

## Education, Class and Marriage in Rural Shanxi, China in the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century

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This paper explores assortative mating by education and registered social class in mid-twentieth century rural China. Using data from rural Shanxi province in north China, we examine whether the dramatic social, political, and economic changes between the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and the mid-1960s altered patterns of assortative mating. Relevant changes included a massive expansion in primary education, extraordinary efforts at social and economic leveling, and a new marriage law introduced in 1953 that forbid arranged marriages and other interference by senior generations in the marriage decisions of adult children. While these and other changes might have been expected to promote marriage across traditional boundaries defined by social and economic status, other changes such as the assignment of class labels created new boundaries.

This study is distinct from most previous studies of assortative mating in 20<sup>th</sup> century China by virtue of its use of detailed and nearly contemporaneous administrative data to focus on the period immediately after the founding of the PRC, and its use of class labels as another measure of status. Most previous studies of assortative mating in 20<sup>th</sup> century rely on survey or Census data collected recently, and well after 1949. Such data typically have a limited number of measures of social and economic status. Often, the only one available for rural populations education, as recalled by respondents many decades later. We make use of data from registers compiled in 1964-66 in preparation for the Four Cleanups campaign. As will be discussed later, the contents of these registers were drawn from other village administrative records that dated back to 1949. Importantly, they not only record education, but class labels and as well as household landholding and other wealth at multiple points in time.

We have three goals in this paper. The first is to compare patterns of assortative mating by class label and education. We focus in particular on homogamy and female hypergamy. As we will see later, class label is strongly associated with family landholding before 1949, and is accordingly closer than education attainment to being a direct measure of past family social and economic status. A finding that patterns of assortative mating differed according to whether status was measured with class label or education would raise the possibility that the current reliance on educational attainment in studies of assortative mating may be yielding an incomplete picture. The second is to examine whether patterns of assortative mating changed after 1949. We focus on whether status homogamy and/or female hypergamy intensified or

weakened after 1949. As noted earlier, while there are reasons to expect boundaries to have weakened, there are other reason to expect boundaries to have weakened, there are other reasons to expect that they strengthened.

The paper is organized as follows. In the first part, we provide background on marriage in China in the next section, with an emphasis on norms and empirical findings related to assortative mating. We also provide some basic historical context on changes in China in the mid-20th century. In the second part, we introduce our setting and our sources. We introduce rural Shanxi, focusing on features of local context that are important to keep in mind when interpreting results and drawing conclusions about China more generally. We also introduce the China Siqing Social Class Dataset – Shanxi (CSSCD-SX) constructed by the Research Center for Chinese Social History (RCCSH) at Shanxi University from their collection of village government archival materials. In the third part, we briefly introduce our methods. Briefly, we use methods for the analysis of contingency tables, where counts of marriages between men and women in particular combinations of categories is modeled as a function of the numbers of men and women in each category, along with additional variables that summarizes features of the combination of spouses' characteristics. In the fourth part, we present our results. We show that patterns of assortative mating by education and family class background differ. We then show that homogamy became less pronounced after 1949. We then examine the interaction between status assortative mating and village endogamy. We conclude with some remarks about future directions.