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Research Article

Marriage of matching doors: Marital sorting on parental background in China

Yang Hu

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Marriage of matching doors: Marital sorting on parental background in China

Yang Hu¹

Abstract

BACKGROUND

Who marries whom has important implications for the (re-)production of social inequalities. Whereas previous studies on marital sorting have mainly focused on the husband's and the wife's traits, in this research I assess the importance of parental background in marital sorting in contemporary China in light of the tradition of marriage of matching doors.

METHODS

Drawing on data from the 2006 China General Social Survey, I use log-linear models to explore the extent to which couples sort based on their parents' occupational status and *hukou* (household registration), and the interaction between the two.

RESULTS

The results show a significant association between the occupational status of an individual's father and of his or her spouse, net of the intergenerational mobility between parents and children and the assortative mating between the husband and the wife. Furthermore, there is a significant net association between the occupational status of an individual's father and father-in-law. Parents' *hukou* status also plays a pivotal role in marital sorting, in that an individual's father and father-in-law tend to have the same rural or urban *hukou*. Nevertheless, the interaction between the father's occupational status and *hukou* is not found to play a significant role in shaping the pattern of marital sorting.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the persistence of the tradition of marriage of matching doors, it is important to conceptualize marriage in contemporary China as a family affair, rather than a de-institutionalized, privatized, or individualized practice.

¹ University of Essex. E-Mail: yanghu.esq@gmail.com.

1. Introduction

Who marries whom has important implications for the production and reproduction of social inequalities (Becker 1973). The study of marital sorting by parental background in particular has important implications for a number of questions that have long interested scholars: namely, whether and, if so, how marriage serves as a key mechanism of social mobility, and the extent to which ascribed traits determine an individual's social outcomes. These questions may be especially relevant in China, where 'marriage of matching doors' (*men dang hu dui*), i.e., marriage between families rather than individuals of equal social standing, is considered to be a traditional tenet of spouse selection (Croll 1981; Xu and Whyte 1990). Moreover, it was widely believed that the practice of matching doors tends to enhance a couple's marital satisfaction and well-being (Lu 2009). Nevertheless, against the backdrop of the societal "individualization" (Yan 2009), "de-institutionalization" (Cherlin 2004), and "privatization" (Davis 2014) of marriage, recent research on assortative mating has increasingly focused on the traits of the husband and the wife, rather than those of their respective families (Han 2010; Kalmijn 1991; Qian and Qian 2014; Xu, Ji, and Tung 2000). Less attention has been paid to the role played by the partners' parental backgrounds in configuring the pattern of marital sorting (for recent exceptions, see Charles, Hurst, and Killewald 2013; Ermisch, Francesconi, and Siedler 2006), particularly in supposedly individualized contexts.

Although it was traditionally believed that parental background can determine an individual's marital mobility in China, the issue of whether this has continued to be the case in the contemporary era remains an open empirical question. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949,² the country's socialist regime and left-wing revolutions forcefully attacked the feudal and imperial social hierarchies that undergirded privileges associated with family background (Wu and Treiman 2007; Xu and Whyte 1990). Scholars such as Yan (2009) also reported a trend toward individualization in Chinese society. However, there is evidence supporting the persistence of traditional values pertaining to marriage, patrilineality, and intergenerational relations (Hu and Scott 2016; To 2013). The reinstatement of China's *hukou* household registration system in 1951 by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) added a new dimension to the complexity of marital sorting in China (Li, Han, and Zhao 2010). Against the backdrop of these dramatic social changes and the inconsistent existing evidence, I am motivated in this research by the need to empirically describe

² The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a socialist regime founded in 1949 under the administration of the Chinese Communist Party. In this research, 'PRC' is used interchangeably with 'contemporary China,' as distinct from feudal and imperial China.

the pattern of marital mobility and to assess the salience of marital sorting by parental background in contemporary China.

Drawing on data from the 2006 China General Social Survey – the only nationally representative dataset containing information on both spouses and their parents at the time of first marriage³ – I focus on the roles played by occupational status and *hukou* in the practice of marriage of matching doors in contemporary China. Log-linear models are used to examine the extent to which husbands and wives sort based on their parents' occupational status and *hukou*, as well as the interaction between the two.

