



Love Matches and Arranged Marriages: A Chinese Replication

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Love Matches and Arranged Marriages: A Chinese Replication

Data from a probability sample of 586 ever-married women in Chengdu, Sichuan, in the People's Republic of China, are used to examine the transition from arranged to free-choice marriages in that society. Retrospective data on mate-choice experiences reveal that the role of parents has declined sharply, while young people more and more dominate the process of spouse selection. However, the transition toward free mate choice appears to have made little further headway in recent years, and there is still little sign of a "dating culture" emerging. Variations in mate-choice experiences are used to test the prediction of defenders of arranged marriage that "love matches start out hot and grow cold, while arranged marriages start out cold and grow hot." In a partial replication of an investigation of the same question conducted by Robert Blood in Tokyo, Japan, in 1959, the evidence refutes this prediction. Multiple regression analyses indicate that wives in Chengdu love matches are more satisfied with their marital relationships than their counterparts in arranged marriages, regardless of the length of the marriage, and that this difference cannot be attributed to the influence of other background factors that differentiate these two types of women.

Throughout the world a revolution has been taking place in the way mates are selected. In societies where parents used to select marital partners for their children, the power of parents is crumbling.

Through some combination of structural modernization, cultural Westernization, and governmental pressure, arranged marriages are increasingly giving way to freedom of choice, or "love matches," in which young people play the dominant role in selecting whom they will marry. (For the classic account of this transition worldwide, see Goode, 1963.)

Even though the nature of the trend is indisputable, its implications are not. Individuals reared in the West, where "youth-driven" mate choice has been the rule in most social strata for centuries, assume that this shift from arranged marriages to love matches is progressive and "healthy." As young people are increasingly freed from arbitrary family dictates and controls, they are able to select partners according to criteria of love and personal compatibility, and the result should be happier marriages and individuals. In the "bad old days" of arranged marriages, according to this view, many people found themselves stuck in marriages with persons decidedly not of their own choosing, mates selected on the basis of family status, wealth, or other criteria, whom they might find personally repulsive.¹ The shift away from arranged marriage, then, should reduce the level of marital misery in a society.

Traditionalists in many parts of the world raise questions about this set of assumptions, however. They point to the high divorce rates in modern societies characterized by freedom of mate choice as evidence of the problems inherent in love matches. They claim that arranged marriages have virtues that are not appreciated by people in Western societies. The contrast they draw is il-

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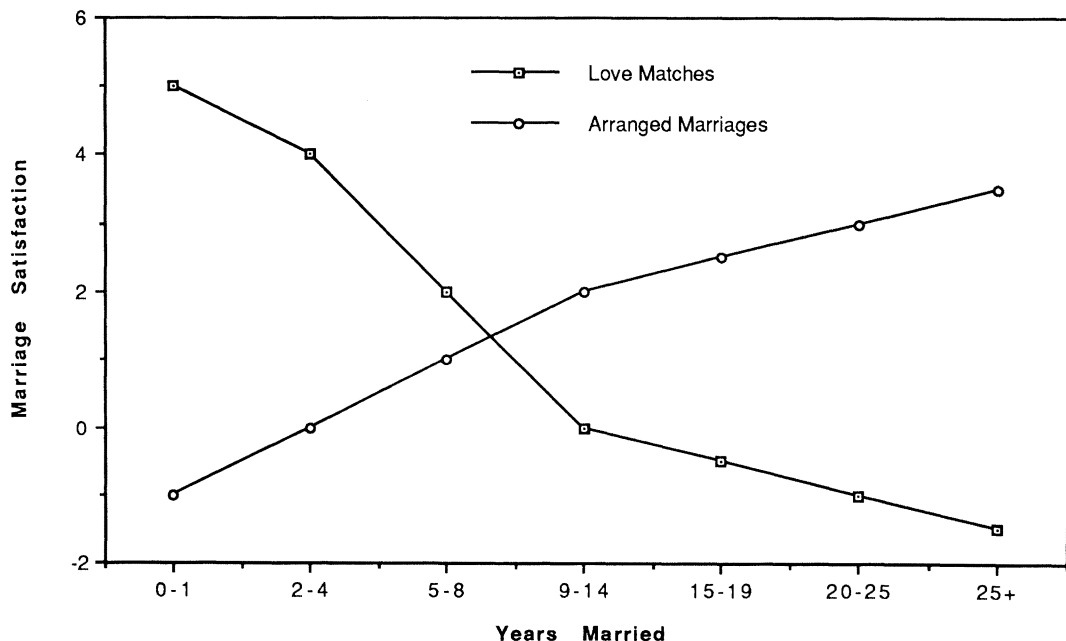
lustrated by the phrase, "love matches start out hot and grow cold, while arranged marriages start out cold and grow hot." In other words, love matches typically involve a very intense romantic involvement, accompanied by idealization of the partner and fantasies about wedded bliss, in the period prior to the wedding (the "hot" phase). Then after the wedding, reality sets in, and some combination of domestic chores, child care burdens, financial anxieties, and mundane life with a less-than-ideal real life partner leads to a more or less inevitable decline in romantic feelings and satisfaction with the relationship over the years. Here traditionalists can point to a considerable accumulation of evidence, from both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies in Western societies, showing that marital happiness and satisfaction ratings do tend to decline over the course of a marriage (see for example, Pineo, 1961; Renne, 1970; Hicks and Platt, 1970).²

The trajectory for arranged marriages, according to traditionalists, is different. Since they don't know each other well, or perhaps not at all, and since they don't have any romantic feelings for one another prior to the marriage, the partners in an arranged marriage "have nowhere to go but

up." After the marriage the couple will have the opportunity to get to know one another and forge common bonds. As this process occurs, compatibility and mutual concern are likely to lead to a mature form of love, perhaps never as "hot" as the premarital emotions experienced in a love match, but a relationship that provides a more realistic and durable bond that can survive the test of time and family difficulties. In the long run, at least, the traditionalists claim, arranged marriages give more satisfaction than free-choice marriages. In Figure 1 we present a hypothetical picture of the trends in marriage satisfaction that might be found for love matches and arranged marriages if the claims of traditionalists are correct.

