ratios for the SCs, thus, appear to have increased, similar to those for other castes.

Table 5.1 on age-specific sex ratio indicates that between 1961 and 2001 the sex ratios have remained consistently high. Table 5.2 suggests a trend of rising age at marriage for men in the younger cohorts with the age group 30–34 being the cut off age for marriage.[1] As the effects of a "marriage squeeze" are experienced more than 20 years after the appearance of sex ratio imbalance as men enter marriageable ages (Kaur 2013, p. 38), this implies, for instance, that if the sex ratios for the 0–9 age group in 1971 is 120 (Table 5.1), and a man starts looking for a bride at the age of 20 with the marriageable age extending up to 30, the percentage of never-married men in these cohorts (20–24 and 25–29) will be high. If we look at Table 5.2, we find high percentages of men in the 20–24 cohorts in 1991 and 2001 who have

Table 5.1 Age-wise sex ratio (number of males per hundred females) (Census of India)

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Age-group	Sex ratio (Meerut)				Sex ratio (Baghpat)
0–9	114.8	120.3	110.21	111	117.8
10–14	120.6	116.7	122.5	112.7	115.3
15–19	116.6	127.2	134.5	125.7	128.6
20–24	102.7	131.92	117.5	116.6	132.3
25–29	105.2	111.6	114.8	112	116.1
30–34	111.4	109.9	114.1	112	102.2
35–39	119.5	108.5	111.7	115.8	110

[1] As prior to the 2001 Census, Baghpat was a part of Meerut district, Tables 5.1 and 5.2 present data for Meerut district for the 1961–2001 period.

Table 5.2 Age-wise percentage of never-married men (Census of India)

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Age-group	Meerut				Baghpat
15–19	68	80.7	89.4	93.4	95.8
20–24	27.5	36.4	48.5	52	63.6
25–29	12.25	15.5	16.5	16.9	22.7
30–34	9.3	8.6	7.1	6.7	8.8
35–39	8.9	5.9	5.3	4.1	5.4
40–44	9.4	5.8	5.2	4.4	4.8
45–49	9.4	5.9	5.0	4.8	4.3
50–54	8.7	5.7	5.6	4.6	4.5
55–59	9.3	6.8	5.8	4.3	5.3
60–64	7.2	5.8	5.6	4.2	6.3
65–69	7.0	5.9	5.8	4.7	7.7

remained unmarried. There is then a significant drop in the percentage of never-married men in 25–29 cohorts and a further decline in the 30–34 age cohorts in both censuses. There is also a visible fall in the percentage of never-married in the older cohorts. Further, if we look at the cohorts over 35, the percentage of never-married men is lower in 1991 and 2001 than it was in 1961.

Thus, the census data does not indicate inflated percentages of never-married men that would be expected to be the logical consequence of long-term sex ratio imbalances. Does this mean that the contemporary panic regarding increasing bachelorhood is exaggerated? If there has not been any significant shift in percentages of never-married men over a 50-year period, then why is the inability of men to marry spoken of as a situation peculiar to the present context? I will argue that while demographic factors provide the context, there is a need to link marriageability to larger changes in political economy in this part of north India to understand the difficulties experienced by some men in the contemporary context with regard to marriage. Marriage being a "strategy" for social reproduction (Bourdieu 1976), I show that in the study context men/families adopt different strategies in response to the difficulties faced and these strategies are tied to ideas of caste and necessities of livelihood. Marriage strategies that worked in the past do not work in the present context. I propose that as men/communities have devised new strategies of marrying, percentages of never married men have remained more or less unchanged despite the persisting female deficit.

5.3 Methods and Fieldsite

This chapter is based on eleven months (September 2012–August 2013) of ethnographic fieldwork carried out as part of my doctoral research in Barampur village of Baghpat district.[2] According to the 2011 Census, Barampur village is comprised of 1657 households. It has a population of 9884 of which, 5417 are male and 4467 female. The Scheduled Caste population of the village is 958. It is a multi-caste village made up of 22 caste groups – 17 Hindu and five Muslim. Of these, five caste groups – three Hindu (Jat, Chamar and Kumhar) and two Muslim (Lohar and Teli) were selected for intensive study. In this chapter, I focus only on two castes – Jat and Chamar. Using M.N. Srinivas' (1987) definition of a dominant caste, Jats are the dominant caste as they "preponderate numerically over the other castes", and wield preponderant economic and political power by virtue of landownership (p. 97). In March 2014, Jats were included in the central list of Other Backward Class (OBC).[3] A significant proportion of Jats have also accessed higher education and the percentage of Jats employed in government and private sector jobs is much higher than other castes (Sahay 2015). Chamars are included in the category of Scheduled Castes. They are numerically the second largest caste of Barampur and numerically the largest Dalit caste in UP (Jeffrey et al. 2004).

Data were collected through a survey, interviews and observation. The survey covered one-fourth of the total households within each caste thorough random selection.[4] The survey gathered information on caste, religion, *gotrā* [clan], structure of household (joint/nuclear), economic status (property/assets/occupation and income) and age, sex, education and marital status. It also collected data on migration of household members and marriage details (age at marriage, marriage distance and dowry) of in-married and out-married women of the household. Apart from the survey, intensive semi-structured interviews with 38 key informants (19 'regional' brides (RBs) and 19 brides from other regions/states, referred here as Cross-regional brides (CRBs) belonging to the five selected castes) were conducted through repeat visits.

The informants for shorter structured interviews included: husbands of CRBs; CRBs who had acted as intermediaries for marriages from their native states; never-married men (over the age of 40 years); elderly men (e.g. school and college teachers, ex-army men, the village headman); and health workers. The names of all

[2] This research compared the lived experiences of marriage of women in what I describe as 'regional' marriage (RM) with women in cross-regional marriage (CRM). In north India, RMs may be defined as those that are endogamous (within the caste and religious group), follow norms of *gotrā* [clan] and territorial or village exogamy (outside the clan, village and neighbouring villages) with a limited marriage distance between a woman's place of birth and marriage (outside the village but usually within the district or in a neighbouring district). Dowry is the predominant form of marriage payment. CRMs, in contrast, are those that contravene caste (sometimes religious), linguistic and state boundaries (Chaudhry 2016).

[3] The Indian Constitution entitles Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes to reservation in government employment and educational institutions.

[4] Every fourth household was selected from a house list provided by the *panchāyat* [local self-government institution] secretary.

informants have been changed to ensure anonymity. This being a gender segregated context, my age, marital status and gender made it impossible for me to interview young men. I had access to only brief conversations with few young men that took place in the presence of older male and female informants. Informal conversations with several people in the village and observation were also used to gather information. Gossip and rumour, though unverifiable, served as additional sources of information providing an insight into the normative tenor of gender, caste and class relations in the village.

5.4 Masculinities: Hegemonic, Subordinate and Marginalised

Scholars have emphasised the plurality and hierarchy of masculinities speaking of "multiple masculinities" and the relations between them: hegemonic, subordinate and marginalised masculinities (Connell 1995). "Hegemonic masculinities define successful ways of 'being a man'; in so doing, they define other masculine styles as inadequate or inferior" (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, p. 3). These related masculinities are termed subordinate. Marginalised masculinities "refer to relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups. Marginalisation is always relative to the authorisation of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group" (Connell 1995, p. 81). In rural north India, as in other contexts, hegemonic masculinity entails earning and fulfilling provider roles for the family. Further, heterosexual marriage is seen as essential for a man (and woman) to transition into social adulthood. Successful masculinity is also tied to having a wife whose productive and sexual labour a man can command. The process of becoming a man is not regarded as complete until he gets married, has heterosexual relations and proves his virility by producing offspring, especially a son. While these elements are common to understandings of what it means to be a man in this cultural context, the idea of "being a man" cannot be treated as "fixed or universal" (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, p. 3). Masculinities are constructed differently in different contexts and at different periods of time, also across different socio-economic groups in the same social context. Also, more than one kind of masculinity can be found within the same social setting (Roy 2007). Thus, for Barampur I show how Jats construct masculinities differently from Chamars and how there may be a change in defining components of masculinity over time.

Not many men meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity and the number of men "rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small" (Connell 1995, p. 79) and masculinities may be equally shaped by socio-economic marginalisation (Rogers 2008, p. 81). I highlight the factors that make it difficult for some men to achieve normative ideals of masculinity that then provide space for subordinate and marginalised masculinities to emerge. As the experience of masculinities is about an entitlement to power, men have power vis-à-vis women but also this entitlement to power is dependent upon men's location within systems of

class, caste and their sexual orientation (Roy 2007) that places them in positions of domination and subordination in relation to each other.

5.5 Unable to Marry: The Unemployed Jat Man

One of the statements I heard often from respondents across castes in Barampur was that in every Jat household there was at least one *randwā* [never-married man]. This, though exaggerated,[5] highlights the apprehension regarding the inability of men to marry. When talking about never-married men, informants distinguished between the 'past' and the 'present'. Elderly informants (65–90) talked about how in their own and previous generations in every family one or two brothers were married and the remaining were left unmarried in order to prevent the fragmentation of land, given the system of partible inheritance, also noted by earlier studies on the Jats (Chowdhry 2011; Kaur 2008; Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Pradhan 1961). The last available data on caste-wise marital status (for 1931) show that a high percentage – 18.6 of Jat men – remained never-married (Census of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh 1931). The fact that in the past, families did not strive to get all sons married offers some insight on why the then existing bride shortage and its consequences for marriageability were not recognised as concerns as they are in the contemporary context.

Amarpal (65, Jat, Male) a *randwā* explained bachelorhood in terms of the practice of *bithānā* [literally to cause to sit but used to refer to a levirate marriage] whereby a widowed woman was remarried with her, generally unmarried, husband's younger or older brother. By being left unmarried, such men were denied the possibility of fulfilling an essential element of hegemonic masculinity (that is, marriage) and filled subordinate masculine roles vis-à-vis the married. Women, however, were not left unmarried. Marriage was in fact compulsory for them. In the past, as joint living was the predominant pattern of residence, a bachelor was accommodated in the household of his married brother with his brother's wife cooking his meals. He worked with his brother on the land and his brother's children inherited his share of the land. While families did not take into account individual desires to get married, even if to deny it, there were 'arrangements' to fulfil the desires of the unmarried with a form of *de facto* fraternal polyandry whereby the unmarried brother had sexual access to his brother's wife; this arrangement was also noted by Pradhan (1961) in his study of Jats of Meerut in the 1950s. Some respondents, however, denied that this was ever the case.

Informants stressed that while bachelorhood was not uncommon in the past, the situation faced by the present generation of young men was different. Rampal (87, Jat, Male), a retired school teacher explained: "*Pehle karwāte nahī the, ab sab karwānā chāte hai shādī, par unkī hotī nahī*" [Earlier men were left unmarried and now they all want to get married but cannot]. Among the Jats, size of landholdings

[5] My survey that covered a proportion of households did not confirm the presence of a never-married man in every Jat household.

had been the primary consideration in the arrangement of marriage. Informants married prior to 1980s explained that when their marriages were arranged (at younger ages) parents of daughters agreed to a marriage based on their assessment of the share of land that a man would inherit from his father. Marriages were hypergamous, that is, women married into families of higher (economic) status. While the construction of canals in the mid-nineteenth century and agricultural developments such as the Green Revolution made the Jats in this part of western UP prosperous, land ceiling legislations, population growth and land fragmentation over time made landholdings smaller. My survey of Jat households in Barampur shows that 31% of the households were either landless or had less than one acre of land; the majority (66%) had between one and five acres and only 3% had more than five acres of land. For the present generation of marriageable Jat men, I was told that anything less than three acres was considered too little for the purpose of marriage. Further, over time several new considerations had emerged as significant in marriage negotiation.

The shrinking size of landholdings, the relatively poor returns from agriculture and availability of employment opportunities in the non-farm sector meant that families were no longer being sustained through agriculture alone. In more than half (57%) of the Jat households, at least one male member was employed outside of agriculture. Informants said that Jats started moving into non-agricultural or salaried employment in the 1960s. Jats also started investing in the education of their children (cf. Jeffrey 2010). According to my survey data on education levels of 150 adult Jat men, 16 were illiterate or had dropped out after class five, 16 had a middle-level education (class 6–8) and 118 had class 10 or above education. Of them, 33 had an undergraduate degree and 11 a postgraduate one. The Jats of Barampur are employed in sugar-mills, as school teachers, engineers, factory workers, railways, in the UP and Delhi police, Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force and the Army. Poorer Jat men tend to work as truck drivers, salespersons in shops, security guards and on UP Roadway buses. Many migrate out for work or are daily commuters to Delhi. As landholdings became smaller and non-farm employment increased, leaving men unmarried possibly ceased to be a meaningful strategy to prevent land fragmentation among the Jats.

Being educated and having a *naukrī* [job], preferably *sarkārī naukrī* [government job] came to define what it meant to be *kābil* [able] and *kāmyāb* [successful] and central to local understandings of hegemonic masculinity and marriageability. Vedpal (63, Jat, Male) pointed out that even a man with more than 10 acres of land at times faced difficulties in getting married because he was not considered *kāmyāb*. Writing on Punjabi masculinity, Chopra (2004) notes that for men, such as the Jats, involved in agrarian work "manliness" is tied to "work of the hand and body", to performing "hard labour" (p. 43–47). In Barampur, a preference for salaried employment over agricultural work (that is, a masculinity associated with physical strength and the body) indicates a shift in one of the defining components of hegemonic masculinity. Jat women of marriageable ages also talked about how they did not regard farmers as desirable spouses. This preference could be attributed in part to an increasing number of Jat women pursuing higher education, which has also resulted in their own lack of involvement in agricultural work unlike older Jat women.

Brijpal (78, Jat, Male), a retired college teacher told me that most students at the university at present were women. The opposite was the case when he was an undergraduate in the 1950s. Education for women has emerged as a significant criterion in marriage negotiation, also noted by Heyer (this volume) and Srinivasan (2015) for the Gounder community in Tamil Nadu. Informants agreed that women (unlike men) did not confront difficulties in finding spouses. Yet, some informants shared how the search for a spouse for their daughters stretched over a few years, as *eligible* men were few in number. Kripa (75, Jat, Female) was illiterate and talked about her marriage in the early 1950s to her husband a schoolteacher with a class 12 education. She compared herself with her postgraduate granddaughter, who was married at the age of 26 years as they had struggled to find a "suitable" match for her – a man with an equal or higher level of education with a *sarkārī* or private *naukrī*.

That Jat women have opportunities for higher education and are getting married at older ages reflects positive changes. The flipside is that *kāmyāb* men within the caste were few in number, thus securing a groom for one's daughter meant competition for grooms and providing a large dowry for the marriage. Dinesh (42, Jat, Male) explained: "It is like a system of bidding. The one [woman's family] willing to give the most wins". With regard to dowry, some scholars such as Das Gupta and Li (1999) suggested that "the surplus of men that could be expected from birth cohorts after 1980 means that there is hope that dowry inflation will taper off" (p. 363). In Barampur, some parents of men struggling to marry told me that they were willing to agree to a marriage without dowry. Yet, there neither seemed to be a decline in dowry nor an increase in dowryless marriages. Sarla (47, Jat, Female) explained: "Even an extremely poor Jat will borrow money from a moneylender to arrange a dowry for his daughter but he will not get his daughter married to an unemployed man", pointing to the practice of hypergamous marriage and escalating dowry. Jeffery (2014) argues that the relation between marriage squeeze and decline in dowry is more complex than what "demographic determinism" can explain (p. 179). Rather than withering, dowry is more likely to persist in the upper levels, while an increasing number of poor men must wait for several years to marry or remain unmarried (Jeffrey 2014, p. 182), as has been the case in Barampur.

For some men, even higher education had not helped them to secure employment. Jeffrey (2010) in his work on Meerut outlines various factors to explain educated unemployment. These include a reduction in the number of new positions created within government bureaucracies and a liberalisation that failed to generate private sector employment (in UP). While rising unemployment has been a challenge for young people across India, elderly informants in Barampur were of the opinion that young men failed to find employment as they were not educated enough to secure the jobs they desired. Rampal (87, Jat, Male) explained:

> Many young men are unable to pass the entrance tests for recruitment in government services and if they manage because their families pay a bribe,[6] they might still fail the physical test as they spend the entire day sitting at the Jat *chaupāl* [courtyard].

[6] In July 2013, all the leading Indian newspapers ran articles about the entrance examination paper for recruitment of Railway Protection Force constables being leaked in Western UP.

Rampal alludes to the fact that Jats had built networks with government officials that they could draw on to obtain jobs for their children, also noted by other studies (cf. Sahay 2015; Jeffrey 2010). Yet, in his view, young men were incapable of securing employment. Older informants pointed out that many unemployed young Jat men neither did agricultural work like men of the older generation nor were they willing to take up casual work such as in construction as they did not see it as fit for someone of their caste status. In Barampur, across castes, the practice was for the women's family to approach the prospective groom's family with a marriage proposal. Those who had failed to find employment were neither approached by the families of daughters nor did their own families try to arrange a marriage for them. Having failed to achieve normative ideals of masculinity, the unemployed were thus marginalised vis-à-vis other (employed) and (hence) marriageable Jat men.

5.6 Jat Responses to the Difficulties Faced: Bachelorhood or Cross-Regional Marriage?

In Barampur, the difficulties in finding wives has resulted in the relaxation of certain norms of marriage, such as the four *gotrā* rule which prohibited marriage between a man and a woman who shared any of the *gotrās* of their father, mother, father's mother or mother's mother. Ashok (39, Jat, Male) explained:

> My father's *gotrā* is Tomar. All Jats in this village belong to the Tomar *gotrā*. I cannot marry in the 84 Tomar villages. My *māmā's* [mother's brother] *gotrā* is Malik so I cannot also marry in the 84 Malik villages. My *dādī's* [father's mother] *gotrā* is Baliyan. If all the Baliyan villages had to be excluded as well, it would have become extremely difficult to get married since now additional criteria such as education and *naukrī* have become important. Now only the father's and mother's *gotrā* have to be avoided for the purpose of marriage.

Another response to address the difficulties faced by men has been cross-regional marriage (CRM). Jat informants, acknowledged the presence of cross-regional brides (CRB) among the Jats, but stated that they were fewer in number as compared to other castes because "*mol lānā*" [to buy a wife] from another state who belonged to a different/unknown caste was regarded as affecting the *izzat* [honour] of the family. Jat informants insisted that they instead preferred to leave sons unmarried and stated that status concerns made bachelorhood preferable to a CRM. In the context of inter-caste marriages, Kusum (47, Chamar, Female) told me about a Jat family with four bachelor sons. "They were telling me to bring them a wife from my natal village [in Muzaffarnagar – neighbouring district]. They said that they were even willing to take a Chuhra [also Dalit but regarded by Chamars as lower in status] woman in marriage". While this statement indicates the desperation felt by some unmarried men, inter-caste marriages between Jat men and lower caste women within the local region were not taking place,[7] with the exception of self-arranged

[7] Such inter-caste marriages were not uncommon among the Jats during the colonial period (Chowdhry 2007).

'love' marriages that were resisted and often evoked violence (cf. Chowdhry 2007). Yet, CRM were tolerated and rationalised in terms of *majbūrī* [compulsion] – "for two cooked meals, to pass on the land and carry forward the family".

The first CRB among the Jats is believed to have come from Darjeeling in the early 1960s. The commonly held opinion was that it was only 'disadvantaged' men – physically disabled, of older age or those with a previous marriage or a 'flawed' reputation who brought CRBs. Not all disadvantaged Jat men, however, brought CRBs as it was not only marriage but a 'good' marriage – normatively 'correct' with a dowry – that went into defining successful ways of being a man. Further, the compulsion to marry was not experienced in the same way by all Jat men. Thus, some remained bachelors while others brought CRBs.

