

**NAODONGFANG: AN EXAMINATION OF MEANINGS IN CHINESE
WEDDING GAMES AND PRANKS**

by © Xuan Wang

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Abstract

This doctoral dissertation in Folklore explores a traditional, widespread wedding custom in China known as Naodongfang. When used generally, the term “Naodongfang” refers to the scope of all jokes, pranks and games played by grooms, brides, groomsmen, bridesmaids, parents, parents’ siblings and relatives during Chinese weddings. Although the custom has a long history, stretching back 2000 years, today many Chinese citizens consider its elements, such as beating grooms, humiliating brides and bridesmaids, and encouraging fathers-in-law and brides to hug and kiss each other, as bizarre, inappropriate, and even malicious. In this study I attempt to answer the questions: “Why is Naodongfang active in China today?” and “What are Naodongfang’s meanings?” I draw on published descriptions and analyses as well as my own ethnographic materials to explore economic meanings; discuss connections to Chinese concepts such as the Golden Mean, Propriety, and female reservedness; and examine Nao culture in the context of the carnivalesque. A significant focus of the thesis is the exploration of gender issues and violence associated with Naodongfang. Reports of injuries, sexual harassment, and sexual assault experienced by both female and male participants have made the custom controversial. Thus, the last three chapters explore connections of Naodongfang with Chinese feminism, patriarchy and constructions of masculinities.

My intention is not to argue whether Naodongfang is good or bad. Rather, I hope this thesis provides new ethnographic materials and analyses on Naodongfang in a way that contributes to a larger conversation of wedding games and pranks and their deeper meanings. I argue that although this custom is criticized and stigmatized by many, it still holds value for some individuals and their communities. These meanings are multifaceted. Naodongfang allows participants to laugh and joke and to step out their everyday lives. This liminal time, with its

freedom from usual decorum, can bring participants together or it can pit them against each other as guests compete for red packets or exert pressure on, or exact revenge against, the bridal couple or bridal party. Although Naodongfang can feel like an act of resistance towards authorities, it also reinforces existing family and clan power structures, as well as gender stereotypes, and promotes heteronormativity.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

As a young folklorist born in the late 1980s, whenever I saw academic essays with titles that included “wedding” or “marriage,” written by female folklorists, I would gasp “yuck” and sneer. I considered weddings and marriage to be trivial subjects and could not understand why they attracted the attention of women scholars. I struggled to align these studies with my feminist perspective. Hence, when I finished my thesis proposal and held it in my hands, I could not believe that I had become a female folklorist studying wedding customs! Is it ironic? No, now I do not believe so. Despite my own earlier dismissal, historically weddings and married life have been important topics for women cross-culturally, and they continue to be for many in my own social circles today. In this thesis, I try to understand contemporary wedding customs in the context of Chinese culture. Although I explore underlying meanings for all participants, as a feminist, my perspective is woman-centred.

Patriarchal cultures limit women’s opportunities and desires; they often do not leave enough space for women to prosper. An old Chinese saying, delivered from grandmothers to granddaughters for generations, states: “Marriage is such an important thing to women, it is as if they are given birth for a second time” (結婚就是又投了壹次胎). It emphasizes how getting married to a good man is like being reborn; it can change your status, class and living conditions. Daoist and Buddhist beliefs, as well as belief in samsara (endless cycle of life) and next life incarnation, historically shaped Chinese worldview. In this common Chinese saying, that marriage is mentioned in the same breath as samsara suggests how significant marriage was for Chinese women. The connection of a woman’s happiness and well-being to the state of her

marriage is reflected in another contemporary Chinese saying, “A woman shows her state of life as happy or suffering from her marriage/husband” (壹個女人過得好不好，可以從她的婚姻/老公身上看出來).

These bits of vernacular wisdom suggest that Chinese women may count too much on marriage and a partner for their happiness. A bride may hope marriage will change her life, save her from a patriarchal natal family, and allow her to be like a princess in a fairy tale, married to a prince and living out a happy ending. Of course, this is not always the case. Moving into another patriarchal family means that sometimes a woman’s situation worsens. Nevertheless, too many women continue to rush into marriage because they cannot bear societal pressures. They do not want to stand out as abnormal when being married still signifies normalcy. In China, unmarried women over the age of twenty-seven are sometimes ridiculed and derisively referred to as “leftover women” (剩女 Fincher 2014). Given the urgency and enthusiasm of many Chinese women to get married, some feminists joke that we “still live in the Qing Dynasty.”¹

Today marriage continues to reinforce social structures (Li 2005; Ueno 2010). It also brings to the forefront discussions of gender and culture. In China, marriage is exclusively a heterosexual institution; it is defined as a union between a man and a woman and same-sex couples are unable to marry. As a result, all the weddings I draw on in this thesis were held for heterosexual couples. My research shows that marriage still has many layers of meanings for both men and women, as well as for families, and communities. Historically, marriage in China was vital to clans, tribes, and communities because it united two powers and their resources; it benefitted both families. If the marriage harmed any party of the alliance, it would not be

¹ Online forum discussions on Chinese feminism. Accessed July 6, 2018.
<https://www.zhihu.com/question/389418347/answer/1385897393>

blessed. New forms of collaboration and social services, such as social care for the elderly and childrearing, gradually lessened some of the responsibilities of traditional clans and families, but nuclear and extended families, with heterosexual couples at their center, still play a significant role in China.

Although I hold the opinion that in the future the popularity of weddings may gradually decline and become primarily a display of the union between two wealthy families (as it used to be in premodern societies), I cannot deny how important a wedding is for large numbers of people today. Some couples plan a wedding for years in advance while others claim to organize the event more for their families and communities than for themselves. I have heard people all over the world claim that their friends/relatives did not want to hold a wedding, but their parents forced them to do so. And they could not disappoint them. It seems that couples, as well as families and communities, can still find value in the wedding ceremony as a rite of passage that marks the transition of single individuals to a married couple and that signals their physical and social maturity (see Van Gennep 1960).

The allure of the perfect wedding can be hard to resist (Otnes & Pleck 2003); from a young age, women learn what a “perfect” wedding looks like through their own participation, as well as through soap operas, advertisements, movies, and celebrities’ wedding shows. Moreover, the wedding industry earns money by creating a fantasy for unmarried couples. Their message is, “We will provide you with a perfect and unique wedding; it is specially designed for you.” In fact, most of these “tailored” weddings are comprised of familiar, old-fashioned elements, and, in reality, the event can be sensational, sentimental, and boring. Despite this, young women can be hesitant to diverge from established patterns. Nothing interferes with their determination to

hold a “perfect” wedding. Such fantasies drive women to spend large amounts of energy, time, and money preparing their unique wedding.

Marriage can be easily dissolved today so why do women persist in desiring the fairy tale white wedding? Feminist writers, like Judith Butler, offer clues. Growing up, many girls are fond of Barbies, the colour of pink, and tales of princes and princesses. This is not because they are genetically predisposed but because from birth they are acculturated to these romantic notions of gender performativity (Butler 1999). Pulling off a splendid wedding can make women feel successful and secure. These fantasies need to be examined critically, however, because they help shape notions of culturally appropriate femininity and reproduce the image of the compliant and cute wife. Indeed, post-wedding tales are noticeably absent. We seldom discuss what life looks like after the prince and princess get married. Are they swearing at each other? Is there intimate partner abuse and violence? Later on, are there conflicts over taking care of a newborn? Seemingly their lives just suddenly stop at the summit of splendour of the wedding ceremony.

What happens during weddings is also not always as happy and perfect as couples expect. In China, arguments and accidents can take place during weddings, especially during Naodongfang. Naodongfang (鬧洞房), the subject of this thesis, is comprised of wedding pranks and games with sexual innuendo that take place at weddings, many in the newlywed’s bed chamber on the wedding night. In Chinese, the character “Nao” is a verb, means to make something lively; “Dongfang” means “bridal couple’s bedroom or bridal chamber.” Sometimes, when the pranks and tricks become too aggressive, people are physically injured. For example, in 2017, a short video documenting a “gate crashing” showed a groomsman using a metal hammer to violently break the lock and glass on the door of the bride’s natal home in Shenzhen. Bridesmaids and photographers were badly hurt by flying pieces of glass (Shao 2017). In 2009,

in Zunyi City, Guizhou Province, a groom was severely burned after being tied and pranked by his groomsmen (Wang & Zhang 2019). Another time flour, which was dumped from the roof to trick people on the ceremony stage, chemically reacted with stage effects, such as the bubble machine or snowflake machine, and exploded. On other occasions, brides have been sexually harassed by the groom's male friends. Some people call Naodongfang a "malicious custom" (惡俗).

On the other hand, Naodongfang has a history of over 2000 years. It was a widely recognized initiation by around 32-92 BCE according to a reference in *The History of the Former Han Dynasty: Geographic Records* (《漢書·地理志》) (Chen 1998; Qu 2002; Shang 2000; Zhu 2009). Huipeng Shang argues that, during these 2000 years the custom has not fundamentally changed (2000, 211) and it is still practised widely in China and in Chinese diasporic communities. For example, award-winning director Ang Lee's film *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), which won the Goldener Bär Award in the Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin, vividly depicts wedding games and Naodongfang occasions during a Chinese American wedding in San Francisco. As the Academy Award winning director of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Life of Pi* (2012), Ang Lee is an expert on representing Chinese traditional and diasporic cultures. According to Lee, by practicing Naodongfang, diasporic Chinese show a strong attachment to their mother culture. Naodongfang is an expression of Chinese identity, whether in Asia or overseas.

In *The Wedding Banquet*, guests clink their chopsticks on their wine glasses to force the couple to have a deep kiss (55:43²) which is similar to the Russian drinking tradition "yelling

² Time notes were made from the version posted on YouTube. Accessed October 13, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmpYwkBRcVE&t=64s>

bitter.” Following this, they all yell with one voice at the groom, asking him to come to their tables for a toast. On the stage, the bridal couple are asked to bite a duck’s head hung on a string (57:40). Then male guests take turns kissing the blindfolded bride who has to guess which kiss comes from the groom (58:20). In addition to these games played during the wedding reception, others take place in the bridal chamber (1:04:50). Blindfolded, the groom picks up cherries from the bride’s breasts with his mouth (1:06:17). Finally, guests ask the couple to strip themselves beneath the comforter (1:07:10).

Ang Lee himself plays a cameo role in this film. During the wedding banquet, when two white American guests are stunned by the Nao culture and Chinese wedding games, his character comments, “you are witnessing the consequence of 5000 years of sexual repression” (1:00:41). Film commentators have agreed that this piece of dialogue captures the central theme of *The Wedding Banquet* (Cheng & Lin 2014, 85; Yang 2015, 20; Shao 2020). While I am not arguing whether or not Naodongfang is the result of “5000 years of sexual repression,” I do agree with Ang Lee’s implicit suggestion that the Chinese have a culturally specific conception of sex. Particular cultural and social structures in China have shaped Naodongfang and Nao culture. This view is echoed in the film by a half-drunken Naodongfang participant who boldly claims, “Certainly I cannot miss your Naodongfang! This is the quintessence of Chinese culture. We need to promote it overseas!” (1:05:05).

In China, as one of the world’s oldest cultures, ethics, righteousness and a sense of shame were of paramount importance; levels of sexual suppression in ancient China were perhaps among the harshest in the world. When the Confucius School established rites and etiquette (*The Book of Rites* 禮記 and *The Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* 儀禮 551 BCE-479 BCE) as a system of manners and rituals that people should live by, sex became taboo in the public sphere.

Moreover, because patriarchy and polygyny were essential governing tools in ancient China, the freedom of sex was severely restricted. Marriages were determined by clan seniors and parents; young boys and girls did not marry for love but the benefit of their families. The status of women was exceptionally low. Most women were supposed to have only one sexual partner during their whole lives. In historical texts, Chinese women were othered and portrayed as one-dimensional and lacking their own personalities. They lived solely for reproducing and raising babies in the domestic sphere.

To maintain the separation between genders and restrict sexual freedom, the Chinese upper classes consistently tried to shape, if not ban and eliminate, Naodongfang. However, 2000 years of attempts to prohibit Naodongfang have failed; the tradition is still alive and popular, proving its longevity and resilience. A longstanding explanation is that because of the substantial restrictions on sex in public, the ancient Chinese developed Naodongfang as a form of sex education in private (Li 2009; Zhang & Liu & Zhang 2014). Scholars widely acknowledge that Naodongfang makes the normally taboo topic of sex accessible in a particular timespan (Shang 2000). Arguably, in ancient Chinese expressions of Naodongfang, when any knowledge of sex was outside the experience of sheltered girls and innocent boys, newlyweds would learn how to perform sex by being forced to simulate intercourse in front of pranksters. Naodongfang became a radical method designed to speed up the bride's initiation into her new social role and to help her move from protected girl to reproductive wife (Li 2009). Brides and grooms were pranked harshly by communities; fortified by liquor, people could laugh, joke and talk about sex without any restrictions all day and night for three days. As a result, when governors and the upper class implemented standards of etiquette to restrict sexual freedom, the commoners promoted Naodongfang in part to help fill a gap in their daily lives.

Naodongfang eventually became established as ritualized tests with sexual connotations. That this ancient custom continues today in various forms fascinates me; I am intrigued by both its age and resilience. This thesis attempts to discover Naodongfang's contemporary meanings at a time when some of the earlier explanations for its existence, such as sex education, no longer apply. What does Naodongfang look like in China today? How is it practised? More importantly, why is it still a part of contemporary weddings? What meanings does it hold for the couple, their friends, and their families? These are the questions that guide this study.

Literature Review

A multifaceted examination of Naodongfang's complexities necessarily brings together a diverse range of scholarship. Before turning to my analysis, I want first to refer to several bodies of literature that form the foundation of my thinking for this project. I do not cite extensively from all of these fields in the chapters that follow but they are fundamental to my approach. While I build most directly on scholarship on wedding games and Naodongfang, theories of play and carnival, as well as international work on humor and jokes, inform my thinking. Above all, folkloristic studies of gendered expressions, especially those from a feminist perspective, shape my approach.

1. Studies of Chinese Naodongfang and Wedding Games

Naodongfang is a wedding custom that involves playing pranks and games with sexual connotations. The Chinese vernacular term, "Naodongfang," has replaced other forms such as "Naofang (鬧房)" and "Naoxinfang (鬧新房)," and means "disturbance in a bridal chamber during the wedding night." Huajie Huang (黃華節) was the first modern scholar to define Naodongfang in 1934. He wrote: "during the period of the wedding, the guests and relatives

come to prank, mock, trick and molest the bridal couple without regard for morals, etiquette and laws, [it] is called Naofang/Naodongfang” ([1934] 1999, 193). “Naodongfang” falls on the spectrum of “Chinese obscene wedding games” and “Naodongfang” is the general term to refer to all wedding games. The spectrum of “Chinese obscene wedding games” includes various wedding customs such as “beating the groom” (打聲), “seeing the bride” (看新婦), “blocking the wedding carriages” (障車), “eavesdropping under the windowsill” (聽房), “stealing in bridal chambers” (偷房) and “Pahui” (扒灰 pranking parents-in-law). In this dissertation, I consider various forms of Chinese wedding games under the umbrella of Naodongfang.

To trace the history of Naodongfang, I draw on published references to Chinese wedding games dating from the pre-Qin period (1100BCE-221BCE) to the Revolution of 1911 that marked the end of the feudal empire. Historical collections include but are not limited to *The Book of Songs* (《詩經》) (around 1100BCE-600BCE), *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (《左氏春秋》) (around 403BCE-386BCE), *Records of the Grand Historian* (《史記》) (around 104-91), *The History of the Former Han Dynasty: Geographic Records* (《漢書·地理志》) (around 32-92), *Folk Customs and Traditions* (《風俗通義》) (around 153-196), *BaoPuZi· Disease and Absurdness* (《抱樸子·疾謬》) (around 317-420), *Youyang Miscellaneous Morsels* (《酉陽雜俎》) (around 803-863), *Book of Old Tang Dynasty* (《舊唐書》) (around 945), *Splendour Dream of Eastern Capital* (《東京夢華錄》) (around 1102-1125), *Dream of Past Capital Lin'an* (《夢梁錄》) (around 1274) and *Classified Records and Anecdotes in the Qing Dynasty · Marriages* (《清稗類鈔·婚姻》) (around 1869-1928). These materials include scholars' comments, folk ballads, myths, regional records, travel notes and diaries. Contributors include historians, biographers, scholars, poets and illustrators. I also refer to *Dunhuang Scripts* (敦煌寫本) and Tang poems (唐詩) to analyze the custom of “blocking the wedding carriages” (障車).

This documentation shows that Naodongfang's core elements of dirty jokes and sexual pranks remained stable over its long history but that the custom adapted to each dynasty.

In general, modern Chinese scholars have not undertaken systematic and in-depth research into Naodongfang and as yet there has been no English or Chinese dissertation written on this topic. The first Chinese academic article on Naodongfang was written and published by Huajie Huang (黃華節) in 1934. He created the categories of literary Naodongfang (文鬧) and valiant Naodongfang (武鬧).³ More recently, Yi Sheng explored Naodongfang's history and rituals in his article "Brief Discussions of Naodongfang" (1993). Some academic work has focused on tracing Naodongfang's origins (Chen 1998), while other publications illuminate the social functions of Naodongfang (Guan 2001; Li 2009; Pan 2009; Shang 1997; Zhang 2006; Zhang, Liu and Zhang 2014), for example, teaching bridal couples about sexual health (Pan 2009). Huipeng Shang (尚會鵬) was the first Chinese scholar to publish a full-length work on the topic. Titled *Naodongfang* (2000), it is based on thorough ethnographical research in the West Village, Henan Province. Shang systematically outlined Naodongfang and interpreted the custom through functionalism. Some non-academic sources on Naodongfang also provide insights. For example, *Practical Methods of Naodongfang in Villages* (Zhu 2009) promotes "joyful, civilized

³ According to the extent to which that the human body is involved, Naodongfang games are divided into two categories: literary Naodongfang (文鬧) and valiant Naodongfang (武鬧) (Ma 1988, 219; Shang 2000, 211; Ye 1986, 79; Zhu 2009, 14). The distinction between literary and valiant is a popular dualism in Chinese philosophy such as Yin and Yang. For example, the ancient government officers were divided into literary officers (文官) who managed paperwork and valiant officers (武官) who fought in the battlefields. Generally, literary Naodongfang involves intellectual skills and verbal exchanges of wits through making couplets, poems, ballads, etc., while valiant Naodongfang is body-oriented. Compared to ancient China, the most impressive transition in modern China is the decline of literary Naodongfang and the rise of valiant Naodongfang. The decline of literary Naodongfang is chiefly due to the lack of classical education and the trend of globalization. Because Mainland Chinese speaking and writing systems have changed, literate expressions in daily communications are gradually simplified and modernized. Facing the same destiny as other genres of folk literature during post-industrialization and globalization, literary Naodongfang is vanishing. Compared to literary Naodongfang, valiant Naodongfang is still well preserved. Nowadays, when people mention Naodongfang, they are primarily referring to forms of valiant Naodongfang such as practical jokes and wedding games.

and graceful wedding games.” This book is not based on academic research but rather is a user’s manual designed to help people, especially those living in rural China, practise Naodongfang safely and happily.

Outside of studies centred specifically on Naodongfang, many Chinese works have documented Naodongfang as a part of weddings. For example, encyclopedic works focus on historical or regional wedding customs but help understand Chinese wedding customs in general. These include Pu’an Hu (胡樸安 1878-1946)’s *Records of Customs and Folklore across China* (《中華全國風俗誌》1922), Shaoyuan Jiang (江紹原) and readers’ letters exchanged through a series of weekly journals *Yusi* (《語絲》) in 1927, *Historical Manuscripts on Chinese Marriages* (《中國婚姻史稿》) which was filed by Peng Chen (陳鵬) in 1935, and Taiwanese scholar Zhisu Ma (馬之驥)’s book *Chinese Marriage Customs* (《中國的婚俗》1988). Moreover, *Spectacles of Chinese and Foreign Wedding Customs* (《中外婚俗奇觀》Feng 1988), *Wedding Customs and Cultures: Tracks of Chinese Wedding Customs* (《婚俗文化：中國婚俗的軌跡》Bao 1990), and *Chinese Concepts of Marriages and Wedding Customs* (《中國人的婚姻觀與婚俗》Wu & Li 1993) helped me understand Chinese weddings and marriages through a cultural perspective.

A few English works also mention Naodongfang. For instance, it appears in Francis L. K. Hsu’s book, *Under the Ancestors’ Shadow; Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in China* (1967, 97). In general, however, systematic English research on Naodongfang is lacking. Instead of exploring the full dimensions of Naodongfang itself, English language authors (and scholarship) have tended to use Naodongfang as a means to criticize issues such as Chinese patriarchy and gendered violence (Christian de Pee 2007, 117), as well as to show women’s resistance to patriarchal traditions (Leutner 2003, 348; Tian 2016, 360).

My examination of Chinese wedding games extends to earlier works on worldwide marriage customs. Wedding games have been documented in many parts of the world as evidenced in research on Canadian shivarees (Greenhill 2010, 2012; Morrison 1974). One of the earliest articles on shivarees in North America is Monica Morrison's "Wedding Night Pranks in Western New Brunswick" (1974). I borrowed her concept of "wedding night pranks" which showed a close connection to my research. As the title suggests, Pauline Greenhill's book *Make the Night Hideous: Four English Canadian Charivaris, 1881-1940* (2010) presents four Canadian shivaree case studies. This tradition originated in Europe and was disseminated in North America by immigrants (Davis 1971). Greenhill notes, "Charivari comprises a cross-cultural range of originally European practices, symbolic means, and purpose" (2010, 16). The shivaree indicates a series of pranks to tease newly married couples. For example, friends can beat gongs under the newlyweds' windows. They might rush into their house and make a mess, hide objects in the couple's pyjamas and saw off bedposts. These pranks with sexual connotations have distinct similarities to Naodongfang. Greenhill's other feminist writing on wedding customs and cross-dressing, such as "The Most Ambiguous Gift: Cash and the Presentation Wedding Tradition in Manitoba" (2010) and "Dressing Up and Dressing Down: Costumes, Risky Play, Transgender, and Maritime English Canadian Charivari Paradoxes" (2012), also influenced my work.

It is easy to identify similarities between Chinese wedding games and pranks that make up Naodongfang and Irish customs described in Caoimhín Ó Danachair's article, "Some Marriage Customs and their Regional Distribution" (1974-1976) and Linda Ballard's "Wedding Pranks" (1991). Works on Irish strawboys (Glassie 1975; Monger 2013), hen parties (Ballard 1998; Young 2019) and stag parties (Monger 2013) comprise a significant portion of my

comparative references. Modern forms of bachelor and bachelorette parties, widespread over North America and Scandinavia, offer other parallels (Li 2000; Shen 2005; Tye and Powers 1998; Tye 2008). Geza Roheim's "Wedding Ceremonies in European Folklore" ([1954] 1999) records early European wedding customs and games that coincide with Naodongfang, and it became a valuable resource. These overlaps made me think about whether wedding games diffuse from one location to another or are separately derived but evolved into similar forms from different areas. Finally, there are also similarities between Chinese Naodongfang and Canadian mock weddings (Taft 1997; Foty 2003).

Comparative work, such as Jane Merrill and Chris Filstrup's book *The Wedding Night: A Popular History* (2011), that addresses wedding nights across cultures is thought provoking even if this book does not mention Chinese Naodongfang in particular. On the other hand, George Monger's *Marriage Customs of the World: An Encyclopedia of Dating Customs and Wedding Traditions* (2013) does present some composite descriptions of Naodongfang, including pre-wedding games and on-site wedding games.

As this brief overview suggests, Chinese scholars mainly have described Naodongfang and analyzed its functions, often emphasizing its importance as sex education. Meanwhile, English language scholarship has tended to present Chinese wedding games descriptively and only offer limited analysis. By applying international theories and perspectives to a Chinese case study, this study attempts to go beyond a compilation of materials, to deliberately investigate the Chinese cultural and geographical backgrounds behind the custom. By exploring Chinese Naodongfang, I hope to fill gaps in Chinese and English scholarship by both providing an in-depth and theoretical analysis of Naodongfang and contributing to the larger study of wedding games worldwide.

2. Play and Carnival

Serious meanings of Naodongfang are disguised by play so scholarship on play and carnival provides another part of the foundation for my study. Play is considered an ambiguous notion in historical and modern human lives. Theorizing and defining play presents problems and scholars have admitted that defining play or games is a “formidable challenge” because “definitions are not perfect creatures. They have weakness, holes and exceptions” (Tekinbaş and Zimmerman 2006, 77-80). Brian Sutton-Smith holds this view: “Any earnest definition of play has to be haunted by the possibility that playful enjoiners will render it invalid” (1997, 213). Regarding Naodongfang as play, I draw on highly reputed theorists such as Brian Sutton-Smith, Johan Huizinga, Gregory Bateson and Roger Caillois.

In the field of folkloristics, play first emerged as a genre when studying children’s folklore (Brunvand [1968] 1998; Georges 1972; Mechling 1986). As Jay Mechling explains, “Children were among the first nonpeasant groups to be studied by folklorists at the end of the nineteenth century... they tended to see children as embodiments of an early stage in human and societal evolution” (1986, 92). Influenced by Darwinism and an evolutionary perspective, folklorists regarded children’s folklore, including games, as remnants of an early stage of human civilization and vanishing traditions and they tried their best to record and conserve them (Newell 1883).

In the nineteenth century, European intellectuals devoted themselves to collecting games and rhymes of their own nations. They then tried to trace origins and compare variants based on their collections. Joseph Strutt (1876), W. W. Newell (1883), and Stewart Culin (1907) were pioneers in collecting pastimes, games and songs in England and North America. Paul G. Brewster published *American Non-Singing Games* in 1953, balancing studies of two types of games: literary games with rhymes and physical games with or without rhymes (Brunvand

[1968] 1998, 478). Play studies at this time concentrated primarily on recording and compiling materials rather than interpreting them and therefore have been accused of lacking theorization (Hughes 1996, 666; Georges 1972, 175-177). For example, Robert A. Georges criticized Brewster's work for offering "no innovations in methodology or analytical techniques" (1972, 176). He contended that "the investigators themselves are frequently unhappy with such overlapping and inconsistent categories is readily apparent" (1972, 177).

Georges was one of the first folklorists to seriously consider play and games. In his contribution to *Folklore and Folklife* (1972), he declared, "play is a form of expressive behaviour common among all human beings and manifested overtly in all cultures" (1972, 176). He saw play as separated from reality in time and space and as non-productive because it does not directly satisfy biological needs associated with survival. But he also stressed that play may contribute to "physical, social and psychological growth and development of the individual" (1972, 173). Folklorists have emphasized play's social function of recreation which coincides with one of the four functions of folklore (Bascom 1954). According to Frank A. Beach in *Child's Play* (1971), functions of play can be classified as a release of surplus energy; an expression of general exuberance, or joie-de-vivre; an expression of sex drive, aggression, or anxiety; youthful "practice" for adult life skills; necessary context for exploration and experimentation; a means of socialization; and/or a tool for self-expression and diversion (1971, 204-208). Similarly, "the inversion, exaggeration, and play of festival are viewed variously as symbolic resistance, a release of aggression, or a mechanism for maintaining the status quo" (Santino 2011, 66).

Naodongfang requires participants to imitate, compete and most importantly, perform. Accordingly, Naodongfang is generally in the realm of play, as well as games. Brewster argued

that “a game is a contest—physical, mental, or a combination of the two—from which both the participant and the onlooker derive pleasure” (1953, 31). In this definition, Brewster emphasized “contest” and “pleasure,” which are two key characteristics of games. Jan Harold Brunvand noted, “By their very nature as voluntary, recreations with rules fixed only by custom and tradition, folk games reveal much about the societies in which they are played and about the individuals who play them” ([1968] 1998, 478).

In cross-cultural scholarship, just as in daily life, the categories of play, game, sport and pastime have overlap and intersections. Play sometimes relates to mirth, laughter and joyfulness. Play can easily switch from the state of competition to relaxation or vice versa. However, people rarely feel relaxed when they are doing sports. According to Linda Hughes, “sports are generally distinguished from games by the vicarious participation of persons other than the players and a more formal institutional structure” (1996, 660). For example, even though “Games” is in its title, the professionalized Olympic Games are surely institutionalized sports. Moreover, Linda Hughes regarded games as play when considering that they are voluntary and have non-utilitarian merits but also noted that games “are sufficiently systematic in their rules and procedures that they can be repeated by others” (1996, 660). Hughes also offers a definition that stresses three essential elements of play: recreational, competitive and rules-oriented, while Tekinbaş and Zimmerman develop an explicit definition of “game” after comparing eight definitions from interdisciplinary scholars in their work *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (2003). They state, “a game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome” (2003, 81).

“Pastime” is different from the above three forms, but pastime is also a part of play. According to Brunvand, “pastime is a traditional recreation performed simply to pass the time

away” ([1968] 1998, 479). It lacks competition, losing or winning and rules. Moreover, pastimes are mainly solo activities, but they easily switch to games when more people join in, introduce rules and distinguish winners ([1968] 1998, 479). Robert A. Georges has a similar emphasis. He believes that with “no competitive interaction, the pastime can be called a nongame or, for convenience here, recreation. Games, however, differ from other play activities in that they involve competition between at least two persons” (1972, 174).

Figure 1 shows the relationship between play, games, sports and pastimes. Sports partially interlock with play but are also largely independent of it; pastimes are independent of games and sports but a composition of play.

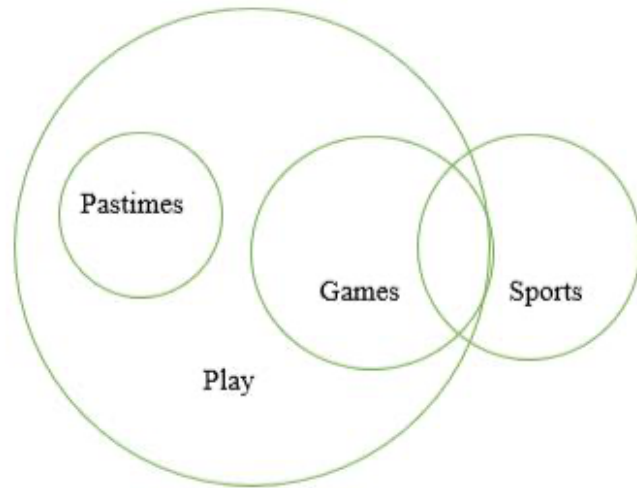


Figure 1 The relationship of play, games, sports and pastimes

Games are located in between formal sports and informal play. Games are part of play but intersect with sports, and only the formality of operating institutions distinguishes them. People may experience the tension of competition and the joyfulness of relaxation simultaneously when they are playing games. Sports are the most rules-oriented among the four forms. Games take second place while play and pastimes are the most free-style, spontaneous and loose in terms of institutions and rules.

However, we need to allow some flexibility to exist in this categorization. For example, while Naodongfang could be considered a game in terms of its competitiveness and sets of rules, its characteristics of recreation, flexibility and improvisation locate it in an ambiguous area of play and games. It is important to note that in the Chinese language, it is hard to distinguish

between play and game because “game” in Chinese is also called Youxi (遊戲). Youxi and Wanshua (玩耍) are synonyms of play and have no clear distinction. Hence in Chinese, WanYouxi (玩遊戲) is a verb-object phrase, and its literal translation is “play with games.” Furthermore, the Chinese concept and philosophy of play is indistinct. The Chinese equivalent of play is “Wan” (玩). Caillois found that the Chinese “Wan” (玩) is far more complicated and broader than the English meaning of play (1961) because play is hard to define due to different semantic systems in different languages. As with “play” in English, “Wan” in Chinese indicates both a verb and a noun. Fiddling with a smartphone in Chinese is called “玩手機,” which means playing with a smartphone. “Wan” could even be used as daily greetings in Chinese, such as “what are you playing?” (你玩啥呢?), that equals to “what are you doing?” in English. Sometimes, Wan encompasses many ambiguous activities. For instance, “I am heading out to play” (我出去玩了) becomes an excuse to leave. Nevertheless, what exactly people are going to do does not need to be specified in this context. Tourism and travel could also be regarded as Wan in a broader sense. Moreover, Naodongfang is called Shua Xifu (耍媳婦) in some parts of China. The activities of Shua Xifu include pranking, tricking, or even making fun of the bride. Wan (玩) and Shua (耍) are synonyms, and they are always combined as one word, Wanshua (玩耍). Hence, Shua Xifu means to play with the bride.

Sutton-Smith mentioned several activities that are not usually regarded as play in the West, such as travelling, daydreaming, and even gossiping. Yet they are all located in the realm of Chinese Wan. Sutton-Smith writes, “all of us carry dozens of characters around in our daydreams with whom we carry on imaginary encounters and conversations, none of which are real in the usual sense” (Sutton-Smith 1997, 3). Caillois had useful insights into Chinese philosophies of play. He found, “Chinese culture is less directed toward purposive innovation.

The need for progress and the spirit of enterprise generally seem to them a kind of compulsion that is not particularly creative” ([1961] 2001, 33). Hence, “the term *wan* basically designates all kinds of semiautomatic activities which leave the mind detached and idle, certain complex games which are part of *ludus*, and at the same time, nonchalant meditation and lazy contemplation” ([1961] 2001, 33). For example, even though sometimes a person is not really playing at anything specific, their mind can be in a playful state. Lying on the chair under the sunshine without doing anything is a good state of play and relaxation. Having a wonderful dream also could be regarded as a composite of play. As Caillois puts it, “It also comprises the pleasure of appreciating the savour of good food or the bouquet of a wine, the taste for collecting works of art or even appreciating them, voluptuously handling and even fashioning delicate curios, comparable to the Occidental category of the hobby, collecting or puttering. Lastly, the transitory and relaxing sweetness of moonlight is suggested, the pleasure of a boat ride on a limpid lake or the prolonged contemplation of a waterfall” ([1961] 2001, 34).

In my view, the Chinese “*Wan*” encompasses all activities outside the realm of productive work. Chinese daily lives could be roughly divided into two parts: unproductive play and productive labour. Every activity that is not related to earning a living is located in the category of play. However, not every playful activity is necessarily unproductive. For instance, a painter who paints for pleasure or a composer who plays the piano also develops their skills. Their purposes are not primarily productive, but their playful outcomes could be productive. It is possible for the tunes the pianist randomly plays in practice to become their most popular and classic tunes and the painter’s “rough draft” to become their most accomplished and famous work. The realm of Chinese play is extensive. The Chinese categorize their hobbies as play. Therefore, some experts in professional fields are called “players,” “*Wanjia*” (玩家). For

example, the hobby of collecting, appreciating and appraising antiques is called Wenwan (文玩) or Guwan (古玩); “Wanjia” intimates that in this context antiques are the equivalent of toys. Sometimes, even a one-night stand could be called “Wan” (play); it coincides with the English concept of playboys.

Huizinga argued that the Chinese have an all-encompassing philosophy of play (1950). He also criticized modern societies’ lack of the essence of play and lamented that “pure play-quality is inevitably lost” (1950, 197). Furthermore, he observed that “business becomes play... The trend is now reversed: play becomes business” (1950, 200). He expressed bitterness concerning modernization: “we have seen great nations losing every shred of honour, all sense of humor, the very idea of decency and fair play” (1950, 205). Caillois and Huizinga’s theories of play emphasize anti-utilitarianism and anti-rationalism. In other words, the theorists do not merely take for granted the utility and rationality of our modern life, but rather reappraise the fundamental meanings of play in life. They argue that play is vital to human beings and that it fundamentally represents the ultimate freedom of body and mind.

A theorist who cannot be overlooked when studying the philosophy of play is Clifford Geertz. His exploration of the Balinese cockfight as “deep play” (1971) draws on Jeremy Bentham’s *The Theory of Legislation* ([1802] 2004). According to Bentham, “deep play” refers to play in which the stakes are so high that it is irrational for people to engage (Geertz 1971, 15). Bentham understood that “This all-or-nothing stake constitutes ‘the evils of deep play,’ undesirable in its high-risk threat to the condition of pleasure or happiness; his liberal-reformist position, therefore, would exclude deep play from the ‘principles of the civil code’” (Tomlinson 2010 “deep play”). Hence, deep play is immoral because it violates the first principle of utility (everything must morally increase utility) and should be prevented legally (1971, 15). However,

in a non-utilitarian way, Geertz interpreted “deep play” with antiphrasis, in a sense opposite to Bentham’s original, utilitarian meaning of it. As Tomlinson points out, “for Geertz the deep play is not so much a practice that threatens the culture; rather, it enriches it, symbolizing ‘the dramatization of status concerns’ (2010 “deep play”). For Bentham, deep play is irrational and immoral; for Geertz, “citing Max Weber, it is about creating significant meaning” (Tomlinson 2010 “deep play”). Geertz’s work argues for play’s underlying meanings; it is not useless or a waste of time. This plays out in Chinese cultures, which stem from agricultural civilization in line with Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Daoism emphasizes “Wuwei” (無為) and nature, and it promotes the idea, “do nothing instead of everything.” Meanwhile, Buddhism addresses samsara (a cycle of death and rebirth before nirvana), incarnation and the wheel of lives (Nadeau 2014: 67, 147). These philosophies shape Chinese conceptions of play.

There is an old saying about Naodongfang dating from ancient China: “Ignore seniority and restrictions for three days when a wedding is taking place” (喜事三天無大小). During the three days of wedding celebrations, people are allowed to neglect privilege, hierarchy, status, seniority, sense of propriety, manners and ethics. Theoretically, this is a time when youth can trick seniors and not worry about punishment, and men can play jokes on women with no fear of repercussions. This kind of event, that allows people of all ages to celebrate, mock, trick, subvert and try their best to enjoy and laugh all day and night, can be considered carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984).

In Chinese, Wan and Nao are synonyms and generally combine the word “Wannao” (玩鬧), which is a verb and a noun. “Nao” means making something lively and negating rules and norms on occasions like weddings, social gatherings, and theatres. Regarding carnivalesque as the main component of Chinese Nao culture, I propose that Chinese Nao culture integrates

carnivalistic activities to express people's subversion of cultural authorities, a disturbance of normal and formal lives and the human tendency to pursue joyfulness. I draw on Bakhtin's theories of "carnival" and "carnivalistic life" (1963) to sketch Chinese Nao culture. Chinese carnivalistic life involves a set of philosophies and aesthetics which are applicable to a facet of ordinary life which is composed of jostling crowds, boisterous laughter and sarcastic swearing.

"Carnaval" originated in Latin and was adopted in French, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese languages; it is Carnevale in Italian. Parties, circuses, parodies, parades, masks and costumes are the prominent motifs of modern carnivals. Traditionally, carnivals were comprised of a series of public activities that occurred before Lent. Carnivals spread throughout the medieval European continent in line with the developments of Christianity and Greek orthodoxy. According to the collection *Carnival and the Carnavalesque: The Fool, the Reformer, the Wildman, and Others in Early Modern Theatre* (Eisenbichler and Hüsken 1999), carnivals were practised across medieval Europe such as in Nuremberg in the forms of "Schembartlauf" (Kinser 1999, 43-87) and "Fastnachtspiele" (Erb 1999, 89-116), in Seville in the form of "the Immaculate Conception" (Gomez Lara and Barrientos 1999, 183-201), in Catalan speaking countries (Bertran 1999, 227-242) and in England Robin Hood and mock King Games (Greenfield 1999, 19-28).

Mikhail Bakhtin is the most cited literary theoretician of carnival, and he profoundly influenced scholars' understanding of carnival. When he analyzed Rabelais ([1965] 1984) and Dostoevsky's ([1963] 1984) literature works, he found both authors were using conventions such as inversion, subversion, sarcasm and the comic that were similar to characteristics of European carnivals. Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque thus became crucial to interpret literary works of grotesque realism. He not only applied carnivals to literature studies, but also discovered the

potential power structures and dynamics of the rebellion towards higher classes from lower classes during carnivals.

Building on Bakhtin's theories and analysis of carnivals, modern anthropologists and folklorists have researched various aspects and forms of carnival, such as carnival and theatre (Bristol 1985), carnival and markets (Agnew 1986) and carnival as public festivals and celebrations. According to Ben Chappell, Bakhtin "has had a profound impact on folkloristics" (2005, 211). Abrahams argued that carnival is "a new way of discussing the playful motives embodied in festive forms... (carnival is) a new way to think about old texts... a perspective useful in rethinking the productions of the Renaissance theater" (1989, 204). Carnival foregrounds "politically and socially subversive motives, whether in literature or in gatherings of people such as riots, marches, or charivari" (Abrahams 1989, 204). Modern forms of carnival are more commercialized and institutionalized than their medieval ancestors. For example, South American carnivals have evolved from religious festival to performative art shows. This is a topic taken up in the edited collection, *Carnival: Culture in Action-The Trinidad Experience* (Riggio 2004). Here the authors discuss the history, development and diasporic expression of Trinidad Carnivals from interdisciplinary perspectives.

Some scholars have researched connections between carnivalesque and festivity, which provides a helpful angle for me to bridge carnival and Naodongfang. Jack Santino has done research on theorizing rituals and festivals. He has written seven books on holidays, rituals, festivals and celebrations in the United States and in Northern Ireland. He studies carnivalesque masquerade such as Halloween from the 1980s. He finds that "parades, protests, and street theater generally are increasingly referred to and studied as ritual or ritualized behavior" (2011, 64). Santino notices many burgeoning emergent events which are not traditional but have the

roots of traditional customs, such as commemorations, LGBT Pride Parades and president inaugurations. At first, he realizes that some events have the looking of carnivalesque, but their purposes are quite serious. He worries “this sociability undermines the stated solemnity of purpose” (2009, 9). Although he insists that, “carnivalesque and the ritualesque are by no means mutually exclusive but rather complementary” (2011, 67), to avoid the seriousness of a ritual, such as Pride Parade, would be deluded by its carnivalesque, Santino parallels Bakhtin’s carnivalesque and put forward a new term, ritualesque, to indicate those events which “involve the public use, production, and display of the symbolic in order to transform society and its members” (2009, 24). He claims, “The carnivalesque can and does overlap with seriousness of purpose, an intention to transform society through symbolic actions, that I term ‘ritualesque’” (2009, 9). He emphasizes that transformative mechanisms of public events which lie in performative use of symbols to effect social change (2009, 2011) will be the most significant characteristic of ritualesque events.

Daniel Crowley contends that “carnival is its conservatism of form in a situation designed to maximize innovation and creativity” (1999, 218). *Western Folklore* published a special issue, “Studies of Carnival,” as a testament to his work in 1999. Crowley had documented rich materials around the world, such as spectacular carnivals held in the Americas, Brazil, Trinidad, the Bahamas, Haiti and Bolivia. Crowley never hesitated to show his love for carnivals as he connected modern elements to ancient antecedents: “The street parades, the masks, the face paint, and the elaborate costumes; the bonfires and effigy-burning; the transvestitism; the political and social satire; even the throwing of water or flour dates back to the Classical world” (1999, 218). While he sometimes wondered whether his works on carnivals would have value for people in the future, he was optimistic that someone would use these materials and find them

meaningful. He practised what Bakhtin called the “carnivalistic life” until the last minute of his life due to his sudden death on the final day of documenting the Oruro Carnival in Bolivia in 1998.

Until recently, “carnival” did not have an equivalent in Chinese languages; it was transliterated into both Mandarin and Cantonese from the Latin alphabets. The official term for carnival in Mandarin Chinese is KuangHuan (狂歡), which is liberally translated but also refers to carnival’s pronunciation. 狂 means crazy or losing mind, indicating the state of trance; 歡 means joyfulness and happiness, mainly drawing on humour, play and laughter. The transliteration of carnival in Cantonese is 嘉年華 (JiaNianHua). Mandarin and Cantonese both use it to indicate modern mega-events, shows, parades and performances worldwide. For example, the Carnival Show (嘉年華秀) takes place every year in the Disneyland Park in Hong Kong. However, Mandarin Chinese expands the concept of Kuanghuan. More recently this term has been often used to indicate negative and irrational social phenomena such as shopaholics in Mainland China.

As a non-Christianized state and culture, China was first thought to lack carnival. However, in contrast to Europeans who held carnivals before Lent, the Chinese practised carnival as a way of life during many traditional festivals and celebrations, rather than at a particular time of the year. According to Bakhtin, “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all people” ([1965] 1984, 7). Carnival becomes “life itself.” Similarly, “Carnival is not contemplated and, strictly speaking, not even performed; its participants live in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a carnivalistic life. Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its usual

rut, it is to some extent ‘life turned inside out,’ ‘the reverse side of the world’ (‘monde a l’envers’)” (Bakhtin [1963] 1984, 122).

Chinese practices of carnival are similar to those pagan calendar festivals in Europe that predate widespread Christianity.⁴ The activities in which the Chinese engage in carnival include temple fairs, folk operas, market days, Yuanxiao/Lantern festivals and weddings. It is widely recognized that traditional Chinese theatre and stage performances have characteristics of “Nao,” in another word, carnival. Even though numerous Chinese scholars have borrowed Bakhtin’s concept of carnival and applied Nao culture to study theatre and drama (Chen 2011; Luo 2014; Wang 2012; Weng 2008, 2010; Zhang 2010), few have used the notion to explore folk festivals and customs. As a staple of Chinese culture, Nao culture has not yet been thoroughly studied. Neither has carnival. In line with writing the historical monograph in the third chapter, I explore the particular cultural context and aesthetics behind Naodongfang, which is Chinese “Nao” culture (鬧文化), by paralleling it to carnival.

3. Humour, (Practical) Jokes, and Obscene Folklore

The first function of folklore, according to William Bascom, is entertainment. Bascom argued that “the function of amusement cannot be accepted today as a complete answer” without considering “—that folklore serves as a psychological escape from many repressions, not only

⁴ Religious festivals with pagan roots are celebrated in different forms around the world. For example, a popular festival in Sweden, St. Lucia’s Day, was combined with the vernacular Yule Festival, which at first was meant to warn people to stay at home to avoid malicious witches during the winter solstice. “The Yule period was presumed to be rife with danger. Particularly in northern Europe, people believed the long stretches of darkness and cold left households vulnerable to witches” (Dorwart 2017). However, when Sweden got Christianized, Yule’s Day evolved to Saint Lucia’s Day, which is memorizing Saint Lucia, a Christian martyr and was believed to hold the candles on her head to help people during darkness. Moreover, the selection of St. Lucia has become a beauty pageant every year. The winners will be displayed by wearing the wreath of candles during St. Lucia’s Day in Sweden and Swedish diasporic communities. St. Lucia’s Day vividly shows how a vernacular festival transformed into a religious festival.

sexual, which society imposes upon the individual” (Bascom 1953). According to Richard Tallman, the use of pranks or practical jokes “all serves its practitioners and carriers in important functional ways—release from suppressed tensions in a manner acceptable at least to the esoteric group, and group identity, solidarity and conformity” (1974, 260).

While folklorists emphasized humor’s group functions, scholars from fields such as medicine and psychology focused on its benefits for individuals. For example, laughter can release endorphins and engage our body, as well as decrease the emission of hormones related to stress, such as catecholamines and cortisol. Blood sugar is regulated, and blood pressure is reduced (McGhee 1999; Fry 1994). According to William Fry, “Mirthful laughter has a scientifically demonstrable exercise impact on several body systems. Muscles are activated; heart rate is increased; respiration is simplified, with increase in oxygen exchange—all similar to the desirable effects of athletic exercise. Stress is antagonized by humor in both its mental or emotional aspect and its physical aspect. Emotional tension, contributing to stress, is lowered through the cathartic effects of humor” (1979)⁵. Fry reassured the intimate nature of humour as it appears in human lives through an experiment he did to himself, stating that “observation of the number of smiles and laughs that came to Fry (himself) during the course of an eight-hour period... Humor become such as integral part of the ongoing life process” (Fry 1963, 5).⁶

⁵ Abstracted from an address given by William Fry at the Annual Convention of the American Orthopsychiatric Association, Washington, D.C., April 1979.

⁶ Psychologists argued that not only do humor and laughter enrich human health, but also reinforce our coping mechanism and optimism (Walsh 1928; Lefcourt et al. 1995; Kuiper and Martin 1998; Moran and Massam 1999; Lefcourt 2001). Humour scholars divide the functions of humour into two approaches: interpersonal and intrapersonal (Martin 2007; Scheel 2017). That is, humour serves to enhance relationships with others (e.g., affiliative, self-defeating) on the interpersonal level, and within the self (e.g., self-enhancing) on the intrapersonal level. This categorization coincides with Sutton-Smith’s scheme of the functions of play: extrinsic play functions (serve in the larger culture), which are interpersonal, and intrinsic play functions (players’ game-related motives for playing), which are intrapersonal (1997, 16-17). The intrapersonal functions of humour include venting stress (Freud [1905] 1960), regulating emotions (Scheel & Gockel 2017, 20), maintaining health and boosting creativity and optimism (e.g., Richards 1990; Lefcourt et al. 1995), etc. As a coping strategy, humour has been used in psychiatry and therapeutic psychology for a long time. Freud (1928) posited that “humor is an effective defense mechanism against negative emotions” (Yue et al. 2016). When discussing the universality of humour and laughter (Martin

Modern Chinese humour scholars have relied on Western created paradigms, schemes, and scales. Some conclude that the Chinese sense of humour is unique but question if a good sense of humour is regarded as highly in China as it is in some Western cultures (Liao 1998; Chen and Martin 2007; Davis 2011). For example, Xiaodong Yue writes, “Westerners will regard humor as a positive and desirable personal trait and humorous people are more confident, friendly, intelligent, pleasant, motivating and socially desirable” (Yue 2016). In contrast, a good sense of humour is not regarded as a particularly positive personality trait in Chinese culture (Lin 1974; Yue 2010; Qian 2011; Liao 2007). Rather, Yue’s respondents, who were Hong Kong Chinese, attributed humour to the expertise of professionals and not something they possessed themselves (Yue 2016). Yue credits this to the influence of Confucius. He argues that the “Confucian way of being a gentleman requires restraint from laughter to demonstrate dignity and social formality” (Yue 2010, 2016; Xu 2011). In other words, being more civilized and cultivated means being detached from an unrestrained/animalistic nature such as laughter. To maintain proper social order and hierarchy, proper humour is “a form of private, moderate, good-natured, tasteful, and didactically useful mirth” (Xu 2011, 70). Consequently, “Chinese people

2007, 2), one of the most distinguished modern humour scholars Rod. A. Martin mainly use scientific data to prove that laughter or mirth have positive functions to the human mental and physical health. Martin raised five potential mechanisms to hypothesize benefits on physical and psychosocial health of the practitioner of humour. 1. Health benefits may potentially result from the respiratory, musculoskeletal, vocal and cardiovascular activities associated with laughter. 2. Humour may potentially influence both psychological and physical health through the positive emotion of mirth. 3. Humour may benefit physical and psychological health through cognitive mechanisms. 4. Humour may benefit physical and psychological health through social or interpersonal mechanisms by increasing one’s level of social support. 5. Humour may conceivably have a beneficial effect on health by promoting a healthy lifestyle (2007). He argued that humour spurs and activates healthy in five aspects: immune system, pain threshold and tolerance, blood pressure, longevity and illness symptoms (Martin 2008, 490-500). Here, “a ‘healthy’ sense of humor would involve a generally cheerful temperament characterized by mirth, happiness, joy, optimism, and a playful approach to life” (Martin 2008, 482; cf. Ruch and Kohler 1998). Moreover, “...a sense of humor may enhance marital relationships, friendship, and other close relationships. It has been suggested that humor allows one to discuss potentially problematic topics in a non-threatening and accepting manner, to engage in creative interpersonal problem-solving, and to enhance positive feelings of warmth, closeness, and enjoyment between partners in a relationship” (Martin 2008, 506). Kuiper et al. (1995, 370) thus proposed that “an increased sense of humor does help the individual deal in a more positive and growth-oriented fashion with a variety of life circumstances and situations” (Abel 2002; Newman and Stone 1996).

have long scorned public humor. Confucian life would lose its seriousness, and sophistry would overturn orthodoxy” (Yue 2010, 2011; Sample 2011).

Yue’s arguments are supported by Chao-chih Liao. She claims that “the Confucian doctrine of moderation advocates against hilarious laughter because it expresses extreme emotion” (Liao 1998). The Chinese prefer a “thoughtful smile” to “hilarious laughter” (Lin 1974) because the “smile of the meeting of hearts is sophisticated, while the American humor of the belly laugh is shallow” (Kao 1974, xxvi; Liao 2003; Raskin 2001). This suppression of laughter and humour is rooted in the denial of human nature and pleasures of the material body.

Anthropologists have significantly contributed to humour studies, encouraging a closer examination of humour’s underlying social messages. Christie Davis stresses, “the key question to ask is why this particular set of jokes is in circulation at this particular time in this particular society rather than some other possible set” (2011, 5). For example, in his cross cultural analysis of ethnic humour in the 1990s, Christie Davis explored why and how a group of people who share common characteristics exchange jokes about a particular group who share some other traits: “The comparative study of humor involves making systematic comparisons between the humour and in particular the jokes associated with different nations, ethnic and regional groups, religious traditions, social classes, occupations, genders and any other social or cultural entities” (2008, 157). According to Davis, the Irish to the English, Newfoundlanders to North Americans, and Jewish to many ethnic groups have been their cultural counterparts’ mocking and joking targets. Similarly, in China some jokes mock people who come from certain areas, such as Henan Province. Henan people have been long scorned by those in other parts of the country and portrayed as mean, evil and bad. Similarly, Post-Soviet countries also share internet jokes and memes to fight against Russia as well as their own authoritarian governances such as Belarus

(Astapova 2021). Although verbal jokes are not my main topic, Davis’s works inspired me to think about Naodongfang in the larger context of wedding games worldwide. Based on his approach of targets and initiators of humour, I create a typology of Chinese wedding games with my fieldwork in the second chapter.

It is challenging, but helpful, to distinguish humour, play and (practical) jokes. William Fry found four overlapping areas of humour and play: precipitation of a logical paradox, smiling and laughter, spontaneous-thoughtful balance and interpersonal behaviour (1963). Referring to Fry’s analysis of humour, play and practical jokes, I drew the following illustration to show the relationships among humour, jokes/practical jokes and play.

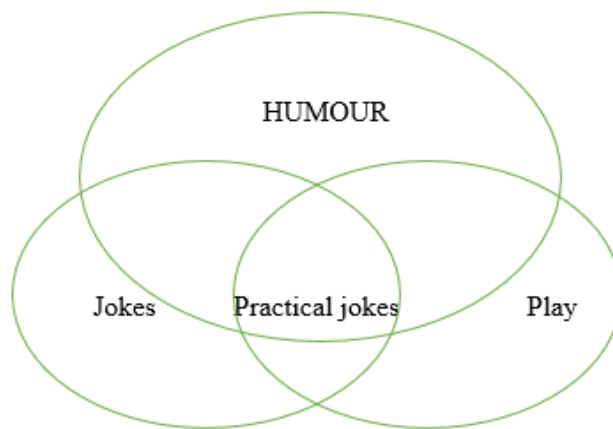


Figure 2 The relationship of play, jokes, practical jokes and humour

Play partially intersects with humour because some types of play can bring laughter, smiles and mirth. Some play is even based on humour and jokes. Chinese Naodongfang falls into this category. Although a few forms of language play, like tongue twisters, are not physical, most of them are. Therefore, play and games are physical and have the side-effect of laughter while humour and jokes mentally stimulate mirth and smiles through wit and speech. Play sometimes relates to humour, and some games make people laugh, but humour and laughter are not necessarily by-products of play and games. When jokes and play intersect with each other, the

overlapping section includes practical jokes that are mainly practised physically rather than mentally or verbally. Hence, the verbal aspects of humour are jokes and physical expressions of humour are practical jokes that overlap with play. Finally, practical jokes are more related to humour than play.

In drawing attention to the importance of the physical aspects of humour, my work builds on a small body of literature in folkloristics that focuses on practical jokes. Folklorists have not studied practical jokes as commonly or systematically as they have studied oral jokes. Elliott Oring found that “folklorists have recorded pranks and practical jokes, both as events and stories, for over a century, but serious attention to them has only developed in the past several decades” (2008, 187). In 1974, *Southern Folklore Quarterly* launched a special issue that included research on practical jokes that were played at events such as initiations (Scott 1974), weddings (Morrison 1974) and in children’s summer camps (Posen 1974). In this special issue, Richard Tallman offered a generic analysis of practical jokes and defined practical joke as “first an event, a competitive play activity in which only one of two opposing sides is consciously aware of the fact that a state of play exists; for the joke to be successful, one side must remain unaware of the fact that a play activity is occurring until it is too late; that is, until the unknowing side is made to seem foolish or is caused some physical and/or mental discomfort” (1974, 260). He addressed elements of practical jokes, such as the prankster(s), the victim(s), the actions (active/action or passive/verbal), the intentions (benevolent, initiative, malevolent) and the results (relationships from opposite sides change or not). He emphasized two main characteristics of practical jokes: esoteric and obscene nature (1974, 259) and two dimensions of practical jokes, “event” and “story.” In this thesis, I stress the “event” of practical jokes and highlight people’s stories through ethnographical materials.

Folklorists have related practical jokes and pranks to certain times of the year, such as April Fool's Day (Dundes 1988; McEntire 2002; Smith 2009; Wright 1927) and Halloween (Santino 1983, 1994, 1996, 1998). Santino connects Halloween activities to mumming in a broad sense (2009, 20). Moreover, disguises and kitchen visits are researched as mumming and rough music by various scholars (Abrahams 1995; Glassie 1975; Halpert 1969; Santino 2009). Pranks and practical jokes are also practised as part of initiations of new members, such as students, fraternity members, apprentices and athletes (Fry 1963, 166). Furthermore, scholars have researched pranks at house wakes in Newfoundland (Butler 1982; Narváez 1994), Ireland (Seán Ó Súilleabháin 1967) and early colonial New England (St. George 1998). Seán Ó Súilleabháin argued that in terms of the Irish funeral customs of "wake," playful and amusing elements in house wakes were to help the bereaved ease their pains and establish normal social orders. Gary Butler also stressed positive functions in his work on Newfoundland house wake rituals (1982). Peter Narváez edited a book *Of Corpse - Death and Humor in Folklore and Popular Culture* in 2003 that focused on humour and pranks related to death while Robert R. Provine's *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (2000) and Moira Marsh's *Practically Joking* (2015) are two recent important works for studying laughter and pranks. I hope that my own research on Naodongfang contributes to this scholarship and extends the folkloristic study of practical jokes.

Before leaving the discussion of humour and jokes, however, it is important to acknowledge the contributions of early scholars of obscene folklore. Gershon Legman (1917-1999), praised as "the great scholar of forbidden, historian of erotica, cult icon of the best generation, and world expert on dirty jokes and bawdy songs" (Davis 2008, 3), was the most remarkable pioneer of erotic folklore and sex humour in 20th century in America. He played a pivotal role in "opening up the field of erotic folklore to scholarly study in the 1960's and 70's"

(Scott 1999) even though he failed to be acknowledged and accepted by the American academia for a long time. During the 1960s, even in the U.S., the subjects Legman studied were not spoken of in polite circles nor taught in universities. Despite this, he continued to collect words, sayings, rhymes, limericks, turns of phrase, stories, jokes and songs throughout his lifetime. A testament to his anti-censorship efforts, his first book was named *Love and Death: The Life of Censorship* (1949). His later works include *The Horn Book: Studies in Erotic Folklore and Bibliography* (1964) followed by his influential *Rationale of the Dirty Joke: An Analysis of Sexual Humor* (1968) and its second series *No Laughing Matter: Rationale of the Dirty Joke* in 1975. His most recent work “Erotic Folksongs and Ballads: An International Bibliography” was published in *Journal of American Folklore* in 1990. As a bibliographic researcher with the Kinsey Institute, he established a motif-index of erotic humour. Thus, Bruce Jackson viewed Legman as “the person, more than any other, who made research into erotic folklore and erotic verbal behavior academically respectable” (Jackson 1974).

One Chinese scholar followed a similar path to Gershon Legman. Huajie Huang, who wrote the first academic paper on Naodongfang, was active in the 1930s. Huang was famous for his collection and work on Chinese obscene lore as well as on topics of women’s folklore, such as menstruation, that were considered unspeakable in public at the time. In contrast to Gershon Legman,⁷ much less is known about Huang’s life and works. This may be due to the fact that Huang died much earlier than Legman, who was still active until the 1990s. Huang’s mobility also makes tracing his life and publications difficult. As a result, details of both his life story and

⁷ Scholars have written biographies of Gershon Legman. The most recent work comes from historians Nina Attwood and Barry Reay’s co-authored article “Amateur Sexology: Gershon Legman and US Sexual History” (2021). Folklorist Susan Davis recently published a monograph *Dirty Jokes and Bawdy Songs: The Uncensored Life of Gershon Legman* (2019) and made a detailed sketch of Legman’s private and academic life. Psychology and criminology writer Mikita Brottman published *Funny Peculiar: Gershon Legman and the Psychopathology of Humor* in 2004, which provides another angle to get acquainted with Legman’s fundamental works.

scholarly contributions remain important gaps for Chinese folklorists to fill. Finally, Dutch sinologist Robert Hans van Gulik should also be mentioned. He is regarded as the first Western scholar to study Chinese sexology and obscene lore, and his *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society* (1974) is a significant contribution. While I do not directly cite works from either Legman or van Gulik in this dissertation, it is necessary to recognize the groundwork they laid for later scholars. These pioneers helped open the door for me to focus on a Chinese wedding custom that largely draws on sexology, erotic humor and bawdy lore.

4. Feminism and Feminist Folkloristics

Confucianism has shaped life in China and its neighbouring countries for the last 2000 years. Countries in the Pan-Eastern Asian Confucian Culture Circle (泛東亞儒家文化圈), such as China, Japan and Korea, integrated Chinese characters into their writing and communication system and historically adopted the Confucian ideology into their own cultures. Confucianism also influenced gendered attitudes towards women in Eastern Asian countries. For example, the code of “Three Obedience and Four Virtues” (三從四德) required women’s silence, virginity before marriage and obedience to their fathers and husbands. Today Eastern Asian societies within the Confucian Culture Circle remain undeniably patriarchal. According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2018⁸, China (103), Japan (110) and South Korea (115) ranked beneath the global average among 149 countries. Compared to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2006,

⁸ Accessed September 10, 2018. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>.

China's rank fell from 63 to 103, indicating a significant decline in gender equality from 2006 to 2018. Similarly, Japan dropped from 79 to 110.⁹

Because the gender gap index ranks China higher than its two neighbouring countries, it might be easy to assume that women there have more gender equality than their Japanese and Korean counterparts, perhaps due to their relatively higher economic participation and political empowerment, or the fact that after 1949 Chinese women were nominally liberated by the Communist ideology of gender equality. Thanks to Communism and Marxism, equality between men and women were officially legalized and institutionalized at the national level. However, Chinese women's lives are full of many contradictions. For example, even though the rate of Chinese women's economic participation is high, their numbers in senior management positions are low and the rate of political participation of women in leading administrative positions is lower still (Lv 2020). The payment of a bride-price is still pervasive in various areas of China, and thus the freedom to marry for love and enter an equal partnership remains a wish for many women. The one-child policy in the 1990s led to countless female embryos and infants being killed. This has resulted in a significant gender imbalance; today the male population in China is 30 million larger than the female and many men have trouble finding a mate. Finally, information about one's age and gender are considered mandatory on filing curriculum vitae and resumes and are just one indication of the prevalence of overt gender and age discrimination in the labour market.