But can we assume that spouses selected by parents will have any realistic basis for developing a compatible relationship? Critics of arranged marriages can point to cases that make this seem quite unlikely—of a young and vital woman married off to an old and feeble man, or to a deformed son of a wealthy family, and so forth. However, traditionalists argue that such cases are atypical and that arranged marriages are generally more likely to produce compatibility than are love matches. They argue that parents are concerned

FIGURE 1. HYPOTHETICAL TRENDS FOR MARRIAGE SATISFACTION IN LOVE MATCHES AND ARRANGED MARRIAGES



about the happiness of their offspring and will usually be in a better position to judge compatibility in the long run than their children are. They can rationally evaluate the nature of their own child and investigate the character of a prospective spouse for that child and then use their wisdom and experience to arrive at the most "suitable" match. Their offspring, in contrast, may be young and immature, and even if not they may be too swayed by emotions and hormones to make a "wise" choice of a marital partner.³ The result of allowing young people to choose their own spouses, then, may be that they will be blinded by love and overlook areas of personal incompatibility, and the latter will become apparent and cause problems later on in the marriage. Parents are less likely to be so blinded, or so the argument goes.

LOVE MATCHES AND ARRANGED MARRIAGES IN TOKYO

So far as we are aware, this set of arguments, and particularly those involving arranged marriages, has been systematically investigated only once. In 1959 Robert Blood conducted a survey in Tokyo, Japan, that was designed specifically to compare love matches and arranged marriages (see Blood, 1967). Blood and his associates interviewed 444 married couples who lived in nuclear-family households in three predominantly white-collar housing projects in Tokyo, with a further restriction that the wives in these families had to be age 40 or younger. His research resulted in a serious challenge to the "starting hot and cooling down versus starting cold and heating up" argument presented by defenders of arranged marriage, particularly in the case of wives.

Figures 2 and 3 convey important results from the Blood study that are central to that challenge. Using a variety of indicators of marriage quality, such as those shown in these figures, Blood did not find the pattern of starting cold and heating up posited for arranged marriages. Rather, for both types of marriages the long-term trajectory was downward, toward less expression of love and lower marriage satisfaction. For arranged-marriage (*miai*) husbands this decline was more gradual than for their love-match counterparts, so that in later stages the men who had experienced arranged marriages were more satisfied and experienced more love feelings. However, for wives

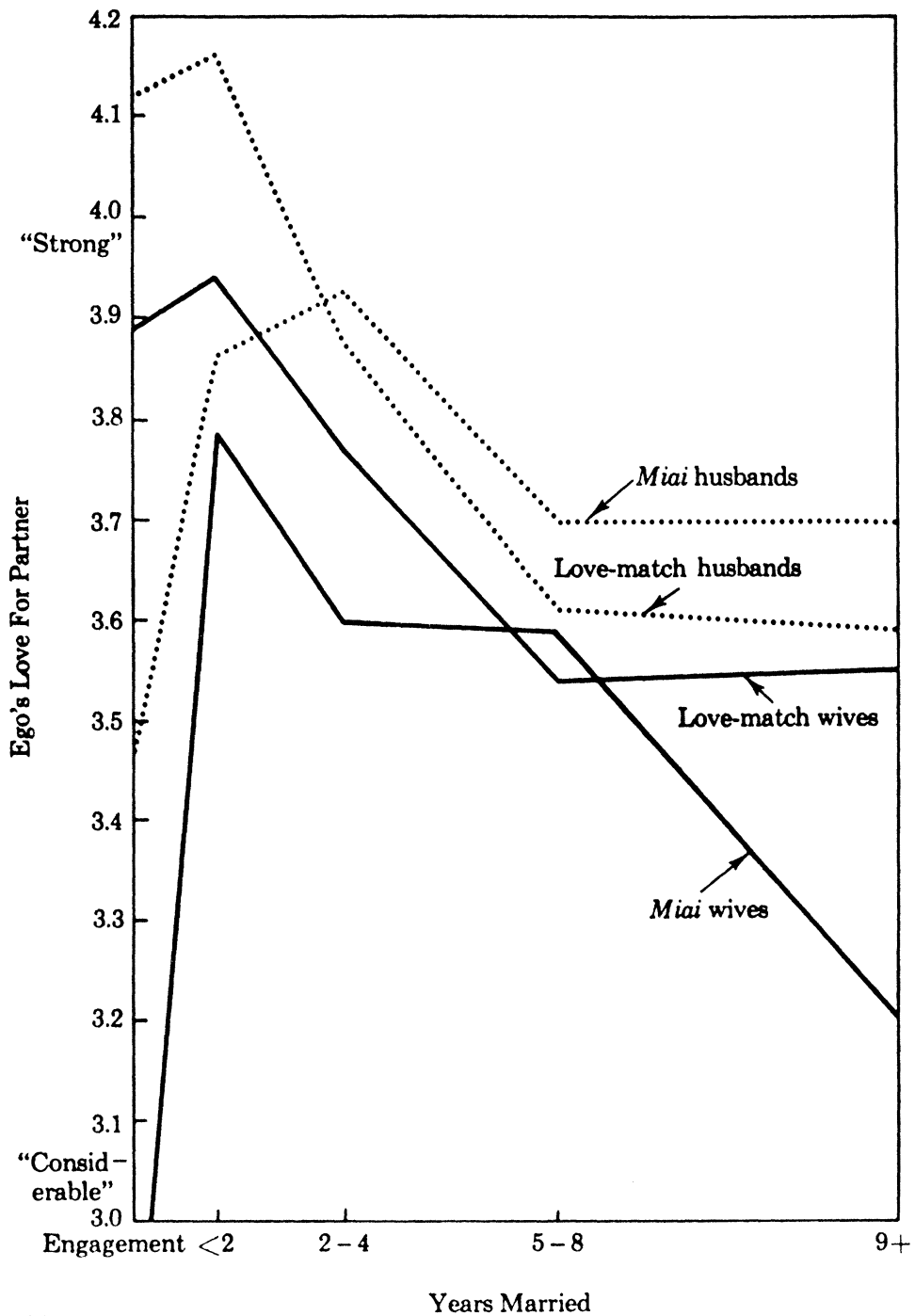
the trend was the opposite, with women from arranged marriages eventually being much more dissatisfied and having fewer love feelings than their counterparts from love matches. If there are any advantages to arranged marriages, according to the Tokyo evidence, they accrue only to husbands. In any case the trajectory of marital feelings is quite different from that posited by the traditionalists, without the signs of steady improvement (becoming "hot") suggested in the hypothetical curve for arranged marriages shown in Figure 1.⁴