In Barampur, Jats consider it acceptable for a man to bring a CRB in two situations. One, when it was evident that none of the men in a family would get married. One brother could then bring a CRB. Praveen (35) falls in this category. He is a landless truck driver with a class seven education that made him 'ineligible' for marriage. He had two younger brothers (30 and 32) also unmarried and drivers on private buses. Both had a reputation of being alcoholics. Praveen brought Varsha (28) from West Bengal in 1992 with the consent of his widowed mother. His mother felt that it was sufficient that one son was married. Praveen's brothers lived with him and contributed their earnings to their household.

Alternatively, a CRM is regarded as acceptable when a man is the only son and failed to get married within the local region. Vinod, for instance, brought Pushpa (late 30s) from Bihar in the early 1990s. Pushpa said that Vinod was much older than her. He had less than two acres of land. Additionally, he suffered from a physical disability and had previously been married to a CRB who 'ran away' before he married Pushpa. She talked about how it was necessary for Vinod to have a family of his own or else his sister's son would inherit his share of the land. Both these situations indicate that it was necessary for one man of each generation in a family to marry. There were cases of men who did not fall in either of the above two categories. These men were aware that a marriage in UP was not possible for them. Amar (52), for instance, was a drug addict. He owned less than an acre of land. His mother was the third 'wife' of a Jat man from Barampur and though a UP woman, her caste status was unknown. Amar was her son from a previous marriage. He brought Jaya from West Bengal in 1986 without the consent of his family prioritising his desire to get married over necessity and familial decisions.

5.7 At the Bottom of the Eligibility Hierarchy: The Chamar Brick-Kiln Worker

Unlike the Jats, Chamar men faced difficulties in getting married not due to unemployment but on account of seasonal labour migration to the brick-kilns. Informants said that parents of daughters, who themselves worked in the brick-kilns, did not

want to give their daughters in marriage to other brick-kiln workers because they did not want their daughters to have hard lives. The Chamars of Barampur were landless. They were traditionally leather-workers and agricultural labourers for Jat farmers. Chamar migration to the brick-kilns started from the 1960s and most had abandoned leather-work by the early 1980s. Satender (55, Chamar, Male) talked about difficulties in getting married as a problem faced by men of his son's generation but not his. I pointed out to him that it was largely men of his generation who had brought CRBs. To this he replied: "*Hā, problem kāfī din se hai*" [Yes, there has been a problem for a long time]. Jagmati (early 60s, Chamar, Female) told me that even when she got married in the mid-1960s, parents were unwilling to give daughters to brick-kiln workers. At that time, those who worked in the brick-kilns were a minority. During my fieldwork I noted that the commonly held opinion was that more men of marriageable age of the present generation and in future compared to the past would fail to marry as labour migration to the brick-kilns had increased over the years.

According to my village survey, 60% of Chamar households migrated to the brick-kilns (in other parts of UP, Punjab and Haryana) for 6–8 months in a year. During the remaining 4–6 months, most (men and women alike) were casual labourers for Jat farmers. The concentration of Chamars in brick-kiln work resulted from several factors that include the decline in traditional leather-work (cf. Varma and Kumar 2006) and lack of available employment throughout the year. Western UP lies in the Green Revolution belt and mechanisation meant that agricultural labour days declined, making the need for alternate employment essential for the landless poor. Unlike other artisan communities such as weavers and potters, Chamars have limited opportunities for employment because of their caste status (Varma and Kumar 2006). A significant factor that explains the concentration of Chamars in brick-kiln work is that household income is more than that from other kinds of employment since women's and other family members' (including children's) contributions make it more than a single wage.

SCs, such as Chamars, remain far behind upper castes and OBCs (Other Backward Class) as far as access to education is concerned (Corbridge et al. 2013). The lack of or lower levels of education limit the possibilities for alternative employment for many Chamar men in Barampur. Moreover, migration to the brick-kilns makes it difficult for their children to acquire/continue their education; whilst some continued their schooling at the migration destination, many dropped out. My survey data on education levels of 130 Chamar adult men in Barampur show that 71 were either illiterate or had dropped out after class five. Twenty-nine had studied to class 10 or above and only three had an undergraduate degree.[8] Lack/lower levels of education also make it difficult to benefit from reservation (see footnote 3). Only a small section has access to and benefit from reservation in public sector jobs

[8] According to the 2001 Census data for SC men (18 years and above) for rural Baghpat: 36.1% are illiterate, 13.4% have primary-level, 20.5% middle-level, 12.2% secondary-level, 7.5% higher secondary-level education and 3.5% are graduates or have higher levels of education (C – Series: Social and Cultural Tables 2001 Census).

(Corbridge et al. 2013). In their study in Bijnor district of western UP, Jeffrey et al. (2004) note that Chamar men had failed to use formal education to gain secure employment. Young Chamar men attributed their failure to a lack of social networks and money needed to bribe recruitment officials or brokers for government jobs. Studies also show that even highly qualified Dalits encounter discrimination in the formal, urban labour market (Thorat and Newman 2007) and are less likely than non-Dalits to find jobs in the private sector (Deshpande and Newman 2007).

Jackson (1999) notes that for high status groups "manliness" does not involve manual labour, which they consider degrading and a mark of inferiority, but lower social groups widely value physical strength as an attribute of men (p. 101). Chamar men, unlike Jat men, had to be employed as their families were sustained through wages and not from land/agriculture or cattle. The history of caste and economic livelihood and the inability to study (and "stay out of the sun") meant that for them physical labour, labouring for others, and their sense of subaltern masculinity were intertwined.

As marriage results in the transfer of a woman's labour to her husband's family, I argue that brick-kiln work, on the one hand, makes marriage for men an economic necessity since brick making requires family labour with the core unit usually comprising of a husband and wife. On the other hand, it affects men's ability to get married by making them less attractive for marriage in relation to other men of the caste engaged in different occupations. In the hierarchy of eligibility, a *sarkārī naukar* [government servant] is at the top. According to informants fewer than 5% of Chamar men in Barampur were in government employment—in the army, police, railways or municipality. This is followed by men with a *private naukrī*: factory-workers, caterers and sales-work in shops, followed by barbers, tailors, masons, and transporters. Brick-kiln workers are at the bottom of the hierarchy. With the exception of brick-kiln workers, men could get married *nirol* [a regular/ideal marriage]. Having fulfilled the desired norms of masculinity, a government employee could find the kind of spouse he wants, with beauty and education being considerations. Such a man also demands a big dowry. Among Chamars, education in women is a desired attribute in marriage only for the eligible men and not for brick-kiln workers "who married illiterate women". In Barampur, few young Chamar women are educated beyond class eight. Informants said that daughters are disinclined to study.

5.8 Chamar Responses to the Difficulties Faced: Lower Forms of Marriage?

Failing to marry *nirol*, brick-kiln workers had to resort to other kinds of marriage arrangements. Some men got married after lying to the woman's family about their employment. It was common for a family working in the brick-kiln to send their son to work elsewhere (as a tailor, in a barber's shop, or factory) and as soon as the marriage took place, he returned to brick-kiln work. There were rumours of men ("gamblers and alcoholics") who had "*paisē le kar*" [taken money] from the groom's family

(instead of giving a dowry as was customary) to get their daughters married to brick-kiln workers. While bride-price had been customary among Chamars in the past (cf. Briggs 1920, p. 36), making a payment to the bride's family was spoken of as an inferior practice, with one Chamar informant referring to it as "*bēchnā*" [selling]. Respondents said that a woman, unlike men, did not face any difficulties in getting married, unless she had a "defect" (e.g. she been previously married and had a child from that marriage). In such cases, she had no choice but to marry a brick-kiln worker who would otherwise find it difficult to find a local wife.

There was also a system of *tigaddā* or *antā-santā* marriage, that is, an exchange marriage that took place between three families/villages. Direct exchange (A gives a bride to B and B reciprocates by giving a bride to A) was not regarded as acceptable but informants did tell me about exceptional cases. Chamar informants were of the opinion that *tigaddā* had been in existence for more than a hundred years. Writing in 1920, Briggs noted exchange marriage ("*wattā sattā*", "*gurāwat*", "*adlā badlā*") among poor Chamars practised to save marriage expenses (p. 38). In the present context, exchange marriage is explained as a solution to the difficulties confronted by men in marrying *nirol*. Informants suggested that the number of *nirol* and *tigaddā* marriages were almost equal in number. A brick-kiln worker, for instance, gave his daughter in marriage to another brick-kiln worker since he wanted a wife for his son who was also a brick-kiln worker and was facing trouble in getting married. Ajay (24, Male) an unmarried brick-kiln worker with a class ten education, told me:

> There has not been a single proposal for me so far and I think that it is because I work in the brick-kiln. Until I find alternative employment, it will be difficult for me to get married. I do not want to have a *tigaddā* marriage even though I have three sisters because you can get any spouse; my sister might get a husband who is a drug addict. My elder sister has a class eight education and if she is married in *tigaddā*, she might get a husband who is illiterate. You do not get the kind of wife you desire.

Being a man involves taking care of one's sisters and fulfilling duties towards them. Being a man also entails making a 'good' marriage. In Ajay's case, this dilemma may rule out an exchange marriage. Men without sisters could not have a *tigaddā* marriage. Some with sisters, like Ajay, preferred not to have a *tigaddā* marriage. An exchange marriage as a marriage involving a payment to the bride's parents is considered a lower form of marriage because it conflicts with the ideal of *kanyādān* [gift of a virgin daughter without accepting anything in return] as well as the norm of hypergamous marriage (which establishes an asymmetrical relationship between wife-givers and wife-takers) (cf. Milner 1988). Yet, an exchange marriage is considered preferable to a CRM as in the former the bride would belong to the same caste.

Yet, compared to the other caste groups in Barampur, I found the largest number of CRBs among the Chamars (and hence a fewer proportion of bachelors as compared to Jats).[9] In eastern UP too, Dalits form a large proportion of men bringing brides from West Bengal and its neighbouring states (Kaur 2012). Among the

[9] According to the 2001 Census, the percentage of never married men over 35 years for SCs is almost half (3.25%) of the percentage of never-married men (35 and above) for all other (non-SC) castes, i.e., 6.7% (C-Series Socio-Cultural Tables 2001).

Chamars, the first CRB arrived in the early 1970s and brides have been coming in ever since, with the most recent bride arriving just a few days before I started fieldwork in September 2012. With the exception of three men, the remaining 19 who had CRMs were all brick-kiln workers. For many of the men who brought CRBs, factors such as a previous marriage, older age, physical disability, illiteracy, a 'flawed' reputation (due to gambling, drinking alcohol, consuming drugs) in addition to brick-kiln work had placed them at the bottom of the hierarchy of eligibility and accounted for their inability to get married within the local region. Such men by managing to get married had succeeded vis-à-vis other Chamar men who remained never-married. Yet, in failing to negotiate a 'good' marriage (within the caste and region with a dowry), they fell short of realising the standards of hegemonic masculinity as had Chamar men who had an ideal marriage (*nirol).*

Like the Jats, Chamar informants explained CRM in terms of *majbūrī* [compulsion]. Ratanpal (early 70s, Male), for instance, brought a CRB when he was over 50 years of age. "*Do rotī ke liye*" [for two cooked meals], he told me. Until then, he lived with his parents and worked in the brick-kiln with one of his married brothers. After their parents died, his relationship with his brothers was strained and they were unwilling to accommodate him in their households. The CRB he brought 'ran away' a few months later and Ratanpal was living alone during my fieldwork, ill and dependent on his neighbours for food. His case points to the necessity of marriage not just because solo-living is unworkable for a brick-kiln worker but also because marriage ensures the provision of care and that 'womanly' tasks (such as cooking) would not have to be done by men.

5.9 Bachelor Men, Marginalised Masculinities?

I have shown that bachelorhood was not uncommon in the past; yet during my fieldwork Chamar and Jat informants stressed that non-marriage for men has different implications in the contemporary context. Some recent studies have focused on the possible consequences of a male surplus. For India, for instance, South et al. (2014) postulate that an abundance of males would increase the likelihood of theft, assault and harassment of women in public spaces. But in Barampur, informants' narratives emphasized young men's deviant behaviour to be a consequence of their unemployed status and *non-marriageability* and *not necessarily their demographic* surplus.

Informants pointed out how young Jat men spent their days "hanging around" for hours at the Jat *chaupāl* [courtyard] harassing women as they passed by, an observation I made as well. Young Chamar men, however, could not be seen hanging around at the Chamar *chaupāl*, which was a space where older Chamar men sat playing cards and smoking. The difference between Chamar and Jat men was that while Chamar men worked in brick-kilns or in other kinds of casual work if they failed to find salaried employment in the government or private sector, Jat young men were "*khālī*" [free]. Jeffrey (2010) noted that some unemployed Jat men regarded harassing Dalit women as an especially good means of "timepass". In Barampur, Jat men

harassed women of other castes, a privilege available to them due to their dominant caste status, something that Dalit men could not do. They also harassed young Jat women who travelled to schools and colleges to study. What we see enacted are male privileges mediated through various hierarchies of generation, caste, class and gender. Some young Jat unmarried women told me that it was common for groups of young men to board buses from the village to the nearby town and grope women on the bus. Informants often remarked, "*māhaul kharāb hai*" [the environment is bad] and expressed concerns about their daughters' safety that have had implications for young women's mobility in public spaces. Sakeena (43, Teli Muslim, Female), for instance, discussed how this had led her to withdraw her daughters from school after class five. "Jat girls are getting educated but the daughters of the poor like us cannot. Jat men can take our daughters from school if they want to and our men can do nothing as even the police is owned by the Jats".

While sexual exploitation of women by men in positions of dominance is not 'new', informants suggested that there was something different about the present generation of young men. Rampal (87, Jat, Male) stressed: "Even earlier men were unmarried, but they never acted this way". He pointed out that bachelor men of earlier generations were not "*khālī*" like the "young men of today". What has also changed is that young women are pursuing higher education and becoming increasingly visible in public spaces.

As masculinities are "defined and redefined in social interaction" (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, p. 3) with the relationship among men in all male spaces being central to the enactment of masculinities (cf. Chopra 2004), such harassment could be read as a response to ideas of "natural claims to space", that is, public space as male space (cf. Srivastava 2012). Connell (1995) considers that men who harass women are unlikely to think of themselves as "deviant". On the contrary, they usually feel that what they are doing is entirely legitimate—"they are exercising a right" (p. 83) and in the process displaying masculinity.

Informants also pointed to the excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs among young Jat men. Ajay (24, Chamar, Male) told me that a few young Chamar men had also acquired "bad habits" (referring to drug consumption) and this, in addition to brick-kiln work, made it unlikely that they would be able to marry. I observed young Jat men always well dressed and with consumer goods – mobile phones, motorbikes – despite being unemployed and wondered how they managed to meet their expenses. Amarpal (65, Jat, Male) talked about an increase in incidents of theft and the loss of parental authority: "They fight with their parents and even threaten them and take money forcefully from them. There is no respect left. They steal money from family members so that they can buy drugs". It is important to stress that not all unemployed unmarried men were engaging in such behaviour. Yet, the dominant narrative focused only on the unmarried. This stemmed from the assumption that marriage has a civilising influence on men even though I observed that some married men also "hung around" in public spaces, harassed women and were rumoured to consume drugs.

Roy (2007) writes that masculinity is "fragile" and the fear of failure to meet desired norms underlies a high level of "masculine anxiety". Rogers (2008) in his

study of Dalit young men on a college campus explains the performance of hyper-masculinity through sexual harassment of women and engagement in "deviant" forms of leisure as a reaction "to the devaluing of their social status", that is, their subordination within higher education and the "white-collar employment market" (pp. 79, 86, 91). In Barampur, were men engaging in the above behaviour to assert masculinity? If so, these practices seemed to be counter-productive; if these men were trying to compensate for failing to conform to valued masculine norms, by engaging in such behaviour they were placed even further away from being eligible and marriageable and hence from hegemonic masculinity.

Informants expressed concerns regarding the consequences of unfulfilled sexual needs of unmarried men. Kavita (41, Jat, Female) remarked that bachelors in the past "had control and *sehanshaktī* [willpower] while the men of today think about sex all the time". She attributed this to pornographic images that they accessed through mobile phones. Respondents, often in a disapproving tone, talked about young Jat men having sexual relations with in-married women of the household/extended family. It was not clear why this was a matter of concern, as this seemed similar to, though not 'sanctioned' in the same way, the practice in the past when the never-married had sexual access to in-married women of household (see Sect. 5.5). Informants narrated accounts of young men "catching hold of women in the fields" as well as visiting nearby villages and paying for sex. I also heard accounts of older Jat men (married and bachelors) having sexual relations with women who worked as casual labourers on their fields or paying for sex. Some of this current alarm thus seemed unfounded.

There were also rumours of young Jat men having sexual relations with other men. Studies show that in rural north India, homosexuality is not considered "odd" or "unnatural" yet it is considered "temporary" (Chowdhry 2011, p. 249), a phase that men are expected to outgrow as they transition to adult heterosexual marriage. Interestingly, it was not only the unmarried who were engaging in such behaviour, yet in conversations informants always implied that this was not/could not be because of homoerotic desire but was due to heterosexual frustration. It is essential to state that the aforementioned may have to do with the aggressive patriarchal culture of this rural context (of which the sex ratio imbalance is one outcome), youth culture and/or a backlash to women's mobility. What the dominant narrative in the village on young unmarried, unemployed men offers is not sufficient evidence in itself to establish a definitive relationship between sex ratio imbalance, bachelorhood and male violence.

5.10 Conclusion

In addressing why, the difficulties experienced by men in getting married is understood as a situation particular to the contemporary context, I argue that demographic factors alone cannot provide an explanation, and marriageability must be linked to wider changes in the political economy. Men are not all in the same position either with respect to their need to marry or the obstacles they face in getting married. The

challenges that men face are differentiated by caste, class and individual characteristics – "various physical deformities" or "blemishes of individual character" (e.g. 'flawed' reputation). On account of such characteristics, men bear a "stigma" – "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (Goffman 1963, p. 3–4) and hence fail to be marriageable.

Men and their families adopt different strategies in response to the difficulties confronting them. The Jats prefer bachelorhood over CRM. Among the Chamars, men were differentiated not only in terms of their need or ability to marry but also by their readiness to have a lesser marriage. A marriage for sex, reproduction and labour, a marriage so that 'womanly' tasks will not have to be performed by men, was a defining component of successful masculinity. Yet, what is also crucial in constructing masculinities is not only marriage but a *good* marriage that placed men in relationships of hegemony, subordination and marginalisation to one another. While some men found ways to marry despite the challenges they faced, this should not divert attention from recognising pronounced son preference and daughter aversion with the continuation of sex selection as well as of a sex ratio imbalance in this part of north India.

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Chapter 6
The Sex Ratio Question and the Unfolding of a Moral Panic? Notions of Power, Choice and Self in Mate Selection Among Women and Men in Higher Education in China

Lisa Eklund

6.1 Introduction

Ever since the first census of 1953,[1] China has had a shortage of women, with the overall sex ratio fluctuating between 107.6 in 1953 and 105.2 in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics 2012). A male marriage squeeze has therefore since long been a reality, especially given the universal marriage norm in China (Lee and Wang 1999; Eklund and Attané 2017). Yet, concern over a male marriage squeeze is a relatively recent topic in public discourses, policy debates, academic circles and popular culture alike. The male marriage squeeze has been framed as highly problematic, associated with a wide range of alarmist scenarios as outlined in the introduction to this edited collection. Staying unmarried is constructed as something pitiful and a source of social exclusion, and unmarried men are often referred in pejorative terms as "bare branches" (Jiang and Sanchez-Barricarte 2012, 2013).