Moreover, mother-workers' rights are not protected in many industries and companies. Women are threatened with dismissal if they plan to have a baby. More probably, these companies would not even hire a woman if they felt she was likely to give birth during her

⁹ Accessed September 10, 2018. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2006>

contract term. Nor can women sufficiently avail themselves of maternal or parental leave. Only six months of maternity leave is guaranteed in most occupations. Mothers often have to go back to work immediately after giving birth, or their positions will not be there for them. Because of the insecurity experienced by working mothers, some Chinese women choose to quit their jobs and become housewives when they have children. They may decide to go back to work after their child gets old enough for daycare; however, by that time, their qualifications often lag behind what society requires and are not competitive. Fathers rarely consider taking parental leave, and they are noticeably absent when raising children. This factor, as mocked in the popular humorous term “widowed childrearing” (喪偶式育兒), has made Chinese women’s situation worse.

After 1978, when Xiaoping Deng, the national leader at the time, ended the Cultural Revolution and introduced capitalism and the market economy to Mainland China, Confucianism was revived and interwoven with capitalism and consumerism. With the end of the “One-Child Policy” (2015) and the initiation of the “Three-Child Policy” (2021), Chinese women’s lives changed again, including in ways that affected them negatively; some were trapped into giving birth to and raising more children. For some, spending time raising children meant that their economic, social and public contributions naturally shrunk. Moreover, Chinese girls have lost the advantages enjoyed by those of us who were born during the period of the “One-Child Policy,” and they have to compete for resources with their male siblings.

According to feminist scholar Xiaojiang Li¹⁰, Chinese women’s liberation is a fraud from both a social and legal perspective (2005, 56). In Chinese, “liberation” (解放) linguistically does not necessarily relate to liberty and freedom but is more connected to the proletarian revolution.

¹⁰ Xiaojiang Li refused to label herself within any feminist school when I personally approached her in a lecture from Chizuko Ueno in Shaanxi Normal University, Xi’an, 10th of September 2019.

In fact, Li argues that a lack of liberty and freedom is a characteristic of “Chinese Women’s Liberation” (婦女解放 2005, 104). It was immersed in the tides of nationalism and social revolution by male enlightenment ideologists who used it as a weapon to confront feudalism and imperialism (2005, 99). When people witnessed the collapse of feudal China, an influx of ideas promoting gender equality became popular among advanced intellectuals and revolutionary pioneers. Following these male intellectuals who called on anti-feudalist and anti-imperialist movements through emphasizing gender equality, the next period in Chinese feminism took place from the 1920s to the 1940s when consecutive wars pushed women into the public sphere and this opportunity became the starting point for Chinese women stepping into societies from domestic spheres. The last period began with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, when women were legally liberated by the Communist regime (Li 2005, 71). It seems like the women’s movement that was sparked by the industrial revolution in the West was replaced by communist revolutions to ensure legal gender equality in China. This trajectory of communist feminism provided the political background for my study.

Communists employ the rhetoric of women’s liberation as part of their ideology and present it as “fait au complet.” In legislation, the “gender equality of China” is expressed grammatically in the perfect tense and confirms an ideological commitment. This contrasts to other parts of the world where the term usually refers to work that is in the future or ongoing and not completed yet. Generally, and globally speaking, women’s liberation movements are still unsteady, having followed a zigzag route full of seesaw battles of the old and the new (Li 2005, 27). Therefore, the legislated liberation of Chinese women may be beyond the actual societal developments of Chinese gender equality and feminism (2005, 147).

Li argues that women's movements worldwide began from the introspection of human beings' consciousness and the new "men" that emerged (2005, 55). In order to pursue the eternal freedom of human beings, "men" had to rethink the place of silent and ignorant women in history. According to Socialists, women's liberation was a prerequisite for shaking hierarchy and abolishing slavery. However, citing Engels' works, such as *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats*, Li insists that "woman" is an imagined category. She notes: "Socialist revolutions truly helped Chinese women step out of feudal families and liberated them to the furthest extent. However, they (socialist revolutionists) did not return the women to themselves, but passed them over to the state/nation. To be accurate, the nation/state accomplished the complete control of Chinese women through 'liberating' them" (2005, 73). Li's theories describe what I call "Nationalist Feminism." When women were "given" the rights of gender equality, they were equally "deprived" of other rights (Li 2005, 75).

According to Chizuko Ueno, nationalism exploits women for national benefits and sacrifices them for national will. Drawing on the case of Japanese army sex workers during the Second World War, Ueno found that women's rights were and can be ignored without hesitation for the sake of national and collective benefits (Ueno 2004). Similarly, "Nationalist Feminism" backed up governmental family planning and birth control policies in China. Li has found that male scholars often persuade women to return to the domestic sphere for the sake of "society (state/nation)" during social reformations (2005, 149). Women once again give themselves to the nation.

Chinese gender constructions are still rooted in a solid Confucianist patriarchal and hierarchal philosophy. Although governmental policies promote the advantages of socialism through emphasizing Chinese women's liberation (Li 2005, 155), the collusion between

governmental authorities and spokespeople of National Feminism, such as Women's Unions (婦聯), renders women's situation as "fake prosperity" (虛假繁榮). According to Li, Chinese women lack three components in feminism: subjectivity (they are passively moulded and shaped by the state, nation and revolutions), consciousness (women's consciousness requires them to separate themselves from the great proletarian team) and awareness (they should become aware of their subjectivity and keep practising it) (Li 2005, 190). Li argues that Chinese women will accomplish their full freedom only by realizing these three goals.

Marxism/Socialism has become the accomplice of Chinese patriarchy and has helped repress Chinese women, the opposite to what Marxism intended. It has resulted in a structure which is popularly called "Chinese vernacular feminism" (中華田園女權). Chinese vernacular feminism ironically derived from a kind of "Chinese vernacular dogs in rural areas," whose Latin name is *Canis lupus familiaris* (中華田園犬), to mock a group of Chinese radical feminists who are regarded as "inauthentic," non-Western-trained, irrational and vernacular. A full discussion of the history and status of Chinese feminism is beyond the scope of this thesis but suffice to say that the dynamics are complex. For example, some Chinese men argue that Chinese women are not promoting "authentic" feminism but instead are using the shelter of feminism to make unreasonable demands in an effort to replace patriarchy with matriarchy¹¹. Chinese vernacular feminists can be mocked in the public sphere by "authentic" feminists who insist on adopting "authentic" Western feminist discourses (Wan 2020; G. Zhang 2018). The conflict between these groups is apparent and makes the whole situation more complicated.

¹¹ "Chinese Vernacular Feminism." Accessed February 13, 2019.
<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%94%B0%E5%9B%AD%E5%A5%B3%E6%9D%83/23687034?fr=aladdin>
<https://www.zhihu.com/question/266449349>

According to the current policies of the PRC, the principal mission of the state is uniting all people as a whole to resolve economic and developmental issues, but they do not address discrepancies between women and men. Chinese feminism is under strict control for the sake of the national benefit. Chinese censorship has regulated liberal feminists. For example, in 2017, all social media accounts of “Feminist Voice” (女權之聲), the most influential feminist NGO in Mainland China, were blocked and then permanently closed without any explanation (Tatlow 2017). More and more LGBT NGOs and students’ organizations are being blocked and closed recently (Zhang 2021).

In my view, Chinese feminism is made up of a dualistic surface and core: the core of Confucianist patriarchy and the appearance of Marxist egalitarianism. The appearance keeps promoting Marxist and Communist feminism and yelling loudly for gender equality and women’s rights. At the same time, the core expresses the long and insistent influence of Confucianist ethics and mores in terms of gender roles and stereotypes.

Chinese feminist folkloristics is arguably still in its formative stages. This became clear to me when disagreements arose during an intense training program I attended at Fudan University in July 2021. After Li Kang, a pioneer feminist folklorist, delivered a lecture to an audience of approximately thirty folklorists, the chair of the Chinese Folklore Society, Tao Ye, invited discussion. To my surprise, many of the male folklorists present disagreed, mocked and even attacked the female feminist folklorists there, including me. I left the session discouraged and feeling even more strongly that the field of feminist folkloristics in China will need decades to catch up to the developments in North America. Ever since, I have thought of that day as the initiation of “Chinese feminist folkloristics.”

I have been heavily influenced by the Western feminist folklore studies that provided the foundation of my doctoral course work. In North America, feminist folkloristics took off in the 1970s (Greenhill and Tye 2001; Locke, Vaughan and Greenhill 2009) in line with the general rise of feminism in Western scholarly disciplines. In the 1980s and 1990s, three folklore journals published special issues on feminist folklore, showing that this focus had garnered wide attention in folklore scholarship (“Folklore and Feminism” of *The Journal of American Folklore* [edited by Bruce Jackson in 1987]; “Feminist Revisions in Folklore Studies” of *The Journal of Folklore Research* [edited by Beverly J. Stoeltje in 1988]; and “Folklore Fieldwork: Sex, Sexuality, and Gender” of *Southern Folklore* [edited by Camilla A. Collins in 1990]). In 1993 two influential books helped push Western feminist folkloristics into a new era: *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore* (Hollis, Pershing and Young) and *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture* (Radner and Lanser). My newly published Chinese translation of Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser’s introduction (Wang 2022) proves that this work still holds significance for feminist scholarship worldwide.

Within the history of Western feminist folkloristics, there was an eventual switch from studies of women’s folklore to folkloric studies from a feminist perspective. For example, after co-editing *Undisciplined Women: Tradition and Culture in Canada* in 1997, Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye published a second collection in 2014, *Unsettling Assumptions: Tradition, Gender, Drag*. In the second collection, subjects like transgender and drag were discussed by various scholars from feminist perspectives. The book is an example of how feminist folklorists expanded their research beyond focusing on women’s folklore, to embrace a broader gender spectrum. Today feminist folklorists join other scholars of gender in conceptualizing gender as nonbinary. Some, like Pauline Greenhill, employ queer theory to uncover meanings in vernacular

expressions from folktales to custom. Their work explores constructions of masculinities and LGBTQIA identities, and issues and promises to push the discipline in new and exciting directions.

Today many feminists consider “woman” as an imagined category. For example, economically disadvantaged women were not included in the early feminist movements launched by middle-class women; the realities of women of color were often overlooked (Li 2005, 59). Intersectionality, introduced in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a black feminist law scholar, demonstrated how class, race and gender intersect. Thus, discriminations are doubled, and even tripled, when women suffer from the intersectionality of race and gender (1989, 139). Intersectionality stresses the intersection of accumulated multi-identities, such as a black woman, a black disabled woman, and a black disabled LGBT woman. Patricia Hill Collins develops intersectionality in many spheres. She proposed the “matrix of domination” to draw a structure of discrimination and oppression (1990, 2000, 2016). These foundations of Western feminist folkloristics have strengthened my capability to study gender issues within Chinese contexts. Emerging methodologies and theories enabled me to think about how women, and other genders, suffer discrimination and to consider how factors such as class and educational background intersect with Naodongfang.

Although women have been active as folklorists in China for several decades, and early male folklorists conducted research projects centred on women (Huang [1934] 1999), gender and feminist studies are more popular with sociologists than folklorists (Li 2007; Pan and Huang 2011). Only a small group of women folklorists have worked in the field of feminist folklore since it first emerged in the 1990s. *Chinese Women’s Folklore and Culture* (1995) was the first attempt to compile an encyclopedia of women’s folklore. Although it consists solely of women’s

folklore entries, Li Xing reflected her feminist perspective in editing the manuscript. Li Kang is one of the most active folklorists who devotes herself to developing feminist folklore in China. She has written works on the theorization of feminist folklore (2014, 2018) and helped develop gender policies concerning the initiative of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2016, 2021).

Tongju Diao and Junxia Wang are also leaders in Chinese feminist folkloristics. They both work on rural women's folklore. Tongju Diao focuses on Chinese rural relationships and kinship. Her particular interest in rural China intersects with my thesis given that Naodongfang is most pervasive in rural China. Her publications, "Women and Dragon Plate: The Practice of Han People's Patriarchal Culture in Folk Religion" (2003), "Be the Daughter of Husband's Family or Her Natal Family: Folkloric Research of Married Daughters' Identities" (2012), and "The Custom of Visiting Natal Family and Changes of Identity of Married Daughters: Concurrently on the Coordinating Function of Folk Culture" (2010), explore various issues in rural women's daily lives drawing on rich ethnographic materials. Junxia Wang's work includes "Women as Practitioners of Burning Incense in Tai Mountain" (2009) and her PhD thesis, *Gift, Relationship and Gender: Gift Mobility and Women's Lives in Ji Village* (2011). As a student of Li Xing, Cuixia Zhang focuses on minority ethnic women's folklore in southern China. Her PhD thesis, *Altar Women: A Feminist Study of "Lianchihui" in a Village of Dali Bai Ethnic Group* (2013) is a beautiful piece of feminist folklore. This study is inspired by all of the above feminist folklorists and their works and grows out of my master's thesis, *A Study of Yugur Female Intangible Culture Bearers* (Wang 2013), which was at the intersection of ICH policies and women's studies.

Feminist scholars have criticized the direction of Chinese feminism. Li warned of the possibility of post-colonialization from the West if Chinese scholars constantly adopt Western

feminist discourses. She insisted that Chinese feminists should avoid being trapped by either ideological or feminist discourses in the West (2005, 194). She objected to the separation of sex and gender in Western scholarship that disregards differences among biological sexes. She called on Chinese feminists to remain true to Chinese vernacular traditions and resist Western assimilation (2005, 156-158). Similarly, folklorist Xiaoping Dong criticized the Chinese tendency to use Western frames to interpret contemporary Chinese gender issues in her article “Women’s Social Development and Cultural Diversity” (2014). She contended that Chinese feminist folklorists should consider the specific Chinese cultural context and social structure and help advance Chinese women’s status (Dong 2014). She argued that Western women and Chinese women have different cultural heritages and perspectives of “gender otherness.” Western societies experienced bourgeois revolutions very early and therefore women’s beauty, intelligence and social movements were encouraged. Scholars should notice differences when they study Chinese women (Dong 2014). Dong and others’ work taught me that Western scholarship cannot be applied uncritically to China. Notwithstanding the limitations, however, I feel there is much to learn by bringing together Western and Chinese feminist scholarship to explore Naodongfang and with this study I hope to contribute to cross cultural understandings.

Autoethnographic Reflections on Doing Feminist Research on Wedding Games

Pursuing Naodongfang as a research topic has sometimes been challenging as a feminist. When I read materials about wedding customs from many cultures, I always feel deep sympathy for the women who are too often one-dimensionally depicted in texts. Their destinies and real images are frequently ambiguous and hidden under different pens. We do not know what happened to them and what their real feelings were. I am afraid to imagine girls in India whose

parents need to work extremely hard to earn enough dowry to marry them to decent men and girls' prices in African tribes are bargained, negotiated and determined by their clans and tribes. No matter who pays the bride-price or dowry, these women's lives often seem hopeless and endangered.

I am the only child in my family. More and more Chinese girls have realized how the "one-child" policy has changed at least three generations of Chinese women's destinies (and after the withdrawal of the one child policy in 2015, Chinese women's lives changed again). Girls of my generation are often as treasured as boys and given the same amount of financial investment and attention. Many have grown up to obtain PhDs or become professionals and high-ranking managers. These women do not need to get married for economic reasons. Hence, more and more "left-over" women choose to be patient; they wait for their Mr. Right and to marry for "love." Women in my generation often face the dilemma of dedicating themselves to careers or investing in their families. Meanwhile, career ceilings as professionals are apparent and social expectations as wives, mothers and daughters are high. Many also face onerous burdens as they raise children at the same time they care for ageing parents.

As the only daughter in my family, I do not have the privilege of controlling everything. Instead, I experience a constant sense of absence and dissatisfaction. I realize that my parents hoped that I would be a son. My parents do not have the choice to favour their male children over me, but this does not mean that there is no gender discrimination in my family. There are still power negotiations, patriarchal repressions, misogyny and verbal violence. As products of a patriarchal society, my parents perhaps cannot avoid misogyny. Born in the 1960s, my father is a typical patriarchal father even though he is gentle and considerate. He stresses filial piety and requests my obedience to him. Raised in an isolated village, he left life in the mountains behind

when he joined the Chinese army. Eventually, through his own efforts, he became a respected, well-paid and high-ranking military officer. At the time my parents married, my mother was working as a teacher in a small town. My father admires my mother's educational background and also supports my education. Nevertheless, unlike mothers who can live out unfulfilled wishes through their daughters, my father's support only goes so far. His perspective, shaped by his family and occupational background, is narrower than my mother's. He is not alone; many Chinese fathers believe that daughters are raised for the benefit of their husbands' families (養女為他人) and therefore are not worth much investment. Moreover, many farmers in my father's generation still believe girls do not have inheritance right, so, obviously, I do not qualify as a descendant according to this way of thinking.

After getting married, my mother pursued higher education, finally finishing her Bachelor of Arts degree in the 1990s. You can see her pride when she describes how she diligently prepared for exams and wrote a thesis while carrying me in her womb. Ironically, my mother gave up her career very early considering her advanced educational background compared to most of her age cohort. At first her permanent job could not be easily transferred when my father was relocated from city to city. Later, my father left the army and started to work in Xi'an. At the time I was preparing for national college examinations and needed more care. Meanwhile, my mother was afflicted by heart disease and other illnesses. Many factors influenced her decision to retire early. She left the workforce when she was around 45 years old, an early age for retirement. Not surprisingly, she felt trapped in regret and hatred towards herself and others in the years following.

At the same time, my mother is an open, knowledgeable and bold woman. When I was a little girl, I was attracted by her collection of porn films that she often watched with her sisters

and friends with the door half-closed. Her collection sparked my curiosity about sex. My sympathies with my mother and her female siblings made me more sensitive to gender issues. Probably because I saw her sorrow, dissatisfaction and repentance, I was determined never to trace her steps. Now I feel that I am the exact opposite of my mother in many ways. I am pursuing a PhD degree overseas, am unmarried, and have no children. All of this is largely because my mother put her expectations and unfulfilled wishes on me, as Ueno claims that many mothers do (2010).

During my undergraduate studies in Journalism and Communication, lecturer Dr. Wang introduced me to the works of Xiaobo Wang (王小波) and his wife, Yinhe Li (李银河). Xiaobo Wang (1952-1997) was a famous contemporary Chinese writer of criticism, satire and fiction. Unlike Wang who was a literary writer, Li is an academic. She studies LGBT issues and BDSM (Li recognizes her own sex interest is in SM) for many years after getting a PhD degree in Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. The couple complimented each other well. After Wang died at a young age, Li's research received more and more attention. She has become an icon among those committed to promoting feminism, gender equality and LGBT rights in China. Now she lives with a transgender person who claims her social gender is male, but her biological gender is female. When I got to know their stories, I was so surprised and inspired that I filled in a questionnaire survey for the course project. My research paper was "College Students' Perspectives about Sex in Xi'an." I felt so privileged when I compared myself to all my classmates who were not pushing boundaries but busy writing boring term projects. I was proud of my boldness and ability to talk about sex publicly even though I still was a virgin at that time.

While reading literature, distributing questionnaires and doing research for the course project, I felt captivated by the scope of gender and sex. The mental and physical interactions

among multiple genders continue to interest me today. However, interest alone was not enough to establish me as a feminist scholar. I developed a vaguely formed but definite desire to study women's issues. My master's thesis at the Minzu University of China focused on female tradition bearers whom the government officially recognized among the Yugur ethnic group (裕固族) (Wang 2013). Later, when I continued my folklore and feminist studies overseas at the Memorial University in Canada, I gradually built up a solid understanding of feminist approaches in folklore. I feel fortunate to have Dr. Diane Tye as my supervisor. Her experience in feminist folkloristics, and virtues such as self-discipline and kindness, inspire me. Following her guide, I clarified my research interests in gender and sex within feminist folkloristics. When I received ethics approval from Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research, I felt excited and well prepared to begin my fieldwork. Things did not go exactly as I planned.

Methodology

Wedding games present a Janus-faced view: they can be positive as well as negative, banned as well as embraced, subversive as well as hegemonic. Moreover, they negotiate many forms of power, including power of the patriarchy; power of family, clan and community; power of the upper classes and intellectuals; and power of mass media and opinion leaders. To discover the essence of Naodongfang, I conducted library and archival research as well as fieldwork. On the one hand, my work is based on academic archival research and interpretations of classical Chinese literature. On the other hand, it also relies on field interviews and participant observation that I conducted in many places in China.

First, drawing on archival materials and texts concerning wedding games, marriage customs and Chinese cultures, this thesis aims to construct a historical and comprehensive description of Naodongfang. Rather than relying on a single academic perspective, I try to build a general understanding of Naodongfang. I bring together both Chinese manuscripts and English sources from various places; I also consulted as many online posts, videos, news reports and comments about Naodongfang as possible. These materials provide a solid basis for a Chinese Wedding Games Archive which is my future goal.

Second, I rely on interviews and participatory observation I conducted. I actually began this project with some fieldwork already under my belt. Its genesis dates to 2014 when Dr. Philip Hiscock encouraged me to develop a term paper I had written on Naodongfang into a PhD thesis. From then I started to intentionally collect materials when I attended weddings. In 2015 I observed three weddings in China: one wedding of my cousin and two of my friends. I was lucky enough to be able to record my cousin Shimin Wang's Naodongfang. In 2016, I was a participant observer at three weddings that I learned about through my friends and family members. The Naodongfang of Xin Tang and Lei Wang, which took place in Danfeng County, Shaanxi Province, became the most valuable case study for my thesis. In 2017 I returned to China for three months of intense fieldwork and documented eight more weddings. In total, I observed fifteen weddings celebrated across China, including in the provinces of Shaanxi, Shanxi, Gansu, Hunan, Hubei, Shandong, Guizhou and Beijing. As an amateur photographer, photos cited in this thesis, besides those resources clarified, were all taken by me during my fieldwork.

I had several reasons for picking these provinces as my fieldwork locations. First, Shaanxi Province is my home, so logistically, it made sense to focus some of my work there. Beyond this, however, Shaanxi Province and Shandong Province are very representative of

Northern Han Chinese cultures. Shaanxi's history can be traced back to the time well before the common era (BCE), and its capital Xi'an was the ancient capital for thirteen dynasties in Chinese history. Its primary industry is farming. Like Shaanxi Province, Shandong Province also has a long history and deep traditions, and the principal industry is also agriculture. More importantly, Shandong Province was the cradle of the Confucius School. It is a perfect spot to study Confucian influences on Naodongfang and Chinese marriages. I participated and recorded five weddings in Shandong Province, representing one-third of the weddings I observed. In terms of Southern China, I picked Hunan Province where I attended two weddings and Guizhou Province where I documented three weddings. I selected these as my main fieldwork sites because Hunan province, Hubei province and Guizhou province intersect with each other and, as is representative of the region, share similar hilly areas and a rice cultivating culture.

My fieldwork progressed from initially attending my friends and relatives' weddings, then wrangling invitations through friends and relatives to weddings of people I did not know, and finally locating weddings to observe through wedding agencies and companies. During my fieldwork in 2017, I had not met most of my interviewees beforehand, and I got to know them at the wedding venues. Generally, I approached and introduced myself directly to the wedding companies' staff when I arrived at a wedding and then followed them to investigate more weddings. Communicating with totally unknown interviewees was often an exciting experience. Some of them asked me to do some work in return, such as shooting their working images. Most were very friendly and took me to investigate more weddings. In addition to documenting weddings, I also attended the annual Wedding Fair in Beijing to become familiar with the wedding industry. In September 2017, I went to one of China's most southern provinces, Guangdong/Canton, to observe the filming of a TV show where competitors vied for three days

for the title of best wedding host. Based on this fieldwork, I was able to recognize trends and concerns within the wedding industry and identify expectations of couples, as well as of Chinese society in general, for wedding companies and wedding hosts.

In all, I interviewed a total of twenty-seven participants. In addition to interviewees from my fieldwork locations, I also interviewed people from places where I did not do participant observation, such as Hubei Province, Gansu Province and Yunnan Province. This was to gain a more comprehensive picture of Chinese wedding games. A chart showing the interviewees' personal information is contained in Appendix A. Interviewees include wedding participants such as brides and grooms, bridesmaids and groomsmen and other relatives and friends. I targeted game designers, abettors, initiators and active participants for their rich knowledge about Naodongfang. Moreover, I interviewed people who work in the wedding industry. I made good connections with wedding designers, wedding hosts, photographers and other professionals. Zhaomin Yang is a successful wedding host based in Weifang, Shandong Province. His well-designed wedding ceremonies, entertaining and laughter-arousing games and auspicious patterned speeches are all based on rich Shandong culture. The wedding he hosted provided me with valuable materials.

Moreover, outside China, I conducted interviews with wedding participants in Chinese diasporic communities. For example, to discover how Chinese Naodongfang was adopted into North American contexts, I interviewed the white Newfoundland-born bride Amy Tam and her Cantonese-speaking China-born father-in-law Tommy Tam. Finally, I collected opinions and narratives from friends who belong to diverse national identities such as Estonian, Finnish, Russian, Belarusian, Indian and Japanese when I was a visiting PhD student at the University of Tartu, Estonia, for ten months.

Challenges

Conducting fieldwork on Naodongfang turned out to be challenging; sometimes it was even daunting and full of misunderstandings and confusion. More than one of my interviewees suggested that I should not attend Naodongfang events. As well, my presence unavoidably modified the space even if I made every effort to be as invisible and unobtrusive as possible. Secondly, people worried about my safety. Naodongfang is male-dominated and my female body sometimes brought me into places of uncertainty and ambiguity. Qi Wang, an interviewee who later became a good friend of mine, claimed he would never take his unmarried girlfriend to Naodongfang. He thought that on occasions of Naodongfang, all unmarried women, except for the bride, were not “appropriate” guests. He stressed the adjective “appropriate” three times: “If you are married, that is better. People know that you are someone’s wife, your husband takes care of you seriously, then they won’t go too far... If you are no one, it is easy to be stricken by a vicious blow... As a group of lads, it is easy to become out of control. You might be pushed down or be randomly kissed and taken advantage of by random people. That is meaningless” (2016). Despite this kind and well-meaning advice, I still observed fifteen weddings across China and participated in four Naodongfang events during my fieldwork.

All folklore fieldwork can be demanding but conducting research in the male-dominated space of Naodongfang was particularly challenging. While reflecting on my traumatic fieldwork experiences is not very comfortable for me, I feel I need to claim the kind of challenges that female fieldworkers too often encounter and to help recognize the real danger that sexual assault presents for female fieldworkers. In 1931 Henrietta Schmerler, encouraged to conduct fieldwork on an Apache Reservation by Professors Ruth Benedict and Franz Boas, was raped and murdered

while carrying out her research. She was twenty-two and an incoming graduate student at Columbia University. This case “put Anthropology on trial” (G. Schmerler 2017) and Schmerler’s experiences prompted female fieldworkers to reflect on their daily work practices and ethics and to look for solutions. Compared to Schmerler, I am certainly luckier. I was not raped, and I am still alive.

During an intense period of fieldwork in September 2017, I asked some of my friends to introduce me to wedding hosts (MCs) and photographers. As I have stressed, I did not personally know many interviewees previously. I stayed in Weifang city, Shandong Province, for a week to interview a wedding host, Zhaomin Yang, and a wedding photographer, Shaoman Wang. I even took part in Shaoman Wang’s photography project to get familiar with their work and lives as a team member in Jinan city. Weifang city became rich soil for me to cultivate, and I felt delighted with my progress. However, I did not realize that some wedding industry members are not as friendly and kind as the people I have just mentioned. On one evening, I arranged to meet an interviewee in a neighbouring town. It took twenty-five to thirty-five minutes to drive from Weifang. The person I was to meet was a wedding host my classmate had referred me to. At the time, I did not realize that conducting an interview in the late evening was unusual. In fact, I remember that beforehand I was in a happy and relaxed mood. I even bought a pair of high-heeled shoes that were on sale while I was waiting for the wedding host in a shopping mall.

I did not suspect anything was amiss when this wedding host took me to a remote agritainment site (village tourist venue) that turned out to be closed when we arrived. I thought he wanted to show me the venue as the expression of local hospitality. In retrospect, I realize that, as a local, he probably knew the site was already closed. For quite a long time, we drove around the town, and I got to know some of his personal history. Finally, we found a place to sit

down in a restaurant and hold the interview. By the time we ordered some food, however, it was very late in the evening. When I turned on my recorder, the dialogue was superficial and full of nonsense, probably in part because the venue was not formal enough for an interview. I realized that I was not likely to accomplish a lot this time and inquired whether I could attend any weddings he was hosting in the foreseeable future. This is how I usually approached participants in the wedding industry, so I tried to keep in touch with him. At the same time, I decided to leave because it was almost 11 pm. Before I came, I had already booked a taxi driver on my phone to take me back from the town to Weifang, but we agreed that the driver would not depart to pick me up before confirming my location and time. Therefore, I was not able to return immediately; it would take another thirty minutes for the taxi driver to arrive.

When the wedding host suggested that he could drive me to Weifang, I naively got into his car again. Thinking back, my judgement may have been clouded by my desire not to lose contact with him; I did not want to offend him. To my surprise, however, he drove the car into an underground parking lot. I thought that he took me to the parking lot because I had not rejected his advances firmly enough, and I protested again that I needed to go back to Weifang immediately. He rejected my wishes again. I lost my patience negotiating with him and stepped out of the car. At this time, I was still holding on to my pride and dignity. I thought there would be a few people in the parking lot who would hear me if I screamed. I still did not believe he had decided to hurt me. However, before I could get away, he came out from the door on his side and tightly grabbed me, using skills he developed when he served in the army for many years. My effort to kick his crotch failed. He quickly and violently hit me in my back, forcing me to kneel on the ground. My knees were bruised. Then he easily lifted me and threw me flatly into the car. My belly and hipbone slammed into the gear shift lever.

I remember he yelled at me when I was kneeling on the ground, “It seems like you are trying to resist me. Who do you think you are?” It sounded to me like he was saying, “I am powerful and masculine. You are a weak and powerless woman.” At that moment, I felt a deep sense of helplessness and powerlessness of being a woman. I felt vulnerable not having the strength or skill to escape. Initially, I thought I had power as a well-educated PhD candidate and a woman with cultural capital, including youth and beauty. However, I found the power was nothing when faced with this emergency and its physical dangers. Being treated by people with care and respect for many years, I forgot how dangerous some corners of the world were. At that moment, I came to understand the feeling of being forced to do something you hate by means of violence, namely, the pain of those women who experience sexual assault. The sense of desperation was agonizing. I thought I might die that night.

At this point, he was irritated and finally realized that I only wanted to interview him and desired nothing more; I was not interested in having sex, and I did not have a crush on him. Perhaps when interviewing him, I had exaggerated my interest in him, but there was never any sexual interest on my part. Moreover, because my thesis is on Naodongfang, our conversations unavoidably contained topics such as sex, jokes and violence. I felt sorry that my serious PhD project made my participant think that I am an easy girl, ready for a one-night stand. I also felt that he denied my worth and dignity as a woman folklorist. When I refused him, it harmed his ego and he got more irritated.

He grabbed my phone and locked me in the car. Many similar film plots flashed through my mind. I became aware of the emergency I was in, in the deep night, forced to stay in an enclosed car in an underground parking lot with a man who had the drive to rape me. I gave up protesting, took a deep breath, and started to talk to him. I mentioned our common friend who

referred him to me and implored him not to harm me if he wanted to remain friends with her. I now realized why my friend might have been reluctant to introduce me to him. To be honest with him, I told him that I was on my period. He did not believe me but forcibly kissed my mouth and touched my private parts to check whether I was wearing a sanitary pad.

Discovering that I was not lying about my period and that I had no sexual interest in him, the participant reluctantly agreed to drive me back to Weifang. For some reason, he rejected my request to call a taxi but insisted on driving me. I was not able to refuse. The half-hour trip was full of the unknown and desperation. I thought I might be raped, killed and abandoned in the dark fields just next to the endless highway. I suspect that he also thought about it. Thank god I did not mute my phone. The taxi driver I booked to pick me up sent me a couple of texts asking whether I still needed a drive. Also, my then boyfriend sent me texts to check on the interview progress before going to sleep. That these messages were constantly coming to my phone in his hands made him feel nervous and might have prevented his further wrongdoing. He must have worried that someone close to me knew where I was, what I was doing and whom I was with, even though he did not know that the person who texted me was just a random driver. He asked, “Is this your boyfriend?” I did not deny or agree. If, during that night, he realized that no one really knew my location and cared about my safety, then I probably would not have been so lucky as to narrowly escape a rape.

I trembled with fear when I hypocritically pretended to smile and say goodbye to him as I got out of his car. I worried that he was following me. What is worse, he said that he was staying somewhere near my hotel for the night. Imagining that he was still there and could come for me anytime, even though I locked the hotel room door, made me shudder and my hair stand on end. No wonder that night I was not able to sleep well. I booked the earliest train and fled back to

Beijing in the morning. My belly and hipbone were bruised, darkened to blue for many days. My shirt was torn during the physical conflict. My bag and pants were dusty from when I kneeled on the underground parking lot. I was timid and kept away from men when I was walking on the streets for a couple of days. He had taken my recorder and refused to return it to me. He must have worried that I would use it as proof against him. My friends scolded me afterwards, asking me why I did not report him to the police. I did not know how to reply to my friends, and today I still have no answer for all who care about me, including my partner.

My experience made me consider the vulnerability of female fieldworkers and caused me to further reflect on my assumptions. It highlighted for me first-hand the complexities of Naodongfang for participants, especially women. In retrospect, I can identify three phases I went through when considering my thesis. At first, I felt confused about the general reluctance of women to take part in Naodongfang. Reports in the media still draw scrutiny from the public by highlighting the suffering of brides or bridesmaids in Naodongfang. However, my preliminary research in 2014 for the term paper did not produce so many negative stories from women and most of my female interviewees enjoyed the games. This discovery surprised me and made me decide to seek out more women's experiences on the topic. Are women pretending to dislike Naodongfang? Is it possible that women's representation as victims depends on patriarchal constructions of gender stereotypes? Women might be afraid or shy to expose their traumatic experiences. I was confident I could create a safe and comfortable space for my participants who might feel embarrassed and pressured to talk to male researchers. I thought that as a woman folklorist, I had a natural advantage to initiate this research. I promised to ease and lighten women's horror and hatred of Naodongfang by being honest and open, thus removing the shame

of talking about sexual topics. I even planned to collect stories from women who reported experiencing sexual harassment.

My hypotheses were all discarded when I was sexually assaulted in 2017. I realized how physically and mentally vulnerable women are. I probably would have never understood the pain and suffering of sexually harassed or assaulted women if I had not been forced to do something unwillingly under men's violence. This switch was the second phase. During this phase, I doubted my choice of a thesis topic and did not want to explore the uncomfortable parts. I reconsidered my whole project and admitted that I was both naive and optimistic about proposing the thesis. Ethical concerns were not easy to handle and constructing a friendly and safe space for my female participants was more challenging than I envisioned. Finally, I decided not to interview any traumatized women. Moreover, I found that the gendered negotiation of power relations, as well as women's standpoints in wedding games, were both very complicated.

I am currently in a third phase. After many years, I still defend my original thesis concerning women's roles in Naodongfang. I believe if more Chinese women saw themselves as active participants in Naodongfang, rather than as victims of it, it might reflect greater gender equity. As I explain more fully later in the thesis, I am not suggesting that women be forced to subject themselves to sexual harassment and abuse. At the same time, in my view, women's reluctance to partake in Naodongfang is not necessarily a strong sign of gender equality and an expression of feminism.

Introduction to Chapters

In an attempt to understand why Naodongfang remains a component of Chinese weddings, this dissertation discusses Naodongfang, or Chinese wedding games, in a broad sense; it explores several different aspects or themes through seven chapters. I begin in Chapter Two by

sketching out what contemporary Naodongfang looks like based on my fieldwork sources. I create a typology of Chinese wedding games and categorize pre-wedding games, on-site wedding games and post-wedding games. Furthermore, I describe Naodongfang's grammar: sexual semiotics involving imitating and stimulating, and demonstrations by humorous humiliation. Based on specific Chinese cultures, I explore three tacit criteria of Naodongfang which include Chinese male expectations of female reservedness, Golden Mean (中庸) and propriety (得體). I discover how joking relationships and kinship intertwine to shape the sense of intimacy and appropriateness in Chinese Naodongfang.

Naodongfang exists today in part because of its long history. Chapter Three traces that past based on rich historical texts in classic Chinese. Historiography proves the existence of Naodongfang for over 2000 years and its geographical spread across China. I examine what Naodongfang was and how it has developed over its long history. Folk legends and their related beliefs speak to the longevity of Naodongfang and suggest its historical and present importance. Moreover, this chapter explores Chinese Nao culture that informs the custom of Naodongfang. By applying Bakhtin's characteristics of carnival and carnivalistic life to Chinese Kuanghuan/Nao culture (狂歡/鬧文化), I point to the aesthetics and philosophy underlying Naodongfang.

Chapter Four considers economic motives of Naodongfang. These mainly draw on symbolic or actual economic exchanges through acts of blocking and obstructing at weddings. Referring to the theory of grabbing marriages, I discuss the blocking of wedding parties as a demonstration of power by both families and argue that such games and play symbolically convey the message that marriage is still an economic exchange and that brides are essentially

purchased or redeemed today. In exploring economics, I also consider the wedding industry in China and draw on my interviews with various wedding professionals.

From the beginning of my study, one of the most puzzling aspects of Naodongfang for me has been the involvement of women, many of whom appear to be reluctant participants. In Chapter Five I discuss women's roles and intersections between Naodongfang and feminism. That Naodongfang was formerly called "teasing brides" (戲婦), suggests that women were once seen as the main objects and victims. I turn to *Jus Primae Noctis* to examine violence against women in Naodongfang and explore questions such as: How have teasing brides been replaced by teasing bridesmaids? What are the power shifts and relationships among participants?

Chapter Six concentrates on one particular wedding custom, Pahui. Pahui generally includes pranks and games directed towards the parents of the groom. During Pahui it can seem as if the groom's father replaces his son to become the main protagonist of the wedding. I argue that Pahui reflects patriarchal dominance in Chinese marriage and society. By performing Pahui, the wedding families exert their patriarchal power and reinforce the stability of the clan-centred family structure in rural China.

Chapter Seven switches the focus to male participants and discusses how Naodongfang initiates grooms by directing violence against them. Here I refer to various forms of mocking, pranking and even beating of grooms in weddings cross culturally through events such as bachelor parties and the Irish Strawboy custom. I discuss the questions: How do participants construct hegemonic masculinity in Naodongfang? How does Naodongfang enhance Chinese gender stereotypes and influence gender dynamics?

Finally, the conclusion reviews the main arguments presented in each of the chapters.

Before starting a comprehensive academic analysis of Naodongfang, however, it is crucial to get acquainted with what Naodongfang looks like in China nowadays. This groundwork is laid in the next chapter.

Chapter Two:

What Does Naodongfang Look Like?

An Examination of Contemporary Chinese Wedding Games

Based on my fieldwork and contemporary published references, in this chapter I create a structural analysis of contemporary Chinese wedding games and discuss the current expressions of Naodongfang in the 21st century. First, however, I place these findings in the broader context of Naodongfang as the custom is represented in published sources dating from 1912. From 1912 to 2021, China passed through a turbulent history that included the end of feudalism, many wars and the construction of contemporary states. I begin the chapter by dividing the one hundred and nine years (1912-2021) into three periods. The first extends from 1912 with the occurrence of the Revolution of 1911 (辛亥革命), the ending of Feudalist China and the initiation of the Republic of China (中華民國), to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. From 1949 to 1978 covers the period of Mao's regime and intensive singular Communist culture controls. During the final period from 1978 to 2021, China experienced an opening up to the market economy and capitalism accompanied by the revival of elements of Chinese traditional culture, including Naodongfang. This overview provides the context for contemporary expressions of Naodongfang.

Chinese Naodongfang from 1912-2021

From 1912 to 1949, scholars noted Naodongfang and mapped its spread across China. In 1922 Jixia (季遐) used a simple method to prove that Naodongfang was observed throughout China. Building on a short essay published in the weekly journal *Yusi* (《語絲》周刊) by

renowned folklorist Shaoyuan Jiang (江紹原), Jixia drew a triangle containing Zhejiang Province and Shaanxi Province, both of which were mentioned in Jiang’s article, and his home province, Jiangxi Province. Jixia wrote, “These three provinces construct a triangle. This triangle covers and represents most of the parts of Han Chinese territory. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that Naodongfang was a custom across China” (1922, 425). I illustrate this distribution below on a map of contemporary China (see fig. 3). The yellow triangle indicates Jixia’s original observation which linked three provinces. The black inverted triangle includes the eight provinces where I did fieldwork. My fieldwork sites (marked with red circles) are spread across China, including (from top to bottom) Gansu Province, Shaanxi Province, Shanxi Province, Shandong Province, Hubei Province, Hunan Province, Guizhou Province and Guangdong Province.



Figure 3 Current map of China and the spread of Naodongfang over the state

Studies, news reports and online posts all indicate that Naodongfang has a more extensive distribution than either triangle suggests. According to Xueyi Lin, in Northern Jiangsu Province from 1991 to 1993, over 11,500 rural couples included Naodongfang in their weddings; this figure represents 74% of newly married couples (1994, 26). A survey of 21,000 people, conducted by *China Youth Daily* in 2014, found that 80% of the respondents were pranked at their weddings. Furthermore, more than half of them did not want to be pranked (Sun 2014). Based on data collected online from 2012 to 2017, a news agency's investigative report¹ ranked Shandong Province as the most frequently mentioned province when correlated to the keyword Naodongfang (Zhao & Guo 2017). “Hunnao” (婚闹 the negative indication of Naodongfang) appears forty-seven times concerning Shandong Province and thirty-eight times in connection to Yunnan Province. Henan Province had fifteen entries, Shaanxi Province fourteen and Guangdong (Canton) Province eight. Xuewen Zhang collected data on the governmental regulation of Naodongfang from the Huike News Coverage Database (慧科新聞數據庫) and did a statistical analysis of eight cases from January of 2018 to May of 2018. These eight cases were located in Henan, Shandong, Hunan, Hubei, Guizhou, Jiangsu and Yunnan provinces (2018, 18). In addition, Zhang drew a diagram to show regulations issued by all levels of government from October 2016 to June 2018 (2018, 23).² Based on this evidence, we can conclude that Naodongfang is widely practised across China from the west to the east and from the north to the south. This distribution is represented by the blue square on the map above, covering nearly all Han Chinese areas. Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, characterized by large ethnic and nomadic cultures, may have different interpretations and forms of Naodongfang and fall outside the scope of my thesis.

¹ The diagram is attached as Appendix B.

² Chinese original version and the English translation of this diagram is attached as Appendix C.

Taiwanese scholar Zhisu Ma (馬之驥)'s *Chinese Marriage Customs* (《中國的婚俗》 1988) is an important resource. The publication is based on oral narratives collected from people who moved to Taiwan in 1949 when the Republic of China government took control and never returned to Mainland China. Because Taiwan lost its contacts and connections to Mainland China by the 1980s, Ma's participants shared memories of weddings that predate 1949. Hence, his book is a valuable source for discovering Chinese wedding customs during the early 20th century without the influence, or interference, of the Communist regime. According to Zhisu Ma, Naodongfang was popular across China prior to 1949 and the games and pranks people practised during the Republic of China's regime 1912 to 1949 correlate with what people are doing today in Mainland China. For example, Ma describes how in Xingguo area, Jiangxi Province (江西興國), guests and relatives tricked bridal couples on their wedding night; it was a common practice for them to rush into the bridal chamber. Hence, the groom and the bride often invited two or three intimate friends or relatives who were good at handling Naodongfang to be their guards and to help them deal with guests' verbal and physical pranks. It was also common for a banquet to be prepared after the wedding ceremony for the guests who sat around the table making toasts. At that time, they selected two candidates who were well-known as practical jokers to be the leaders of Naodongfang. These two people came up with ideas and proposed challenging assignments to embarrass the bridal couple. Saying suggestive and obscene phrases publicly comprised most of the embarrassment. This custom continues today (Ma 1988, 141; Zhu 2009, 13).

The dissemination of Naodongfang in the early 20th century is also evidenced in regional records compiled by Chinese vernacular intellectuals. Most references are brief: "Naodongfang is similar everywhere, hence omitted" (Ma 1988, 253), or "Naodongfang will be taken in three

consecutive days” (Wang 2010, 328). Similarly, according to an official investigative report on customs and rites of passage in Baojing County during the reign of the Republic of China (1943, 77), Naodongfang was referred to but not explained or described. This cursory treatment suggests that people took Naodongfang for granted; it did not require explanation because everyone already knew what it was. Therefore, ironically, the unconscious omission of Naodongfang in regional records may offer further proof of its widespread popularity in China.

During Chairman Mao’s nearly thirty-year reign, Chinese traditions and folklore were tremendously reshaped under communist ideology. Especially during the Cultural Revolution, many old wedding customs vanished. For example, a well-known and widely conducted policy during the Cultural Revolution was “Smash Four Dross” (破四舊), which targeted old thoughts, old cultures, old folklore and old norms (舊思想、舊文化、舊風俗、舊習慣). Therefore, divination of auspicious time in terms of bridal couples’ horoscope, wearing traditional wedding dresses, asking for bride’s price and using sedan chairs were all abandoned (Zhao 2014, 29). Many wedding customs, including Naodongfang, were temporarily diminished or curtailed during this period (Shang 2000, 154). At the same time, revolution-style weddings became popular. The “revolution wedding” required people to hold a simple and thrifty wedding as the communist and socialist ideologies promoted. Weddings were simplified during this period, and elaborate rituals or ceremonies were rarely observed (Hu 2018, 69; Ma 2014, 12). There were no banquets or ceremonies other than bowing to Chairman Mao’s picture and narrating some mottoes from Mao’s famous speeches (Ma 2014, 12). These policies sometimes changed the situations of rural areas in a good way. People stopped asking for a high bride price, and women were not exchanged and purchased any longer.

The fact that the Communist government outlawed all traditional practices between 1949-1978 is the reason that many Mainland Chinese citizens today are unacquainted with Naodongfang. However, while Naodongfang and obscene wedding games seemed to disappear in Mainland China during these thirty years of communist cultural policy, diasporic Chinese did not stop practising Naodongfang (as seen in the example of Ang Lee's film mentioned in the previous chapter). Moreover, Naodongfang never entirely vanished but was practised by people in remote rural areas under strict supervision, or in a communist/collective way with adaptations. Once the ideological repression loosened, the folklore revived immediately. Therefore, it is more accurate to say that Naodongfang hibernated, rather than died out, during the Mao reign in Mainland China. Yuanyuan Li studied Communist influences on wedding customs in China's rural areas between 1958-1983. Li found that ideological and dominant culture's influences were limited within a particular timespan and intermittent. Like the power of a stream, the vitality of folk customs flows on. Folk customs may hibernate only to be revived later on (Li 2018, 95).

After Chairman Mao died in 1978, Xiaoping Deng assumed the role of the factual governor of China. He issued important policies to propel China into the global market by adapting Communist ideology into a specific Chinese version. When Xiaoping Deng launched the "Reform and Opening Policies (改革開放政策)" in December 1978, China became more open, more diverse, and capitalist; the country achieved impressive economic success in the 21st century. Moreover, China's traditions and customs were revived (Bender 2011, 180) by the joint forces of governmental encouragement, nationalistic movements and academic efforts. For example, the ideology of "culture" was emphasized at several crucial Communist Party meetings³. Intangible Cultural Heritage, formalized by UNESCO, has also helped to revive

³ Accessed May 7, 2020. <https://www.koolearn.com/shiti/st-2-1314843.html>

Chinese “traditional” cultures. Some significant calendar festivals are now highlighted and politicized as national holidays, including the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year), the Lantern Festival, the Qingming Festival, the Dragon-boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival. As a result, these traditional Chinese festivals have taken on unprecedented cultural, political and economic significance. Unlike traditional calendar festivals, Naodongfang has never been officially promoted by the government as a Chinese tradition. In fact, it was banned and stigmatized for a long time. Nevertheless, Naodongfang is currently experiencing the same cultural revival as many other Chinese traditions and customs. A revived Naodongfang appeared as a composite of earlier Chinese traditions under the influences of market economy.

Deeply trusting the principle of socialist equality, and sincerely acknowledging Communist ideologies during the Mao regime, many Chinese experienced a kind of cognitive dissonance when they had to face the massive ideological shift from hating capitalism to embracing capitalism. Having been governed by the Marxist ideology of “evil capitalism” for many years, it was easy for some Chinese people to blame the market economy and capitalism as the reasons for Naodongfang and what they see as the decline of morals. Many speculate that Naodongfang is not “traditional” Chinese but emerged only after 1978 as a consequence of “corruptive and decayed” capitalism (Tam 2017). However, historical and ethnographical materials discussed in the next chapter attest to Naodongfang’s long history, notwithstanding a short period of dormancy under Mao. Although some Chinese residents may be embarrassed to admit that Naodongfang is a significant component of Chinese culture with a long history, it is still actively practised across China and overseas today. The presence of Naodongfang in China today reminds us that when folklore is meaningful to people, it does not disappear; it may hide and disguise itself under the oppression of political ideology and the regulation of cultural

policies. All in all, folklore spreads and functions whenever it befits an opportunity. Aiming to draw a picture of contemporary Naodongfang, the following section introduces the spectrum of modern Chinese wedding games.

A Typology of Contemporary Chinese Wedding Games

Before I began my research, I thought Naodongfang had vanished in most parts of urban China. However, it soon became clear that Naodongfang is still pervasive in both urban and rural regions, but in different forms. In large metropolitan areas, where people's backgrounds are diverse and class gaps are tremendous, Naodongfang can be practised in many ways. For example, traditional Naodongfang, which is supposed to be held in the bridal chamber on the wedding night, has been abandoned by most people in cities. Because of today's busy urban lifestyle, people do not have time to attend a wedding for three days the way the ancient Chinese did and some rural Chinese still do. Others refuse to take part because they regard Naodongfang as vulgar and obscene. One of my friends, a scientist in a university in Xi'an, told me that members of his social circle, comprised of scientists, scholars and professors, never hold Naodongfang parties (Du 2014). However, some urban residents are happy to participate and have adapted Naodongfang into milder, tamer versions, such as pre-wedding games and on-site wedding games. In some small to medium sized cities, it seems that Naodongfang is still a part of many people's lives. At least this is where the weddings I documented and observed primarily took place. Finally, based on my research, rural China appears to be the location of the majority of Naodongfang activities and residents of villages and small communities are those who seem to most frequently practise Naodongfang. Jinhong Li, who comes from a small town called Gepai County in Shaanxi province, told me that Naodongfang is necessary for every wedding in his hometown (2014). Naodongfang in rural China takes a wide variety of forms and sometimes

includes more obscene elements than are usually seen in larger centres. As well, behaviours may be accepted here that are avoided in other places because they are considered as sexual harassment. Because so many young people have headed to big cities to work, however, more and more villages are empty, and I was told that some no longer have enough participants left to hold Naodongfang.

The Chinese were among the earliest peoples to distinguish Li (禮 etiquette or ritual) from Su (俗 folk custom) and Chinese wedding ritual and etiquette was committed to a written form around 221BCE. Li indicates the rules of etiquette, or the set of rituals, created by upper-class intellectuals and government in an attempt to control the lower classes; it represents elite aesthetics and interests. Confucian classics, such as the *Book of Rites* (禮記), the *Rites of Zhou Dynasty* (周禮), and *The Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* (儀禮) laid out guidelines that were followed by feudal intellectuals for thousands of years. “Six Etiquettes” of marriages (六禮)⁴ was created in the Zhou Dynasty (1046BCE-256BCE). Nowadays, the rules of etiquette have been significantly pared down; for example, the procedures of delivering betrothal gifts and asking for wedding dates are simplified and combined. In contrast, Qin Ying (親迎 transporting the bride from her natal family to the groom’s family), the last of the “Six Etiquettes,” is still lavishly practised in China. The whole process is compressed into the one wedding day that

⁴ Generally initiated by the groom’s family, the “Six Etiquettes” consisted of six procedures required to arrange a marriage and hold a wedding: Na Cai (納彩 letting a matchmaker representing a man’s family, visit a woman’s family to make a proposal), Wen Ming (問名 asking for the woman’s name, birth date and Ba Zi [八字 Chinese horoscope]), Na Ji (納吉 going to temples to foretell whether the man and the woman match well with each other according to their names, birth dates and Chinese horoscope), Na Zheng (納征 delivering the man’s betrothal presents to the woman’s family), Qing Qi (請期 asking for the consent of the woman’s family and deciding on the most auspicious wedding date), and Qin Ying (親迎 the process of transporting the bride to the groom’s family and formal wedding ceremonies) (*The Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* 《儀禮》, 221BCE). In contemporary China, the vast majority of people no longer practise arranged marriage, so the horoscopes and divination are not strictly abided by as they were in the past. However, people still make divinations for the auspicious wedding date and ceremony time by calculating bridal couples’ birth dates and horoscopes. Matchmakers continue to function in some areas, but their significance is in decline.

stands out over all other preparation days due to its symbolic and significant meaning.

Interestingly, while the once strictly regulated “Six Etiquettes” have been greatly simplified, Naodongfang is still pervasively practised in China.

My following structural analysis of Chinese wedding games draws on Christie Davis’s categorization of joking initiators and joking targets (Davis 2011). In the chart below, five headings across the top identify targets, initiators and three functional beneficiaries (economic benefits, social interaction benefits through power negotiations and emotional benefits through entertainment). Down the left side of the chart, games are listed in chronological order of a wedding day. The pre-wedding games cluster includes A) picking up the bride and blocking the door, B) tricking the groom and blocking wedding cars, and C) tricking parents/Pahui; on-site wedding games that take place during the formal wedding banquet and ceremony; and the post-wedding games cluster that includes A) Naodongfang in the afternoon or the evening (indoors) and B) demonstrating/stripping/cross-dressing the groom (outdoors). These types of activities and their meanings will be more fully discussed in later chapters.

Table 1: Typology of Chinese Wedding Games

	Targets	Initiators	Economic benefits	Social interaction benefits: Power Negotiations	Emotional benefits: Entertainment
Pre-wedding Games Cluster A: Picking up the bride/ blocking the door/Gate Crash 接親遊戲, 堵門遊戲	Groom and groomsmen	Bride’s side. Mainly females	Red packets	The bride’s side has advantages. Groom and groomsmen are bantered. The aim is to test the groom’s capabilities.	Nao, making the atmosphere lively, joyful, noisy. Making fun of groom and groomsmen.
Pre-wedding Games Cluster B: Blocking wedding cars 障車;	Groom	Groom’s men, drivers, neighbours,	Cigarettes, alcohol, money, candies	Testing the groom to see if he is a good sport, humiliating the	Nao, making the atmosphere lively, joyful, noisy.

molesting the groom 戲郎		employed professionals		groom by cross-dressing him. Bachelors' jealousy and revenge	
Pre-wedding Games Cluster C (sometimes played on-site): Pahui; tricking parents and seniors 扒灰、描畫公婆	Parents, seniors, sometimes siblings of the groom	Parents' friends in the same age cohort, colleagues, extended family members, people from the same community	Sometimes economic but mainly for fun	Showing off the patriarchal power and strength of the groom's family.	Nao, making the atmosphere lively, joyful, noisy.
On-site wedding games during the ceremony (simplified Naodongfang)	Bridal couple	All guests	Cigarettes, alcohol, candies, stealing and reward	Guests have advantages as they can make any inquiry to the bridal couple	The couple and their families must entertain and satisfy all guests
Post-wedding Games Cluster A: Naodongfang (at night, sometimes afternoon, indoors)	Bridal couple. Depending on the situation, either the groom or the bride becomes the primary target dynamically	Groom's men, friends in same age cohort, colleagues, family members, kin. Mainly males.	Cigarettes, alcohol	Groom's side has advantages. Testing the couple's understanding of each other. Harassing the bride. Satisfying bachelors' desires for women and easing their jealousy of the couple	Nao, making the atmosphere lively, joyful, noisy. Sexual connotations and satisfaction
Post-wedding Games Cluster B: demonstrating/ stripping/cross-dressing the	The groom is the main target, sometimes	Groom's men, friends in same age cohort, colleagues,	Use of cigarettes, alcohol, money, candies, but	Bachelor's jealousy and revenge, a test of friendship and the groom's	Nao, making the atmosphere lively, joyful, noisy. People laugh when

groom outdoors (A similar version of pre-wedding games cluster B). Sometimes it takes place indoors and is combined with Naodongfang.	the bridal couple	family members, kin. Mainly males.	mainly for fun.	endurance, humiliating the groom by cross-dressing him	they are making fun of the groom.
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1. Pre-wedding Games

A wedding can be an ideal context to uncover tensions and power dynamics among different alliances. Many games create rivalry between the groom and bride. For example, at Buryat Mongol weddings, boys will vie to grab a wooden pillow. Four boys are divided into two sides, representing the bride and groom. They are dispatched to wrestle until the wooden pillow is caught by one side (Li 1982). During Yi⁵ people’s weddings, the groom’s side and the bride’s side compete for a piece of pork. Once the groom’s side catches the pork, the bride starts preparing for departure (Wu 1986, 70). Qiang⁶ bridal couples customarily race into the bridal chamber. The one who arrives wins dominance. Similarly, Tujia people⁷ vie for who can sit on the marital bed first. It is said that the first person to put his or her hips on the bed will control

⁵ The Yi (彝族) or Nuosuo people (historically known as Lolo), are an ethnic group in China, Vietnam and Thailand. Numbering nine million people, they are the seventh largest of the 55 ethnic minority groups in China. Over 4.5 million live in Yunnan Province, 2.5 million live in southern Sichuan Province, and 1 million live in the northwest corner of Guizhou Province. Nearly all the Yi live in mountainous areas, often carving out their existence on the sides of steep mountain slopes far from the cities of China. Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is the prefecture containing the largest population of Yi people within mainland China, with two million Yi people in the region.

⁶ The Qiang people (羌族) are an ethnic group in China with a population of approximately 310,000 in 2000. They live mainly in a mountainous region in the northwestern part of Sichuan on the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau.

⁷ The Tujia ethnic group (土家族) has more than 8 million people and are considered the 8th largest of China’s 55 official minority. They live in the Wuling Mountains, straddling the common borders of Hunan, Hubei and Guizhou Provinces, and Chongqing Municipality. In Chinese, Tujia means also “local,” as contrasted from the Hakka (客家) whose name implies wandering. The vast majority of the Tujia use varieties of Chinese, mainly Southwestern Mandarin. Today there are at most 70,000 native speakers of the Tujia language, most of whom live in the northern parts Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture in north-western Hunan Province, where I did my fieldwork.

the household (Ye & Wu 2000, 163). These games become symbolic competitions for foretelling future dominance in the household.

These wedding games divide people into two opposing sides in terms of relationship and gender: the allies of the bridal couple unite against other participants; the allies of the bride's side counter the allies of the groom's side; the allies of women counter the allies of men. In China, pre-wedding games in cluster A focus on "grabbing the bride." Here the groom gathers his pals and attempts to gain entry and rush into the bride's house either by force or by his wits, employing measures such as bribery of the bridesmaids and the bride's relatives with red packets. People are divided into two teams made up of the bride's allies and the groom's allies. Both families manifest their power through the size and wealth of the teams they have recruited (Shang 2000, 28). Modern pre-wedding games generally include at least two thresholds for grooms and groomsmen to break through: 1) the main gate of the bride's natal family and 2) the door of the bride's bedroom.

Cluster A of pre-wedding games has various Chinese names and English translations. It is called "grabbing marriage" (搶親), "picking up the bride" (接親) or "blocking the door" (堵門) in Chinese. In English, "gate crashing" is widely used in Chinese diasporic areas (Tsang 2013). Generally, initiated by the bride's friends and relatives, the groom's side will be blocked, teased and harassed by purposely created difficulties. Brides' alliances are generally females, and grooms' troops are almost always composed of males of the same age. For example, the following quote shows how the Yi people⁸ practise pre-wedding games:

⁸ The Yi ethnic group in southwestern China is often regarded as a rich resource for anthropologists and folklorists to study earlier cultural practices because they retained old customs, including the practice of slavery until 1949 when the PRC government began to govern the area. Throughout history, Chinese leaders in different dynasties applied various administrative means to govern minority ethnic groups like the Yi, such as appointing Yi officers and endowing them autonomy under central governance.

There is a strange ritual named “knocking on the gate” in the Yi ethnic group in Yunnan Province. The groom was surrounded by groomsmen and came to the front gate of the bride’s natal house. They slapped the gate and beseeched sincerely. But no one answered. Then they started cursing and yelling. On the other side of the gate, the bride’s friends had prepared a big vat of cold water and some buckets. No matter how piteously the groom begged, the bride’s team would not be merciful; they argued with the men the other side by their honey tongues. The stalemate lasted a long time. Some groomsmen jumped over the wall and sneaked into the house. They cleverly released the door bolt and dismantled the barricades. Sometimes, groomsmen forced the gate to open by strength. When the gate opened, the groom’s team rushed into the bride’s house. The girls who had guarded the entrance kept pouring buckets of water towards the groom’s team, or threw stones at them, or slapped and kicked them, or smeared ashes of the wok on their faces, or tore up their clothes, or scratched men’s faces... Until the groom’s team got really exhausted and looked like drowned rats, girls’ attacks would not cease (Song & Li & Du 1983, 244).

The Dongxiang people, a Muslim ethnic group in Northwestern China, have a fascinating tradition called “throwing pillows” that takes place on wedding nights. According to this tradition, the women hide the bride in the corner of a bed and the young men try to hit her with pillows while singing songs. Women attempt to protect the bride from getting hit by any pillows, and they throw pillows back at the men. Men rush the bed and try to pin the women down while the women attempt to push the men down off the bed. Laughter and noise fill the air in the bridal chamber. Once a pillow hits the bride, the women finally give up and remove the bride’s colourful veil to show her off to the guests. Meanwhile, they open the chest and display the bridal dowry. Finally, the event ends, and people leave (Guan 2001; X. Wang 1997). This example vividly demonstrates gendered confrontation during pre-wedding games.

Lindy Tsang, an Irish born Chinese, is a successful YouTuber. Her Bubzbeauty, Bubbiosity, and BubzVlogz channels feature uploaded fashion videos; the Bubzbeauty channel has attracted over 2.8 million subscribers. Tsang uploaded some of her wedding videos on YouTube in 2013, and one of them shows the full scene of Chinese Gate Crash in Northern Ireland. She introduced the video like this:

What is the Gate Crash?

Traditionally, the groom and his groomsmen have to go through a number of obstacles before he can meet his blushing bride. Gotta love Chinese tradition for giving us girls an excuse to be evil!! Bridesmaids vs Groomsmen. Who's going to get their butt kicked?

For Tim to meet the bride, he was challenged upon:

1. Are you strong enough?
2. Are you sweet enough?
3. Are you brave enough?
4. Are you fit enough?

We hope you guys enjoyed the wedding video. Today, we're so excited to share the Gate Crash part of our Wedding with you guys. I only got the footage today and already spent all day working on it. We really hope you guys get a good kick out of this video. I laughed many many times editing this. Big thank you to Cinematic Tide for filming the day for us. You guys are awesome!!!