2. Background

2.1 The tradition of marriage of matching doors

Marriage of matching doors has long been a common marital practice in China. In the feudal and imperial eras, when marriage was largely a familial arrangement rather than the result of an individual choice, marriage was intended to represent a balanced “mutual exchange of ritual obligations and material wealth” between two families, which is inferred and recognized by the wider public through visible signs such as occupational status and the presentation of a dowry (Mann 2011: 57). In many respects, the tradition of marriage of matching doors resembled the prevailing assortative mating in Western societies, which has been extensively discussed in previous research (e.g., Becker 1973; Fernandez and Rogerson 2001; Kalmijn 1991; Qian and Qian 2014): It sanctioned marriage between two parties of equal social standing, which in turn served to reinforce preexisting social hierarchies. However, the practice of marriage of matching doors also had unique characteristics derived from Chinese traditions. In this section, I will focus on the distinctive features of marriage of matching doors, and their implications for this research.

The first feature of marriage of matching doors is the involvement of the couples' parents and extended families in the process of marital sorting. This process is vividly represented by the concept of ‘doors’ symbolizing clans of extended families. Based on a foundation of close kinship ties and patrilineal traditions, Chinese parents and extended families played active roles in the spouse selection and marriage of their adult children (Croll 1981) – from arranging matchmaking events to explicitly stating their preferences regarding their potential son- or daughter-in-law (Mann 2011; Xu and Whyte 1990; Xu, Ji, and Tung 2000). As it was traditionally believed that a marriage of matching doors was happier, more stable, and longer-lasting than heterogamy (Lu

³ This research focuses on first marriages only.

2009), the Chinese parents who followed this practice tended to select a mate whose parents matched their own social status. At the same time, an individual's parental background may limit the scope of his or her education, work, and socialization experiences; thus, an adult child's opportunities to meet potential spouses may be restricted to these contexts.

The second prominent feature of marriage of matching doors lies in its social visibility. As a key component of social exchange is its legitimization in the marketplace (Homans 1958), a marriage of matching doors was not only based on the implicit logic of marital sorting; it was also a form of explicit display in the social milieu in which the marriage would be blessed and recognized by relatives and acquaintances (Croll 1981). It was traditionally seen as essential that the 'matching doors' be made as explicitly visible as possible. Scholars who have studied marital sorting in Western societies have tended to focus on factors such as income, wealth, and human capital (e.g., Becker 1973; Charles, Hurst, and Killewald 2013; Kalmijn 1991). However, given the importance of visible display in marriage of matching doors, I focus on parental occupation as a clear and comprehensive indicator of an individual's social, economic, and cultural standing in the Chinese context (Bian 2002; Mann 2011).

2.2 Marital sorting in contemporary China

While acknowledging the baseline tradition of marriage of matching doors in feudal and imperial China, there has been an ongoing debate among scholars about whether and, if so, how the social changes that have taken place in China under the regime of the PRC have changed Chinese families in general, and traditional marital practices in particular. In an effort to uphold the ideal of egalitarianism, the country's socialist revolutions attacked privileges associated with family background (Johnson 1985). The Cultural Revolution, a left-wing socialist movement that dominated the country between 1966 and 1976, further advanced such socialist ideals, valorizing individual choice in spouse selection (*zi you lian ai*) (Yan 2009). The 1950 Marriage Law rejected arranged marriages and promulgated instead the ideal of a 'love marriage.' Under the law, men and women were granted equal rights to individual autonomy over marriage and divorce (Davis 2014; Xu and Whyte 1990).⁴ Following China's economic reforms in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the CCP no longer enforced the socialist ideal of egalitarianism, but instead focused on building a market-oriented economy. This shift led to a renewed emphasis on socioeconomic status in the marriage market.

Against the backdrop of these dramatic social changes in China, scholars such as Davis (2014) and Yan (2009), drawing mainly on qualitative evidence, have argued that

⁴ In feudal and imperial China, only men were permitted to file for divorce.

the institution of marriage has become increasingly “privatized” and “individualized” in China and that individuals’ marital decisions may have lifted anchor from the traditional mooring of marriage of matching doors. There is, however, mounting evidence that the Chinese family has been resilient to social changes. Chow and Chen (1994), for example, found that Chinese women turned to the marriage market and the domestic sphere to seek social mobility after the 1978 economic reforms. Hu and Scott (2016) and To (2013) also found that values pertaining to marriage and intergenerational relations have remained largely traditional across distinct generations since the establishment of the PRC.