Several features of the Tokyo study make a replication elsewhere seem worthwhile. First, the restricted nature of the sample used by Blood raises questions about whether the same sort of pattern would have been found even in Japan with a more representative sample. Second, Blood did not subject his results to multivariate analysis, thus leaving open the question of whether the contrasts drawn between the two types of marriage could be spurious. Finally, it is not clear that this single Japanese case study can allow us to be conclusive about the merits or demerits of the two types of marriage. For the majority of the Japanese population, the peasants, free choice and even trial marriages had been the rule up to a century prior to Blood's survey, with arranged marriage being fostered subsequently through a process of "samuraization" (see the discussion in Goode, 1963, chap. 7). Then American military occupation after World War II played some role in undermining this newly dominant arranged-marriage custom. Given this history, we might suspect that cultural support for love-match and arranged-marriage alternatives in Japan would be different and perhaps more shallow than in other societies. In any case, not only social scientists, but also individuals in transitional societies who are debating these alternatives and facing anxieties about finding a spouse, deserve additional attempts to compare the implications for marital relations in free-choice and arranged marriages.

A PARTIAL REPLICATION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

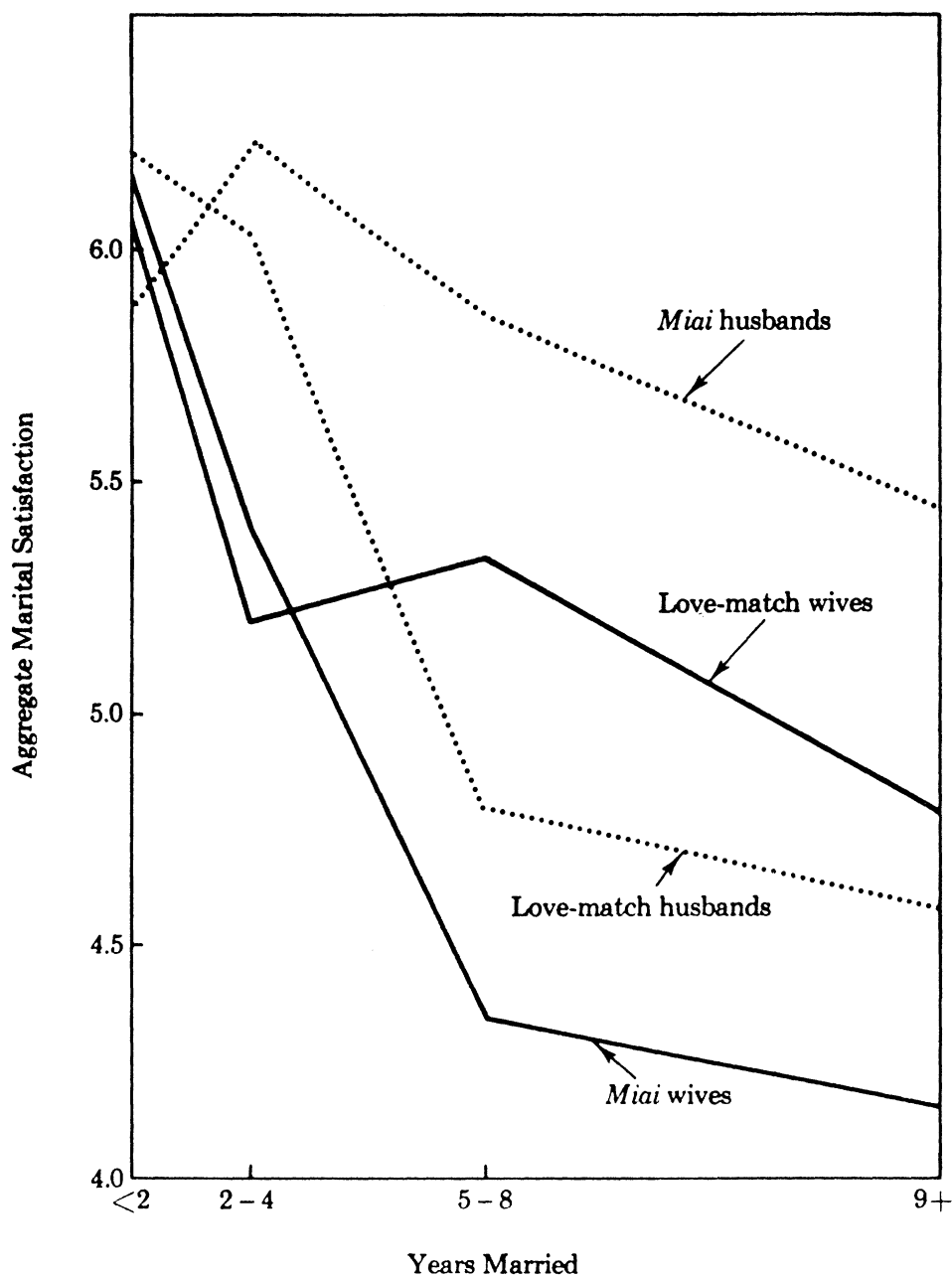
In the pages that follow we report the results of a partial replication of the love-match/arranged-marriage comparison conducted in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province, in the People's Republic of China. A probability sample of 586

FIGURE 2. HUSBANDS' AND WIVES' LOVE FEELINGS IN LOVE MATCHES AND ARRANGED MARRIAGES BY LENGTH OF MARRIAGE, TOKYO, 1959



Source: From *Love Match and Arranged Marriage: A Tokyo-Detroit Comparison*, by Robert O. Blood, Jr., p. 87. Copyright © 1967 by Robert O. Blood, Jr. Reprinted by permission of The Free Press, a Division of Macmillan, Inc.