To the groomsmen, thank you for erm... the "nice & touching" video messages you all left for Tim. They were... very touching indeed. Tim is lucky to have you all. However, I'm luckier to have my girls ^_~ (Tsang 2013)

Through the message above, Lindy Tsang illustrates the purpose of gate crashing (the groom and groomsmen have to go through several obstacles before meeting the blushing bride), the approaches (some challenges to test the strength, cuteness, courage and match), the participants (the bride's party and the groom's party), the power dynamics (bridesmaids versus groomsmen) and her attitudes to these games (she laughed many, many times when editing this video and felt appreciative to both groomsmen and bridesmaids). In this video, which was taken in Northern Ireland, people were speaking Cantonese. It is vivid proof that wedding games are prevalent throughout Mainland China and diasporic Chinese communities in very similar forms.

Stimulating the five senses (hearing, speaking/tasting, smelling, touching and seeing) is an essential component of initiation rituals (Wang 2013), and cluster A of pre-wedding games can be categorized accordingly. From the beginning, the groom encounters a vibrant soundscape which is composed of cheers, yells, laughter and joking. Secondly, both tasting (using his tongue) and speaking (using his mouth) are part of tests for the groom. For example, bridesmaids

and the bride's family might feed the groom and his friends unusual foods and beverages such as wasabi or dumpling soup with excessive salt/chili/vinegar or strong liquor. Then, the groom may need to recite a wedding vow in front of the bride and guests to declare his love and fidelity. He might say, "I will love my wife forever; never react when she curses me and beats me," and so on. Thirdly, smell is a component although it is sometimes put in the same category as taste because the nose and mouth almost function simultaneously. For example, the fragrance of perfume from the bride and bridesmaids pervades the space.

Fourth, physical contacts and interactions are pervasive in pre-wedding games. The groom and groomsmen need to cooperate to pass tests and endure the severe treatment from the bride's side. These challenges are mainly

related to the tactile sense. Hence, stimulating the sense of touch is a fundamental approach to initiate a groom. Sometimes, bridesmaids use tape to pull out the groomsmen's leg hairs.

Clamps in the shape of lips will be put on the groom's and groomsmen's mouths. When the bride pulls the clamps, they feel pain (see fig. 4)⁹.

One of the most popular pre-wedding games is to apply the plastic wrap to the groom and groomsmen's faces and let them use their



Figure 4 Pre-wedding games: pulling out the groomsmen's leg hairs and mouth clamps

faces to rip off the film (see fig. 5)¹⁰. Plastic wrap is transparent, so their disfigured faces are

⁹ Picture refers to 35MM Wedding Photography. Accessed February 11, 2017. https://weibo.com/u/3901087506?is_all=1

¹⁰ Picture refers to 35MM Wedding Photography. Accessed February 11, 2017. https://weibo.com/u/3901087506?is_all=1

visible to the guests and the camera when the event is being documented. The plastic wrap also has good tensile strength, so efforts to tear it apart will make them look worse but certainly also makes the guests laugh more. Men's twisted faces, without a doubt, add to the lively atmosphere. Generally, to make the groom and his side laugh to the point of tears is the primary purpose and best result of pre-wedding games. Grooms and groomsmen are supposed to



Figure 5 Pre-wedding games: ripping off plastic wrap with the groom and groomsmen's faces

experience a state of physical pain and a mood of mental joyfulness at the same time.

The last sense stimulation is sight. The groom may hope to see a beautiful bride dressed blushing for her special day, but a surprise may occur when he lifts the bride's red veil. Sometimes the face of a popular comedian or a famous billionaire will show up in front of his eyes. Popular memes and stickers such as Doge and Jack Ma are often worn as masks (see fig.



Figure 6 Pre-wedding games: brides and bridesmaids wearing masks of popular memes and stickers

6).¹¹ Occasionally a bridesmaid will impersonate the bride under the veil while the real bride hides in the wardrobe. When the groom lifts the veil, he is tricked by the woman in front of him.

¹¹ Picture was obtained from the webpage of an online shop. Accessed February 18, 2017. https://detail.tmall.com/item.htm?id=619763106960&ali_refid=a3_430673_1006:1103346767:N:p1jTmwrECGXm+TR6V8rjeA==:3d8c6dc3477238b81715258f7ebfc4aa&ali_trackid=1_3d8c6dc3477238b81715258f7ebfc4aa&spm=a2e0b.20350158.31919782.9

The games illustrate three classic theories of humour: superiority, incongruity and arousal-relief¹² (Scheel and Gockel 2017). The incongruity theory was developed by Kant (1724-1804) to indicate humour where the punchline or resolution is inconsistent, incompatible and incongruous with the set-up. Kant stressed that “Laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” ([1790] 1911, sec. 54). Incongruous risibility is triggered by the contrast between “high” and “low,” or sanctity and profanity, or their surprising similarity (Davison 2020). In other words, risible humour always relates to a surprise out of people’s expectation. It is reacted to by joking targets who are supposed to be mocked or tricked on these occasions (Meyer 2000, 313). Moreover, “The term incongruity has many different meanings—inconsistent, not harmonious, lacking propriety and not conforming, so there are a number of possibilities hidden in this term” (Berger 1998, 3). The theory of incongruity could explain how humour and jokes are set up during Gate Crashing. For example, when the groom expects to see a stunningly beautiful bride when he lifts the veil, he is unprepared for the exaggerated face mask of a comedian or a totally different woman sitting in front of him. Like the last straw, all tortures vividly contrast with the efforts he has made. This incongruity between the groom’s strong will to reach his goal and the unexpected resolution makes the audience burst into laughter. The more sincere and determined the groom is, the funnier the consequence will be. Pre-wedding games generally are full of strategies, wit and

¹² For Aristotle, comedy is based on “an imitation of men worse than the average,” of people who are “ridiculous.” Hobbes carried the idea a bit further. As he put it in *The Leviathan*, “The passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly” (Berger 1993, 2). Both indicated the approach of superiority. Arousal-relief theory was developed by Freud. Freud argued that the function of laughter and jokes is to release the energies of the libido and sexual desire in his book, *Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious* ([1905] 1960). Freud believed “childish, immature, and largely unconscious sexual and aggressive (libidinal) drives, residing in the id, seek instant gratification and expression on the basis of the pleasure principle” (Martin 2007, 33).

tricks based on the theory of incongruity. The prank of “the bride’s other face” is the most typical one.

“Finding wedding shoes” is another wedding game that applies the principle of incongruity and stimulates the tactile senses. The groom is required to find the bride’s high-heel wedding shoes which have been strategically hidden in the bedroom. According to my interviewee Hongtao Gao, who is an experienced wedding host, the spots for hiding wedding shoes include the air conditioner, the toner cartridge of a printer, a toilet’s tank, curtain, balloon, a safe box, under the bed cushion, under a woman’s gown, in women’s tote bags and even in a bridesmaid’s hair. “People who come up with the idea of hiding shoes in secret places are not aiming to get small amounts of money, for example, [when they hide a shoe in] in the printer or

in the hair of bridesmaids. You need to give them big red packets for informing you of the spots. So I always suggest to the groom to prepare some big money for getting shoes, such as 100 or 200 yuan. The small money like 10 or 20 yuan is not working here” (Gao 2017). At one wedding I observed, my friend Chao Yue looked for his bride’s high heel shoes in the ventilation opening in the ceiling (see fig. 7).



Figure 7 Pre-wedding games: looking for the bride’s high heel shoes

After finally finding the bride’s high-heel wedding shoes, the groom is required to kiss the bride’s feet. He also needs to put the pair of shoes on the bride’s feet. For example, after locating one of the high heels that was hidden under a bridesmaid’s dress, my interviewee Hu put the red wedding shoe on Yulu Chen’s bare foot (see fig. 8). Interpreted symbolically, this action

could be read as an expression of the groom's obedience and of matriarchal power on the bride's side. Before touching and kissing the bride, the groom has been initiated by tests that incorporate all the five senses. He now is ready to transport the bride either to his home or to the wedding venue.



Figure 8 Pre-wedding games: the groom helping the bride wear wedding shoes

With transnational intermarriages becoming more popular in China, participants can come from other countries and be unfamiliar with Chinese pre-wedding games. For example, my friend Xiaoxiaoge posted his photographic works for one wedding in Tongren, Guizhou Province. A French groom married a Chinese girl. He and his best man were required to pick up Majiang tiles with their bare feet (see fig. 9), the groom painted the best man's lips with lipstick held in his mouth (see fig. 10) and the bridal couple knelt in front of the groom's parents and served them a traditional Chinese tea ceremony (see fig. 11).



Figure 9 The French groom and the best man picking up Majiang tiles with their toes



Figure 10 The French parents-in-law being served the tea ceremony by the Chinese bride



Figure 11 The French groom applying lipstick on the best man's lips

In cluster B of pre-wedding games, activities occur around the couple's travel to the groom's house. "Blocking wedding cars" is typically played here. Generally, after the groom picks up the bride, people of various identities will block the wedding troop in exchange for gifts or just for fun. Participants include acquaintances, neighbors, drivers and even friends of the groom. Male participants hope to be treated with cigarettes while women and children rush to pick up gift packages containing money and candies that are dispersed along the path. The economic exchange involved in blocking the wedding parties will be discussed in Chapter Four. Moreover, the groom becomes the main target. He is cross-dressed or made up to look ridiculous and might even be tied to a telegraph pole or a tree by his group of lads. He is teased and embarrassed by various people, including his team members who just successfully helped him break through the barriers in the bride's natal family. It is now his male friends' and groomsmen's turn to trick him. Although I did not personally witness any groom being tied to a tree, there are many online examples, including Figure 13.¹³

¹³ The photo was obtained from *Foshan Dianshitai*. Accessed May 20, 2018. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1632818863175229232&wfr=spider&for=pc>

Comparing Figure 12 and Figure 13, it is fascinating to see how similarly some wedding games are practised in different cultures. According to a 1980 newspaper report, in Belfast, Northern Ireland, a girl was tied to a tree and pelted with cakes. Beer bottles were hung around her body. The report read, “Police and army rushed to Upper Main Street, Strabane, last night where a girl was tied to a lamp post. But it was not a sectarian incident-it transpired that the girl is getting married shortly and was tied to the post by her friends. Later she was conveyed round the town in wheel-barrow...twas just a wedding prank” (Danachair 1976, 163)¹⁴. The Irish example is very close to Chinese practices of tying a groom to a tree or telegraph pole and parading the bride on the street with a cart or carriage. The Chinese even have an early reference



Figure 12 A bride tied to a lamp post in Belfast in 1975



Figure 13 A groom tied to a tree by his lads

¹⁴ Other Irish reports offer similar descriptions: “The most usual form which this disruption takes in modern Ulster is that the prospective bride or groom is lashed to a tree or lamp post, or carried round in an unusual conveyance, curiously dressed and daubed with flour or other materials. This treatment is normally inflicted by working colleagues... How long this custom has been practised is not known, but it has been observed at various times since the mid-1970s” (Ballard 1991, 21). (The Sunday Press, 3 February 1975). And, “A couple of years earlier the present writer saw a party of girls in Belfast wheeling a luggage-truck along the street. The truck was decorated with flowers and streamers and had a girl tied upon it. All the party danced and sang, and the “victim” was obviously enjoying the experience. Enquiry discovered that a girl from a local factory was about to be married, and that this was her workmates’ way of celebrating the occasion. Further enquiry reveals the recent occurrence of similar pranks in Athlone, Dublin, Dundalk, Newry and Newtownards, all of these are towns” (Danachair 1976, 165).

in 1927, decades before the Irish incident, that reportedly ended more tragically: “I heard about one accident many years ago. In one village, they tied up the groom and left him in the wilderness. When they realized this and came back to find him, he had been eaten by wolves” (Yang 1927, 198). Did the Chinese borrow these games from Europe or vice versa, or are similar customs shared by human beings who live in different parts of the world but have similar living conditions and means of production? Exploring where and how the games diffused is beyond the scope of this study, but the similarities are worth noting. These pranks, which are mainly done to the groom by bachelors, will be analyzed in Chapter Seven.

While waiting for the bride, the groom’s parents become significant joking targets; wedding games related to them are called Pahui (扒灰). In cluster C of pre-wedding games, the groom’s parents and senior clan members will be tricked by their same-age friends, colleagues, extended family members and community acquaintances. Parents and even their siblings are made up to look silly and asked to dance “ash father and vinegar mother” (灰公醋婆) when the father-in-law is supposed to hold an ash rack on his back, and the mother-in-law needs to hang a vinegar bottle on her neck. Sometimes Pahui occurs as part of the wedding ceremony and is performed on the stage in front of banquet guests. More often, Pahui occurs when the bride arrives with the wedding team. When the bride arrives at the groom’s family home, the father-in-law is required to deliver her into the bridal chamber by carrying her on his back¹⁵



Figure 14 Pahui: A comically made-up father-in-law holding the bride on his back

¹⁵ It is a pervasive folk belief in China that a bride’s feet should not directly touch the soil until she arrives at the bridal chamber. If her feet touch the ground, it will impair the good fortune of the marriage and the wedding families. Hence, either the groom, the groom’s father, the groom’s male siblings or the bride’s male siblings are

(see fig. 14)¹⁶. The most controversial part of Pahui is the physical contact between the father-in-law and the bride and in some parts of China. He can be forced to hug or even kiss the bride. By decorating the father-in-law's face with colourful cosmetics and making him behave stupidly in public, it might be argued that community members symbolically warn of the consequences of incest between the father-in-law and the bride.

I was unable to uncover any evidence of the ancient Chinese requiring the father-in-law to kiss the bride in the way modern Chinese Naodongfang participants sometimes do, but the practice dates back until at least the first half of the 20th century. For example, in 1934 Huajie Huang mentioned that parents-in-law were asked to publicly teach bridal couples about sex in the Hengcheng area (衡城) ([1934] 1999, 200). Not abiding by orders and seniority, “people especially play unscrupulous pranks on the groom's parents, uncles and aunts” ([1934] 1999, 204). Today Pahui is mainly for fun, but its underlying meanings are worth exploring and are discussed in Chapter Six.

2. On-site Wedding Games

On-site wedding games take place during the wedding banquet and formal ceremony. Even though some couples choose to hold a church style marriage ceremony, perhaps influenced by the Western wedding industry, most Chinese weddings today are not religious. Instead, they combine a formal ceremony with a banquet. The event is often held in a romantically decorated hotel banquet hall with support from various professionals such as wedding designers, wedding hosts, lighting and special effect engineers, photographers and hotel staff. On-site wedding

required to deliver her into the bridal chamber by carrying her on their backs. Even in modern weddings, rarely does the bride walk on her own.

¹⁶ The photo was obtained from the webpage of *Jinrong Baguanv*. Accessed May 25th, 2018. <https://cj.sina.com.cn/articles/view/1154814715/44d512fb019004k0v>.

games allow the bride and groom's families to interact with and entertain all guests in the banquet hall. Due to their more public nature, on-site wedding games generally are not as threatening or obscene as other wedding games in Naodongfang.

In Chinese wedding ceremonies, common patterns pervade. Normally the wedding host introduces the bridal couple to their guests and the bride's father leads his daughter by the hand and delivers her to the groom who stands on the stage. The groom kneels and vows to the bride and her father that he will take care of her forever. Emotions can run high at this point, and it is common for the bride to sob. The couple and their parents then make a speech. Sometimes the wedding host asks the couple to perform and they may sing a song or play a game. Occasionally they engage in modified, tamer versions of Naodongfang games. Until everyone starts eating the banquet meal, a band or various types of entertainers may perform on the stage if the wedding budget allows. Like pre-wedding games in cluster A, on-site wedding games are played mainly for fun and lack strong sexual and obscene elements. They always make the bridal couples look good in front of all the guests and rarely do things get out of control.

Ethnographic descriptions of couples playing on-site wedding games in large cities such as Beijing date back at least twenty years. For example, in 1999 Huipeng Shang documented a wedding in Beijing where the bride and the groom, both educated overseas, engaged in traditional Chinese wedding games. At this wedding, guests asked the couple to play two games. One involved the bride, who was held by the groom, lighting a cigarette for a guest standing on a chair. In the second game, the groom had to get a grape in the bride's mouth by blowing it from the lower to the higher part of a plate. The matchsticks that the bride used to light cigarettes were worth noting. These matchsticks, supplied by the hotel, were bigger, longer and thicker than normal matchsticks, and therefore were not easily blown out by the mischievous guests when the

bride was trying to light their cigarettes. Obviously, the wedding game was familiar enough to the hotel that it specifically ordered the larger matchsticks (Shang 2000, 167). I discovered that on-site wedding games were still being played in Beijing in 2017 when I was a participant observer at a Western-style wedding of a UK-educated couple. During the banquet, guests demanded that the bride and groom pick up cherries with their mouths.

A final example comes from Russian folklorist Olga Mazo (Ольга Мазо) who attended a Chinese wedding in Beijing in 2016. She provided the description and photos to me through an email in 2018. The picture beside shows the scene at the wedding ceremony where the bride is crawling on top of the groom, simulating, or at least



Figure 15 A bride crawling on top of a groom during a wedding ceremony in Beijing.

implying: sexual intercourse (see fig. 15):

At the tables after drinking and accepting congratulations, the young couple should do some funny tasks if the guests asked them to do. The tasks weren't obligatory, and as I understood, mostly assigned from the young people but not the elder relatives. When the young couple was preparing the task, people at other tables continued eating and drinking and only the last task made many of them leave their seats and gather around to watch. The task was the following. Four men sat on the chairs and the other four men sat in front of them. The bridegroom laid his face up on their knees. The bride should crawl on him with a lighter in her hand and light a cigarette that was in the bridegroom's mouth. When she started to crawl, the men started to move their knees, so the bridegroom was moving up and down. He had already drunk a lot and he was a slim boy, and his wife was a plump lady, twice as broad as him. So I felt pity for the guy and thought that it was a very rude joke. But everyone was happy, they surrounded them and made photos and videos. Finally, the girl crawled to the guy's head and lit the cigarette. It was the last task and

after it everybody left the restaurant very quickly. The ceremony lasted for 2-3 hours (Mazo 2018).

Compared to the most popular game of “biting a cherry with two mouths,” “monkeys steal peaches” (猴子偷桃) is less widespread. Peaches symbolize testicles, and the game is played by only the boldest and most open families at their wedding ceremonies. In this game, the goal is for the bride to push an egg up one leg of the groom’s pants and retrieve it from the bottom of the second trouser leg. On the way, the egg will touch the groom’s penis and testicles. Depending on convenience and supply, the egg is sometimes replaced by some other round-shaped food items (Ma 2014). Amy Tam describes how these games were played in the Chinese diasporic community in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2007. During her wedding to Francis Tam, a Canadian-born Chinese man, they played wedding games such as “biting a cherry with two mouths” and “monkeys steal peaches.” At first, the couple was required to stand face to face, simultaneously biting a cherry that was hung on a string between them by the master of ceremonies (see fig. 17). However, the real purpose of this game is to make the couple kiss each other because the master of ceremonies would mischievously lift the string. Later, Amy Tam was asked to push an egg through Francis’s trousers (see fig. 16). Unfamiliar with Chinese wedding games, she was initially stunned by the boldness of the game. Amy eventually relaxed and enjoyed the fun; she now looks back fondly on the game and the people’s laughter as a precious

memory. These cases suggest that Chinese weddings continue to retain elements of Naodongfang, as featured in Ang Lee’s film, *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), across social classes and throughout wide parts of the world.



Figure 16 On-site wedding games in Newfoundland and Labrador: Biting a Cherry with Two Mouths



Figure 17 On-site wedding games in Newfoundland and Labrador: Monkeys Steal Peaches

3. Naodongfang: After-party Wedding Games

Post-wedding games include indoor Naodongfang and those in cluster B that involve stripping/cross-dressing the groom outdoors. After the wedding ceremony, usually during the evening but sometimes in the afternoon, a group of the groom’s friends will rush into the newlywed’s bridal chamber to perform “Naodongfang,” a series of pranks with sexual innuendos. Post-wedding games in cluster B are similar to those in pre-wedding games cluster B but practised at different times and occasions, when a groom usually comically displays and parades on the street.

Naodongfang's vernacular elements are distinctive: male-dominated, no music and dance, but alcohol, games and pranks. Compared to pre-wedding games and on-site wedding games, Naodongfang is more obscene and explicitly sexual in many ways. For example, nudity and stripping are allowed. In this section, I draw on two incidents of Naodongfang I documented during my fieldwork. In the case of my cousin, Shimin Wang, his friends did not organize Naodongfang. Instead, members of the extended family were responsible. The participants included his two older sisters, three male cousins, two female cousins, two nephews who were small at that time, my mother and me. His Naodongfang started around 10 pm on the wedding night. It lasted one hour and a half and was comprised of six games in total.

The first game required the groom and the bride to cooperate in emptying a paper cup full of beer. The groom needed to hold the bottom of the paper cup with his teeth and allow the bride to drink (see fig. 18). The second game required the groom and the bride to cooperate in lighting a cigarette. When the groom held a cigarette flatly by his lips, the bride smoked from the butt of



Figure 18 Naodongfang game 1



Figure 19 Naodongfang game 2



Figure 20 Naodongfang game 3



Figure 21 Naodongfang game 4

the cigarette. Their faces and mouths were unavoidably close to each other (see fig. 19). The third game was “monkeys steal peaches.” The bride pushed an egg up the left trouser leg and down the right trouser leg of the groom. Behind them, two of my little nephews were watching and laughing (see fig. 20). During the fourth game, almost seated on an empty beer bottle, the groom needed to hold the bride in his arms when his thighs suspended in the air for a length of time (see fig. 21). A possible symbolic interpretation of this game is that it mimics anal sex.

During the fifth game, the couple was required to maintain an awkward position (see fig. 22). Once the bride dropped herself on the flat body of the groom, they needed to redo it or drink liquor as punishment. However, the bride was not strong enough to push herself up for a long time, hence the groom needed to support her with his arms. The TV behind them was playing a popular show for blind dates. The sixth game was not completed. The groom’s elder sister lifted the groom’s shirt and placed something on his chest. It could have been a food item intended for the bride to pick up by her mouth (see fig. 23).



Figure 22 Naodongfang game 5



Figure 23 An unfinished Naodongfang game

The bride may have thought that the half-naked groom and his sister went too far or worried that the annoying Naodongfang games would never end, because when the Naodongfang participants made her choose between continuing or finishing a full bottle of beer as punishment, my cousin-in-law refused to cooperate any further and decided to quit by finishing one bottle of beer. My cousin-in-law's red wedding high-heel shoes on the floor and her bold gesture of holding a 600ml bottle of beer expressed her firm but silent subversion (see fig. 24). The party ended awkwardly after her implicit refusal. We came to do Naodongfang to express our good wishes for the couple, and we did not mean to humiliate her. The fact that all participants were related to the groom meant it was a show of patriarchal power and perhaps made the bride feel unfairly treated. Especially when the groom's elder sister played the role of an active prankster during Naodongfang, the situation became tricky; it seemed like the bride was going to be forced to do something she did not want to do. Consequently, once she became uncooperative, Naodongfang immediately stopped.



Figure 24 The bride quitting Naodongfang with the price of finishing a full bottle of beer

The second Naodongfang was held for Xin Tang and Lei Wang whose wedding took place at Christmas 2016. My father and I were invited to their wedding in Danfeng County, Shaanxi Province, because my father was a former colleague of Tang's father. Tang's Naodongfang lasted for one hour and a half. They played five games separated by breaks. With the permission of the couple and other participants, I took a full-length video with Gopro and many photos. The scenes were somehow modified by my presence and cameras, however. I felt

that this Naodongfang was milder and less violent and that my presence saved Tang and Wang from being tricked too harshly; at least, they were not stripped naked. I appreciate the couple's generosity and consideration in inviting me, an unmarried woman who normally would not have been seen as an appropriate participant, for the event. They also protected me from any danger during that night.

The bride, Lei Wang, skillfully negotiated with Naodongfang participants a couple of times. For example, when she was asked to play a game with eggs, she warned, "if the egg breaks and gets on the bedsheet, we cannot sleep on it." After the first two games, that involved only the groom Tian lying on the bed, the participants who were all male, started asking Wang to go to bed. The men yelled, "go to bed," but the bride insisted, "I won't go to bed." At this point, one man started to whip the groom by using a leather belt. Wang then proposed, "change to another game, please. There will be water spilt out (which makes the floor wet and dirty)." After the groom was whipped eight times, the bride gave in and started to take off her shoes. Beating the groom was a strategy to force the couple to agree to the pranksters' demands because these men made the bride feel sympathy for her husband. The game consisted of pranksters stabbing

small holes in the cap of a water bottle. While the bride stood on the bed, the groom was expected to drink water from the bottle that was placed between the bride's thighs. When the bride squeezed the bottle, water spilt out from the small holes and the groom needed to catch the

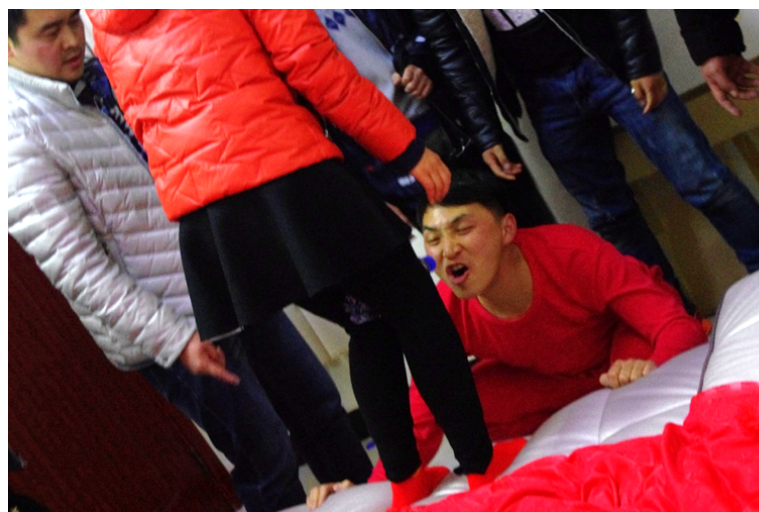


Figure 25 The bride squeezing a water bottle with her inner thighs and spilling water onto the groom's face

water in his mouth (see fig. 25). When the groom stuck out his tongue to catch the water, it could be read as a symbolic inversion of male ejaculating semen onto a female's mouth and face.

The above game went on for eight minutes and the groom was whipped by the leather belt over twelve times in total. However, no matter what kind of harassment they were experiencing, the bridal couple always smiled and did not show any unhappiness towards the crowd. Being tolerant and never getting angry during Naodongfang contributed to the couple's positive reputation afterwards because the ability to deal with Naodongfang is also seen as signifying their abilities to deal with interpersonal relationships in their future lives. At the end of

this game, all the pranksters applauded Tian and Wang's cooperation. Beating the groom also takes place in the Hani ethnic group, Yunnan Province, where young boys from villages hold whips as they wait for the groom and his party. No matter how severely members of the groom's party are lashed, they cannot retaliate and need to patiently bear the lashes (Yang 1983, 48). Sometimes the bride will be asked to beat the groom too (see fig. 26). However, compared to the groom's friends who beat him harshly, the bride generally hits the groom lightly and symbolically. Hence, to make the couple



Figure 26 The bride hitting the groom with a twig



Figure 27 Naodongfang game: "Apple with Toothpicks"

comply, beating the groom becomes a strategy and a test of the bridal couple's care and love for each other.

“Apple with toothpicks” is another typical Naodongfang game that I observed played both in Danfeng County, Shaanxi Province, and in Hancheng county, Shanxi Province. This game is never played as part of pre-wedding games or on-site wedding games because its obscenity and required skills are more suited to Naodongfang than public or semi-public spaces. Generally, an apple is studded with toothpicks and hung on the neck of the groom. The apple is positioned precisely in front of the groom's penis. The bride needs to pull out the toothpicks from the apple by using either her hand or teeth. When the bride pulls out any of the toothpicks, the apple will move towards the groom's groin and undoubtedly the sharp toothpicks will hit his penis and cause him pain (see fig. 27). The prop needs to be prepared on site. During a break, all men came out of the bedroom and sat in the living room to chat, eat snacks and wait for the game master to prepare for a prop of “apple with toothpicks” (see fig. 28). The photo I took below also proved that Naodongfang is an almost male-dominated space.



Figure 28 The game master making a prop for playing “Apple with Toothpicks”

In Tian and Wang’s case, people questioned why the toothpicks were so easily taken out of the apple; someone suggested that because the apple was rotten. Then they asked the bride to take out the toothpicks with her teeth instead of her hand. If she is worried that the toothpicks would hurt her husband, the bride must be meticulous and skillful when pulling them out. At the same time, a man standing behind the groom threatened to whip him. Moreover, people started calling on the groom to take off his red stockings because he did not seem to find the toothpicks painful at all. They thought if he were wearing only a pair of undershorts, his pain would increase. Hence, the groom took off his stockings and started playing the game in his underpants. However, while the couple was concentrating on accomplishing the task, unbeknownst to everyone, one of the men crept up behind the groom and suddenly pulled down his underwear. All participants, including me, saw the groom’s naked private parts even though he immediately put his underpants back on.



Figure 29 Practising “Apple with Toothpicks”

The alliances and power dynamics are constantly shifting during Chinese wedding games. For example, in terms of pre-wedding games that take place in the bride's natal family, the initiative right belongs to the bride's side. Bridesmaids try their best to prank the groom's team and prevent them from picking up the bride too easily. Women's status seems high in this phase. But when the groom and his lads have picked up the bride and carried her into the couple's bedroom, which is mostly purchased by the groom's family or attached to the groom's parents' house, the initiative power and advantages transfer to the groom's side. Therefore, power is dynamically overturned.

The bridal couple often forms an alliance to fight against the other participants. My interviewees Jing Ma and Wenjie Zhao also stressed the need for cooperation between the bridal couple to confront the others. One of her Naodongfang games required Jing Ma to light cigarettes for all guests while the groom carried her on his back. If some guests did not smoke, lighting cigarettes was replaced by feeding them with pieces of fruit. Ma told me that there were nearly thirty people present. She had to light cigarettes or feed fruit to all of these guests while Zhao carried her on his back. Moreover, participants will create obstacles so the bride cannot light cigarettes easily. They might blow out the lighter or make the couple chase them (Shang 1997). Therefore, this game tests the couple's endurance as well as their capabilities to work together; they need to collaborate and finish the task as fast as they can. Ma was worried about her husband because Zhao had to carry her on his back for more than twenty minutes to finish this game. If she fell from his back, they would have to start over from the beginning. She said that when she was on his back, she was able to feel Zhao's legs shaking. Therefore, Zhao appreciated how Ma did her best to shorten his pain by successfully convincing all the participants and passing the tests (Zhao 2014). The cooperation and solidarity of the bridal

couple are some of the most distinctive characteristics of Naodongfang; the community expects them to have endured these challenging experiences and thus reads them as indicators of doing a better job in their marital lives.

The Grammar of Naodongfang

Naodongfang's humour and meanings depend on sexual semiotics (sexual imitation and sexual stimulation), humorous humiliation, and purposeful obstructions.

Sexual Semiotics: Imitating and Stimulating

During Naodongfang, people often require the bridal couple to imitate intercourse or simulate sexual behaviours in the name of playing wedding games. We can easily interpret the sexual implications of these games. For example, when the bride holds a baby bottle under her arm and feeds the groom from its pacifier, it is not a stretch of the imagination to see how this game imitates the sexual behaviour of the groom sucking the bride's breast. Hanging a banana, sausage or even cucumber, in front of the groom's groin and urging the bride to eat it imitates a blow job (Cheng 2014). The connections between the pacifier of a baby's bottle and a bride's nipples, as well as a banana and the groom's penis, are apparent. The parallel of the groom who

is required to do push-ups over the bride laying on the ground and coitus is also obvious (Zhaxi 2014).

According to my interviewee

Leshun Cheng, who was the best

man for Tang and Peng's wedding

on Dec 7, 2014, the groom Tang was



Figure 30 Sucking Coca-Cola with a straw

required to suck Coca-Cola through a straw from a tin that was held between the bride's thighs (see fig. 30). This game clearly simulated oral sex.

During the last game of Tian and Wang's Naodongfang, the couple was asked to break a balloon that was put under the groom's pants (see fig. 31). The position and actions displayed in the photo suggest they were having sex. In fact, without using her hands, Wang had to sit on Tian and try to tightly squeeze the balloon with her hips while Tian held her legs. She attempted a couple of different positions before she successfully burst the balloon. The more effort they made to break the balloon, the more they looked like they were having intercourse. The scene had obvious sexual connotations.



Figure 31 The bride sitting on the groom's body to break a balloon with her hips

One purpose of making a bridal couple imitate intercourse is to stimulate and arouse their sexual desires through bodily contact. Sensitive body parts, such as the breasts, belly and penis, are emphasized. For example, pranksters may put a drop of wine on the bride's belly button and ask the groom to suck it in an imitation of foreplay. To touch each other's skin is rendered to stimulate their sexual sensitivity. According to the photo Leshun Cheng provided, the bride was required to use her mouth to pick up melon seeds that were distributed on different parts of the groom's body, such as his nipples, underarms, belly button and groin region (see fig. 32). Zhisu Ma also recorded the game of bridal couples picking up watermelon seeds from each other's bodies (1988, 138). Participants sometimes intentionally throw a small item, such as a bean or grape, down the bride's collar and instruct the groom to take it out (Zhang & Liu & Zhang 2014).

According to Jixia, guests can also order the groom to pass a coin from the bride's left sleeve to her right sleeve. This game is the female



Figure 32 The bride using her mouth to pick up melon seeds placed on the groom's nipples

version of "monkeys steal peaches" but was called "order of delivering coins" (傳錢之令 1927, 427). As these examples show, much of the humour and meanings of Naodongfang games and pranks is contained in their sexual connotations and simulations. Forcing couples to publicly engage in actions that are suggestive of what are normally the most private activities is Naodongfang's fun.

Demonstration by Humorous Humiliation

In 1927, an avid reader Lingde Yang, wrote to the famous writer, Zuoren Zhou (周作人). His correspondence, published in the *Yusi* journal (1927), included mention of some wedding games played in Suiyuan (綏遠). Yang described how when the couple visited the bride's natal family, pranks were played that night. The groom needed to wear a ring on his neck to imitate a donkey who was pulling a mill and the bride controlled the grinding. A couple of times the bride whipped the "donkey." Pranksters burst into laughter and felt satisfied. Moreover, they asked the bride to hold a Mantou (steamed bun) and feed the groom who was supposed to be a hawk at this point. The bride waved her hand and greeted the groom, "hawk;" the groom then imitated the cries and screeches of a hawk and picked up the bun with his mouth (Yang 1927). The groom's obedient transformation from a donkey to a hawk comprised this example of Naodongfang in 1927. From this reference, we can see that humorously humiliating a groom is not new in Chinese Naodongfang.

Making a fool of the groom is a central motif of Chinese wedding games. Sometimes these games are performed in public spaces, announcing the marriage to the community; sometimes, they are performed indoors during Naodongfang, demonstrating the group's power over the groom. In Hunan Province, the groom is usually comically made up and cross-dressed as a woman, wearing bras and underwear, and then paraded in the street. This custom is called "parading in streets" (遊街) in Hunan Province (Huang 2014; Liu 2016) and "dropping around streets" (串街) in Guizhou Province (S-Anonym. 2017). Xiaoying Huang, one of my interviewees from Hunan Province, told me that the groom must beat a gong or a pan along the road to announce his marriage to the whole community. Sometimes the groom needs to beg for money at shops and restaurants along the street. He tries to get as many people as possible to

donate because the belief is that the more people contribute, the luckier his marital life will be. To demonstrate the marriage along the road is to call for recognition from the community. According to Huizinga, one function of play is “a contest for something or a representation of something. Representation means display, and this may simply consist in the exhibition of something naturally given, before an audience” (1950, 13). Thus, according to Huizinga’s theory, a couple is witnessed and recognized by the community through this humiliating display.

In private spaces for Naodongfang, the purpose of the demonstration can also be to indicate the groom’s sovereignty over the bride. A gong or a pan is tied behind the bride’s buttocks, and a wand is tied above the groom’s groin that naturally drops down to imitate the shaft of the penis. The groom needs to beat the gong or the pan loudly with the wand through his waist’s jerking motion. The louder the sounds are, the better the couple will be (Huang 2014). The ability to beat the gong loudly symbolizes a competent sexual ability determined by the groom’s waist’s strength and flexibility, as well as the groom’s “ownership” of the bride. Photos provided by Xiaoying Huang on Nov 22, 2014.



Figure 33 Beating a pan with a wand tied to his waist, the groom wears bras and underpants over his clothes



Figure 34 The groom comically made up

Purposeful Obstructions

Naodongfang would not be funny if the games went smoothly and the newlyweds accomplished their tasks without a hitch. To see the couple finish a game successfully is not the purpose for Naodongfang participants. Instead, surprising them with tricks that hinder their progress is the goal. Introducing something unexpected and flexibly changing the game rules are common. For example, in a hilarious version of the game “monkeys steal peaches,” when the bride pushes the egg through the groom’s pants, the tricksters will distract her and look for a chance to suddenly punch the egg and break it. This generally happens when the egg is being passed through the crotch of the pants, and the bride needs to push the egg past the spot as fast as she can. Not all Naodongfang pranksters finally crack the egg. For example, in my cousin’s Naodongfang, because the participants were family members, we did not go so far as breaking the egg. However, seeing the egg break and discolour a groom’s pants would definitely be the pranksters’ goal for some Naodongfang occasions.

Another example comes from the game of “biting a cherry with two mouths.” As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this game is to make the bridal couple inadvertently kiss each other as they both try to bite a cherry. Hence, not only does the game master mischievously lift the string to make the couple kiss, but according to my participant Lao Mo, they will try to increase the difficulty of biting the fruit. He explained, “at first, people use an apple. And then it becomes smaller and smaller, to a hawthorn fruit and finally a candy” (Lao Mo 2017). Eventually, the couple cannot avoid kissing each other’s lips when they bite the small item of food. Moreover, when the couple is playing this game, people around them may push their heads or backs and make them embrace or kiss each other. An unearthed relief stone from the Han

Dynasty is thought to depict this scene, showing a maid pushing a bride's head in order to make newlyweds kiss each other (see pg. 123; Liu 1998, 70)

The intentional obstruction captured in the carving, and that has played a part in wedding games for a long time, persists today. In Tian and Wang's Naodongfang, participants pushed the bride Wang towards Tian, who was lying on the bed with balloons in his shirt to imitate breasts (see the first photo of fig. 35). Later, one of the male guests produced four eggs to put down Tian's pants. The participants threatened that if Wang did not take out the eggs with her hand, they would crack them in Tian's pants. However, when she searched for the eggs by putting her hand in Tian's pants, the men moved her hand to rub Tian's crotch (see remained photos of fig. 35). After safely removing all four eggs, everyone swarmed Tian's body and rubbed him for fun.

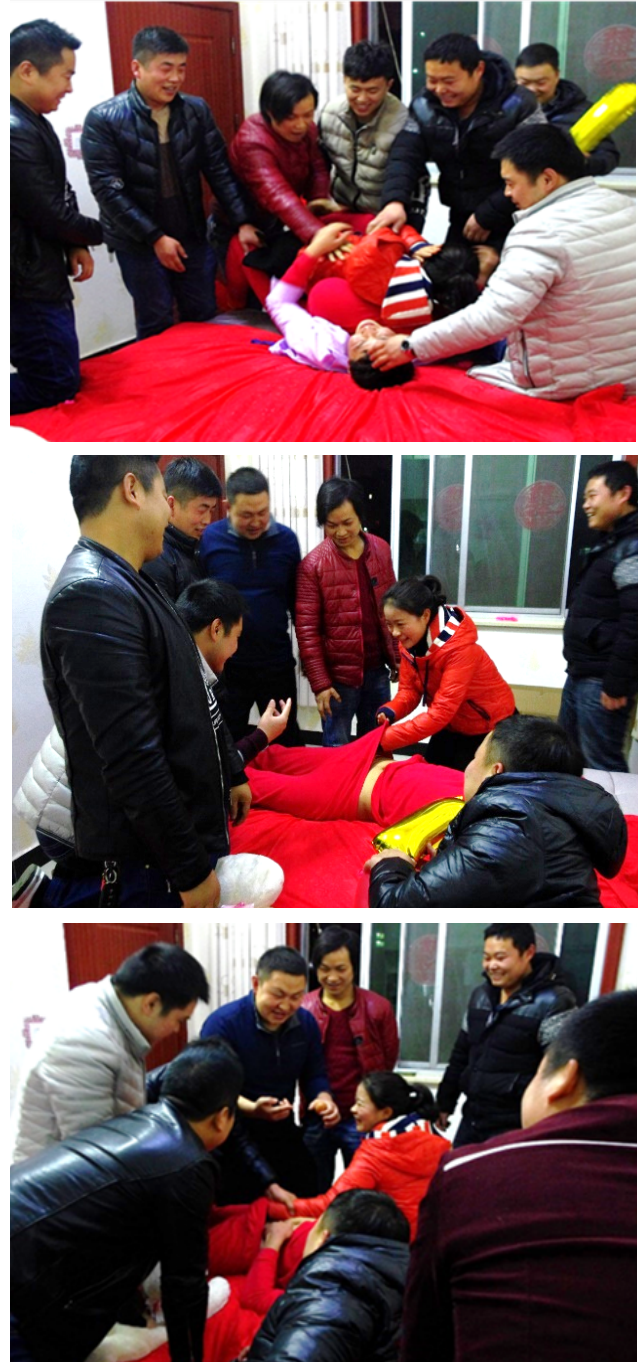


Figure 35 Purposeful obstructions in Wang and Tian's Naodongfang

During the last game at Wang and Tian's Naodongfang, the guests put a balloon on Tian's crotch and asked Wang to stamp on it and burst it. However, once Wang lifted her foot, the prankster intentionally took away the balloon (see fig. 36). This action meant that if the bride were careless, she would have stamped on her husband's penis and could have injured him. Fortunately, in this case, the bride was smart and careful, and the couple finally accomplished all the tests they were presented with.



Figure 36 Threatening to take away the balloon when the bride treads on it

Moreover, Naodongfang rules are always flexible and constantly negotiated. How many toothpicks or eggs the bride ultimately needs to remove depends on last-minute negotiations on the scene. For example, at first, the number of toothpicks Wang needed to pull out of the apple was twenty. However, when the group of male participants realized that it was quite easy for her to remove the toothpicks with her hand, they proposed she use her teeth and decreased the number of toothpicks to five near the end of the game.

“Ain’t No Fun”: The Tacit Criteria of Naodongfang

What makes a Naodongfang a successful event? What elements affect people's judgements on whether a Naodongfang is fun? In the final section of this chapter, I discuss three tacit criteria, based on Chinese traditional aesthetics and culture, that make a Naodongfang appropriate and fun. First, female behaviours and reactions at the Naodongfang event need to fit

the expectations of Chinese patriarchal society. Second, the tacit interaction among people needs to fit the Chinese philosophy of Golden Mean (中庸) and propriety (得體). Third, who can or cannot participate in Naodongfang must conform to Chinese standards of joking relationships and kinship. If the event does not meet people's expectations or abide by these three implicit criteria, participants will comment that it "ain't no fun."

1. Male Expectations of Female Reservedness

Qizhe Zhang has argued that in Naodongfang a bride is observed, admired and evaluated by participants (2006, 88). A bride's reservedness, or modesty, can heighten Naodongfang (Shang 2000, 52). A valued female virtue in China, reservedness (矜持) means that women are appreciated if they are silent, shy and modest. As a Chinese construct, the shades, covers and social distance that create reservedness leave the space for men to imagine female beauty. Interviewee Qi Wang shared his view that many Chinese men still do not like stark nakedness, but, he believes, they prefer the indistinct, partly hidden and partly visible. He suggested, "They like something imaginable which can be filled with fantasies" (2016). He argued that women's protestations and negotiations during Naodongfang are displays of female reservedness. He felt that by playing into hegemonic notions of femininity, the women make a Naodongfang more fun. Qi Wang described the qualities of an ideal woman during Naodongfang:

I never see any bride who is entirely open to Naodongfang. Some of them get your points and cooperate with your inquiries. Nevertheless, there is no possibility that a bride can teach men how to play in Naodongfang. They may pretend to be shy and say, "I do not know how to do it." Even though they actually know the point of this prank, they never speak out but still show a little bit of unwillingness. That is reservedness. Girls must always be reserved. It is not good to show the groomsmen that she knows everything about Naodongfang. People won't have a good impression of her if she behaves like that. You know, girls always care about their reputations... Some girls like to play with boys, but they feel shy to speak out. They count on you to raise some obscene ideas. They want to play, but they feel shy (Wang 2016).

These contradictory attitudes in Naodongfang (“they want to play but they feel shy”) call into question at least one of Huizinga’s characteristics of play. Huizinga defines play as a voluntary activity (freedom) that is superfluous (unproductive), distinct from “ordinary” or “real life” both as to locality and duration (limited time and space), and creates order (is rules-oriented) (1950, 7-13). Huizinga’s view of play as voluntary is echoed by others, including Jan Harold Brunvand ([1968] 1998, 478) and Robert A. Georges (1972, 173). Naodongfang appears to challenge this view, however, because, as Qi Wang’s comments suggest, it is sometimes difficult to judge whether or not some women participate entirely of their own free will. Put another way, Chinese Naodongfang is not necessarily fully voluntarily. Rather, it seems to me that brides can take part in Naodongfang ambivalently; they may participate in a half voluntary and half reluctant way. They may not enjoy these activities but feel coerced into complying.

Arguably, some of the fun of Naodongfang comes from the bride’s “seemingly” unwillingness. According to Qi Wang, women may initially refuse to be tricked, but they eventually comply and in the end they enjoy themselves. Qi Wang feels that Naodongfang’s real fun lies in this process of negotiation: “When you ask the bride to cooperate, she refuses. If you insist, she will finish the task with a burst of big laughter at last. Because whether a Naodongfang is funny and worth being called a Naodongfang, depends on the bride’s cooperation. If she fully cooperates without any reluctance, it ain’t no fun. If she never cooperates, it ain’t no fun. **Naodongfang is aimed at the process of having fun, not at achieving a purpose.** Although the bride knows everything, during Naodongfang, she always refuses to cooperate. However, if you ask her to continue... she will do it with a burst of laughter... That is the funniest part” (Wang 2016). Thus, if the participants did not hinder and obstruct, and if couples did not protest and negotiate, then much of the entertainment value of

Naodongfang would be lost. Guests would complain, as Qi Wang did, that it “ain’t no fun” (沒意思).

2. Chinese Golden Mean (中庸) and Propriety (得體)

When I informed Qi Wang that I wanted to study the rules and principles of Naodongfang, he claimed, “Naodongfang initially is a challenging thing. If you are studying the mean or middle (度), then you will never know how to measure and scale it” (2016). As he suggests, the concepts of balance and propriety are fundamental in Naodongfang. According to Confucius, the doctrine of the *chung yung* (中庸) represents moderation, objectivity, rectitude, honesty, sincerity and propriety. Yu-Lan Fung (馮友蘭 1895-1990) introduced Confucius’s ideas to the West in English. He wrote that “the idea of *chung* (中) is fully developed in the *Chung Yung* or Doctrine of the Mean. *Chung* is like the Aristotelian idea of the ‘golden mean...’ The real meaning of *chung* is neither too much nor too little, that is, just right” ([1948] 2018, 192). Fung went on to explain *Chung* and *Ho* (和) in Chinese philosophy: “[It is] to have no emotions of pleasure or anger, sorrow or joy, welling up: this is to be described as the state of *Chung*. To have these emotions welling up but in due proportion: this is to be described as the state of *ho* [harmony]. *Chung* is the chief foundation of the world. *Ho* is the great highway for the world. Once *chung* and *ho* are established, Heaven and Earth maintain their proper position, and all creatures are nourished” (*Chung Yung*; Fung [1948] 2018, 193).

Here I draw on the concept of the golden mean, or balance, which avoids extremes and pursues the middle, in order to describe the tacit understanding and negotiation among participants in Naodongfang. However, the complexity of “just right” is context-dependent and difficult to measure. As a result, the concept of propriety (得體) is also useful. Fung stresses that

the process connecting the golden mean (*chung*, the approach) and harmony (*ho*, the outcome) is “proper proportion” (得體). He believes that “in order to achieve harmony, the differences must each be present in precisely their proper proportion, which is *chung*. Thus the function of *chung* is to achieve harmony” (Fung [1948] 2018, 193-194). For example, in Naodongfang, the bride should show her unwillingness in a particular way. In order to make the event harmonious and full of fun for those present, she must express mild resistance; she should be neither too fierce nor too weak. Likewise, the groom needs to show his anger in a reserved and humorous manner. The couple must not direct their anger toward the pranksters. Qi Wang told me: “According to Chinese belief and unwritten rules, during your wedding day, you are the ‘red person’ (紅人). If you direct your anger to others, it will harm both you and others. A wedding is a red event; hence you cannot get irritated on an auspicious occasion” (Wang 2016). His description of the goals for Naodongfang, and the wedding day more generally, also characterizes the pursuit of *Ho*, or harmony. It is achieved by practising balance, the golden mean, and propriety.

It is challenging to maintain elegance and, maybe even one’s composure, when someone keeps whipping you with leather belts. Hence, arguably a steam valve mechanism also exists in Naodongfang. During Tian and Wang’s wedding, the groom Tian was beaten by the male participants over thirty times within one hour and a half. At the same time, at least three other male guests were also intentionally beaten by the group of men. They were pushed on the bed, had their heads covered with quilts and were anonymously flogged by all present. If only the groom were targeted, it might have been easy for the couple to protest, but because other participants in Naodongfang were also beaten, it did not appear as if there was a particular grudge directed at the groom. Including some other participants in the beatings also meant that

Tian could join in when the tables were turned on them, which may have allowed him to vent any dissatisfaction. Ultimately, all the beatings were greeted with laughter and noise.

An ancient legend links the supposed origins of Naodongfang with the desire to show off the beauty, intelligence and virtues of a bride to the community: “An intellectual’s son married a pretty and literate woman. He wanted to show off his daughter-in-law’s intelligence and beauty to the community, so he arranged a banquet. During the wedding night, all intellectuals in the town came to see the bride. After the banquet, people urged the bride to serve them tea and light cigarettes for them. Moreover, they teased her through quick-witted speeches. The bride appropriately (得體) behaved and responded fairly to all questions and tests. Finally, she gained the praise of all the guests. Then wedding tests became widespread and a new custom emerged” (Chen 1998, 61). This narrative also reflects that the ancient Chinese highly valued the bride’s demonstration of control and her measured response. Thus, balance, expressed through the golden mean and propriety, became the ultimate goal for both couples and guests at Naodongfang. Just as the couple strive to exercise the right amount of restraint and good humour, the lads present face the challenge of determining the “appropriate” extent to trick, beat and molest the couple without pushing them to the point of refusal. There is a Chinese belief that if young people can learn balance and identify the golden mean, including how to maintain appropriateness or proper proportion during Naodongfang, they will be more likely to succeed in the future and be better able to deal with any complicated situations that arise in their marital lives.

3. Joking Relationships and Intimacy in and out of the Chinese Kinship System

In addition to the characteristics and criteria discussed above, the concept of the joking relationship is essential to understanding Naodongfang.¹⁷ Anthropologists and folklorists have emphasized the importance of studying social relationships in terms of jokes and humour. Peter Lyman writes, “joking is a special kind of social relationship that suspends the rules of everyday life in order to preserve them” (Lyman [1987] 1998, 172). In particular, Scheel highlights how humour works on building intimacy and alienation: “Humor can increase/decrease closeness and power and can, therefore, influence the two main dimensions in person perception: liking and status. Among the positive functions is an increase in group cohesion, but it might also serve negative functions such as derision and social isolation” (Scheel 2017, 21). Meyer also highlights the importance of cohesion and exclusion. Out of the four basic communicative functions humour serves, Meyer claims, “Two tend to unite communicators (mutual identification, clarification of positions and values), and two tend to divide communicators from each other (enforcement of norms, differentiation of acceptable vs. unacceptable behaviors or people). These functions of humor in communication as, alternately, unifier or divider, allow humor to be used to delineate social boundaries” (Meyer 2000, 310; Scheel 2017, 21). Humour during Naodongfang acts in both cohesive and divisive ways.

In Radcliffe-Brown’s influential writing on jokes and relationships (1940, 1941), he notes that “teasing among friends may serve their sense of close friendship” and “give one another the license to tease” (Mechling 1986, 104). In Naodongfang, tricksters are generally those of similar age, class and social background. They are siblings, kin, friends and colleagues of the

¹⁷ Apte listed types of “joking activities,” including “teasing,” “swearing,” “taunting,” “making fun of (another),” “banter,” “horseplay,” “vulgar or obscene remarks,” “playful insults,” “sexual innuendos,” “petting,” “heavy petting,” “rough horseplay,” “fondling,” and “practical jokes;” all indicate joking (Apte 1985: 35). Naodongfang contains most of these joking activities.

newlyweds. Among intimates who are more inclined to trick each other than strangers, one type of joking targets is kin. Oring writes, “Joking relationships were characterized by the license people had to assault, insult, steal or destroy the property of, throw excrement at, or play pranks upon certain categories of kin. These behaviors were not voluntary but, in some sense, mandatory, and the behaviors had to be received with equanimity by those kin who were the victims of the joking” (Oring 2008, 185). Oring joins many others who note a correlation between joking behaviour and intimacy. Freedman holds the view that a joking relationship mainly expresses intimacy rather than aggressiveness among kin. As he argues, “Abusive joking behavior often takes place between categories of kin whose relations are warm and supportive...The abusive nature of many of these expressions could connote intimacy because the sense of the relationship trumped the abusive expression and framed it as a joke. It did not communicate hostility or create antagonism” (Freedman 1977, 162). Oring writes of the “dyadic tradition” to uncover how intimates communicate (Oring [1984] 1992, 135–144). According to micro-sociology which divides daily communication groups into dyads and triads, the number of relationships among people depends on the number of people and how many possible dyads exist among them¹⁸ (Simmel 1955; Giddens et al. 2013, 118). Beyond this, Tavarelli contends that “behavioural and linguistic routines [were] generated and maintained by dyads: couples, siblings, or close friends. Dyadic traditions were largely humorous and much of that humor involved insult, abuse, or references to or re-creations of shared, unpleasant experiences. These traditions were employed to register mood, symbolize intimacy, and activate a shared sense of the past and

¹⁸ For example, in a dyad, which is a group consisting of two persons, there is only one relationship. In a triad that consists of three persons, there are three relationships. Four persons can produce six dyads of relationships, and a five-person group can produce ten possible dyads.

the history of the dyad” (Tavarelli 1987-88, as quoted in Oring 2008, 188). As one type of dyad, siblings and kin can build intimacy by conducting jokes and humour.

Kinship systems thus become a priority when studying joking relationships in Naodongfang. For example, Zhisu Ma was stunned by the Naodongfang in Northern China where “insiders” tricked “insiders” (自家人)—people who come from the same clan and share the same family name or clan name. A native of Southern China, Zhisu Ma expected that people from the same clan (本家) would avoid pranking their kin or relatives. Conversely, Huipeng Shang regarded Naodongfang as an expression of strong kinship bonds. He argued that the main participants of Naodongfang are insiders who belong to the same clans in Henan Province, in Northern China (2000).

The concept of “generational order” (輩分) is fundamental to Chinese kinship systems as the premise is that “seniors and juniors are supposed to obey strict hierarchical orders” (長幼有序). Seniority in the generational order is the most visible rule and social status is determined by age and generation (Shang 2000, 143). For example, a newborn baby could be the generational grandfather of a sixty-year-old man regarding their clan’s generational order. Therefore, the baby is nominally and factually the grandfather of the old man. Only senior family members may call juniors by names. The reverse is not permissible, and in fact, a junior calling a senior by their full name when they are present is extremely offensive.

This norm is related to another Chinese concept: face (面子). The premise is that it is important to develop the skills to keep your own face decently in public and appropriately take care of others’ faces. The concept of maintaining your own dignity is straightforward, but the skill of taking care of others’ faces is more implicit (Zhang & Yang 1997, 310-316). Chinese face, or one’s pride and dignity, can be easily damaged and needs to be approached particularly

gingerly. Appropriately taking care of others' faces (給面子) is a composite of Chinese wisdom. It requires sympathy and skill to compliment and make people feel comfortable. Moreover, rules regarding face are hierarchical. This means people who come from inferior positions need to expend more energy to protect superiors' and seniors' faces. However, the reverse is not true. The most senior individual is given the greatest care while the most junior member is not afforded much consideration. Success or failure of maintaining a decent face thus displays the power and wealth of individuals and clans. That is why Chinese families sometimes take out loans to make their weddings look luxurious and splendid. Weddings thus become a vehicle for families and clans to display ostentation and extravagance.

In studying Naodongfang, Huipeng Shang stressed one essential concept in opposition to joking relationships: "avoidant relationships." Sometimes people are involved in an avoidant relationship where they need to avoid speaking or behaving in particular ways because their speech and presence become inappropriate. More specifically, Shang divided daily lives into two types of occasions: formal occasions and informal occasions. Formal occasions include when family and clan members are present, when greeting and hosting guests, when younger and opposite gender people are present, or when people in "avoidant relationships" are present (2000, 142). In formal occasions, people never talk about sex as it is inappropriate. However, in informal occasions, such as chatting or engaging in farming activities together, people openly talk about sex and frequently make fun of sexual topics. People of the same sex in "joking relationships" are the main participants of informal occasions.

Given Shang's division of formal and informal occasions, one person can be blamed, not because he or she is talking about sex, but because he or she is talking about sex at a wrong occasion and in front of those who have avoidant relationships with him or her. If a man jokes

with a woman who does not share a joking relationship with him, his behaviours can be regarded as offensive and could result in cutting off relations between the two. Inappropriately talking about sex in front of people who have an “avoidant relationship” is taboo (Shang 2000, 142). This may explain why Naodongfang never takes place in front of the brides’ parents. Huipeng Shang further argues that Chinese people seem to behave according to opposing extremes. On some occasions, men are absolutely decent; but on other occasions, they are totally opposite and behave obscenely. For example, when dealing with women with whom they form “joking relationships” (e.g., elder sisters-in-law), a man can be licentious. On the other hand, when encountering women with whom he has an “avoidant relationship,” a man must be serious and decent (Shang 2000, 141). This rule shows the complexities of joking relationships and kinship in China.

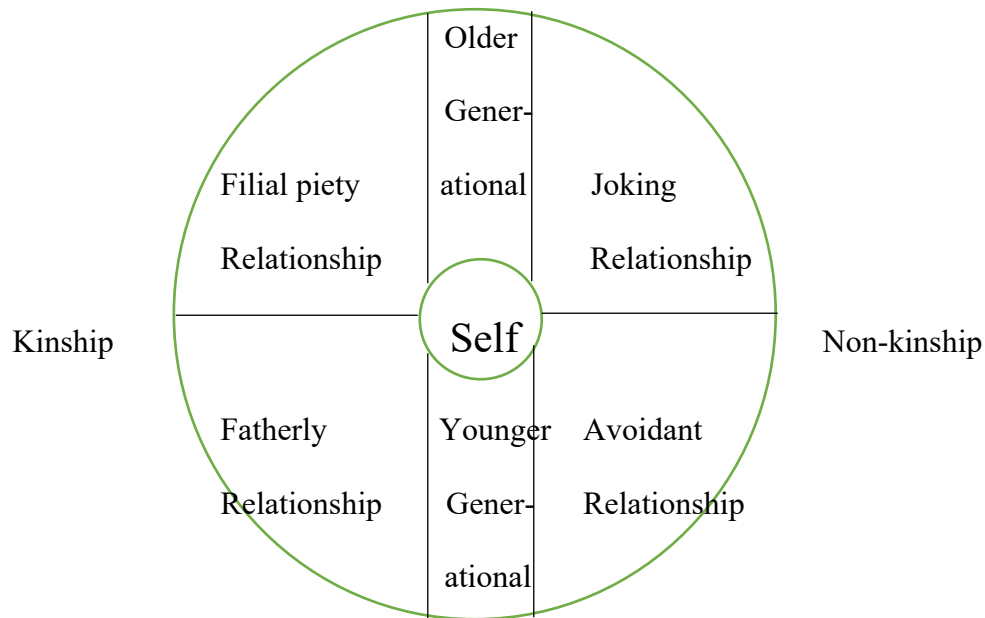
Naodongfang’s participants are generally young men who come from similar or younger generations of the newlyweds. Huipeng Shang found that the youngest generation in a village (no matter the actual age) is most likely to prank all others because they are forgiven due to being of the lowest generational order. In contrast, seniors who come from older generations rarely participate in Naodongfang because they are the first to take responsibility if someone has to be blamed for this occasion (2000, 40). Based on Shang’s works, I identified four rules of Chinese joking relationship and kinship:

- a) Elderly males and younger generational females are in avoidant relationships (such as fathers-in-law and daughters-in-law, uncles and nephews-in-law) (Shang 2000, 103). They connect to each other not because of kinship, but with affinity. The elder brother and his younger brother’s wife are in a strict avoidant relationship. He is not allowed to joke with his younger brother’s wife but is permitted to joke with his wife’s younger sister (Shang 2000, 108).
- b) Elderly females and younger males in the same generation share joking relationships, such as young males and their elder kin’s wives.

- c) Males and females without kinship and affinity are generally in avoidant relationships because they possibly could have sexual relationships. Sykes writes, “Relations between the young men and the young women were conducted entirely in terms of a joking relationship but this was one of relative modesty and restraint and there was a deliberate avoidance of open obscene” (Sykes 1966, 192). On occasions like weddings and Naodongfang, people sometimes break this rule.
- d) Males from the same generation share joking relationships. Males of the same age, either kin or non-kin, can be in joking relationships even if they come from different generations.

Huipeng Shang drew a diagram to illustrate the quadrant of Chinese joking and kinship relationships (2000, 108). I translated it into English.

Table 2 The Quadrant of Chinese Joking and Kinship Relationships (Shang 2000)



What are the criteria for avoidant relationships and joking relationships within the Chinese kinship system? According to Shang’s illustration above, when dealing with people who belong to younger generations than you, the relationships are either fatherly or avoidant. In Naodongfang, you are not allowed to prank those who are in younger generations than you. The seniors cannot play jokes on juniors but can blame them; juniors can prank seniors but cannot blame them. When dealing with people who come from older generations, generally, you need to

show respect to them. For senior kin, you need to show filial piety, and generally, no joking relationship exists among you. However, joking relationships exist if you and seniors are not kin but relatives.¹⁹ Based on this, those you can prank during Naodongfang come from the same generation as you or are people who come from older generations and not your kin. People who come from younger generations without kinship can prank you. The rules revealed in this diagram are illuminating but they need to be further developed. For example, it overlooks gender relationships; the avoidant relationship generally exists between opposite genders but not for people of the same sex. Moreover, the three days of a wedding represent a liminal time and chaos and abnormalities can happen, and sometimes generational orders can be ignored. Therefore, the above quadrant is not universally applied to all occasions and usually not strictly abided to by all people. However, it is helpful in that it identifies some crucial elements regarding Chinese kinship systems and joking relationships.