Furthermore, China’s *hukou* household registration system, which was first established in the feudal era and was disrupted during the first half of the 20th century, was reinstated by the CCP in 1951 (Chan and Zhang 1999). The *hukou* system provides individuals with access to welfare benefits, such as education, health care, and unemployment subsidies. Under this system, individuals are assigned either a rural or an urban status. As socioeconomic development is much more advanced and social resources are much more abundant in urban than in rural China, having an urban *hukou* carries a higher symbolic status than having a rural *hukou* (Chan and Zhang 1999). Because having a rural *hukou* had blocked rural residents’ mobility up the urban chain until these restrictions were relaxed in the 1980s, it also limited individuals’ opportunities to meet and marry across the rural–urban divide. As a result, Li, Han, and Zhao (2010) noted that inter-*hukou* marriage was rare, and identified a pattern of *hukou* homogamy whereby men and women tend to marry within their own rural or urban *hukou* category. Although the ban on rural-to-urban migration was lifted in the 1980s (Hu 2016), the socioeconomic and the symbolic distinctions between having a rural or an urban *hukou* persist up to today. This is vividly reflected in urban families’ reluctance to marry ‘downward’ into rural families (Li, Han, and Zhao 2010). As adult children and their parents usually share a *hukou* before marriage, the parents’ *hukou*, in addition to their occupations, may provide a crucial point of reference in perceptions of whether the ‘doors’ of the families of the partners match. Moreover, the effects of occupational status and *hukou* on marital sorting may not operate independently. Indeed, it has been reported in a number of qualitative studies that *hukou* closely intersects with occupational status in determining an individual’s social standing, particularly in urban areas (e.g., Chen and Hoy 2011; Wang and Fan 2012). Therefore, it is important to consider the possibility that the parents’ occupational status and *hukou* may interact with each other in configuring the marital mobility of their children.

2.3 The current study

Given the social changes China has undergone in recent decades, the salience of marriage of matching doors cannot be taken for granted in the contemporary era. New contingencies imposed by *hukou* also add to the complexity of marital sorting under the regime of the PRC. A main objective of this research is therefore to provide an empirical assessment of the extent to which couples in contemporary China sort based on their parents' occupational status and *hukou*. If the tradition of marriage of matching doors indeed persists, we would expect to observe that an individual's parental background (i.e., occupational status, *hukou*, and the interaction between the two) would play a significant role in determining the occupational status of his or her spouse (H1), net of the assortative mating between the husband and wife and the intergenerational mobility between parents and children:

H1a: There is a net association between the occupational status of an individual's parents and of his or her spouse.

H1b: There is a net association between the *hukou* of an individual's parents and the occupational status of his or her spouse.

H1c: There is a significant interaction between occupational status and *hukou* of an individual's parents in determining the occupational status of his or her spouse.

Moreover, based on the preceding discussions of marriage of matching doors, we would expect to observe a further net association between the backgrounds of an individual's parents and parents-in-law (H2):

H2a: There is a net association between the occupational status of an individual's parents and parents-in-law.

H2b: There is a net association between the *hukou* of an individual's parents and parents-in-law.

H2c: There is a significant interaction between occupational status and *hukou* in the association between the backgrounds of an individual's parents and parents-in-law.

3. Data and methods

3.1 Data

This research draws on data from the 2006 China General Social Survey (CGSS).⁵ Although there are more up-to-date waves of the CGSS available, the 2006 wave is the only dataset that contains information on both spouses and their parents at the time of first marriage. Given the rapid changes in the Chinese labor market and the potential impact of marriage on individuals' occupational and *hukou* mobility, it is important that we examine couples' occupational status and *hukou* at the time of marriage.

Led by China *Renmin* University and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the CGSS is one of the largest-scale national social surveys in China. In the 2006 CGSS, multi-stage stratified probability-proportional-to-size sampling was used to survey 10,151 individuals randomly selected from each household from 500 street areas in 125 cities and towns across China. The general response rate to the 2006 CGSS was 51.1%. The survey had a wide geographic coverage, ranging from major cities to remote villages, and from the eastern coast to the western hinterland.