FIGURE 3. HUSBANDS' AND WIVES' AGGREGATE MARITAL SATISFACTION IN LOVE MATCHES AND ARRANGED MARRIAGES BY LENGTH OF MARRIAGE, TOKYO, 1959



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ever-married women between the ages of 22 and 70 residing in the two main urban districts of Chengdu (which together contained about 1.2 million people in 1982, or 97% of the urban population of that city) was interviewed in 1987, with a response rate of 87.7%.⁵ Sichuan is China's most populous province, with over 100 million people, and it is located in the Southwest. Even though Chengdu is the capital of the province, it may be less cosmopolitan than cities near the coast, such as Peking, Canton, or Shanghai. No claim is made here that Chengdu is representative of urban China in general. However, existing research on other urban areas (see Whyte and Parish, 1984) suggests that the general features of the mate-choice transition process in Chengdu are similar to what is occurring elsewhere.

Women in the Chengdu sample were first married over a 55-year period, from 1933 to 1987, and during this time period a major transformation from arranged to free-choice marriages has been under way. The results of the Chengdu survey will be used to compare Chinese love matches and arranged marriages. Unfortunately, husbands were not interviewed, so we can only examine how marriages were viewed by wives. The Chengdu survey also uses somewhat different measures from those employed by Blood, and of course our sample is broader and more representative, so what follows is a partial, rather than an exact, replication of the Tokyo study.

Arranged marriages were the dominant tradition in China for all classes for centuries, unlike the situation in Japan. Furthermore, Chinese arranged marriages often took a more extreme form than that found in China's Asian neighbor. While in the Japanese *miai* custom the young couple had a ritualized meeting and at least some opportunity to express an opinion about the partner selected for them, in China many people experienced what could be called a "blind marriage," in which the parents monopolized the decision (with the aid of hired go-betweens), and the couple did not even meet until the day of the wedding.⁶

This arranged marriage system came under attack in the early decades of this century, with reformers and revolutionaries denouncing the personal misery and suicides that resulted (see Pa, 1933/1972). One interesting voice in this chorus of criticism was a young fellow by the name of Mao Zedong, who used one of his first appearances in print, a series of newspaper articles in 1919, to

draw attention to the tragic case of a young woman driven to suicide by her unwillingness to accept the man chosen for her by her parents (see Witke, 1973). Over time a combination of increasing wage labor in China's towns and cities and growing Western influence on China's culture and educational system did begin to foster a growing voice for young people in mate-choice decisions during the republican era (1912-1949—see Lang, 1946; Levy, 1949).

After the Chinese Communists came to national power in 1949, they vigorously promoted freedom of mate choice. The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, adopted in 1950, denounced the "arbitrary and compulsory feudal marriage system . . . which ignores the childrens' interests" and proclaimed that "marriage shall be based upon the complete willingness of the two parties. Neither party shall use compulsion and no third party shall be allowed to interfere" (quoted in Yang, 1959: 221). Marriage registration offices were established nationwide, where couples were to be interviewed at the point of marriage to see whether they were doing so voluntarily. A nationwide propaganda campaign was launched during the period 1950-1953 to try to mobilize support for, and compliance with, the Marriage Law. In subsequent years socialist transformation of the economy eliminated the family as a production unit (until the post-Mao reforms, at least), and the resulting proletarianization of the population, combined with industrialization and the spread of education, helped to accelerate the process of transition from arranged to free-choice marriages (see the fuller discussion in Parish and Whyte, 1978; Whyte and Parish, 1984).

Cross-sectional data from the Chengdu survey can be used to get some picture of the timing and extent of this transition. Responses to several pertinent, closed-ended questions are displayed by time periods in Table 1. Women in the sample are arrayed in this table in terms of the years they first married, rather than by birth cohorts, and the time divisions that form marriage cohorts in the table are selected to match the major political turning points in recent Chinese history—the coming to power of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, the launching of the Great Leap Forward in 1958, the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and the beginning of the post-Mao reform era in 1977.

Several features of the contrasts across mar-

TABLE 1. CHANGES IN ASPECTS OF FREEDOM OF MATE CHOICE IN CHENGDU

Item	Year First Married				
	1933-48	1949-57	1958-65	1966-76	1977-87
1. Traditional arranged marriage (%)	69	22	1	0	0
2. Type of marriage (%)					
Arranged	68	27	0	1	2
Intermediate	15	33	45	40	41
Individual choice	17	40	55	59	57
3. Dominant role in mate choice (%)					
Parents	56	30	7	8	5
Mixed	15	11	6	3	6
Respondent	28	59	87	89	89
4. Introduced to husband (%)	91	76	54	59	60
5. Who provided the introduction? (%)					
Own generation	38	43	75	75	74
Other	8	17	7	6	9
Parents' generation	53	40	18	19	17
6. Dated husband prior to marriage? (%)					
Often	12	17	24	40	48
Sometimes	6	18	27	13	21
Rarely	23	22	30	31	24
Never	59	44	18	16	7
7. Number of romances (%)					
None	73	29	9	5	5
One	24	63	74	66	67
More than one	3	8	18	29	28
8. Had other marital prospects (%)	4	5	2	6	9
9. How much in love when married? (%)					
Completely	17	38	63	61	67
	26	29	22	26	19
	35	20	9	11	10
	9	4	4	1	3
Not at all	13	9	2	1	0
<i>n</i>	71	107	82	116	210

riage cohorts visible in Table 1 deserve comment. First, it is apparent that a major shift away from arranged marriage has occurred, with instances in which parents dominate the proceedings declining from 60% to 70% in the pre-1949 period to under 10% today. Relatedly, those who met their husbands directly rather than through an introduction, those whose introducers were peers rather than parents, those who had some romantic relationships and dates prior to marriage, and those who describe themselves as having been in love have all increased in comparison with the pre-1949 era.