There are some strategies to dynamically and temporarily change the generational order during Naodongfang. For example, in Canton, when greeting Naodongfang participants, the bride must degrade her own generation to the youngest one. This makes all guests her seniors. It is believed that if she refers everyone according to her future children's generation, rather than her own, it signifies prosperous reproduction. Second, seniors may deliberately disguise their generations in Naodongfang. Because age is not the only criterion to determine generations, sometimes it is hard to tell just by appearances. Moreover, other participants may also help seniors hide the fact that they belong to an older generation.

¹⁹ In Chinese concepts, although all are called family/clan members, relatives indicate those members who are related by affinity, such as marriages, but not necessarily share the same blood. But kin indicate people who at least share some blood lineage.

A third strategy is to get made up or to wear a mask to hide one's identity. The clowning and make-up symbolically transfer people's status from a recognized, acquainted person to a magical and unfamiliar figure; this figure is endowed with privileges to do things that are not allowed during his or her daily lives. Like in other masking traditions, such as carnival and mumming, disguise in Naodongfang can potentially subvert the usual social order. After his face is smeared with colourful ashes, the father-in-law is permitted to engage in intimate interactions with the bride; actions which are usually avoided in daily life now become acceptable. Once seniors' identities are ritually "covered," they are allowed to join avoidant occasions, such as Naodongfang, because these methods "hide" seniors' generations and make their joking behaviours acceptable in a liminal time and space (Shang 2000, 110).

My fieldwork underscores the complexities of Chinese joking and kin relationships. When I documented a wedding in Danfeng County in 2016, as an outsider, no one knew my age or generational order. As a result, I was well accepted at this Naodongfang occasion. However, at another wedding in Hancheng County, my younger cousin was my contact, and he accompanied me to his friend's wedding. The groom was the same age as my cousin, and he was undoubtedly younger than me. Because my cousin introduced me as an elder cousin to the Naodongfang participants, they immediately knew that my generational order was older than theirs. Hence, when I asked questions about Naodongfang, people were not frank with me and felt awkward answering my questions. My inquiries were inappropriate and embarrassing because I was from an older generation as a non-kin and non-affinity female senior. I was the one who violated the rule that female seniors without kinship or affinity should not be in joking relationships with younger men. If I were the younger sister of my contact, things very likely

would have been different. Guests might have been more inclined to trick me and involve me as an insider.

Above is an example of how Chinese kinship and generational orders strongly influence people's communications in Naodongfang. In rural areas of China, where kin and relatives make up most of the participants at Naodongfang, specific social rules decide who is in joking or avoidant relationships with whom. In this context, Chinese kinship systems intersect joking relationships and determine how intimacy is deteriorated, enhanced and performed in Chinese Naodongfang. However, more and more pranksters of Naodongfang in urban settings are friends, classmates and colleagues. Joking relationships are more dynamic and diverse on these occasions.

The blatant sexual connotations of Naodongfang make some scholars uncomfortable and the subject has been largely, and intentionally, ignored in scholarship. However, Naodongfang holds significance for ordinary people. As this chapter has shown, the custom is popular throughout many parts of the country and diasporic communities. Having outlined what comprises Naodongfang, in the following chapters I explore why so many Chinese people remain committed to it today, beginning with the history of Naodongfang and Chinese Nao culture.

Chapter Three:

Historic and Cultural Backgrounds of Naodongfang

In this chapter, I document Naodongfang's long history and explore its integral connections to aspects of Chinese traditional culture. Drawing on historical materials, including published histories, scholars' comments, regional records, travel accounts, folk ballads and poems, I begin by pointing to twenty-eight references to Naodongfang that attest to its presence in parts of feudal China prior to 1912. As further evidence of its importance, I then turn to folk legends that explain Naodongfang's origins. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on Naodongfang's connections to Chinese Nao culture (composed of Renao (熱鬧) and Renqi (人氣)) and its relationship to the carnivalesque.

As noted earlier, "Naodongfang" has referred to a range of pranks and games in Chinese weddings over history. Before the term was widely accepted in the Qing Dynasty, "beating the groom" (打聲), "teasing the bride" (戲婦) (Dong and Slyshkin 2008: 9), "seeing the bride" (看新婦), "blocking the wedding carriages" (障車), "teasing the wed family" (謔親), "eavesdropping under the windowsill" (聽房) and "Pahui" (扒灰 pranking parents-in-law) were practised. Forms of all these activities later were referred to as Naodongfang. The term was established in the late Qing Dynasty around 1869-1928 (Xv Ke) when Naodongfang, and its abbreviated version "Naofang," appeared in a book by Zhong Qi (鐘琦 1818-1904) and other regional records. In my search of historical sources, I considered Naodongfang to include the full spectrum of Chinese obscene wedding games, as well as activities and events that take place on the wedding night in the bridal chamber. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Chinese to English are my own.

The History of Naodongfang prior to 1912

Scholars hold different views of the genesis of Naodongfang. Some consider the earliest recorded reference to Chinese Naodongfang to date from the Pre-Qin period (2100BCE-221BCE). Pre-Qin people sang rhythms and songs on many occasions. *The Book of Songs* (《詩經》, 1100BCE-1600BCE), collected by Yin Jifu (尹吉甫)¹, includes 311 folk songs and poems that depict many aspects of Pre-Qin people's lives. Confucius (孔子) censored and finalized the collection as *300 Songs* (《詩三百》), promoting it as a classic requisite for his disciples in the Confucian School. Scholars have noted the significance of *The Book of Songs* to the study of ancient Chinese folklore, including wedding customs. Late Qing Dynasty scholars such as Ma Ruichen (馬瑞辰 1782-1853) (1989: 346) and Fang Yurun (方玉潤 [1811-1883] 1986) considered “Tang Feng· Chou Mou” (《唐風· 綢繆》) from *The Book of Songs* to be a wedding song. Later, contemporary scholar Chen Zizhan (陳子展 1898-1990) argued that this song's lyrics depict a Naodongfang occasion held on the wedding night when guests congratulated and embarrassed the bridal couple by singing songs (Chen 1982:4). Its classic Chinese text is as follows:

綢繆束薪，三星在天。今夕何夕？見此良人。子兮子兮，如此良人何！
綢繆束芻，三星在隅。今夕何夕？見此邂逅。子兮子兮，如此邂逅何！
綢繆束色，三星在戶。今夕何夕？見此粲者。子兮子兮，如此粲者何！

Arthur Waley translated *The Book of Songs* and his version is relied on widely by English language academics. He put “Tang Feng· Chou Mou” under the categorization of “marriage,”

¹ To avoid of confusing about the order of Chinese family names and given names, as seen in my below discussion of historical works, I refer to people active before 1912 in the classic Chinese style with family name and then given name. However, when referring to people from 1912 to 2021, I have opted to use the western order of given name and family name. Hence, in the following section, people's family names appear before their given names, except in the cases of modern authors who were born after 1912.

indicating that he also believed it was a ritual wedding song. Waley translated the lyrics as follows:

Fast bundled is the firewood; the Three Stars² have risen. Is it to-night or which night, that I see my Good Man? Oh, masters, my masters, what will this Good Man be like?

Fast bundled is the hay; the Three Stars are at the corner. Is it to-night or which night, that shall see this meeting? Oh, masters, my masters, what will that meeting be like?

Fast bundled is the wild-thorn; the Three Stars are at the door. Is it to-night or which night, that I see that lovely one? Oh, masters, my masters, what will that lovely one be like?
(Waley 1960, 87)

At first glance the Naodongfang elements are barely visible in this translation. They emerge more clearly, however, when Wenjun Wang (王文君) points out that the folksong would have been sung in an antiphonal way by male and female participants. Wang contends that the first stanza was sung by female guests to tease the bride, the second stanza that pokes fun at both sides of the bridal couple would have been a chorus for male and female guests, and the last stanza directed towards the groom would have been performed by male guests (Wang 1984, 41). While Wang's interpretation (1984, 39) differs from that of Liu & Yang (2008), Linchang Jiang (江林昌 2009, 42) and Shan Li (李山 2017), these modern scholars all agree that "Tang Feng·Chou Mou" is a folksong depicting Naodongfang and that it includes an obvious joking and bantering scene. Drawing on their translations, I read this song as follows:

What is the night tonight? You have met a Good Man as excellent as him. You, you, what will you do with him? (Females)

What is the night tonight? You two could be such excellent partners to each other. You, you, what will you do tonight? (All participants)

What is the night tonight? You have met such a lovely one like her. You, you, what will you do with her? (Males)

² The Belt of Orion.

In contrast to my interpretation, Arthur Waley thought the song was intended to be sung by the bride or the groom rather than by other participants. Concerning the translation of “子兮,” he used “oh masters, my masters,” and in a footnote explained that “子兮” “may merely be a meaningless exclamation” (1960, 87). Other scholars who regard “Tang Feng· Chou Mou” as a Naodongfang song, have argued that the translation of “子兮” should not be read as a “meaningless exclamation” but as “you,” the second-person pronoun. Considering the apparent gender implications of “良人” and “粲者,” which respectively indicate good boys and pretty girls, the antiphonal characteristic is distinctive. That said, despite the evidence of bantering and joking, and lyrics that have obvious sexual connotations, the song does not explicitly describe characteristic pranks and tricks of Naodongfang. Rather, it leaves us imagining what Pre-Qin’s weddings looked like.

Some scholars believe that Naodongfang originated in the custom of “seeing the bride” (Wang Shaoxi 王紹璽 1933). According to *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (《左氏春秋》 403BCE-386BCE), when the leader Zhuang Gong (莊公) married Madam Aijiang (哀姜夫人) in 670BCE, he invited ministers and women from royal families to “see the bride.” Curiosity to see the bride, as well as gossiping and making judgements about her, arguably contributed to the lively atmosphere that made up the Naodongfang event.

Most Chinese academics, however, trace Naodongfang back to the late period of Warring States Time (戰國 500BCE-221BCE) (Chen [1935] 1990, 269; Chen 1998; Qu 2002; Shang 2000; Zhu 2009) to a historical description of Prince Dan (?-226BCE) of the Yan State. They regard this as the earliest official reference to Naodongfang. The text and my translation are as follows:

初太子丹賓養勇士，不愛後宮美女，民以為俗，至今猶然。賓客相過，以婦侍宿，嫁取之夕，男女無別，反以為榮。後稍頗止，然終未改。

At first, Prince Dan of the Yan State raised and supported valiant warriors in his palace for defending against the other states during the wars. He did not value beautiful women in his palace; on the contrary, he used those women to serve and entertain warriors. Hence the custom spread from the palace to commoners. Things are the same today. When guests arrive, people greet guests by sending women (wives, daughters, concubines, etc.) to sleep with them. Men and women do not have any sense of gender segregation during the wedding night. They are proud of that. There is no fundamental change until today, even though some minor adaptations have been made (*The History of the Former Han Dynasty: Geographic Records* (《漢書·地理志》, Ban Gu 班固 32-92AD 1962, 1657).

The story of Prince Dan of Yan State may refer to communal marriage and promiscuity dating from the early stages of institutionalized marriages as indicated by the statement that “men and women do not have any sense of gender segregation during the wedding night. They are proud of that.” The passage also lends possible support to Jiantai Zhu’s view that during the Warring States Time there was a social ethos toward audaciousness and frivolity that spread outwards from the Yan area through the influence of Prince Dan, the member of its governing class (2009, 10).

The Han Dynasty saw the formation of Naodongfang in today’s sense. For example, Yang Shuda (楊樹達 1885-1956) believed that Naodongfang became popular during the Han Dynasty (202BCE-220AD): “Guests and hosts drank alcohol and laughed loudly; their behaviours did not have taboos and restraints. As with contemporary Naodongfang, this tradition had already existed in the Han Dynasty” (《漢代婚喪禮俗考》 *Textual Research of Customs and Etiquettes for Marriages and Funerals in the Han Dynasty*. [1933] 1989, 23). Moreover, other materials record a custom called “eavesdropping outside the bridal chamber” (聽房), which is a type of Naodongfang. This custom was described in *The History of the Former Han Dynasty* (《漢書》): “During the wedding nights, people eavesdropped below the windowsill of a bridal chamber to catch sounds, such as movements, conversations and even moaning, from a newly

married couple. People regard this as an entertainment and gossip what they have heard during the next day” (Ban Gu 32-92AD 1962).

The most convincing proof of Naodongfang in the Han Dynasty comes from archaeological evidence. In the archaeological site of Shenliuzhuang Han Dynasty Tomb in Ju County (莒縣沈劉莊漢代畫像石墓) in Shandong Province, archaeologists discovered a stone relief of a woman and man who seem to



Figure 37 An unearthed Han Dynasty stone relief shows “A Picture of Woman and Man Kissing”

be kissing (see fig. 37). The archaeological field reports noted, “the lower frame shows three people; a man and a woman stand in the centre and face each other. They are embracing each other, and it seems like they are kissing. A woman who looks like a maid stands behind the women. The maid pushes the woman’s head with her hands to make/force them to kiss. Relief shadows above those figures’ heads indicate bed curtains, which means that this is an indoor occasion” (Su & Zhang 1988, 797). Yuxin Liu (劉玉新) argues that the carving vividly depicts an indoor occasion of joking and pranking during a wedding proving that Naodongfang was popular in the Han Dynasty (Liu 1998, 70). Shang Huipeng supports Liu’s hypothesis (2000, 178).

From the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), scholars began to openly criticize Naodongfang.³ Comments in *Flourishing Speech* (《昌言》) by Zhong Changtong (仲長統) are

³ Critiques appeared in dynasties after Zhong Changtong. In the Jin Dynasty (around 265-420), Naodongfang became a controversial topic. For example, Ge Hong (葛洪) criticized Naodongfang in his book *BaoPuZi: Disease and Absurdness* (《抱樸子·疾謬》) (317-420), and he has been widely quoted. This is my translation of Ge Hong: Among commoners, there is a tradition to tease the bride. The bride stands in the middle of a group of people; relatives test her with obscene questions. If the bride answers slowly or with hesitation, people will embarrass and blame her. The obscenity of this custom is hard to mention. People often beat the groom and

frequently cited as the earliest critique: “Nowadays, during the wedding period, people tease the bridal couple and threaten them with rods; they drink a lot and induce the newly married couple’s sex desires by liquor. People advocate for obscenity in public and expose privacy

even hang him upside down with toes tied up. They are drunk and alcoholic; they do not know everything about limits and restrictions. These behaviours leave people bleeding, bruised, bent or with broken limbs. What a pity it is! Ancient people felt sad when they left home (for marriage), so that they did not snuff out a candle; they felt upset and did not play music or sing during weddings. According to ancient etiquette, wedding families were ashamed, and people did not celebrate. Nowadays, people fail to abide by classical etiquettes which would make them admired by folks and trusted by neighbours. People should berate these behaviours and change them. How could we tolerate those folks and develop this custom together? However, folklore has been practised for a long period. People never think it wrong. Only fierce criticism and rigorous punishment could stop it (Ge Hong [317-420] 1954, 148).

During the Song Dynasty, Hong Mai (洪邁 1123-1202) wrote a book titled, *Textology of Folk Customs* (《俗考》). He commented: “today people still practise this custom. In the bridal chamber, the groom is invisible, but a gang of young men come to molest the bride. This custom is called ‘Xueqin’ (謔親 bantering wedding families). They lift the bride’s clothes and use needles to stick into her; or take off her shoes and stare at her feet, which makes the bride, who is supposed to be seriously displayed and serve in clan temples, now behave like a prostitute who is leaning against a doorframe to tout” (Jiang 1927, 151; Shang 2000, 179). Quoting Ge Hong’s *BaoPuZi*, Hong Mai raised a point that still puzzles researchers today: “This custom is undoubtedly bad. However, according to *BaoPuZi*, from the Jin Dynasty until now, this custom has been popular for thousands of years and has not changed. How strange this is!” (Jiang 1927, 151; Shang 2000, 179). Also drawing on *BaoPuZi*, Yang Shen (楊慎 1488-1559) questioned why the obscene practice of Naodongfang/Xueqin had continued for so many years in his book, *Minium (Red Lead) Extension* (《丹鉛續錄》).

In the Ming Dynasty, Tian Yiheng (田艺蘅 1524-?) recorded Naodongfang in his book *Liuqing Diary* (《留青日札》): “Among the Huizhou area (徽州), when the bride arrives at the groom’s home, all relatives try their best to trick and molest the bride. People call it ‘teasing the bride.’ Sometimes accidents can happen, and newlyweds can die from pranks and tricks.” He mentioned an interesting method the newly married couple used to defend themselves from Naodongfang: “It is said that newlyweds often carefully seam their clothes and shoes to avoid being torn off by crowds. Yet this method still does not always work during the chaos.” He traced back the custom to the Tang Dynasty but suggested its origins lie in ethnic groups in the south of China: “How do customs and traditions get corrupted like this? This custom was practised in the Tang Dynasty under the name ‘Nongxinfu’ (弄新婦, ‘teasing the bride’). It is indeed the remnants and influence of Southern ethnic savages. Nowadays, in the Yue region, relatives and friends will definitely make the groom drunk in the bridal chamber” (Chen 1990, 271; Tian 1985, 701).

By the Qing Dynasty, criticizing Naodongfang had become accepted among literati. For example, Gong Wei (龚玮) discussed Naodongfang under the title of “Malicious Marriage Customs” in his book *Chaolin Critics Extension* (《巢林筆談續編· 嫁娶惡習》). This attitude was reflected in *Textual Research on Puberty Rites, Weddings, Funerals and Sacrifices* (《冠婚喪祭考》):

Among the secular world (民間), there is a custom called “seeing the bride” (看新婦). After the wedding ceremony, no matter old or young, the relatives and friends who come from the clans or neighbourhoods will come to see the bride for consecutive days... Nowadays, not only do people privately practise this custom, but in a very formal and public way. For example, seniors and children gather in a line to wait to see the bride... During commoners’ weddings, there will be a large crowd gathering around. They may embarrass the bride through strict rules or trick the groom through pranks or jokes.... They claim that these behaviours will cheer up the crowd and make the newlyweds more affectionate... many harsh pranks are practised in some remote villages. For example, to frighten the couple, people pour water on them or throw firecrackers towards them. Some brides get sick after this. Hence the wedding families always suffer a great loss of money because of this custom (Chen 1990, 271; Zhu 2009, 14).

among clans and relatives. These traditions are extremely obscene, and it is easy to indulge people in illicit sexual relations. No other tradition could influence people like this. It should be prohibited”⁴ (see also Guan 2001; Qu 2002; Sheng 1993; Wang 1997). His opinion of Naodongfang was shared by other ancient literati and officialdom who obeyed Confucian morals and codes.

In *Fengsu Tongyi* (*Folk Customs and Traditions* 《風俗通義》), Ying Shao (應劭 153-196AD) documented the earliest tragedy associated with Naodongfang. He described how in the Ru’nan (汝南) region, a man called Zhang Miao (張妙) knew another man named Du Shi (杜士) who was getting married. After they had eaten the banquet and drank liquor, guests started playing around and joking. Zhang Miao tied Du Shi up and hit him twenty times with a rod. Then he hanged Du Shi upside down by tying his toes together. Although Du Shi died from this treatment, officer Bao Yu (鮑昱) judged the death accidental as a result of drinking liquor. He concluded that Zhang Miao did not intentionally mean to kill Du Shi and therefore he received a reduced penalty (Sheng 1993; Wang 1997).⁵

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (南北朝 420-589), the Xianbei (鮮卑) who are regarded as ancestors of Mongolians and other nomadic groups from Northern China, are thought to have beaten grooms during their weddings and made them “exhausted and weakened”

⁴ The original Chinese text of Zhong Changtong’s critique is as follows:

今嫁娶之會，捶杖以督之戲謔，酒醴以趨之情欲，宣淫佚於廣眾之中，顯陰私於親族之間，汙風詭俗，生淫長奸，莫此之甚，不可不斷者也。

⁵ *Youyang Miscellaneous Morsels · Odd Rituals* (《酉陽雜俎·禮異》) (around 830-863) recorded a similar tragic accident. When Jia got married, his friends Yi and Bing tricked him. Yi and Bing put Jia in a cabinet and covered the cabinet with quilts. Jia was smothered to death (Wang 1997). In the Qing Dynasty, scholars still cited the example of “Zhang Miao beat Du Shi to death” from Ying Shao (應劭 153-196)’s manuscript *Fengsu Tongyi*. For example, in his *Guisi Reserved Scripts* (《癸巳存稿》), Yu Zhengxie (俞正燮) asked, “...these accidents are exactly what Du Shi experienced. From the Han Dynasty to the Jin Dynasty, the folklore did not change. Was it the fault of Bao Yu (the judge) who lightly sentenced the murderer and did not outlaw the custom that it has thrived until today?” (Qu 2002; Sheng 1993).

(大委頓者). Accordingly, a wedding custom with strong nomadic influences, known as “beating the groom with rods” (杖婿), emerged around this time. In the book *Youyang Miscellaneous Morsels* (《酉陽雜俎》) (around 830-863), Duan Chengshi (段成式) described this custom: “In the Northern Dynasties, people set up a tent close to the residence. This tent was called Qinglu⁶ (青廬). People held weddings there. Depending on the level of luxury or frugality, the groom’s family gathered hundreds or tens of lads. These young men gathered around the wedding carriage and kept yelling, ‘hurry up and come out, the bride’ (催妝). Yelling would not stop until the bride came out and boarded the carriage. During the day of picking up the bride, the bride’s family members and friends all came. They used rods to beat the groom and regarded this beating as a token of joyfulness. Sometimes the groom would be extremely exhausted and weakened after these tortures” (Li 2002, 159).

Another example suggests the prevalence of “beating the groom with rods” in royal families. According to the *History of Northern Dynasties* (《北史》), an emperor whose name was Gao Yang (高洋 526-559), was teased by his sister-in-law during his wedding, causing him to hold a grudge against her. Gao Yang was the emperor of Northern Qi (北齊). When he married Duan Zhaoyi (段昭儀), Yuan Shi (袁氏), the wife of Duan Zhaoyi’s brother Duan Shao (段紹), played pranks on Gao Yang that were popular among commoners. This resulted in Gao Yang developing hard feelings towards her, and he reportedly yelled at Duan Shao, “I will kill your wife.” Yuan Shi felt afraid of him and hid in the palace of Lou Taihou (mother of Gao Yang); she never dared to go out until after the emperor died. Scholars, such as Huipeng Shang (2000) and Jiantai Zhu (2009), agree that Yuan Shi probably beat or whipped Gao Yang with rods or

⁶ The colour of the tent could be either green or black. There is not yet consensus among scholars due to the ambiguity of classic Chinese characters.

bamboo. Gao Yang and his noble families were of Xianbei descent, so the custom of beating the groom would have been known to them, and, therefore, it would not be surprising if the emperor was beaten and tricked at his wedding (Chen [1935] 1990, 270; Shang 2000; Zhu 2009). The report is interesting, however, because it provides evidence that even members of royal families could not avoid Naodongfang during their weddings; they could not suppress the power of customs during ancient times.

Centralized power re-emerged in the Sui and Tang Dynasties (618-907). According to Peng Chen, the custom of “blocking wedding carriages” (障車) became popular in the Tang Dynasty. When the wedding carriage or sedan chair was on the way to deliver the bride to the groom’s family, villagers gathered together to try to stop it and demanded food and liquor in return for letting it go on. From emperors (aristocrats) to ordinary folks, it appears that no one escaped being blocked during their weddings (Chen [1935] 1990, 250). In *Old Book of Tang* (《舊唐書》 945AD), Left Silangzhong (左司郎中 the title of an official rank) Tang Shao (唐紹) made a proposal to the emperor in the first year of Taiji (太極元年 712AD) to curtail the custom. He argued that “this custom disturbs social order, impairs finance; thus, it should be prohibited... I propose that people who participate in blocking wedding carriages must be punished. People who have warrantors should list their names in the crime book. People who do not have warrantors need to be beaten 60 times and then convicted” (Zhou [1930] 2011, 44; Zhu 2009, 13)⁷. Tang Shao was clearly unsuccessful in eradicating the custom of “blocking wedding

⁷ The similar example was recorded in the *Book of Yuan Dynasty: Ministry of Rites III* (《元典章·禮部三》) under the title of “Prohibiting Wedding Blocking Behaviours.” It read, in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), “...officers proposed, weddings must be held at an auspicious time. Today some reprobates do not fear laws and regulations. Once a wedding is held, they gather around, namely for the sake of tradition, and actually beat and harm the wedding families, asking for gifts like foods and liquor” (Fan 2005). These materials prove that from the Tang Dynasty to the Yuan Dynasty, even though the governing classes tried to prohibit “blocking wedding carriages,” the custom was still stably held.

carriages” given that this tradition is still widely practised today in China with vehicles replacing carriages and sedan chairs. Writing in 2000, Shang describes a contemporary example: “People gathered around and blocked the passages. For villagers, to stop the wedding team and ask them to perform, sing and play musical instruments is a free show; for wedding families, this is a good chance to show off their decency” (Shang 2000, 28).

By the Tang Dynasty, many wedding customs were well established. For instance, the customs of “blocking the wedding carriage” (障車 Chen [1935] 1990, 250), “speeding up the bride” (催妝 Chen [1935] 1990, 248), “putting down the fan” (卻扇 Chen [1935] 1990, 256) and “seeing the bride” (看新婦 Chen [1935] 1990, 278) were prevalent in the Tang Dynasty.

Meanwhile, as a representative genre of classic Chinese literature, Tang Poetry (唐詩) reached its peak. Therefore, in the Tang Dynasty, the tradition of making poems and verses about blocking carriages (障車文), putting down the fan (卻扇詩) and speeding up the bride (催妝詩) were invented and shared. As mentioned above, during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, wedding guests gathered outside the bride’s home to loudly urge her to finish her make-up (妝) and to come out of the house. The bride generally did not want to leave her natal family and often felt sad about the separation. Plus, the bride’s family sometimes intentionally hampered her departure and tried to delay the wedding schedule. However, the wedding schedule was strictly governed by Chinese beliefs and taboos that were thought to bring good fortune; for the sake of auspicious time (吉時), the groom’s family and friends gathered around the bride’s natal family and tried their best to speed up the departure.

Meanwhile, making poems about “speeding up the bride” (催妝詩) and “putting down the fan” (卻扇詩) became part of wedding ceremonies in the Tang Dynasty. For example, Bai Juyi (白居易), a revered poet in the Tang Dynasty, composed a poem about “speeding up the bride”:

《和春深二十首 十九》
何處春深好，春深娶婦家。
兩行籠裏燭，壹樹扇間花。
賓拜登華席，親迎障噫車。
催妝詩未了，星鬥漸傾斜。

The spring has so blossomed. In late spring, someone is holding a wedding. Two rows of candles, flowers and fans are decorating the room. Guests are standing on the gorgeous carpet and greeting each other. The carriage is blocked by guests when picking up the bride. The competition of exchanging “催妝詩” (poems of speeding up the bride) never ends. Stars come to fade in the horizon and morning is coming.

The Tang emperor asked Lu Chang (陸暢) to write a poem about “speeding up the bride” for his sister Princess Yun’an (雲安公主) during her wedding:

《雲安公主下降奉詔作催妝詩》
雲安公主貴，出嫁王侯家；
天母親調粉，日兄憐賜花。
催鋪百子帳，待障七香車；
借問妝成未？東方欲曉霞。

How noble Princess Yun’an is. She will marry an aristocratic family. The mother of the emperor helps her make-up. The emperor gifts her flowers and hair accessories. Her wedding bed has already been decorated with “curtains with the pattern of hundreds of children” (百子帳). People have already prepared to block the “carriage of seven fragrances” (七香車). May I dare to ask whether the princess has dressed well and finished her make-up? The rosy dawn is coming from the east⁸.

“Putting down the fan” poems are based on a traditional Chinese aesthetic concerning the beauty of shades and covering. The ideal for ancient Chinese women was to be shy and reserved and, as a result, they often held up fans to cover their mouths when they were smiling. Thus, holding a fan not only invoked an image of a bride’s beauty and reserved nature, but also had a symbolic meaning in Chinese aesthetics. Poems of “putting down the fan” were composed when the bride arrived at the groom’s family or during Naodongfang. As is easy to imagine, in the space of Naodongfang in the evening, the room was full of people, liquor and noise. People in their neighbourhoods were curious to see what the bride looked like. Was she pretty or not? Did she

⁸ According to the above poems, we can tell that in the Tang Dynasty a wedding generally was held at night time. Nowadays, some areas of China still begin a wedding before dawn according to the divination of auspicious time.

have a good personality? The bride felt shy and bashful, so she used a fan to cover half of her face. According to the *Dunhuang Scripts*, people who were good at making up verses and poems would narrate as follows: “you don’t need to cover your beauty with thousands of layers of fans. A beauty like you is not easy to see. Please don’t feel attached to your past lives, because finally, you will belong to your husband’s family.”⁹ For the wedding of Princess Yun’an, Lu Chang created a poem of “putting down the fan” that compared the Princess to the goddess of the moon, Heng’e (嫦娥):

寶扇持來入禁宮，本教花下動香風。
嫦娥須逐彩雲降，不可通宵在月中。

You held a precious fan and stepped into the forbidden moon palace. Your skirt blew the flowers, and the wind became fragrant. You cannot stay in the moon palace during the whole night. You should descend with seven colours’ clouds and land in the mortal world.

During the Song and Yuan dynasties, Naodongfang does not seem to have changed significantly. Even though intellectuals’ negative comments and assessments pervade the historical materials, Meng Yuanlao (孟元老) nostalgically depicted wedding customs in his book *Splendour Dream of Eastern Capital* (《東京夢華錄》1127). He writes: “During the wedding day, the groom’s family dispatched carriages or sedan chairs towards the bride’s natal house. The bride’s family was responsible for greeting guests. They put colourful ribbons on the carriage. While musicians played music, people began urging the bride to board the carriage and depart (催妝). The wagoner and sedan chair lifters refused to depart and asked for ‘Lishi’ (利事、利是、利市 red packets with money or gifts like foods, cigarettes and candies). This tradition was called ‘lifting the sedan chair’ (起檐子). When the wedding family satisfied the people’s requests, they finally lifted the sedan chair and departed. When the wedding party came back to the groom’s house,

⁹ 千重羅扇不須遮，百美嬌多見不奢。侍娘不用相要勒，終歸不免屬他家。

followers, wagoners and sedan chair lifters would again ask for money, gifts and decorations. This tradition was called ‘blocking the door’ (攔門)” (Meng [1127] 1982; Chen [1935] 1990, 248).

By the Qing Dynasty, Naodongfang had attracted more widespread attention from scholars. Zhong Qi (鐘琦 1818-1904) wrote, “There is a folk custom during the wedding night. Relatives and friends gather and come to the bridal chamber. They yell and laugh, sit or lay down until late-night, or even stay up until the daylight. People call it ‘Naofang’ (鬧房 an abbreviated version of Naodongfang). This custom spreads in Jiang, Zhe, Yue and Min areas (江、浙、粵、閩 roughly covering today’s southeastern China including Jiangsu Province, Zhejiang Province, Guangdong Province and Fujian Province). How loud the room and the crowd are will depend on the appearance of a bride. If a bride is plain, people would laugh loudly and drink a lot while bantering her. If a bride is ugly, people will make fun of her. If a bride is pretty, people would definitely try their best to tease her and get close to her. Generally, the crowd will not let the bridal couple sleep for the whole night. Sometimes clan members and relatives also join Naodongfang, which is very malicious” (Chen [1935] 1990, 272).

In the Qing Dynasty, brides became the main target during Naodongfang. Xu Ke (徐珂 1869-1928) used the full term “Naodongfang (鬧洞房)” in his book *Classified Records and Anecdotes in the Qing Dynasty · Marriages* (《清稗類鈔·婚姻》) (around 1869-1928), “In Huai’an (淮安), when a bride walks into a bridal chamber, all the guests follow her. People try their best to make the bride laugh. Jokes, riddles, bantering and obscene speeches spread through the chamber... The purpose of doing Naodongfang is to insult brides and bridesmaids. They exchange dirty jokes or gossip about a bride’s appearance; they paint faces with the bride’s make-up powder or rouge to entertain each other. They will not stop until they are satisfied. The

wedding families will not do anything to stop them but let them do whatever they want without interference” (Wang 1997, 50). All these actions from the Qing Dynasty are still discernable in modern China today.

Wu Youru, an illustrator in the late Qing Dynasty, published a book called *Wu Youru Paintings Compilation* (《吳有如畫寶》) in 1884 in the traditional Chinese ink and brush painting style that includes a wedding night accident. In Ningbo (寧波), Zhu held a wedding for his son. Zhu was the servant of Fan’s family and Fan’s son came to the wedding. After the banquet, Fan’s son snuck into the bridal chamber and hid in the couple’s bed with the quilt covering him. After a while, the newlyweds went into the room and did not realize Fan’s son was there. The couple began preparing to go to sleep. Fan’s son spied on the groom taking off his clothes and the bride taking off her shoes. He giggled and the bed shook. The bride was shocked



Figure 38 “A Wedding Night Accident” (鬧房受刺) illustrated by Wu Youru in 1884

and jumped to escape. Fan's son lifted the quilt and revealed himself. The groom got so angry that he grabbed a pair of scissors and stabbed the man's shoulder, severely injuring him. The groom's mother rushed into the couple's bedroom when she heard the noise. Discovering that her son had stabbed their master's son, she pleaded for forgiveness, but Fan's son cursed loudly and left (Wu [1884] 1998, 41; Zhu 2009, 110; see fig. 38).

This brief overview attests to Naodongfang's long history. It illustrates that the custom took various forms throughout Chinese history. At first, perhaps out of curiosity, people came to see the bride (看新婦) in the Spring and Autumn Period and mischievously eavesdropped outside the bridal chamber (聽房) in the Han Dynasty. Later, during the Northern and Southern dynasties, grooms were fiercely "beaten" (打聲), while in the Tang Dynasty entertaining and economic functions are discernable through "blocking the wedding carriages" (障車). In Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, Naodongfang appears to have been more widely practised and there are more references in this time period, but sources also show that it was harshly criticized by some intellectuals. Importantly, all of these aspects have links to present day Naodongfang.

1. Naodongfang in Folk Legends and Beliefs

Folk legends and beliefs represent a second source that speaks to the longevity of Naodongfang and suggests its historical importance to at least some families and regions of China. In contrast to the intellectuals' negative comments found in historical manuscripts concerning Naodongfang, folk legends generally reflect more positive attitudes towards the custom. Many are origin stories that focus on the important and well-respected historical figures who supposedly created Naodongfang and who often fought off evil authorities or monsters in the process.

Today, the invitation, “Groom and Bride, please enter the Dongfang (新人入洞房),” frequently signifies the end of a wedding ceremony and signals guests that they can start enjoying the feast. “Dongfang,” that translates literally to “cave house” (“dong” means “cave” and “fang” is “house”), refers to the bridal chamber or newlyweds’ bedroom. Jiantai Zhu (2009) recorded a legend that explains the origin of this unusual term. According to Zhu, the Yellow Emperor, a mythical figure from five thousand years ago, was a ruler of significant accomplishments; he built alliances among tribes and propelled the stone age to the bronze age and the agrarian age. When the Yellow Emperor became leader of the united tribes, he was the first to be addressed as “emperor” in Chinese history. In the legend, the Yellow Emperor invented the “cave house” to discourage promiscuity that was causing disagreements and battles among members of different tribes. He worried that alliances among tribes would be dissembled by grabbing marriages and conflicts. The solution came one day when he was inspecting the tribes. He noticed a clan that lived in three caves; they had constructed high stone walls to keep out wild animals and the only entrance was a small opening. These caves inspired the Yellow Emperor and he suggested, “when people are getting married, we must hold ceremonies to mark their marriage and they can receive wishes from all tribes. The couple should first bow to the sky and the earth, then bow to their parents, and finally, bow to each other. After the ceremony, people will celebrate their marriage with a banquet complete with liquor, dances and songs. After the celebration, the bridal couple should be delivered into a cave which is strictly protected by high walls. Only a small entrance should be left for food delivery from their family members. The couple should stay in the cave for forty days to three months in order to get to know each other and learn how to make a fire and cook. From then on, only if a couple stayed in a cave and held a formal ceremony, would their union be considered a formal marriage. It was not

permissible to grab the bride or the groom in a formal marriage. To distinguish themselves from single women, married women needed to coil up their hair. A woman with a hair coil indicates that she is married and other men cannot make improper advances to her. Otherwise, these men are violating tribes' law" (Zhu 2009, 2). Later, his suggestion was accepted among all the tribes and the story is that parents rushed to dig caves for their sons and daughters. As the new custom caught on, both the custom of grabbing marriages and promiscuity declined.

In addition to the Yellow Emperor, Yao (堯), Shun (舜) and Yu (禹), who were regarded as mythical tribes leaders and consecutively advanced China's development from the primitive period to the feudal period, were also responsible for the creation of Naodongfang. According to Zhu, Yao and Yu were both concerned with Naodongfang at their own weddings. For example, when Yu led the tribes to fight enemies, his wedding was in danger of being postponed. Because people still wanted him to get married as scheduled, they heavily guarded his bridal chamber. The enemy Wuzhiqi (巫支祁) sent some demons and spirits to disrupt Yu's wedding but Yu's attendants secretly fought off the enemies outside of the bridal chamber for three days. Thanks to them, Yu's wedding went ahead uninterrupted. Later, people began to follow Yu's example by inviting friends and relatives to Naodongfang on their wedding nights in order to exorcise demons and evil spirits (Zhu 2009, 7).

Xueli (雪犁) compiled and edited a comprehensive collection of Chinese folklore that includes in seven legends about the origins of Naodongfang. Four of these legends share the same main plot with minor differences (1994, 558-573). They all include magical protagonists (often the incarnation of a powerful immortal) whose roles in the mortal world were reputational emperors. In the first story, an emperor, who was the incarnation of the Ziwei Star (紫微星, known as "Emperor Star"), went out of his palace incognito to investigate "Minjian" (民間, a

traditional Chinese concept of the folks/commoners' world in contrast to the aristocratic world). One day, he found a female ghost sneaking around and following a wedding party. The ancient Chinese believed that bridal couples were very vulnerable and that evil spirits intended to harm them and disrupt their weddings. Worried about the newlyweds, the emperor followed the wedding party. He knew that the ghost would hide in the bridal chamber; hence, he put a chair in front of door and sat on it to scare away the ghost. He suggested guests stay outside of the bridal chamber chatting and laughing during the whole night. Drawing on an ancient belief that evil spirits cannot function in daylight, he promised that when the sun rose, the ghost would leave. The guests followed his directions and as a result the ghost was forced to leave without harming the bridal couple. After that, people began to practise similar wedding night customs in an attempt to exorcise evil spirits and protect newlyweds (Collector: Jiangshan. From Xueli 1994, 559; Zhu 2009).

The second legend in Xueli's collection specified that the incarnation of the Ziwei Star was Zhao Kuangyin (927-976), the initiator and first emperor of the Song Dynasty. In this version, Zhao saved a bridal couple before he became emperor. At that time, he was involved in a war. One day, when he and his soldiers wandered around Bagong Mountain (八公山), he heard drums and horns, which indicated a wedding troop passing by. Zhao knew that this was an extremely unlucky day to hold a wedding and was not surprised to see seven evil spirits following the bridal sedan chair: the spirit of death, the spirit of the crow, the spirit of the double-faced ghost, the spirit of the coffin, the spirit of drowning, the spirit of five injuries and the spirit of blood. He followed the wedding party and when he found out that the family was poor, he felt he needed to save them.

After the banquet, he saw that the seven spirits were still circling the bridal chamber under the moonlight and decided to do something before guests headed home. He suggested, “in my hometown, we have a tradition during weddings. After the banquet, guests make the bridal chamber boisterous and full of joy. How about we do the same today?” People replied, “sounds good, but we don’t know how to do it.” Zhao listed some ways to have fun. For example, he put a table in the room with melon seeds, peanuts and candies on it and asked the bride to deliver these snacks to the guests. He added, “today is a wedding day; ignore all restrictions for three days when a wedding happens. Everyone should come and have fun.” Immediately, the room got riotous. A man asked the bride to pour a drink of liquor and toast him. That fellow asked the groom to feed the bride with red dates. The third guest requested the bridal couple sing a song. Zhao Kuangyin also had the talent to recite auspicious chants. He led like this: “If the bride eats a red date tonight,” the people answered, “Hooray (好)!” Zhao continued, “a champion in the imperial examination (狀元) will be given birth in the following year,” and the crowd yelled, “Hooray!” Hence, the bridal chamber was riotous until the dark of night. The seven spirits waited for a chance to get into the bridal chamber to hurt the couple. However, until the cocks crowed at dawn, they did not find any chance and left unsuccessfully. When Zhao saw the spirits were gone, he allowed the people to go home and left the newly married couple sleeping.

Zhao Kuangyin still wondered why the couple would hold their wedding on such an inauspicious day. They told him that a teacher in their county had picked this date. Zhao headed to the teacher and questioned him, “we have many lucky days for weddings. Why did you pick a date which was so unlucky and dangerous to them?” The teacher smiled and replied, “because I knew an auspicious figure would appear and save them, although that day was an inauspicious date. I divined that the Ziwei Star would come and make everything good. The wedding families

have luck; that is why I picked that date for them.” Zhao felt happy because he was recognized as the Ziwei Star by the teacher. He rewarded him with loads of treasures. Later, when people realized that the initiator of Naodongfang was the emperor Zhao Kuangyin, the custom and legend spread widely. People, therefore, started to practise Naodongfang in order to protect newlyweds by maintaining a lively atmosphere during their weddings (Collector: Tongfu. From Xueli 1994, 566).

These legends link the origins of Naodongfang to an esteemed figure. Another example is found in the last legend in Xueli’s collection where the emperor Zhao Kuangyin is replaced by another outstanding emperor from the Qing dynasty, Qianlong (乾隆). Such narratives suggest that over history Naodongfang was often viewed positively, or at least neutrally. The positive associations support the argument that Naodongfang was generally regarded as a respected and desirable custom. These legends gave way to the custom of inviting small children (generally boys) to attend Naodongfang because of the belief that they could be possible incarnations of the Ziwei Star or the Wenqu Star (文曲星). Since it is impossible to know whether these children will become powerful and influential figures when they grow up, it is thought best to beat the odds by recruiting as many young boys as possible. If it turns out that any of them has the ability to exorcise evil spirits, like the emperors in the folk legends, the newly married couple will be blessed and safe (Narrator: Makaigui. Collector: Yueli, Jiwei Xiao. From Xueli 1994, 570).

In contrast to the Yellow Emperor who created the “cave house” to discourage grabbing marriages and promiscuity in Chinese pre-history, the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty (秦始皇 259BCE-210BCE) was a cruel dictator who is associated with the cave house in a negative way. Although the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty brought together six countries and established the first grand unified regime in China which marked the initiation of Feudalism in Chinese

history, he had the reputation of being a tyrant. He forcibly recruited labourers to build the Great Wall and many workers died during the construction. He was also famous for burning manuscripts and killing intellectuals. In folk legends he surfaces as a villain in relation to the Dongfang, or cave house.

When constructing the Epang Palace (阿房宮), the emperor asked ministers to bring beautiful women to him. A smart and pretty woman named “The Third Lady” (三姑娘) was forcedly delivered to the Epang Palace to serve the emperor but she refused and escaped to Hua Mountain (華山). Meanwhile, because the emperor was killing intellectuals and burning manuscripts, numerous intellectuals ran for their lives. A young intellectual named Shenbo also ran to Hua Mountain. One day, the Third Lady encountered Shenbo on the mountain. Even though their clothes were in rags and their faces were pale, it was love at first sight. They held a wedding ceremony by picking and burning branches as incense and making their vows in front of the sky and the earth. They were entirely devoted to each other and even though they could not live in a fancy house with tiles, they were happy to live together in a cave under a giant rock (Zhu 2009, 4). In this legend, the villainous First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty contrasts with the lovers who are happy in their cave house.

Legends belonging to ethnic minority groups also describe the origins of Naodongfang. For example, members of the She ethnic group (畬族) antiphonally exchanged folk songs all night long during weddings; the longer and livelier the singing event, supposedly the happier and luckier the bridal couple will be (Shang 2000, 132; Zhu 2009, 9). They believed that in ancient She Mountain, a green-faced, long-toothed demon would invade villages in search of children to eat and properties to rob. The demon, who lusted after virgins, used magic to grab brides during their weddings. After having sex with innocent brides, the demon immediately abandoned them

in the forest and left them to die among wolves and other beasts. Year after year, no one knew how many brides had died because of this demon. A clever girl named Lanjinfeng (蘭金鳳 Orchid Golden Phoenix) was captured by the demon during her wedding. She figured out that he was very afraid of lively occasions. Thus, she made a fabricated appointment with the demon and tried her best to persuade him to send her back home. Once she got back, Lanjinfeng lit the room and called on all the villagers to join her. They made noise by drinking and laughing all night and the sounds of singing and goblets clinking made the house so lively, the demon fled. When people discovered that their partying could destroy the demon's magic, they carried on the tradition of singing all night long in order to protect brides from being grabbed by the demon (Shang 2000, 132; Zhu 2009, 9).

These legends are ancient examples but Naodongfang continues to be the subject of contemporary oral narratives. Rather than stories of mythic creatures and Chinese nobility, today personal experience narratives and urban legends with sensational plots are the most common orally transmitted narratives. For example, Zhu recorded a legend based on Naodongfang. In the western area of Fujian Province, there was a belief that candles and lights were not allowed in the bridal chamber; the room had to be kept dark. When one newly married couple stepped into the dark room following their wedding, the bride said to the groom, “while we have so many guests and relatives who are still standing outside, we should not seek our own pleasure (have sex). You should go out to them.” The groom agreed and left. A villain with evil intentions was in the crowd impersonating a guest. He snuck into the bridal chamber after the groom left. Because the room was very dark, the bride thought he was the groom and slept with him. Later, when the groom came back, he also approached to make love with the bride. The bride felt strange, “you just came in and slept with me. Why did you leave right afterwards?” The groom

replied, “I just came from the living room and stepped into the bedroom.” The bride realized that someone else had slept with her, but she kept silent. The next day, she felt so upset and ashamed that she hanged herself. After she died, her family charged the groom. When the police checked the scene, they found a short poem on her skirt explaining the circumstances. It told how a perpetrator had snuck into the bridal chamber and slept with the bride. When she realized what had happened, the bride felt so ashamed that she killed herself to avoid the spread of rumours. The police realized that the groom was innocent; they investigated the criminal, and he was convicted and sentenced in the end. To avoid similar crimes in the future, they issued a new regulation: all wedding families must organize Naodongfang and the bridal chamber must be lit as brightly as if it were daylight. People must celebrate in a lively way so that there would be no opportunity for a villain to harm a newly married couple. According to legend, the incident gave birth to the custom of Naodongfang in southwestern Fujian (Zhu 2009, 44).

Folk legends reflect active and inactive approaches to affect future. As Jixia (季遐) notes, the active approach expresses the worldview that human beings can influence their fortune by their actions. For example, if people make a wedding livelier, then the wedding families will be more prosperous (越鬧越發). Prosperity implies 發, which means growth and fortune and is a common theme in Chinese beliefs in terms of both reproduction and wealth. In contrast, the inactive approach reflects a worldview that positions people as passive recipients; they must bear the outcomes of evil spells and malicious spirits. Jixia identifies the inactive approach in a Naodongfang narrative he learned from his mother. “...So and so the aunt got married. She had offended and irritated some of her relatives; hence no one came to her Naodongfang. Later, a person came to Kuifang (窺房 eavesdropping in the bridal chamber). It seemed like the newly married couple were sleeping deeply without a sound. Suddenly, the person saw the candles’

flames were flickering and almost going out.¹⁰ After a gust of wind, he saw a woman with dishevelled hair (generally the image of a female ghost in Chinese culture) kneeling in the front of the bed and kowtowing to the couple.¹¹ Although the bridal couple initially seemed good, both died very soon after” (1927, 425).

The legends discussed above generally depict Naodongfang as an auspicious and positive custom. The three types (stories of auspicious and mythical figures who were incarnated as respected emperors and initiated Naodongfang; tales of folk heroes who were brave and courageous enough to fight villains such as bad emperors or demons; and urban legends of everyday people’s experiences), affirm Naodongfang as an essential component of a Chinese wedding. The narratives express and reinforce three folk beliefs: 1) lively situations and groups of humans have magical powers to exorcise ghosts and evil spirits; 2) newly married couples should be prioritized and protected; and 3) newly married couples, especially brides, who are easily possessed by evil spirits, need to be protected by customs.¹² The narratives support the importance of Naodongfang in controlling unlucky elements during weddings and ensuring that the newlyweds remains safe and prosperous. The beliefs and legends underlie the practice of lively and noisy weddings and led to the pervasiveness of Naodongfang that continues until today; they also reinforce Renao as an important aspect of Chinese culture.

¹⁰ According to the Chinese belief, candles in the bridal chamber are supposed to be lit all day and night for three consecutive days to ensure the good fortune and longevity of the wedding couple.

¹¹ According to Chinese etiquette, only deceased, ancestors and seniors are greeted by kowtow. The implication is that the bridal couple would die soon and hence the female ghost was kowtowing to them in advance.

¹² For example, the bride is required to jump over a small bonfire to exorcise evils, or she has to be delivered by someone on their backs or walk on her feet with a carpet as the medium from directly touching the soil.

Chinese Nao Culture: A Fondness for Renao (熱鬧) and Renqi (人氣)

Chinese weddings do not have a strict separation of a solemn ritual ceremony and lively reception. Even during what can be the most touching and sentimental moments, such as when a father delivers his daughter, the bride, to the groom and family members stand together on the stage in a united display of their love for the couple, the atmosphere often is not very serious. Perhaps because the wedding ceremony usually is held in a big banquet room, and guests are anticipating the meal that takes place immediately afterwards, the dramatic gesture of the father passing over a sobbing bride to the groom who is kneeling in front of the assembled guests, is not enough to subdue the boisterous atmosphere. Guests can be preoccupied with greeting each other, chatting, drinking beverages, clicking wine glasses, cracking sunflower seeds, and eating candies at the same time they are watching the wedding families' "stage drama." Even at the most serious moments, then, laughter, jeers and cheering can sometimes be heard from the crowd; in fact these are the main sounds at Chinese weddings.

The element of "Renao" (熱鬧 revelry and boisterous) is arguably the most significant characteristic of Chinese weddings (Shang 2000, 36). The character "Nao" (鬧), that composes part of the term "Naodongfang," is a verb. Combined with other characters, "Naohonghong" (鬧哄哄) is an adjective used to describe a space full of noise and lively atmosphere, "Xuannao" (喧鬧) is a noun to indicate a noisy space full of chatting and various sounds, and "Renao" (熱鬧) implies a heated, energetic and noisy space. While there is no exact translation of "Nao" in English, the character is a combination of boisterousness, joyfulness and loudness. It amplifies the five sensory stimuli and creates a sensual space. Just as a fan creates a gust of wind and boosts a flame, Nao adds spice and flavour to any occasion and creates a state of disorder, euphoria and even ecstasy. Chenglin Zhang agrees that Nao is crucial in celebrating festivals,

elevating the atmosphere, and enhancing interpersonal relationships. Events characterized by Nao satisfy people's expectations, demonstrate harmony and highlight a festive and joyous atmosphere (Zhang 2016, 5).

Chuanyin Zheng (鄭傳寅) discusses how and why the Chinese developed a fondness for Nao by analyzing the popularity of folk dramas and, as he terms it, "watching Renao" (看熱鬧). The idiom "watching Renao" is used widely to refer to occasions such as temple gatherings, market days and watching folk dramas. "Watching Renao" also indicates spontaneous mass gatherings. Zheng believes that during earlier periods when public transportation was less convenient, the ancient Chinese who worked on farmlands rarely had opportunities to travel any distance or to meet with one other. They fulfilled their desire for social interaction by "watching Renao" and taking part in nearby festivals where the atmosphere was lively and emotions were elated. In order to satisfy the psychological need of "watching Renao" and create a lively festival atmosphere, folk dramas were often performed with colourful costumes, mysterious and odd masks, deafening sounds from drums and gongs, thrilling openings and vocals that roared into the air (Zheng 2004, 95).

When laws encounter folklore and customs in China, they sometimes have to defer to what is known as "Renqing" culture (人情社會 Song 2011). The term refers explicitly to interpersonal relationships in this context; literally Ren means human beings and Qing means sentiment. The argument is that Chinese society, to some extent, is not governed by laws but by human relationships. In Renqing culture, written rules and regulations are not as useful as relationships. For example, when encountering bureaucracy, you can apply for a document through an official channel. It can be far more efficient, however, if you know someone who works there and they are willing to intercede on your behalf. In some cases, your friend's

friend's friend may be enough. Many Chinese routinely rely on this kind of "Renqing" to solve daily issues.

As one of the earliest secular cultures to emphasize the significance of Ren (人 human beings) in many contexts other than deities, the Chinese believed that ontological human bodies could exorcise evil spirits. For example, as Huipeng Shang puts it, the fondness for Naodongfang and Nao culture is based on the beliefs of Renqi (人氣 Human's breath 2000, 129). Supernatural powers are redundant; only the gathering of human beings and strong "Renqi" can scare away ghosts and evil spirits. Hence, "Renqi" (human's breath) becomes crucial to understanding "Re" (heat) and "Nao" in China. By extension, devils are thought to be afraid of Renao in the form of noises and human beings (2000, 129). Similarly, when I asked my interviewee Hongtao Gao, "what is essential when conducting a successful pre-wedding games session?" We had a conversation as below.

Wang: What is essential when conducting a successful pre-wedding games session?

Gao: **People.** You need to have lads around.

Wang: In some weddings, the groom and the bride are working in another city and they just come back to hold their wedding in their hometown. Hence, they cannot recruit a big team of groomsmen and bridesmaids. Is that possible that only two of them come? How can you conduct pre-wedding games with them?

Gao: Only the groom and the bride are ok. However, it is not possible that only two of them come for the wedding. There are always people to fire firecrackers. There are always people to hold "four kinds of gifts" (四樣禮). **Once there are people around**, no matter if they are groomsmen or not, I can design and conduct a pre-wedding games session... Picking up brides need to play games. There are no merits of Renao and atmosphere if you don't play games. This part of games is the most interesting. People always praise a wedding host if he can do it well. If it is a very plain and simple pre-wedding session, "what is the next, what is the next..." Too boring! Designing a pre-wedding session always relates to a wedding host's experiences and how many weddings he has hosted (Gao 2017).

In contrast to human world of Renao and Renqi, a quiet and solemn space may be regarded as a spirit's residence rather than the home of humans. Humans should avoid these spaces to protect

themselves from spirits. Ancient Chinese literati Hong Liangji (洪亮吉) suggested a replacement term for Naodongfang in Jing County: “Nuanfang” (暖房) (1806). “Nuanfang” means heating the new chamber with human warmth and breath. People also used the word to indicate a kind of housewarming; it was customary to visit and celebrate someone’s new residence. New buildings lack warmth and “Renqi.” Therefore, the host invited certain groups of friends and relatives to “Nuanfang” (heat the chamber). The goal was to warm the host’s new residence and exorcise any misfortune. Naodongfang, therefore, gained credibility due to this folk belief. An old saying goes, “No seniority and restrictions for three days. No people in the bridal chamber, or ghosts will come to Nao (harass) the newlyweds” (三天無老少，人不鬧鬼鬧) (Shang 2000, 132). It reflects the Chinese belief that the more human beings are in a space, the fewer spirits and evil beings exist there. Based on the principles of sympathetic magic, participants’ belongings were assumed to have magical powers. According to a folk belief, any items that Naodongfang participants left in the bridal chamber (including garbage) should not be cleaned up for three days or else the newlywed’s good fortune will be taken away at the same time. This belief becomes an excuse to not clean a bedroom after Naodongfang.

Renqi can be interpreted as a measure of popularity and Naodongfang can be read as an indicator of the bridal couple’s popularity and their families’ power. If the wedding family does not have a boisterous wedding, it can question their status in their community (Shang 2000, 25). Greenhill identified a similar dynamic in shivarees in Canada: “Generally speaking it was considered an honour to be shivareed, because it denoted to the married couple that they were well respected in the community (from Chester McMackin)” (Greenhill 2012). An interviewee of mine, Lao Mo, thought that the reason people take part in Naodongfang is to pursue Renao. “If no people come for Nao, the venue would feel cold and cheerless; this is not a good sign for a

happy event like a wedding. Moreover, if no one comes to Nao, it might indicate that the wedding families have bad interpersonal relationships with others in the community. Chinese people like Renao and they can Nao many things” (2016). According to another interviewee, people who did not experience Naodongfang as part of their weddings were often upset and envious of others who had lively Naodongfang nights, which they felt reflected how many good friends and social relationships they had. The feeling is that people with few friends are unable to hold an evening of Naodongfang (Zhao 2014).

2. The Soundscape of Chinese Nao Culture

Pen-Yen Tsao (曹本治)’s concept of soundscape applies to the sonic aspects of Chinese Nao culture. Tsao studied the “soundscape” of a Daoist temple in Hong Kong (1989) where he divided ritualistic sounds into two types: sounds of instruments, (器聲) such as gongs or drumming, and human sounds (人聲), such as chatting, singing, hymning and reciting sutras. He did not include laughter because ritualistic occasions usually lack the element of humour and play. The lack of laughter in ritualistic occasions does not mean that Chinese religious rituals are silent, however. Shiyu Zhao claims, “The absence of a unique supreme god and systematic doctrines make Chinese religious rituals inclined to use approaches such as imitation, sorceries, magical controls, dances and songs, taboos, sacrifices and feasts other than prayers, preaching and chanting sutras” (2002, 119). Therefore, Chinese religious ritualistic soundscapes, based on Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, are characterized by noise and higher-decibel sounds. The soundscape of Nao is a combination of sounds such as finger guessing games, TV shows, music, wild laughter, yelling, joking, cursing and so on, accompanied by the warmth of human bodies, smell of alcohol and a generally frivolous and boisterous atmosphere. Together the sounds and atmosphere create the soundscape of Naodongfang; they must be considered in unity.

Early missionaries often recorded their negative impressions of Chinese Nao culture and its lively soundscape. For example, British missionary John Macgowan (1835-1922), sent to China from the London Missionary Society, found that the Chinese had a specific sense of humour and a particular fondness for comedies. Reflecting an Imperialist perspective, he writes:

Everything is done, as it were, on the street, and good humor and infinite forbearance are the characteristics that mark the conduct of the populace in reference to what would seem to us to be the high-handed proceedings of the play-acting fraternity. Comedy, on the whole, suits the genius of the Chinese better than the more serious plays. They are a laughter-loving people and their faces have been so formed that unaesthetic as they are they have a wide area on which to spread a smile. There is a strain of fun that runs through their natures that makes them quick to catch the slightest hint of a joke, and that sends the laughter rippling from their hearts and lighting up their features with floods of sunshine” (Macgowan 1909, 193).

He compares English perception of sound to the Chinese equivalent:

From this it may be easily believed that they are fond of laughter and merriment and the bright and joyous side of things, and social intercourse, and plenty of company, and loud-sounding music and firing of crackers. The solitary feeling that makes an Englishman like to be alone, and shut himself up day after day in a house by himself and not care to see visitors, is something that is quite incomprehensible to a Chinaman. Their love for their fellow-kind is a passion with the Chinese, and they seem to be able to stand an amount of noise and loud talking and screaming babies and barking of dogs, such as would send an Englishman off his head (Macgowan 1907, 132).

He continues:

Their pleasures run, too, in the same line as that of their worshippers, and there is nothing that will put an idol on such good terms with everybody as a rousing play, when there are lots of fun and noise, screeching music and clang of cymbals, beat of drum and hilarious amusement (Macgowan 1909, 184).

Macgowan appears to have some appreciation for the Chinese enjoyment of noisy theatre, but many missionaries were less tolerant. American missionary Arthur Henderson Smith (1845-1932) clearly showed his indifference to Chinese theatre/folk drama in his book *Village Life in China* (1899). He writes: “When to these embarrassments are added the excruciating music, the discomfort attending the dense crowds, and the universal confusion which is an invariable concomitant of a Chinese theatre, it is not strange that these representations have for Westerners

very few attractions, after the first glance has satisfied curiosity. This indifference on our part is almost unintelligible to the Chinese. That a foreign traveller, who is told of a theatre in full blast at the town at which he expects to spend the night, should feel no joy, but should deliberately push on so as to avoid spending the night at that place—this is to the Chinese profoundly incomprehensible” (Smith 1899). The attraction of Nao culture and its noisy soundscape evaded Smith.

3. Dionysian Spirit of Nao Culture

Alcohol often fuels a Nao atmosphere, just as it does carnival. Shiyu Zhao writes that the Western spirit of carnival comes from Dionysus, the ancient Greek god of wine and ritual madness (2002, 117). According to Bakhtin, wine cleanses the intestines (viscera) and thereby it is essential to carnivals: “in the time of Rabelais it was customary to turn a wineglass upside down, repeating the words of the penitential psalm: ‘create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit in my bowels’” (1984, 163). Although there is no Chinese deity of alcohol to rationalize liquor indulgence, there is a Chinese culture of alcohol consumption. During Naodongfang, liquor lowers inhibitions and participants behave more wildly than they would usually. With alcohol consumption, people often speak more loudly and laugh boisterously, and these sounds all combine to make the lively soundscape of Naodongfang. Of course, alcohol also can cause people to lose control and sometimes it is blamed for accidents that occur during Naodongfang (Zheng 2018).

Satu Apo explored why alcohol is so highly emphasized in Finnish culture (2002). He discussed ale as a sacred/ritual drink, the social values of intoxication, alcohol as an instrument of social communication and exchange, intoxication as transgressing social boundaries, drink as the measure of man, and so on. He reached nine conclusions about Finnish attitudes toward

sacredness, social interaction and social power. For example, he claims, “Alcoholic beverages and intoxication were highly valued in both a social and an economic sense. The right to consume alcohol and become intoxicated was earned through one’s own labour contribution or the wealth one possessed” (2002, 172). His observations apply to many other cultures, including Chinese. In the past, alcohol was used to communicate with deities and gods as part of many Shamanic rituals and the Chinese idiom, “No liquor, no feast” (無酒不成席), indicates that it remains the catalyst of Chinese weddings as well as other lively and joyful folk events.

Chinese Nao Culture and Connections to Carnavalesque Life

When Chinese scholars relate Chinese Nao culture to carnival, they are not referring to the Western carnival held before Lent but specifically to the Chinese concept of carnival. The Chinese do not have a custom called “carnival” that they practise at a particular time of the year. Instead, as described earlier, they engage in forms of Nao culture as part of a practical philosophy of life; in other words, they engage in a “carnivalistic life” (Bakhtin 1963). According to Chinese philosopher Yu-lan Fung, the Chinese “have not had much concern with religion because they have had so much concern with philosophy. They are not religious because they are philosophical. In philosophy they satisfy their craving for what is beyond the present actual world. In philosophy also they have the super-moral values expressed and appreciated, and in living according to philosophy these super-moral values are experienced” ([1948] 2018, 43). This suggests that in China, a philosophy of life (or “living according to philosophy”) based on Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, often shaped beliefs concerning moral virtues or the existence of an afterlife. Greenhill’s observations concerning Canadian shivarees are relevant here. Greenhill notes that “shivarees were - and where they are practised, still are - very much a part of everyday life, not extraordinary events. They were made to fit into the cycles of

sociability, house-visiting, and biological, social, and cultural reproduction that community members deal with daily” (2010, 174).