To date, studies investigating the consequences of a demographic shortage of women have largely focused on the marriage squeeze among men in their late 20s and above, showing that men who have not been able to marry mostly belong to the rural, low-income and low-educated segment of society (Li et al. 2010; Attané et al. 2013; Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2013; Jin et al. 2013). However, the risk of being unable to marry is not a cause of concern only for rural men. Research has found that the combination of hypergamous marriage norms (women marrying men of higher socioeconomic status) and the scarcity of women has resulted in also urban families investing heavily in the assets of sons, most notably in housing (Wei and Zhang 2011) in order to avoid the risk of "leftover sons". This suggests that the

[1] Given the history of female infanticide and excess female mortality there has also been a female shortage historically in China (see Lee et al. 1994).

L. Eklund (✉)
Department of Sociology, Lund University, Lund, Sweden
e-mail: lisa.eklund@soc.lu.se

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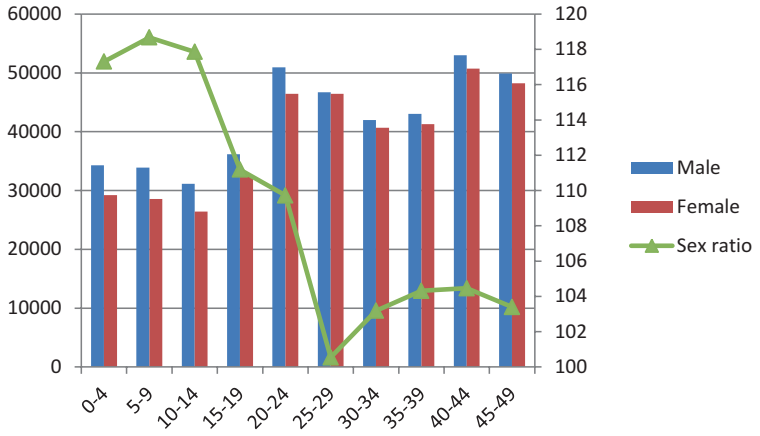

Fig. 6.1 Sex ratio and number of males and females by age cohorts 0–49, year 2013, China (China Statistical Yearbook 2014)

sex ratio question has become part of a risk society, to borrow a term by Beck (1992), and involuntary singlehood a new social risk. Yet, social risk often has moral underpinnings; revealing concerns about cherished ways of life being threatened (Garland 2008), as is the case for those being subject to a marriage squeeze.

As evident from Fig. 6.1, for young adults entering marriageable age the male marriage squeeze is projected to intensify. The sex ratio of those aged 20–24 is not only significantly higher (at 110) than older cohorts, but the age cohort 15–19 is also substantially smaller. Diminishing sizes of age cohorts further exacerbates male marriage squeeze, given that older men tend to marry younger women (Guilmoto 2012).

The risk of being unable to marry also concerns women, despite their numeric shortage. The term "leftover women" was coined about a decade ago to denote women aged 27 and above and who have "failed" to marry (To 2013; Gaetano 2014; Li 2014). This new development has been interpreted as a reaction of the government and state-controlled actors – such as media – to affirm moral boundaries, whereby rejecting marriage or failing to marry is seen as deviant (Hong Fincher 2014, Li 2014). Hong Fincher (2014) suggests that preventing women from not marrying or marrying late through the stigma associated with being a leftover woman is a strategy to increase the supply of brides for the increasingly large group of surplus men. In fact, she shows how the leftover media discourse was first initiated by the All-China Women's Federation.

Despite belonging to the age group with the most surplus of males, young adults (18–25) have been largely absent in previous research on consequences of high sex ratios in China, and no studies have zoomed in on those in higher education. Moreover, little effort has been made to offer an integrated understanding of how a shortage of women affects both women and men. With the purpose of contributing to filling these gaps, this study will focus on young women and men in higher education.

More specifically, it attempts to investigate what implications sex ratio imbalance, here referred to as "the sex ratio question", has for mate selection strategies and practices. Do young women experience more choice due to their shortage? Are men in higher education "immune" to the risk of a marriage squeeze? How is risk of being subject to a marriage squeeze constructed and averted? In order to avoid demographic determinism, which assumes that sex ratio imbalance automatically generates a marriage squeeze (Jeffery 2014), the chapter will further explore the social embeddedness of mate selection strategies, and how the sex ratio question interacts with other factors implicating choice. In order to do so, the chapter will theoretically draw upon concepts of power, choice and self. Adopting a qualitative approach, the chapter privileges the point of view of young adults to focus on mate selection processes unfolding among peers, between young lovers, and in relation to young adults' family members. The structure of the chapter is as follows: Sect. 6.2 outlines the theoretical perspectives guiding the analysis. Methods and material are accounted for in Sect. 6.3. Sections 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7 present the main findings which emerge from the empirical data, namely the themes of universality of marriage; fear of being leftover; factors limiting choice; and strategies to avert risk of involuntary singlehood. Section 6.8 offers conclusions and directions for future studies.

6.2 Theorizing the Sex Ratio Question and Mate Selection

Although easily criticized for demographic determinism, one of the most influential scholarly work that attempts to merge insights from demography and sociology with regards to understanding consequences of sex ratio imbalance on mate selection is the book *Too many women? – The Sex Ratio Question* by Guttentag and Secord (1983). They suggested that sex ratio adds ***one*** power dimension between women and men; those in short supply have more dyadic power due to the awareness that there are alternative relationships available. Hence, in high sex ratio societies, women have more choice in terms of mate selection. Yet, women would be highly valued for their feminine roles; "single women for their beauty and glamour and married women for their roles as wives and mothers" (1983, p. 19). Consequently, women and men would adopt complementary roles; women as homemakers and mothers, and men as breadwinners. Relatedly, Guttentag and Secord foresaw that women would gain social mobility mostly through marriage in high sex ratio societies. They explained the intensification of hypergamy through the interaction between dyadic power, where scarce women have the upper hand, and structural power, possessed by men holding key positions in society. They further postulated that due to men holding structural power they would organise to influence social norms endorsing monogamy and stability in relationships, devaluating promiscuity for women and raising the psychological cost of other relationships. Indeed, cross-national data reveals that in high sex ratio societies, marriage rates tend to be higher and divorce rates lower (South and Trent 1988).

6.2.1 Conceptualising Choice

In order to allow for a deeper understanding of how the sex ratio question may impact mate selection beyond the dyadic power approach, this chapter calls for a sociological conceptualisation of choice. It draws inspiration from Eva Illouz's (2012) concepts of *ecology of choice* and *architecture of choice*. Ecology of choice refers to the broader social environment in which choices are made, which in one way or the other regulates choice, such as explicit rules and regulations, as well as policies and more implicit outcomes of certain social dynamics and processes. Importantly, sociological studies have pointed out that marriage squeezes have to be understood not only in terms of numeric imbalances between the sexes, but also in relation to how marriage is constructed as a social, political and economic institution (Eklund 2013; Jeffery 2014). Yet, the sex ratio question shapes the ecology of choice in two ways; demographically, it points at the actual risk of failing to find a spouse for the sex in high supply. Discursively, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, it holds the potential of exaggerating the actual risk of being subject to a marriage squeeze by intensifying the norm of hypergamy. Architecture of choice refers to "mechanisms that are internal to the subject" (Illouz 2012, p. 20) and differs depending on an individual's notions of self. Of importance here is to what extent the individual is placed at the centre of identity making, how decisions are made and prioritised, and to what extent importance is placed on individual interests and wellbeing vis-à-vis those of the family, community or other groups. As such, the architecture of choice framework goes beyond the dyadic power perspective, which concerns relations between women and men, ignoring notions of self. The architecture of choice concerns both the criteria an individual uses to evaluate a potential partner and the modes of consultation deployed to make a choice. This opens up for a frame in which modes of consultation do not only concern the individual's interests and desires, but also the value the individual and her/his family can gain from a particular choice, with implications for intergenerational relations. It also concerns aversion of risk and anticipation of regret, as captured in the concept of remote consequences of choice (Illouz 2012). In line with the dyadic power perspective, in high sex ratio societies women would potentially be more concerned about criteria and prone to considering questions such as "Is he the one, or will I find a better partner?", and men more concerned with questions such as "If I don't pursue this relationship, maybe there will be no second chance?" However, to what extent these questions guide decisions concerning mate selection depends on different notions of self.

6.2.2 Conceptualising Self

To further understand how notions of self shape architecture of choice, inspired by the work of Liu Fengshu (2011) this chapter differentiates between the *utilitarian self* and the *expressive self*. This differentiation builds on the work of Buchmann and

Eisner (1997), who in their study of the West identified an expressive revolution, which represents a shift away from the utilitarian self, focusing on sense and rationality, to the expressive self, focusing on sensibility, desire and the self at the centre of identity making. In terms of mate selection, the expressive self is associated with love, desire, emotions and companionship, which according to Giddens (1992) is typical for individualisation processes, while the utilitarian self emphasises concerns over social mobility. The emergence of the expressive self has been well documented in China. For example, Lisa Rofel (2007) defined the emergence of the desiring self as the most pertinent feature of individualisation in post-Mao China, especially among youth. Similarly, Yan Yunxiang found that "greater control of the individual over her or his life, the centrality of companionate marriage and conjugal relationships, and an emphasis on personal well-being and affective ties" (Yan 2010: 1) is typical for the emergent desiring self in individualising China. Yet, Liu (2011) argues that – different from the West, where expressive self emerged at the expense of utilitarian self – China is witnessing a dual individualisation process where both the utilitarian self and the expressive self seem to be developing simultaneously. Assuming that a process of dual individualisation is unfolding, in terms of mate selection, this means that the criteria used to evaluate a partner are shaped both from the perspective of utility and rationality (utilitarian self), and from the perspective of desire and love (expressive self).

6.3 Methods and Material

In order to understand how individuals relate and respond to the sex ratio question this study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is useful for discerning how individuals perceive their reality, how they create meaning and navigate through everyday life (Kvale 2007). In order to be able to explore in-depth how individuals relate and respond to the sex ratio question the study generated empirical data through semi-structured interviews. The study further adopted a case study strategy, where one clearly defined group was under scrutiny (Creswell 2009), in this case young adults enrolled in higher education. The sex ratio of the university in which the informants were enrolled is not publically available, but according to informal sources the sex ratio for all students was 127 at the time of the study, with the following breakdown: Bachelor students: 130, Master students: 111, PhD students: 151.

The study applied a maximum variation sampling, which serves to select informants representing a "wide range of variation on dimensions of interest" (Patton 1990, p. 182). Dimensions deemed relevant for this study included age, sex, place of origin, socioeconomic background, family structure, sexual orientation and different mate selection experiences. In order to maximise variation within the case, the sampling occurred in two phases. In the first phase, the sample was drawn from an introduction course in sociology, open to all Bachelor and Master students at campus regardless of disciplinary background. During one of the classes I introduced my research project and asked interested students to get in touch with me

through social media (We Chat). About 15 of the informants were recruited this way. In the second phase, I applied snowball sampling by asking the first phase informants to introduce me to students with characteristics underrepresented in the first sample, most notably on sexual orientation, rural origin and marital status.

In all, 25 young adults – 12 men and 13 women – were interviewed during February–March 2014. They were all students at one of the most prestigious universities in Beijing, majoring in different disciplines. All informants belong to the post-1990-generation, and the youngest informants were 19 years old at the time of the interview and the oldest were 24. One man was married and had a child, the rest were either single or in a relationship. Most of the informants came from urban areas of 15 different provinces. Five informants originated from rural areas.

The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the informants, and later transcribed by a student at Lund University. The interviews were coded by me in the software NVivo according to the methodology set out by Saldaña (2013), calling for systematic coding of qualitative material. As the coding proceeded, new key words and concepts appeared which made me recode some of the interviews. The coding eventually led to the identification of certain categories which were merged into themes. In addition, analytical memos were taken, commenting on the coding, categories and themes that appeared. Inspired by an inductive approach to theory (Creswell 2009), the concepts used in the analysis were identified based on the themes which emerged from the data analysis. In order to ensure anonymity, actual names of informants are not used in this chapter.

6.4 The Universality of Marriage?

Previous literature has established that marriage is close to a universal practice in China (Davis and Friedman 2014). By 2011, 5.2% of men aged 35–39, and only 1.4% of women the same age group were unmarried (Eklund 2016b). In 2010, the mean age at first marriage in urban areas was 26.2 years for men and 24.4 years for women, and about 18 months younger for women and men in rural China (Lu and Wang 2014, p. 40–41).

Reflecting these statistics, at the level of architecture of choice, marriage was a key goal for all but two of the 25 informants. Typically, it was associated with "happiness", "stability", "settling down", "security", "have someone to rely on", "avoidance of loneliness", "insurance against breaking up", "having children", "growing up" and "adulthood". Motives for desiring marriage also had ideological underpinnings which are gendered. For men, marriage was associated with a sense of responsibility and a sense of direction in life. For women, marriage was something "natural", and associated with removing responsibility from their parents, as expressed in the following quotes: "If I'm married, they [the parents] will feel that there is someone who has responsibility to look after me, and then they would feel relaxed", and "if I stay unmarried, then they [the parents] will still think I am a little girl." Those quotes reflect a sentiment that women are not fully independent indi-

viduals, but need either their parents or a husband to protect and support them. Yet, two women rejected the idea of marriage (see further Eklund 2016a). These women regarded marriage as a commitment for life, something they were not prepared to enter as it would involve giving up their freedom. Ruixiang, aged 22, who was in a relationship with an older man, explained how she thought living together with the same person a whole life is "very scary". Similarly, Wenhui, a single woman aged 22, expressed that forming a family would entail loss of freedom:

> If you get married, you choose to become a partner with someone, and then you have to shoulder his whole social network, the social relations with his family, his friends and his colleagues. So you don't get married with only him, but you get married to his entire social network.

Women like Ruixiang and Wenhui, are part of an increasing group of urban, well-educated, heterosexual women who reject marriage. Although they do not seem worried about being labelled leftover women, they are the target of the leftover women discourse that has been critiqued for instigating a moral panic "toward the increasing liberation of highly educated professional women from the domestic sphere" (Li 2014: 7), whereby women who reject marriage are constructed as "folk devils",[2] and women who fail to marry are depicted as deviant. Interestingly, none of the male informants rejected marriage. This might suggest that the shortage of women has created a competition amongst men, whereby being an unmarried man becomes associated with lack of status. It may also indicate that marriage often entails a patriarchal privilege for men which they do not wish to give up. Even for the five informants who identified themselves as bi- or homosexual, heterosexual marriage was a goal. For them, marriage is a prerequisite for meeting the filial obligation of passing on the family line and to have children. This suggests that intergenerational relations are important for shaping the architecture of choice, even if it is at the expense of their own sexual identity. When asked if the sex ratio question opens up renegotiating intimate relationships for men, Xuedong, a singleton 22-year-old male informant, who came from a very well-off, urban, and well-educated family, explained:

> To have an intimate relationship with a boy is too strange for our parents, so it can only be underground (…) I believe that I will just marry a girl and have a normal life. I'm capable for that, so it's not necessary for me to bring so much trouble to my parents. (…) I will still keep straight to my parents. I really don't want them to be mad. I think it's too cruel. Both of the two sides have no fault but they both get hurt and no one gets any benefit from it [same-sex partnership].

As the quote suggests, Xuedong suppressed his expressive self in terms of sexuality and prioritised the interests and wellbeing of his parents. Not marrying was therefore not considered a choice, and choice was confined to heterosexual marriage. Except in two cases, there was consensus that not marrying was "abnormal" and "unnatural". This is not surprising given that same-sex marriage is not recognized

[2] In the moral panic literature, the hostility towards 'folk devils' are one aspect which characterises a moral panic (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994), although Ungar (2001) notes that not all moral panics have clearly identifiable folk devils.

by law in China and having children is confined to marriage (Eklund 2013), which reflects that heterosexual marriage is part of a hegemonic social and moral order (Davis and Friedman 2014).

At the level of ecology of choice, previous research has found that the near universal practice of marriage can be partly explained by policies related to work, family and care arrangements, which reflect a gender ideology reinforcing marriage as a livelihood strategy deployed in the absence of welfare protection and equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market (Eklund 2016b). In particular women benefit from a glass floor where hypergamy provides for upward social mobility and an insurance against poverty (Fong 2002). When discussing the issue of divorce, one female informant expressed that, "divorce is as scary as unemployment". Moreover, lack of social welfare in combination with a generation of singleton children has created closer inter-dependence between generations (Jun and Sun 2014). In my study, all but six informants were single children, and low fertility partly reinforces marriage, as the single children of today's China do not have siblings to share the responsibility of passing on the family line (Eklund 2013, 2016b).

6.5 Fear of Being Leftover: Constructing and Debunking Risk

According to the dyadic power perspective, which posits that hypergamy becomes intensified in high sex ratio societies, the actual risk of becoming subject to a marriage squeeze is small for men with higher education. The small risk is also empirically supported by data, which show that men with higher education continue to marry beyond their 30s (Yong and Wang 2014). Yet, it was clear from the interviews that being a man with higher education does not constitute immunity to the risk of being leftover. For sure, some young men reasoned that "it won't happen to me", and that they still had many years ahead before they would start worrying about becoming a "bare branch". Still, several students expressed that they found it hard to find a partner, and that they feared being leftover, and this probably has intensified over the years as marriage squeeze has become a hot topic.

According to informants, the risk of a marriage squeeze was largely constructed through media. It was also reinforced through activities such as the "Bare branches day", celebrated on 11 November every year. The celebration started as an initiative by some unmarried men and has now spread across the country and the day is frequently a theme in media and is used for commercial purposes to boost sales (Tatlow 2013). As explained by Bomei, an urban, 21-year-old female student who had a boyfriend since high school, it is also celebrated on campus:

> I know that some boys will play guitar for the beloved ones. Even if the girls don't like them, they will play guitars, write poems, and shout out the poems for them, and they will sing love songs at night at campus. (…) Last Bare branches day there were some boys under my dormitory singing some bachelor's love songs.

Activities such as the Bare branches Day contribute to generating a sense that being unmarried is a cause of concern. They also sustain and reproduce the idea that failing to marry is problematic and being leftover is deviant. Hence, they spark anxiety by popularising the notion of risk of involuntary singlehood into the everyday lives of young adults. However, for the young men interviewed, the risk of being leftover was mostly understood as being grounded in lack of resources, status and wealth – particularly in relation to housing – and, relatedly, the practice of hypergamy. This implies that men are not prepared to "marry down" ad infinitum.

Hypergamy was understood as being amplified by the scarcity of women, who were ascribed more dyadic power in mate selection, as also suggested by the literature (Guttentag and Secord 1983; Yan 2009). This sentiment also prevailed among some male informants. Guoda, a 24-year-old man who had had several girlfriends, but was single at the time of the study, explained:

> In China because of the birth control policies there are too few women, and too many men. Women then become like goods on the market, you could say that it has shifted from a buyer's market to a seller's market. Since women are few they have the advantage of choice. Before there used to be maybe one guy pursuing one girl, now there can be two or three. Then women of course will turn into short supply. A resource in short supply will of course be valued higher, and will have the right to choose.

Hence, contrary to what previous studies suggest, it is not just men of lower socio-economic status who fear being subject to a marriage squeeze.