The extent of the change shown in the table might be exaggerated as a result of two kinds of biases. First, even though respondents were all residing in Chengdu at the time of the interviews, some of them were not when they married. Higher portions of the earliest marriage cohorts than of recent cohorts actually lived in rural areas when they married. Since the arranged-marriage tradition remains stronger even today in China's villages, that fact might tend to inflate the

percentages for behavior associated with arranged marriages in the early cohorts. In addition, some political bias might be involved. It may be acceptable to admit to an interviewer that your parents controlled the process if you married before 1949, but it may be unacceptable to reveal that fact about a marriage occurring within the socialist era. We made a number of attempts to "screen out" such biases by recomputing the figures in Table 1, with those who married in rural areas and those we assumed would most likely display political bias (e.g. Party members) removed, and in general the extent of the shift from arranged to free-choice marriages shown in the table was only slightly affected. In fact, only the elimination of women with rural roots had a detectable impact on the results, and that was mostly for the second, 1949-57, marriage cohort, rather than for the first (indicating somewhat more "actual" freedom of mate choice in Chengdu than shown in the second column of Table 1—results not displayed here). So the general extent of the transformation is clear from the data, even if the exact percentages

for each time period may be open to some argument.

The results in Table 1 also show that in spite of the increasing role that young people have played recently in selecting their own spouses, very little in the way of a "dating culture" exists yet in Chengdu. (Elements defining a dating culture might include the ability of young people to link up romantically without adult supervision in a setting that is not defined as leading directly to marriage. In such a dating culture it is acceptable for young people to "try out" a variety of romantic partners before progressing to the stage of preparing to select a spouse. See the discussion in Modell, 1983.) Most women (over 90%) never had another person they considered marrying besides their eventual husbands, and less than 30% even had had other boyfriends. Furthermore, even in recent years generally 30-50% of the women interviewed say they rarely or never dated their future husbands, and even for those who did, the dates almost always came after the decision to marry, rather than prior to it (a fact that is not obvious from the table but is made clear by ethnographic observations in China).⁷ In this setting, in which young people have to make a vital decision about their lives without being able to gain experience first via casual dating, it is understandable that in some cases parents are able to exert considerable influence. Depending upon which measure one chooses, parents play some or even a dominant role in 11-43% of recent marriages, and almost one-fifth of those who rely on introductions end up receiving these from their parents or other senior kin.⁸ So a second conclusion that can be drawn from the table is that the transition to freedom of mate choice has not produced as much ability for young people to exercise free choice as currently exists in the West.⁹

A final pattern that becomes clear from the figures in the table is that the transition to free mate choice seems to have largely "stalled" since the late 1950s. Although there have been small increases since then in indicators such as the percentage of women with other marriage prospects and in those who often dated prior to marriage, the major shifts occurred among the early cohorts. This pattern emerges more clearly if six of the indicators in Table 1 (from panels 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 9) are used to construct a mean Freedom of Mate Choice Scale. The six items indicated were arranged in a consistent direction, with a high score

indicating greater freedom of mate choice. The average item-to-item correlation (r) was .42. We then constructed our scale by computing the standardized, or z , scores for each item and then taking the unweighted mean of these standardized scores. Values computed for this scale are plotted in the form of a three-year moving average against years of first marriage in Figure 4.

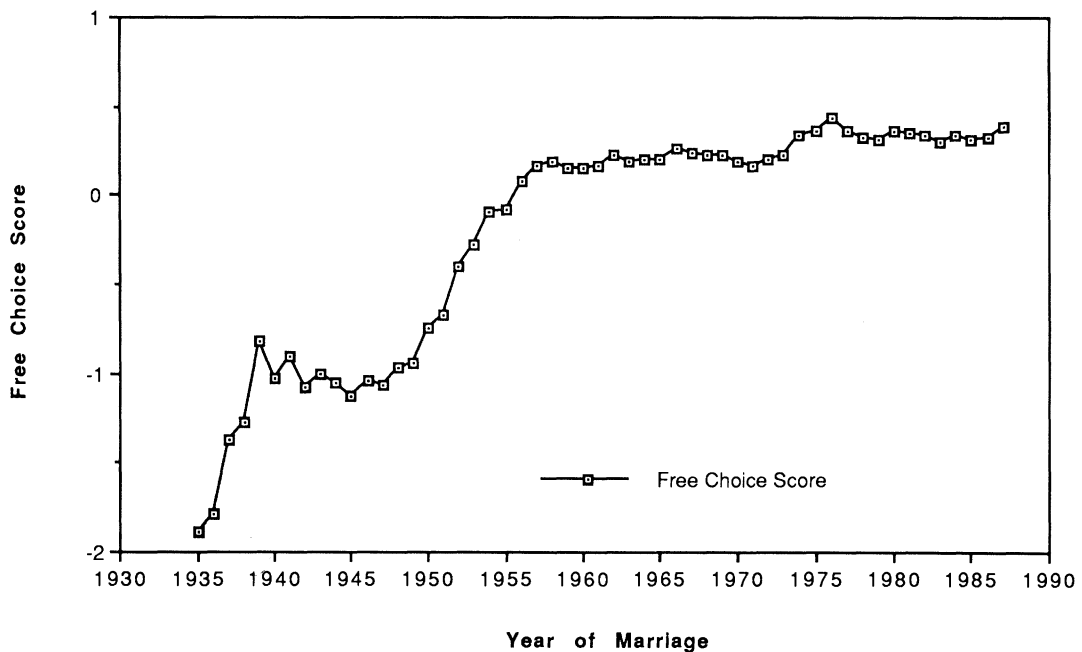
From this figure we can conclude that freedom of mate choice was already increasing during the 1930s, that this increase halted during World War II, and that a major further increase occurred during the post-war period and the 1950s. However, there have been only incremental shifts toward even greater freedom for young people since that time. The reasons for this "stalling" of the transition (which contrasts with a more linear trend toward freedom of choice in Taiwan—see Thornton, Chang, and Lin, 1989) are too complex to go into here, but explanations are attempted in a companion paper (see Whyte, 1990). Suffice it to say here that while China's communist leaders have consistently advocated freedom for young people to choose their own mates, they have erected considerable barriers designed to inhibit young people from developing a dating culture, not to mention experimenting with premarital sex. In any case, the figures in Table 1 and Figure 4 attest to the substantial change in the direction of freedom of mate choice that has occurred in the lives of Chengdu women, while also leaving enough variability in mate-choice experiences even recently to allow us to compare free-choice and arranged marriages.