The meaning of carnival in English and French does not exist in the Chinese context. As with humour which is transliterated as “Youmo,” carnival is translated as “Kuanghuan Festival” (狂歡節) in Mandarin Chinese and transliterated as “Jianianhua” (嘉年華) in Cantonese, to indicate the festive celebrations of modern carnivals worldwide. However, Kuanghuan (狂歡) is used in many other contexts, for example to describe a shopping frenzy. Hence, carnival in Chinese does not refer to a particular festival but becomes a popular term to indicate an atmosphere of revelry, the mindset of craze and a state of mania and extremity. As a signature of Chinese folk culture, Nao expresses outwardly as carnival. Literature and drama scholars, as well as historians, have a long tradition of studying Nao culture through Bakhtin’s theories of carnival (Cai 2004; Chen 2011; Luo 2014; Wang 2012; Weng 2008, 2010; Zhang 2010; Zhao 1996, 2002; Zheng 2004). Scholars including Shiyu Zhao, Chuanyin Zheng and Minhua Weng have explored the connections between carnival and Chinese stage performances, such as folk dramas and theatres. However, these works mainly draw on medieval play scripts and texts that lack any ethnographic context. Although they apply Bakhtin’s theories to the feature of Nao in Chinese folk dramas, more work remains to be done. To date neither Nao culture nor Chinese carnival have been sufficiently studied by Chinese scholars.

Chinese folklorists have drawn a connection between carnival and Chinese calendar festivals. Jingwen Zhong (鐘敬文) first applied carnival/Kuanghuan to Chinese folk festivals (2001). He argues that Chinese folk gatherings and public performances are Chinese expressions of carnival. Hence, in a broad sense, temple fairs, forms of folk theatre and market days are considered carnivalistic occasions. Following Zhong, Chinese folklorists started to relate Chinese

folk festivals to carnival and scholars have since suggested that the Lantern Festival (元宵节) is the closest to carnival (Chen 2016; Li 2015; Xiao 2015; Xv 2015; Ye 2015; Zhang 2012; Zheng 2004). As a living tradition, it is recognized as the most typical folk festival to show “Re” and “Nao” (Xiao 2002, 132). Yizhen Wang interprets four prosperities of “NaoRe” in the Lantern Festival based on official historical records from the Sui Dynasty (《隋书·柳彧传》) written by Wei Zheng (魏征 636AD). First, the Lantern Festival is not daily Renao but a carnivalesque festive Renao. Participants come from everywhere. It is called “filling up streets and calling on friends to play and travel” (充街塞陌, 聚戏朋游). It also subverts order; abnormal behaviours are allowed, such as “no need to ask classes and backgrounds; different genders are mixed” (无问贵贱, 男女混杂). Secondly, the soundscape and landscape of the Lantern Festival are full of sensationally stimulating colours and sounds. It includes deafening sounds from gongs and drums, laughter and talking (鸣鼓聒天的声之喧) as well as dazzling colours from magnificent fireworks, crackers and lanterns (燎炬照地的色之炫). Thirdly, the Lantern Festival entertains and eases people’s tensions and anxieties because of its NaoRe characteristics. For example, the festival is “regarding vulgarity as joyfulness and promoting obscenity as jokes” (以秽嫚为欢娱, 用鄙褻为笑乐). Finally, the NaoRe includes games, competitions, wrestling, boisterous parades and dramatic performances. Wei writes, “people are wearing beasts masks, men are cross-dressing like women, and circus, songs and dramas are performed” (人戴兽面, 男为女服, 倡优杂技) (Wei Zheng [636] 1997; Wang 2012, 85).

The above four properties of NaoRe that are present in the Lantern Festival illustrate some the similarities between Western carnival and the Chinese Lantern Festival. No matter Renao or NaoRe, the notion of Nao or “Kuanghai” (狂欢), is the main characteristic of the Lantern Festival. Therefore, as Wang notes, “the boisterous celebrations of the Lantern Festival

in the Sui Dynasty not only established the paradigm of later Lantern Festivals, but also integrated folk drama performances as routines of celebrations, and stressed ‘Nao and Re’ as keynotes of folk performances” (Wang 2012, 85).

Because the closest Western concept to Nao is carnival, approaching the analysis of Chinese “Nao culture” (闹文化) from the perspective of carnival is useful. Chinese Naodongfang illustrates all four characteristics of carnivalesque life Bakhtin identified in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* ([1963] 1984): free and familiar contact among people, eccentric behaviors, carnivalistic mésalliances and profanity.

Free and familiar contact among people

Bakhtin stresses that the familiarity of the marketplace ignores hierarchy and order. Here physical and intimate interactions are allowed outside of the usual imposed restrictions and regulations. He writes, “people who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square” ([1963] 1984, 123). This characteristic is reflected in the popular idea that “there is no order and seniority for three days of Naodongfang” (三天無大小). As with carnival, weddings bring together people into a communal space. Naodongfang familiarizes the bride and the groom’s family members, neighbours, clans and kin (Shang 2000, 86-87). Moreover, Naodongfang is not only an important ritual for newlyweds but also can be a carnival space for a whole community, especially during times when other kinds of entertainment were lacking (Shang 2000, 99). It parallels the Canadian shivaree described by Chester McMackin, an interviewee of Greenhill’s. McMackin stated, “It (the shivaree) meant an opportunity for the community to get together as a pleasant conspiracy directed to the newlyweds... All branches of religion, politics, moral views, and even conflicting other beliefs

were put to rest for the occasion” (2012). Similarly, Zhong argues that during Naodongfang conventional gender divisions between males and females lessen (Zhong 2001) and that this facilitates Chinese Nao culture and a carnivalistic space.

Free and familiar contact among people makes laughter possible. People who share a joking relationship are supposed to be close. For something to be laughable, it must be familiar and relevant to people’s lives. In return, laughter has the magic power to make people feel intimate. It can bring them together and give them the strength to face the world; terror is conquered by laughter (Bakhtin [1965] 1984, 336). Shanti Elliot builds on Bakhtin: “in carnival, laughter and excess push aside the seriousness and the hierarchies of ‘official’ life” (Elliot 1999). He argues, “the serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations, and always contain an element of fear and intimidation... Laughter, on the other hand, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations” (1999, 90). Freedom emerges in carnival. Nao culture confirms bonds through play, humor, and carnival. The mode of carnivalesque that Bakhtin saw expressed through playfulness and jokes (1984) is present. The laughter, associated with humor, that Gervais and Wilson indicated was a signal of play (Gervais and Wilson 2005), constitutes “part of a broader set of grotesque and carnivalesque aesthetics” (Majkowski 2015).

Eccentric behaviours

Secondly, Bakhtin writes, “the behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in noncarnival life, and thus from the vantage point of noncarnival life become eccentric and inappropriate” ([1963] 1984, 123). For example, in Chinese Naodongfang, unacceptable

behaviours are accepted without worrying about potential consequences. Someone who behaves normally in their daily life (noncarnival life) can behave abnormally in carnival life. Alessandro Falassi makes an insightful statement on this festive eccentricity: “As festival times, people do something they normally do not; they abstain from something they normally do; they carry to the extreme behaviors that are usually regulated by measure; they invert patterns of daily social life. Reversal, intensification, trespassing, and abstinence are the four cardinal points of festive behavior” (Falassi 1987, 3). For example, witnessing a father-in-law forcibly kiss his daughter-in-law would not be acceptable for most Chinese in their noncarnival lives, but “Pahui” can be overlooked during weddings or carnival time.

Carnivalistic *mésalliances*

Bakhtin describes carnivalistic *mésalliances* when he writes, “a free and familiar attitude spreads over everything: over all values, thoughts, phenomena, and things. All things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchical worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations...Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” ([1963] 1984, 123). Bakhtin refers to the meeting of two extremes that are unlikely to come together in noncarnival life but confront each other during carnival. Chinese philosophies integrate the meeting of two extremes. For example, the Middle Way in Confucianism is the encounter of two extremes. An old Chinese saying puts folklore in the same breath as the elite culture. “大雅大俗.” “雅” means elegance, indicating refined and elite cultures, and “俗” indicates vulgar lore and folk cultures. The saying goes: “extreme elegance becomes vulgar” or “people could see vulgarity from elite cultures.” This saying reflects that the

Chinese have the wisdom to integrate two extremes in the same breath that carnival does. When Naodongfang breaks down the differences of hierarchy and seniority that usually separate individuals, all people have the potential to be mocked. People of every age, class, race and cultural background can meet in the space of Naodongfang. Carnival thus can become a stage for common people. Some, who were usually overlooked, such as vagrants, transients, peddlers, unlicensed players, beggars and rat-catchers, became visible.

Reversal is a primary characteristic of carnival. In Ivanov's essay "The Semiotic Theory of Carnival as the Inversion of Bipolar Opposites" (1984), he compares Bakhtin's carnival to Turner's concept of "status reversal in rituals and the role of 'inferior' in carnival images" (1984, 12). Turner sheds light on liminality in rituals of status elevation and rituals of status reversal. He points out that rituals of status reversal are accompanied by "robust verbal and nonverbal behavior, in which inferiors revile and even physically maltreat superiors" (Turner 1969). People in inferior positions exercise ritual authority over their hierarchical superiors by mocking and verbally addressing superiors in obscenities. They "establish a hierarchy that resembles a parody of the normal hierarchical order of the superiors" (Turner 1969). This status of reversal supports Bakhtin's analysis of carnivalistic *mésalliances* as well as my analysis of Nao culture.

Profanity

According to Bakhtin, three distinct forms of humorous performances characterize carnival: "1. Ritual spectacles: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace. 2. Comic verbal compositions: parodies both oral and written, in Latin and in the vernacular. 3. Various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons" ([1965] 1984, 5). All three fit Arthur Berger's definition of humour that he argues dismantles sacredness and reverence through

ridiculing and joking behaviours. He claims, “humor is a force that respects nobody; nothing is too revered, too holy to be ridiculed, and nothing is out of boundaries as far as humorists are concerned. Humor sheds light on our darkest secrets, and thumbs its nose at the objects of our greatest reverence. Humorists parody, ridicule, and make fun of sex, religion, love, marriage, children, society, politics” (1993, 156). Similarly, Oring notes, “as joking relationships seemed a challenge to notions of solidary kinship relations, sexual reference and display, scatology, transvestism, burlesque, and other forms of coarse and unseemly expression seemed an affront to sacred belief and practice” (Oring 2008, 188). Dressing a groom as a woman and parading him down the street, seemingly against his will, can represent a kind of comic spectacle; ridiculously made-up parents-in-law and their funny dance are comical parodies.

During Naodongfang, curses, oaths and obscenities can be freely exchanged and help to liven up the atmosphere. Profanity can be pervasive as people joke around, use flirtatious expressions, curses and sexually suggestive talk, all of which are forbidden in everyday life. Naodongfang rhymes often contain sexual connotations and implications. Metaphoric semantics are frequently used in making these rhymes. For example, “at first we want to see the bride’s hands and arms. Her arms look like lotus’ roots. She will have a son of Zhuangyuan (champion in an imperial examination) when the roots sprout from the lotus. Secondly, we want to see the bride’s feet. Her feet look like water chestnuts. Thirdly, we want to see the bride’s waist. There is a fragrance bag hanging on her waist. If she doesn’t show it to us, we will pull it out by our hands” (Ma 1988, 138). In this rhyme, the primary purpose is to sexually badger the bride by emphasizing her hands, feet and waist and ,in the end, threatening that they will touch her if she refuses to satisfy their inquiries. Naodongfang supports Bakhtin’s observation that the use of profanity in carnival reflects an upgrading of the lower stratum of material body: “carnivalistic

blasphemies, a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringings down to earth, carnivalistic obscenities linked with the reproductive power of the earth and the body, carnivalistic parodies on sacred texts and sayings, etc.” ([1963] 1984, 123).

Part of the answer to my question as to why Naodongfang is practised in China today lies in its history. Naodongfang has been part of the folk culture for a long time. Furthermore, according to folk legend, it seems to generally have been regarded favorably. Theories of carnival and soundscape help to illuminate Nao culture as a carnivalesque and living philosophy that is embedded in Chinese daily life and to explain Naodongfang’s popularity. Economics also plays a significant role, however, and the next chapter explores economic considerations of Naodongfang.

Chapter Four:

The Economics of Naodongfang

This chapter discusses the economics behind Naodongfang. As a possible remnant of the ancient custom of grabbing marriage, Naodongfang is rooted in economic exchange. Recent modifications of wedding games, tamed, moulded and institutionalized by the members of the wedding industry for their benefit, speak to the continuing importance of economics. Drawing on my fieldwork, as well as accounts of other ethnographers, I describe pranks like blocking the wedding party and explore their underlying economic motivations. I connect today's wedding games first to the history of blocking wedding parties and grabbing marriages that were economic transactions and then consider the influence of the wedding industry that is shaping the games and their future.

Wedding Pranks in Exchange for Economic Benefits

Blocking actions during weddings have a long history and in China during earlier times, if a marriage was not considered an appropriate match, the groom risked immediate rejection when he came to pick up the bride. Over time, physical rejection and the violent aspects of grabbing marriage evolved into symbolic games and play. Today, the groom gathers his peers and conducts “gate crashing” or “grabbing the bride” (搶婚, Ye 2000). There the groom and groomsmen must try their best to satisfy any inquiries from the bride's side who, in turn, intentionally hinders them from picking up the bride easily. Generally, the groom is expected to bribe the bridesmaids and the bride's relatives with “red packets” (red envelopes containing money) in return for them removing any barriers. For most participants, the key purpose of “grabbing the bride” and “blocking the wedding cars” is to receive gifts and treats, which include

cash, liquor, cigarettes and candies. Interestingly, people often claim that the benefits exchanged during wedding games are symbolic. Rather than obtaining tangible gains, they aim to gain intangible ones, such as good luck adhered to the gifts. Although sometimes the amount of any benefit is too trivial to be seriously considered a real economic gain, the substance of economic exchange in wedding games is still significant.

In pre-1949 China, badgering the groom for rewards was a common activity. Zhisu Ma described several cases, including an example in Nanjing when the groom begged the master of the schedule and asked the bride's family to open the gate to let him in. Only after lengthy pleading, and distributing of red packets containing money to those present, was the gate opened. The front gate was just a start. More obstacles were waiting for him. He had to complete the "giant path of opening the door" (giving gifts such as hats and boots to the bride's younger brothers) and the "small path of opening the door" (distributing red packets to the bridesmaids). Then the bride sluggishly got up from the bed, took a shower, started to dress and put on her make-up (Ma 1988, 251). This contrasts with my experience of the norm in modern Chinese weddings where the bride generally prepares herself well before the groom arrives; her deference has become symbolic. Zhisu Ma also recorded a parody of "blocks and barriers" conducted by a group of bridesmaids in Guangdong Province. The bridesmaids closed the chamber door, kidnapped the bride and demanded tea and food in return for her release. The groom's side was forced to haggle and bargain with them (1988, 297).

In the Cantonese region, economic payment was part of an extended practice of teasing the groom called "treating the new son-in-law" (待新女婿). This took place three days after the wedding when the bridal couple went back to visit the bride's natal family (歸寧, or 回娘家). The bride's family members would prepare a grand feast for the groom. When people sat around

the table, female family members and friends tried their best to embarrass the groom. They asked difficult questions. If the groom failed to answer, or if the female attendees were not satisfied with his answers, they would discuss methods of punishing him (Ma 1988, 140). People from Huangpi area in Hubei Province (湖北黃陂) treated the groom harshly. For example, they fired off crackers when the groom stepped into the bride's natal family home. The groom was forced to cross passages full of smoke and flying bits of crackers and to kowtow (kneel down and touch his head on the floor) when he passed through every doorsill/threshold. Often pranksters put debris and pieces of porcelain under the carpet that he had to kneel on (Ma 1988, 141). In Hefei city, Anhui Province, when the groom reached the gate of a bride's family, the bride's acquaintances blocked the entrance. Although the groom could finally get into the house, people harassed him. They asked him to kowtow to all the relatives one by one that would make him desperately exhausted. When the groom sat down, female guests behind a folding screen gossiped, giggled and made fun of him. They observed his behaviours and reactions, criticizing him loudly so that he could hear. They cavilled him and laughed wildly. When he made a mistake, all the women would burst into riotous laughter. The groom felt so embarrassed that his face and ears became red, making the women laugh even more wildly (Ma 1988, 141).

Ma noted another occasion when contemporary Mongolians refused to open the door until the groom begged (Ma 1988, 233). They captured the groom as a prisoner and made him kneel and face the bride to simulate a court hearing occasion. After a long time, when the bride finally said, "it is enough, please stand up," they finally stopped (Hu [1922] 1986, 495). The bride's family and relatives wanted to show him the power. The subtext was that the groom had better not dare mistreat the bride or he would have her family to deal with. According to Zhisu Ma, the bride's younger brother should particularly be skilled at asking for red packets in

Shaanxi Province (1988, 208). For example, he may request to sleep with his sister on the excuse that he does not want to leave her. The groom has to coax him with a red packet (Zhu 2009, 49). Today during the process of blocking the door, small children (who are the bride's close family members such as younger brothers, cousins and nephews) will be given big red packets that generally contain 100 CNY (20 CAD) to 2000 CNY (400 CAD) depending on the wealth of the groom's family. In 2020 bridesmaids are given 50 to 200 CNY per person, depending on how many bridesmaids the bride invites and the wealth of the groom's family.

In Huajie Huang's paper on Naodongfang, published in 1934, he paid close attention to economic exchanges in wedding games. In Huang's hometown Guangdong (Canton) Province, if the newlyweds did not satisfy the tricksters' requirements, they negotiated penalties (Huang [1934] 1999, 195). Sometimes the penalties involved payments of fruits and pastries, sometimes they took the form of hosting banquets, and sometimes the couples needed to pay money or promise to sing songs the next day. The newlyweds would also bargain with the pranksters and if the bride was too shy to react, the bridesmaids would help her reply. The deadline for paying the penalty would be in three days when the bride visited her natal family. During that night, all penalties and punishments must be met, allowing guests to gather and amuse themselves for another full day (Huang [1934] 1999, 195). Sometimes, however, guests came up with unreasonable demands. Their goal was not to receive economic benefits but the chance to play obscene pranks on the couple. If the newlyweds rejected the economic penalties, it was a chance to force them to play games (Huang [1934] 1999, 204). If people's requests were too outrageous, the couple and their families would get angry and sometimes hold lasting grudges against those people (Huang [1934] 1999, 209).

Many wedding customs involve economic exchanges. “Stealing in the bridal chamber” (偷房) has similar functions to blocking wedding parties. Small pieces of clothing may be stolen during Naodongfang, and then the next day, the newlyweds have to redeem them by treating guests to a banquet or pastries. Xianfang Sun (孫鹹方)’s unpublished thesis on Naodongfang describes such an occasion in Hua County, Shaanxi Province (陝西華縣). When the newly married couple fell asleep, sisters of the groom snuck into the bedroom. They stole the bride’s clothes that they kept until the next day. When the bride traded them with candies or other treats, the clothing was finally returned (Sun 1930, 27, as quoted in Shang 2000, 197). Many examples took place in Zhejiang Province. In Wuyi, Zhejiang Province (浙江武義), people stole many things, including wedding gowns, pillows, clothes, comforters and blankets. The next day, they asked for money from the bride to buy candies. The smallest amount of candies would be five kilograms and the largest reached twenty-five kilograms. Once they got the money for buying candies, they returned these articles (Sun 1930, 56, as quoted in Shang 2000, 205).

Similarly, Zhisu Ma recorded this custom in Yongkang region, Zhejiang Province (浙江永康). People there tried to steal the newlyweds’ property. During the second night of the wedding, guests made the couple drunk that they would sleep deeply. Then they picked the lock and snuck into the bridal chamber to mess up the newlywed’s wardrobe. They stole and hid some items of clothing. Then they lit firecrackers to wake up the couple suddenly. Everyone burst into cheers and celebrated their success in stealing the couple’s belongings. The following day, they traded the stolen items for pastries provided by the bride and her family. Local customary rules determined how many pieces of pastries were traded for one pair of socks and how many pastries were traded in return for a piece of clothing (Ma 1988, 138).

In Shanghai, participants in Naodongfang took off the bride's shoes and exchanged them for candies and pastries (Hu [1922] 1986, 210). In Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, before 1949, during the day of Naodongfang, the bride needed to hide her menstruation supplies because Naodongfang participants would intentionally look for them and make fun of her. Brides in Nanchang were more afraid of "stealing in the chamber" than "pranks in the chamber" because their underwear could be stolen and shown publicly in the street. The newly married couple had to treat pranksters to a banquet to end the pranks (Sun 1930, 59, as quoted in Shang 2000, 203). The custom of "eavesdropping outside the bridal chamber" (聽房) also has economic benefits. Eavesdroppers are dispatched or volunteer to listen for any sounds and conversation from the newlyweds during the wedding night. During Salar Muslims' weddings, in Xunhua, Qinghai Province, the custom of "dingna" vividly shows "eavesdropping outside the bedroom" and its economic dimensions:

The bride gives money to this person, who later shares it equally with other females of the groom's side... The groom persuades the escorts to leave and, in most cases, he must bribe them to do so. If his persuasion is unsuccessful, the groom must wait to sleep with the bride the following night. When the new couple do spend the first night together alone, young males of the groom's village listen outside their room. Some joke in low tones about the activity, real or imagined, inside. If one of the young men is married, he may instruct the new couple through the window. The young men do not leave unless the couple gives them money. The next day, in an exaggerated way, those who listened tell other young male villagers about what they heard that night. This is called dingna (Ma et al. 1999, 62).

In the 21st century, sedan chair lifters have been replaced by wedding car drivers. Because blocking a moving vehicle is always dangerous, people often make a plan in advance. Sometimes they will block the car when it slows down for signal lights or gets close to the destination. If drivers have not been well treated and rewarded with cigarettes and gifts, they may stop in the middle of the journey and drag out the wedding schedule. Therefore, the masters who manage money and gifts (掛賬先生、托盤先生) need to negotiate with them (Ma 1988, 268) to guarantee

the schedule will not be disrupted. During my fieldwork, Daxiong, who was holding two packages of cigarettes in his hand, played the role of the master who manages money and gifts for Tian's wedding (see fig. 39). In the middle of the road, he negotiated with a boy who was blocking the car. Behind them, a group of young men can be seen blocking participants.



Figure 39 A group of young men blocking the wedding party

Past records in Jiangxi and Jiangsu Provinces show that people such as dressmakers, carpenters, chefs, silversmith, hairdressers and bridesmaids came to ask for Lishi (利事) during the wedding day (Yan 2016, 28; Zhu 2009, 49). Similarly, in order to avoid strikes from the wedding car drivers, concierges, housekeepers and doorkeepers, the master of the schedule must prepare enough gifts beforehand to reward these people (打點 Shang 2000, 69). My interviewee Hongtao Gao, who is an experienced wedding host in Xi'an, described the situation:

Many places have the tradition of blocking the wedding party. You need a manager (总管) to deal with them (打點). When you pick up a bride in Xi'an, you need to deal with many people, like clean-keeping staff and security personnel in the neighbourhood. When the security staff see your wedding cars are driving out of the neighbourhood in a line, they intentionally close the gate. You need to pass candies, cigarettes and red packets first. They will say like this, "we have a team leader and some other colleagues." Then you need to satisfy all of them. You lit firecrackers, right? The

chippings were left on the ground. Cleaning staff stand in a line with hands held together. You need to give them candies and red packets. In Xi'an, that is the custom. There is no way that you can pick up a bride so easily. Unless you are picking up brides from some newly build estate neighbourhoods. Those staff are enthusiastic about preparing for red carpets and applauding collectively in two lines for your arrival. New estate personnel are good at services like this. However, in old neighbourhoods, such as those reformed from Chengzhongcun (villages in cities), residents are mainly composed of villagers. They are extremely good at pranking and blocking the wedding party. They will ask for gifts when you go in and ask once again when you go out. But in the high-end estate communities, the personnel do not dare to do that. However, you still need to give them red packets and cigarettes as etiquette. Each red packet includes five to ten CNY (one to two CAD), plus one pack of cigarettes (Gao 2017).

Gao continues to describe his experiences of how people ask for gifts by blocking the wedding party:

Some people will tie paper cups to a red thread. The red thread will wrap your wedding car, and they put paper cups under the wheels of your car. The belief is that your car should not squeeze these cups. If your car passes on the cups, that shows disrespect to the neighbours. Their purpose is red packets. Then the chief manager needs to serve cigarettes, candies and red packets to them. When I hosted a wedding, the groom's father had a friend who is an unemployed idler. He closed the main iron gate. I inquired to him, "our wedding needs to start on time at 12 o'clock. There is a ritual waiting for us." He replied, "this is not your business (in Shaanxi dialect)." Then I replied, "alright" and I approached the manager to deal with him. He asked for 1,000 CNY (200 CAD). Just for one obstacle, 1,000!!! They negotiated and finally he got 600 CNY, just for one gate.

Last time in Zhangba Hotel, I was impressed by the bride's aunt. I don't know where she came from. It seemed like she had never seen money before, and she was pretty greedy. She hid one wedding shoe in her bag. People had looked for that shoe for half an hour and realized that shoe was in her bag. The groom gave her 200 CNY. She was not satisfied. She asked for 1,600 CNY (320 CAD). Aya, one piece of shoe worth 1,600? I cannot believe that she really raised that idea without shame. We bargained and bargained. Finally, the bride got pissed off and jumped on the ground from the bed. She wore her old shoes and said, "let's go." The aunt was so embarrassed, but she still insisted on that price. Finally, an extra 600 CNY was given to her to finish this parody. She got 800 CNY for one shoe (Gao 2017).

Today some people still practise the custom of "dispersing beans and grains" (撒谷豆) depicted by Wu Zimu in the Song Dynasty around 800 years ago: "The master of the schedule holds a flower bucket and disperses five types of grains, beans, candies and pastries in front of the entrance. Children compete to pick up these gifts. This custom is called 'Dispersing beans and

grains' (撒谷豆)". The pictures below were taken at weddings I observed in Binhai City, Shandong Province, on August 23, 2017 (see fig. 40) and in Tongren City, Guizhou Province, on September 30, 2017 (see fig. 41). The tradition is practised in basically the same way across China from south to north.



Figure 40 Dispersing and picking up gifts in Shandong Province



Figure 41 Dispersing and picking up gifts in Guizhou Province

During my cousin's wedding in 2015 in a small village in Shaanxi Province, both sides of the wedding families set up many obstructions. Holding a bucket of red packets, candies and small gifts, the groom's elder sister sat on the front seat of the lead wedding car. Her role was

crucial because she needed to disperse a certain number of gifts from the car window to participants who were creating the last blockage. When people swarmed to grab and pick up the gifts that dropped on the ground, wedding cars passed quickly. Contrary to my expectation, not only were children and young people rushing to pick up gifts, but many seniors also tried their best to grab as many gifts as they could (see fig. 42). I was impressed by one of my aunts-in-law who frantically grabbed anything on the ground. It seemed to me that these gifts would be too trivial for adults to make an effort since they consisted of small amounts of money, candies that are hard on the teeth and cheap chocolates. But the people present were very keen on these gifts, no matter how modest. Perhaps they were attractive because of the good luck attached to



them. Participants engaging in these grabbing actions become symbolically rich rather than receive any significant economic benefits.

Huipeng Shang did fieldwork in West Village in Henan Province for many years. This area is located in Central China, where agriculture is the main occupation and the Han Chinese are widespread. He described the “ritual of kowtow” (磕頭禮) in West Village, which signified local weddings’ economic benefits. When the newlyweds practised the ritual of kowtow to seniors, such as aunts and uncles, the elders were supposed to reward them with red packets. For example, the master of ceremonies introduced all relatives one by one, from the closest to the

farthest concerning kinship, to the couple. They were supposed to kowtow or at least bow to their senior relatives. When the wedding master called on a particular senior, he or she needed to stand out, receive a kowtow from the couple and give them money in return. Generally, the wedding master shouted out their generational titles, such as, “the third uncle from XXX village gives XXX Yuan (CNY), kowtow now.” However, occasions of “kowtow” were also full of bantering. The audience sometimes would yell loudly, “Aya, only thirty Yuan, pick more bills from your pocket, please.” This pressure drove the senior relatives to increase the amount of money they planned to give. Undoubtedly people would gossip about who had given what amount of money for whose wedding. Finally, when the bride kowtowed to the seniors, young boys would sometimes push her head towards the ground or pull her legs out to make her fall on the ground (Shang 2000, 34).

The ritual of kowtow is affiliated to a custom called “change the way of calling/referring (改口).” This relates to the moment when the couple changes the way of referring to each other’s parents and clan members. For example, when the bride moves from calling the groom’s parents “uncle and aunty” to “father and mother,” she receives a big red packet. Generally, this packet contains at least 10,000 CNY (2,000 CAD). There is a complicated system to refer people in China, especially in distinguishing maternal and paternal clan members. For example, aunts and uncles in a general American way will be replaced by Gugu (sisters of the father), Yiyi (sisters of the mother), Jiujiu (brothers of the mother) and Shushu (brothers of the father). Hence, “changing the way of calling/referring” is an essential procedure and a typical ritual for newlyweds to become familiar with each other’s relatives and kin.

According to the scene shown in Figure 43, during the procedure of “picking up the bride” in Binhai City, Shandong Province, the bride’s family members all held up red packets to

“seduce” and convince the groom to change the way he referred to them (改口), from general terms to kinship terms. It highlights the Chinese spirit of collectivity and the strong sentimental bonds among kin and clans in Chinese culture. In this way, the groom symbolically moved from an outsider to an insider; he obtained admission and the support of his wife’s clan members.

Figure 43 vividly portrays a touching Chinese wedding scene. I was moved to tears when I saw so many big smiles and such happiness.



Figure 43 Clan members holding up red packets to trade with the couple to change ways of referring to them (改口)

In some areas of Southern China, such as Guizhou Province, Guangxi Province and Hubei Province, members of minority groups sometimes improvise folksongs by using given tunes, vernacular languages and ballad patterns (Shang 2000, 66). For example, the Yao people in Guangxi Province would gather about twenty proficient singers and the singing contest could last over twelve hours (Chen [1935] 1990; Zhang 1935). Singing duets (對歌) is widespread among the Tujia in Hubei Province, the She, the Maonan (Shang 2000, 66, 100) and the Buyi (Feng 1988, 174). Nantong city, Jiangsu Province, is known for “嗨嫁號子,” a type of vernacular

choir for singing during weddings (Yan 2016, 28). In the past, in He County (賀縣) of Guangxi Province, people voluntarily joined Naodongfang. The content of songs included the hospitality of the wedding families, the decoration of the bridal chamber and local traditions. People sang from evening until deep in the night, and until the dawn. When wedding families rewarded singers with big red packets, they left the party after singing a farewell song. The Naodongfang drama then ended with loud sounds of crackers (Zhu 2009, 58).

When I was a participant observer at a wedding in Gaopo County, Guizhou Province, wedding goers, who were of Miao descent, practised a custom called “liquor of blocking the gate” (攔門酒). The groom’s family home entrance was blocked by a fence made of a long red rod and blue plastic stools. Next to the fence was a table covered with gifts, drinks and treats. Two teams of female singers wore different sets of costumes and stood on each side of the fence. They were hired and represented each side of the wedding families. Facing their opponents, the singers exchanged folksongs in an antiphonal style



Figure 44 The custom of “Liquor of Blocking the Gate” (攔門酒)

(see fig. 44). The bride actually had been sitting in the groom's house for a long time and no one really was blocked by the fence. The custom of exchanging folksongs is maintained and practised purely as a symbolic ritual rather than a real competition.

In line with the rapid development of the economy and technology in China, electronic payment has become commonplace in daily life. Thus, the most technologically advanced method of receiving red packets at weddings is to let the groom scan the QR code of Alipay on your smartphone (Gao 2017). Holding a smartphone, the groom scanned the QR codes to bribe the gatekeepers from the bride's side and begged them to let him in (see fig. 45)¹. Other times people printed out the QR code beforehand for the groom to scan. Generally, the amount of gift money needs to be negotiated and paid immediately by phone on the spot. This transition has made the economic merit more visible than in the past when people exchanged money hidden inside paper-made red packets. People also have lost the pleasure of guessing and secretly opening the red packet to check how much money they got. Yet another development is the WeChat payment function called "Red Packets." Sometimes, people add the groom to a chat group which is composed of



Figure 45 Electronic red packages paid by smart phones

¹ Photos were obtained from webpages of *Nanfang Caijingwang* and *Shijue Zhongguo*. Accessed July 25th, 2018. <http://www.sfccn.com/2018/11-8/2MMDE0NjlfMTQ1Njg2MA.html>
<https://item.btime.com/31dn7p6kl538um86sjn748l6rj0?from=haoz1t1p1#2>

bridesmaids and people who ask for red packets. When the groom sends a digital red packet to the group, all members in the group can “grab” the red packet and randomly share a certain amount of money (Gao 2017).

Although all types of breaking through barriers during weddings are disguised as parodies and performances today, there is no guarantee that they do not result in violence. Sometimes, under the surface of playful events and mock performances, the violence in weddings may indicate real disagreements and conflicts between the two families. Occasionally the two families have not yet reached an agreement on the dowry and bride-price, and they plan to negotiate it on the wedding day. The groom’s party will forcibly intrude into the bride’s house with strength and violently break through the barriers, show their arrogance and absolute power to the bride’s side, and terminate the stalled negotiations. The bride’s side has no strength to stop and has to accept it. My interviewee Gao has hosted over 1,000 weddings in Xi’an. He had witnessed several cases that the groom’s side used force to solve the obstacles from the bride’s side.

If the groom’s team comprises soldiers or people from sport’s college, they will smash the gate directly, and the gate opens. I also cannot control that kind of occasion. No games are certainly needed because all obstacles have been resolved in this way... I remembered one time in Huayin County, the bride’s natal family has a house with a yard. The bride’s room did not have a metal fence on the window, but only gauze. The lads of the groom grabbed the gauze and threw it away. Then one guy jumped into the room through the window. He opened the door and all lads rushed in. There was a lady who might be the bride’s aunt. She kept asking for red packets from the groom. However, there were so many lads around. They lifted the aunt by four limbs and dropped her on the stool ten times. I cannot control the occasion. The aunt almost cried, but she kept asking for red packets. Once again, they lifted her and continued dropping her on the stool. Finally, she gave up. That wedding only consumed six red packets in total from the groom’s side (Gao 2017).

In 2018, a short video of “gate crashing” showed a groomsman holding a metal hammer covered with red paper violently breaking the lock and glass on the gate of the bride’s natal family home in Shenzhen. Bridesmaids and photographers were severely hurt by shattering glass (see fig.

46).² Although violently breaking doors or other barriers during weddings is rare, this case was depicted as being representative of overwhelming power on the groom's side.



Figure 46 Using a metal hammer, a groomsman violently smashes the lock and glasses of the front gate at the bride's natal family home

Moreover, the line between a violent grabbing marriage and mock performance is sometimes obscure. Historically, women's voices and feelings have been omitted in scholarly analysis, making the underlying meanings of customs like grabbing marriage ambiguous. For example, whether or not the female protagonist was willing to be grabbed, is missing in these texts. Did she make an agreement with the groom to get married in this way? Was it possible that she did not want to marry him, and the mock grabbing event became an actual kidnapping? Consider the above accident of breaking the front gate of the bride's natal family home with a metal hammer. Was it play? Parody? A wedding game? Or a real threat? We do not know the bride's thoughts and the bridesmaids' attitudes, who were badly hurt by the shattered glass. That said, it is often difficult to judge whether a wedding accident is a fake show or a real conflict because we lack the participants' testimonies, particularly the female ones, to make a valid assessment.

Recent news coverage underscored the continuing relevance of economics to wedding games. According to a news report, on October 9, 2020, two elderly people who constantly

² Photos were obtained from the webpage of *Wangyi Xinwen*. Accessed April 20, 2018. <http://news.163.com/17/1121/15/D3PAKORB00018AOR.html>.

blocked wedding parties were arrested by local police and received administrative detention for fifteen days. The “Golden Week” holiday in October is a popular time to hold weddings. A group of older adults, including both men and women, organized and acted as a team, constantly blocked wedding car teams in many places in China. People believe that they are a professional and organized group and responsible for obstructing wedding parties in different areas of a city. These elders, who were not acquainted with wedding families at all, asked for big red packets like 100 CNY and 200 CNY. If they were not satisfied, they would insist until their demands were met. In Shandong Province, these old people are regarded as rascals and beggars, and sometimes they sit in front of hotels’ elevators pretending to be disabled. Similar cases took place in Zhejiang Province in 2019 and in Anhui Province in 2018; in the latter situation, the offenders were detained for a couple of days by the local police (Guanchazhewang 2020). Considering that asking for red packets and gifts during weddings might be the only source of income for these elderly people, the economic dynamics behind the custom deserve much more attention.

Before leaving the discussion of the importance of economic exchange to contemporary weddings, it is worth noting that other kinds of economic exchanges may also be present. These include bride’s price, betrothal money and guests’ present money; all can involve large amounts of money and are embedded in complicated social dynamics. Although these are beyond the scope of this thesis, it is perhaps useful to include a brief explanation of bride-price in Chinese marriages. The bride-price given by the groom’s family to the bride’s family may reach 200,000 CNY (40,000 CAD) (Yuan 2018). Many rural bachelors cannot get married because their families cannot afford this large amount of money. This custom is still prevalent in parts of China because of its economic functions. For example, the money families gain from their

daughters will be used to pay the bride-prices for their sons. If their daughters cannot bring in enough money, their sons cannot get married. This scheme shows how cash flows in the marriage market.

The high cost of bride's prices has been a significant issue in China and the government has issued policies to change the situation nationwide. For example, they assigned fifteen areas as the "Wedding Customs Experimental Areas" (Meirijingjixinwen 2021). In these areas, local governments are directed to try their best to regulate unreasonable bride-prices and "uncivilized" wedding customs, including Naodongfang. Many Chinese believe that paying high bride-prices is the result of introducing market economy because any bride-price was strictly forbidden during Mao's regime. Moreover, high bride-prices are also a consequence of a gender imbalance in the population after the one-child policy. To lessen issues related to an aging population, the communist party issued the three-child policy on May 31, 2021. All in all, the socioeconomics regarding Chinese marriages are complicated and lie outside this study that focuses only on the small amounts of gift money exchanged during wedding games.

Naodongfang as Economic Exchange in Minority Ethnic Groups

The ancient Chinese observed that "rich people made marriages by paying a dowry and bride price; poor people obtained wives by stealing and elopement" (婚禮富家厚納聘，貧者竊妻去) (*New Book of Tang* 《新唐書》 Song et al. 1060; Ye & Wu 2000, 17). This old saying signifies that marriage has been formalized by economic exchanges from early history; grabbing marriages without dowries and matchmakers were regarded improper and not acceptable in ancient China. Thus, the ancient Chinese noticed that grabbing marriage was practised in remote areas bordering central China in either a realistic or a parodic way. In the Song Dynasty, the

famous poet Lu You (陸遊 1125-1210) recorded a mock grabbing marriage of Miao people³:

“The marriage is made by a secret appointment. After making a date, they waited for the girl alongside a road, captured and tied her, then took her home. The girl tried her best to yell and scream for rescue; however, all knew that these were dramatic performances” (Ye & Wu 2000, 18). In the Qing Dynasty, *Dongchuanfu Record* (《東川府誌》) described Yi people’s grabbing marriage, as follows:

The bride-price was negotiated through silver, and the dowry was determined by cattle and horses. The glib tongues of matchmakers decided the price. Hence, poor men had difficulty getting married. When Yi people held weddings, preparations started three days ahead. They took axes and cut pines. They used these pines to build a small cabin for the bride. Dozens of vats of water after washing the rice were displayed next to the cabin. They gathered tribes and relatives to guard the cabin by holding weapons and gourd ladles. The groom and his relatives wore new clothes, covered their faces, rode horses, took weapons and loudly invaded the village. Two families battled fiercely. The groom intruded into the cabin and kidnapped the bride on his horseback and fled. The parents of the bride swung weapons and poured the water after washing rice⁴ towards the groom. They yelled and called upon neighbours and relatives to chase the groom. However, the bride’s relatives failed to give chase, so they came back with resentment. The bride pretended to escape from the horseback three times, and the groom took her back on horseback three times. Finally, all people were happy with her reactions and praised her as an authentic Yi descendent (according to Yi morals of integrity and fidelity) ([1761] 1908).

Like early anthropologists headed to islands and jungles to investigate isolated tribes, early Chinese researchers studied ethnic minority groups in south and west China. Based on early ethnographies on Chinese minority ethnic groups, scholars have noticed the significant switch from actual grabbing marriages to wedding games and parodies and have linked the phenomenon of obstructing the passage of wedding parties in modern China, to earlier forms of marriage by

³ The Miao live primarily in southern China’s mountains, in the provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangxi, Guangdong and Hainan. Some sub-groups of the Miao, most notably the Hmong people, have outward migrated into Southeast Asia (Burma, northern Vietnam, Laos and Thailand) starting in the 18th century. According to the 2000 census, the number of Miao in China was estimated to be about 9.6 million. Following the communist takeover of Laos in 1975, a large group of Hmong refugees resettled in several Western nations, mainly in the United States, France and Australia.

⁴ The water after washing the rice has magic power because rice is believed auspicious and sacred among minority groups in South China.

capture (Ye & Wu 2000) and matriarchal society (Ma 1988: 140). Ye and Wu's book provides rich ethnographical resources on grabbing marriages. For example, the custom that the bride's side banter and teases the groom and makes him feel embarrassed is recorded among the Pumi, A'chang, Tu, Yao and Yi ethnic groups (Ye & Wu 2000, 10, 21). The fleeing and chasing actions must be performed three times as a routine in the Yao ethnic group (Ye & Wu 2000, 161). In the Naxi ethnic group, until the groom bribes the bride's side with a large number of silver coins, people beat, pour water and scatter sand on the groom's party (Ye & Wu 2000, 71). Dai people⁵ disperse copper coins on the ground to stop the bride's party from chasing the groom. Once the bride's party stops to pick up the coins, the groom successfully captures the bride and leaves (Ye & Wu 2000, 129). Among the Dai people, small children comprise a "children's block." The groom needs to distribute some candies and money to them. After this, a group of women waits for him. In return for mocking the groom, these women are rewarded with gifts and money. Sometimes young adolescents tie their belts, rope and fabric to make a barricade, and they ask for candies and gifts in exchange for letting the groom pass. Performances, such as singing and dancing, are required to pass (Ye & Wu 2000, 140, 144).

In Yi ethnic groups in Yunnan Province, the groom invites three men to join his party, two of whom are referred to as "the men who capture the bride" in the Yi language. These men will be attacked with water, rods, beatings and curses from women on the bride's side (Song & Li & Du 1983, 243). Similarly, the Dong people⁶ practise a custom known as "stealing

⁵ The Dai people refers to several Tai speaking ethnic groups living in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture and the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture of China's Yunnan Province. By extension, the term can apply to groups in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar when Dai is used to mean specifically Tai Yai, Lue, Chinese Shan, Tai Dam, Tai Khao or even Tai in general. The population of Tai people in Myanmar is over six million and in Mainland China is over one million.

⁶ The Kam people are officially known in China as Dong people. They are famous for their native-bred Kam Sweet Rice (Chinese: 香禾糯), carpentry skills and unique architecture, in particular a form of covered bridge known as the "wind and rain bridge" (Chinese: 風雨橋). The Kam people live mostly in eastern Guizhou, Western Hunan and northern Guangxi in China. Small pockets of Kam speakers are found in Tuyen Quang Province in Vietnam.

marriage.” After making an appointment with the bride’s family, the groom will “ta” (“pick up or elope,” a transitive verb in the Dong language) the bride with his “gou” (“lads or pals” in the Dong language). The gou’s mission is to guarantee the safety of the groom and help him deliver the betrothal gifts. They must bear abuse from the bride’s side, including having their faces smeared with black ash and mud and being hit by rocks. In the Longsheng Dong (龍勝侗) branch, the “gou” needs to prepare “xuesai” (tea soup with grains and pig intestines) for the women. At other times the gou can be lifted in the air and swung back and forth by the women (Qin 1990, 154).

According to Ye and Wu, the participants in marriage by capture can be divided into two opposing groups: grabbing and anti-grabbing. The groom’s team members are his friends and relatives, and mainly males. The bride’s side is composed of her friends and relatives. The grabbing group attacks, and the anti-grabbing group defends (2000, 139). It is similar to nowadays pre-wedding games session, groomsmen grab, and bridesmaids defend (see Chapter Two). Ye and Wu suggest reading the conflict as a battle between matriarchy and patriarchy (2000, 100). According to Qin, the Dong people’s custom of grabbing marriage evolved through three phases. He believes it originated in the actual practice of abducting women from other tribes for marriages. It later became an ambiguous intertwining of actual abducting actions and a half real and half performed kidnapping. In its most recent incarnation, the custom evolved to symbolic and parodic capturing events (Qin 1990, 155). It is possible that Qin’s observations on the development of grabbing marriages applies to most Chinese groups.

Taiwanese scholar Guojun Chen offers several explanations for mock grabbing marriages: “Perhaps they want to test the men’s courage and acuteness. Perhaps people admire the virgins who were captured before, and they simulate them. Or the girl’s natal family feels sad

about their loss; hence, they set up blocks and barriers. Or the girl wants to show her fidelity and virginity by pretending not to be taken too easily. Or there is a folk saying that the simulation of conflicts can purify and exorcize evil elements of the bride” (Chen 1977, 140). Ye and Wu disagree with these interpretations (2000, 198). Instead, their position is that the custom reflects women’s inferior status compared to men’s. Historically women were the property of tribes; it was in the tribe’s best interest not to allow their communal property to run off. In essence, grabbing marriages are expressions of disagreements about mercenary marriages (2000, 191). Although when the groom’s party arrives at the bride’s family home, the groom’s side selects an articulate person to negotiate with the bride’s side, the necessary procedure of bargaining and Q&A session indicate that women have been seen as goods and objects for exchange (2000, 210). That is to say, wives are exchanged or purchased, not loved.

On the other hand, Ye and Wu argue that mock grabbing marriages may reflect fewer arranged marriages and a greater tolerance for romantic love. They point to the Han Chinese example for whom every marriage has a price (2000, 172). On many occasions, the bride’s parents may not agree with the proposed marriage because both families have not mutually agreed upon a bride-price. In these cases, the groom may get the consent of only the bride. Once he has successfully grabbed her, her parents have no choice but to accept the deal. Alternatively, the bride-price might be too high and out of reach for many grooms. A successful grabbing marriage depends on the bride’s natal family reaching a compromise by accepting a lower or even zero bride-price. Even though bargaining sometimes continues after the performance, the completed grabbing event indicates that the bride’s parents have lost their advantage (2000, 78, 84, 91). Any belated bargaining and quarrelling initiated by the bride’s family is generally a smoke screen to hide their embarrassment at accepting a bride-price less than they hoped for

(2000, 175). Mercenary marriages absolutely hinder free love, but mock grabbing marriages somehow promote free love.

Historical Evidence of Blocking Wedding Parties for Economic Exchange

In the past, the most direct benefit of blocking carriages and hindering wedding parties was an economic one.⁷ As discussed in Chapter Three, the custom of “blocking wedding carriages” (障車) was popular in the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The *Chinese Encyclopedia of Etymology* (《辭源》) explains the term as follows: “when Tang people held weddings, crowds waited for the wedding troops and they blocked streets and doors. When the wedding carriage came, it cannot pass. This custom was called blocking carriages. Hence, there were proses and verses made to accompany this custom. Most of them are blessings and congratulatory sayings” (1931). In the Tang Dynasty, Left Silangzhong (左司郎中 the name of an official rank) Tang Shao (唐紹) proposed to the emperor to forbid the custom of “blocking wedding carriages” (712AD):

Wedding ceremonies and rituals should follow the *Six Etiquettes*; that is why marriages and weddings should be reported to clan temples and seniors. The bride is supposed to be delivered at dusk and greet her parents-in-law and seniors in the morning. However, some obscene and vulgar peasants will stop wedding parties and carriages on their way to pick up the bride for the groom’s family. They ask for food and drinks for frivolity. Recently, the custom has become more and more popular and even with aristocrats. They gather together and play music, stop the wedding party and block their passage. The path is blocked for a long time, and wedding schedules are delayed. Expenses that attribute to these people are over 10,000 (Tang Dynasty

⁷ There were debates among early theorists about whether or not play could be economically productive. In his 1958 masterpiece *Men, Play and Games* (English translation in 1961), Roger Caillois insisted that play “creates no wealth or goods, thus differing from work or art” ([1961] 2001, 5). He emphasized that “play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money for the purchase of gambling equipment or eventually to pay for the establishment” ([1961] 2001, 5). Caillois expanded Huizinga’s views of play as superfluous (unproductive) and claimed that “play [is] denuded of all material interest.” In order to include bets and games of chance that end in material wealth, Caillois emphasized that “property is **exchanged**, but no goods are produced” during play ([1961] 2001, 5). Hence, he recognized that economic behaviours exist in play and games. This statement of Caillois coincides with my analysis of economic exchange in Chinese wedding games.

currency). The expenses to satisfy these people even exceed the expenses of betrothal presents and dowries. Even though the occasion is full of songs and dances, laughter and chatting, it is of no help to the marriage. This custom disturbs social order, impairs finances and should be restricted. It does not fit into the etiquette that nobles should abide by. I propose that people who are participating in blocking wedding carriages must be punished. People who have warrantors should list their names in the crime book. People who do not have warrantors need to be beaten 60 times and then convicted (Zhou [1930] 2011, 44; Zhu 2009, 13).⁸

While Tang Shao was not happy to see the custom of “blocking wedding carriages” continue, the tradition of composing prose and verse about it became popular among the aristocratic classes and then spread to lower economic levels. Before the Tang Dynasty, there were no verses about “blocking wedding carriages.” It was just the hustle and bustle of the crowds. During the Tang Dynasty, a new literary genre developed to congratulate newlyweds and their families. This genre was called “prose and verses about blocking carriages” (障車文). Having been practised by both the aristocracy and the commoners, the tradition developed in two directions. The first direction served intellectuals and aristocrats and represented “elegant culture” (雅文化). During the preparation of the weddings, aristocratic families invited (or hired) famous poets, literati and scholars to write prose about blocking wedding carriage. These proses would be recited at weddings to show off the wedding families’ high level of literacy and decency⁹. Sikongtu (司空圖), wrote “Prose about Blocking Carriage” and this piece was included in the *Full Collection of Tang Literature* (《全唐文》). The work was well polished; its main body emphasized how

⁸ The original text in Chinese: 又士庶親迎之儀，備諸六禮，所以承宗廟，事舅姑，當須昏以為期，詰朝謁見。往者下俚庸鄙，時有障車，邀其酒食，以為戲樂。近日此風轉盛，上及王公，乃廣奏音樂，多集徒侶，遮擁道路，留滯淹時，邀致財物，動逾萬計。遂使障車禮貶，過於聘財，歌舞喧嘩，殊非助感。既虧名教，實蠹風猷，違紊禮經，須加節制。望請婚姻家障車者，並須禁斷。若有犯者，有蔭家，請準犯名教例附簿；無蔭人，決杖六十，仍各科本罪。

⁹ For example, Zhong Chuan’s daughter was married to Du Hong’s son in Jiangxia. Until the dusk, someone came to ask for “proses of blocking carriages” from Tang Yun. Yun ordered his four servants to prepare for paper, ink and brush. They waited next to the horse for minutes, and Yuan immediately finished four proses. The original text in Chinese: 唐末汤策“俱以书奏受惠”，晚年辅佐江西钟传，“传女适江夏杜洪之子时，及昏暝，有人走乞《障車文》。笈命小吏四人各执纸笔，倚马待制，既而四本俱成” (Fan 2005, 813).

physically and mentally suited the bridal couple was, how splendid the wedding was and how graceful the newlyweds' virtues were.

Another direction served the commoners and symbolized “folk culture” (俗文化). These verses were made and recited by participants who blocked wedding carriages to ask for gifts from the wedding families. Some of these verses are recorded in *Dunhuang Manuscripts* (敦煌寫本)¹⁰, which were first discovered in the Dunhuang caves but widely dispersed over the world before the first world war. *Dunhuang Manuscripts'* significance for folklore studies is that they were not official texts but anonymously written and privately collected. In the collection, many folk ballads and prose did not serve the aristocracy but were used by commoners. According to Guofan Gao (2008), the verse with the code *Dunhuang Manuscripts P3909* (敦煌寫本 P3909) was a “verse about blocking carriages.” There were three narrators in the prose. The first one was the initiator or gatherer of blocking carriages; he was a leader or 障車之法. The second narrator was a woman from the bride's side who answered, scolded and accused the participants of blocking actions. Some scholars think that the woman could be the bride herself. The third narrator was a group of boys (兒郎偉) who followed the leader to block carriages for rewards. These patterned verses depicted a vivid scene of blocking carriages and people's explicit purpose of asking for rewards. Here, I translated two verses about blocking carriage:

Leader: I am a descendant of the chancellor, raised by either Wang, Guo, Cui, Chen families who are eminent and influential. They are loyal to the emperor. How could you regard me as an ordinary man? [Translator's note: These impressive backgrounds from big

¹⁰ During three English Expeditions in Central Asia between 1900 and 1916, Aurel M. Stein discovered the caves in Dunhuang in Northwestern China, a sandy area which belongs to today's Gansu Province, but was named as “Chinese Turkestan” by Stein in 1901. Dunhuang caves preserved precious manuscripts written in various languages such as Tangut, Khotanese, Sanskrit, Kuchean, Sogdian, Uighur, Turkic and Mongolian. However, these scripts and many precious antiques were abducted and delivered back to England without official permission from the government in the Qing Dynasty. Later, more expedition teams affiliated to European countries came to Dunhuang and abducted more historical relics in the early 20th centuries when the downfallen Qing government faced threats of colonization from the strong alliances of European countries. Therefore, *Dunhuang Manuscripts* scattered, being kept and studied in many places in the world.

clans or aristocracy did not necessarily mean the leader's actual situation. These parts were patterned and exaggerated.]

A woman answered: Today, we thank the emperor's education and cultivation, all creatures on the earth are well cared for. Where do your little boys come from and block the street and stop the carriage?

Leader: These 15 boys are loyal and wealthy. We heard that you are going to hold a wedding; hence we came to block your carriage.

Boys: We crossed the South Mountain in the evening under the stars. We came to you as our leader said. Even though we watched out for the whole path, all efforts proved in vain because we know that you would not treat us with bottles of liquor.

Leader: I am a descendent of reputational clans. You are holding a wedding, and that is why I came. I do not mean to ask for lamb and liquor but wish you wealth and prosperity.

Boys: But you told us that we would have liquor. We want to ask for a treat definitely.

Leader: Hold down and we need strategies. We require a camel, three phoenixes, nine eastern sacrificial animals and western lambs... If there is a shortage of any one of them, we will not leave.

Boys: Liquor is being poured like a river; meat is accumulated like a mountain. Hundreds of feasts are displayed...

Leader: Blocking carriages spread from ancient times to now. People blocked the street and arranged banquets in alleys. Intellectuals and good people gathered. Finally, the banquet finished, and cups stopped clicking; music also became silent. Hence, we came for blocking carriage and asking for money. If you can deal with us, then we will leave. I wish you have tons of gold coins and thousands of silk textiles.

Boys: We ask for feasts and banquets, music and songs of Yangzhou style. If there is a shortage of any of them, we will definitely stay and delay the schedule.¹¹

Another verse about blocking carriages in *Dunhuang Manuscripts* is labelled as S6207. This piece of text has similar patterns and strategies as the first one. This verse was recorded in 932AD by an officer. My translation of the text is as follows:

¹¹ The original Chinese text is below:

障車之法：吾是三臺之位，卿相子孫，太原王郭，鄭州崔陳，河東裴柳，隴西牛羊，南陽張李，積世中臣，陳君車馬，豈是凡人！

女答：今之聖化，養育蒼生，何處年小，漫事縱橫，急手避路，廢我車行。

障車之法：小年三五，中赤榮華。聞君成禮，故來障車。

兒郎偉：梭梭南山，迢迢北門。夜昔更蘭，從君統首。徒勞提防，定知無酒。

障車之法：吾是九州豪族，百郡名家，今之成禮，故來障車。不是要君羊酒，徒君且作榮華。

兒郎偉：向來所說，將君作劇。恰恰想要，欲便所索。

障車之法：先自有方。須得麒麟壹角，三只鳳凰。遼東九味，西國胡羊。擬成桂昔，秦地生薑。少壹不足，實未形相。

兒郎偉：有酒如江，有肉如山。百味飲食，羅列斑斑。自余雜物，並有君前。

障車之法：今古流傳。攔街興酒，枕巷開筵。多招徒黨，廣集諸賢。杯觴落解，絲竹暫咽。故來遮障；覓君錢財。君須化道；能罷萬端。劍南口馬；雲走飛先。金錢萬貫；綾羅數千。

兒郎偉：百僚揚州，美味歌宴。如其少壹，定必留延。

Leader: Today, we came to block carriages according to ancient rules and customs. You did not provide lambs or liquors; do you want us to wait here for a long time? If so, we will not answer any questions from you, and you will miss the auspicious time for the wedding.

A people from the newlyweds' side: In our proud country, there is no famine, and nothing is deserted; foreigners from four directions came to make the pilgrimage. Who are you guys who invaded the neighbourhoods during the night? You have made chickens and birds screech and fly and dusted roads and fields. Why do you hurry on your journey during the night? You should better stop here, and I must question you.

Leader: I am a Confucius gentleman of our Great Tang Empire. I like elegance and grace. I can recite any sutras and histories. I can compose a verse or a poem immediately. I should examine you first; who are you, and why do you stop us?

Boys: This imperial path is so broad and plain. See, there are no blocks... Why should we move blocks as you wish?

Boys: We are boys from neighbouring states, and we are travelling here. We are handsome and outstanding. Our mouths are full of pearls and jades (a buttered/silver tongue) and we dress so elegantly with belts. Therefore, we came today to block the carriage and ask for lambs and cows.¹²

In the Song Dynasty, in his book *Dream of Past Capital Lin'an* (《夢梁錄》) (around 1274), Wu Zimu (吳自牧) made a thorough record of a complete wedding routine which is very similar to a modern Chinese one. This piece shows three rounds of blocking actions for economic benefits:

Before the wedding day, the groom's family needs to set up the schedule and gather groomsmen (行郎) in advance. These boys hold vases, candles, fragrant balls, curtains, towels, dressers, mirrors, skirt boxes, costume cabinets, auspicious knots, shade umbrellas, chairs, and so on. Masters of the schedule, executives and female professionals ride on horses and head to the bride's family. Musicians are playing instruments. Flower sedan chairs or brown sedan chairs follow the team. The bride's family treats the party with the etiquette of liquor. Colourful flakes are dispersed; silver plates and gift money are distributed. Musicians play instruments to speed up the bride. The master of the schedule informs the group of the auspicious time and urges the bride to board soon. The masters of tea and liquor exchange poems and verses, also speeding up the bride to come out and board. After the bride has boarded, sedan chair holders are refusing to lift the chair and depart. Poems and rhymes are continually exchanged until sedan chair holders are satisfied by money and liquor. When they lift the sedan chair, musicians start playing. When the team arrives in front of the groom's house, the

¹² 吾等今來障車，自依古人法式。君既羊酒並無，何要苦坐則。問東定必答西，至南定知說北。猶自不別時宜，不要數多腰勒。

無怠無荒，四夷來王。是何徒眾，夜入村坊？雞飛鳥宿，風塵荒荒。君是何人，徹事夜行？君且停住，吾欲論平。

我是大唐儒士，極好芬芳。明賢經史，出口成章。未審使君，有何抵擋？

兒郎偉：無偏無擋，王道蕩蕩。春符分明，憑何徹障？

兒郎偉：我是諸州小子，寄旅他鄉。形容窈窕，嫵媚諸郎。含珠吐玉，束帶矜裝。故來障車，須得牛羊。

(長興三年 932 壬辰歲三月二十六日畫寶員記)

schedule is just caught. Musicians, female professionals and masters of tea and liquor start to exchange verses and rhymes, ask for red packets and gifts through blocking the entrance. The master of the schedule holds a flower bucket and disperses five types of grains, beans, candies and pastries in front of the entrance. Children compete to pick up these gifts. This custom is called “Dispersing beans and grains” (撒谷豆), for repressing the evil spirit of Qingyang (青陽煞).¹³

According to Wu Zimu, there were seven roles on this occasion. Groomsmen (行郎) accompanied the groom to the bride’s family and displayed betrothal presents (they may or may not personally know the groom); executives (授事街司) helped manage various issues of weddings; officially registered and self-support prostitutes (官私妓女) were hired to entertain guests and make the wedding look splendid¹⁴; musicians played instruments during weddings (樂官); the master of the schedule (克擇官)¹⁵ supervised the wedding team to catch the auspicious time and assured all procedures were completed on time as planned; the masters of tea and liquor (茶酒司) were supposed to be good at singing and narrating auspicious chants as well as heavy drinkers of alcohol and tea¹⁶; sedan chair lifters (擎檐從人) departed once they were rewarded with gifts.

When analyzing these seven wedding roles’ functions and responsibilities, only the master of the schedule was in a neutral position and did not join in any blocking activities to ask

¹³ The original Chinese text: 至迎親日，男家刻定時辰，預令行郎，各以執色如花瓶、花燭、香球、沙羅洗漱、妝合、照臺、裙箱、衣匣、百結、青涼傘、交椅，授事街司等人，及顧借官私妓女乘馬，及和倩樂官鼓吹，引迎花檐子或棕檐子藤轎，前往女家，迎取新人。其女家以酒禮款待行郎，散花紅、銀碟、利市錢會訖，然後樂官作樂催妝，克擇官報時辰，催促登車，茶酒司互念詩詞，催請新人出閣登車。既已登車，擎檐從人未肯起步，仍念詩詞，求利市錢酒畢，方行起檐作樂，迎至男家門首，時辰將正，樂官妓女及茶酒等人互念詩詞，攔門求利市錢紅。克擇官執花鬥，盛五谷豆錢彩果，望門而撒，小兒爭拾之，謂之“撒谷豆”，以壓青陽煞耳。

¹⁴ These professional females could be performers. They did not necessarily engage in sex during the weddings. But depending on how much they got paid by the wedding families, sex sometimes happened.

¹⁵ Some scholars believe that masters of the schedule could be Daoist fortune-tellers who preserved the knowledge of Yin-yang, Five Elements, horoscope and Zodiac to calculate the auspicious time of a wedding. According to the newlyweds’ birth dates, time and their zodiac symbols, they also can predict whether the couple is in harmony with or impair each other.

¹⁶ The bride’s side and groom’s side respectively hired their own masters of tea and liquor. Masters of tea and liquor from the two allies competed in an exchange of poems and verses as well as their drinking capabilities.

for money or gifts. This role was once a wedding supervisor; he was the one who decided when, where and to whom gifts should be given. Other participants, such as musicians, sex workers, and masters of tea and liquor, joined in blocking activities and asked for gifts and money, no matter who paid them and which side they were responsible for. According to Wu Zimu, during the process of picking up the bride, the wedding team was blocked for three times. The first obstruction took place when the wedding party arrived at the bride's natal house. The bride's family treated the party to liquor and gifts. The second happened when the sedan chair lifters refused to lift the sedan chair and depart. The third took place when the party arrived at the groom's house. This was the last chance to ask for gifts and money; hence all attendees (including musicians, entertainers, groomsmen, masters of tea and liquor, wedding guests, neighbours) joined this last blocking activity. Traces of all of these activities can be found at contemporary Chinese weddings (see pg. 165).