6.5.1 The Utilitarian Woman?

Popular culture repeatedly conveys the message that men are at risk of failing to marry because of women being utilitarian and rational in their mate selection strategies, always looking for a husband of higher socio-economic status (Li 2014). An example of the "utilitarian woman" often discussed in the interviews was from a popular match-making TV-show called "If you are the one", where a woman stated "I'd rather cry in a BMW than laugh at the back of a bike". The link between the risk of involuntary bachelorhood and hypergamy is also emphasised by the match-making industry and media, which frequently report that women are uninterested in marrying men with lower economic status (Hong Fincher 2014; Li 2014). Indeed, for the men interviewed, risk as perceived by the informants was strongly underpinned by the idea of the utilitarian woman as a "gold digger". Among several male informants there was a sense that the utilitarian self had grown stronger among women, and that "women these days" focus too much on money and status in mate selection. The idea of the emerging utilitarian woman has also led to debates on campus. One male informant even had as homework for one of his classes to interview people on campus about "why young women in today's China are so preoccupied with money and material wellbeing". Just like the celebration of the Bare Branches Day, activities like this contribute to anxiety of being leftover and reinforce the norm of hypergamy at the level of ecology of choice.

Yet, discussing criteria for an ideal husband revealed that aspirations for a hypergamous marriage were not necessarily rooted in the utilitarian self, seeking social mobility through marriage. Rather it related to a gendered family ideology based on complementarity, as also found by Liu (2014). This complementarity is underpinned by an essentialist understanding of what a woman versus a man is, and what her or his roles and functions are. In order to be considered an ideal wife, women typically thought they had to be "loving", "kind" and "understanding", responsible for creating a nice home, educating children, and for providing emotional support for the husband. An ideal husband was seen as endowed with "ability", "potential", and "responsibility", and would ideally be older and have a good job. Although the construction of the able, potential and responsible husband may appear as being in line with the idea of the utilitarian woman, none of the female informants were explicit in their quest for a hypergamous marriage in a purely utilitarian sense. Rather, to be able to express her femininity as loving and caring, the ideal wife needed a husband with wealth and status in order to create the material wellbeing, enabling her to express her feminine self. This suggests that the ecology of choice is not only marked by hypergamy prompted by the utilitarian woman, capitalising on her scarcity, but also by an essentialistic gender ideology that drives hypergamy for expressive self reasons.

Indeed, among the women interviewed, the utilitarian woman for social mobility purposes was hard to detect. For example, the criterion of men being able to offer housing in order to be considered a suitable match (see Hong Fincher 2014; Fong 2002) was not universally shared by female informants and some even thought it would be beneficial if the husband did not have a flat, as explained by Bomei:

> I think that even if he's poor, we can together make money and strive for a better future (…) Even though we may not have a very good material life, we will have quality of life, and we will both enjoy the process. Being with a rich man that you don't like is kind of monotonous and you kind of suppress yourself. Because you want to spend his money, you need to cater to his needs. I don't think that's a good thing. (…) I'd rather strive together with a poor boyfriend that I really love.

Tingting, a 22-year-old, who has had her only love experience with another woman, but who describes herself as bisexual, feels strongly that she wants to get married to a man since she wants children. However, housing is not a criterion for her:

> If he has a flat he may have some psychological advantage and feel that he is in a higher position. (…) If we both pay back the mortgage every month we may have a feeling that this is the result of our joint effort. So I actually am not so keen on the idea that the partner has a flat. For example, if his parents have provided a flat, then his family may feel that "when you got married we gave you more". I rather wish for building my life together with my husband.

There are thus several examples where scarce women do not necessarily capitalise on their ascribed dyadic power. While some women from an expressive self perspective idealise hypergamous marriage to be able to adhere to an essentialistic gender ideology, other women reject hypergamy because they see such gender ideology as harmful. Indeed, such women were concerned about the power relationships within the family and the dyadic power men would gain *after* a hypergamous

marriage had been formed. This presents a very different kind of a utilitarian woman – and indeed a more feminist one – compared to the gold digger portrayed in media (see further Li 2014).

6.5.2 The Expressive Man?

The norm and practice of hypergamy is also a cause of concern for women in higher education (see Liu 2004; Hong Fincher 2014; To 2013; Gaetano 2014), even though statistically women with a higher education are not necessarily at an increased risk of being leftover. In fact, the proportion of single women with a higher education aged 30–34 decreased from 6.1 in 1990 to 4.1 in 2000 (Jones and Gubhaju 2009: 255), and as discussed earlier some women reject marriage willingly. Yet, although sex ratios were high on campus, several women interviewed in this study shared a concern about becoming a leftover woman due to the norm of hypergamy at the level of ecology of choice. This norm implies that men are uninterested in marrying a woman with higher social status. This in turn can be understood from a structural power point of view; given that men hold more structural power, marriage is not as important for social mobility and men can therefore "afford" to let expressive self guide choice. Assuming that men are more aligned with their expressive self is supported by Buchmann and Eisner (1997), who suggested that the diffusion of the expressive self would start among men, who would be better positioned to place themselves at the centre of identity making given their structural power. Men preferring marrying down can also be understood as reflecting an essentialist gender ideology, where the "expressive man" wants a woman of lower social status in order to be able to take on the role of the main breadwinner and allow for his masculine self as "able" and "responsible" to be expressed (Eklund 2016b). Yamei, an urban, 21-year-old single woman who fears being leftover, explained:

> The term bare branch is an old one. It means a person who has not found a partner. "Leftover women" is a term, which makes me fearing becoming one. (…) Men seem to like to find a woman who is slightly beneath themselves. But for many women, like PhDs, and those who have good jobs, there are very few men who are even more outstanding and who want to be with them. And after you have done a PhD you are quite old. The older you get the easier it is to become a leftover woman. I think this is a terrible thing.

Hence, different from the risk of remaining single for men, age and ambition were emphasised as risk factors for women. Women who are too strong-minded, well-educated and career-oriented believe they run the risk of being leftover, and there is a sentiment of a "best-before date" for women, suggesting that women are subject to ageism.[3] These are risk factors amplified in the leftover women discourse, and may prompt women to adapt their behaviour. In her study of leftover women,

[3] Eklund (2016b) has documented how the social policy framework in China fuels notions of age hypergamy by institutionalizing that the marriage age for women is lower than for men (20 and 22 years respectively).

Hong Fincher (2014) interviewed one informant who gave up her career in order to make herself more attractive on the marriage market.

However, the ideal of a hypergamous marriage could well reflect the "utilitarian man", concerned with sense and rationality rather than love and desire, choosing a wife of lower social status in order to ensure patriarchal privilege in the family, as exemplified by Xuedong, who, as quoted above wants to marry a woman despite his bisexual identity:

> My father often emphasizes the status of the man in the family. Because of his influence I don't want to marry a woman who is more powerful than me. I want to lead (…) For big matters I would be the decision-maker, for small things I could let go. The man's position in the family should be higher than the woman's.

Interestingly, while the utilitarian woman responsible for increasing the risk of men becoming leftover was a frequent topic in popular and media discourse, the utilitarian man responsible for increasing the risk of women staying single unwillingly was not.

Moreover, the fact that young men in higher education still worry about becoming leftover suggests that the utilitarian self may also guide some men, who have an interest in marrying up, or at least not down. In fact, the ideal of hypergamy was mostly prevalent at the ecology of choice, reflected in popular culture, including TV shows where "relationship experts" explain why hypergamy is necessary. When asked about their personal preferences, at the level of architecture of choice, criteria were neither always strict, nor gendered, as evident also from the characteristics of some of the informants and their partners, where for example the female partner was older than the male partner. In fact, there were several examples among both women and men informants that it would be acceptable or even unimportant if a wife would earn more money than her husband, if the man would be younger or even of lower educational status, as long as affection and companionship was there.

6.5.3 The Complexity of Choice

For several informants the risk of being leftover was understood as stemming from the criteria used to evaluate a potential spouse being too rigid, where both the expressive self and the utilitarian self set the criteria for an ideal spouse. Importantly, the ways in which the expressive self and/or utilitarian self manifest itself contributes to narrowing or broadening the array of choice. For those inclined to be more guided by the utilitarian self *or* the expressive self, choice may be broader. While those who expected both the utilitarian self *and* the expressive self to guide choice would experience a more narrow array of choice, as some suitors simply would not be considered. Feiyi, a female student from rural China aged 21, yet to experience a relationship, denounced the idea that surplus men equalises abundance of choice:

> I think love and marriage are two separate things. If you want a low level marriage, for sure you need love, but if you don't have the material conditions in place, it will be a low level marriage and after the wedding both will have big problems (…) I will bear the pain and break up [with a boyfriend of low social status], I wouldn't be able to do it [get married].

In a similar vein, one male informant who came from an affluent family explained how he would never consider a prospective wife unless she was highly educated and cultivated, no matter how loving, caring and attractive she would be.

Indeed, the notion that women have more dyadic power due to their numeric shortage stems from an understanding that the utilitarian self is at the centre of decisions and priorities in mate selection. In fact, none of the female informants interviewed suggested that a shortage of women translated into more choice, as stated by Feiyi:

> I think there is a lot of choice for marriage, but the choice for love is not plenty (…) There have been many boys courting me, but I've always felt that if I don't like someone why would I agree to him, why would I be with him?

As the quotation implies, the notion that women have more choice due to their scarcity ignores the complex interplay between different criteria of choice shaping mate selection at the level of architecture of choice, where *both* expressive self and utilitarian self are at play. Hence, at the architecture of choice, a more complex picture emerges where both women and men grapple with both utilitarian and expressive self. Moreover, the utilitarian woman can also reject hypergamy, just as the utilitarian man can prefer marrying up for social mobility purposes. Yet, both women and men relate to an ecology of choice marked by hypergamous norms, where women are expected to marry up. This instigates anxiety for men to be "not good enough" and for women to be "too good", fuelling fear of being leftover among both women and men in higher education.

6.6 Limiting Choice

In addition to criteria being too rigid, other aspects limiting choice emerged from the data, namely, parental influence, confined social circles and gendered dating scripts, pointing at the social embeddedness of mate selection strategies.

At the architecture of choice, modes of consultation with regards to what constitutes an ideal spouse also included parents, who play a vital role in mate selection practices, suggesting that intergenerational relations are important for understanding how mate selection strategies are formed and pursued (Eklund 2016b; Huang et al. 2015; Jun and Sun 2014; To 2013). Parents influenced not only if to marry (as discussed above) but also *whom* to marry, especially in the case of daughters, as also noted by Halskov Hansen and Pang (2010). In general, informants from affluent families and from families where the parents had secure public sector jobs with generous social benefits, including old-age pension, were less constrained in terms of mate selection in the sense that their parents did not intervene in the process itself. However, students from less well-off families and rural origins indicated that modes of consultation went well beyond their own concerns regarding love, desire, emotions and companionship. Feiyi, who was quoted above concerning perceptions

of choice and who thinks love and marriage are two separate things, describes how parental expectations are important for shaping decisions about mate selection:

> When I choose a partner, I will use my mother's standards as the main ones. (…) in China, many young women are controlled by their parents when they choose a partner. The family will have expectations on her behalf. Often, young women are more willing to follow the advice of their parents than young men. Young women are more complaisant, more filial than men (…) Parents will think "he has money, he has a car, he has a flat, he has social status, so you should marry him, if you marry him you will be happy". This is the definition of happiness among today's parents in China; first you need to have a material foundation, which works as an insurance.

While wealth and status may not be the key criteria for a young woman about to form a union, her parents may be the ones exerting pressure to marry upwards. This ambition on part of parents can be explained by the view that women are not capable of being fully independent individuals, as discussed above. Feiyi went on to describe how her cousin was forced to end a relationship with a man she truly loved:

> Three years ago she was dating a boyfriend. Back then he did not have any money, and he was also not very good looking. But my cousin is a real beauty. She is tall, 1m78cm and very slim. She is really beautiful and also very virtuous and gentle. She knows how to cook and how to deal with children. So my aunt though that these are also important assets, and therefore she needed to find herself a rich man. Otherwise she would let herself down. [The aunt thought] "imagine, such a precious daughter, and you give her away to hardship, that would not do! For sure she would need to marry a rich man in order to be happy". So my whole family including my mother was against my cousin marrying him… they later broke up and she found herself a new boyfriend.

As the quotation suggests, the expressive woman can be suppressed by her "utilitarian parents", who expect higher utility from their daughter's marriage (See also To 2013).

Another reason young adults are at risk of involuntary singlehood concern the social circle to which young adults belong, and the fact that social circles do not necessarily span across different educational groups. This is particularly true for young adults originating from urban areas, and who seldom encounter other young adults who are not in higher education, or who could not picture marrying a "rural bumpkin" (Fong 2002). This was expressed by Guoda, who as quoted below thinks that surplus men means a "seller's market" for women:

> Regarding educational level I would not encounter anyone who has not gone to university. I don't meet people like that (…) I don't have any friend like that, so I think that naturally I would not meet such people, there is no such chance.

Hence, national or local sex ratios aside, the actual risk of being unable to marry is also increased due to limited interaction among women and men across social classes. This suggests that there are indeed several "mate selection markets" and consequently several marriage squeezes, as suggested by Jeffrey (2014). The risk of being subject to a marriage squeeze is also augmented though limited interaction within educational groups, as explained by Andong, a man aged 20:

> There are many men with high educational level, like [university] students; they are all high IQ students. It's not a problem. But sometimes [a woman remains single] because she meets too few people. (…) She doesn't have the chance to meet a man with high educational level and high salaries.

Moreover, in principle all students live in dormitories where women and men stay in separate buildings. While women are allowed to enter men's dormitories, men are not allowed to enter women's, except for example carrying heavy luggage. Having difficulties in meeting someone of the opposite sex was also expressed as a concern among those who studied subjects which were dominated by one or the other sex. Long days in school and much time devoted to studying also limits social interaction.

Gendered dating scripts, which denote acceptable behaviour for courting and dating (Uecker and Regnerus 2010) was another factor that prevented women from capitalising their ascribed dyadic power. The informants displayed a wide variety of dating scripts, but there was a tendency for dating scripts to assume that men were to take more initiative (see Farrer 2014 for similar observations). Men were by and large considered to be responsible for paying during dates. Buying gifts for (potential) girlfriends was also frequently mentioned as an important dating practice. Indeed, dating scripts tended to be less permissive of women taking initiative, as suggested by Bomei:

> All my roommates are traditional and conventional. They even don't have a boyfriend, and every time they think of making a boyfriend they feel shy. Even though they find someone they like, they are shy to express themselves, and they will feel uncomfortable to contact the boy they love.

Moreover, it may well be that a young woman fancies a boy but she will not approach him for fear of being turned down or perceived as not prudent. Yamei, who fears being leftover explained:

> Girls are more shy and boys are a little more forthcoming. For example, if a girl meets a person she really likes she will think about it for a long time, like "does this boy have a girlfriend", "will he like me", "if I tell him, will our relationship change afterwards". She will think a lot, and then time goes on and it [the opportunity] will pass. On the other hand, if a boy likes a girl he will consider if he wants to talk to he or not, and then he will do it.

However, there were also accounts of situations where women had been active and defying norms of being reserved, as explained by Feiyi, who at first did not approve of her brother's fiancé, who was considered too forthcoming: "She [the girlfriend] was the one who courted my brother, and we [my mother and I] thought how can a girl behave like that? So not respectable!" The sex ratio question also affected dating scripts in one respect, namely male suitors' ideas about commitment. In Guoda's experience, women can enter and exit relationships due to the idea of a seller's market. This notion of "surplus men" can also be used as a justification for breaking up on part of men, as there is a sentiment that women can use their dyadic power to easily enter another relationship. The example is indicative of how young men can capitalise on the idea of female dyadic power, but actually undermine it by lessening the notion of commitment. Hence, the existence of surplus men would potentially translate into advantage for women only if accompanying norms and dating scripts would allow for pro-activeness on part of women, and if men's commitment would not get undermined by the idea of surplus, replaceable men.

6.7 Averting Risk

In order to minimise the risk of being leftover, the informants revealed several strategies, including expanding the social circle, marrying early, and "playacting hypergamy". Recognizing that a limited social network may constitute a risk to permanent singlehood, some informants explained how they were open to going on mass dates, a practice which has mushroomed in China in recent years, or having their parents introduce potential partners to them. Moreover, chances for interaction with other young adults of the opposite sex is crucial for mate selection, and out-of-class activities, such as art circles, sports activities and volunteer projects were identified as important arenas for having the chance to interact with a wider circle of potential partners. These findings concur with Laumann (2004), who found that not only parents are stakeholders in widening the social network, but also teachers and university administrators have an important task.

Another way of averting risk pertained to timing. In fact, most informants had a clear idea that marrying early is important. This signifies a sentiment to have it "all settled" before reaching the critical years of being leftover. Andong, who plans to study abroad, told how he plans to marry his girlfriend once he turns 22:

> I want to let it [the relationship] settle down. And maybe because we are so far away, I'm in the US and she's in China. Maybe this relation of marriage may consolidate our relationship and we don't break up. It's a kind of insurance.

He further explained that timing of marriage is informed by a notion that expectations on wealth and status are lower for a younger man:

> We are so young and we a have chance to earn money from 20 to 30. But if you are older than 30, then you have to form a family soon, and if you don't have money, you probably don't have a chance to find a girlfriend.

The reduced demands on young men in terms of wealth was also implied by Yamei, who fears becoming leftover, and who explained that demands for the man's family to provide housing would be lower for a younger couple:

> [Housing] is not important because we can rent a house; house is really expensive in China. If we get married when we are young, we don't have that much money, unless his family is very rich, so we could just rent a house and make some savings. After ten years when you could afford a house, we buy a house.

The logic of marrying early also applied to women, to avoid the risk of becoming a leftover woman. Yamei explained how marrying at a young age would increase the chances of letting the expressive self guide choice and finding the "perfect match":

> I think that once you end up in that situation [single in the late 20s], you are not so fuzzy with criteria anymore. If you are getting old and still don't have a partner I think you will face reality. But I do hope that I will find the right man at a young age.

Similar sentiments have been found by Liu (2004). It seems that the perceived risk of a marriage squeeze indirectly impacts practices and strategies which favour early marriage, motivated by concerns over remote consequences of choice, and the

notion that it is better to "grab the opportunity". Indeed, the one informant who was married came from a rather less privileged rural background, and could be considered to be more at risk of a marriage squeeze because of it. Aspirations for early marriage are also prompted by hypergamous norms, as the expectations placed on men in terms of having accumulated wealth and status are perceived to be less accentuated in marriages at young ages, which shows that men are also subject to ageism to some extent.

Playacting hypergamy was another strategy used to avert risk and improve the position in the dating market. Several informants talked about how men would conceal their economic status and family background in order not to disappoint and deter a potential girlfriend from pursuing a relationship. This typically involved providing for lavish dating activities and buying expensive gifts, something which fell heavily on male students with a rural and less priviliged background. With the same fear of putting off a male suitor of lower status, some female informants explained how they would hide their family background and not tell their boyfriend of her family wealth. The practice of playacting hypergamy again suggests that the norm of hypergamy dominates at the level of ecology of choice.

6.8 Conclusion

This study has examined how the sex ratio question unfolds at the micro level by focusing on mate selection practices and strategies among university students in a high sex ratio context in urban China. While it is not possible to generalise the findings beyond the current case, the results help deepen the understanding of micro-level processes and help to obtain a theoretically more grounded understanding of the implications (and lack thereof) of high sex ratios.

