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978-0-521-13068-4 - The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China

Elisabeth Croll

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IN CONTEMPORARY
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ELISABETH CROLL

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

London New York New Rochelle

Melbourne Sydney

Cambridge University Press

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521130684

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First published 1981
This digitally printed version 2010

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-23345-3 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-13068-4 Paperback

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P R E F A C E

The research for this book was undertaken while I was a Fellow at the Contemporary China Institute from 1974 to 1977. It is primarily concerned with the processes of change within the institution of marriage in the People's Republic of China, the economic and ideological factors responsible for differing degrees of change and the contest between the generations and between political and kin or neighbourhood groups which projected changes have occasioned. It is based on both documentary sources and a brief period of interviewing in China in 1977. This book, which employs an anthropological approach, is a revised version of an original manuscript which was presented as a Doctoral thesis in the Department of Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, in January 1978. I would like to thank Dr James Watson of the School of Oriental and African Studies for his advice and encouragement throughout this project. He has on all occasions been generous with his time and I am grateful for his careful reading of the various drafts of the manuscript. In addition I would like to thank Professor A. Mayer, Dr D. Parkin and other members of the Anthropology Department who have taken an interest in this project both informally and in research seminars. My thanks are also due to Dr C. Howe and the Contemporary China Institute of the University of London, where as a Fellow I was provided with both financial support and research facilities. I am very grateful for both. I would also like to thank Christine Lyall Grant of Cambridge University Press for her careful reading and editing of the final typescript.

The introduction to the book contains some discussion of the broader anthropological interest of the study and particularly the applicability of the anthropological method to a documentary study of one of the less accessible societies. Until the last year or so most anthropologists of Chinese culture have been reluctant to turn their

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attention to the People's Republic of China, partly because fieldwork has been virtually impossible in China over the last few decades. The first two years of this project were planned on the assumption that no such opportunity would materialise, but in the third year I was able to undertake some limited but intensive interviewing, and a household survey, in a few selected rural and urban locations. Although this visit in no way constituted the normal definition of fieldwork, data from this source did enable me to elaborate on certain of the hypotheses which I had previously developed from documentary sources prior to my visit. The Contemporary China Institute, the Chinese Embassy in London and the Guangdong Branch of the China Travel Service all made it possible for me to visit China and collect some data for this study. I would like to thank the many persons both in London and China who helped me to make the best possible use of a very short time in the field.

The book covers a wide time-span, but because of the reduction in publications on the subject during and since the Cultural Revolution, the case studies illustrating contemporary trends and problems are primarily drawn from the early 1960s rather than more recent years. Interestingly, in the last year and since the revision of this study for publication, there have been a number of more contemporary references in the Chinese media to the problems of marriage and especially to the persistence of 'arranged and venal marriages' and 'feudal and superstitious ceremonies' (*Survey of World Broadcasts* 5 August 1978, 6 and 11 January 1979). It has been forecast that there may be some revisions of the 1950 Marriage Law in the near future (*Survey of World Broadcasts* 13 January 1979), and a new campaign to reform marriage was launched in the earlier months of 1979. It once again publicised the fact that marriage should be determined and controlled by the principals themselves, that they must oppose marriage on a mercenary basis, that they must marry at an appropriate later age and that they must refrain from extravagance and practise economy in the celebration of marriage. The media has provided recent negative examples of all the above to add to those given in chapters 2 to 6. The campaign has also reaffirmed the principle of 'free-choice' marriage and hinted that very real difficulties have hindered this process of change (*New China News Agency* 29 December 1978; *Survey of World Broadcasts* 6 and 11 January 1979; *Beijing Review* 30 November 1979; *Women of China* 1 January 1980). Although there

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is little analysis in the media of the obstacles to change of the type presented in chapters 8 and 9, the recognition and illustrations of the problems do add further evidence that many of the phenomena, suppositions and hypotheses put forward in this book remain valid in 1979.

Finally, I would like to express my personal appreciation to James Croll, who has taken an active interest in the project and shared in the care of Nicolas and Katherine.

September 1979

E.C.

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NOTE ON ROMANISATION AND WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

In this study I have mainly used the Hanyu Pinyin system of romanisation. Where well-known personal and place-names are less recognisable in this form I have placed the more familiar forms in parentheses when first cited in the text. The exceptions are a few village names associated with existing anthropological studies which are already familiar to many readers in the Wade-Giles romanisation. Where these and Chinese authors and titles have been written in or translated into English, then they remain as they were presented in the original texts.

1 catty = 1 jin = $\frac{1}{2}$ kg = 1.1 lb

1 mu = $\frac{1}{15}$ = $\frac{1}{6}$ acre

1 li = $\frac{1}{2}$ km = $\frac{1}{3}$ mile

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GLOSSARY

<i>anjia luohu</i>	settle down permanently
<i>bai jiuxi</i>	marriage feast
<i>biao</i>	cousins of different surnames
<i>boxiao jieji chushen</i>	exploiting-class origins
<i>buxiao erzi</i>	unfilial son
<i>caoshuai jiehun</i>	hasty marriage
<i>chengfen</i>	class status
<i>fenjia</i>	household division
<i>fumu baoban ernu hunyin</i>	arranged marriage
<i>hu</i>	household
<i>huangdao jiri</i>	auspicious days
<i>hunyin ziyou</i>	free-choice marriage
<i>jia/jiating</i>	family
<i>jiating chengfen</i>	family background
<i>jiazhang</i>	head of the household
<i>jiazhuang</i>	dowry
<i>jiehun yishi</i>	marriage ceremony
<i>jieshao ren</i>	introducer
<i>jindaide ziyou jiehun</i>	free-choice marriage in the modern way
<i>jinqin</i>	close kin
<i>lianai zhishang</i>	supremacy of love
<i>lichang</i>	standpoint
<i>luanlan lianai</i>	fickleness of love
<i>maimai hunyin</i>	marriage by purchase
<i>meiren</i>	matchmaker
<i>mingmei zhengzhu</i>	marriage properly conducted
<i>pinjin</i>	betrothal gift
<i>qiantu/chuxi</i>	future
<i>qiuhun</i>	proposal of marriage
<i>shidu</i>	appropriate
<i>shijie guan</i>	world viewpoint
<i>tan lianai</i>	courtship
<i>tang</i>	cousins of same surname
<i>timian</i>	pride, 'face'

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<i>wanhun</i>	late marriage
<i>xianhua</i>	gossip
<i>xiaodao</i>	filial
<i>xiaxiang</i>	sent-down-to-the-countryside youth
<i>xixin yanjiu</i>	to like the new and to oppose the old
<i>xuanze airen di biao zhun</i>	norms for selecting a spouse
<i>zaohu</i>	early marriage
<i>zhao duixiang</i>	choose a spouse
<i>zhaosan musi</i>	changeability and untrustworthiness
<i>zhengzhi diwei</i>	political status
<i>zhitong daohe</i>	to be of one mind and purpose
<i>ziyou jiehun</i>	freedom of marriage
<i>zu</i>	lineage
<i>zunzhong/zongbai</i>	social status/respect