3.2 Sample

For the analytical sample, I first exclude respondents who have never been married, are not in a first marriage, or were first married before 1951 (step 1: $N = 8,193$ (10,151–1,958)). I then eliminate respondents with missing information on their own or their spouse's occupational status, or on their parents' or parents-in-law's occupational status or *hukou* at the time of marriage (step 2: $N = 7,339$ (8,193–854)). Correlation analysis and t-test show that the cases eliminated at step 2 tend to be slightly older rather than younger ($r = .06$; $t = 5.49$, $p < .001$). This means that the analytical sample slightly underrepresents the older population. If previous research is correct in asserting that recent generations are more "individualized" than their predecessors (Yan 2009), then the results may underestimate the strength of the tradition of marriage of matching doors in contemporary China. Finally, I exclude respondents who reported an inactive occupational status (e.g., unemployed) at the time of first marriage for themselves, their spouse, their parents, or their parents-in-law (step 3: $N = 6,831$ (7,339–508)).⁶ The

⁵ See <http://www.chinagss.org> for more information.

⁶ Although some of the cases deleted at step 2 and at step 3 provided valid information on the occupational status of the individual, the spouse, the parents, or the parents-in-law before (rather than at the time of) marriage, many of these responses date back to more than ten years before marriage, and thus may not accurately reflect the social standing of the individuals and their families at the time of marriage. Therefore,

respondents reporting inactivity on the occupational measures tend to be women ($\chi^2 = 5.59, p < .05$) or members of the older cohorts ($r = .05; t = 4.43, p < .001$), which may lead to an underestimation of the strength of marriage of matching doors. The final analytical sample contains 6,831 randomly selected individuals ($M_{\text{age}} = 45, SD = 12$), one from each household, who entered a first marriage after the reinstatement of *hukou* in 1951 ($M_{\text{year-married}} = 1985, SD = 12$) and who provided valid information on their own, their spouse's, their parents', and their parents-in-law's occupational status as well as on their parents' and parents-in-law's *hukou* status at the time of marriage. A dataset containing 6,831 couple dyads is constructed based on this sample.

3.3 Measurement

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the key variables. Following previous research on marital and social mobility (Wu and Treiman 2007; Xu, Ji, and Tung 2000), I have chosen to focus on occupational status and *hukou* as the key (visible) indicators of the socioeconomic and symbolic standing (i.e., doors) of individuals and families in contemporary China. The 2006 CGSS asked the questions: "What was your (alternatively, your spouse's/father's/father-in-law's) occupation (alternatively, *hukou* status) at the time of marriage?" Although Beller (2009) urges scholars to include mothers' occupation in social mobility research, the 2006 CGSS did not collect information on the occupation of the mother and the mother-in-law at the time of marriage. Nevertheless, as patrilineality is key to the tradition of marriage of matching doors, it is appropriate to focus on the father's occupational status. It is, however, worth noting that the omission of the mother's occupation usually leads to an underestimation of the strength of intergenerational occupational mobility (Beller 2009).

the analytical sample is restricted to respondents who provided valid occupational status measures at the time of marriage.

Table 1: Sample characteristics (N = 6,831)

Parameter	Column percentage		
	All	Rural <i>hukou</i> origin ^b	Urban <i>hukou</i> origin ^b
<i>Occupational status at the time of first marriage</i>			
Wife ^a			
IVc+VIIb (Peasant)	58.09	78.71	8.16
IVa/b+VIIa (Semi/unskilled manual, small business owner)	13.73	9.62	23.69
V+VI (Foreman, skilled manual)	9.12	3.85	21.88
I+II+III (Professional, nonmanual)	19.06	7.82	46.27
Husband ^a			
IVc+VIIb (Peasant)	47.42	65.53	6.83
IVa/b+VIIa (Semi/unskilled manual, small business owner)	20.61	16.49	29.84
V+VI (Foreman, skilled manual)	14.01	7.03	29.65
I+II+III (Professional, nonmanual)	17.96	10.95	33.68
Wife's father ^a			
IVc+VIIb (Peasant)	69.52	95.22	7.31
IVa/b+VIIa (Semi/unskilled manual, small business owner)	8.70	1.07	24.74
V+VI (Foreman, skilled manual)	8.08	0.77	25.79
I+II+III (Professional, nonmanual)	13.70	1.94	42.16
Husband's father ^a			
IVc+VIIb (Peasant)	68.01	94.96	7.64
IVa/b+VIIa (Semi/unskilled manual, small business owner)	9.97	2.65	26.38
V+VI (Foreman, skilled manual)	8.65	0.61	26.66
I+II+III (Professional, nonmanual)	13.37	1.78	39.33
<i>Hukou at the time of first marriage</i>			
Wife's father			
Rural	70.77	-	-
Urban	29.23	-	-
Husband's father			
Rural	69.14	-	-
Urban	30.86	-	-