The study found that both women and men express anxiety over becoming "left-over". However, overall campus sex ratio had little to do with their notions of power and choice in mate selection. Rather, limited social networks and few opportunities to interact with the opposite sex were factors which limited choice. This gives support to the claim by Jeffery (2014) that there are indeed many marriage squeezes, and that local sex ratios bounded by factors such as space, class and age may be of more relevance for individual women and men than macro or indeed meso-level sex ratios, such as university campus. In the current study, the strongest factor instigating fear of being leftover is the notion that the ecology of choice of mate selection in today's China strongly endorses hypergamy. This study concludes that the sex ratio question fuels hypergamy as it tends to ascribes dyadic power to women. The idea about the "utilitarian woman", who gains social mobility through marriage – inflated by media, commercial and campus activities – is to some extent norm-setting, intensifying hypergamy at the level of ecology of choice. Yet, women in higher education also expressed fear of failing to find a husband for the same reasons; because ecology of choice endorses hypergamy, men would be interested in marrying only women of lower social standing. In fact none of the female informants

perceived that they had more choice due to their numeric shortage, challenging the dyadic power perspective, which suggests that women have an advantage in mate selection when sex ratios are high, in the context of young adults in higher education. One reason why women were not able to "capitalise" on their numeric shortage was the existence of gendered dating scripts preventing women from being proactive in courtship. However, the most important reason why high sex ratios did not lead to more choice in mate selection was the growing significance of the expressive self in the archaeology of choice of mate selection, where love and companionship are becoming important criteria. Moreover, not all men expressed that they wanted a wife who was "beneath" them, and hypergamy is not as firmly infused in mate selection norms and practices at the architecture of choice level as it seems to be at the ecology of choice level. In fact, using dyadic power for social mobility through marriage may result in less dyadic power in marriage, and is thus not an appealing strategy for some women. Yet, the idea that (young) women have dyadic power due to their shortage, seems to instigate some parents to urge their daughters to suppress their expressive self and gain more utility through marriage, boosting the "utilitarian woman".

Without suggesting that the male (or female) marriage squeeze is completely fictive, I suggest that a moral panic about being leftover is unfolding among women and men in higher education. Several observations and conclusions drawn from this study support the unfolding of a moral panic as defined by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994): (1) Being "leftover" is a cause of concern which sparks anxiety. (2) There is hostility towards those (women) who reject marriage, as evident from the Leftover woman discourse. (3) There is close to consensus that failing to marry is a problem, even though moralising and judgments may be as much part of a problem as the phenomenon itself (Garland 2008). (4) There is disproportionality; where the actual risk of being leftover is exaggerated through media and the inflation of hypergamous norms at the level of ecology of choice. This moral panic impacts mate selection in two ways: First, it seeks to exercise social control and uphold moral boundaries, similar to moral panics producing a society of law and order (McRobbie and Thornon 1995; Ungar 2001), and thus helps to reinforce the hegemonic status of heterosexual marriage. This intensifies the urgency for women to marry, as found by Hong Fincher (2014), but also for men. It also contributes to hampering alternative subjectivities and lifestyles from emerging, such as same-sex unions. Second, the moral panic makes young adults aware of what Illouz (2012) refers to as remote consequences of choice. This may instigate intentions of early marriage as expectations on young men in terms of wealth and status are lower, and women fear passing the "best-before-date".

I conclude that the unfolding of a moral panic about being leftover is symptomatic of a high sex ratio society organising to influence norms which strengthens the institution of marriage, in order to spur women to enter marriage at an early age, a proposition which is in line with the work of Guttentag and Secord (1983). In order to gain further insights into how high sex ratios implicate mate selection, studies exploring the intersections between sex ratios and age, class, space, gender and sexuality are needed. More qualitative research is also needed to further understand

how – if at all – individuals and families adapt and respond to sex ratio imbalance. However, future research should also be mindful not to further a moral panic around being unmarried by zooming in on only the negative consequences of singlehood and over-ascribing social problems to the sex ratio question.

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Chapter 7
The Impact of Bride Shortage in South India: Vellala Gounders in Western Tamil Nadu

Judith Heyer

7.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the impact of bride shortages emerging in the 2000s and 2010s among Vellala Gounders in villages in western Tamil Nadu. It is important to stress that while bride shortage followed an increase in daughter deficit this was not the only factor responsible. The chapter makes a contribution to the literature by looking at bride shortage in a community with a 'South Indian' kinship system, a key characteristic of which is that relationships between women's marital and natal families are close throughout their lives. The chapter also makes a contribution by looking at bride shortage in a community that was located in a dynamic industrialising local economy into which it had become progressively more integrated by the time bride shortage emerged. One of the important features of the villages' participation in a dynamic industrialising local economy was that there was substantial geographical mobility, but all of it was within relatively short distances from the villages. Also important was the fact that there had been a steady rise in income and wealth associated with increasing inequality over the decades preceding the 2000s and the 2010s. Increased daughter deficit and associated bride shortage have received considerable attention in the literature in the North Indian context (Chaudhry in this volume; Jeffery 2014; Larsen and Kaur 2013). Srinivasan is one of the few to have looked at bride shortage in a South Indian context (2012, 2015, 2017). This chapter complements Srinivasan's work.

The chapter draws on long-term research in villages in Tiruppur district that have been studied in depth (Heyer 2013, 2016a) from the early 1980s when they were predominantly agricultural, to the 2000s and 2010s when they were more integrated

J. Heyer (✉)
Emeritus Fellow, Somerville College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
e-mail: judith.heyer@some.ox.ac.uk

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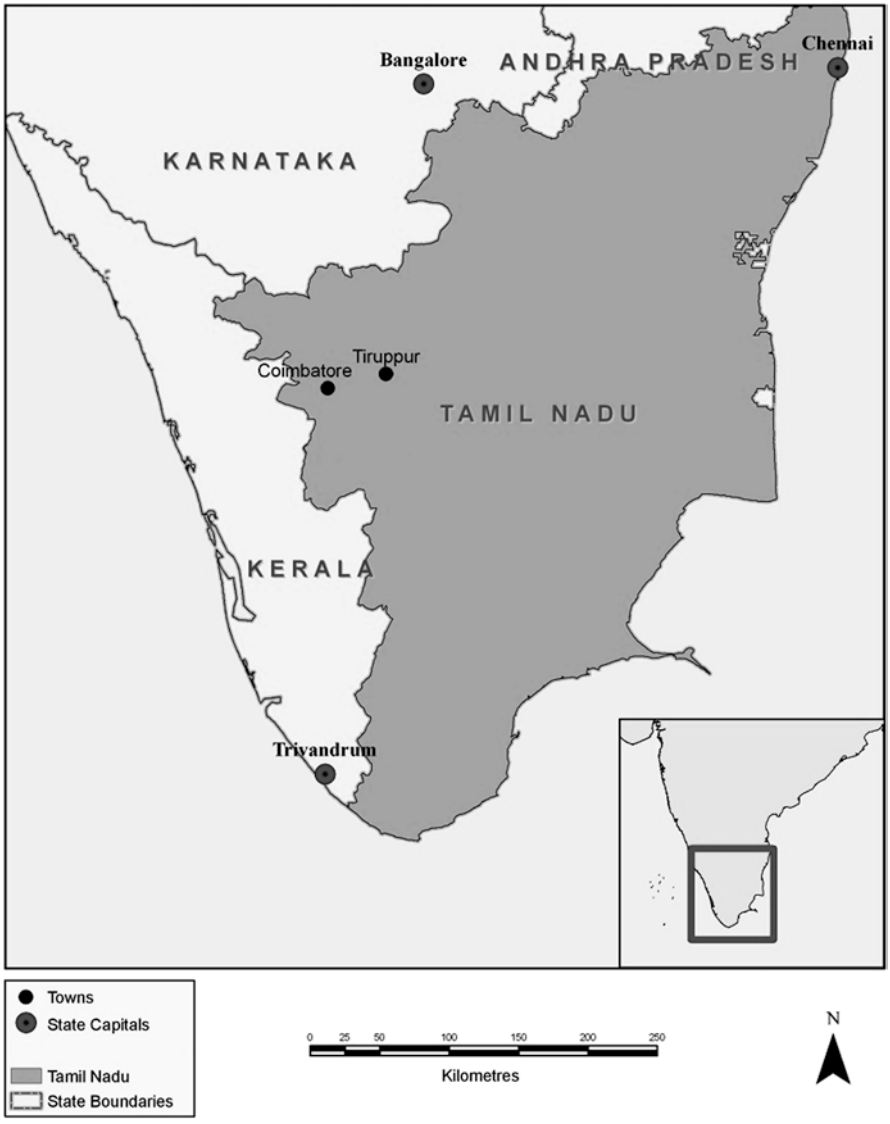

Fig. 7.1 Map depicting the location of research villages (Carswell and De Neve 2014)

into the urban and industrial economy. The villages are 40–60 km north of Coimbatore and 20–25 km northwest of Tiruppur, both substantial industrial centres (Fig. 7.1). Since the late 1980s as roads and bus services have improved the villages have been within commuting distance of both Tiruppur and Coimbatore. The chapter focuses on Vellala Gounders (referred to as Gounders in the rest of the chapter), an OBC[1] group that dominates the study villages as it does the majority of villages in the region.

[1] Other Backward Classes, which is the official designation of intermediate caste groups in India.

The emergence of bride shortage among Gounders in this region at this time was partly the result of the fertility decline that was associated with an increase in sex selection that resulted in an increasingly male sex ratio (Srinivasan 2012, 2015). Also important was the fact that brides' families had become more discriminating in their choice of grooms as the economy developed and the villages became more integrated into the regional economy, and men living in rural areas, particularly those with less education continuing in agriculture, were less preferred. Another factor contributing to bride shortages was that men tended to marry older, and women younger, so the decrease in fertility meant that the cohorts of men looking for brides were larger than the cohorts of women looking for grooms.

The shortage of marriageable women had significant impacts on families. Families with sons for whom it had earlier been easy to find brides now found themselves having to search for brides. The better off families with educated sons, particularly those with sons in non-agricultural occupations, had less difficulty, although even for them it was not easy to find brides, and many had to accept brides of lower status than before. Those who suffered most were poor families with less educated sons, particularly sons continuing in agriculture, many of whom faced the prospect of sons not being able to get married at all. The impact on families with daughters was relatively more favourable. It had become easier to arrange daughters' marriages than it had been earlier, and their marriages often involved bridegrooms from better status families than before. Increased participation in education enhanced the marriage prospects of daughters too. The position of the daughters themselves improved over the period concerned, although it did not improve as much as might have been expected. There was a general improvement in the position of men, but men suffered from a loss of status as a result of many of the changes taking place. Daughter deficit seemed likely to decrease with a decline in son preference as modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation continued, and as the kinship system made it relatively easy to substitute daughters for sons. However, rural men, particularly poor and less educated men, were likely to continue to face difficulty attracting brides.

The chapter is organised as follows. Section 7.2 provides background on the villages and the data. Section 7.3 looks at the development of the shortage of brides and its impact first on families with sons and then on families with daughters between 1981/1982 and the 2000s and 2010s. Section 7.4 looks at the impact on sons, and Sect. 7.5 on daughters. Section 7.6 looks at the likelihood of a decrease in the daughter deficit and bride shortage. Section 7.7 concludes.

7.2 The Villages and the Data

The data come from sample surveys conducted in 1981/1982, 1996 and 2008/2009, supplemented by in-depth interviews in those and in other years in the 2000s and 2010s. In 1981/1982 when the first survey was conducted, the village Gounder community consisted of relatively small and marginal farmers with livestock, and agricultural labourers, living in mixed caste villages. Gounders are generally known

Table 7.1 Occupations of Gounder men and boys in the workforce

Male individual occupations (%)	1981/1982	1996	2008/2009
Agriculture and livestock	66	46	55
Agricultural labourer	16	14	6
Knitwear, mills, workshops, powerlooms	8	26	28
Shops, trade, transport	6	11	9
Construction, borewell mechanic, wood		1	2
Government, coop, electricity, et al.	5	2	1
All	100	100	100
Numbers	154	129	104

for their role in the industrialisation of the region (Mahadevan and Vijayabaskar 2014; Chari 2004; Baker 1984). The Gounder community on which this chapter is based is a rural community in the drier belt of the region that had weak links with urban and industrial areas in 1981/1982 (Heyer 2010). The community became more closely connected to urban and industrial areas in the late 1980s and thereafter (Heyer 2013, 2016a, b).

A 20% random sample of 234 households in seven hamlets in two revenue villages was selected for the 1981/1982 survey, 84 of them Gounders. The sample survey covered basic demographic information, information on marriages and dowries, land ownership and operation and involvement in non-agricultural activities. I conducted selected in-depth interviews aimed at getting more information on questions not covered elsewhere.[2] In 1981/1982, the bulk of the male Gounder work force was engaged in agriculture (Table 7.1). Most of the remainder was engaged in trade and services derivative of agriculture. Small numbers of young men were also working in mills, factories and workshops and a few in white collar jobs outside the villages. Few had more than secondary school education and the majority had much less than this (Table 7.2). Gounders were the most numerous of the landowners in 1981/2 (Table 7.3).[3]

I returned in 1996 with two research assistants (M. Srinivas and Paul Pandian) and Dr. V. Mohanasundaram, to interview members of 1981/1982 sample households and their descendants. Sixty-eight of the original 84 Gounder households were still represented in the villages, in 91 households following subdivision. The research assistants stayed in the villages interviewing members of the households we traced, using a questionnaire covering very similar ground to that covered in

[2] I worked with V. Mohanasundaram, later Dr. V. Mohanasundaram, for most of the interviews. He acted as my interpreter as well as completing some of the 1981/1982 survey on his own using a questionnaire.

[3] There were also Naidu and Chettiar landowners, and Chettiar traders and labourers. The other caste groups represented in large numbers were two Dalit groups, Arunthathiyars and Pannadis. Dalits are ex-untouchables occupying some of the lowest positions in the social hierarchy in India. Arunthathiyars and Pannadis, otherwise known as Pallars or Devendras, are two of the three most numerous Dalit groups in Tamil Nadu. A variety of other caste groups were represented in smaller numbers.

Table 7.2 Education – percentages of Gounder males and females 15 < 25 years

Standard reached	1981/1982		1996		2008/2009	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
0	14	71		2		
I–V	29	24	14	17	3	5
VI–IX	43	5	48	27	24	10
X	7		14	37	13	29
X+	7		24	17	61	57

Table 7.3 Landholding size distributions, Gounder households

Acres	0	> 0 < 2.5	2.5 < 5	5 < 7.5	7.5 < 10	10+	All
1981/1982							
Numbers	12	16	15	18	7	16	84
%	13	19	18	21	8	19	100
1996							
Numbers	9	18	26	20	3	15	91
%	10	20	29	22	3	16	100
2008/20099							
Numbers	12	19	23	10	4	10	78
%	15	24	29	13	5	13	100

1981/1982. I also did additional in-depth interviews. The villages had become much more integrated into the industrial economy by 1996. This is reflected in the occupations of Gounder men and boys (Table 7.1). Large numbers of individuals resident in the villages were commuting up to an hour or more to industrial employment in nearby towns and urban centres. Industrial units were also being set up in the villages and surrounding rural areas. Agriculturalists were suffering from increased costs of labour and water shortages. The economy had become more open, the old agrarian interests had lost some of their power, and the state had been intervening to strengthen the position of the poor on a much larger scale than before (Heyer 2012). Levels of both male and female education had increased substantially (Table 7.2).

In 2008/2009 I returned with two more research assistants (Arul Maran and Gowri Shankar) and we interviewed members of 242 households, 78 of them Gounder, in a new 20% sample in the same hamlets and villages as before. We used a questionnaire that covered similar ground to that covered in the earlier two surveys. I did additional in-depth interviews again. In 2008/2009 industrial and other non-agricultural employment had increased further as substantial numbers employed outside agriculture had outmigrated between 1996 and 2008/2009. This is not the case with the occupations of Gounder men and boys resident in the villages (Table 7.1). Considerably less land was being cultivated in 2008/2009 however and there had been substantial real estate development. Many agriculturalists were still suffering from the increasing cost of labour and from water shortages although they had adapted to some extent to these and moved into crops for which markets were

better than before. They were also suffering from a marked decline in state support, particularly state supported research and extension on which they had relied very heavily earlier. Large numbers of Gounders were now sending their children to college for the first time (Table 7.2).

I returned briefly to do further interviews in 2003, 2004 and every year from 2010 to 2014, focusing on different issues each time. In 2014 I focused on Gounder sex ratios, marriage and inheritance strategies, and the care of the elderly. The strength of the data used in this chapter is that they include a considerable amount of material on the context. The weakness is that data on sex ratios and the ways in which people dealt with bride shortage are less strong. The numbers are too small to get reliable estimates of demographic variables. This problem is exacerbated by the need to distinguish different cohorts for the purpose of identifying changes over time.

7.3 The Impact of Changes on Families with Sons and Families with Daughters

There was a widespread perception of bride shortage in the villages in 2014. In household after household during fieldwork we were met by people telling us that they were worried about finding brides, that they were having difficulty finding brides, that "there was a shortage of girls". Their statements were supported by our finding a number of young men in their late 30s and early 40s who were not yet married in a community in which it had previously been virtually unheard of for young men to remain unmarried beyond the age of 35. The bride shortage that had emerged in the 2000s and 2010s in the study villages was in part a consequence of the fertility decline which culminated in the majority of Gounder couples starting families in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s having only two children each. The decline in fertility combined with strong son preference led increasing numbers to resort to sex selection. This was a community that was known to have practised infanticide earlier (George et al. 1992). It was clear from interviews conducted in 2014 that in these villages they had been practising sex selection in the 1980s and 1990s too. Several of the daughter-only parents whose daughters had been born in the 1980s and 1990s gave accounts of the pressures they were under to go in for sex selection, and the widespread sex selection among fellow Gounders at the time. One of these accounts came from Krishnasamy (male),[4] one of the largest landowners in the sample, who told us in 2014: "15 yrs ago people were doing scans. When my daughters were born, 20–25 yrs ago, people were encouraging me to go for a scan. I refused. Now fewer people are doing scans. Daughters are valued more." Another came from Palaniammal, the wife of a smaller landholder, who told us that when she had three daughters, in the 1980s, she was not happy. She thought of going for

[4] All the names of respondents in this chapter are pseudonyms.

a scan. But she got a horoscope saying that if she had a son her husband would die. As she said, "After that I was satisfied." "Now", she added, "I am happy".[5] Evidence of son preference was strong in 1981/1982. Krishnasamy had had a sister who had drowned herself and her three young daughters in a well in the late 1970s after being harassed by her marital family for not bearing a son. Subramaniam, another relatively large landowner, responded to a 1982 question why he was not pursuing agriculture seriously by saying that with four daughters he was depressed and did not see the point. Furthermore, significant numbers of women had been rejected by their husbands after giving birth to daughters, more indication of the strength of daughter aversion in this community. There was some evidence of the neglect of girl children as well (cf. Heyer 1992).

It is somewhat surprising for there to be such strong son preference in a community with a South Indian kinship system. In the North Indian literature son preference has been attributed at least in part to a kinship system in which women move to their husbands' families upon marriage and have little further contact with their natal families after that (Jeffery 2014). In the Gounder case, women move to their husbands' families upon marriage but care is taken to marry them not too far away as it is expected that they will maintain contact with their natal families throughout their lives. Daughters are expected to return to their natal families before giving birth to their first child and to stay for some time afterwards. They generally return frequently after that, the grandchildren maintaining regular contact with their maternal grandparents. Daughters' maternal uncles play a special role in many of their life-cycle ceremonies, particularly those associated with their maturity, their coming of age. There is also a special day during the harvest festival for daughters and their husbands to visit daughters' natal families. Daughters play strong roles throughout their parents' lives. They are nevertheless subordinated to their husbands and their husbands' families. Their husbands and their husbands' families have priority over their own. Son preference can be understood in a context in which sons were expected to continue to live with their parents, and to manage and work the family land. Daughters and their husbands are seldom a good substitute in this respect.