Naodongfang and the Wedding Industry

Today Naodongfang, and wedding games generally, are experiencing another kind of economic influence: pressures exerted by a wedding industry that is motivated by its own profit. While blocking the wedding party may mean more fun than economic reward for most wedding guests, the wedding industry is serious business. In contrast to Naodongfang that is controversial, pre-wedding games are well-accepted and popular in both China and diasporic Chinese communities. Less obscene pre-wedding games have become an essential component of many weddings not only because they fit with Chinese Nao culture and are less offensive, but because they have been tailored and promoted by members of the wedding industry. The fact that the bride's side holds the advantage and power during pre-wedding games session is one reason that they are less violent and sexually explicit than Naodongfang. When Naodongfang is under the

control of the groom's male side, the groom's lads can sometimes get out of hand, and this is when sexual assaults on the women can happen and other injuries and property damage take place. Moreover, the presence of a camera team, wedding professionals and a more extensive and diverse group of guests also adds a measure of control. Having paid wedding professionals in the room can result in participants performing for the camera and being directed, rather than spontaneously expressing their own feelings and free will. For above reasons, pre-wedding games that generally take place in the morning are less explicit and obscene than the Naodongfang played in the evening.

Hongtao Gao is an experienced wedding host. He has worked part-time in the industry for over ten years in order to supplement his primary job as an audio announcer at a television station in Xi'an. Gao especially emphasizes the pre-wedding games as an essential component. According to him, the primary purpose of pre-wedding games is to help the photographer take funny photos of the groom and his lads. Because taking good photos and videos is a major business of wedding industry, wedding companies actively plan and promote pre-wedding games as part of their wedding packages; they know how the games should be carried out to get the best pictures. For example, Gao suggests, "The plastic wrap game requires the groom and boys to tear up the transparent wrap with their faces, teeth and noses. Photographers are here to catch these photos. We need to make them show some facial expressions of agony and embarrassment at the same time... Similarly, silk stockings are used to put on the heads of grooms and groomsmen. The cameras are capturing moments when their faces are deformed. No matter wasabi, pepper, or toothpaste, all ingredients put in the drink aim to make them look bad. That is not true that people have to be perfect in photos. People are pursuing happiness and fun" (Gao 2017). Gao is an expert on pre-wedding games, and he can create them with objects available on-site. For

example, games featuring a banana, lipstick or balloon can be conducted immediately if people have any of these at hand.

Activities around picking up the bride are mainly meant for fun and showing off. To help create a festive and Renao atmosphere, and also for the effect of wedding photos and videos, the venue for gate crashing games generally has switched from the bride's family home to a bigger, brighter, and well-decorated hotel room. The bride's real bedroom might be too small for conducting ideal wedding games (Gao 2017). In addition, renting a hotel room eases the burden of cleaning up after the wedding games (Ma 2014). Moreover, wedding designers and hosts often suggest that the bride and her bridesmaids prepare for some games and set obstacles (刁難) for the groom and groomsmen beforehand (Gao 2017). Gao usually distributes a Microsoft Word document to instruct the bride and her bridesmaids on designing pre-wedding games. If they are not satisfied with the suggestions in the document, they can search online and/or create their own games. A wealth of online instructions is available such as "Rank 10 Wedding Games of Gate Crash" (Fomoday 2017). It is also not hard to come up with ideas if you know the principles of creating pranks. For the uninspired, another option is purchasing a full package of wedding game props from numerous online suppliers at the cost of approximately thirty to thirty-five Canadian dollars. Over thirty props will be delivered to your address in three days (delivery is even available on weekends). According to one online shop, a package of wedding game props includes (see fig. 47):

- One vowing card
- One card for lip prints
- A certificate of wedding
- A certificate of award
- Eighteen cards of games (ten cards with instructions plus eight blank cards)
- Eight shiatsu plates (foot massage pads)
- Two jumping ropes
- Two hats of Zhuge Liang (a wise historical figure who wore a unique hat)

A screaming chicken
 A tube of wasabi
 Four toothbrushes
 Thirty props for photography
 Two rolls of red thread
 Four taps for pulling out leg hair
 Two eye patches
 Two lipsticks
 Eight sets of plastic wraps with frames
 Two punishing bricks
 Eight pairs of glasses with straws
 Four sets of costumes (funny or cross-dressing)
 One set of spices with four flavours (sour, sweet, bitter and spicy)
 Two wolf-teeth rods
 Two wolf-teeth hammers
 Eight clamps with the pulling ribbon



Figure 47 Package of pre-wedding games props and instructions

Free gifts: one instruction card of 30 recommended games, one pen, one black man's mask (popular meme figure), one mask of Yunpeng Yue (Chinese comedian).¹⁷

When I inquired about Naodongfang, Gao explained that he only organizes pre-wedding games and never hosts any post-wedding party, such as Naodongfang. Gao has witnessed the formalization of wedding games in the Chinese wedding market as he explained: "There was always the custom of picking up brides in Xi'an. Finding wedding shoes and gate crashing are also old customs. However, only doing the old versions of customs is boring. If people are not well-known for wedding games, we could suggest and design games for them. It becomes our duty to suggest ideas to increase the atmosphere. In terms of the generation of our parents, they did not have Renao in the morning (no formalized pre-wedding games session), hence they pursue Renao in the evening through Naodongfang. However, at our age, the Renao has been

¹⁷ Online shop link:
<https://detail.tmall.com/item.htm?id=571667048744&ns=1&abucket=1&skuId=3940373211812>.
 See the translation of the instruction of 30 recommended games through the Appendix D.

done in the morning. Therefore, there is no necessity for Naodongfang anymore” (Gao 2017). Gao’s experiences reflect how the wedding industry has institutionalized pre-wedding games in the morning and that these have largely replaced Naodongfang in the evening.

In China, the wedding industry has developed and prospered rapidly due to the market economy and capitalism. The cost of weddings varies hugely, and different cities have very different prices. Figure 48 was taken by me on September 2, 2017, at Weifang City, Shandong Province. The wealthy young couple booked the wedding venue in the Pullman hotel, which is the highest-ranked and most expensive hotel in Weifang. They also hired a wedding film shooting team with a budget of around 4000 CAD. In the presidential suite of Pullman, the process of “picking up the bride” and all pre-wedding games were perfectly designed,

performed, produced and displayed. Bridesmaids and groomsmen stood in a line and applauded identically like a team; they exhibited distinct traits of performance (see fig. 48). The bride’s dowry, which consisted of a



Figure 48 Performing groomsmen and bridesmaids by a rich wedding family

significant amount of shining gold jewellery worn by the bride, was perfectly featured and artistically showed off in the wedding film which was played for the guests who sat in the banquet hall and did not join the pre-wedding session.

Essential professionals that make up a wedding team are called “Four King Kong” (四大金剛) in the jargon of the wedding industry. They include a dresser, one to two videographers, a photographer and a wedding host (Gao 2017). According to Zhigang Sun, a former wedding planner and current wedding host in Pingyuan County, in his experience each staff member’s individual payment did not exceed 600 CNY (2017). Thus, the wedding team composed of four to five staff cost 3,000 CNY in Pingyuan County. However, in Xi’an, hiring a wedding host costs 2,500 CNY and a team of “Four King Kong” will cost at least 10,000 CNY. In Pingyuan County, the average price of hiring a dresser was 280 CNY; the most expensive dresser was 880 CNY. But in Xi’an, Gao has heard about one dresser asks for the price of 10,000 CNY. Even more extreme, a high-end wedding film team costs over 20,000 CNY. Holding a wedding at that level may cost 100,000 CNY (20,000 CAD) in total.

A Wedding Hosted by Zhaomin Yang

As Figure 49 shows, the intrusion and guidance from the videographer was obvious at Liu and Ren’s wedding as he worked to ensure the best quality video. In fact, all aspects of this wedding were carefully managed by Zhaomin Yang, the wedding planner. Unlike in cities where people often conclude a wedding in the morning or at noon due, a wedding in rural Binhai, Shandong Province can be held over two to three days. Villagers and wedding staff start to prepare many days before the wedding day. The two-day wedding I



Figure 49 Manipulation and interference from Yang’s wedding company

observed organized by Zhaomin Yang was divided into five sessions. The first session was the afternoon before the wedding day. People gathered in the wedding family's yard to decorate the venue and prepare for the banquet. The first session was mainly designed for the groom's parents and their siblings to entertain the villagers. When the community did not actively prank the wedding family, the wedding master designed some games to make people laugh and to heat up the atmosphere. For example, Yang instructed the groom's parents to smear flour on each other's faces (see fig. 50). It needs skill and strategy to get people to play wedding games and order them around. Firstly, the wedding host needs to capitalize on people's desire for revenge. For example, if you smeared flour on my face, I would be more ready do the same to you in return. Second, the wedding host needs to provide persuasive parlanes, such as auspicious words and chants, or to make the action a must-do tradition by explaining the reasons for doing it. For example, Yang claimed, "you are lucky to be a mother-in-law today. If you are happy, you can smear some flour on the father's face" and so on.



Figure 50 Parents smearing flour on each other's faces

Shandong Province was the cradle of Confucius and has many local wedding customs. For example, the bride needs to cross three barriers, including a coal basin, a miniature bridge

and a brick covered with red paper. As a tradition bearer himself, Yang asked the groom's parents and their siblings to "disperse beans and grains" (see fig. 40 pg. 170), practise the custom of "putting thousands of quilts on the bed" (鋪床歌)¹⁸ and collectively dance in the courtyard. People generally would not turn down a wedding host's requests. This session and its meanings will be elaborated in Chapter Five.

The second session took place during the very early morning of the wedding day at 6:30 am. The groom's troop started to pick up the bride. A grand feast was waiting for him and showed the hospitality of the bride's family. Approximately 50 people of all ages from the bride's side gathered in an apartment around 120 square meters, and they were armed to the teeth. However, the groom's team was not bantered and blocked too much by the bride's side, but his team was tested in another way, by food and liquor. Yang did not instruct people to do typical pre-wedding games as Gao would do; instead, the groom's team had "internal conflicts" promoted by him. According to the requests of Zhaomin Yang, two groomsmen needed to feed the groom with many foods. Sometimes it was obviously too much for him. The bride's family was happy to see the groom pranked by his own groomsmen. After a quick banquet, Zhaomin Yang organized some small games for groomsmen and bridesmaids in the bedroom. Finally, he asked all members of the bride's family to hold red packets and seduce the groom to change the way of calling them (see fig. 43 pg. 73).

The third session took place when the bride arrived at the groom's family home and the groom's side practised the "changed way of referring/calling." Zhaomin Yang asked all groom's relatives to sit in the middle of the yard to be performers and spectators at the same time. He instructed on some games and rituals for the bridal couple and their parents (see fig. 51).

¹⁸ In the bridal chamber, by singing rhymes piece by piece, people need to put many layers of quilts on the couple's bed one by one, to wish a good reproduction and prosperity to the wed families.



Figure 51 The couple performing wedding games in front of family members

Interestingly, he built on the value Shandong people historically have placed on intellectuals and scholars due to the education of Confucianism. When Yang was giving a formal speech in the wedding venue, he unexpectedly referred to me as a PhD candidate from Canada who had come to investigate the couple's wedding. Emphasizing the specialness of local traditions and announcing my presence was meant to reflect well on the wedding family and seemed to make them feel blessed and honoured. This situation never happened at other weddings I joined.

The fourth session of the ceremony started in the afternoon around 1 pm after people had a short break. The afternoon session became entirely a show of Shandong traditional wedding games. I fear that it was especially designed for my research by Zhaomin Yang. There were two games conducted in front of the gate of the groom's family home when many spectators stood around to watch. First, Yang asked two boys to twist a piece of red cloth into as tight a knot as they could. The couple was supposed to unfasten the knot with their teeth. It is not hard to

imagine how tightly the boys made the knot and how difficult it was for the bridal couple to unfasten with their teeth. The purpose of this game was to expose the intimate contact of the bridal couple to the community and to test their collaboration when



Figure 52 The couple unfastening a cloth knot by teeth

solving difficulties (see fig. 52). No wonder the bridal couple failed to unfasten it. Hence Yang invited their parents to show them a good example. The attention shifted to the parents and proved that Chinese newlyweds are never considered the sole protagonists of their weddings. The second game required the bride to fill up a red pillowcase with straw and female family members to sew the opening. This was a test of sewing skills, not of the bride, but of the unmarried maids of the family. However, the groom's lads kept bantering and taking away the pillowcase from the bride; the groom was angry at this point, and he tried his best to grab the pillowcase back even as he was dragged onto the ground. This game session lasted almost 20 minutes.

The last session of the two-day wedding was the formal wedding ceremony in a hotel banquet hall around 7 pm. Yang did not host the ceremony on the stage as other wedding hosts would do. Instead, he recruited a woman who works at the TV station to host. Yang explained that his style did not fit the occasion at the hotel, so he invited another wedding host to replace him. Obviously, he knew his style and limits. As the leader of a wedding company, he plays the

role of manager and director and his responsibilities go beyond those of a wedding host whose main job is standing on the stage and hosting a wedding ceremony for half an hour. Yang controlled all five sessions over the two days. Even though he chose not to be master of ceremonies during the stage ceremony, Yang was still very present. Wearing the fluorescent yellow T-shirt with his company's name on it, he jumped on the stage, delivered a short speech and a wedding gift to the bridal couple and made a bow to all guests.



Figure 53 Zhaomin Yang is prominent in hosting vernacular weddings

As this example shows, wedding masters have the power to direct, manipulate and prank people at weddings; however, their purpose is simple: to make everyone happy. If they fail to please the wedding families and their guests, they risk being judged as incompetent. Wedding host Hongtao Gao told me that he never limits himself to any particular wedding style but tailors his hosting style to fit any background and occasion. The majority of his clients are middle class people living in cities but who have maintained close connections to their rural past, but he emphasized the importance of adjusting hosting style to audiences.

You need to adjust your style to audiences. For instance, some families' backgrounds are intellectuals, postgraduates and scholars. They work in the school of music, and then you should not do pranks. You cannot joke around because they want high-end, gorgeous, and

posh weddings. But if you host a wedding in a “village in cities,” the style is totally different. In “villages in cities,” people do not care about the wedding host nagging about what is love, what is destiny. They like to laugh a lot. Sex jokes make them happy... You also need to know the situation of the wedding families well. Sometimes if the groom’s parents are remarried, or the groom has a single-parent family, it is inappropriate to prank or joke. If the parents are optimistic and the family is on good terms, they are more tolerant to jokes (Gao 2017).

The decision whether or not to include games as part of a wedding often depends on the intentions and preferences of the wedding host. However, one significant point is that all wedding hosts need to keep events under their control. On some occasions, people are so eager to Nao that the ceremony may not proceed as planned. Professional wedding hosts care about their good reputation and performance, and neither cannot be guaranteed if the situation is chaotic. Wedding planner Zhigang Sun asks, “When you are making a speech on the stage, there is an egg flying towards you. How can you host a wedding like that?” (Sun 2017). Similar testimonies are provided by Gao.

Last time I joined a team for picking up the bride. The groom’s house was a villa. I assumed that it was a scholar’s family and rich. However, when I stepped into the villa, I saw a colourful plastic tent erected in the yard, and people were eating minced noodles¹⁹ (臊子面) ... I thought, well, this family no doubt was moved from a village in cities. As expected, all people around were speaking with the Shaanxi dialect. That wedding was the most dangerous one I have experienced. When I was saying opening remarks in front of the lens, someone lit firecrackers toward my hips. I was scared to death, you know? I told them not to spray the snowflakes at the groom and the bride. But they did not listen to me; instead, they sprayed snowflakes towards me. I had no time to escape. The lads were composed of idlers. Tattoos, big figures, bald, driving roaring ORV... You cannot control that kind of occasion. And finally, I hid in the corner and let them do whatever they wanted... My throat would be hoarse just for a morning. So now you understand why some wedding hosts take loudspeakers with them (Gao 2017).

Gao’s remarks highlight that wedding hosts are responsible for protecting people from danger. For example, he did not recommend using snow spray bottles that are made of sodium nitrite, sodium benzoate and alkane, because these elements are harmful to people’s eyes and flammable

¹⁹ According to the villagers’ tradition in Xi’an, during the wedding day, guests come in succession and are served by minced noodles in the yard. The service is provided full day long until the end of a wedding.

and combustible. Sometimes the pre-wedding games get out of control and the bridesmaids become unhappy. On these occasions wedding hosts need to adjust their strategies according to the bridesmaids' reactions. Interestingly, Gao does not believe women have the volume of the voice or the authority to keep control in these situations:

Some bridesmaids have good personalities and do not mind playing with groomsmen. Some of them do not. Wedding hosts need to take the situation under control. If the situation is embarrassing and the bridesmaids are unhappy, the bride is unhappy too. That will embarrass the groom. You need to speculate what will happen according to people's reactions and their personalities, and stifle it in the cradle. We cannot let the same things as the lawsuits in news reports happen, such as sexual harassment or something that cannot be solved... At first, you need to have a loud sound. You need to warn the groom that he should tell his lads, don't get chaotic. "All guys must listen to my command because we cannot miss the auspicious time. Let's do the civilized grabbing marriage step by step." You need to inoculate them.

The occasion of picking up brides in Xi'an is not possible for a woman to host because a woman host cannot control the lads. Women's voice is not loud enough. No one is going to listen to her. The process of picking up brides is risky. A pretty woman wedding host may be harassed by the groom's lads. Thus, woman wedding hosts had better not work for this session. Male wedding hosts are tough and could control this occasion (Gao 2017).

While not everyone shares Gao's gendered views, he does underscore the importance of wedding professionals maintaining control. As a common component of contemporary weddings, pre-wedding games are organized and orchestrated by paid wedding planners and hosts whose goals differ from those of the family and guests who played them in earlier community contexts.

Economics has been a factor behind Naodongfang from the historical custom of blocking wedding carriages and "Blocking Door/Gate Crash" games rooted in mock grabbing marriages and mercenary marriages. Today pre-wedding games have been co-opted by the wedding industry. While wedding night Naodongfang is generally organized by bachelors, pre-wedding games are more often the domain of the wedding professional. Institutionalized, moulded and shaped by members of the wedding industry, these games are designed to make clients happy. Bridal couples and their families want to feel they have got good value for their dollar; everyone

must have a good time and there should be memorable photographs to prove it. By extension, satisfied customers result in more bookings for the wedding planner.

In the next chapter discussion moves from economic motivations to women's roles in Naodongfang.

Chapter Five:

Sexual Harassment, Malicious Custom, or Feminist Expression?

Exploring Naodongfang from a Woman-Centred Perspective

Naodongfang's meanings for women are complex and understanding their participation in the custom can be challenging. Historically women's best interests have not been a primary consideration in Naodongfang; brides could be harmed physically and emotionally by taking part. That Naodongfang was first referred to as "teasing brides" (戲婦), suggests women were original targets and contemporary accounts attest to the fact that they are still under attack and that the bride and bridesmaids can experience more than teasing. Today sexual harassment from male participants can occur when the lively and chaotic Naodongfang gets out of control, something which may have always been the case. Given this, and the negative coverage of the custom in the media, it is not surprising that more and more people regard Naodongfang as a "malicious custom." But this does not tell the whole story. Despite being frequently targeted as one of the most "malicious custom" in Chinese folklore (W. Li 2016; X. Li 2017, 63; Z. Li 2017, 139; Y. N. Li 2018; Mu 2015; Qi 2013, 4; Sheng 2016; Shi 2017; Shu 2018; D. Wang 2017; C. Yang 2018; Zhou 2018), Naodongfang persists, offering clear proof of folklore's vitality in the face of opposition and even regulation. Significant for this chapter is that women are still taking part. Here I explore the power dynamics for female participants. I begin by discussing the possible links of harassing brides to the historical practices of grabbing marriages and the *Jus Primae Noctis*; these are just two examples of how brides in the past could be badly treated, abducted or raped. Based on testimonies from interviewees and news reports, I then consider the emergence of bridesmaids as Naodongfang's the newest victims. Finally, I interpret women's

participation in Naodongfang in the context of contemporary Chinese feminism and ask if the future might bring transformation for women both in term of their roles and Naodongfang's meanings.

The Jus Primae Noctis and Violence Directed towards Brides

According to earlier Chinese literati, women were plagued by violent pranks and sexual assaults from community members during Naodongfang. These writers tended to interpret the prevalence of the custom as a reflection of women's low social status (Chen 1990, 271; Zhu 2009, 14). Mechthild Leutner offers a good analysis of women's sentiments towards Naodongfang, even though her focus is on marriages in the late Qing Dynasty: "These [female sentiments] included the suppression of negative sentiments of the bride when being teased verbally and being touched by young members of her new family during the nao dongfang (naughty behaviour in the bridal chamber) rite. During these acts the bride had to show passivity and helplessness, while her inner 'private' sentiments—that is clearly to be seen in autobiographical documents—were characterized by the feeling of shame and humiliation" (Leutner 2003, 348). Huajie Huang provides one account from the 1930s that seems to support Leutner's observation: "During Naodongfang, the bride waited for guests after she finished washing and preparing herself. Someone wanted to see her hand; someone wanted to see her feet. Standing next to the bed, closing her eyes with her head hanging down, the bride did not say anything and did not react to these behaviours" (Huang [1934] 1999, 201). These writers suggest that women did not enjoy Naodongfang but that they quietly went along.

A review of contemporary news coverage related to Naodongfang quickly reveals that women can still be victims. This is indicated, for example, in stories about civil lawsuits.¹ One account published in 2003 reported on a lawsuit in Henan Province when a bride was raped by one of the groomsmen. The sexual assault occurred when he slept with the newlyweds on their wedding night as part of local custom. The defendant was sentenced to three years in prison (Dahebao 2003). Descriptions of Naodongfang mishaps also spread through contemporary legends and personal narratives. An interviewee in West Village informed Huipeng Shang of a tragedy that took place in 1997. While practicing the custom of eavesdropping, a man snuck into the newlyweds' chamber and hid beneath the bed. He used an audio recorder to record the couple's conversation, moaning and heavy breathing. The next day he played these audio clips for many people. The bride felt so ashamed that she drank pesticide and died. The groom also took his life after the death of the bride (Shang 2000, 153). A similar story appeared in Zhang and Yang's book, *Chinese Defects* (1997, 307). Such reports have resulted in widespread public outrage over the custom.

There are several possible explanations for the history of violence towards women during Naodongfang. As discussed earlier, sex education is thought to be one of the reasons Naodongfang was practised in earlier periods of Chinese history. Men learned about sex by actively participating in Naodongfang, while women learned about sex by being forced to join in Naodongfang (Shang 2000, 147). Moreover, in ancient China, communities may have relied on

¹ For example, a report was published in 1999 about a case based on a suicide that took place in Jiyang (濟陽) in Shandong Province. The plaintiff was the bride's parents and the defendant was the groom. The defendant used Naodongfang as a defence to lessen his responsibility for his wife's suicide. The bride's suicide was prompted by the groom's accusation that she was no longer pure after being stripped and pranked by Naodongfang participants and his decision to send her back to her family immediately after the wedding. Her later diagnosis of schizophrenia resulted in the tragedy of suicide (Wang 2000, 41). Although arguably this tragedy was more a result of the cruelty of patriarchal thinking rather than of Naodongfang itself, the writer of the news report asks why this feudal custom, that disrupts the social order, is still practised.

Naodongfang to speed up the process of initiating bridal couples and endowing them with new social roles; they may have used Naodongfang to “ripen” (催熟) new relationships (Zhou 2015). Violence may have been rationalized and legitimized as a means of sex education. Similarly, Ye and Wu argue that some of today’s seeming illogical wedding customs, such as violent disturbances or pretending to capture or be captured, stem from “grabbing marriage” and have a long history of rationalization (2000).

A second explanation that helps explain the violence towards women in Naodongfang is that it is the remnants of the cross-cultural practice of *Jus Primae Noctis*, or the right of the virgin night (Zhou [1930] 2011; Chen 1998; W. J. Li 2016; Y. N. Li 2018). Zuoren Zhou (周作人) was the first scholar who related Naodongfang to *Jus Primae Noctis*. When he annotated and translated the foreword of a book, *Jus Primae Noctis*, by an anonymous Japanese scholar, he considered Naodongfang to be the remnant of *Jus Primae Noctis* (《談龍集〈初夜權〉序言》 [1930] 2011, 67). According to Zhou, Mongolian governors conducted *Jus Primae Noctis* among the Han Chinese during the Yuan Dynasty. At that time, Han Chinese girls had to first sleep with Mongolian lords when they got married. Furthermore, Zhou stated, “in the middle part of Jiangzhe area (江浙), during first two nights of a wedding, clan members of the groom would come to the bridal chamber to trick and flirt the bride without restrictions. Even though people claimed that these activities were intended to make the bride laugh, they may conceal the fact that Naodongfang is a primitive remnant and the adaptation of *Jus Primae Noctis*” ([1930] 2011, 67). Hence, Naodongfang may have come about as an atonement for the bride’s (forced) promiscuity and the bride redeemed herself from forcibly having sex with other men in the tribe (Chen 1998; W. J. Li 2016; Y. N. Li 2018). The bride thus gained the right to have sex with her

husband solely when Naodongfang participants were satisfied with playing pranks on her rather than having sex with her (Guan 2001).

In an earlier time, men in a tribe would have sex with the bride before she lived a monogamous life with her husband. Especially men who helped the groom grab the bride had the privilege of having sex with her (Ma 1988, 142; Shang 2000, 187). Based on Morgan's works on group marriages of the Australians and the punaluan family in Hawaii (1871), Engels writes, "When the young man has captured or abducted a girl with the help of his friends, she is enjoyed by all of them in turn, but afterwards she is regarded as the wife of the young man who instigated her capture. If, on the other hand, the captured woman runs away from her husband and is caught by another man, she becomes his wife and the first husband loses his rights" (Engels [1884] 1985, 75). Moreover, in Central Australia: "When a girl arrives at a marriageable age the man to whom she has been allotted speaks to his cross-cousins and to other men of the same marriage group. They cut the girl's hymen open with a stone-knife, and then they have intercourse with her, first the ipmanna (grandparent or grandchild generation), then the ankalla (cross-cousins; as a marriage this would be halfright), then the other potential husbands and finally she is handed over to her real husband" (Spencer & Gillen 1927, 203, 472-473). Thus, Engels thought the institutionalization of *Jus Primae Noctis* succeeded the transition from polygamous to monogamous marriage in some cultures.²

The argument is that over time, as it became unacceptable for men to have intercourse with a bride, Naodongfang and other playful forms were replacements. Therefore, any kind of

² "Marriage by capture, it may be remarked, already shows signs of the transition to monogamous marriage, at least in the form of pairing marriage... Thus, while group marriage continues to exist as the general form, side by side with group marriage and within it exclusive relationships begin to form, pairings for a longer or shorter period, also polygyny; thus group marriage is dying out here too, and the only question is which will disappear first under European influence, group marriage or the Australian aborigines who practise it" (Engels [1884] 1985, 75).

sexual game became permissible and was protected by customary law in Naodongfang (Sheng 1993). Male participants could physically touch, rub and pinch the bride or verbally bully her. Although men do not really have sex with the bride, their desire is satiated through aggressive pranks and games. Meanwhile, the bride redeems herself and gains the right to have only one sexual partner, who is her husband (Guan 2001).

In Europe, *Jus Primae Noctis* is thought to have evolved and adapted into playful forms. One example is the “bride’s dance” or “best men’s dance.” Roheim writes, “The best man says: ‘I have endured much but the victory is mine. The prize (the bride) I now recommend to you’. He has the first dance with the bride. Then she dances with the groom and with all the men. This is the ‘bride’s dance’” (Roheim 1999). Young bachelors are supposed to pay for dancing with the bride. According to Roheim, “The initiative is hers. The dancers pay for the dance and they have the right to order her around. They tell her to bring wine, to sweep the room, to hop on one foot, etc.” (Roheim 1999, 202) As with Naodongfang, male participants ask the bride to complete tasks according to their will, and many of them were domestic labours to test women’s obedience. However, the groom finally saved the bride by returning the money. Roheim explains, “All those who are present dance with the bride but they have to pay for the dance. Finally when the groom sees that she is tired, he puts money in the dish and takes her away” (Roheim 1999, 203). The process of conducting symbolic *Jus Primae Noctis* was then accomplished.

Roheim writes, “the meaning or latent content of this custom is perfectly obvious. It is ceremonial defloration, carried out not by the groom but by the best man. The three candles symbolize the male genital, the garland and the parta the female” (Roheim 1999, 201). He continues:

The best man has three lighted candles in his right hand. He dances with several girls and so does the inviter. Finally the best man dances with the bride. He manages to whisk her out of the room. The young men are in ambush and they beat her with their hats till she makes her escape and ascends on a rope ladder to the garret. The best man follows her and pulls the ladder up. Here he takes the wreath of the bride and also deprives her of the parta (circular ornate headdress worn only by virgins). He now sticks the parta and the wreath on a pitchfork. The parta is really his now, but the bride usually buys it back (Roheim 1999, 201).

The initiators of the “best men’s dance” were the best men but not the groom. The best men took the bride’s wreath and her parta which implied taking away her virginity. The symbolic ceremony of defloration was pervasive in many cultures. In Slavonia, according to Roheim, “At Nagy Bako the master of ceremonies (nasz nagy) holds the three candles. He raises the candles high and asks those present to testify that there is ‘no fault’ in the bride (i.e., that she is a virgin). The meaning of the wreath made of rosemary is quite conscious in Slavonia. The bride tears it into pieces herself and puts the pieces into the groom’s topboots. She says she is giving him her maidenhead” (Roheim 1999, 201). Tearing the wreath into pieces and putting them in the groom’s topboots symbolically implied that the bride would lose her virginity to the groom soon. The euphemism of maidenhead and the ceremony of defloration were also expressed in some European folk play scripts of the “bride’s dance.”

The best man says: “Dear young woman! May I take the wreath off your head?”
She replies: “No, I would rather you cut my head off.”
He continues: “I take the wreath off without damage to the maidenhead.”
Then he sticks it on a fork or sword and says: “I have fought with a virgin. You may think this is only a joke but I can assure you, it is not so easy. Love has its arrows and these arrows are capable of inflicting wounds. It was difficult indeed” (Roheim 1999, 202).

The sentence that “I take the wreath off without damage to the maidenhead” implied that males do not necessarily have sex with the bride as their primitive ancestors did. However, the *Jus Primae Noctis* needs to be accomplished through symbolic ways such as dancing with the bride, taking off her wreath and pranking her. The Slovenian best men who “hook the bride and drag

her up into the attic” and twelve official persons who run after and interact with the bride in the bridal chamber, also implied the replacement of real sex:

The best man has a crooked stick, he uses this to hook the bride and drag her up into the attic. Here she is deprived of her wreath and decorated with the parta. The first of the ‘best men’ follows her into the bridal chamber holding twelve candles in his right hand. Having lit the candles he conducts the bride into the room. He distributes the candles giving one to each of the ‘official persons’ at the ceremony and keeping two himself. Then they all dance in a circle and sing wedding songs. The bride runs back into the bridal chamber, the others after her (Roheim 1999, 202).

Naodongfang also has similarities to the Western custom of the shivaree that sometimes ended in harassment and violence for women. Sweterlitsch writes, “In some parts of the South and Midwest United States, the marriage celebration does not end until after newlyweds’ first night is disrupted with a surprise and customary shivaree. The bride and groom are expected to invite the nighttime revelers into their home and give them food and drink” (Sweterlitsch 2010, 344). Over time, the shivaree adapted its function from expressing disapproval of marriages the community deemed unsuitable to heralding new marriages and welcoming newlyweds (Greenhill 2012). This is similar to how Naodongfang may have adapted from being a sex education tool in early times to welcoming and celebrating a marriage nowadays.

Firstly, like Naodongfang, participants in the shivaree are mostly young male friends of the newly married couple; the majority of them are bachelors. As Greenhill notes, “the charivariers had in common age, sex, and working-class occupations. Clearly, the majority of those who participated in the charivari were in their early teens and unmarried” (Greenhill 2010, 53). Secondly, couples who were pranked in shivarees generally were tolerant and kept silent during the event; the community expected the couple to accept everything the pranksters did to them. As Greenhill points out in her book, however, not all participants in these events happily complied and occasionally a bride objected to events taking place. Reminiscent of Chinese Naodongfang, is a shivaree described by Greenhill where guests seemed to overdo things. As the

target of more than one visit from pranksters who destroyed her home's domestic order, the bride seemed more annoyed than elated:

The bride sat alone on the steps of her house while approximately twenty women streamed in and began a series of traditional pranks - moving the furniture to different rooms, tying all the socks and underwear together, leaving confetti balls in drawers, hanging bras from the kitchen cupboards, and so on. I learned that the bride had been Shivareed the night before, and so had just returned her house to normal when it was being made topsy-turvy again. She did not look happy. She looked tired and angry... It's much harder to react well to your friends dirtying, messing, and turning your home upside down, especially when you know you'll have to clean it up alone the next day (Greenhill 2010, 182).

Thirdly, both the shivaree and Naodongfang accentuate gender divisions and stereotypes and are laden with sexual connotations. Describing one shivaree, Greenhill observes, "The groom came out, joined his friends, and began drinking. The bride sat alone on the steps of her house... The gendering of Shivaree tricks orients them particularly toward giving women and men very different experiences of the event" (2010, 182). Sexual connotations underline both Chinese and Canadian wedding pranks. Greenhill notes:

The event's pranking was explicitly gendered and sexualized, focusing upon the couple's bedroom. Tricks employed the bed and nightclothes: "breaking the nightgown by cutting holes at strategic points; preventing entry by sewing up the pyjamas; putting nasty things inside (filling them with honey); or making them noisy by sewing bells to them." Friends might subject the groom to "blackballing, blackening the groom's genitals with shoe polish... The women (aunts, sisters, cousins, and best friends) tend to do the bedroom and nightclothes tricks; then men (brothers, cousins, and friends) the automobile tricks. The gendered and sexualized focus on fertility is capped by "mock congratulations (I wish you all the joy, And every six months a boy)" (Greenhill 2010, 181).

Some parts of China, more than others, have more wedding customs that involve physical actions directed towards brides. For example, "pinching the bride" (掐新娘) among the Bai ethnic group in Yunnan Province is a custom that is too ambiguous to be defined as either violence or play. During Bai weddings, brides will be fiercely pinched by people in the crowd (Feng 1988, 88; Hong and Du 2012). The Bai believe that they will have better health after pinching a bride and assuming some of her auspiciousness. Even though her body has become a remedy according to

folk belief and practice, the bride herself may not enjoy having so many people swarm around her and pinch her. It needs to be noted as well that sexual harassment can easily take place under the shelter of this belief.

Some Chinese minority ethnic groups have long traditions of singing wedding laments and oral poetry, some of which speak loudly of women's hardships.³ The sadness of women could be exposed in these bridal lamentations that, just like funereal laments, have become performances. There can be contradictions beneath the performances, however. A Romanian example offers a parallel. Gail Kligman explored the witty speech play and antiphonal singing of Romanian peasant women at weddings as oral poetry. She discovered that Romanian women sang songs to the bride about the miseries of their lives as women and that their singing and weeping subverted the values of patriarchal society.

Female participants in Naodongfang are generally not harsh pranksters; they tend to consider the bride's feelings. When males quantitatively outnumber females as participants in Naodongfang, the brides, bridesmaids, and other women present often are allied against their male counterparts. Females have been vocal about anti-grabbing marriage (Ye & Wu 2000, 124), as expressed in the following Tu wedding song (my translation), where women curse the groom's side. This lament vividly depicts Tu women's pain and sense of helplessness:

If you are dumb, this is your time to speak;
If you are deaf, this is your time to listen;
If you are ownerless pye-dogs, this is your time to bark;
Why do you come to us?
Like those savages without manners, come for grabbing a person?
Like those conscienceless robbers, come for robbing and stealing?
A bastard like you, needs to be cursed drastically! (Ma 1981, 88)⁴

³ Many scholars have studied Chinese wedding laments. See, for example, Fred Blake's "Death and Abuse in Marriage Laments: The Curse of Chinese Brides" (1978), Yuk-Ying Ho's "Bridal Laments in Rural Hong Kong" (2005) and Anne McLaren and Chen Qinjian's "The Oral and Ritual Culture of Chinese Women: Bridal Lamentations of Nanhui" (2000) and Mark Bender's "Folk Song Traditions" (2011).

⁴ 妳們倆是啞巴，也該是說話的時候了

Mongolians have a reputation for being skillful practitioners of verbal arts in their daily lives. Their nomadic heritage of singing wedding songs includes examples similar to the Tu wedding laments above. For instance, Mongolians exchange songs with lines such as, “Who are you guys? You look like hunters, but without hounds; you look like fighters, but only the groom holds bows and arrows. Who are you guys?” “We are here to pick up a beauty from your family. We set this deal a long time ago...” Participants continue to exchange lines until the groom’s side successfully persuades and calms down the bride’s side (Ma 1988, 237). Finally, the Mongolian custom of “tying belts” vividly indicates women’s strong resistance to patriarchal marriages. After the wedding banquet, when the bride needs to depart for the groom’s family home, her female friends will unfasten their belts to make a long rope and tie them together. They pass the belt rope from one sleeve of the bride and get it out from another sleeve. Using this method, the rope of belts passes through all girls’ sleeves and tightly ties them together. The groom and groomsmen will first try to persuade them to unfasten the belts. Finally, they resort to force. They use strength to open girls’ fingers and untie the belt rope. Girls cannot help crying and struggling when men pull the bride out of the crowd. Sadness pervades. When the bride is put on horseback, she cries and protests and tries to roll down from the horse. After being comforted and persuaded, she wears the red veil and circles her natal tent three times on a horse. She finally salutes to her family and friends and heads to the groom’s tent (Wu 1986, 9). I sob every time I read this description. The mock “grabbing marriage” vividly conveys some Mongolian women’s deep attachment to each other and their sorrow over the unavoidable tragic

妳們倆是聾子，也該是聽見的時候了
妳們倆如果是野狗，也該是喊叫的時候了；
為什麼到我們這裏來？
像那些不懂規矩的野人，搶人來了嗎？
像壞了天良的盜賊，盜竊來了嗎？
像妳們這樣的野人，要罵個痛痛快快！

destinies. Their deep-seated fear is sparked by the uncertainty of marital life and the bride's chances of sharing mutual love and compassion with her husband.

Bridesmaids as Newly Emerged Victims in Naodongfang

Today bridesmaids, perhaps even more so than brides, can be victims of violence. The current role of bridesmaid is a combination of the earlier Chinese "bride's accompanier" and the Western bridesmaid. In ancient China, a senior female called the Big Sister (大妗姐) accompanied the bride when she was alone in the groom's residence. The Big Sister was skillful at handling wedding issues (Kong 2012, 47). Sometimes, these accompaniers actually were bodyguards. Unlike modern bridesmaids who are usually unmarried young women, in ancient China the bridal accompanier could be married. She was invited to weddings to show the bride a good example of a woman and a wife. In some cases, ancient Chinese middle and noble families had servants; they would send the bride's handmaids (陪嫁) to the groom's family to accompany the bride (Kong 2012; Shang 2000, 29; You 2017). The maid would continue to serve and take care of the bride in the new household as she used to do, but she could also be required to play the role of concubine to the groom for the remainder of her life.

My interviewee Lao Mo believes that the current practice of inviting bridesmaids and groomsmen spread to China from the West. He claims that there was no earlier Chinese custom of groomsmen and bridesmaids in Shandong Province other than that of inviting unmarried young women with particular zodiac symbols to accompany the bride. These women were called Dakei (大客) in the Shandong dialect. Generally, two young women (Dakei) whose zodiac symbols have benefits for the bride, would be invited even if they did not personally know the bride or the groom beforehand (Lao Mo 2016). This reinforced the belief that some zodiac symbols conflict with each other while others align (Wu & Li 1993, 125). Therefore, the invited

women's zodiac symbols must be in harmony with the bride's. Some contend that Chinese bridesmaids, who share harmonized zodiac symbols with, or dress similarly to, the bride become camouflage for her by confusing evil spirits and kidnappers (Thompson 2008; Yang Hu 2016). However, bridesmaids can be much more than a camouflage; they can become scapegoats for harassment that was once directed only to brides.

Modern Chinese weddings can be designed to show off groomsmen and bridesmaids. For example, groomsmen and bridesmaids dress similarly, often wearing suits and cocktail dresses, to make them visually look like each other and to distinguish them from other guests. Yang Hu recognizes the purpose of showing off the wedding families' power by displaying a line of young and beautiful bridesmaids: "Weddings today have become a social display during which Chinese newlyweds receive recognition and blessings from acquaintances and families. But like the procession of a luxurious and high-profile wedding motorcade, a bridesmaid is often objectified as part of the wedding display. The physical beauty and number of bridesmaids are often seen as a sign of power and 'face' of the families involved in the marriage" (Yang Hu 2016). While it is uncertain when or how it began, bridesmaids started to become the target of stunts, insults and pranks in Naodongfang as stand ins for the bride. Yang Hu continues, "In many cases, bridesmaids are unwillingly involved in sexual stunts designed for the newlyweds. In extreme cases, some are stripped of their clothes and molested, or even attacked... Most reports of alcohol poisoning, sexual harassment, and abuse of bridesmaids are concentrated in rural areas and provinces such as Shandong and Hainan where traditional gender norms hold away" (Yang Hu 2016).

Reports of lawsuits support Yang Hu's observations. In Jiyuan city in 2005, in Henan Province, a lawsuit involved a sexual assault resulting from a wedding custom called "painting

soft-shelled turtle” (畫老鰲). A soft-shelled turtle indicates longevity in Chinese culture but can also be a negative characterization, referring to a coward or a cad. According to the custom, Naodongfang participants strip the bride or bridesmaid and “paint soft-shelled turtles” on her body, mainly on her belly and breasts but sometimes on her private parts as well. In this case, they used black shoe polish and food colouring (Yan & He 2007, 60). A woman, who was not informed about the local custom when she was invited to be a bridesmaid, was shocked when male guests started to strip her. After being sexually assaulted by Naodongfang guests like this, the bridesmaid called the police and launched a lawsuit. Although the bride sent money and gifts to ask for her forgiveness, she insisted on suing the Naodongfang guests in court (Yan & He 2007). In 2007, when the judgement was made, one of the ringleaders was sentenced to three years in jail followed by three years probation and the defendants were ordered to compensate the complainant 15,000 CNY (3000 CAD) (Yan & He 2007).

In 2013, another disturbing news report was published. In Tai’an City, Shandong Province, a bridesmaid who was only sixteen years old was stripped and sexually assaulted by Naodongfang participants. Afterwards, she tried many times to take her life and was diagnosed with PTSD. Five participants were accused of the “crime of compulsory indecent assault on women” and sentenced to prison terms from one to three years (Wang & Zhang 2019, 55). My interviewee Gao commented on televised news reports he had seen about harassing bridesmaids:

Now the custom becomes horrible. Weddings in Xi’an are OK. Last time I watched TV. It said in one area in Shaanxi Province, people were harassing the bridesmaids with the excuse of finding peanuts. Someone threw a peanut with the shell into the collar of the bridesmaid’s dress. The groomsmen were touching and harassing the bridesmaid by saying that they were trying to take out peanuts... WTF, that group of men looked like wolves and they surrounded that girl in the middle... (Gao 2017).

My interviewee Lao Mo, who is from Shandong, believes the switch from Nao brides to Nao bridesmaids is because bridesmaids have become substitutes for brides. He comments, “People

are afraid of being blamed for pranking brides and the wedding family may hold grudges if they prank a bride too severely. Nevertheless, few people would mind pranking bridesmaids. I know some girls who have been bridesmaids. They are resentful of these situations. But they are psychologically prepared; hence, they can accept being pranked if these pranks do not go too far” (Lao Mo 2016). At least two reasons have been suggested as to why “teasing brides” has developed into “teasing bridesmaids.” First, the male guests are all acquaintances of the groom, so it is possible that they worry the groom will bear grudges and take revenge if they go too far towards the bride (Yan & He 2007). Hence, bridesmaids can be the most vulnerable members of the bridal party and have the least power in Naodongfang. Second, the rate of premarital pregnancy has increased over the last thirty years and that has become more and more common. In China, a popular trend is called “getting married after dedicating themselves to a baby” (奉子成婚). Some couples do not seriously consider getting married until the woman’s pregnancy cannot be hidden. “In an earlier time, we Nao brides. But now we don’t play with brides. Because many brides are pregnant, no one dares to Nao a bride who is pregnant. What if some accidents happen to the mother and baby?” (Sun 2017).

Because guests would not want to risk hurting an unborn baby, I was randomly informed by people during the investigation that sometimes an invented pregnancy can protect a bride and pregnancy is offered as an excuse to avoid Naodongfang even when the bride is not expecting (2016). This is unlikely a widespread strategy, however, given that premarital pregnancy would be seen in some circles to reflect badly on the bride and potentially damage the wedding families’ reputation. Couples claiming premarital pregnancy would risk being condemned and gossiped about by people because they have broken the rule of arranged marriages and violated the fair exchange principle of mercenary marriages. A more common strategy is for bridesmaids

to become scapegoats and act as substitutes for the bride for verbal and physical sexual harassment.

Professional Bridesmaids

Wedding companies often suggest the bridal couple should arrange at least two pairs of bridesmaids and groomsmen. One bridesmaid and one groomsman are a minimum and only allowed in some specific situations; four or five pairs of bridesmaids and groomsmen are ideal because they make the wedding look lavish. Photography and videography are designed around these attendants. For the sake of perfect wedding photos and videos of bridesmaids and groomsmen playing gate crashing games, wedding families often try their best to recruit as many bridesmaids and groomsmen as they can. However, as the age at which Chinese women marry gets progressively older, the bride sometimes has difficulties recruiting bridesmaids. Her girlfriends may already be married and therefore are not qualified to be bridesmaids who are supposed to be unmarried. When the bride's female friends are not available, professional bridesmaids stand in.

In China, there are two types of professional bridesmaids: “professionalized bridesmaids” who are hired to help the bride manage various affairs during the wedding day, and sex workers who handle sexual harassment from male guests. Yang Hu investigated “professionalized bridesmaids”:

Professional bridesmaids have become a routine option for wedding packages, currently offered by more than 50 wedding-planning firms in China. A professional bridesmaid would be required to act as the make-up artist, to drink alcohol, and to fend off rude guests on behalf of the bride, among many other tasks. They are required to perform what the sociologist Arlie Hochschild termed “emotional labor”: faking smiles, engineering a joyous atmosphere, and taking part in traditional stunts that are otherwise considered too vulgar for many. Depending on the level of “difficulty” of the services they provide, a professional bridesmaid is paid between 200 yuan (around £22) and 800 yuan (around

£90) per wedding. Many professional bridesmaids work on weekends, in addition to their routine weekday jobs, in order to generate extra income (Yang Hu 2016).

Zhouzi also examined the market for professional bridesmaids in China:

One kind of professional bridesmaid provides customized advanced services and they do not need to take risks. Another kind of bridesmaid is required to handle the occasion. They need to have an immense capacity for liquor and be strong enough to protect the bride from rude guests. They need to be involved in obscene and vulgar parodies and games. These risks discourage young women from playing the role of bridesmaids for their friends. If you take on the responsibility for it, you are supposed to make sacrifices and deal with embarrassments (Zhouzi 2016).

Possible sexual harassment scares away many young women from being bridesmaids for their girlfriends. My interviewee Lao Mo claims, “In some areas, bridesmaids are pranked too harshly. People have difficulties in recruiting voluntary bridesmaids. Therefore, some have started to hire bridesmaids... You must be prepared to be a bridesmaid. You need psychological preparation” (Lao Mo 2016).

When brides are not willing to be pranked during Naodongfang, and securing women to be their substitutes is difficult, they may resort to the easiest and fairest way out, the market economy. Because being a bridesmaid can be challenging, wedding families sometimes turn to hiring “mademoiselles” (小姐 the euphemism for sex workers in modern Chinese) as bridesmaids. This is especially the case in those areas that are famous for harassing bridesmaids, such as in Jiyuan city (Yan & He 2007, 61). Bridesmaids are substitutes for brides in Naodongfang; in turn, hired sex workers become substitutes for ordinary bridesmaids. In a 2005 news article, Ms. Zhao of Nanjing city explained her thoughts about why people are hiring sex workers as bridesmaids:

When my son had his wedding, guests made one of the bridesmaids cry. At first, they asked her to drink liquor while sitting on the lap of a groomsman. Later they tied her up and acted obscenely. The bridesmaid was innocent as an unmarried girl. She felt ashamed and sobbed in front of the guests. We also felt embarrassed because we had invited her. I think even though China has become rich and many wedding banquets are held in four- and five-stars restaurants nowadays, cultures have not advanced to the same level. Hiring

sex workers to be the bridesmaids is the least favoured choice, but that is the only method out of no method (Mumu 2005).

The tradition of hiring sex workers as bridesmaids in China is not new. As discussed in Chapter Four, according to Wu Zimu (吳自牧)'s *Dream of Past Capital Lin'an* (《夢梁錄》) (around 1274), during the Song Dynasty officially registered and self-supporting sex workers (官私妓女) were hired to entertain guests and make the wedding look lavish. They were artists and performers but could be involved in the sex business if guests demanded it. Even though they were not called bridesmaids at that time, they functioned similarly to sex worker bridesmaids today. Xu Ke (1869-1928) recorded a similar case in the Qing Dynasty: "Bridesmaids were popular in many provinces. Sometimes they were called Xiniang (喜娘) or Xipin (喜嫖). If bridesmaids were pretty and adorable, Naodongfang participants would put their emphasis and eyes on them instead of the bride. Especially in the Hengzhou area (衡州), before a wedding, the bride's family must hire one or two bridesmaids. They were pretty and good at singing and chanting verses. On the wedding day, they came with the carriages, flirted and entertained guests. Sometimes sex took place. They would stay for three to five days, or even up to one month. It depended on whether the wedding family could afford the payments. Even though these bridesmaids had bad reputations, they were satisfied with earning a lot of money" (Xu 1986, 2000). Similarly, before 1949, in Suzhou, "Xiniang" were experienced professionals paid to attend weddings; they were young and pretty and very capable of dealing with flirting, pranks and other issues at weddings (Shang 2000, 73).

Reputedly bridesmaids (sex workers or not) are hired across China, but both wedding hosts I interviewed made a point of distancing their region from the practice. They argued that their own city had no custom of Nao bridesmaids. However, they had heard of this happening in neighbouring areas. Zhigang Sun talked about the harassment of bridesmaids:

Wang: Many news reports say Shandong is famous for Nao bridesmaids.

Sun: No. That's not right. Not all places in Shandong Province. We don't play this here (Pingyuan County, Dezhou City, Shandong Province). There are rare cases of harassing bridesmaids here. This is related to people's concepts. Those cases like online videos showed cannot be realized here. The consequence would be that the bridesmaids are extremely pissed off. Nao bridesmaids is popular in South Linyi (南臨沂). Linyi has the reputation for Nao bridesmaids. Those bridesmaids are not real friends of the bride. They are hired sex workers from KTV or somewhere. Locals there do not have limits on this.

In 2014, I experienced it once. I hosted a wedding in Ningjin County. The bride's hometown was Linyi. Eight bridesmaids came from Linyi to join her wedding here. The groom's guys took a long time to solve blocks by giving red packets. So, when they got into the bedroom, they ordered the photographer and videographers to stop shooting and confiscated their devices. And they held one bridesmaid in the washroom and closed the door. People outside were scared and knocked on the door. The groomsman replied, "I will not release her unless you return all red packets." Then the bride's side returned all red packets. That time was horrible. Bridesmaids were stripped. But they can accept it and did not feel angry about that.

Wang: Why did those bridesmaids accept this?

Sun: They have that kind of tradition. People become used to the unusual custom because people are always doing that in their hometown. Nao is popular over there (那邊興鬧). If bridesmaids in Pingyuan county were treated like this, they would call the police for sure.

Wang: No one was angry?

Sun: No. It is a problem of custom. For example, her identity is a bridesmaid, with two groomsman. If we adapt this case to another occasion, e.g., on the street. They are not bridesmaids and groomsman anymore. Will she call the police? Definitely! However, when she is a bridesmaid, she won't complain.

Wang: What do you think about this custom?

Sun: Definitely a malicious custom (惡俗). In Pingyuan County, if a guy holds the bridesmaid and runs far away will be the maximum. That is the most severe case. He doesn't dare to touch bridesmaid's clothes or do something else.

Hongtao Gao also described his experience of weddings with hired sex workers:

If someone is hiring sex workers, they are particularly for play. The hired bridesmaid does not know everyone. Then the lads of the groom will hug and play with her without limits. In Xi'an city, I don't hear about this. But in adjunct towns and villages, they do hire sex workers. In this situation, our wedding hosts have in no position to stop people harassing the bridesmaids. I generally hosted weddings in Xi'an, and I did not go to adjunct towns very often. During weddings I have hosted, I did not meet hired sex workers. In some places, groomsman are obscene. They always want to take advantage (占便宜) of being groomsman, and they touch, rub or kiss bridesmaids. Sometimes the bridesmaids have a good temper, and they do not get angry. But as a wedding host, you need to control the occasion within limits. If the groom is also a stupid guy, his

groomsmen will be unruly. They think they are allowed to do obscene things. Therefore, on these occasions, you need to speculate about bad outcomes and immediately coerce them before bad things happen. We never allow things like the news reports to happen. In Xi'an, the maximum is lifting the girl and dropping her on the ground. You cannot flagrantly touch or rub a bridesmaid. Those people in villages seem like they have never seen women before. They enclosed a bridesmaid in a washroom like wolves. In this case, the wedding host needs to extinguish the bad thing immediately like an extinguisher (Gao 2017).

Other interviewees admitted that hiring sex workers is common in their region, but none had personally encountered it. Perhaps like urban legends, sex worker bridesmaids are not as common as the number of stories about them suggest. It is also possible that sometimes guests might not be able to distinguish if bridesmaids are friends of the couple or sex workers. In the case of hiring sex workers, some guests actually come for specific services. Qi Wang, my interviewee, emphasized that a groom needs to clarify the expectations for Naodongfang. If some guests are coming for specific purposes and sexual stimulation, then it is easier to hire bridesmaids who have professional experiences dealing with sexual harassment. He heard that in Chang'an County, Shaanxi Province, hiring sex workers to deal with the demands of Naodongfang is common. Chang'an County is frequently mentioned since bridesmaids were stripped and touched by guests (Qing 2017). Hence the groom and the bride may decide to hire sex workers to prevent this issue. Qi Wang comments, "those women have price lists based on how much they get paid. Fewer limits, higher prices. For example, 2000 RMB (400 CAD) allows the guests to do pranks to a certain extent" (Wang 2016).

Activities of this kind, including the hiring of sex workers, are similar to those at some Western bachelor parties. For example, they are exclusively designed for the groom and his bachelor friends; the bride is forbidden to join. Qi Wang describes: "When the groom is playing with the hired women, the bride stays in the next room. The guests ask the groom to touch and play with these women, something like that. Those women are wearing sexy lingerie... My

friends have shown me photos. Two girls wore costumes. They took costumes with them and changed before Naodongfang. They explained what their limits were and that guests could not break the agreement” (Wang 2016). When asked why men enjoy this kind of entertainment, Wang replied, “a naked woman flatly lying in front of you and a lady wearing sexy lingerie standing in front of you will bring you totally different kind of stimulation... Roleplay, costumes and women with sexy lingerie are not frequently seen in [the men’s] daily lives. They feel excited about that. Maybe on some other occasions, women won’t cooperate with your requests. But in this space, you can order them to do anything as you wish. For example, these girls will say, ‘You give orders, I will satisfy you...’ ‘Well, then give a stripper dance’” (2016). Based on fair economic exchange, Chinese Naodongfang can parallel the stereotypical Western bachelor party.

The phenomenon of sex worker bridesmaids, that used to be contained underground but has gradually emerged into the public view, exposes gender issues in Chinese society. If Nao brides have roots in practices like the *Jus Primae Noctis*, Nao bridesmaids have no comparable historical explanation and thus there is no historical rationalization. The harassing of bridesmaids is a contemporary expression of female objectification and gender stereotypes in China. Negative behaviours from men have led to the poor reputation of Naodongfang in public. Scholars worry that when sex workers are hired, males become even less restrained. For example, Zhouzi has found that, as a bridesmaid, “if you are a real friend of the couple, guests will show mercy on you for the sake of the couple. However, if you are hired, guests and participants will try their best to Nao you, because they want the money paid to you to be worthwhile. Wedding families also hold similar thoughts. Hence, what employed bridesmaids will put up with during these Naodongfang is not hard to imagine and expect” (Zhouzi 2016).

While the mistreatment of women during Naodongfang is indisputable, relying only on media reports would create a misleading picture. For example, Shandong Province was the most frequently mentioned province about “Hunnao” (婚鬧 the negative indication of Naodongfang) according to an investigative report from 2012 to 2017 (Zhao & Guo 2017). Yet, it is possible this is just one province where Naodongfang is popular. Others may not be ranked as highly simply because Naodongfang accidents are not reported on as often in their local media. Some media outlets may report on wedding customs more than others. Given that Shandong Province is the cradle of Confucius, and people were historically trained according to Confucianist codes and morals, it is possible that local media there might be more interested in making Naodongfang a piece of news than in other parts of China. Another possibility is that the tendency of mass media to portray Naodongfang negatively could be seen as a legacy of Confucianism.

Naodongfang is located on an ambiguous line between light hearted fun and accident or crime. In this way it parallels the shivarees. Three of the four shivarees Greenhill investigated in her book resulted in tragedy and ended with the death of either the bride or groom. She writes, “At their most extreme, charivaris approach or even achieve riot status; when benign they are simply playful gatherings” (Greenhill 2010, 16). The mass media depicted this custom as a dangerous and violent event that often led to criminal acts. The press advocated banning shivarees, just as the Chinese media has lobbied against Naodongfang. Greenhill notes, “‘Make the night hideous’ is a journalistic convention for referring to charivari” (2010, 14), and “several articles mention the need for more stringent policing. However, greater and more extensive legal repression of the practice of charivari was perhaps the most common call from the newspapers” (2010, 75). Greenhill argues that newspaper reports present a one-sided picture:

The nature and outcomes of the charivaris I’ve discussed in the previous three chapters might suggest that most such treatments were intended badly, and that in the main they

were poorly received and ended in violence, in court, or at best in negative feelings. As I've already suggested, however, a more likely explanation is that the predominance in the literature of charivaris with unhappy results is an artefact of historic written documentation in legal and newspaper records. The authorities and the press were unconcerned with run-of-the-mill charivaris, the vast majority of which were accepted with aplomb (Greenhill 2010, 144).

Like Greenhill, I question if the press coverage of Naodongfang is representative of the custom.

While violence against women should never be condoned, stigmatizing a custom by highlighting extreme cases ignores the way it is more generally practised and accepted. It overlooks any positive meanings contained in the custom and succeeds in manipulating public opinion.

Chinese Feminism and Naodongfang

Is it possible that Chinese authorities are utilizing a communist/nationalist feminism stance to suppress Naodongfang and that banning Naodongfang is a tool to justify and legalize Communist feminism? Political and cultural authorities have criticized Naodongfang and encouraged women to say “no” to this custom (Dang 2018; W. Li 2016; Yuan 2018). Clearly some have heeded their call. In the past, when bridesmaids did not object loudly when they were kissed, hugged and even stripped by Naodongfang guests, male guests argued that any protests were made in jest; it was joking behaviour (Shi 2017). After many lawsuit cases, women started to share their traumatic experiences with journalists. While earlier they had chosen to be silent and reserved, they now hoped that more and more victims would stand up against the malicious custom and prosecute perpetrators (Yan & He 2007). For example, Shang recorded a brave bride who firmly rejected Naodongfang. A bride, named C. D. H., described her Naodongfang in 1990 (Shang 2000, 57-58). She refused to cooperate with the pranksters and even humiliated them back. She got angry, lifted a plate and yelled at them, “will you leave? If you are not leaving, I will throw all the dishes at you.” The pranksters left but they waited outside to eavesdrop on the

newlyweds' conversation. The groom blamed her, "Don't you know rules in our area? You ashamed me because you offended my friends." C. D. H. replied, "I don't care about rules. I don't like 'Luan' (obscene jokes)." Then the groom got angry and they quarreled with each other. Finally, the groom ordered the bride to leave, and she left for her mother-in-law's room. The groom complained, "are you not afraid of being called the woman who does not know how to behave properly?" She replied, "I am not afraid of that" (Shang 2000, 57-58). From this account, we can tell that the bride was proud of her rejection of Naodongfang and the strength she showed.

In these situations, saying "no" to Naodongfang is a feminist action that expresses a woman's legal right and her autonomy. It is important that those responsible for acts of violence against women be held accountable and charged. But I am not entirely convinced that banning Naodongfang would advance the cause of Chinese feminism or improve the status of women more generally. In contrast, such actions may strengthen gender oppression and stereotypes under Confucianist patriarchy and Communist hierarchy. Chinese women often reluctantly participate in Naodongfang because appearing enthusiastic or eager in Naodongfang would harm their image as the ideal bride and the pure and innocent virgin. As Shang indicated in his book, the cultural expectation is that women are supposed to be passive and shy during Naodongfang (Shang 2000, 33). Accordingly, women may comfortably play the role of the victim just as they seek protection in familiar gender roles on many other occasions, such when they allow a man to pay the bill when on a date. The interpretation of Chinese women solely as victims in Naodongfang relies on patriarchally constructed gender stereotypes. In other words, women are socially constructed as submissive, timid figures who never exercise agency or equally participate in wedding games. While not all women think in this manner, mass media shapes

public opinion by emphasizing women's suffering and vulnerability, particularly the danger of harassment and rape during Naodongfang. Naodongfang is then constructed as a dangerous space for women, especially for bridesmaids who are supposed to be the targets of predatory Chinese bachelors.

It is possible that women's reluctance to take part in Naodongfang is not necessarily a sign of their improved status or of the rise of feminism. This is a complicated argument. I acknowledge that women have been victims of sexual harassment and assault during Naodongfang and am certainly not suggesting that they should tolerate this behaviour or must learn to enjoy their own oppression. On the other hand, I do believe that one possible path forward for at least some women is to find positive meanings in Naodongfang and to discover ways to subvert the current gender stereotypes and power dynamics. Their active participation and power to tease men back, in a reversal of the dynamic that makes them the target, potentially could be a potent demonstration of women's improved status and liberation.

For example, in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), Zhuang Chuo (莊綽 1079-1149) recorded weddings in the Wu region in his book *Trivia Essays* (《雞肋篇》): "Etiquette rules are very absurd in that area. Common families' girls are not covered by umbrellas or canopies. If the bride is marrying for the first time, she sits on the couch where people can easily observe her. If she remarries, she sits in front of the couch. People stand around her, applaud and cheer her up. Men go ahead to comfort and touch the bride. Those brides look happy and do not feel any awkwardness and uncomfortableness." Unlike scholars who have used Zhuang Chuo's description to amplify their negative assessments of Naodongfang, contemporary Chinese scholar Jiazhuang Shen (沈家莊) draws on this material to argue that women in the Song Dynasty had higher social status and were more liberated than those in other dynasties. For example, he

uses the adjective “bold” (大方) to depict the Song women. He believes that these women were confident enough to behave unabashedly as suggested by Zhuang Chuo’s description that, “men go ahead to comfort and touch the brides. Those brides look happy and will not feel any awkwardness and uncomfortableness.” He also points out that these customs trained and socialized women to develop healthy and confident personalities; women’s social status was strengthened (Shen 2005, 38).