FREEDOM OF MATE CHOICE AND MARRIAGE QUALITY

Has the shift toward greater freedom of mate choice in China produced more satisfactory marriage relations or less satisfactory ones? We examine this question first with a graphic display of the impact of the mode of mate choice on marriage quality for Chengdu and then by subjecting a marriage quality measure to multivariate analysis to see whether any impact detected is spurious or not. This exercise can only be conducted for wives, since we did not have the opportunity to interview husbands.

The dependent variables in the Chengdu study are not exactly comparable to those used by Blood. Blood's most reliable measure of marriage

FIGURE 4. FREEDOM OF MATE CHOICE IN CHENGDU, 1934-1987



Note: A three-year moving average was used to smooth out the irregularities in trends caused by the small number of marriages in our sample for each individual year of marriage.

quality was an aggregate indicator of marriage satisfaction (used in Figure 3), which was constructed from a weighted average of ten separate satisfaction questions, each answered with responses on a 7-point scale.¹⁰ A similar measure was constructed for Chengdu, consisting of the mean of the standardized scores of wives' responses to six closed-ended marriage quality items (each responded to in three categories) and one general marriage satisfaction question (responded to according to a 5-point scale, from very dissatisfied to very satisfied).¹¹ The resulting measure is our Marriage Quality Scale.

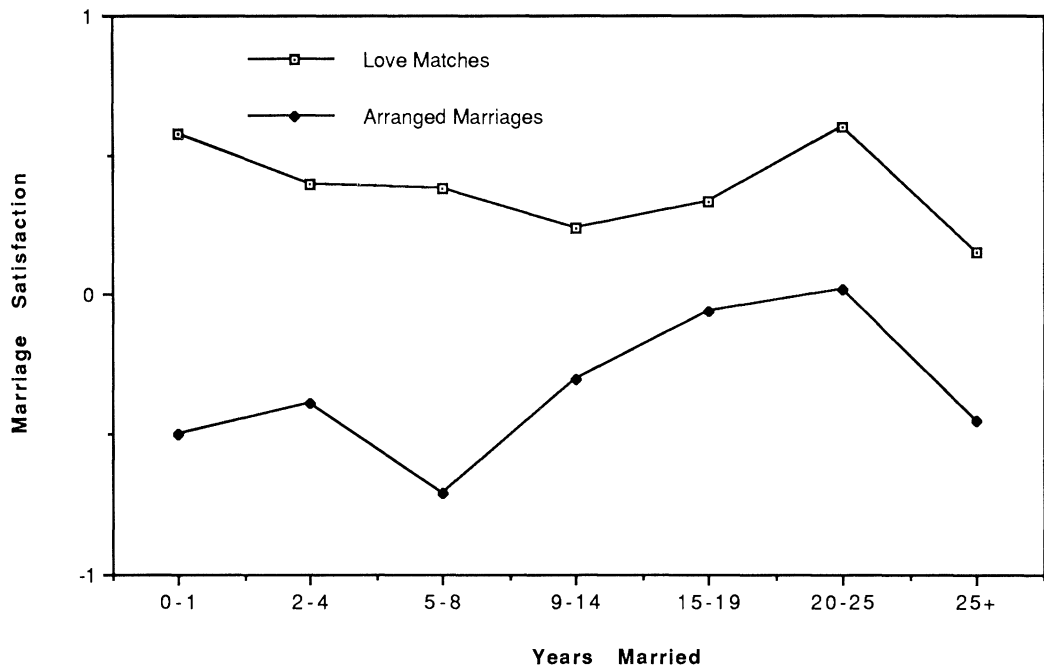
In order to present results in a fashion parallel to those already reviewed from the Blood survey, we graphed values of the Marriage Quality Scale according to the number of years married, with love matches and free-choice marriages displayed separately. In order to construct such a graph, we divided the sample into three categories according to scores on the Freedom of Mate Choice Scale. The middle category, totaling about 30% of the sample, is omitted from consideration here, thus allowing us to compare relatively "pure" cases of free choice and arranged marriages. The results of

this procedure are displayed in Figure 5, with only respondents still married to their first husbands included.

The main feature visible in Figure 5 is that the curve for "love matches" is consistently higher than that for arranged marriages, regardless of the length of the marriage. In other words, the Chengdu data, even more clearly than the Tokyo data, indicate that women in free-choice marriages are consistently more satisfied with their marital relationship than are women in arranged marriages. However, it is also clear that the plots in Figure 5 do not look too much like those in Figures 2 and 3. The pattern in which women who have been married longer are generally less satisfied with their marriages than those recently wed, which is found not only in Blood's survey but in a large number of Western studies (as noted earlier), does not appear in our Chengdu results. Indeed, for both love matches and arranged marriages, wives who had been married 20-24 years reported having the highest-quality marriages of all.

This "peak" for women married 20-24 years cannot be explained in terms of the "U-curve"

FIGURE 5. MARRIAGE QUALITY BY MODE OF MATE CHOICE IN CHENGDU



hypothesis that assumes an improvement in marriages that enter the "empty nest" phase, since wives married longer than 25 years are not particularly pleased with their marriages. Nor does this pattern fit any particularly obvious explanation based upon cohort effects. In fact, if anything, most Chinese would assume that people in that marriage cohort (who wed during the period just prior to and during the Cultural Revolution) should be more unhappy than others today, since ideological zeal and concern for political security often led young people then to marry individuals because of their political credentials, rather than their personal compatibility (see the discussion in Croll, 1981; Honig, 1984). Anecdotes abound of people who married in those years who now regret the ill-suited partners with whom they are stuck. (Only 5 of the 116 women in the Chengdu sample who first married during the Cultural Revolution decade got divorced, and their omission is not sufficient to explain the "peaks" in the curves in Figure 5.)