The bride shortage in the villages was associated not only with an increasingly high sex ratio. It was also associated with the fact that brides' families were becoming more discriminating. Many wanted their daughters to move into households in which men were engaged in non-agricultural occupations and women stayed at home (see Heyer 2014 for the increase in numbers in the villages describing themselves as 'housewives' or 'staying at home'). Alliances with families better placed in relation to the growing non-agricultural economy were now preferred to alliances with rural families. However, there was still strong pressure not to have daughters move too far away.

This was a community in which marriages were as much about relationships between families as about relationships between individuals, where family and kin

[5] Palaniammal also said that having three daughters and no sons had turned out to be an advantage. Having married sons and their families living with them could cause a lot of problems.

were key institutions in the economy and society. In the 1970s and 1980s marriages were regarded as opportunities to make valuable alliances by marrying sons and daughters into families of similar status. These alliances were like networks, through which all sorts of benefits could accrue. They were sources of credit, capital, jobs, business links and partnerships, as well as social relationships. The shortage of marriageable women had a profound impact on all of this. Instead of there being competition to find bridegrooms for daughters, with dowry playing a key role, it had become relatively easy to find good matches for daughters in the 2000s and 2010s. The pressure to give dowries was also less[6] though education had replaced dowries to some extent and this put pressure on daughters' families instead.[7] Families with daughters could now expect to marry their daughters into families of higher status than themselves whereas families with sons could no longer make as good alliances as before, as sons were having to be married into lower status families. For poor families with daughters there were chances to marry up. Poor families with sons often found it difficult to get their sons married at all.

In discussions of household investment strategies in the better-off households in 1981/1982 daughters' marriages featured on a par with investment in agriculture, land, and buildings. Families were concerned to have their daughters well settled in households in which they would be treated well, and with the possibilities of using their daughters' marriages to cement existing or to form new alliances. It was important for the reputations of their families and the subsequent marriages of their sons that they be seen to marry their daughters well. It was daughters' parents that had to seek alliances. They would be the ones that had to approach families with sons of suitable age. This could take time and effort. It was not always easy to find a suitable match for their daughters. Finding the resources to finance dowries was also a major concern.

It was sons' marriages that were regarded as a problem in the 2000s and 2010s. In 1981/1982 sons' marriages hardly featured in discussions of investment strategies. They did not take time to arrange. It was relatively easy to find a suitable bride. In 1981/1982 parents arranging sons' marriages talked of beginning to look for a bride a few months ahead of the marriage, confident that this would be relatively straightforward. The dowry brought by a bride was useful but not much was made of this. In the 2000s and 2010s sons' marriages had become a source of considerable anxiety. Many households in which there were marriageable sons in 2014 were having difficulty finding brides. Sons were getting married later and/or not at all. In many cases sons and their families said that they had been searching for a bride for

[6] Dowries were often paid, after the marriage negotiations had been completed. There was no evidence of any increase in the number of sovereigns involved over the four decades under consideration though, and very few instances of anything other than gold being included in dowries in this case.

[7] Educated brides were valued not because they would engage in paid employment, but because they would be able to contribute to their husbands' activities, business and otherwise. Few women in better-off households were allowed to engage in paid employment after marriage (see below). They were expected to stay at home.

years without success. The problem was more severe for sons who did not have enough education, and/or were working in agriculture. It was not enough for sons to be hardworking and of good character (not drinking for example). Education and employment in non-agricultural occupations mattered now. The status of the family was also less important, although some households were still building relatively expensive houses to enhance their status prior to finding a bride.

Another important change between the early 1980s, the 2000s and 2010s was in the intergenerational balance of power (Kabeer 2000). The older generation still arranged the majority of marriages, but the younger generation now had a say. There were self-arranged marriages, so-called 'love' marriages, in the 2000s and 2010s, something unheard of before. The younger generation had more education, in many cases college education, in many cases education away from home. This meant that they had more exposure, and more independence. Many were moving into worlds and occupations that their parents did not know. Married sons no longer necessarily lived at home. Parents still exercised control to the extent that they financed their sons' education, and controlled their inheritance. But sons were no longer as strongly under their parents' sway.

Daughters had also been getting more education in the 2000s and 2010s but not much of this was away from home as in the case of sons. It was sons not daughters who were sent to more prestigious schools, which involved staying in hostels away from home. Parents were still arranging daughters' marriages, although daughters had also been getting involved in self-arranged marriages. However the majority of daughters were still controlled heavily by their families before marriage and their husbands' families afterwards. Educated daughters might be allowed to work for a few years before marriage, but seldom after. This was the case for Nanjappan's daughter who was married to an agriculturalist after doing a BCom degree and working in a finance company for 4 years. Nanjappan told us: "Her husband's relatives were keen on her BCom because her husband had only studied up to Standard XII. He doesn't want her to work now though." There were numerous such examples. Examples of educated daughters being allowed to work after marriage were the exception rather than the rule (see below). Daughters marrying into poorer households might have to go out to work whether they wanted to or not. Many whose husbands worked in the textile industry worked there too. Daughters had to defer to their husbands and the older generation. When we asked young women whether they would be able to continue their education, or continue their career, after marriage we frequently got the response "It depends on my husband's wish". Parents did not seem to take their daughters' wishes to continue their education or careers into account when arranging their marriages either. There were too many other factors at play. The fact that women were in short supply did not appear to work strongly in their favour. Their position had improved in some ways. In other ways it was no better than before (see Heyer 2016b on this). I come back to this below.

7.4 The Problems for Sons

Although the position of sons had improved in many respects—they had more education, better employment, more choice and more mobility—they faced problems associated with the bride shortage and other changes that had taken place between the 1980s and the 2010s. Not only were they getting married with more difficulty, and later, if at all. There were other changes undermining their position including the declining status of agriculture, and the increasing status of Dalits. I take these up below.

In 1981/1982 most young men were married in their mid to late 20s, although some were married earlier even in households that were relatively well-off. In the 1990s there was an increase in the number of Gounder men in sample households getting married when they were over 35. In the 2000s there were Gounder men in their 40s who had not yet married. Moreover, many men who had married in their mid or late 30s had married late because it had taken years to find a suitable bride. There were a number of adverse effects associated with marrying late. Men were not treated as full adults in this society until they were married. It was frustrating for them to have to wait until they were in their late 30s or their 40s for this. There was also the worry of not being able to get married at all, and of not having children to rely on as they grew old. Men who married late would also have more difficulty investing in their children's futures at a time when their parents were no longer able to give much support and/or needed more support themselves (Vera-Sanso 2012).

The men in their 40s who were not yet married who we interviewed in 2014 said that they had been looking for brides for years. The main reasons cited were: insufficient education or girls not being interested in men involved in agriculture. Another reason was their inflexibility concerning what they considered to be a suitable bride. It is clear that what was important for men was both being in a position to attract (and to support) a good bride and being willing to compromise on the sort of bride they were looking for. Some men in relatively well-off households got married late because they (and/or their parents) were waiting to build up the position of their households before going ahead, and because it was no longer easy to find brides with the characteristics they were looking for. However, it was seldom the case that men in relatively well-off households had not got married by the time they were in their late 30s or their 40s. It was in less well-off households that men got married really late, or did not get married at all. It was surprising in these cases how adamantly what appeared to be possible solutions were ruled out even by men in their 40s who claimed that they had been searching for brides for years. These men were clearly having to consider brides who they regarded as in some sense lower status than themselves. This did not extend to brides from lower castes, or brides from other regions however, unlike in Srinivasan's case (2015, 2017).[8]

[8] Srinivasan's account comes from a context that is different in that there was more contact with other regions. She also notes that the marriage of cross-region brides was a recent phenomenon. North Indian cases are better established (see Chaudhry in this volume for example).

The suggestion that men might consider lower caste brides was met with vehement diatribes about the impossibility of marrying a Dalit in more than one case. Marrying someone from a neighbouring state was a possibility that was less strongly opposed. Ramasamy, for example, interviewed in 2014, gave a response that was typical, "I could marry a girl from Kerala, from any caste. It is only if it was from here that it would have to be a Gounder". People were said to be less worried about caste backgrounds that they did not really know. Armugam (male) told us "I am willing to look outside my caste … though SC (Dalit) is out of the question. If from Kerala, it should be a Nair only. I have worked in Kerala so I know the caste system there. Most people think Malayali from Kerala is OK. They don't ask about caste. They don't know the caste system there." (Srinivasan 2017 reports the fact that people were less worried about caste backgrounds in Kerala that they did not really know too). But very few in the study villages had in fact married outside the region. There were two cases in the study villages of Gounder men marrying Dalit women, both from Kerala, one of which I followed up. The Dalit concerned, a second wife, was being treated more like a servant than a wife. She had been brought in to look after her husband's elderly parents after the first wife had found them intolerable and moved out. Srinivasan (2015) reports 1–2 similar cases. No one in the study villages that are the subject of this chapter knew of a Gounder man marrying anyone from Kerala other than the two cases mentioned above. Srinivasan found many such. These villages were clearly more conservative and less exposed to distant places than Srinivasan's were. The fact that the local economy was strong in our case meant that while there was a lot of outmigration nearly all of it was within the region, not further away.

The outcome of inflexibility on the part of men in their late 30s or 40s who were still not married was that they were unlikely to get married at all. This was something that was happening for the first time in these villages. It seemed likely that it would only be this one cohort that faced this problem so acutely though (see below).

The difficulty of finding brides was leading to a loss of self-esteem of Gounder men remaining in the villages. This was not the only contributing factor. Others included the decline in the status of agriculture. The strengthening of the position of Dalits was another factor contributing to the loss of self-esteem of Gounder men who were finding it difficult to face the increased assertion of Dalits over whom they had previously exercised very strong control (Carswell and De Neve 2013; Heyer 2012, 2010). The growing alternatives to agricultural labour provided by the garment and other industries meant that Dalits, many of whom continued to work as agricultural labourers, were working on much better terms and conditions than before. They had also benefited from greatly increased state support in the form of housing, new settlements, roads, street lights, water supplies, subsidised food and other essential commodities, and free TVs, and, after 2008 or so, from the MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme). Gounders complained bitterly about the improvement in material conditions of Dalits, particularly those resulting directly from state support. They resented the fact that this had made Dalits less deferential, more assertive, and more expensive to employ.

The fact that Gounder men were no longer finding it easy to attract brides exacerbated all this. Their frustration and bitterness was reflected in the increasing aggression of Gounder political parties (Carswell and De Neve 2015; Wyatt 2013). In 2013 they were making political capital out of opposition to inter-caste marriages alleging that Dalit men were preying on Gounder girls (Pandian 2013). There were Gounder atrocities against Dalits around this issue too (cf. Ravishankar 2015). It is generally assumed that high sex ratios will be associated with increasing aggression and violence. But high sex ratios are clearly only one of the factors in this case.

7.5 The Problems for Daughters

There was no doubt that the position of women was stronger in a number of respects in the 2000s and 2010s than it had been earlier. This was not only a result of their increasing scarcity, but also a result of other changes in the economy and society that had taken place. Factors like education, increased involvement in the non-agricultural and urban economy, and improved communications and media exposure, had put them in a stronger position. Whether their increasing scarcity worked in their favour or put a brake on the improvements that came about in other ways is a more difficult question. A shortage of marriageable women can lead to an increase in restrictions on women as they become more valuable to their natal families, and as they are seen to need more control than before with the greater freedom associated with education (Purewal and Gill 2015). The most significant change for Gounder women in the villages between 1981/2 and the 2000s and 2010s was their increased participation in education. This was the result of general changes in the economy and society, as well as state policy. Education had become a requirement for people to engage in the economy and society at large, particularly but not only for those moving out of agriculture. Men led the way, but women soon began to catch up with men in this respect.

The families of educated men were looking for educated brides, sometimes even for brides more educated than their husbands to compensate for their husbands not having enough education themselves. The main reason they wanted wives to be educated was so that they could support their husbands in their enterprises and in their dealings with the outside world. In 2008/2009, more than half of the young Gounder women in the relevant age group were continuing beyond Standard ten (Table 7.2) and many of them were getting college education. They were getting BA and BCom degrees rather than degrees in engineering which were the preferred options for men. They were also going to less prestigious colleges than men. These were a huge changes from 1981/1982. Going to school outside the villages, for higher secondary education and college increased their exposure to the world outside their kin groups and villages. They were now circulating much more widely than before. This gave them more power relative to the older generation. The majority were more able to stand up for themselves than they had been earlier. Moreover, education got a few of them into professional occupations, and others thinking

about the possibility of getting into professional occupations. Furthermore Gounder women in the villages faced a greater range of possibilities on marriage in the 2000s and 2010s than they had done in 1981/1982. In 1981/1982 virtually all Gounder women from the villages were married into rural and agricultural families in which they had no choice but to be involved in agriculture. In the 2000s and 2010s many were getting married into urban families, and/or to husbands working outside agriculture. The majority of respondents in the survey not describing themselves as 'housewives' or 'staying at home' who had husbands in non-agricultural occupations were still involved in agriculture. A minority were working outside agriculture alongside their husbands (in textile units for example). (See Heyer 2016b for more discussion of the changes in Gounder women's lives).

Many Gounder women were in a stronger position vis-à-vis their parents and their husbands in the 2000s and 2010s (cf. Rao 2014), but their position was not as strong as might have been expected. Parents were still arranging daughters' marriages; nearly all of which took place by the time their daughters were 24 or 25 years old. There had been little change in the age of marriage of women, despite their increased participation in higher education. Most young women accepted that their parents would still arrange their marriages and that they would have little say in the matter though not as little as in 1981/1982. One respondent, Kaliappa (male), told us, "Women can reject their parents' marriage proposals now, unlike in 1981/2", as an example of women's stronger position. Rejecting parents' marriage proposals is one thing. Having a positive say is another. Kaliappa's statement says a lot about how limited the progress was. Most married women were still not allowed to continue with their education or go out to work. Moreover women who had more education usually had to compensate by being especially deferential at home. Something similar has been described by Guerin et al. (2013) and Still (2014) among others who show that women who begin to take on more prominent roles in the wider society have to be especially deferential at home. In our research many young women who wanted to continue with their education, and/or have careers, said that whether or not they could do so "depended on their husbands' wishes", and whether they would be married to husbands who might support their education or careers "depended on their parents". Few parents were choosing husbands who would allow daughters to continue their education, or engage in paid work. Some educated daughters might be able to have more say, but most were married to people who did not support their continuing education, still less their wish to pursue careers. Outstanding exceptions were (1) an aspiring college lecturer who had married a buying agent stationed in Tiruppur who supported her aspirations and her continuing education, (2) the daughter of an unusually well-educated agriculturalist who was being married to someone who would support her becoming a teacher, and (3) a daughter in the IT sector who had been working in Pune and then Chennai, whose parents hoped that she would end up marrying and working in Coimbatore. These were very much the exceptions. There were other cases such as that of Thulasi, the older of two daughters in a household of modest means who had to stop her education after completing a BCom and was not allowed to go out to work after she was married to a close relative to whom she had been promised when she was

young. She was not at all happy about this but she felt that she had no option but to agree. Her younger sister, Sivagami, was continuing her education meanwhile, and aspired to work as a professional following the example of a cousin in Chennai. She was working hard to qualify for scholarships that would make it easier for her to persuade her parents to allow her to pursue her goal.

Self-arranged marriages were still very much in the minority and the marriages concerned were not usually associated with the continuation of education or careers. Virtually all were within caste. They first came up in the 2000s and 2010s. Some came about as young women met and got involved with men at college, others through work in textile units and elsewhere outside the villages. Self-arranged marriages often involved husbands who were less educated and less supported by their families, as well as a lack of support from the women's families, although in many cases families got reconciled. The fact that some women were arranging their own marriages may suggest that they had more autonomy than earlier. It was clear however that women still had much less autonomy than men and that gender discrimination remained severe. One of the areas in which gender discrimination was most obviously in evidence was property ownership. Only if there were no sons did daughters inherit the family land, and even then it was nearly always their husbands who exercised effective control not the women themselves. In a few cases daughters with brothers inherited small amounts of land, but the amounts were always small. There were a number of cases in which daughters took responsibility for parents as they aged, sons having completely cut themselves off, but sons still got the land. Women continued to be heavily discriminated against in the labour market too. Outside agriculture discrimination took the form of women being in less well-paid positions than men (Heyer 2013). In agriculture women were paid much less than men.[9] Women were generally in subordinate positions in self-employment too. Thus, although women had gained through increased participation in education, and benefitted from increased geographical and social mobility, the extent to which they were discriminated against continued to be strong.

7.6 The Likelihood of a Decrease in Daughter Deficit and Bride Shortage

The acute shortages of marriageable women in the 2000s and 2010s seemed likely to decrease, both as a result of the decline in son preference and as a result of a decrease in the difference between the size of the cohorts of men seeking brides and women seeking grooms as the fertility decline tailed off. But rural men, particularly poor and less well educated rural men, were likely to continue to face difficulty attracting brides. It should be no surprise that son preference had declined given the

[9] Daily agricultural wages for men in 2008/9 were INR 100–150 (USD 2–3) and for women INR 60–70 (USD 1–1.5). 'Contract labour' that is, labour working in gangs at piece rates, got twice as much or more. There was far more contract work for men than for women.

circumstances here. What is surprising is that son preference was so strong in the first place in a community with a kinship system in which married daughters maintained such close contact with their natal families. Son preference was strong however at a time when the community was still predominantly agrarian, and people were relying on sons continuing to live with them, pursuing agriculture, and looking after the family land, as their fathers grew old. Families may have maintained close contact with daughters but daughters' primary responsibility was for their husbands' families and their husbands' land.

By the 2000s and 2010s parents were no longer expecting sons to continue to live with them, or to continue in agriculture. They were expecting sons to move out of agriculture, and to live elsewhere. Daughters were as likely to maintain close contact as sons. Daughters may have maintained contact earlier, but sons actually lived with parents whose primary responsibility they were. In the 2000s and 2010s it would have been difficult to find examples of son preference as strong as those reported in 1981/1982. We have already noted the fact that Krishnasamy, the father of two highly educated daughters, told us in 2014 'Now fewer people are doing scans. Daughters are valued more.' There were several reasons for many parents saying in the 2000s and 2010s that daughters were better than sons. Daughters were easier to control, did better in school, were easier to marry, and often looked after parents better than sons when parents got old. The evidence bore this out. Despite generally having less encouragement, and being sent to schools that were less prestigious and less expensive, daughters often did better and continued further than sons in education. Fewer dropped out before completing Standard X as sons tended to do and nearly as many daughters as sons continued into higher education too (Table 7.2). In households in which daughters had gone into higher education while sons had not it was always said that sons "had not been interested". The reality in many cases was that despite what were often persistent efforts to persuade them they had refused to go on. Murugasamy was one such example. He had a daughter who had completed Standard XII and gone on to marry a textile company owner. His son had dropped out in Standard VIII however. He told us about the many visits he had made to the school and to the headmaster to try to find a way to get his son to continue. They were all to no avail. Since he was relatively uneducated his son was only been able to get semi-skilled work. He was also one of the men still unmarried in his late 30s in 2014.