Sometimes during Naodongfang women can leave pranksters feeling bewildered, and maybe even a little desperate. When a bride finishes all the challenges presented to her without any hesitation or reluctance, participants may be at a loss. For example, L SQ moved to a small village when she got married in 1976. Having been influenced by an urban lifestyle and possessing an outgoing personality, she approached her Naodongfang with enthusiasm. She joyfully performed the tasks set out for her and easily satisfied all pranksters’ requirements. Participants from the village were surprised and astonished. They admired her and stories of her capabilities spread widely (Shang 1997). On the other hand, pranksters can be confused if a bridal couple does not react as they expect. As discussed in Chapter Two, the pranksters’ enjoyment of Naodongfang is based on the bride’s ambivalent response that expresses her reluctance and displeasure but ultimately also her consent to go along with their plans. If the newlyweds were to complete all tasks and requirements without any hesitation or objection, people would lose interest in tricking them. It would be no fun. For example, the pranksters might complain, “It is so boring to ‘Nao’ you guys who behave like an old couple” (Shang 2000, 157, 164).

Another example comes from the film *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), directed by Ang Lee. The film depicts a young American-born Chinese boy who is gay but does not come out of

the closet to his Taiwanese Chinese parents. When his parents urge him to get married, he fulfills their wishes through a marriage of convenience to a girl from Mainland China. Weiwei agrees to marry him in exchange for US residency. She has an optimistic and extroverted personality and approaches Naodongfang without reserve. She behaves boldly, challenging participants to “bring it on!” Moreover, when she and the male protagonist are drunk and naked beneath the comforter during Naodongfang games, she claims, “I will liberate you” and has sex with him. Her boldness and openness result in her accidental pregnancy on the wedding night, which is unexpected for everyone except the parents who desperately want grandchildren. At the end of this film, Weiwei, the groom, and his American boyfriend, temporarily live together to welcome the baby. The film exposes intergenerational conflicts among members of the diasporic Chinese community and Naodongfang is a central thread and vehicle to advance the plot. Although the messages of this film are not clear cut and Weiwei’s open attitudes result in an unplanned pregnancy, she emerges as a symbol of a new generation of Chinese women. Weiwei is open and optimistic to pursue her purpose and path (gaining the US green card). Meeting the challenges of Naodongfang was not a problem for her. She takes responsibility for an unexpected baby rather than seeing it as a punishment for irresponsible sex. Surely, we can expect that the more open and liberal women’s minds are, the fewer victimized narratives at Naodongfang there will be.

Historically authorities and literati consistently described women as victims of Naodongfang but because women’s own voices are largely missing from the historical record it is impossible to know what they thought. Ancient literati called for a ban on Naodongfang primarily because they believed it threatened the social order by ignoring the usual separation of males and females and by disregarding rules of seniority. Their concern was not because women were humiliated and sexually harassed. For example, Xianfang Sun recorded an officer’s

objections in Yancheng city in 1930. The local government issued a notice of their intention to ban Naodongfang and promote more “civilized” wedding celebrations:

After checking urban and rural areas, in old-style weddings, people are utilizing the chances of picking up the bride and Naodongfang to arrest the wedding family members and use red and black ink to smear their faces. These family members are tied to carts. In front of carts, colourful paper lamps are guiding the way, like a dragon. Drums and gongs are played loudly. Moreover, crackers are fired. This kind of custom has been popular; however, if it gets to fire, the damages would be severe. When the wedding party arrives at the groom’s house, men and women, seniors and children all scramble in a crowd. The thieves are waiting in hiding; fire alarms are waiting for calling. Municipal administration, police and fire control all get bothered. Weddings are the first concern of human ethics; hence we design etiquettes and rituals. Weddings are serious and deserve to be called civilized governance. However, social disposition now has lost ancient elegance. Intending to show off, ignorant small families make noises by holding weddings. Especially during the wedding night, seniors and juniors all show up in the bridal chamber. Obscenity and ugly behaviours are pervasive and harm customs and dispositions. During the nights, crackers and candles are lit still to shine the night. If any ignorance on fires and candles happens, the city is in danger. The wedding custom undoubtedly impairs societal public security if it is not prohibited (Sun 1930, 54-55, as quoted in Shang 2000, 201-202).

Sun did not mention how women experienced or felt during Naodongfang. The city government wanted to ban Naodongfang because of the potential fire hazard, harm to local customs, and threat to public security.

More recently, stories in the media focusing on women’s harassment and abuse during Naodongfang have raised concerns about women’s safety. These reports interpret women as victims; they are unwilling participants in the games and thought to experience shame and bear grudges (Yan & He 2007; Wang & Zhang 2019). To understand Naodongfang’s complexities, however, it is important to pay attention to its multi-layered narratives and to apply an intersectional, female-centred perspective to its analysis. Some of my female interviewees enjoy the tradition. For example, Tao Liu was excited to describe one Naodongfang she took part in:

I think it was very interesting. I did not know what would happen beforehand. They did the egg game, then a banana game. After they did the banana game, the couple needed to exchange each other’s clothes under the comforter. The bride needed to wear the groom’s clothes, while the groom wore the bride’s, including underwear. We made the deal that

we would pull the comforter off when three minutes were counted. They needed to exchange well within three minutes, or else, when we opened the comforter, they would be naked or half-naked in front of pranksters. However, the couple was pretty fast and completely exchanged each other's clothes within three minutes. I suspect that they have trained and practised this prank. I have heard that many people are exposed naked when doing this prank. I took part in Naodongfang a couple of times. That time was the funniest. Many people are not good at playing. I think people from Northeastern China are bolder and more forthright. The groom told us, you can come to Nao me if you want (Liu 2017).

She continued to explain her sense of loss over not taking part in Naodongfang for her own wedding because her husband disagreed:

I really think Naodongfang is a precious memory. During my wedding, my husband did not want to do Naodongfang, so he informed his friends not to come and compensated them with red packets and treats. If we do Naodongfang, I think I can accept it because I am a crazy girl. But my husband may not. Some people will get angry if their naked body is exposed under your sight when snatching off the comforter. The Naodongfang I took part in last time in Kunming was very funny (搞笑) and amusing (好玩). If the bride and the groom are cooperative to people's requests, they actually enjoy Naodongfang with spectaculars. But my husband would be bashful on this occasion. Honestly, if my husband was cooperative, I think our Naodongfang would be very interesting. But he did not cooperate, then that was fine for me to give up. Naodongfang needs both sides of the couple to enjoy it. You cannot do it by yourself. I think there is a Siren (妖精) living inside women. Sometimes, to be crazy and insane is good. It is acceptable to play occasionally. Indeed (Liu 2017).

Lei Wang also had a positive assessment of Naodongfang when she was a bride. Although she escaped the bedroom a couple of times when the games became obscene, she always returned with a smile on her face and cooperated with all requests. She seemed to enjoy the process. Sometimes she even helped to prank her husband in a show of openness and tolerance of her friends' tricks. These accounts call into question the usual characterization of Naodongfang. Modern scholars have argued Naodongfang's negative effects on women but rarely can they point to its positive aspects. Naodongfang and wedding games can make individual participants laugh and feel happy. They can have intrapersonal benefits and psychological rewards for the bridal couple and others who take part.

Is it possible that a categorical rejection of Naodongfang by women could end up reinforcing stereotypical gender roles? Can the custom be interpreted positively for female participants? These are difficult questions. Naodongfang is an intense space that reinforces gender stereotypes: men are active and dominant while women are placed in passive and submissive roles. Women generally express a shy and demure image regarding Naodongfang at least in part because that is what their society and culture expect of them. However, I worry that stressing the victimhood of Chinese women in Naodongfang narratives does not improve their status. Instead, it reinforces gender stereotypes and threatens to trap women. Inversely, I wonder if greater gender equality requires women to see themselves less as victims and more as active participants. Here there are links to research by Diane Tye and Ann Marie Powers on Canadian bachelorette parties. Tye and Power point out that bachelorette parties contain mixed messages that can be experienced differently by different participants. The authors write that “(bachelor/ bachelorette parties) are not a reversal of socioculturally constructed gender values, but a hyperbolization and enforcement of them” (1998: 551). At the same time, however, the events provide opportunities for women to challenge conventional gender roles. While bachelorette parties are not a perfect liberating feminist statement for women, given that they “reflect a narrow conception of women’s possible roles” (Tye and Powers 1998: 551), they do represent a subversion, or at least contestation, of those roles. In the end, bachelorette parties have the ability to simultaneously support patriarchy and contest it.

There are parallels to Naodongfang. I am not suggesting that women participate in their own oppression or that they should be sexually assaulted by men. However, I am asking if opening up Naodongfang as a space where women can challenge restrictive gender roles, rather than assume the role of victim, could lead to greater transformation. By actively partaking in

wedding games, and turning the tables on the men, could women gain momentum in raising their social status in the communities to which they belong? Is it possible to read some women's willingness to engage in Naodongfang, and perhaps their eventual transformation of the event into a more female-centred practice, as expressions of their empowerment, agency and greater gender equality? These complex questions deserve further study.

The next chapter discusses the roles of parents in Naodongfang through an examination of the custom Pahui.

Chapter Six:

Pahui as Games of Patriarchal Clan and Community

Particularly in towns and small cities, clan and community members contribute to, and participate in, weddings in various ways. In the category of wedding games known as Pahui, the parents of the groom, especially the father of the groom, become the primary target. In some parts of China, the father-in-law can be asked to play wedding games with the bride. To become a “Pahuilao,” a father who has a daughter-in-law enters a new life stage that reflects the Chinese concept of “completeness.” He has accomplished a very important life goal: helping his son to get married. By achieving this, the parents-in-law reassert their identities and obtain superiority in their family, clan, and community. In this chapter I examine the origins of Pahui, discuss a specific type of Pahui which requires physical contact between a father-in-law and a bride, and consider how this custom relates to Chinese patriarchal social structure.

Pahui

“Pahui” (扒灰) literally means “scooping up ashes” in modern Chinese, and it connotes a sexual relationship between father-in-law and daughter-in-law. The term is widely shared linguistically in China. According to my research, “Pahui,” appears in both Northern China (Northeastern China, Shandong and Huabei areas) and Southern Chinese dialects (Zhang 2010, 314). As a custom at weddings, it refers to the father-in-law and the bride physically interacting in front of guests; for example, the father-in-law might be required to deliver the bride into the bridal chamber by carrying her on his back. This happens in locations including Nantong city in Jiangsu Province (Yan 2016, 30), Hunan Province (Feng 1988, 462; Ning Village area, Guan

2001, 56; Mei Mountain area, Yi 1996, 69; Zhu 2009, 54), Shanghai (Chen 1989, 68), Ping County in Jiangxi Province (Yang 2015, 53), Sichuan Province, Hubei Province and Chongqing Municipality (Zhu 2009, 10, 54, 59). There are also equivalents in Northern China where it is called “smearing joyful ashes on faces” (抹喜灰). “Smearing joyful ashes on faces” refers to using red or black cosmetics to make up the parents-in-law and tricking them in various ways. This is done in many places, including Henan Province (Shang 2000, 34, 62), Qinghai Province, Gansu Province and Xinjiang Han Chinese (Wang & Xu 2007, 186). My fieldwork indicates that Pahui is practised in Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces as well. Therefore, Pahui is pervasive in Southern China (Hubei and Sichuan Provinces), Middle China (Henan, Shanxi and Shaanxi Provinces) and Western China (Gansu and Qinghai Provinces). Considering Henan, Hubei, Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu provinces intersect with each other, we can safely conclude that Pahui is practised widely from the center of China, radiating outward. It covers most Han Chinese regions (excluding Mongolia, Uyghur, Tibet and Southern seaside areas).

In 1981 Meng described pranking the parents-in-law as a popular wedding custom in Western China, especially among minority Muslim groups such as the Hui and Dongxiang. For example, the Hui and Dongxiang people liked to smear ashes from the bottom of the pot on the faces of parents-in-law. They wore a lambskin coat inside out, copper bells were tied on their waists, and worn-out fans were put on their backs. The father-in-law rode a skinny donkey backwards, and the mother-in-law rode old cattle backwards. Some boys chased old cattle towards the donkey or suddenly shocked the donkey by fiercely patting him. Because local people believed that being tricked was a form of best wishes and reflected the wedding family’s popularity, even if the parents-in-law were injured by these pranks, they never got angry (Meng

1981, 95). Meng's work shows that, at least in 1981, "smearing joyful ashes" existed in northwestern China, although it was not called Pahui.

Jiantai Zhu also recorded a similar custom as being pervasive in South China. In Tongliang County, Chongqing Municipality, parents-in-law face many demands, such as needing to hold bamboo baskets, sit in a sedan chair, get colourfully made up, smear their faces with soot/colly from the bottom of a wok, pretend they are homeless beggars, tie themselves with a red rope and hold a bamboo stick on their backs. Even though some parents-in-law are over seventy years old, they cannot escape being treated this way. The demands do not stop until the newlyweds satisfy the pranksters with cigarettes and red packets (Zhu 2009, 59).

In contemporary Chinese weddings, Pahui can be conducted either as part of the wedding ceremony or during the pre-wedding session. Generally, when waiting for the bride to arrive, the groom's parents will be pranked by their friends or acquaintances from the community. The father-in-law can be made up by his fellows to look silly. In Pingliang city, Gansu Province, people do not use the term "Pahui," but they practise "smearing joyful ashes on faces" in precisely the same version as in Southern China. Pants belonging to the parents-in-law, as well as to the newlyweds' sisters and brothers, are ripped into pieces (Qin 2016, 2). When dressing and making them up, black shoe polish and colourful paints are used to smear their faces. They are supposed to wear tall hats made of paper, and two strings of red chillies are hung on their ears. Their lips are painted with red lipstick. They must dance and sing around the banquet tables or are chased by people. Sometimes, they hold brooms on their backs or dress like folk opera actors/actresses. In some extreme occasions, after dressing and making up, parents-in-law need to wear cart saddles on their necks to simulate donkeys or bulls. They must pull and parade a cart around the village that the bride sits on (Qin 2016, 2). Qinghai Province is located next to Gansu

Province where the people play similar games. There people can ask the parents-in-law to ride a bull or wear worn hats. They paint pairs of glasses on their faces or use iron fibres to make pairs of glasses that they must wear (Zhu 1994, 79).

According to E Rong's article on Pahui in Hubei Province, parents-in-law will perform folk dramas with props. The father-in-law needs to hold an "ash rack" on his back; the mother-in-law needs to hang a vinegar bottle on her neck (vinegar and its sour smell symbolize a wife's jealousy towards her husband's possible sexual partners in Chinese culture). The father-in-law is required to wear a folk opera costume and put paint and cosmetics on his face. Crowds push them to meet the bride who is still sitting in the wedding car. The wedding party is guided to have a rest somewhere, but the father-in-law's male siblings carry the bride on their backs, taking turns, in order to deliver her to the groom's family home (Rong 2009, 94). When considering why people practise this custom, Rong's interviewee GHI claimed, "It is popular now. If you don't play like this, no people come to see your wedding. The main purpose of holding a wedding is Renao (熱鬧 lively, crowded and boisterous), right? Moreover, if there is someone who comes to trick and banter you, it proves that you have good relationships with them. They are boosting and flattering you! Those who are not popular enough to be pranked prove that no people want to boost and flatter them and people naturally keep away from their weddings" (Rong 2009, 94).

My fieldwork shows how popular Pahui still is at weddings. In Tian and Wang's wedding, in Danfeng County, Shaanxi Province, Tian's parents performed Pahui while waiting for the wedding party to catch the bride. The parents-in-law were not harshly made up, and they maintained decent appearances. However, on his shoulder, the father held an "ash rack" covered with red paper. A cowboy hat became his unique costume. The mother wore a red scarf, held a

fan and danced “Yangge” (a folk dance). In this case, the leading entertainer of Pahui was not the groom’s parents but a hired performer who wore a purple folk drama costume. Holding a bronze pipe, she simulated a comical character, a clownish matchmaker (媒婆), who was essential in traditional Chinese marriages. The actress led a team of Yangge dancers and followed the parents to greet the bride and the wedding party (see fig. 54).



Figure 54 Parents-in-law and a clownish matchmaker performing Pahui and Yangge dance

When the car arrived with the wedding party, the father-in-law rapidly put the bride on his back and ran like the wind to their household. First, he needed to run as fast as possible to avoid the bantering, obstructions and tricks that he may encounter on his way back. Second, it is a common belief that the bride stepping on the earth before she arrives at her husband’s home brings bad luck. Hence, the males from the wedding families are required to deliver her to the bridal chamber. In Wang and Tian’s case, the father-in-law’s friends did not prank him or force

him to physically interact with the bride. This suggests that in Northern China, in locations such as Shaanxi Province, the primary method of conducting Pahui may be “smearing joyful ashes on faces” rather than asking



Figure 55 Father-in-law carrying the bride on his back and running like the wind to the household to avoid being pranked

the father-in-law and the bride to perform intimate contact, as in the cases reported in Southern China.

According to my interviewee, Tao Liu, Pahui is pervasive in Hunan Province:

When my uncle’s son got married, they practised what we called “Shaohuolaoguan” (烧火老倌) in his hometown in Hunan Province. He wore a high hat made by a packing box of a bottle of liquor. Then they paraded through the street. Actually, if you have done this to others before, they definitely will come to Nao you. Anyway, many people will come to prank you because this is substantially a happy event. You don’t want to make anyone unhappy during that day. This is not a part of Naodongfang. The person who is parading through the street is not the groom, but his parents. There are too many cases of parading through the street in my area. The father-in-law needed to wear bras outside of his clothes and people put two apples in his bras. He also wore red underpants outside. His face was painted with red colour. His hands were tied backwards. Someone followed him and whipped him by a bamboo stick, so he had to approach forwardly. Generally, followers drop by some shops and ask for food and cigarettes from these shops. You don’t need to pay them immediately. Instead, after “parading through the street,” the parents-in-law need to go back to pay all bills. My uncle paid in total over 1,000 CNY last time. This is called “begging for happiness” (讨喜). Owners of these shops are pretty happy. They allow you to take whatever you want, and they keep accounts. Until the end, parents-in-law go back to pay bills. I must tell you, whenever people hold weddings, I feel pretty excited. If they are playing games like this, I will feel more excited. I will for sure follow them to do pranks. I always almost die laughing (Liu 2017).

Tao Liu's strong interest in taking part in wedding games is evidence that not everyone thinks of Naodongfang negatively.

Clownish Make-up

The ash-smearing tricks were not confined only to parents-in-law. In the northern part of Shandong Province, pranking the mother-in-law and her sisters was especially popular. Drunken adults would ask for treats, such as wedding pastries. Whether or not the pastries were given, participants gathered around the hostess (the groom's mother) to take off her shoes and bandages for feet binding.¹ They would put her onto the back of a bull and parade her through the street. Alternatively, they would make up her face with thick powder and decorate her head with a red flower; they made her look like an opera actress. The hostess did not know if she should cry or laugh. She could not show any impatience even if she was harshly bantered (Huang [1934] 1999, 205).

In fact, all wedding participants are eligible to be tricked. For instance, in Huzhou (湖州), Hubei Province, a participant was cross-dressed and decorated with red and green cosmetics. His goal was to embarrass the bride and to make her laugh. By imitating a woman, he intentionally behaved coquettishly and foolishly (Huang [1934] 1999, 203). In Lengshuijiang (冷水江), people would drag a senior family member of the groom to the bridal chamber and force him to carry "huipazi" (ash rack 灰耙子) on his back (Zhu 2009, 54). Sometimes, the joking targets were random participants. In Shaanxi Province, a parody was enacted that needed one young male participant to play the role of a goddess (娘娘). Powder and rouge were smeared on his face and he was cross-dressed like a woman. The "goddess" sat in the middle of the hall while the

¹ The custom of Lotus Feet, or feet binding, was legally banned after 1912. Hence this record could be regarded as a piece of evidence around the beginning of the 20th century.

newlyweds knelt and kowtowed towards him. He threw a cotton male doll to the bride. Like caressing a baby, the bride held the doll carefully in her arms and then delivered it to the bedroom. According to belief, the mock “goddess” symbolized fertility and the parody foretold the couple would give birth to a boy soon after they got married (Ma 1988, 210).

Similarly, in Hengcheng (衡城), Hunan Province, there was a tradition called “the parody of jury” (打傳堂卦). Hengcheng people would vote for a man known for his comical abilities to play the role of a judge. The mock judge would be made up as a clown with black ink. His dress mimicked that of a real judge. He wore a replica of the Qing Dynasty judicial attire with lotus leaves composing the hood, counting beads replacing precious stone beads and carrots and garlic decorating his cap. Relatives of the wedding families who were physically strong played the judge’s guards. They arrested the newlyweds and the groom’s parents and made them kneel in front of the judge. They ordered the parents to explain how to have sex to the couple. The newlyweds needed to recite this back, piece by piece. If they made a mistake, the guards would beat them (Hu [1922] 1986, 26; Huang [1934] 1999, 200). There are some similarities between this custom and European carnival’s “the parody of jury” when a commoner was selected to foolishly and clownishly play the role of governance such as a king or a judge (Ju 2015). Both events subvert the usual hierarchical social order. Two distinguishing features are evident in this wedding custom, however. First, someone needs to be made up to look foolish. Second, the father and mother-in-law must speak publicly about sex.

As mentioned during the discussion of pre-wedding games in cluster B in Chapter Two, a groom sometimes has black or coloured makeup applied to his face and is paraded through the streets. During my fieldwork in Baojing County, Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous area, Hunan Province, an interviewee assured me that in the past, Miao people smeared black soot on

the faces of the groom and his party (Liang 2016). This is also supported by ethnographical materials documenting how the Miao people smear the groom's face with black (Ye & Wu 2000, 141). Hence, either the groom or his parents are made up to look ridiculous and taken out in public. This highlights the importance of humorous humiliation, as was discussed in the second chapter. However, one interesting point needs more attention. The targets of "smearing ashes on faces" could be any wedding participants other than the bride. The reason for this might be aesthetic. Because the bride always is the object of the gaze on her wedding day, her appearance is valued. As a result, she may be exempt from being smeared in red or black and forced to look foolish like others in the wedding party.

The above examples show that guests continue to smear cosmetics or coloured substances (such as black ink, colly, red seal paste and shoe polish) on people's faces to make them look comical during weddings (Zhu 2009, 40). The joking targets can be anyone except the bride. Making people look ridiculous in celebrations and festivals is pervasive cross-culturally. The Chinese are not alone in finding activities like smearing ashes, paint and cosmetics on people's faces. For example, the custom of smearing a wedding or birthday cake in a person's face is comparable. As Bakhtin writes, "folly is a form of gay festive wisdom, free from all laws and restrictions, as well as from preoccupations and seriousness" (Bakhtin [1965] 1984, 260). Moreover, Oring adds, "the clown is the violator of the nomos of the social group. That nomos², which protects the social group, also violates individual freedom. The laughter inspired by the clown is the laughter of an infinite God at the presumption of a finite society that regards its

² The synonym of "nomos" in English could be "norms." In sociology, nomos refers to provisional codes, habits or customs of a society. The term derives from the Greek νόμος. It refers to explicit laws, as well as all the normal rules and forms people take for granted in their day to day activities.

prescriptions as absolute” (Oring 2008, 189). Through fooling someone and being fooled, people gain pleasure and freedom.

Origin Legends of Pahui

Origin legends of Pahui reveal similar patterns and motifs. In one group of legends, Pahui became an argot when a father-in-law was suspected of having sex with his daughter-in-law. In an attempt to hide his embarrassment from his accuser who was outdoors, the father-in-law hastily answered from his room inside, “I am scooping up ashes” (Jiangshanxieshou 2018). *Proverbs and Couplets in Wu Region* (《吳下諺聯》) from the Qing Dynasty, explains Pahui’s connotation by means of homonyms. When people burned incense and paper money made by tinfoil in temples, the ashes would contain tinfoil remnants. Hence, people combed through the ashes to acquire the tin that they then traded at the market for cash. “Pa” is scrabbling or combing through something and “hui” means ashes. As a result, Pahui literally means stealing tin by scrabbling ashes. Moreover, in Chinese, tin (xī, 錫) has the same pronunciation (but different tones) as daughter-in-law (xí, 媳). Stealing tin (偷錫) thus became the homonym of stealing a daughter-in-law (偷媳) and, as mentioned earlier, people use “Pahui” to indicate adultery between a father-in-law and a daughter-in-law.

In addition to “stealing tin from ashes,” “Pahui” can also mean “dusting off by hands.” In Pahui origin legends, protagonists are all historical figures, such as the famous poet Su Shi (蘇軾) and the famous officer Wang Anshi (王安石) in the Song Dynasty. Legends were told that Su Shi or Wang Anshi lived with their sons and daughters-in-law together in a clan household. One day, the daughter-in-law fell asleep in Su Shi’s study room. When he came back and looked at this young beauty, he felt a strong urge to write poetry. He dipped his finger in ashes from the incense burner and wrote a poem on his desk. He metaphorically analogized a beauty’s figure as

Pipa, a traditional Chinese string instrument with the shape of oval bottom. The poem he made was like this, “There seems like a Pipa behind the bed curtain. I really want to play with it, but it violates ethics and morals” (芙蓉帳內壹琵琶，欲要彈它禮又差). When his daughter-in-law woke up, she noticed the poem written on the desk and realized her father-in-law was fond of her. She also replied with a poem written in ashes, “I would like to lend you this Pipa and play a beautiful tune. It is better to keep the goodies within the family” (願借琵琶彈壹曲，肥水不流外人家). When Su Shi came back and read this corresponding poem, he was excited. However, his son (or some other significant people) suddenly showed up behind him. In order to avoid embarrassment and suspicion, Su Shi promptly dusted off these poems and destroyed the evidence. When his son inquired, “What are you doing, father?” Su Shi replied, “I am dusting off (扒灰) my desk.” Hence, Pahui (dusting off) became the argot to imply a sexual relationship between a father and a daughter-in-law (Haiyichun 2017). In some other legends, the main plot points stay the same, but poems are sometimes adapted and different.

The third explanatory legend is based on a wedding custom practised in some regions of China. As a reward and as a means of predicting good luck, the father-in-law generally hid some jewellery or gifts in the ashes of the hearth and waited for the bride to find them. For example, he would hide money packets behind a chamber pot, a broom or in the ashes of the hearth. When the daughter-in-law was doing her cleaning duties on the first morning after the wedding, she would find these gifts. This custom reflects the parents-in-law’s expectations that the bride would be a diligent worker in the clan home. It also expresses their wish for a happy and auspicious life for the newlyweds. However, the custom sometimes became a vehicle for illicit relations when the father-in-law and the bride exchanged love letters and secret messages in

hearth ashes (Hunqingzhishiwang 2017). Therefore, Pahui (scooping up ashes) is now a term that mocks secret sexual relations between fathers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

Last but not least, an uncommon legend shows the possibility of an inappropriate relationship by depicting a father-in-law's curiosity towards his daughter-in-law. Ancient Chinese women used cloth bags that were full of plants' ashes for their menstruation. These ashes were replaceable. Hence, they mixed the used ashes with hearth ashes when they renewed their cloth bags. When the daughter-in-law kept secretly doing this so as to avoid embarrassment, she roused her father-in-law's curiosity. He headed to the hearth to scrabble through the ashes and discover what she was doing (Diyidazongshi 2017). Given that menstruation is a female bodily function and considered taboo in many cultures, the father-in-law's interest in the most personal female feature of his daughter-in-law shows his intentions and the potential for sexual relations. Interestingly, all the origin legends focus on the fathers-in-law's desires and embarrassment. Together they illustrate why "illicit relationship between fathers-in-law and daughters-in-law" becomes "Pahui."

Physical Intimacy between Father-in-law and Daughter-in-law

The most popular version of Pahui in Northern China involves the father-in-law carrying the bride on his back and delivering her to the room. However, in Southern China the tradition can be practised in other ways. In 2018, a surprising piece of news burst onto the public scene. During a wedding banquet held in Yancheng City, Jiangsu Province, a drunken father-in-law forcibly kissed his daughter-in-law on the mouth in front of the wedding guests.³ A short clip of

³ "Naohun in Yancheng City. A Father-in-law Forcibly Kissed A Bride" [鹽城鬧婚：公公婚宴上強吻新娘。這是什麼惡心的習俗]. *Baidu Tieba*, February 26, 2018. Accessed March 6, 2018. https://tieba.baidu.com/p/5566936015?red_tag=1720876445.

a video showing the bride explicitly resisting sparked a giant debate throughout the country. Most Chinese who waded in considered the custom at best rude and at worst sexual assault. Rumours and “fake news” emerged in response to the video. Some said members of the two families got into a fight during the wedding banquet, following which the father-in-law was so ashamed that he jumped from a building (Zhongxinwang 2018). This proved to be false as did another story of the couple divorcing immediately after the wedding. After the spread of rumours and intense criticism from the public, the newlyweds and their families issued a statement through a lawyer. This letter called for public bullying of the family to end. It claimed that spreading and adapting videos, photos and stories without the family’s permission violated privacy laws and asked that both the general public and the news media stop spreading these materials.

Moreover, friends of the family launched an online live stream to explain the situation to the public that featured the father-in-law and mother-in-law, as well as the bride and the groom. During the live stream, the father-in-law defended himself by saying that he was practising a centuries-old local wedding custom called “Pahui” in Yancheng city and locally considered an essential component of weddings. They insisted that the father-in-law was simply performing a traditional role when he kissed the bride and did not really assault her.⁴ The family contended that those who showed sympathy for the bride, and criticized the father-in-law, or the custom of Pahui, were putting their fingers in another’s pie. This very public case reflected the wide range of opinions, as well as the ambiguity, that contemporary Chinese feel towards Pahui in particular, and the tradition of Naodongfang and Chinese obscene wedding games in general.

⁴ Accessed March 6, 2018. <https://v.qq.com/x/page/u05654t4c33.html>.

Scholars are unsure when and how Pahui evolved into its current form where fathers-in-law and brides are required to engage in intimate physical interaction, such as kissing. However, Pahui recorded by Xianfang Sun in his master's thesis in 1930, proves that it was practised in Yancheng city a long time ago. In this area, people



Figure 56 Pahui: physically intimacy between the father-in-law and the bride

have traditions of arresting wedding family members, using red and black ink to smear their faces and tying them on carts (Sun 1930, 54-55, as quoted in Shang 2000, 201). Indeed, the Yancheng case is not unique. In some parts of China, the father-in-law can be asked to hug or kiss the bride when playing wedding games (see fig. 56⁵). Some news reports indicate that intimate interactions between a bride and her father-in-law can be financially profitable. For example, the bride and her father-in-law can be rewarded with 10,000 CNY (2,000 CAD) if they comply with the guests' demand that they kiss (Suqingzhe 2019).

Scholarly analysis of play helps illuminate Pahui's underlying structure and meanings. Gregory Bateson drew on mathematics, communication, philosophy, semiotics and psychology to analyze play; his work stressed the process of denoting signals in play. He pointed out that "we face two peculiarities of play: (a) that the messages or signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant and (b) that which is denoted by these signals is non-existent" ([1972] 2006, 319). For example, a bite is not really a bite when the word indicates playful behaviour. This means that linguistic expressions or sentences containing the word can be false

⁵ The photo was obtained from this website. Accessed August 9, 2018. <https://cj.sina.com.cn/articles/view/1154814715/44d512fb019004k0v>.

or meaningless outside of the play. If I nip you as playful behaviour, and you feel a bite but you know that I do not really mean to hurt you, it is just play. Bateson writes, “The playful nip denotes the bite but does not denote that which could be denoted by the bite” (Bateson [1972] 2006, 319). In other words, the pain in play does not denote or refer to an existential feeling. Sutton-Smith has a similar view: “Play is a paradox because it both is and is not what it appears to be” (1997, 1).

Bateson also stressed the significance of frames, or context, in terms of play. He argued that “the play of two individuals on a certain occasion would then be defined as the set of all messages exchanged by them within a limited period of time and modified by the paradoxical premise system which we have described” ([1972] 2006, 322). This process compares to Berlo’s theory of the Communication Process whose key components are (1) the sender, (2) encoding, (3) the message, (4) the channel, (5) decoding, (6) the receiver, (7) noise and (8) feedback (see fig. 57; Berlo 1960, 30-32).

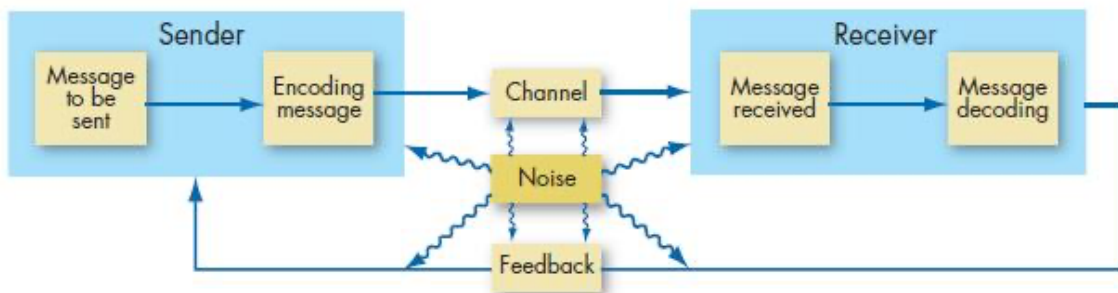


Figure 57 The Communication Process. Chart cited from *Organizational Behavior* (15th Edition). Stephen P. Robbins and Timothy A. Judge. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., publishing as Prentice Hall. 2013. P. 338.

When engaging in play and games, the sender initiates a message by encoding a thought in speech or behaviour. When he or she speaks or behaves, the speech or the action is the message. Berlo writes, “The receiver is the person(s) to whom the message is directed, who must

first translate the symbols into understandable form” (Berlo 1960, 30-32). This step is the decoding of the message. Whether the play participants decode the message as a harmless joke or aggressive insult, depends on how they decipher the message. Gregory Bateson also pointed to the importance of shared knowledge: “Noise represents communication barriers that distort the clarity of the message, such as perceptual problems, information overload, semantic difficulties, or cultural differences.” He illustrated that psychological frames are related to “premises,” which means the messages are enclosed within an imaginary boundary by the “virtue of their sharing common premises or mutual relevance” ([1972] 2006, 323). People who come from different cultural frames sometimes cannot appropriately denote and interpret the sender’s original purposes and meanings of the message (speech and action).

In Naodongfang, noise could be interpreted as fuzzy cultural backgrounds; if a participant does not share the same cultural message with the others, she can feel psychologically isolated. Noise, therefore, impacts how to interpret each other’s purposes and determines whether the pranks and games should continue. In the Pahui case from Yancheng city, the bride was not a local so presumably she was unprepared for, and not able to immediately understand, the local Pahui tradition and did not share the implicit common premises of the others present. Hence, when her father-in-law forcibly kissed her, she reacted negatively, and people could explicitly see her unwillingness in the video clip. However, if the bride were a local, things might have been totally different. For example, many news reports referred to brides who were willingly cooperative and happily complied during Pahui. They interacted intimately with their fathers-in-law without hesitation (Suqingzhe 2019).

Pahui/Smearing Joyful Ashes: Demonstrating the Power of Patriarchal Clans

Although extreme cases of Pahui are infrequent in China, public physical interactions between fathers-in-law and daughters-in-law that carry sexual connotations have attracted much attention from scholars. Articles by Junxiu Chen (2006), Fangfei Li (2015) and Li Lei (2015) explore this custom from the perspectives of sociology, anthropology and folklore. In both news reports and academic studies, Hubei Province, located in the middle of China, is recognized as a location where Pahui occurs. Hubei Province is known for its Southern Chinese rice-cultivating culture (as opposed to wheat that is usually a Northern Chinese product). For example, in Tianmen City, Hubei Province, pranking the father-in-law at a wedding is essential. As a folklorist, Yuan Yu's paper on this "abnormal wedding custom" mainly draws on valuable fieldwork materials, including oral histories and photos (2005). Yu used Malinowski's functionalism to conclude that Pahui's purpose is to warn the father-in-law and the bride of possible inappropriate relations. Moral and ethical pressures are exerted when they practise this custom. Pranks make them feel embarrassed and strengthen the shame surrounding any possible sexual attraction among them (2005, 65). All six publications that examine Pahui in Hubei Province support that Pahui's function is warning (Deng, Sun and Li 2015, 135; Feng 1988, 462; Guan 2001, 56; Lei 2008, 109; Yang 2015, 54; Yu 2005, 65).

Similarly, Shikui Zhu argued that when Huai'an people paint seniors' faces with red and black ink and ridicule fathers-in-law through Pahui, it acts as a warning to them to obey morals and regulations and avoid affairs with their daughters-in-law (Zhu 1994, 79). As Makarius writes, "the taboo breaking of clowns has also been viewed as reinforcing the mores of the society. By framing the violations within a ritual context, they can be safely viewed, contemplated, ridiculed, and rejected as modes of behaviors appropriate to the everyday world"

(Makarius 1970, 68, as quoted in Oring 2008, 188). Through practising Pahui, people's sexual desires, normally repressed by moral and social restrictions, are vented and released (Yu 2005, 65).

According to E Rong (2009), residents of Rong Village in Hubei Province did not practise Pahui until 2000, when the custom rapidly spread through villages in the middle of the province. Thus, she conjectured that the custom was invented after 2000. However, studies from the 1930s by Xianfang Sun (1930) and Huajie Huang (1934) show that tricking parents-in-law and smearing colours on people's faces were already common in Southern China at that time. Moreover, "smearing joyful ashes" was documented in Western China, especially among Hui and Dongxiang ethnic groups, according to Meng's research in 1981. Therefore, Pahui obviously was not invented around 2000, but may have diffused from other parts of China to Hubei Province where its popularity grew.

Warning of incest may be one explanation behind Pahui but it is not the only. According to my research, Pahui is deeply connected to China's patriarchal clan society. The custom is rooted in a familial structure in which the bridal couple lives with the in-laws and the groom is in line both to inherit his parents' property and take care of his clan elders.

Community oriented weddings: parents are pranked by their same age group

Junxiu Chen recorded a Pahui event in the Tianmen area where the Pahui team was composed of twenty-four people; these were the groom's parents' siblings and their partners (2012). The participants were divided into twelve pairs, and each pair was composed of a man and woman, but the organizer intentionally avoided pairing actual couples. The idea came from the "Pahui Association" (扒協), a self-governed informal organization of villagers who design and conduct Pahui events for community members. Twelve senior males took turns to transport

the bride to the bridal chamber by holding her on their backs. During the delivery, the groom's father undoubtedly carried the bride for the longest time. Meanwhile, twelve senior females danced around with vinegar bottles hanging around their necks. Members of the Pahui Association tried their best to banter with the group and to block their way in order to prolong the bride's delivery. They increased the difficulties of tasks to boost the joyful atmosphere.

The Pahui Association designed a series of rituals for initiating the father-in-law from an ordinary father to a "Pahuilao" (扒灰佬), or "Shaohuolao" (燒火佬), a father who has a newly married daughter-in-law. The initiation rituals included the father-in-law filing an application and submitting it to the association. The "chairman" of the Pahui Association reviewed and accepted his application and members of the association stamped his certificate of Pahui. The father-in-law exchanged gifts and played some games with the bride that had sexual connotations (J. Chen 2012, 50).

My interviewee Hongtao Gao noticed that "parents never take part in Naodongfang." Instead, they participate in wedding games and pranks, such as Pahui, that are conducted by community members who are in their same age cohort. Gao commented:

I witnessed 'Nao parents' in Chang'an county before. The neighbours from the village painted a moustache on the mother-in-law's face. She wore a suit and a high hat. The father-in-law wore a skirt and had a milk bottle hung on his neck. The father-in-law made a pigtail hairstyle. Each of them held small flags that said, "I will have a grandson," "I will feed him," etc. They needed to dance in front of the wedding car. If you don't dance, villagers will not allow you to pass. The parents were ordered to do this and that, dance Yangge, do whatever to make people laugh loudly (Gao 2017).

Xie's wedding in Guozhuangzhai, that I documented as part of my fieldwork, had a typical Pahui. His parents and his uncle and aunt dressed in folk opera style and were pranked along the road many times by the community members. In Figure 58, the two women on the left and two

men on the right are the groom's father and mother, uncle and his wife. They wore costumes of the ancient emperor and empress and were made up in folk drama style. To distinguish these family members, the groom's mother wore a gold-coloured hair decoration and his aunt wore an



Figure 58 Parents-in-law and their kin well dressed and decorated with folk opera costumes

enamel-coloured hair decoration. The groom's father wore the emperor's round cap while his brother wore an officer's cap. Others present in the photo were members of the Yangge team (see fig. 58).

The local community enthusiastically and routinely pranked the groom's parents. During the combined "blocking wedding cars" and Pahui, Xie's parents were stopped at least three times by their neighbours and relatives and made to perform games and parodies as they led the wedding cars' team to their residence (see fig. 59). On each occasion, all the wedding cars stopped and waited on the road until the games and parodies finished. Compared to Tian's father, who was barely made-up and only wore



Figure 59 Parents-in-law being stopped to do games by their peers

a cowboy hat, Xie's parents were vividly made-up, although they were not made to look ridiculous. They were open to tricks and pranks and happy to entertain their community members. They ignored the usual norms of decorum and enjoyed being the centre of attention on this momentous day.

Chinese small town and rural weddings are often supported, and controlled to some extent, by local community members. The involvement of the Pahui Association mentioned above, for example, may contribute towards Pahui retaining its wild features. The wedding above that I observed in Hancheng County, Shanxi Province, was community-organized; in other words, it was a vernacular wedding. For instance, the village's festival team took part. The village of Guozhuangzhai (郭莊砦) has a festival team that is comprised of over forty members. Made up of both men and women, this team performs Yangge dances and plays drums and gongs at various communal occasions such as celebrations, festivals and weddings. The village's informal norms were recognizable to me, even as an outsider (see fig. 60). The mission of the festival team was to lead the wedding party, who were travelling by car, from a specified



Figure 60 The village festival team composed of drummers and gong players

intersection to the groom’s residence, which is located in the middle of the village, a distance of over 1000 meters. Each drum was decorated with a red banner bearing the village name, “Guozhuangzhai” (郭莊砦). Following a lead drummer who stood on a truck, villagers rhythmically played drums and waited for the wedding party to arrive.

In rural areas, the community’s power and influence can be significant. With autonomous associations, villagers’ rites of passage such as births, weddings and funerals are well managed. When a family holds red events (weddings) or white events (funerals), villagers generally are supposed to help them for free. In return, when others need help, the family will volunteer. Thus, rural weddings can draw on a huge amount of assistance from community members and become a feast and festival for everyone living in the area: a “big day” (大日子) for all. It is common in some rural areas for couples to hire commercialized wedding services. For example, wedding banquets can be organized by a village-run catering business. There are still many rural areas, however,

where weddings are very much community affairs. Neighbours and relatives come to help the wedding families to prepare for food. For example, when I documented Ren and Liu’s wedding in Binhai, Shandong Province, female seniors from



Figure 61 Female village seniors volunteering to make dumplings for the wedding family

the village voluntarily prepared banquet food for the wedding family, including homemade dumplings (see fig. 61). Sometimes, led by an experienced wedding host like Zhaomin Yang,

community members also take part in the wedding as active participants. For example, under Yang's instruction, villagers were dancing together with Liu's parents in the yard of their family house (see fig. 62).



Figure 62 Villagers dancing together in the yard of Liu's family house under the wedding host's instruction

A remarkable scene touched me emotionally during Liu & Ren's wedding. As mentioned earlier, it is a familiar wedding tradition/taboo that a bride's feet not directly touch the soil; hence, she must walk on the red carpet or be held by some others to avoid walking on her own. In Liu and Ren's case, no one was asked to hold her; instead, she needed to walk on her own. There were still 200 meters after the bride got out of the wedding car. However, there was not a fancy red carpet long enough to reach 200 meters, so as the bridal couple kept walking forward, people from the community ran ahead to lay out pieces of



Figure 63 Community members ran and rushed to alternatively deliver fragmented red carpets for the bridal couple to walk on

red carpet to make a path for the bridal couple to walk on. The scene to me was somehow awkward and ironic. On one hand, the flashy and beautifully dressed bridal couple were walking on the carpet with petals and flowers dropping on their heads. On the other, villagers ran back and forth in the dust to deliver the red carpets piece by piece. Unfortunately, I failed to capture the two opposite scenes in one photo (see fig. 63). However, I was moved by people's keen and sincere efforts to help the wedding couple. I felt the care and mutual support from the community powerfully expressed by their diligence and assiduousness to finish this simple but specific mission. They were doing everything they could to ensure the couple began married life together with good luck.

Parents-in-law as protagonists of wedding games

During my fieldwork, I observed how parents-in-law, and not the newlyweds, can become the main protagonists of the wedding. During Xie's wedding, his parents were stopped in the path by their acquaintances of the same age and asked to play the Naodongfang game "biting an apple by two mouths" (see fig. 64), which is usually played by the groom and the bride. In the scene, it seemed that the parents were transformed into a newly married couple and were being pranked by their friends once again. Even though they were holding a wedding for their son, the community did not allow the groom and the bride to occupy the center stage. The most



Figure 64 Newlyweds' invisibility and parents' repositioning at their son's wedding

hilarious aspect for me was the yellow Chinese characters on the red inflatable gate behind the parents-in-law who were performing “biting an apple by two mouths.” Wedding companies usually print the wedding couple’s names on a detachable banner and fix it to a red inflatable gate, to announce their marriage to the community. Xie’s wedding was the first time I have seen the wedding couple’s names entirely ignored. In this case, it was not the couple’s names, but the groom’s parents’ names, on the detachable red banner. Characters on the red banner proclaimed, “Mr. Baipeng Xie and Mrs. Yindi Wang are wishing their beloved son a happy wedding.” It was a striking statement of the newlyweds’ invisibility and the parents’ repositioning as central characters at their son’s wedding. Interviewee Hongtao Gao also underscores the central role the groom’s parents can play in a wedding and how the bridal couple themselves can be nameless on the invitations: “Actually, many weddings are directed by parents. For example, if you read an invitation card from a rural wedding, it will be written like this, ‘Mr. Who and his wife are holding a wedding for his son/daughter.’ If invited guests are mainly the parents’ friends and acquaintances, the wedding will be driven by them. On these occasions (parents-driven weddings), the parents cannot avoid having red smeared on their faces and being made to wear hats. People will prank them” (Gao 2017).

In traditional weddings, the father-in-law and the bride can become the main joking targets and the groom be all but ignored. No wonder many wedding hosts suggest a milder Pahui and adapt this custom into a more simplified and entertaining form with less obscene elements whenever they are given the chance. In other words, they have tamed or “civilized” Pahui. Under the direction of a wedding host, some entertaining elements remain but scripts are altered to avoid embarrassment between the father-in-law and bride. Instead, interactions between the bride and the groom are highlighted. For example, siblings of the father-in-law may still carry and

deliver the bride, but the performances between the father-in-law and the bride are skipped (Sun & Li & Deng 2015, 116). According to Gao, the wedding host sometimes draws the parents-in-law into some wedding sessions. For example, when the bridal couple clinks their wine glasses and drinks wine together on the stage, the wedding host may also ask the parents to drink wine like the wedding couple. “Happy silver marriage!” Moreover, “when doing the tea serving ceremony, you can throw a question to the bride, ‘Will you first serve tea to your father-in-law or your mother-in-law? If the father-in-law goes first, you will have lots of money to spend next year. If the mother-in-law goes first, you will give birth to three babies next year.’ Then you let the bride decide” (Gao 2017). Gao’s experiences reflect how the parents can be drawn into the wedding festivities, sometimes to the point of becoming the primary focus.

Zhaomin Yang also has the talent of drawing parents into weddings. For example, in the wedding I documented, the parents and their siblings, hand in hand, performed in front of the video camera according to Yang’s instructions (see fig. 65). Moreover, during the afternoon wedding game session, he asked the parents-in-law to show a good example to the bridal couple by solving a wedding game that required two people to undo a knot tied in a piece of cloth with

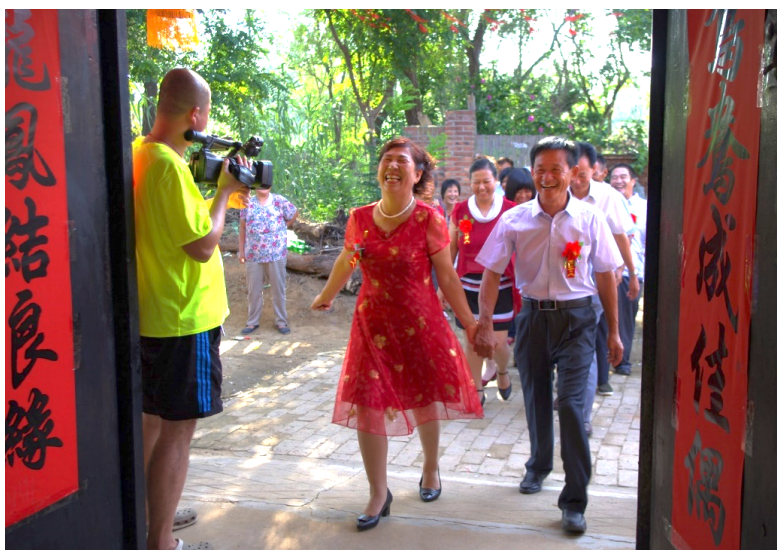


Figure 65 Hand in hand, the parents and their siblings performing many plots in front of the camera under Yang’s instruction



Figure 66 Parents-in-law showing a good example to the bridal couple by solving a wedding game

their teeth (see fig. 66). Without Zhaomin Yang’s instructions, people might not voluntarily play wedding games like these. Through drawing in the parents, wedding hosts like Yang highlight the significance of parents in Chinese weddings.

Father-in-law swapping with his son to play games with the bride

Some scholars have noted that in areas where Pahui is popular, the father-in-law, rather than the groom, can become the center of attention. For instance, in Figure 67, the groom’s father stood intrusively between the bride and the groom on a wedding ceremony stage. The four Chinese characters on his yellow plastic vest read, “I want to Pahui.”⁶ In these situations, the groom’s significance is diminished and the roles of the groom and his father are temporarily switched (Lei 2008: 108; Li & Deng & Sun 2015, 125). Chen stresses that parents-in-law and newlyweds communally perform and complete the wedding ceremony together. More accurately, the ceremony is completed by the father-in-law and the bride (J. Chen 2012, 50). In three

interviews conducted by Yuan Yu (2005), all interviewees emphasized that when guests trick the father-in-law and the bride, the groom is asked to stay away from them. The groom was not allowed to join in or witness Pahui, and he was assigned tasks like catering to the guests or told to stroll around. This indicates how the groom can be omitted



Figure 67 Father-in-law wearing a yellow plastic vest with four Chinese characters on it: “I Want to Pahui.”

⁶ The photo was obtained from this website. Accessed April 11, 2018. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%89%92%E7%81%B0/3981?fr=aladdin>.

and lose his position as the main protagonist of his own wedding. During some Pahui occasions, the father-in-law goes so far as to swap with his son in carrying out sexual games with the bride. This is especially true in vernacular weddings, like the wedding designed by the Pahui Association, where there is minimal or no presence of commercial wedding planners. In many cases, no one, including the bride herself if she is a local and/or familiar with the custom, feels this is anything out of the ordinary.

Clan-oriented weddings: father-in-law's siblings demonstrate patriarchal power to the community

Pu (2005) and Xi (2010, 252) explored the phenomenon of the groom and his father swapping roles in Chinese weddings. Unlike those scholars who support the view that Pahui aims to warn of sexual relations between the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law, Pu and Xi contend that Pahui in Qinghai and Henan Provinces is not merely a warning. They argue that “smearing colourful face” is what Edward Tylor would term a survival (1871) of the ancient custom of grabbing marriage. I support Xi’s observation that Pahui could be the redemption of the *Jus Primae Noctis*, which allowed the feudal lord to sleep with a virgin bride during the first couple of nights after her wedding ceremony. When elders in the hierarchical system have the *Jus Primae Noctis*, juniors are omitted. Hence, the groom has to waive the *Jus Primae Noctis* to his father who is more established in the hierarchical and patriarchal power system.

The idea of a warning of incest and waiving *Jus Primae Noctis* to seniors could explain why the father-in-law is ridiculed to perform the intimate interactions with the bride who shares the same household, but it does not solve the puzzle as to why all male siblings are involved in this practice. In many cases, many male siblings of the father-in-law are ridiculously made-up as

“firing men”—Shaohuolao (燒火佬)
 (see fig. 68)⁷. Rather, I would argue
 that showing off the patriarchal
 power of the wedding family is the
 primary purpose of tricking the
 father-in-law and his siblings.
 Making a display of how many
 male siblings the father-in-law has
 can be a statement of how strong



Figure 68 All male siblings of the father-in-law ridiculously made-up as “Firing Men” — Shaohuolao (燒火佬)

and powerful his family is; both are prominently demonstrated by emphasizing masculine visibility. Similarly, Zhaomin Yang asked four pairs of senior couples of the wedding family to follow the groom’s parents and to perform some rituals as a team (see fig. 69). Perhaps not all men in the team were siblings of the father-in-law; however, they were definitely kin or relatives of the parents. These people showed the strong bonds of patriarchal clans and were a powerful expression of masculinity. The social capital of the wedding family from the patriarchal perspective is proclaimed.



Figure 69 Stood pair by pair, senior couples of the wedding family following the parents of the groom to perform some rituals as a team

⁷ The photo was obtained from this website. Accessed April 11, 2018.
<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%83%A7%E7%81%AB%E4%BD%AC/365979>.

“A perfect man of completeness:” Chinese societal and familial structure

Perhaps a main reason that Pahui is widely practised across China is that clan-centred families are still the dominant family structure. In rural areas, three or more generations of a big clan-family can live “under the same roof” (同壹屋簷下). They cook, eat and entertain together. Hence, fathers-in-law and daughters-in-law can be geographically and sentimentally very close to each other in their daily lives. Interactions among them are frequent. Moreover, male siblings from all generations in the clan family can be potential sexual partners of the bride. In this sense, the warning function is directed at all male siblings. Secondly, in rural China, people often get married at a young age. Commonly, the maximum age for getting married is twenty-seven and many young people get married in their early twenties. This means the father-in-law, who is often in his forties to fifties, is still sexually active. Thirdly, in line with the trend of urbanization and labour mobility for working in big cities, more and more young men choose to work outside their hometowns to earn money. Hence, newly married brides and young mothers who are raising small children are left in rural areas to share the common household with clan seniors. The visible absence of husbands also increases the possibility of illicit sexual relationships between fathers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

In contrast, fathers-in-law from nuclear families in urban settings, where extended family members live dispersedly, are pranked differently than their rural counterparts. They sometimes are made up to look foolish and carry the bride on their backs, but rarely do they replace the grooms in doing sexual games with the brides or lead wedding ceremonies instead of their sons. Therefore, the sexual implications in urban settings are often obscure. In these contexts, Pahui acts as less of a warning; it is the entertainment value that dominates.

The Chinese have an old saying that you do not get married or hold a wedding for yourself. The implication is that weddings are held for families and clans, not for individuals. As a result, many weddings are not organized by the bridal couples, but by their parents. For example, my interviewee Gao commented on the parents' influence in Chinese weddings. "Some young people want to do travel wedding instead of holding a wedding in their hometown. The idea is good, but most parents would not agree with it. You cannot get married without informing your neighbours. No matter how, you can skip the wedding company, skip the wedding host, but at least you need to invite people to come for a dinner and inform them that your child is getting married" (Gao 2017). My interviewee Sun mentions one couple who had decided to get married on the 1st of October. However, according to a local fortune teller, the 1st of October was not an auspicious date for them, so their parents strongly disagreed. Finally, they had to change it to the 2nd of October (Sun 2017).

Chinese societies are still typically patriarchal. The guests who come to weddings are mainly the parents' friends and acquaintances. They come to "face-reward" (給面子) to, or for the benefit of, the well-established parents, not the groom and bride who are often young and inexperienced. That the father-in-law replaces the groom to play the leading role at the wedding shows that the groom has not assumed a leading role in the household even though he has got married. The groom's father is demonstrating that he is still the master of the family/household (壹家之主) through manipulating his son's wedding. A wedding definitely signals the groom's entry into manhood, but he cannot be the head of the family until he has proven himself. Only after many years of power negotiations, generally after the groom becomes a father, is he finally considered competent enough to be the master of a clan family.

Notions of “completeness” (圓滿) and a “perfect man” (person) (完人) drive many parents to try their best to contribute to their descendants. For example, they can take out big loans to help their son get married or they may pay an unreasonable bride-price and hold an extravagant wedding with the consequence of living in more impoverished conditions for many years. In return, parents become “perfect men (people) with completeness.” To be perfect men, parents have to raise at least one son and help him get married. A couple who does not have a son is already “incomplete” in many senses. Furthermore, even though a couple has a son, the fact that they do not have a grandson represents a permanent loss (Yang 2010). They are regarded as having no offspring (絕後). According to Yang’s research, his interviewee Shuquan’s son and daughter-in-law work in cities and only have one daughter. Due to the rapid pace of life, high educational costs and the influence of the “one-child policy,” the couple decided not to have a second child. This decision made the grandparents in the village feel lost and Shuquan eventually became an alcoholic (2010).

Young men can be expected to go back to their hometowns to marry even if they have worked in cities for several years. This is still a familiar life pattern for some rural residents. In return for his parents’ support growing up, a son has the responsibility to inherit their property as well as fulfil their wish to be “complete.” For example, my interviewee Zhigang Sun went back to his hometown in a small village after working in Tianjin city for six years. His experience of returning home to take on the role of eventual master of the family/household when his parents called him back is very common. He commented, “Young people in my village are all like this. After graduation from high school, they went to big cities to work. And once their parents mention getting married, they come back.” When I asked, “will you begrudge having to leave city life? Did you come back to the village without hesitation?” He replied, “Coming back is

coming back. That was it! If I stay there longer until my current age, I will not come back. I was very young at that time. When parents called me for marriage, I immediately accepted” (Sun 2017). Whether or not this pattern holds true for the next younger generations remains to be seen but Sun’s experience suggests that the concept of “completeness” and the traditional clan-oriented family structure are still relevant for some rural families today. For them, a wedding becomes a rite of passage for parents; it is like their second wedding. In fact, their son’s wedding is probably more important than their own wedding which was held by their parents when they were young. It can prove their accomplishment of the most significant life purpose (立命). Now they can die without pity (or meet ancestors without shame for some of them). A son’s wedding becomes the ritual for acknowledging his parent’s identity as “perfect men (people) with completeness.” Given this, parental interference and significance cannot be ignored in Chinese weddings, especially during the ritual Pahui.

In the next chapter, the focus moves from parents to groom. It discusses men’s roles, including beating, humiliating and cross-dressing grooms during Naodongfang.

Chapter Seven

Naodongfang as Male Initiation: Jealousy, Revenge and Bullying

As the joking target at a Chinese wedding, the groom can be tricked and abused by pranksters in many ways. Ye and Wu contend that beating grooms, preventing them from getting into rooms or embarrassing and tricking groomsmen were popular activities from the Tang Dynasty according to Tang historical materials (1998: 54). These customs can still be witnessed today. Beating grooms and humiliating them through means such as make up, cross-dressing and tying them to a post, remain common. According to my interviewee Hongtao Gao, in Ankang City, Shaanxi Province, people tie up the groom and pour chicken blood on him. They also use extinguishers to spray powder on him (Gao 2017). My interviewee Zhigang Sun spoke of people throwing eggs and pouring beer and soy sauce on the groom: “The groom will look like a drowning ghost after this” (Sun 2017). Therefore, Hongtao comments that “grooms in Ankang city have to prepare at least three sets of suits for their wedding days because the first two sets will be torn to pieces by people. It would help if you prepared enough suits to keep at least one set for the formal wedding ceremony” (Gao 2017).

Just as in those cases when females are victims and get hurt, grooms are sometimes injured too. For example, in 2014, a groom in Taiyuan city in Shanxi Province was beaten and died some days later.¹ In 2015, a groom in Shaanxi province accidentally fell from the 6th floor of a high building in an attempt to avoid being pranked during Naodongfang (Hao & Qi 2015). As mentioned earlier, in 2009, in Zunyi City, Guizhou Province, a groom was tied and pranked

¹ Accessed May 3, 2018. <https://www.chinanews.com/sh/shipin/2014/10-29/news516130.shtml>.

by his groomsmen during “picking up the bride.” The men poured paint on his body. Unfortunately, there was a gas leak in the shower room and when the groom tried to clean the paint on his body, he was badly burned and had to be hospitalized. Later, the groom sued all eleven participants who pranked him (Wang & Zhang 2019). Recently, in 2018, also in Zunyi city, a groom was hit by a car when crossing the highway to escape from being pranked by his groomsmen (Pengpaixinwen 2019). This chapter explores why grooms are pranked at weddings. First, I compare beating grooms during Naodongfang to the Western wedding traditions of Irish Strawboys and bachelor parties. Second, I discuss the feminizing of grooms and groomsmen in wedding games through methods such as cross-dressing. Finally, I consider intimate physical contact among males during wedding games within larger constructions of Chinese masculinity.

Beating Grooms

Throughout my fieldwork, the physical abuse of grooms was prevalent. For example, for over one hour and a half during Tian and Wang’s Naodongfang, participants beat Tian more than thirty times with their belts. According to my interviewee M (anonymous):

Nowadays, Naodongfang participants need to sign in first. Every participant needs to beat the groom three times on his buttocks. When playing games, if the bride does not cooperate, the result is to beat the groom. There is a saying: if the groom can sit on a chair on his buttocks the next day, it indicates that he does not have a group of good lads. Hence, we need to check his buttocks after beating him to see whether they are bruised enough. I heard that in some areas, people will beat the groom to death. They are all cases in villages. In rural areas, people hit the groom very severely. They even have used metal nails to stab the groom. Urban areas are milder; we only beat his buttocks. However, in the past, the beatings were more severe than today. People used a rolling pin to bash the groom. But now only belts are used because belts can bruise the buttocks without injuring the bones (M 2016).

At the wedding I observed in Hancheng, beating the groom was a ritualized procedure. A group of young men waited for the wedding car to arrive at the venue. Before the wedding car arrived, a senior woman from the groom’s family tried unsuccessfully to dissuade the group of young

men by saying, “don’t beat the bridal couple too harshly.” When the bridal couple arrived, young men swarmed around the wedding car and beat the groom (see fig. 70). After the bride got out of the car, the group immediately surrounded her and the groom and hauled them over to a wall. I am not sure what they did to the bride, but she became outraged and started to sob. At this point the group of young men let her go but they continued to bully the groom. After negotiations, the groom agreed to leapfrog to the wedding venue that was nearly 50 meters away (see fig. 71).