We do not have a satisfactory explanation for the unexpected shape of the curves in Figure 5, although they lead us to speculate that the "nor-

mal" course for marital satisfaction over the life cycle in China might be different from that in other societies. Perhaps some degree of success in preserving filial piety and socializing children to respect family obligations makes having teenagers at home less stressful than it is in other societies for Chinese mothers, or even beneficial (e.g., as such children are able to take over more of the arduous burden of domestic chores). Further, most older Chinese women will never see an "empty nest," since they will end their days of living in a three-generation family and tending small children once again for one or more of their grown children.

The main point we stress here is that marriage quality in a society such as China is likely to be affected not only by relations with the husband and children but also by relations with others in the family, including parents-in-law and grandchildren. To be sure, before we go too far with such speculations it would be nice to have access to longitudinal data from China to make sure that the shape of the curves in Figure 5 is not simply the product of unusual cohort effects. However, it could be noted that data from Taiwan earlier in this century provide some support for these

speculations. In an era of arranged marriages on Taiwan, the early years after the wedding were particularly stressful, as brides arrived as strangers and provided drudge labor that allowed their mothers-in-law to enjoy increased leisure. This pattern resulted in high suicide rates for young brides in comparison with older women. But as employment for women outside the home and freedom of mate choice increased somewhat, this situation changed; older women were chained at home, caring for their grandchildren, so that their increasingly independent daughters-in-law could contribute to family earnings. The result was a shift to a situation in which persons who committed suicide were more often older women than young brides (see Wolf, 1975).

Be that as it may, the best summary of Figure 5 is that marriage quality fluctuates irregularly along the length of the marriage, that perhaps there is some modest tendency for Chinese arranged marriages to get "warmer" over time, but that, even so, love matches are rated more highly at every stage. In order to test the robustness of these conclusions and to try to approximate the details of Blood's study more closely, a number of variants of the results shown in Figure 5 were calculated and graphed, with a simpler freedom-of-mate-choice dichotomy closer to the one used by Blood (with 1 = met husband through a nonpeer introduction; 2 = met husband directly), a restriction to wives under age 40, and an exclusion of wives residing in extended-family structures. Although the shape of the resulting curves varied somewhat in comparison with Figure 5 (results not displayed here), in general they showed the same tendency for the quality of love matches to be higher than for arranged marriages.¹² The

results of these further checks add confidence to the conclusion that in Chengdu, women who experienced love matches feel they have better marriages today than their counterparts who submitted to arranged marriages.

The final step in the present analysis involves going beyond the sort of procedures carried out by Blood and subjecting the freedom-of-choice/marriage-quality relationship to multivariate analysis. To examine whether the association between these two realms, as shown in Figure 5, might be spurious, Marriage Quality Scale scores were used as the dependent variable in ordinary-least-squares regression, with the Freedom of Mate Choice Scale (in its full, rather than categorical, version) and a large number of other measures included as predictors in a variety of models. In all, more than 50 measures covering a broad range of topics were examined in our search for a "best model," and many predictors that had moderately strong bivariate correlations with the Marriage Quality Scale had only weak multivariate associations and were rejected from our final regression analyses. Examples of "failed predictors" include the respondent's educational attainment, her age at first marriage, family income, the extent of homogamy in the marriage by various criteria, and even the year of marriage. The final outcome of this analysis, our "best model," is displayed in Table 2.

Since the main point of the current effort is to test for spuriousness in the association between freedom of choice and marriage quality, the details on how we selected and screened other predictors before arriving at the final model shown in Table 2 are not described here. (Some of the predictor variables used were ordinal, rather than in-

TABLE 2. REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF CHENGDU MARRIAGE QUALITY SCORES

Predictor	Bivariate Correlation	Standardized Regression Coefficient
Freedom of Mate Choice Scale	.41***	.33***
Respondent's political status when wed	.19***	.10
Husband's educational attainment	.23***	.13*
Husband's good class origin label	.12**	-.15**
Respondent's parents' marriage good	.21***	.12*
Respondent close to father growing up	.30***	.15**
Father approved of respondent's marriage	.20***	.11*
Close relations with husband's kin now	.26***	.12*
Number of joint leisure activities with husband	.25***	.11*
R^2		.33
N	501 ^a	282

^aMedian N .

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

terval. However, our inspection of models using alternative, dummy variable versions of these variables produced no major differences from the results shown in Table 2.) From the table it can be seen that the way wives perceive the quality of their marriages is affected by status characteristics of the women and her husband (her political status, his educational attainment and class origin label),¹³ the closeness of other social bonds (good relations between her parents, close ties to her father and his approval of the man she married, and closeness to her husband's relatives).¹⁴ But far and away the strongest predictor is the degree of freedom of mate choice experienced in forming the marriage. Together these variables account for about one-third of the variation in Marriage Quality Scale scores, and by itself the Freedom of Mate Choice Scale explains about 11% of the variance in the dependent variable.

Thus the central claim resulting from Blood's study in Japan has been strongly reconfirmed. In a major provincial city in socialist China a transition toward increasing freedom of mate choice has transformed the way spouses are selected, even though that transformation process has been "stalled" in recent years. Young people have much more say in whom they will marry than earlier generations did. Furthermore, women who had "love matches" feel better about their marriages today than do women who experienced arranged marriages, regardless of when they first married. This is not a spurious result. Even when we control for other predictors, the way in which the spouse was selected continues to have a strong and significant impact on satisfaction with the marriage currently. Indeed, this impact is stronger than for any other measure included in our study.

To put one final piece of evidence in view, we also can consider the question of divorce briefly here. Divorce is still quite uncommon in China, and only 3.9% of the first marriages of our respondents had ended in this fashion (compared to 25.9% of the marriages of respondents in the Detroit survey). However, freedom of mate choice also has an inhibiting effect on marital instability in Chengdu (contrary to the prediction of the traditionalists), with a modest but statistically significant correlation of $-.11$ between scores on the Freedom of Mate Choice Scale and having been divorced from the first husband. Evidently freedom of mate choice contributes to marital

stability as well as to the quality of intact marriages.