It was also clear that daughters were looking after their parents as they got old, in many cases better than sons. Thus there was Karunaiammal whose husband had left her after she bore only a daughter, who was left looking after her elderly parents with no help from Ramesh, their Coimbatore millworker son. He was reported as having moved to Coimbatore 'leaving the family in distress'. There was Palanathal who told us that if she needs help her two daughters married to labourers would help but not her cutting master son. In another case Sivagami was living with her third daughter who had serious health problems, and was being helped by her other two daughters but not by her son who had a workshop in Tiruppur. There were also cases of daughters in daughter-only households helping parents as they aged and/or got sick.

None of this amounted to a preference for daughters. It did amount to a decrease in daughter aversion. This was consistent with claims that sex selection was no longer taking place.

7.7 Conclusions

The chapter has discussed the impact of bride shortages that emerged in a community undergoing fundamental changes between the early 1980s and the 2000s and 2010s. One of the more important changes was that the villages in which the community concerned—Gounders—was located were being drawn into a dynamic industrialising economy and that there was a strong move away from the villages and into urban and non-agricultural occupations associated with this. The fact that Gounders had a 'South Indian' kinship system also had important implications for the impact of bride shortages. It meant that daughters could substitute to some extent for sons.

In the majority of Gounder households in the 1980s and early 1990s it was still considered essential to have sons. This was a period in which sons were still expected to continue in agriculture, and to manage and take over responsibility for the family land as their parents grew old. Daughters maintained close contact with their parents. They were married nearby to make this possible. But daughters could not be expected to take over the management of their parents' family land. In households dependent at least in part on wage labour, whether in agriculture or elsewhere, the logic was different. In such households sons were preferred because they could earn more than daughters, and could keep in touch with and look after ageing parents better than daughters could. Daughters could use their own lower earnings to support parents, but they had to have the support of their husbands to do so.

Many things had changed by the 2000s and 2010s. One important change was that Gounder households in the villages now saw a future outside agriculture for their sons. They recognised that sons would not necessarily live with their parents once they grew up. Daughters might be as close to their parents as sons and might provide a lot of what was expected from sons. This was possible in a society in which daughters were married close by, and there was a tradition of close contact between married daughters and their parents. What also made it possible was the fact that much of the economy was local. People working outside agriculture did not need to move far away. The fact that the kinship system made it possible for daughters to play a more positive role with respect to their natal families was important in reducing daughter aversion and the practice of sex selection. The fact that women were more educated and more exposed to the wider world put them in a stronger position in other respects as well. However patriarchy was still strong. Daughters were still subordinated within their natal families as well as within their marital families. Women's interests were still subordinated to those of men. Sex selection may have abated. Bride shortages may be less serious in the years to come. However there is nothing to suggest that these have in themselves strengthened the position

of women. To explain the fact that the position of women is stronger, one must consider factors other than bride shortage.

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Chapter 8
Sex Ratio Imbalances in Asia: An Ongoing Conversation Between Anthropologists and Demographers

C.Z. Guilmoto

8.1 Introduction

This volume seeks to provide a more concrete discussion of the social impact of and responses to demographic change.[1] Research so far has often found it more expedient to rely on global theories linking high sex ratios to various strands of social disruption (Poston et al. 2011; Hudson and den Boer 2004). Yet these doomsday scenarios are rarely reflected in field-based studies. The chapters in this volume indeed provided little to feed headlines on marriage crisis, rape or trafficking beyond the routine expressions of ordinary gender violence that have long been part of patriarchal settings. They describe in minute detail the mechanisms through which tensions in marriage markets convert into growing psychological anxieties and social marginalization in local rural and urban parts of both China and India. They also show us resources deployed by individuals and families to reverse the demographic odds through bold innovations and normative change. When even archetypal patriarchal institutions such as the *Khap Panchayats* of northwestern India prove willing to revise their tenets in the face of marital imbalances, a new avenue of deep institutional transformations seems possible (Larsen and Kaur 2013).

We can easily restate the actual issue addressed in this book as the following: what do numbers do to social organizations? We already know a lot about sex ratio imbalances at birth in the world, and we are aware of the extreme form of gender bias they manifest (UNFPA 2012). We already have a clear sense of what institutions can do to demographic numbers and, more precisely, how patriarchy can skew the sex ratio at birth. We still do not know exactly how numbers will in their turn

[1] This chapter has benefited from very useful comments by an anonymous reviewer, the Series editors, and Sharada Srinivasan.

C.Z. Guilmoto (✉)
Institut de recherche pour le développement-CEPED, Paris, France
e-mail: christophe.guilmoto@ird.fr

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impact the functioning of social organizations. Will demography become the driving force behind the forthcoming transformations in the institution of marriage? This volume showed indeed that marriage finds itself at the crossroads and that two alternatives seem to emerge.

On the one hand, the mounting tensions on the marriage market could lead to a typical *involutive* process of reinforcing and systematically applying long-established rules to avoid the risk of complete collapse of traditional matrimonial arrangements. Following Geertz's (1963) emblematic discussion of involution in Indonesia, both China and India would witness an "overdriving" of existing marriage practices particularly governing endogamous and hypergamous unions. An involutive process corresponds here to a stricter enforcement of matrimonial rules, with only limited adaptation to the changing demographic circumstances of marriage today. The main adjustment may be restricted to an attempt at reviving archaic and long-abandoned practices such as levirate, child betrothal or wife purchase. Such a process leads to the systematic normative exclusion of non-standard practices and a social castigation of deviants, in particular unmarried men and women falling into identified discredited categories (such as *chade*, *malang*, *guang gun, sheng nu*) as described in this volume. For the single population, the situation is even more devastating than for parents without sons, as the accelerated process of social sorting through marriage adds to already unfavourable individual characteristics—from physical to socioeconomic attributes—leading to a new unpropitious marital status that will likely close many social options.

On the other hand, institutions are never permanent even if their enduring features are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Traditional marriage institutions might stop serving as an efficient clearinghouse to match unmarried individuals for an increasing share of the families in China and India, and their self-reproducing properties may be called into question. This volume provided insights on the new scripts that people are trying to put forward though innovative strategies (see for example, Zhang and Bélanger in this volume) such as uxorilocal flexibility, dowry renegotiation, new inheritance rules, old age support from daughters, exogamous unions, and normative contestation. Yet these changes will be difficult for various reasons even when the utilitarian merits of inherited marriage institutions are challenged. First, these institutions often remain controlled by conservative bodies such as married elders unaffected by the demographic crisis. Second, they are dominated by higher-status men who are still expected to fully benefit from traditional hypergamy and resulting hegemonic masculinities. Vulnerable low-status men are mostly voiceless and powerless, and readily attract blame for their own failures and lack of adequate investments in education, social mobility and asset accumulation. Third, the institution of marriage is at the centre of the patriarchal setup. In India, marriage remains somewhat insulated from more disruptive market forces, with dowry functioning over recent decades as the single adaptive mechanism. Advocating for changes in such an institution requires entirely fresh legitimation narratives, and it is not clear where new figureheads may come from to rewrite family scripts. From a power perspective, the fact that the costs and benefits of the imbalances will remain unevenly distributed preserves a system

firmly in the hands of the upper (male) strata. In this regard, changes in China linked to "marriage and its discontents" (Kam 2014) appear to be earlier and broader.

8.2 In the Beginning Was Anthropology

The question of social flexibility and rigidity and the pathways to institutional change driven by sex ratio imbalances are part of an ongoing dialogue between anthropologists and demographers around what the former call gender bias and the latter, sex selection.[2] We will show how dialogue has forged strong links and a mutual interdependence exemplified perfectly by chapters in this volume. Initially, demography required an anthropological perspective to make sense of a distorted preference system that led in China, India and several other countries to an unexpected rise in the proportion of male births. For its part, anthropology required hard numbers to confirm the intensity of the gender bias that its field-based investigations had already documented. A slight tension exists between qualitative and quantitative approaches on issues of causation and manifestation as each discipline may try to project its field- or data-based master narrative. The dialectic of this epistemological divide has provided over the years a rich source of interdisciplinary exchange and has infused the domain of sex selection with all the necessary materials to make sense of gender bias and skewed ratios. We will try to tell this story briefly and show how it has brought us to the contents of this volume.

At a broader disciplinary scale, the convergence of qualitative and quantitative research methods around demographic issues roughly dates back to the 1980s (Kertzer 2006) as illustrated by the pioneering work of John C. Caldwell on migration or fertility in Africa and Asia. This convergence corresponded to the perceived need for a better grasp of the context of demographic choices such as family-building or reproductive strategies. However, the data gathered by demographers were inappropriate to capture the contours of social institutions, and available theories—mostly informed by insights obtained from microeconomics—somewhat ineffectual when trying to explain their logic. In contrast, anthropologists probably felt less attracted due to these technicalities and restricted topics of demography. Demographers who lack micro- and macro-theoretical tools are at times content with a crude conceptualization of the plasticity of social arrangements. What is labelled as "culture" often corresponds to the residual factors that their statistical models fail to account for. Yet the limited capacity of the dominant economic reasoning to explain variations in demographic behaviour—from high to ultra-low fertility—within similar socioeconomic contexts forced demographers to adopt "thicker" social sciences and a more anthropological approach. This new perspective

[2] For simplicity's sake, we bring together several other disciplinary strands such as statistics or economics, and gender studies, sociology or history under the respective umbrellas of "demography" and "anthropology".

was rapidly extended to other fields relating to population such as mobility, mating choices or health behaviours, with gender and patriarchy gradually added to the scope of demographers.

On sex selection, the groundwork was done by anthropologists, who for long had access to rural communities—especially in India where village studies flourished since the 1950s. The reconstitution of families and lineages clearly established the dominance of patrilineal institutions and the prevalence of patrilocality (Karve 1968). Fifty years ago, matrilocal practices had almost disappeared from Kerala and the few surviving matrilineal societies were confined to Lakshadweep and Meghalaya in India, Yunnan in China or the Central Plateaus in Vietnam.

In the 1980s, anthropologists started to look more closely at how patriarchy was being implemented. They discovered that gender inequality could result in tangible consequences for society, leading to a need for more quantitative evidence. The first demonstration of the powerful combination of field observations, demographic measurements and ethnographic monographs appears in work on female neglect and kinship in India by Barbara Miller (1981). Her study offered a detailed mapping of marriage practices and related them to various forms of gender inequity. In the process, she proposed an innovative disaggregation of India in terms of regional gender institutions that would later prove essential for deciphering the geography of discrimination in South Asia. The next strand of research examined more directly the demographic and economic implications (Dyson and Moore 1983; Agarwal 1994), and in-depth fieldwork strived to capture the local contours of patriarchal practices and mindsets within specific contexts (Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Kapadia 1995). At the same time, new data on excess mortality among young girls in Punjab and Bangladesh suggested that such mortality resulted directly from biased local gender norms (D'Souza and Chen 1980). This issue was later popularized in 1990 by Amartya Sen, who captured the multifarious evil of Asian patriarchies in a stunning demographic summary ("More than 100 million women are missing") focusing on excess female mortality.

Some qualitative surveys started describing how new reproductive technologies were applied in a patriarchal context. First reports surfaced from India depicting the formidable demand for prenatal diagnosis and selective abortions during the late 1970s (Ramanamma and Bambawale 1980; Jeffery and Jeffery 1983). They stressed in particular the inclination by Indian middle-class women to resort to prenatal diagnosis as a way to redesign their family strategies by terminating unwanted female pregnancies. Anthropologists clearly demonstrated that the new reproductive technology responded to an underlying unmet demand for gendered fertility control before traces of sex imbalances showed up on the statistical radar screen (Khanna 1997).

A later important development also came from anthropology—a discipline whose scope is often limited by its emphasis on cultural specificity and on the primacy of contexts—when Croll (2000) attempted a cross-national analysis of gender discrimination in Asia. A later synthesis by Miller (2001) provided the first international comparison of sex-selective abortions from Pakistan to Taiwan in relation to

"patriarchal demographics." This analysis was complemented by a comparative anthropological overview of son preference in three different contexts (Das Gupta et al. 2003). Independently, Kaser (2008, 2012) and his team in Graz assembled a similar combination of historical and ethnographic evidence to delineate the contours of patriarchy in Eastern Europe at a time when the presence of prenatal sex selection in this part of the world was completely ignored.

Yet, despite their correct intuition about the surge in sex selection, anthropologists were poorly equipped to capture the magnitude of the phenomenon they had described. Anthropologists rarely venture into a systematic demographic inventory of the communities where they work—a rather tedious and time-consuming task—and lack the probabilistic tools to determine whether their research locality meets the gold standard of representativeness. They run the risk of missing the overall demographic forest for their local trees as micro-level statistical data provide but a tenuous picture of the broader contexts. This is even truer with birth masculinity, since the computation of the sex ratio at birth requires large samples, rendering micro-level measurement in field sites often pointless.

8.3 The Demographer's Turn

Prenatal sex selection had initially attracted only descriptive or speculative research among demographers (Chahnazarian 1988; Bennett 1983). The sex ratio at birth seemed largely biologically determined and therefore remained mostly an object of statistical curiosity. Demographers were not really listening to what anthropologists were saying about emerging sex selection. They waited for census evidence to emerge in China and India in the early 1990s. After census figures confirmed the presence of a suspect surplus of male births, demographers spent years debating the possible factors of sex ratio imbalance (enumeration issues, biological features, hepatitis, post-natal discrimination). In Eastern Europe, for instance, no one noticed the simultaneous rise in birth masculinity observed after 1991 for almost 15 years. Facing the obvious traces of deliberate prenatal gender discrimination, many demographers remained reluctant to accept the statistical prominence of an otherwise well-kept family secret.

Once demographers became convinced of the existence of "social sex selection," they started providing a regular mapping and monitoring of the phenomenon, going far beyond what local field studies had been able to uncover (Banister 2004; Arnold et al. 2002). For instance, demographers produced annual estimates showing variations and trends in prenatal sex selection. They also produced maps outlining the dramatic disparities in the sex ratio across China and India (Guilmoto and Attané 2007). Looking at the hotspots of birth masculinity in northwestern India, there is little doubt that areas of high birth masculinity closely coincide with the most rigid forms of patrilineal and patrilocal kinship already established by anthropologists. In countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam, it has even been possible to confirm the

statistical link between male-biased kinship structures and prenatal discrimination (Guilmoto 2012b, 2015). Economists went further searching for correlates of all kinds. They often did so with little theoretical baggage, except a basic demand framework of gender valuation. High sex ratio at birth, for instance, was related to unexpected variables, such as the price of tea in China (Qian 2006). Such work heralded a new trend in which hurried correlations would provide a substitute for a more grounded theory of gender bias, especially in countries where field research proves less feasible than elegant econometrics. However, all possible economic correlates of high sex ratio appear of little significance compared to the anthropological circumstances of its emergence.

The demographic depiction of imbalances in China and India was reinforced by the censuses of 2000 and generated a more alarmist literature, feeding in particular on the millions of "forced bachelors" predicted for China and India. Even in childhood, these males were predicted to exhibit potential unruly and antisocial behaviour as adults. The growing surplus of men was notably construed as a growing international security issue, with potentially major repercussions on migration, sex work, hyper-nationalism or violence in Asia (Hvistendahl 2012; Poston et al. 2011; Hudson and den Boer 2004). The first sign of a "moral panic" around local surpluses of men and overly masculine countries date from this period. Newspapers carried many reports along these lines, in which the excess of males was perceived as a dangerous population bomb undermining the social harmony traditionally ensured by universal heterosexual marriage.

Several studies also traced links between male surpluses and unsavoury social outcomes such as sex work, sex crimes, trafficking, AIDS or violent behaviour (South et al. 2014; Kaur 2013; Edlund et al. 2013; Bien et al. 2013; Trent and South 2012; Tucker et al. 2005). Because these studies were based on statistical evidence derived from various proxies of sex imbalances and social outcomes, they must be considered with some caution for different reasons. First, it was often too early to expect anything concrete to happen in affected societies. Most of the surplus men were still younger than 30 and the marriage squeeze was far from observable.[3] Second, doing fieldwork was more complicated than assembling data, especially in countries such as China. Third, feared consequences such as sexual violence, trafficking or AIDS are facilitated by institutions and criminal practices prevalent in Chinese and Indian societies long before the emergence of high sex ratios. In fact, they proceed from the same local patriarchal institutions that recently nurtured prenatal sex selection, and it is difficult to distinguish causal factors from consequences. Northwestern India, the hotbed of sex ratio imbalances at birth, is a textbook case with a long history of gender, family and community violence (Drèze and Khera 2000).

[3] Heyer's study in this volume is unique since it focuses on a Tamil community that was affected by high sex ratios for several decades thanks to the presence of selective infanticide and sex selection.

8.4 Predicting a Marriage Squeeze

After confirming the presence of prenatal sex selection, demographers started to indulge in their favourite activity: drawing population forecasts and predicting future social change. It was relatively easy to convert skewed levels of birth masculinity into predicted sex imbalances among adults after a few decades. The sex ratios among birth cohorts are bound to remain more or less the same until adulthood, and only sex differentials in migration or mortality could affect them later in life.

It proved more complicated to assess the potential impact of sex ratio imbalance on demographic mechanisms such as union, household formation, ageing or migration. One idea emerged: a male surplus was bound to disrupt the workings of the marriage system in the future, as basic arithmetic suggested that a sizable proportion of men would remain unmarried. The marriage issue came to dominate the debate over the consequences of a sex ratio imbalance at birth, with far less attention accorded to other demographic processes related to household composition, mortality, sexual behaviour and migratory behaviour.

Statisticians tried later on to figure out more precisely what current imbalances at birth would actually imply for marriage behaviour in subsequent decades. This attempt turned out to be a more demanding enterprise than demographic forecasting. Describing a marriage squeeze involves a complex set of hypotheses about future marriage dynamics. As the female marriage age has increased in both China and India, the current exceptional pace of social and economic transformations suggests that the institution of marriage will continue to change. Indeed, the most advanced countries in Asia have unexpected stories to tell about the delay in women's marriage. The rise of singlehood among women in Japan, South Korea, Myanmar, Thailand or Singapore has forced sociologists to recognize a gradual "flight from marriage" in these countries. This makes drafting future scenarios of marriage patterns complex.

An additional issue in forecasting the marriage schedule is that the age at marriage itself may be influenced by basic supply and demand demographic constraints. The standard safety valve in a marriage system is the age at marriage, and the surplus sex may simply have to defer marriage. More precisely, the spousal age gap can absorb some of the shock linked to demographic imbalances. This is, of course, what is already happening in parts of China and India, as several studies in this volume demonstrate. Realistic simulations of the forthcoming squeeze should therefore anticipate not only the potential rise in the age at marriage for men and women, but also an increase in the age difference between spouses as a response to the imbalances. Based on these parameters, forecasting marriage imbalances involves simulating the behaviour of birth cohorts over the years. For each five-year period, birth cohorts are "married" according to the expected marriage probability by age and sex. The simulations are conducted for the male and female single populations, and when men are in surplus during a period, a proportion among them are unable to marry and will try to marry again during the next period. Surplus men may therefore accumulate over the years, and some ultimately will not be able to marry

by age 50—the usual age limit for marriage. Since women are in deficit, they will be married according to this model exactly according to the marriage schedule.[4]

Simulations allow for the computation of two new indicators. One is the proportion of never-married men at age 50 in the future. The second is the intensity of the squeeze itself. It is expressed as the ratio of single men and women "trying to marry" during each period. "Trying to marry" means the probability of marriage according to the marriage schedules used in the computation. The squeeze is therefore the sex ratio of expected marriages during a given period.