Similarly, during the wedding I observed in Weifang, young men kept creating obstacles for the bridal couple. At first, two young strong men pulled on opposite sides of a red cloth

and tried their best to tie it in a very tight knot that was supposed to be opened by the couple with



Figure 70 Ritually beating the groom by a group of young men in the village



Figure 71 The groom was punished to do leapfrogs for 50 meters

their teeth. Obviously, this was a pretty difficult task after the men's intentional efforts to make the knot as tight as possible (see fig. 72). Second, they held bamboo sticks, stood behind the groom and were ready at all times to whip and beat him (see fig. 73). Finally, they kept taking away props in order to make the wedding games more difficult for the couple to play. Wedding couples can become easily offended during this kind of ritualized violence. In this case, the groom Liu got angry at the guests and at one point he violently grabbed the props back and dropped himself on the dusty ground as seen by the dust on his pant (see fig. 74). These examples indicate that a groom is not only battered by the bride's side but can also be abused by young men from his own community. During my fieldwork, I became intrigued by how beating and hindering grooms has become a custom to the extent that young



Figure 72 Two young men making the cloth knot as tight as possible



Figure 73 Some men holding sticks and waiting to beat the groom



Figure 74 The groom fiercely grabbed the game prop back from two young men

men in the community will sometimes show up to beat a groom at his wedding even though they do not personally know him. The following exchange I had with Zhigang Sun provides some clues to why this is:

Sun: Because many brides are pregnant now, people start to Nao grooms. It is rare that a groom's full suit survives his wedding day. When he gets out of the wedding car, all his clothes will be stripped off. No matter winter or summer, only his underpants will be left. After stripping him, the groom will be tied to a telegraph pole.

Wang: When you married, were you pranked like this?

Sun: No. It was not popular when I married.

Wang: You mean the custom became popular recently?

Sun: We were not like this before. Perhaps three or four years ago, the custom spread from Ling county in Dezhou city. Pingyuan county did not do this before.

Wang: That is interesting. I would like to know why people are doing this across China. Because of the pervasiveness of internet culture?

Sun: Wedding games everywhere will gradually become the same. One reason is the development of social media. Another reason is that people are working and studying in other places besides their hometown. In the past, if people were good at studying, they would pass the exam and go to universities in big cities. Someone who was not good at studying would stay at home. However, things have changed. Nowadays, even common families will send their children to big cities for colleges or Polytechnique schools. They can easily find a job in Dezhou city. Spreading a custom from Dezhou to Pingyuan, very close and fast, right? So, for instance, my home is in Pingyuan, but I am working in Dezhou; I learned this custom from attending my friend's wedding in Dezhou. Then when I have a wedding in Pingyuan, my friends come and they undoubtedly bring the same custom here. In the course of contacts, the custom spreads.

Wang: Have you attended many weddings with Nao grooms?

Sun: "Many" is not an accurate phrase. "Too many" is the correct phrase. Almost every wedding has a section of Nao grooms (2017).

According to Sun, the popularity of Nao grooms derives from labour mobility and the rapid communication in digital times. He may be correct but, as I discuss more fully later, abusing grooms has a history cross culturally. It is interesting, however, that rarely is a bride harshly pranked by her own friends and family. During Naodongfang her "trouble" comes from her

finance's side. On the other hand, a groom can be beaten and abused by both his and the bride's side. In this chapter I focus mainly on violence directed towards grooms by their friends. Those who are normally allies suddenly become temporary enemies.

Revenge

Deliberate or unconscious revenge is sometimes evident in Naodongfang. It is the motivation my interviewee Sun gave for Nao grooms (2017) and testimonies from news reports support his view. The accounts tell of people who hold a grudge sometimes looking for revenge at weddings. For example, newlyweds may be unhappy with their treatment in Naodongfang. When asked why they later became batterers at others' weddings, they replied, "I am returning how he treated me," or "everyone experiences this. It doesn't matter" (Z. Li 2017, 140). Revenge is largely, but not solely, conducted by men. Shang noted a case that was initiated by a woman: "There is an elder sister in my wife's clan; she is very fierce. She likes Luan (亂 joking). When I visited my wife's village during the Spring Festival for the first time, I forgot to bring candies as gifts for her children. Hence, she deliberately tricked me during my wedding... Those women at the front gate are neighbours. I joke with them every day. They had been waiting for a long time to smear joyful ashes on my face" (Shang 2000, 64, 76).

The one who teases the newlyweds most harshly generally is the one who is later pranked most severely at his own wedding. This is similar to what Pauline Greenhill observed about the Canadian shivaree: "[I]f the groom has been known for particularly nasty tricks at others' charivaris, he can expect to receive the same or worse from previous victims" (Greenhill 2012). My interviewee Cheng noted: "in Naodongfang, the person who harshly tricks the couple is always the one the groom has most harshly tricked earlier. Generally unmarried bachelors would

not dare to tease the newlyweds too harshly because they worry that the groom will take revenge on them in a more brutal way when they get married” (Cheng 2014).

Journalist Heng Zheng wrote an article about people’s explanations for why they take part in Naodongfang: “Wedding day is the most auspicious day. People attend weddings to benefit from the good luck associated with them. Hence we Nao.” However, the underlying reasons are not always as innocent as the last claim suggests. One young man reported, “When I see my friend is getting married, I am jealous and envious; hence I want to Nao him.” Meanwhile, a young woman commented, “When I see this guy abducted my best girlfriend, I feel it is unfair and I must Nao them” (Zheng 2018). Sometimes, the goal of Naodongfang participants is to irritate and humiliate the couple. Zheng’s interviewee, Mr. Zhang, in Kunming city, described what happened during his friend’s wedding: “We egged on the groom to kiss the bride. If the groom refused, his workmates would hold the bride and act obscenely to irritate the groom. When the groom got irritated, his workmates started to mock him” (Zheng 2018).

For men, the main method of channeling a bachelors’ revenge on the groom is to beat him. In a show of bravado, my interviewee M boasted that he did not let the fear of future repercussions affect his violent conduct at friends’ Naodongfang: “I am the last one to be married among my friends. During their Naodongfang, they negotiated with me and asked me to beat them lightly. They said they would beat me lightly at my Naodongfang. I replied, ‘No way. I will beat you as harshly as I can. You can beat me as harshly as you can when I get married. I am not intimidated’” (M 2016). M described a painful story about how fierce the revenge can be if someone holds a grudge against the groom:

Actually we do not want to play Naodongfang games; we just want to beat the groom. Because you know that he beat you before, so you want to take revenge. I heard about one case. The man held a grudge for a long time against the groom. Thus, once he knew that the groom was getting married, he prepared for one month before the wedding date.

He went to the mountain and picked up a date tree branch. He put the branch in the water of a well for a month. On the wedding night, he came. He did not say anything but harshly beat the groom and immediately left. The date branch had become extremely strong after being put in the well water for a month and the blows from the branch were unimaginably painful. People all know that the groom cannot fight back during the wedding day no matter how fiercely beaten or bullied by people (M 2016).

The ritual abuse of grooms satisfies what Freud referred to as the hostile tendency. Freud divided humour into harmless wit and tendency wit. Harmless wit uses puns and other means of language skills while tendency wit satisfies unconscious desires; tendency wit is divided into sexual tendency and hostile tendency (1916). Freud believed humour that satisfies the sexual tendency is often obscene and points to the opposite gender by flirting and seducing, while humour that satisfies the hostile tendency gains pleasure through threatening peers of the same gender. In Naodongfang, when groomsmen trick the groom by requiring him to cross-dress or otherwise look ridiculous, or when they tie him to a pole and throw eggs at him, they arguably satisfy the “hostile tendency” which originates in their bachelor jealousy and revenge. Freud theorized that when we mock our enemies, their failure, combined with the audience’s laughter, becomes a source of our pleasure. Many scholars of humour since Freud have also pointed to jokes as expressions of aggression. For example, folklorist Elliott Oring believes that jokes and humour come out of aggression: “Aggressive impulses, may, on occasion, utilize forms of intellectual play (i.e., jokes) as weapons, but impulses of play, mediated by the intellect, can similarly manipulate aggression in the construction of jokes” (Oring 1975, 159). Similarly, Richard S. Tallman claims that “the purpose of a practical joke is to fool someone, to have fun at the expense of someone else” (1976, 269).

Studies of masculinity and initiation rites hold clues to better understanding aggression and bullying behaviours disguised as humour. Many scholarly articles show how initiation rites construct and reinforce hegemonic masculinity from boyhood to manhood. Based on his research

on initiation rites in a Mesoamerican cargo system, Alexander Moore (1979, 76) highlights that men's rites of intensification "demonstrate collective bases for common behaviour. They therefore must somehow overcome any real basis for disunity and opposition within the community" (1979, 76). Moore writes, "traditional initiations are based on a sense of tribal belonging that encourages chauvinistic and xenophobic attitudes; the tribal group is defined, at least in part, by the exclusion of outsiders. In the context of an elaborately organized and inescapably interdependent society, we can ill afford this kind of tribalism today" (Moore 1979, 191). While traditional "puberty rites" have lost their significance and rituals marking people's coming of age such as menstruation now only operate in nuclear families and schools, if at all, scholars recently have looked to occupational groups and other social groups as contexts for initiation rituals. For example, Michael A. Robidoux explores the underlying meanings of initiation rituals for novice Canadian professional hockey players (2001).

Ray Raphael's foundational work, *The Men from the Boys: Rites of Passage in Male America* (1988) highlights the importance of various modern male initiation rituals. Raphael's interviewees come from multiple backgrounds and include soldiers of the Vietnam War, bodybuilders, athletes and even gang members. Raphael also creatively defines new emergence as initiation rituals. For example, from Raphael's standpoint, even a mid-life crisis can be considered a rite of passage. Raphael identifies a type of freestyle initiation. He writes, "Freestyle initiations can occur in any location, situation, or context; the only requirement is that a youth set for himself a series of goals which, once achieved, will prove to his own satisfaction that he's a man" (Raphael 1988, 67). Some studies underscore how initiation rites can be cruel and fun at the same time and sometimes the boundary between torture and enjoyment is obscured. For example, incoming students at St. Peter's University are supposed to be initiated

during a week called Frosh Week (McDavid 2002). The rites include a lot of unpleasant tasks such as crawling through a slide full of food and having the university's letters shaved on your head. Students expressed a range of emotional responses but many later generally characterized the activities positively. Initiation tests can be a type of socialization that is experienced as anxiety producing or enjoyable or both.

The answer as to why beatings and humiliation are pervasive in male initiations worldwide lies in widespread constructions of hegemonic masculinity. Conventional stereotypes of masculinity value physical and emotional toughness. In the past this helped to perpetuate bullying behaviors. Victims were expected to take abuse without complaint, and perpetrators often defended themselves by protesting that they were "only playing" or "it is just a joke." Hence, it seems possible to understand bullying as one broad type of play for children. Drawing on a developmental-behavioural psychological perspective, Gail Sessoms explains the various skills children develop from their play. The physical functions help children develop muscles, bones, stamina, brain function, balance, speed and coordination. The emotional functions help children deal with relationships.²

Children learn all these skills from play, including bullying. Although today scholars understand that bullying constructs intragroup order and maintains hierarchy in ways that are often psychologically damaging to individual group members, it was once a tolerated, if not implicitly encouraged, aspect of hegemonic male culture. It is possible that some of the main

² According to Sessoms, "self-esteem is enhanced" and the child "learns how to build healthy relationships." She argues that not only do they learn to succeed through play, but they also learn how to react to disappointment (2013). Finally, the social functions of play are significant to children's socialization and the formation of their egos. Sessoms writes: "Social functions of play help children develop social skills when they learn about taking turns and sharing, rules, negotiation, cooperation and conflict resolution. Your child will learn which behaviors are inappropriate, such as hitting, and how to apologize and make amends. Children need the social skills learned during play to enter the adult world. While playing with others, children begin to develop characteristics such as kindness, empathy and self-control. Children begin to develop morals and to understand more about consequences" (Sessoms 2013).

methods of bullying found in Naodongfang, such as beating, mocking and cross-dressing, may be rooted in knowledge and experiences of childhood or of types of male initiations in areas such as sports. Western wedding customs like strawboys and bachelor parties are other examples that can continue male bullying practices.

Irish strawboys and Naodongfang

Analysis of violence against the groom in Western pre-marriage customs, such as the Irish tradition of strawboys, helps shed light on its place in Naodongfang. One of the most striking characteristics in accounts of Irish wedding traditions is the ever-present potential for fun to get out of control and turn into tragedy. This is evident in Linda Ballard's following description of an Irish wedding:

Around the shores of Lough Neagh the custom was to fire shots after the newly married couple. Sometimes the shots were counted, as a large number indicated the widespread popularity of the couple. The custom was not without attendant risks, as the following account, recorded in the Portglenone area, reveals, 'There was a story about a man and a woman, they got married here at the chapel, Greenlough Chapel down there... They were walking up here after getting married and he had got a castor hat on, a big tall hat. And they would have shot at the weddings at that time you know. There were one or two walking up behind them, and they had guns with them. One boy says to the other, 'You see my blowing the hat off the boy!' And he got up the gun to shoot and he took the skull and hat and all off (Ballard 1991, 22).

Figure 75 shows how commonplace this danger was at weddings.³ The photo is of a group of men waiting for a bridegroom near Portglenone, Co. Antrim, Ireland in



Figure 75 A group of Irish men holding guns and waiting for a bridegroom in the early 1900s

³ The photo was obtained from Linda Ballard's article "Wedding Pranks." *Archaeology Ireland* 5, no. 4: 21-22.

the early 1900s to salute him with gunfire. While normally this resulted only in celebratory shoots being fired, as Ballard's account indicates, there was always the potential for things to go wrong. With men holding loaded guns to welcome the groom, you would never really know for sure what would happen to that groom and whether events would get out of control. The possibility of tragedy was always there.

In the past, the custom of Irish strawboys, that has parallels with Naodongfang, was arguably one of the most significant ways for bachelors to express their jealousy of the married couple. Young men in the village covered their faces with straw masks and formed a team of "strawboys" who came for treats even if they were not invited to the wedding. Moreover, Irish strawboys were believed to be spiritual when they wore straw costumes. Hence, strawboys were supposed to be entertained and treated well by the wedding families, and, based on the principle of contagious magic, it was believed that if they threw their straw costumes on the treetop next to the newlyweds' residence, it would carry bad luck to them. Ballard writes:

In parts of Co. Fermanagh, uninvited guests prepared themselves to join in the celebrations by dressing in straw costumes with masks which obscured their faces. Costumes of this sort were also worn by the Christmas Rhymers in Fermanagh and elsewhere. Strawboys expected to dance with the bride and her friends and to be hospitably treated at the wedding party. Their arrival was often thought to betoken good luck to the couple, and to exclude from a party a group of high-spirited and disguised young men might well be considered unlucky. If they considered they had been well treated they made a bonfire of their costumes in the yard before they left, but if they were poorly entertained the costumes would be thrown up into the highest trees surrounding the place where the party had been held, and left there to rot as an inauspicious omen.



Figure 76 Irish Strawboy and his costume

Strawboys were also familiar in parts of the south and west of Ireland (Ballard 1991, 22. See fig. 76).⁴

In his article “Some Marriage Customs and Their Regional Distribution,” Caoimhín Ó Danachair describes the essential elements of the strawboy tradition, including cross-dressing, disguise and dancing at weddings:

Whenever a wedding takes place, gangs of men and boys appear on the scene, dressed up in women’s dresses, and with straw masks completely covering their heads, in order to dance at the wedding. A gang consists of twelve men; the captain of the gang asks the bride to dance with him. It is thought to bring bad luck if anyone recognises the “straw boys”, as they are called. In a letter dated “Belmullet, Sept. 28, 1892”, Mr. Green writes: “At a wedding our fish curers were at the other day, several gangs of strawboys turned up in succession. They drank very little, but the dancing went on till 6 a.m.” (A. C. Haddon 1893, 123-124; as quoted in Danachair 1976, 156).

Henry Glassie addresses why bachelors made up the majority of mummers in Ireland and compares mummering to strawboys. He notes that strawboys are the more violent pranksters probably because this is the last request “the community of bachelors would make of the woman who was being taken from them” (1972, 116). Hence, they chose “Hallow Eve to wander abroad like the spirits, to frolic with a house’s young women, to attack those who held women from them, to batter violently at the conventions that frustrated sexual interchange” (1972, 116). Bachelors show their dissatisfaction especially when the number of women is limited, and bachelors find it difficult to locate wives in villages for themselves. Because marriage is still so significant to men’s status in villages, Danachair writes, “In rural Ireland the unmarried person never had the same status as those who were married. An unmarried man of fifty was still a ‘boy’ while his married nephew of twenty-five was a man; the young wife of twenty had the full status of a matron while the spinster of forty-five was practically a nobody” (Danachair 1976, 170).

⁴ Notes of Figure 76: “Victor Ross of the Derrylin area, Co. Fermanagh, wears a strawboy costume which he has made. The double-pronged crown to the mask indicates that it is to be worn by the leader of the group. The single-pronged mask was worn by a member.” Linda Ballard. 1991. “Wedding Pranks.” *Archaeology Ireland* 5, no. 4: 21-22.

That gender imbalance was a serious issue in villagers' lives, and could result in violence, was reflected by strawboys. Ballard observes: "They are more broadly characteristic of those who have not been invited... They generally stayed outside, and I've heard of them reaching a briar through the window and catching the bride by the hair of her head" (Ballard 1991, 21).

Strawboys thus became an expression of subversion against the powerful married men who monopolized the community's female resources. It is understandable in the context of Irish rural society described by Glassie and others that bachelors would feel jealousy towards newly married couples. By wearing strawboy costumes and demanding dances with brides during a "surprise visit" at the Irish wedding, bachelors transferred *Jus Primae Noctis* to the groom.

Just as in Naodongfang, Ballard found a dialectical characteristic of strawboys: "The ambivalence of these customs associated with marriage provided opportunities for the expression of jealousy and ill feeling, but accounts often stress that behaviour of this sort illustrated the popularity of the couple concerned" (Ballard 1991, 22). In both the strawboys tradition in Ireland and Naodongfang in China, the most pranked couple is usually not socially incompetent. Instead, the bride and groom are popular figures with a wealth of social resources in the community to draw on.

Bachelor Parties and Naodongfang

Another Western pre-marriage custom that is similar to Chinese Naodongfang is the bachelor party. Bachelorette parties offer comparison as well, but my focus here is the bachelor party. Compared to the strawboys tradition, bachelor parties have fewer violent elements and pranks are targeted at the groom rather than at the bridal couple more generally. The bachelor party (also known as a stag party or stag night) in North America is held shortly before a man gets married. Usually hosted by the groom's best men or his group of closest friends, it is

considered a last goodbye to the groom's pre-marital life. As a celebration of his final night of "freedom," the gathering can be a low-key affair consisting of a few drinks or cards' games, but at least stereotypically, it is a wilder event that can include hiring a female stripper or visiting a bar with topless waitresses. Generally, sex does not take place in this situation, however, sex, liquor and pranks are recurring motifs at bachelor parties. For example, in an online list of "Ten things that should be done in a bachelor party," one suggestion is to require the groom to obtain the telephone number of a woman he has never met before or take a naked photo of her (Easter 2019).

Both bachelor parties and Chinese weddings are contexts for sexualized games that are strikingly similar. For example, when Hui Li and Qihuan Shen recorded Swedish and Danish bachelor parties in 2000 and 2005, they noted that parading and cross-dressing grooms are prevalent both in Scandinavian bachelor parties and Chinese wedding games. In Denmark, the bride and groom were respectively guided by their friends and asked to complete some tasks on the street. They were forced to wear ragged costumes and boards declaring "I am gonna be married" hung around their necks. The groom was forced to drink a bucket of liquor. Sometimes he was tied to a pole on the street. Meanwhile, the bride was required to sell something trivial, such as outdated newspapers or empty bottles, to people passing by. She had to try to sell these objects to the highest bidder; hence, she enticed passengers by promising to dance with or kiss them (Shen 2005, 77).

Hui Li observed two bachelor parties held for Scandinavian men; one took place in Sweden and the other in Beijing. In the Swedish version, the groom was dressed up oddly in the 1970s style of black bell-bottom pants and high-heeled boots like Elvis Presley. His workmates painted his face blue and white to indicate his Finnish nationality. As an aircraft company

employee, the groom had to distribute posters of his company to passengers, saying: “this is the best aircraft in the world. Come to buy it.” Later, the groom was cross-dressed in a female costume and given artificial breasts. Finally, he played some games with beer bottles on a soccer playground. The bride was asked to cook and sell omelettes on the street (2000, 24-27). In the Beijing version, the Swedish groom was made to wear an olive-green Chinese army coat. He had a trumpet hung on his neck and was forced to sing and blow the trumpet in Tian’anmen Square around midnight after all men got drunk. The connections between Chinese wedding games and games played at Scandinavian bachelor parties are apparent. In fact, it is possible that there is cross cultural exchange among the events; Chinese participants may have learned some of these games from bachelor parties held in Scandinavia and adapted them to Chinese Naodongfang, or vice versa. Significantly, Hui Li notes that in the Scandinavian examples, the fiercest pranksters were former grooms whom the current groom had pranked before (Li 2000, 27), which is the same as in Chinese Naodongfang.

Despite the many similarities between bachelor parties and Naodongfang, there is a clear distinction between the individualism of the bachelor parties and the collectivism of Naodongfang. At the bachelor party, the groom is the target and participants are usually his male friends. In contrast, the jokes and pranks of Naodongfang target both the groom and the bride and participants are from a broader community. Naodongfang is the only party held for the newlyweds, not one of two or more events held respectively for the groom or the bride by their own friends. A final difference is timing. A bachelor party is held before a wedding and as such it is the most significant male pre-marriage ritual. In contrast, Naodongfang takes place right after a wedding and, at that time, the couple is legally married. The groom’s status is reflected in the activities held at each event. The underlying premise is that he is single during the bachelor

party, and therefore hypothetically able to have casual sex with another woman. During Naodongfang, however, he is a married man and, as such, extramarital sex is out of the question.

In China, pre-marriage bachelor and bachelorette parties are much less popular than Naodongfang. Nonetheless, some Chinese participants may regard Naodongfang as a type of bachelor party to say a farewell to their pre-marital lives; hence, a confluence of bachelor parties and Naodongfang initiates. For example, Teo's interviewee claimed: "After this day, I'm someone's wife and he's someone's husband. It's really our one final chance to go wild," Ms. Wang, 28, said. "A wedding is such an important occasion; we should create lasting memories of this day" (Teo 2016).

Feminization of Grooms in Wedding Games

While Naodongfang initiates both brides and grooms in a rite of passage, grooms can be particularly tested. A variety of means are used to test a groom's ability to be a good sport; he can be forced to perform heavy labour or to cross-dress. As an expression and side effect of misogyny, men's hegemonic masculinity is deconstructed and then reconstructed, often by feminizing and demasculinizing them. During Hu and Chen's "gate crash," the groom and his groomsmen were made to wear Swan Lake ballerina tutus. They held each other's hands and danced ballet at the bridesmaids'



Figure 77 The groom and groomsmen wearing Swan Lake ballerina dresses and dancing

request (see fig. 77). Moreover, Hu wore a cute bunny rabbit hairband and knelt like a knight in front of the bride. One bridesmaid put lipstick on Hu's lips, and he was asked to stamp the wedding vow document with his lips' print and to read the vows loudly to the bride and all guests (see fig. 78).



Figure 78 Pre-wedding Game: the groom decorated with lipsticks and a bunny hairband

When pranking a groom, it is popular to dress him in a female costume; sometimes he is made to wear padding that gives the impression of exaggerated female breasts and hips. Other times he can be forced to wear bras and women's underpants outside his formal clothing. At Tian's Naodongfang, two balloons were put under his red undershirt to mimic female breasts and another was placed on his crotch. Pranksters asked the bride, Wang, to squeeze the balloons until they burst. With her fingers, she tried to pinch the balloons that simulated breasts (see fig. 79). The scene was clearly meant to reverse and distort the groom and the bride's gender.



Figure 79 Gender reversed in Naodongfang

Cross-dressing is an essential part of wedding games and traditions in many countries and it can act as a sort of parody that both mocks and intensifies the meaning and importance of the wedding on a societal and communal level. For example, the groom can be cross-dressed at a Western bachelor party, especially if it takes place in a bar district. He can be forced to wear a bra and put on makeup like a woman. In writing about Irish strawboys, Danachair also mentions the prevalence of cross-dressing. In this tradition he notes that “the men usually wear woman’s dresses and false faces” (1976, 161). Similarly, cross-dressing is an integral component of mock weddings usually performed in conjunction with the community celebration of a couple’s marriage or a milestone anniversary on the Canadian and American prairies. In mock weddings, much of the humour comes from cross-dressed actors; men dress like women, while women take on the men’s roles, usually in an exaggerated way (Taft 1997). When genders are reversed, normal life is disrupted. Michael Taft writes, “The mock wedding, in its function as a parody, turns the world upside down, and is a celebration of ‘nonsense’ as much as anything else” (Taft 1997, 132).

Taft explains why men agree to dress like women during mock weddings and other wedding games. He argues that it represents being a “good sport” and is proof of, rather than a challenge to, their masculinity. He writes, “The more that the male actors mug as women, the more they accentuate their own manliness” (1997, 135). Moreover, if a man can endure humiliation from other men, he becomes qualified to live and work in this community. Taft continues, “The exact dimensions of being a good sport will vary from community to community, at the heart of this designation is a man who will neither shirk nor fear the responsibilities of community life... In ritual and ludic contexts, the good sport is one who, in the

interest of good fellowship, is willing to endure ridicule, humiliation, and even physical pain at the hands of other community members” (Taft 1997, 133-4).

In a “ludic” or playful manner, male rites of passage can have the goal of making the initiate emotionally and physically stronger. Raphael writes, “In most cultures, boys must repudiate their prior vulnerability and aspire to a matrix of personality traits more appropriate to manhood: strength, endurance, courage, confidence, self-reliance” (Raphael 1988, x). These traits of hegemonic masculinity that Raphael mentions relate to the historic identification of men as “breadwinners” and labourers. Initiation rites can test male physical strength and emotional toughness that historically were part of a hegemonic construction of male identity and affirmation of manhood. By extension, wedding games that target the groom can be read as a test of whether or not he is a man and competent enough to take on the responsibilities of his marital life as a husband. For example, in Wang and Tian’s case, participants mainly targeted the groom, rather than the bride, which made the whole atmosphere joyful and elated, instead of obscene and threatening. It means that the groom undertook the humiliation the bride supposed to take and saved her from Naodongfang. The dynamics implied how the bridal couple would treat each other in their married life. Historically, in Chinese culture a man was judged on his ability to live up to his responsibilities and to protect his wife.

Cross-dressing the groom during wedding games symbolically feminizes and demeans him. For example, the photo



Figure 80 Men mimicking penetration in Naodongfang

I took at Tian's Naodongfang vividly shows a participant simulating penetration. As Tian lay on the bed, with the three balloons put under his red undershirt and pants to mimic breasts and private parts, one of his friends rubbed his giant "breasts" and imitated having intercourse with him (see fig. 80). Through actions like these, Naodongfang male participants feminize the groom and humiliate him.

On the one hand, agreeing to be cross-dressed and going along with the pranks that follow a groom's ability to be a good sport. On the other, he risks being feminized and symbolically penetrated by his male peers. The dynamics parallel those described by Clover Williams in her study of Californian bachelor parties. Clover argues that guests "Other" the groom through feminizing him. The bachelor's feminization is an objectification, humiliation and expulsion (1994, 106). In another context, Oring similarly described feminizing a male friend and simulating sexual penetration as an act of domination. He writes, "dueling among Turkish boys is expressed in terms that feminize and subordinate an opponent by portraying him as a submissive female to be sexually penetrated" (Oring 2008, 187).

Japanese feminist scholar Chizuko Ueno argues that one of the most powerful ways men confirm their hegemonic masculinity to other men is demonstrating that they are not gay. Hence, she contends that the binary scheme of gender is not males versus females but straight males versus straight males. Females can be used as media or tools by men who believe that an obvious means to prove their hegemonic masculinity. To avoid being identified as homosexual, is to marry a woman or to have many female sexual partners. According to Ueno, men who are feminized, and do not conform to hegemonic masculine stereotypes, run the risk of being labelled as homosexual and rejected by their male peers who more successfully embody those hegemonic masculine traits (Ueno 2010). Thus, Ueno argues, within the context of hegemonic

masculinity, if a man is deemed penetrable, he is considered a non-man (Ueno 2010). Within the confines of hegemonic masculinity, feminization is a fundamental mechanism used by some males to exert superiority, revenge, insult and hatred over others; this dynamic validates the importance of a dualistic gender scheme of “males versus males” (Ueno 2010).

Taft points out that the men who willingly dress as women during mock weddings do so for comic effect. Rather than call into question their hegemonic masculinity, cross-dressing underscores it. Taft writes, “Men are confident and not be afraid to dress as women to accentuate their own manliness; cross dressing allows men to express their female side; or transvestism disempowers the women who are disempowering men and re-assert men’s power and control to women” (Taft 1997, 132-7). Taft also finds that when more and more women are working outside the domestic sphere, men are not “in control of the agricultural and economic forces,” and that “the good sports of the community are under siege. They need every chance they can get to re-assert their power and control” (1997, 137). While it may first seem that cross-dressing disempowers men and promotes women’s significance, it can be argued that men’s cross-dressing actually reinforces hegemonic masculinity and power. In other words, this embodies the sociological monoecism of men, or a state of having both male and female organs of reproduction. The absence of monoecism of women apparently becomes an opportunity to disempower women and re-assert men’s hegemonic masculinity.

Chinese Masculinities

When picking up the bride, physical contact between male and female participants is generally limited, but this may not be the case for physical interaction among the male participants. Some experienced wedding hosts are able to judge whether a group of bridesmaids will take part in games with a group of groomsmen and, if they are willing, will organize

wedding games for them. More often, however, games involving physical contact pit men against men. For example, male guests might put a balloon on the crotch of a groomsman who is made to lie down on his back. In a simulation of heterosexual sex, the groom needs to break the balloon by doing push-ups on top of the groomsman. Sometimes the wedding host will ask the groom to kiss the forehead of the groomsman when they face each other (Gao 2017).

When I was a visiting doctoral student at the University of Tartu, Estonia, I took a course titled “Humor and Its Applications.” In this class, I shared a short clip of the YouTube video of “Gate Crash” made by the Irish-born Chinese vlogger Lindy Tsang whom I mentioned in Chapter Two (see pg. 71). The clip depicts a group of Cantonese-speaking Irish-born Chinese groomsmen passing a piece of seaweed from one to another using their mouths. Thus, the men seemed to be kissing each other on their mouths. Another game had groomsmen picking up grapes with their mouths from the groom’s toes in his bare feet. After watching this video, an Estonian female student claimed that most Estonian men would never kiss another man in public (as in passing along the seaweed by their mouths) because they would worry about being regarded as gay. This comment made me think further about the uniqueness of Chinese gender constructions and the performativity of Chinese masculinities.

Historically physical contact between members of the opposite gender was rigorously prohibited. To counterbalance this, physical contact was tolerated, and even encouraged, among those of the same gender. Moreover, constructions of hegemonic masculinity dominate in China, and it is possible men may be willing to have physical contact with the men in the context of wedding games because the general cultural assumption is that they are straight. Marriage is an exclusively heterosexual institution and there is not legal recognition or public space made for LGBT recognition. LGBT people must live their lives secretly, homosexuality is not taken

granted and it is not at the forefront of many people's thoughts and daily lives. The invisibility of gay individuals in China and their lack of legal rights helps to allow participants in wedding games to interpret two men having intimate physical contact as something other than homosexual activity if they wish. Chinese wedding games are a way for some men to humiliate and feminize other men, but perhaps, ironically, as Taft found in his work on mock weddings, the men's willingness to be humiliated does not result in their identification as gay but rather may be read as confirmation of his straight identity. Moreover, no matter how severely the groom is humiliated or feminized, he has presumably already proved his heterosexuality through his marriage to a woman.

Why Chinese men do not seem to mind showing physical intimacy with other men when playing wedding games needs to be considered within the larger context of Chinese masculinities. Chinese ethos is characterized by introversion and harmony (Fung [1948] 2018; Luo 2014). As a result, Chinese masculinity has its own particular aesthetics (Bao 1990, 35). A contributing factor might be the long history of labour divisions in China that valued mental competence as much as, if not more so than, physical strength. An example is the popularity of Junzi. Because of advocating Confucius and his influences, a moderate "Junzi" (君子) is the ideal image of a Confucianist "man of virtues." Junzi's English equivalent would be a gentleman. The Chinese often use fixed sayings such as "gentle and moist like a jade" (溫潤如玉), "humble like a Junzi" (謙謙君子) and "suave literacy and politeness" (文質彬彬) to depict the virtues of a typical Junzi. Hence, rather than being physically strong, the masculine ideal is to be an intellectual like Confucius.

The Chinese philosophy of "Yin" (shady side) and "Yang" (sunny side) do not necessarily put yin/females in the lower stratum compared to males but rather in a dynamic

rotary wheel. In the wheel of Yin and Yang, females and males are complementary to each other instead of in dualistic opposition. This relates to the Eastern Asian conception of the unity of body and soul (Nadeau 2014, 74, 147). More precisely, Chinese culture has long been naturalistic under the influence of Daoism. It is not necessary to adhere to the female-male dualism in the Chinese synthetic approach. Chinese philosopher Yu-lan Fung argues, “this-worldliness and other-worldliness stand in contrast to each other as do realism and idealism. The task of Chinese philosophy is to accomplish a synthesis out of these antitheses... According to Chinese philosophy, the man who accomplishes this synthesis, not only in theory but also indeed, is the sage...both this-worldly and other-worldly” (2018, 9). Hence, it is possible Chinese Daoist philosophy helped contribute to a recognition of individuals being made up of a complex of stereotypical feminist and masculine traits.

Another example of the East Asian non-binary and naturalistic concept of gender is evident in Ian Buruma’s description of Japanese masculinity: “There is a certain consensus about the Japanese stereotype. As taxi-drivers, students or ‘salarymen’ will gladly point out to any foreigner within earshot, the Japanese are ‘wet’ and *yasashii*. They stick together in mutual dependency like ‘wet’, glutinous rice, so dear to the Japanese palate. And they are ‘soft, meek, gentle and tender.’ They express themselves by ‘warm, human emotions’, instead of ‘dry, hard, rational thought’. Finally, they are so closely in tune with nature, in harmony with it, and not in opposition” (Buruma 1985, 219). These underlying Asian philosophies do not provide explanations for violence directed at grooms, for men’s physical interactions, or for male behaviors more generally during Naodongfang, but they may provide important clues for further investigation.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined Chinese Naodongfang through its broad spectrum of games and pranks, ranging from pre-wedding games that humiliate grooms and parents-in-law (Pahui) to wedding night pranks that test the couple. The work has been shaped by my desire to understand more about the origins of Naodongfang and why it is still practised today. In the first chapter, I began by explaining why I initiated this project and defined my research focus. I then presented an overview of scholarship that provided the foundation for the study. This includes Chinese and English research on Naodongfang and wedding games more broadly, as well as works on play and carnival, humour, jokes and practical jokes. I outlined the impact of both Chinese and English feminist folkloristics on my life and work. In describing my methodology, and giving an account of challenges in this research, I reflected on the traumatic experience of nearly being raped by an interviewee. I believe this experience, albeit negative, made me more open and sympathetic to women who reported being sexually harassed or assaulted during Naodongfang. The incident also shaped my study in that it dissuaded me from seeking out traumatized interviewees and asking them to recount their experiences due to my concern for their well-being. I had a new personal understanding of how difficult, and damaging, sexual assault can be.

The second chapter focussed on modern forms of Naodongfang. Based on my fieldwork documenting fifteen weddings and recording twenty-seven interviewees, as well as published sources describing Naodongfang after 1912, I created a typology consisting of pre-wedding games, on-site wedding games and wedding night/after-party (Naodongfang). I discussed the principles underlying many of the games and pranks: sexual simulation and stimulation,

demonstration by humorous humiliation and purposeful obstruction. Male expectations of female reservedness, the Golden Mean (中庸) and propriety (得體), and joking relationship and kinship inform a successful Naodongfang.

The third chapter explored Naodongfang's historical place in Chinese culture. Divided into three parts, the first section introduced historical texts that reference early Chinese wedding games. Drawing on twenty-eight historical texts, I traced Chinese Naodongfang's chronological development. A fragment of folksong in *The Book of Songs* (《詩經》 1600BCE-1100BCE) is regarded as a description of wedding pranks while historical texts and evacuated relief stones of the Han Dynasty offer other early evidence of Naodongfang. Second, ancient folk legends and related beliefs concerning Naodongfang reflect the custom's deep connection to aspects of Chinese culture, such as a preference of "Renao" (熱鬧) and "Renqi" (人氣). Based on the particular soundscape and Dionysian spirit, the second section focused on "Nao," a significant concept in Chinese folk culture and living philosophy. Nao culture integrates playful interactions with loud and boisterous laughter and wild talking. Neither sacredness nor tranquillity exists in Nao spaces because folk beliefs associate auspiciousness and luck with sound. The third section compared Bakhtin's "carnivalistic life" and Chinese Naodongfang given that "Renao" (熱鬧) is a significant characteristic of Chinese weddings.

The fourth chapter explored economic motivations behind Naodongfang. Drawing on contemporary sources, as well as my own ethnographical materials, I examined the practice of blocking wedding parties and pranks in exchange for red packets (gift money) and gifts. I connected economic exchanges in Naodongfang to earlier customs in Chinese history and practices of grabbing marriage in human history. Here my research extends Tao Ye's historical approach of "grabbing marriage" to an ethnographical approach of "disturbing marriage," given

that many violent components of weddings have gradually evolved to semiotic expressions of play and games in modern societies. Finally, distinguishing vernacular Naodongfang and the institutionalized pre-wedding games session planned and managed by wedding professionals, I explored the influence of the contemporary wedding industry on wedding games.

Chapter Five examined the role of women in Naodongfang. Is Naodongfang sexual harassment, malicious custom or feminist expression? While violence against brides could be rationalized by *Jus Primae Noctis*, the recent phenomenon of hiring sex workers as bridesmaids redirects the violence from bride to bridesmaid. As scapegoats of brides, bridesmaids can be sexually harassed and assaulted during weddings. The seriousness of violence against women notwithstanding, I question the victimhood of women that dominates mainstream news stories about Naodongfang. Some women I interviewed enjoyed their experiences of Naodongfang making me ask if negative and victimized narratives are the only stories to tell and if their predominance may also further strengthen women's vulnerability and inferiority in China.

To my knowledge, Pahui is unique to Chinese culture. As far as I have been able to determine, this custom that involves intimate contact between fathers-in-law and brides has not been located in other cultures. Chapter Six explored the custom of Pahui by drawing on origin legends as well as my fieldwork materials. I considered Pahui in the context of Chinese patriarchal societies. Parents replacing the bridal couple as the central figures of weddings, a father replacing his son as the protagonist in practising wedding games with the bride, and the pranking of a groom's uncles, all are visible demonstrations of masculinity and the significance of the patriarchal clan.

Finally, the seventh chapter analyzed the roles men play. During Naodongfang, male guests beat the groom and prank him, possibly releasing their bachelor jealousy. The violence

tests the groom's ability to be a good sport and reinforces hegemonic masculinity. The pranking of grooms mirrors wedding customs in the West, including Irish Strawboys and Bachelor Parties. The second part of the chapter discussed these parallels and explored the feminization of grooms during Naodongfang. As an assertion of hegemonic masculinity, cross-dressing and humiliating grooms during Naodongfang strengthen the notion of a gender binary and needs to be understood within Chinese constructions of gender and masculinity.

There have been numerous attempts on the part of governments and regulating bodies to prohibit the practice of Naodongfang, but they have never successfully eradicated it. The custom that stretches back over thousands of years has helped to shape ideas of gender, family and power in both ancient and modern China. To understand Naodongfang, one must contextualize it in its long history. Why has this tradition survived so long despite with interference from authorities? Why does Naodongfang exist and function today? These are central questions in my study. My research suggests answers lie in the ways that Naodongfang fulfills economic motivations and enhances both gender roles and patriarchal clan structure.

As a well-respected officer in the Qing Dynasty, Zeng Guofan (曾國藩) claimed that folklore and customs are impossible to regulate: "Folklore (風俗) is a trend that most people would like to follow. Even for someone with the power to mould, it is hard to change. This is because the most powerful existence is wind (風), and the wind can wipe off everything. Likewise, folklore for people is initiated from a tiny individual but finally cannot be controlled" (風俗之於人心，始乎微而終不可禦者也). This sentence implies that folklore does not consciously compel people, but unconsciously influences them through its irresistible wind. Using the example of "protecting temples with the armed forces" in the Qing Dynasty, Shiyu Zhao argues that Chinese traditions and customs are impossible to transform by force (2002,

156). When Europeans defeated China in wars in the 17th and 18th centuries, Christianity was widely introduced and spread in China; many vernacular temples were transformed into churches. However, the Chinese often used the armed forces to protect temples and themselves so as not to be converted to Christianity. There was a conflict between the spread of Christianity and a strong Chinese attachment to vernacular beliefs. Moreover, Zhao claims that Western missionaries encountered difficulties dealing with Chinese lower economic classes who were prone to hold irrational and complicated beliefs. Hence, folk culture's place and importance in traditional China cannot be underestimated (2002, 160).

The efficacy of many current cultural policies to ban Naodongfang, such as “transforming customs and folklore” (移風易俗) and “reformation of wedding customs” (婚俗改革), remains vague, sporadic and temporary. Yuanyuan Li writes about the inefficacy of efforts to erase folklore: “It lacks an effective and universal regulation about Naodongfang nationwide. The appeals and suggestions do not have restrictive power” (2018, 95). For example, even though the governments of Dali city in Yunnan Province have attempted many times, the efforts to ban Naodongfang result in very few changes (X. Li 2017, 64). Moreover, Li claims, “even though vulgar Naodongfang is hindering the establishment of cultural and ideological civilization, banning it is absolutely not realistic” (X. Li 2017, 63).

Although many people think Naodongfang is too bold and antiquated for civilized modern China, I am not convinced that forcibly eliminating Naodongfang is the solution. Aspects of Naodongfang are problematic but people should have the right to decide for themselves, not the government and mass media. Similarly, one interviewee of mine, Jinhong Li, a journalist for the Communist Party's news media *People's Daily*, claimed that Naodongfang is meaningful to ordinary people. He commented, “the tradition cannot be decided or judged by

someone who is an outsider. The judgement from the upper classes, intellectuals, journalists and governors cannot represent the benefits and willingness of people who really practise and enjoy it. They should decide what they want to do by themselves” (Li 2014). Li is skeptical of the survey result which claims over 70% of young people dislike Naodongfang, launched by *China Youth Daily*. He questioned the newspaper’s database and its intentions to conduct and publish this survey. Chinese netizens also have complained that Naodongfang is “none of the government’s business.”¹ Agreeing with Xu & Zhu (2010, 55), I hold the same view that folklore is a powerful force that cannot easily be regulated by formal rules and regulations. As a result, the effect of regulations introduced from top to bottom is limited. I suggest that political authorities only can partially and temporarily shape folk customs for short periods. Folk customs are resilient and if they are meaningful, they will continue.

My work on Naodongfang has persuaded me of the need for cross-culture comparative study. As seen throughout this dissertation, this kind of games played at Naodongfang are not unique to China but are practised in many cultures in similar forms. Naodongfang can be compared to Irish strawboys, European and North American bachelor and bachelorette parties, and North American shivarees. Mapping wedding games worldwide could shed more light on the meanings of play, humour and carnival within their cultural contexts. I hope this dissertation contributes to international and interdisciplinary research on wedding games, and customs more generally.

¹ Similarly, Newfoundlanders subverted criticism from outsiders directed at Newfoundland cuisine. For example, the letter to the editor printed in the *Evening Telegram* in 1978 showed: “People who do not know the reality of a Newfoundland rural way of life, such as movie stars, city slickers, Greenpeacers should stay out of our affairs. A person whose hands have never been dirty or salted by the sea should keep their dainty hands out of it” (qtd. in Lamson 22; Everett 2005, 149).

Human beings are so tiny and our lives are fleeting. However, rituals like weddings illuminate the long history of humanity, as well as the significance of everyday life. Our lives are woven by these crucial days. From this perspective, it is understandable that Chinese people invest so much money, time, energy and affection in weddings. Studying such loaded occasions re-evaluates the power of the grassroots and all vernacular customs, even those that are stigmatized. I feel very lucky to have worked on a project like this one. During the five years of doing fieldwork, researching, writing and revising, I found this trip a fascinating but never-ending journey. I dream of a better future that is more open-minded than now. I look forward to the day that a woman will be free to choose whether or not to have Naodongfang as part of her wedding. If she does take part in Naodongfang, she will not have to worry that people will sexually assault her. She can fully enjoy the games. If she decides not to participate in Naodongfang, she will not worry about external pressures that force her to do it for the sake of traditions and folk beliefs. That will be a day of freedom with lots of choices. Such a tolerant, friendly and women-centred future is my ultimate wish, and I hope this PhD thesis contributes in a small way to that. It is possible that the golden age of Chinese feminism is coming into its own, and the improvement of gender equality may provide the chance to revive and reshape the old Chinese wedding custom, Naodongfang.

Appendix A: Interviewees' Information Chart

編號	姓名	職業/角色	性別	地區	籍貫	現居住地	採訪時間	介紹關係	備註
1	向光明 Xiang, Guangmin	某退休局長	男	保靖	湘西	保靖	2016.10.24	偶遇	茶葉店
2	M (Anonymous)	參加者	男	西安	西安	西安	2016.12.18	網絡	
3	王琪 Wang, Qi	參加者	男	陝西丹鳳	丹鳳	丹鳳	2016.12.24		
4	高鴻濤 Gao, Hongtao	主持人	男	西安地區		西安	2017.2.1	田坤	婚慶影響
5	劉弢 Liu, Tao	參加者	女	雲南、昆明、湖南瀏陽	湖南	瀏陽	2017.2.4	陳林希	積極態度。出格的婚禮遊戲有沒有可能開心?
6	櫥子 The Chef	婚禮人員	男	韓城			2017.2.5		如何打新郎
7	老莫 Lao Mo	參加者	男	山東濰坊	臨沂	濰坊	2017.2.6	黎明	打夯，大客
8	李曉玲 Li, Xiaoling	新娘	女	甘肅地區	甘肅	西安	2017.2.8		部隊革命風格
9	劉美寶 Liu, Meibao	參加者	男	河北地區	河北保定	北京	2017.2.12	張誌芹	
10	Tommy Tam	參加者	男	廣東地區/海外	梅山	聖約翰斯	2017.4.19	Amy 嶽父	diaspora
11	楊照璿 Yang, Zhaomin	主持人	男	山東地區	濰坊濱海	濰坊濱海	2017.8.22		婚慶影響
12	王紹滿 Wang, Shaoman	光和影子攝影團隊	男	山東地區	濰坊	濰坊	2017.8.23	崔冬璇	婚慶影響
13	孫誌剛 Sun, Zhigang	主持人	男	山東地區	德州	德州	2017.8.24		婚慶影響
14	L (Anonymous)	參加者	男	山東地區	德州	上海	2017.8.25	許鈺偉發小	

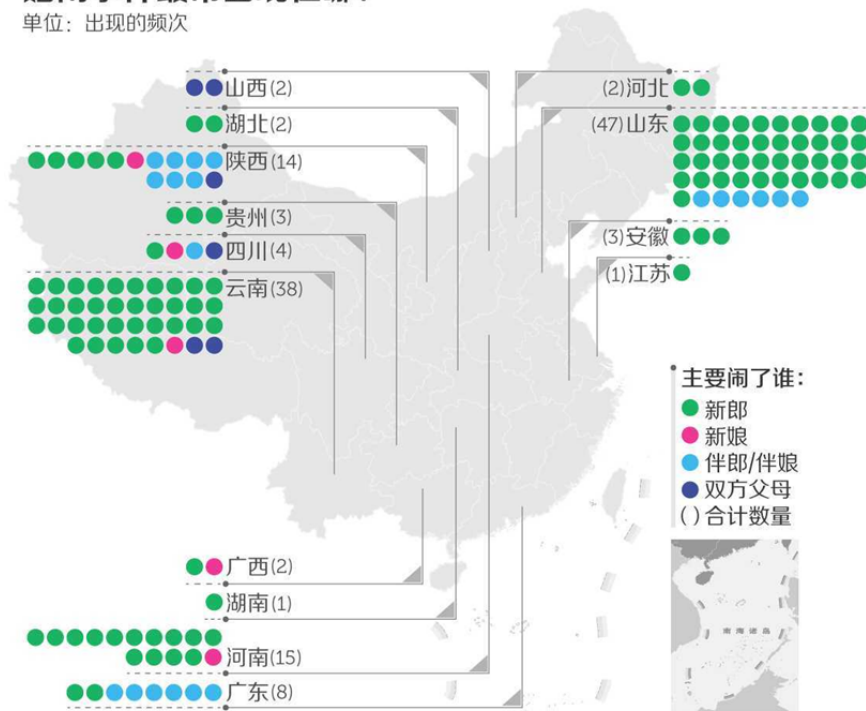
15	孫偉 Sun, Wei	主持人	男	山東地 區	濰坊		2017.9.6	崔冬 璇	婚慶影響
16	孔大師 Kong, Dashi	參加者	男	湖南地 區		青島	2017.9.22	黎明	小胡婚 禮。為何 不鬧
17	S (Anonymous)	參加者	女	貴州	高坡	貴州	2017.10.7	李喬 楊	串街、新 郎表親
18	賈玉茹 Jia, Yuru	伴娘	女	甘肅	甘肅	西安	2018.1.2		
19	陳林希 Chen, Linxi	伴娘	女	湖南地 區	懷化	長沙	2014.11.14		
20	黃曉英 Huang, Xiaoying	新娘	女	湖南地 區	懷化	懷化	2014.11.22		
21	杜曉旭 Du, Xiaoxu	參加者	男	陝西地 區	西安	西安	2014.11.25		大學
22	程樂順 Cheng, Leshun	參加者	男	湖北地 區	武漢	溫哥 華	2014.12.5		
23	李金紅 Li, Jinhong	參加者	男	陝西地 區	葛牌	北京	2014.11.16		媒體
24	馬靜 Ma, Jing	新娘	女	甘肅地 區	天水	天水	2014.11.2		
25	趙文傑 Zhao, Wenjie	新郎	男	甘肅地 區	天水	天水	2014.11.9		
26	馬培堯 Ma, Peiyao	參加者	男	天水	宁夏	北京	2014.10.30		
27	扎西 Zhaxi	參加者	男	甘肅地 區	蘭州	蘭州	2014.11.18		

Appendix B: An Investigative Report about Naodongfang¹

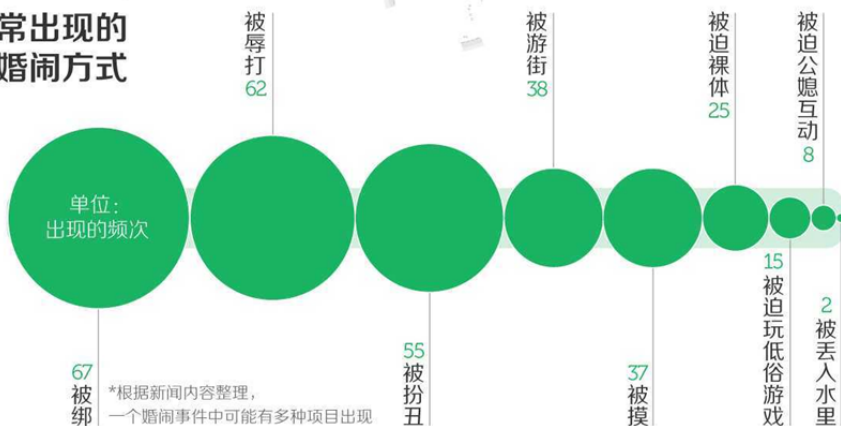
奇葩的婚闹习俗 折腾着各地的中国人

2012-2017年，新闻报道中的婚闹事件最常出现在哪？

单位：出现的频次



常出现的婚闹方式



¹ <http://www.jder.net/name/66833.html>. 趙鹿鳴、郭曉靜：《我們分析了近五年的新聞，發現山東最愛鬧婚》

Appendix C: The Diagram of Governmental Management and Control of “Hunnao” Events¹

表二 现行关于“婚闹”行为的政府管控

时间	政府	规定名称	引导方向
2016年10月12日	云南大理	《大理州进一步整治不文明闹婚行为的通知》	积极动员社会各界和民众自觉抵制不文明闹婚行为
2017年3月27日	河南叶县	《叶县移风易俗、文明节俭操办红白事工作实施方案》	曝光不良风俗，树立正确的舆论导向
2018年3月20日	江苏阜宁	《关于深入开展“倡导文明婚礼、抵制陈规陋习”行动的通知》	引导婚庆行业及从业人员切实履行“倡导文明婚礼、抵制陈规陋习”的责任
2018年3月28日	江苏盐城	《关于严禁党员干部大操大办婚丧喜庆事宜的规定》	党员带头，移风易俗。
2018年4月25日	河南台前	《关于“婚俗文化创新、倡树文明婚礼、建设文明乡风”的实施意见》	劝阻和制止不文明闹婚行为
2018年4月27日	山东博兴	《拒绝奢侈婚庆、抵制恶俗闹婚号召》	营造移风易俗的浓厚氛围，推动移风易俗工作深入开展
2018年5月3日	厦门思明	《关于开展移风易俗树立文明新风的倡议书》	将民俗活动专项整治工作纳入社区治理工作中
2018年6月15日	山东滨州	《弘扬文化推动文明婚庆》	中海天地桥竖起了“禁止婚闹”的指示牌

The Diagram of Governmental Management and Control of “Hunnao” Events

Time	Jurisdiction	Regulation	Guiding Directions
2016. Oct. 12	Dali, Yunnan P.	“An Announcement on Further Regulating Uncivilized Naohun in Dali Zhou”	Appealing people from every social class to protest uncivilized Naohun actions
2017 Mar. 27	Ye County, Henan P.	“The Plan of Transforming Social Customs and Civilly and Thriftly Conducting Weddings and Funerals in Ye County”	Exposing bad customs, constructing right guidance on public opinions
2018 Mar. 20	Funing, Jiangsu P.	“An Announcement on Deeply Launching the Movement of Promoting Civilized Weddings, Protesting Old Rules and Vulgar Customs”	Guiding the wedding industry to take the responsibility of “promoting civilized weddings, protesting old rules and vulgar customs (陳規舊俗)”

¹ Xuewen Zhang collected the data from the Huike News Coverage Database (慧科新聞數據庫) on the regulation of Naodongfang and did a statistical analysis of eight “Hunnao” cases from January of 2018 to May of 2018. These eight cases were located in Henan, Shandong, Hunan, Hubei, Guizhou, Jiangsu and Yunnan provinces. Zhang found that Hunnao events are mainly made up of pranks targeting the groom. These include beating and stripping the groom, tying and pouring liquids on the groom and forcing the groom to parade in the street (X. Zhang 2018: 18). Zhang drew a diagram to show the regulations issued by all levels of government from October of 2016 to June of 2018 (2018: 23). I have translated the diagram into English and supplemented it with the addition of the last line based on Wang & Zhang’s article in 2019.

2018 Mar. 28	Yancheng, Jiangsu P.	“Regulations on Prohibiting the Communist Party Members and Leaders to Extravagantly Holding Weddings and Funerals”	Party members should lead the trend of transforming social customs
2018 April 25	Taiqian, Henan P.	“Conducting Creative Wedding Cultures, Promoting Civilized Weddings, Constructing Civilized Disposition of Villages”	Dissuading and stopping uncivilized Naohun behaviours
2018 April 27	Boxing, Shandong P.	“The Appeal of Refusing Extravagant Wedding Ceremonies and Rejecting Vulgar Wedding Customs”	Creating the atmosphere to transform social customs, and pushing operations to regulate wedding customs
2018 May 3	Siming, Xiamen city	“The Proposal of Transforming Social Customs and Forming New Civilized Ethos”	Putting regulations of folklore and folk events into the management of communities
2018 June 15	Binzhou, Shandong P.	“Praising Good Culture and Promoting Civilized Wedding Events”	An advertisement board, “Forbidding Hunnao,” was erected in Zhonghaitiandi Bridge
2018 Aug. 24	Rizhao, Shandong P.	“Working Plan of a Special Rectification Action on Demolishing Vulgar Hunnao in Rizhao City”	N/A

Appendix D: Instructions of 30 Recommended Wedding Games¹



游戏攻略

- 1、请新郎和兄弟团一起用脸撞破面目全非框，姐妹们拿起手机帮兄弟团们拍下这一刻珍贵的瞬间。
- 2、请新郎和兄弟团戴上跑男吃糖诸葛帽，在规定时间内吃到眼前的糖，超时处罚；
- 3、请新郎和兄弟团用嘴含着跑牙奶嘴载歌载舞或用鼻孔吹灭蜡烛；
- 4、请新郎和兄弟团耳朵夹上夹夹乐，一声令下，伴娘们用力拉扯手中的绳子；或直接夹在脸上，承受10秒疼痛，承受不了罚红包；
- 5、请新郎和兄弟团一起脱鞋在指压板上跳绳99下，接受爱的考验。
- 6、请新郎和兄弟团一起做俯卧撑，必须让地上的尖叫鸡疯狂尖叫。
- 7、请新郎和兄弟团戴上眼罩，互相给对方涂口红，其他人只能用语言提示不许动手帮忙。
- 8、请新郎和兄弟团穿上热辣草裙、戴上花环四件套以及热辣文胸，完成一段激情辣眼睛的表演。
- 9、请新郎和兄弟团戴上小丑头套、小丑鼻子，来段即兴表演，逗乐新娘和闺蜜团。
- 10、请新郎和兄弟团穿上超级战袍，角色扮演即兴表演一段。
- 11、请新郎和兄弟团穿上屁股短裤，其余兄弟团成员亲吻屁股短裤，必须留下唇印。
- 12、请新郎和兄弟团用嘴含着跑牙奶嘴载歌载舞或用鼻孔吹灭蜡烛；
- 13、请新郎和兄弟团用嘴对嘴（贴住接吻卡）的方式，传递接吻卡，传完所有人才算结束，其中用手或接吻卡落地请重新开始。
- 14、请新郎和兄弟团身上贴满抖抖贴，并在一分钟内抖掉（不许用手及其他人帮忙），超时或有剩余抖抖贴罚红包。
- 15、请兄弟团两人一组用吹气球吸管吹气球，最先吹爆气球的获胜，输的兄弟们接受姐妹团的惩罚。
- 16、请新郎和兄弟团在涂有芥末的牙刷上刷牙，激情燃烧一回。
- 17、请兄弟团一起头戴丝袜绑在一起，姐妹一身令下，兄弟们在不借助收的情况下，把丝袜从头上挣脱出来，超时罚红包。
- 18、请兄弟团戴上格格发饰，模仿以下段子：自打我进宫以来，就独得皇上恩宠。这后宫佳丽三千、皇上就偏偏宠我一人、于是我就劝皇一定要雨露均沾，可是皇上非是不听啊。皇上啊，就宠我、就宠我，你叫为奴情何以堪呀！
- 19、请兄弟团戴上兔兔发箍，变身兔女郎，表演兔女郎舞蹈一段。
- 20、请兄弟团穿上天鹅裙，完成一段动感小天鹅舞蹈一段。
- 21、把粉色公仔随机丢在地上，兄弟必须做出跟公仔一样的动作。
- 22、请新郎和兄弟团以捡肥皂式的动作挤爆气球，超时罚红包。
- 23、请兄弟团戴上胡子吸管眼镜或吸管头盔，喝光姐妹秘制饮料。
- 24、请兄弟们挽起裤脚，姐妹们撕脚毛神奇——透明胶伺候。
- 25、请兄弟团戴上动物面膜，做俯卧撑20下，面膜掉了要重新做哦。
- 26、把爱心蜡烛摆成心形，请新郎边做俯卧撑边吹灭所有的蜡烛。
- 27、请新郎在6条红绳中选出牵新娘的那根，只有三次机会。（选错一次，接受惩罚一次）
- 28、宝宝初体验，在奶瓶中加入各种奇葩饮料，新郎和兄弟团在规定时间内喝完；
- 29、在杯子里加入各种奇葩饮料，对着乒乓球吹起，乒乓球掉进哪个杯子，就喝光那个杯子的饮料；

免费送游戏攻略卡

Translation:

1. Requiring the groom and groomsmen use their faces to rip off the preservation film frames. Bridesmaids need to take photos to memorize this cherished moment.
2. Asking the groom and groomsmen to eat up all candies in a set time with wearing the hats of Zhugeliang. Punishments apply if they cannot finish candies on time.
3. Asking the groom and his men to dance with holding gag-tooth-shape pacifiers in mouths. Asking them blow candles by sneezing.
4. Applying clamps on the groom and groomsmen's ears or faces. Bridesmaids need to pull all clamps together. Or testing whether they can endure for 10 seconds. If they failed, they need to give red packets.
5. Asking boys to take off their shoes and jump on the foot massage pads 99 times.

¹ Online shop link:

<https://detail.tmall.com/item.htm?id=571667048744&ns=1&abbucket=1&skuId=3940373211812>.

6. Asking boys to do push-ups upon the screaming chicken. Every time the chicken has to be pushed and screams (imitating sex moaning).
7. Asking boys to cover their eyes by eye patches and mutually apply lipsticks on each other's lips. Instruction by words are allowed but participants cannot help them with physical touches.
- 8-10. Boys are required to wear hula-hula dance costumes/garlands/bras/clown noses and dresses to perform in front of the bride and guests.
11. Asking groomsmen to imprint their lip marks on prop hip pants which is worn by the groom or other boys.
12. ...
13. The groom and his men are required to use mouths to pass down a piece of paper one by one. If the paper drops down, the game needs to be restarted.
14. Asking boys to shake off stickers which are pasted on their bodies. Bodily shaking is allowed but hands are not.
15. Competing blowing and bursting balloons through separating boys into two groups.
16. Asking boys to brush their teeth by using wasabi as toothpastes.
17. Putting stockings on boys' heads and tying these stockings together. Asking them to get rid of stockings without using hands.
18. Asking the groom and groomsmen to wear like Manchurian palace style with unique hair accessories and recite like this: after I came into the palace, the emperor only loves me even he has 3000 beauties. I asked him to give more attentions on other ladies, but he disagreed. How can I help with this if he only loves me?
- 19-20. Asking boys to wear bunny girls/Swan Lake costumes and accessories and dance like bunny girls/ballerinas.
21. Throwing a doll on the ground and asking boys to imitate the random poses of the doll.
22. Asking the groom to bend his back and let a groomsman hit his hips to squeeze balloons (imitating a typical sex posture between gays).
23. Putting straw-glasses on and finishing beverages which were filled with strong spices.
24. Asking boys to lift their pants and waiting for girls using taps to pull out their leg hairs.
25. Asking boys to do 20 push-ups with moisturizing masks sticking on their faces. If the moisturizing mask drops down, they need to redo push-ups from the zero.

26. Arranging candles in a heart shape on the ground and asking the groom to blow them off while he is doing push-ups.

27. There are six red threads respectively tying on wrists of the bride and five bridesmaids. The groom needs to find which thread is connecting the bride through trying three times.

28-29. Finishing esoteric recipe beverages in the feeding bottles. There are several types of strange beverages put in different cups. Boys are required to blow table tennis balls into cups they pick. They need to finish the cup of beverage no matter which cup the tennis ball drops in.

30. Doing five selfies and asking for certain amounts of likes on social networks.

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