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Chinese Cultural Studies:
Modern Marriage in China - Two Texts

China Youth Daily

The Correct Viewpoint Towards Marriage

from F. Schurmann and O. Schnell. eds., *Communist China*, (New York: Random House, 1966, 1967) as excerpted in William J. Duiker and Jackson J. Speigelvogel, *World History*, (Minneapolis/St. Paul: West, 1994), p. 1115

[Duiker Introduction] One of the major goals of the Communist government in China was to reform the tradition of marriage and place it on a new egalitarian basis. In the following excerpt, a writer for the magazine *China Youth Daily* describes the ideal marriage and explains how socialist marriage differs from its capitalist counterpart.

Now then, what is our viewpoint? Is it different from that of the exploiting bourgeois class!

For one thing, our basic concept on marriage is and must be that we build our happiness upon the premise that happiness should be shared by all. We advocate equal rights for man and woman, equal rights for husband and wife. We oppose the idea that man is superior to woman or that the husband has special prerogatives over his wife. We also oppose any discrimination against or ill treatment of the wife.

We believe that marriage should be based solely upon mutual consent. We oppose the so-called arranged marriage, or the use of any deceitful or compulsory method by one of the parties in this matter. We uphold the system of monogamy, husband and wife ought to have true and exclusive love toward each other, and concubinage is not permitted,

We believe that the very basic foundations for love between man and woman are common political understanding, comradeship in work, mutual help, and mutual respect. Money, position, or the so-called prettiness should not be taken into consideration for a right marriage, because they are not reliable foundations for love.

We also believe that solemnity and fidelity are important elements for a correct relationship between husband and wife, and for a happy family life. To

abandon one's partner by any improper means is to be opposed. In our society, those who intend to pursue their happiness at the expense of others run contradictory to the moral principle of Communism and will never be happy.

For the exploiting class, the concept about marriage is just the opposite. The landlord class believes in pursuing happiness by making other people suffer. They subscribe to such biased viewpoints as "man is superior to woman," "man is more important than woman," "man should dominate woman," etc. Under this type of ideology, women are merely slaves and properties of men and marriage is nothing but a process of buying and selling with compulsion. In the bourgeois society the whole matrimonial relationship is built upon money, and becomes simply a "monetary relationship," In economic relationships women belong to men, Love is nothing but a merchandise; women trade their flesh for men's money. This concept about marriage is indeed reactionary and it shall meet with our firm opposition, Among our young worker comrades there are still a few whose thinking is still under the influence of the exploiting class. They cannot do away with the thinking that man is superior to woman; they look down upon their own wives, especially those who have lower education and those who come from rural areas. When they look for lovers, what concerns the man most is whether the woman is pretty or not; what concerns the woman most is whether the man is earning high wages and has a high position, They disregard all the other elements for a good match.

Some of them even use deception to steal love or to force the other party to marry them. Their attitude toward love and marriage is most revolting.

They love the new ones and forsake the old, get themselves involved in multi-angle romance, or even seek excuses as grounds for divorce. All this sort of thinking and behavior are certainly contradictory to the moral quality of the working class and Communism, and contradictory to the socialist concept and system of marriage. Therefore those who have formed such a wrong concept about marriage ought to adopt a correct one in accordance with the moral principle of Communism. Only then will there be possibility for true love and happy family life.

Tani E. Barlow and Donald M. Lowe

Teaching China's Lost Generations

from Tani E. Barlow and Donald M. Lowe, Teaching China's Lost Generations, (San Francisco: China Books, 1987), as excerpted in William J.

Duiker and Jackson J. Speigelvogel, World History, (Minneapolis/St. Paul: West, 1994), p. 1118

[Duiker Introduction] One of the problems with Deng Xiaoping's reform program is that it has led to the recital of many of the "feudalistic" customs of the past. The following passage from a book by two young Americans who recently taught in China shows that forty years of revolution have not erased some of the oldest traditions in Chinese society.

Whether you marry out of blind passion or a more regulated sort of affection, marriage is still the biggest event in anyone's life. Nowadays it cost several thousand yuan to have a decent wedding in Shanghai. (The official exchange rate is about 1 yuan to U.S. \$0.52, and the average monthly wage is about Y50 -- 65.) The groom buys or makes all the furniture. A specified number of items, usually a TV, radio, sewing machine, electric fan, or sofa, is negotiated in advance. The bride usually supplies bedding, dresses, clothing, dishes and household utensils. The groom's family pays for the wedding banquet, which runs about Y60-75 per table. The problem lately is that many families try to impress friends and colleagues by having lots of guests.

But, wedding guests must each contribute a gift of Y20.00 which is leading to genuine hardship among our students, and even among young workers who make over Y50 a month, because with the whole sixties generation now getting married, it is not unusual to get a wedding invitation every month,

No one can refuse an invitation without seriously damaging social relationships, so the financial burden of the wedding is rapidly overwhelming everyone. The government has tried to regulate the spiraling cost of marriage by raising banquet prices, and limiting the number of guests one can invite.

It has just begun offering inexpensive group weddings, also. On October 1, the Shanghai municipal government sponsored one, which attracted only about 300 couples. Lots of people get around the regulations easily by hiring a few cooks and throwing an enormous private banquet in their danwei's [cadre's] hall or at home, thus bypassing the state-owned restaurants.

Xiao Shen and Xiao Qian would very much like to keep the cost of their wedding down, but aren't too hopeful because they represent only one voice in the planning and must convince their parents and even all their grandparents that cheaper is better, The older generations have reasserted their control over marriage, in the wake of the GPCR (Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution), finding the return to older social conventions very reassuring. This situation strikes young people as more than a little ironic. Their own parents, who married in the 1950s during the first marriage reforms, were rebelling against their parents, They married for love and didn't have weddings at all, just registered at the state's marriage bureau -- no banquet, no furniture, no worries. So, the generation which benefited most from marriage reform is, according to their children, now making it difficult for love to survive, by insisting on elaborate weddings and many times selecting spouses for their children. This of course is the younger generation's perspective. Lao Zheng has his own strong feelings 'about the marriage crisis. He complains about how spoiled GPCR kids expect all sorts of electrical appliances while he and

his wife married in the late 1950s with nothing, and still don't have anything except two kids to feed and a lot of responsibilities,