We thought it important to give a concrete illustration of what the marriage squeeze looks like. In the next section, we present results from a set of estimates prepared for China and India. We will briefly sum up its basic parameters, which illustrate how demographers can simulate the functioning of a marriage system. We will also see the conclusions that may be derived from such results as well as their obvious limitations.

The model used is based on standard population forecasts of the populations of China and India until 2060 (see Guilmoto 2012a for technical details; other studies of the marriage squeeze in China include Huang 2014; Jiang et al. 2014).[5] The only adjustment pertained to trends in the sex ratio at birth. For both countries, we posited a regular decline in birth masculinity from a high point in 2005 (SRBs of 120 and 113 in China and India) to a normal level of 105 by 2025. This rapid decrease may sound overly optimistic, but it corresponds to the downward trend already observed in China and India. This scenario aims in fact to describe the least severe development possible—rather than unchanging scenarios of high sex ratio leading inevitably to more catastrophic outcomes.

We are also forecasting the rise in the age at marriage as well as a rise in spousal age gap. The age at marriage is assumed to increase gradually by 3 years in China and by 4 years in India for men and women. In addition, the spousal age difference is expected to grow from 2 to 4 years in China and from 5 to 7 years in India. This rise represents the first response to the mounting demographic imbalance. In theory, the age gap could broaden much more, but there is no reason to believe that women would accept a larger increase.

8.5 The Demographics of a Squeeze

The first results from this set of simulations refer to adult sex ratios until 2060 (Fig. 8.1). These sex ratios have been weighted by marriage rates to factor in the age and sex distributions and the corresponding probabilities of marriage. Unsurprisingly,

[4] A more refined model (based on the "harmonic mean" model) assumes that both sexes adjust to the imbalance. Yet assuming a gradual *decline* of the female age at marriage as a response to the oversupply of single men is not a sociologically sound assumption in Asia where female age at marriage has been increasing over decades.

[5] We tried to update the model with recent United Nations 2015 population forecasts, but failed due to the implausibility of parameters describing gender bias.

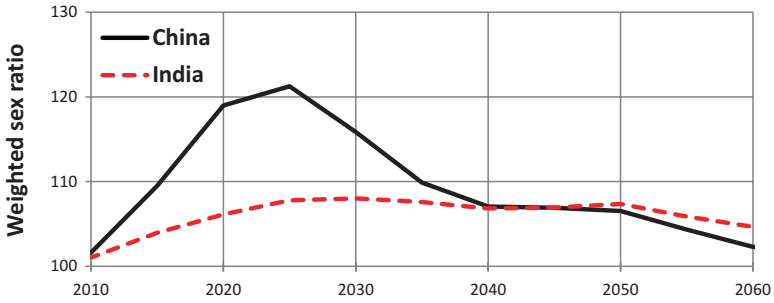

Fig. 8.1 Weighted adult sex ratio in China and India, 2010–2060 (Source: see text for detail)

such marriage-corrected adult sex ratios tend to resemble the original sex ratio of the same birth cohorts 20–30 years earlier. They reach 120 for China in 2025, but the rise is moderate in India where the ratio attains only 108 in 2025. In the absence of migration, the surplus of male births in a population translates into a similar surplus of men of marriageable age after 30 years.

Interestingly, China's adult sex ratio declines gradually after 2025, when the sex ratio at birth of the cohorts starts decreasing, and it finally falls below 105 after 2050. But India's adult sex ratio stays above 105 longer and overcomes that of China by 2050. This somewhat unanticipated demographic outcome is the consequence of India's long-term reduction of the size of its birth cohorts. Since women in India marry older men, they are born in more recent cohorts, which are also much smaller cohorts. Given that the age gap is deemed to increase to 7 years, the sex ratio imbalances will remain significant in India, even after the sex ratio at birth returns to normal.

Still, this approach does not capture the severity of the squeeze, as it fails to account for the growing number of unmarried men crowding the marriage market. In fact, younger birth cohorts with a male surplus will be added to the pool of bachelors attempting to marry over an extended period.[6] After the imbalance is computed from the more realistic number of single men trying to marry, the squeeze grows much faster than sex ratios. As indicated earlier, the indicator used here is the sex ratio of single men and women expected to marry according to predicted marriage patterns.

The order of magnitude of the squeeze is quite larger than that of the original birth imbalance, as shown in Fig. 8.2. According to sex ratios, the surplus would plateau at 20% in China, whereas the imbalance between potential grooms and brides reaches 17% in 2020 and 59% in 2040 in China. The male surplus levels off thereafter at a level close to 45% and drops only after 2060. The squeeze in India is also much more pronounced than sex ratio measurements would have us believe.

[6] The easiest analogy is the queue for a given show at a movie theatre. Beyond the new batch of prospective viewers, the line is likely to swell if people who could not get seats for the previous shows are still waiting.

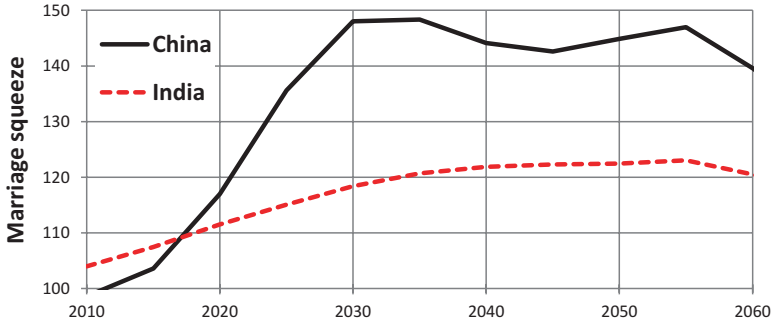

Fig. 8.2 Marriage squeeze in China and India, 2010–2060 (Source: see text for detail)

It reaches 11% in 2010 and 18% in 2020, plateauing at 22% from 2040 onward. Compared to the adult sex ratio, the predicted marriage squeeze turns out to be a process (1) occurring later, (2) at least twice as strong in its intensity and (3) lasting longer. If we consider the gravity of a phenomenon to be the conjunction of intensity and duration, the measurement of the marriage squeeze offers the picture of a far more serious disruption of the marriage system than the current sex imbalances at birth by 10–15% would suggest.

We may also illustrate the extent of the squeeze in absolute numbers, by computing the number of men "failing to get married," or those unable to marry according to the postulated marriage schedule. By applying the marriage squeeze ratio to the number of expected marriages, we compute on average 2.7 million fewer marriages in China and 2.3 million fewer marriages in India per year in 2040–2060. Results are almost similar for China and India as the squeeze is stronger in China but the number of expected marriages higher in India because of its population size and younger age structures. Since this reduction in marriages may simply correspond to delayed marriages, it is difficult to figure out what these numbers mean. A more meaningful measurement could involve the predicted percentage of men who may never marry at all.

The research shows a delay in marriage and a marriage squeeze in the proportion of men never married at age 50. In China, this indicator will rise only after 2030—that is, for cohorts born after 1980 when the sex ratio at birth started rising (see Fig. 8.3). The increase from a previous level of 3% is rapid, passing 5% in 2036 and 10% in 2048. It stabilizes at 12% thereafter. In India, where marriage has long been almost universal among both men and women, the rise is also visible only for those born after 1980. It is slower, reaching 5% after 2050. Compared with other indicators such as birth masculinity and the marriage squeeze, the increase in male singlehood appears moderate. This is due to the alleviating effect of late male age at marriage postulated in our model.[7]

[7] Without such a rise in spousal age gap, the proportion of never marrying among Chinese men would reach 15% in 2060 and 10% in India (Guilmoto 2012a).

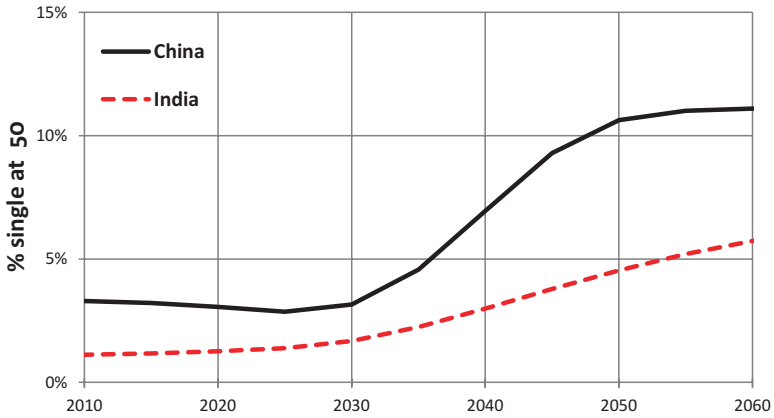

Fig. 8.3 Proportion of men single at age 50 in China and India, 2010–2060 (Source: see text for detail)

8.6 What Do Simulations Tell Us That We Did Not Know?

Let us try to summarize the three main lessons of these findings. The first one is the cumulative role of time. Sex ratio imbalances at birth are often assumed to have instant consequences on society, but results show it takes at least 25 years for significant imbalances at birth to be noticeable. During this first period, the flexibility in marriage patterns takes care of some of the imbalances. The rise in the adult sex ratio comes first, but the cumulative impact on the marriage market will peak only later—that is, after 2030 or 2040. Moreover, the squeeze will remain pronounced for decades even after the sex ratio at birth is assumed to return to normalcy. What we are witnessing today is therefore only the tip of the iceberg. The second lesson relates to the aggravating effect of long-term imbalances. The cumulative impact of high birth masculinity is more severe than foreseen, and male surplus in the marriage market proves two or three times larger than the original excess of male births. In China, the excess of males appears to get closer to 50% by 2030 in our relatively optimistic scenario. The third lesson is that delayed age at marriage is a simple but effective way to ease the crisis (see the various scenarios in Guilmoto 2012a for a fuller demonstration). It is already happening, and the proportion of single men at 30 is rapidly increasing. Historically, this mechanism worked for centuries in Europe, but it was somewhat constrained in Asia by less flexible marriage patterns that insisted on early marriage. This explains in part why the rise in the proportion of never-married men at age 50 increases only slowly and at a level lower than what the original sex ratio at birth would suggest.

These three lessons have important implications for social scientists. We know that today's observations correspond only to the first signs of a situation bound to

deteriorate more severely in the next 20 years, independent of what happens to birth masculinity today. After all, the future participants in the marriage markets of the 2030s are already born, and the sex imbalances may be easily estimated. The future intensification of sex imbalances will exacerbate the situation for affected vulnerable populations, with ultimately higher rates of bachelorhood. The marriage market in new regions and higher-status groups will be affected in turn by demographic imbalances. The role of age at marriage should not be downplayed. In fact, the institution of marriage possesses built-in mechanisms that are likely to reduce the intensity of the crisis by allowing men to delay marriage. However, nothing is guaranteed, and the notion of risk pervades the process of marriage (see Eklund in this volume).

8.7 Conclusion: From Demography Back to Anthropology

Asia has long harboured rumours about the impact of numerical imbalances on marriage practices. For instance, an excess of young women is supposed to have fuelled the spread of the dowry system in India. Even if the formal proof of this hypothesis remains complex, the diffusion of dowry and its subsequent hyperinflation may be seen as a response to an anticipated marriage squeeze affecting young women in independent India (Bhat and Halli 1999). Similarly, an excess of women in post-war Vietnam resulted from the preponderance of men among war victims (Goodkind 1997). The surplus of women at marriageable age skewed the marriage market for some years. After looking at the estimate of the marriage squeeze, can we say numbers have come again to haunt the marriage markets in China and India?

With their forecasts and simulations, demographers have turned the tables on anthropologists and forced them to reconsider the changing circumstances of marriage practices. The demographic perspective outpaced those of other social scientists by imagining the future of marriage systems, offering figures for the impact of skewed birth masculinity on marriage rates and on involuntary singlehood. With such figures, it is easy to advance a few hypotheses on marriage in these countries, predicting as we did a rise in late marriage and singlehood among men. It may be tempting to go further and imagine patrilineal families becoming extinct because of male singlehood and absence of progeny, a rise in bride price in China or a collapse of the dowry system in India, the emergence of non-standard family arrangements, the gradual collapse of traditional patriarchy and a more global crisis in the sex market based on raw numbers (Hakim 2015; Jeffery 2014; Kaur 2013; Eklund 2013; Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2012).

To most social scientists, pure exogeneity may be a source of theoretical frustration. Marriage practices appear to be firmly rooted in social arrangements and their historical (read “endogenous”) dynamics. On the contrary, sex ratio imbalances among adults appear as purely exogenous phenomena evolving from demographic trends and their unintended consequences. In most cases, minor demographic disturbances are automatically absorbed by the flexibility of the marriage system itself.

Yet the scenario for the first half of the twenty-first century is different because of the magnitude of the female deficit predicted over the next decades, and there seems to be little alternative but an inevitable delay in male marriage and an ultimate rise in the proportion of men remaining unmarried. While higher male singlehood rates are common in Western marriage systems, the emergence of millions of "involuntary" bachelors will spell a revolution for the patriarchal marriage tradition in both China and India, where traditionally less than a few percent of men remained unmarried. Demography plays the role of an unexpected, exogenous shock, one bound to influence the marriage market for decades and to trigger radical transformations in the institution of marriage.

Moreover, no obvious link connects the initial factors of son preference and sex selection to their future consequences—namely, rapid changes in the institution of marriage. Individual men who find no bride today are not those who manipulated the gender of their offspring years earlier. Most of them were in fact not even born in a family that had resorted to sex selection in the past. A similar sociological mismatch exists between the higher-status groups that inaugurated prenatal gender discrimination and the lower-status groups finding themselves at the receiving end after 30 years. The latter are social categories that displayed little interest in sex selection in the past, but whose daughters may withdraw from their communities' marriage pool through hypergamous processes. As in many cases of tragedies of the commons, the ultimate result of earlier opportunistic decisions may come as an unforeseen development to actors who thought they could beat the biological odds.

Ignorant of the complexity of marriage patterns, demographers may still be in a position to advance original prognostics on the changing ecology of choice (Illouz 2012). In doing so, they force anthropologists to confront the possibility of an institution as central as marriage overdetermined by mere supply and demand constraints. Yet we may wonder whether numbers tell the whole story, and whether the marriage market is as simple as demographers think. It is time to examine candidly some of the loopholes in the demographic scenarios of marriage change in China and India as they point to the need to bring back anthropology into the picture.

Demographic forecasts are commonly based on large administrative units and pay no attention to local heterogeneity or social entities. The projections presented earlier refer to the two largest countries in the world, and they ignore regional, social or ethnic configurations. However, there could be demographic variations across provinces within China and India. This explains why the chapters in this book focused on the states of northwestern India or a tiny sub-region of Tamil Nadu. They would have nothing to say about West Bengal or Karnataka. Regional forecasting of the future marriage squeeze has proved too complicated so far for China and India. Such forecasting would require in particular assessing the contribution of local migration parameters to imbalances among adults, and China's case clearly shows that the departure of female labour worsens the marriage prospects of sedentary male workers. Even more difficult would be the modelling of the migratory responses to sex ratio imbalances. Many women have long "married with their feet," using transregional marriage as a tool for social mobility (Srinivasan 2017; Liu et al. 2014; Davin 2007; Kaur 2004). It is not clear whether unmarried men should remain

indefinitely trapped in "bachelor villages," as a move to the city may open up new opportunities. Significant migrations of unmarried men could therefore happen as a response to local shortages of potential brides, but this would be a challenge to marriage modelling.

The same comments apply to social units since field investigations have already told us about the rise in nuptiality differentials across social groups. Even the family situation may be a cause for marriage vulnerability, as shown in the chapter by Li et al. in this volume. The consequences of the squeeze are likely to be extremely uneven across social categories, putting most particularly lower-status males at special risk. A recent demographic study of India has attempted to disaggregate the impact of the squeeze on social categories (Kashyap et al. 2015). Unsurprisingly, many uneducated men and well-educated women are unable to find a spouse according to these simulations. This corresponds to what is illustrated by this volume's chapters on rural India by Mishra and Chaudury and on urban China by Eklund. Among the poorest, male singlehood could in fact reach levels two or three times higher than average, unless specific social mechanisms—such as strict endogamous rules—prevent the bride drain toward better-off groups.

This brings us to the specific role of hypergamy, which is a distinct determinant of marriage squeeze. Hypergamy, expressed through inter-regional, interethnic or inter-caste marriage, is a long-standing strategy for social mobility for women and status uplift for their families in patrilineal China and India. It also leads to depletion of available brides to low-status men and of available grooms for high-status women (Edlund 1999). For a long time, this structural imbalance was resolved by the large gap in socioeconomic standing between men and women. As long as women were in a majority among the least educated and in a minority among the better educated, educational hypergamy was, for instance, perfectly possible from a pure supply and demand standpoint. This gender gap has now reduced, most particularly in China with high female participation rates and a rapidly declining gap in educational attainment. The arithmetic of hypergamous practices and a narrower gender gap in social achievements leads automatically to a potential rise of so-called "leftover women" unable to marry because of their high social status and reluctance to "marry down." Even if their number is in no way comparable to the millions of poor unmarried men, the case of China's leftover women has already gained a lot of attention, thanks to the social visibility of this group and their privileged position in the power hierarchy of urban China (Hong Fincher 2014). It also delineates the contours of a potential flight from marriage among educated women similar to the experience of richer East Asian countries. As indicated earlier, any rise in female singlehood would represent another blow to the patriarchal structure of marriage exchanges by further shrinking the pool of marriageable women.

Another question relates to the formation of marriage markets themselves. The demographic approach is based on the pre-existence of a closed population constituting the pool of potential brides and grooms, but this is a gross simplification. In the past, marriage exchanges were firstly constrained by marriage rules governing family interactions in which local rank and status considerations prevailed over individual characteristics. In India, exchanges are typically segmented along caste

lines, but formal criteria for mate selection based on ethnicity, regional identity or religious orientation have also been common in China. The marriage market is in fact an ongoing process of unification of local marriage networks in which individual characteristics—typically, age, size, income, education and assets—are expected to gain ascendency over collective attributes of patrilineage and community. The transformation is still incomplete, especially in India, and there is hardly a unified, competitive marriage market at the national or even regional level. This is a domain where only sociologists and anthropologists can dispel the demographers' simplification. They need to describe in particular how the marriage squeeze may force communities to expand gradually their endogamous boundaries—that is, to open up marriage markets in order to lessen the crisis.

The law of numbers loses much of its steam when applied mechanically to large population aggregates since it fails to capture the complexity and inner dynamics of marriage markets. Changes in individual and collective norms governing the age at marriage, the age gap between spouses, elasticity in endogamy and hypergamy, and the obligation to marry, are expected to accelerate. So far, the emphasis has been on extreme practices such as kidnapping, trafficking and polyandry through levirate, but these have always been fringe or criminal adjustment mechanisms to "market failure" and they are unlikely to become part of a new normative system governing union in China and India. We should rather expect endogenous innovations to emerge as a response to the forthcoming squeeze. A list of potential changes is long and includes a gradual dismantling of a heteronormative system built on forced marriage, individual hypergamy and collective endogamy, patrilineality and patrilocality, and heterosexual unions.

While the marriage squeeze may be portrayed as an exogenous shock—the type of events expected to cause instant and abrupt institutional transformations—its impact on individuals and communities has been in fact extremely gradual and will continue to be felt over the decades to come. Changes in the institution of marriage will therefore be similarly incremental rather than sudden, and the case of Gounder women examined in this volume by Heyer suggests how both norms and practices can adjust. With marriage markets locally reshaped by social innovations, marriage rules are changing fast, and this may disrupt some of the assumptions of demographers describing the squeeze. The old arsenal of kinship solutions has rapidly exhausted its resources, and we will need continuous anthropological research to chart the future evolution of marriage practices and norms.

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