Partisans of family change and freedom of mate choice can rest easier now. Evidence presented here indicates that the shift toward freedom of mate choice is not only "progressive" in some ideological sense, but it also has some real benefits. The claim that love matches are superior to arranged marriages, at least in terms of the satisfaction experienced by wives, now rests on firmer evidence than a single study conducted with a restricted sample in Tokyo 30 years ago.

NOTES

1. For purposes of argument we are oversimplifying the alternatives here. In reality the variations in mate selection involve not two categories but a continuum, from total parental control to total freedom of choice for the young. Few cultures can be found at the extremes of this continuum, and in many locales with arranged marriage, the young people may be consulted to some degree and may even have an ability to veto prospects selected by their parents. In such intermediate cases the likelihood of being stuck with a repulsive partner would presumably be lower.
2. A number of cross-sectional studies argue that the long-term trend is more complex and in fact curvilinear, with marital satisfaction improving again in the postparental or "empty nest" phase of the life cycle (see, for example, Hudson and Murphy, 1980; Lupri and Frideres, 1981; Rollins and Feldman, 1970). This possibility is not of particular concern in the present study, since such a trend would not invalidate the argument that the main trend during most of the life of a free-choice marriage is toward decreased marital satisfaction. However, it might be noted that the divorces that traditionalists also focus on occur most often in the early stages of a marriage and become less likely the longer the marriage lasts, even if marital satisfaction has declined. The literature on predictors of marriage quality and stability will not be reviewed here, as our focus is on the narrow issue of whether the mode of mate choice makes a difference. Readers not familiar with this literature should consult one of the general reviews available, such as Lewis and Spanier, 1979.
3. Obviously, this argument carries greater force if the customary age at marriage in a particular society is quite early than if it is relatively late.
4. Of course, there are the usual problems of skating on thin ice here by inferring longitudinal trends from cross-sectional data. Longitudinal data exist (e.g., Pineo, 1961) that substantiate the same downward trend in marital satisfaction inferred from cross-sectional studies in societies with free mate choice, but we lack such longitudinal data on

- arranged marriages. So there is some possibility that cohort differences rather than life cycle stages could explain part or all of the trends observed in Figures 2 and 3.
5. This study is a collaborative project between the University of Michigan and Sichuan University and is jointly directed by the two authors (the first of whom is on leave from a faculty position at that university) and Yuan Yayu. The research is supported by grants from the U.S.-China Cooperative Science Program of the National Science Foundation, the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, Sichuan University, and China's State Educational Commission. The Chengdu survey, like Blood's 1959 Tokyo study, was conceived as a partial replication of an earlier Detroit Area Study survey, although in neither Detroit portion of these two research enterprises (in 1955 and 1984, respectively) was relative freedom of mate choice inquired about. See Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Whyte, 1990.
 6. In China there were a number of variant marriage customs besides the blind pairing off of young adults, and in at least some of these—child betrothals and “adopted future daughters-in-law” (see Wolf and Huang, 1980), for example—the monopolization of the process by parents is even more blatant.
 7. For comparison purposes, 45% of the women of all ages interviewed in the counterpart survey in Detroit ($n = 459$) had had other serious marital prospects and 66% had had other boyfriends.
 8. In the Detroit survey, only 44% of wives had met their husbands through an introduction of some sort, and only 7% of these women had relied on parents for that introduction. As noted in an earlier footnote, the Detroit survey did not include questions about the role of parents comparable to panels 1–3 in Table 1, nor were respondents asked how often they dated their eventual husbands.
 9. Our conclusion here reconfirms the results of earlier research on contemporary urban marriages. See Whyte and Parish, 1984. This sort of partial shift in the mode of mate choice is visible in many other developing societies. See, for example, Vogel, 1961 (for Japan); Thornton, Chang, and Lin, 1990 (for Taiwan). Of course, by drawing this comparison with the West, we do not mean to imply that China will eventually and inevitably develop customs and norms about dating that are identical to those found in, say, the United States. We are simply stressing that even greater premarital freedom and autonomy for the young are possible and have not yet developed (and perhaps may never develop) in China.
 10. Wives were asked to tell how they felt (in seven categories ranging from “extremely bad” to “ideal”) about the courtesy and respect shown them by their husbands, the help he gave with household tasks, the interest he took in making family decisions, the share in such decisions he gave the wife, his ability as a breadwinner, his role as a father to their children, his understanding of her problems and feelings, his companionship in doing things together with her, her sexual satisfaction in the marriage, and the love and affection she received from him.
 11. The six other items concerned whether in their free time the respondent and her husband often, sometimes, or not very often spend their leisure time together, how often he tells his wife of his thoughts and feelings, how often she tells him her thoughts and feelings, how affectionate he is toward her, how affectionate she is toward him, and how much concern he shows for her concerns and problems. The average item-to-item correlation among all seven items was .45. Items were reversed to obtain a scale in which a high score indicates high marriage quality.
 12. There were occasional minor departures from this pattern. The sample included only a few women who had been married one year or less, and on some graphs the few arranged marriages in this category were rated higher than comparable love matches. And when we used the simpler, two-category freedom-of-choice measure, women in arranged marriages who had been married from 15 to 19 years reported slightly higher quality than did their counterparts in love matches. However, for marriages both briefer and longer than this, love matches rated more highly. These other graphs also showed no consistent trend for marriage quality to be lower at later stages in the marriage, although “peaks” in marriage quality ratings did not always fall in the range of 20–24 years.
 13. The reversal of the sign of the relationship with husband's class origin is unexpected, and we do not have an explanation for why the net effect of marrying a “good status” male would be negative.
 14. In these instances, traits and relationships concerning the respondent and her husband or her mother and her father generally had similar effects. We inserted in the final model only the single predictor that had the largest net impact, and in some instances this produced a “female” indicator and in others a “male” one. In other words, we could have constructed a model focusing entirely on the respondent's traits and on her relationship with her mother, rather than her father, but the resulting model would not have explained quite as much variation in Marriage Quality Scale scores. Even more inclusive models than the one shown in Table 2 were examined, and in general these left the strong association between freedom of mate choice and marriage quality largely intact.

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