Note: ^a Difference between rural and urban *hukou* origin is significant at the 1% level, two-tailed tests. ^b For the wife and the wife's father, *hukou* origin refers to wife's father's *hukou*. For the husband and the husband's father, *hukou* origin refers to the husband's father's *hukou*. Column percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Based on previous research on occupational mobility in China (e.g., Bian 2002; Lin and Xie 1988; Wu and Treiman 2007), I first code the occupational status following the six-category Erikson-Goldthorpe (EGP) scheme (see Wu and Treiman 2007). I then reverse the coding of the EGP scheme so that a higher score indicates a supposedly higher occupational status. Because in China being a self-employed small business owner is a low occupational status that is only slightly higher than that of a peasant (Wu and Treiman 2007), I reorder the occupational status categories to place small business owners above peasants and below unskilled manual workers. Due to cell-size

considerations, I further combine the six EGP categories into the following four categories based on the proximity of occupational categories reported by Wu and Treiman (2007):⁷

- (1) Peasant (VIIb, IVc);
- (2) Semi/unskilled manual worker or small business owner (VIIa, IVa, IVb);
- (3) Foreman/skilled manual worker (V, VI);
- (4) Professional/managerial class or routine nonmanual worker (I, II, III).

I include the *hukou* of the individual's father and father-in-law at the time of marriage, distinguishing between rural and urban types. I do not include the husband's and the wife's *hukou* at the time of marriage for two major reasons. First, an individual who has never been married usually has the same type of *hukou* as his or her father (Chan and Zhang 1999; Li, Han, and Zhao 2010). Second, premarital change in an individual's *hukou* status is usually related to his or her occupational mobility (Hu 2016; Wu and Treiman 2007), which may have already been captured by the individual's occupational status. It is clear from Table 1 that the distribution of occupational categories differs significantly depending on the father's *hukou* status.

3.4 Analytic strategy

I utilize log-linear models to examine the associations between the husband's, the wife's, the husband's father's and the wife's father's occupational status, as well as the *hukou* status of both spouses' fathers at the time of marriage. Figure 1 below illustrates the modeling strategies. The equation for the baseline model is also specified below, in which $\log F_{ijklmn}$ is the predicted frequency count for cell $ijklmn$ and λ is the grand mean cell count.⁸ As depicted in Figure 1 (Panel A), the baseline model includes the main effects of all variables (λ^{Hocc_i} , λ^{Wocc_j} , λ^{HFocc_k} , λ^{WFocc_l} , $\lambda^{HFhukou_m}$ and $\lambda^{WFhukou_n}$), the intergenerational assortative mating between the husband and his wife ($\lambda^{Hocc-Wocc_{ij}}$) and the intergenerational occupational mobility between the husband and his father ($\lambda^{HFocc_{ik}}$), and the intergenerational occupational mobility between the wife and her father ($\lambda^{Wocc-WFocc_{jl}}$). Based on the research of Wu and Treiman (2007), the baseline model also

⁷ In their research, Wu and Treiman (2007) used sorted logistic regression models to produce a scale rank of the EGP occupational status as follows: professional and manager (I, II): .45; routine non-manual worker (III): .33; foremen and skilled manual worker (V, VI): .13; semi- and unskilled manual worker (VIIa): .069; small business owner (IVa, IVb): -.20; peasant (IVa, VIIb): -.79. The sampling strategy for the data Wu and Treiman used in their analysis is similar to that of the 2006 CGSS.

⁸ To conserve space, the full equation is spelled out for the baseline model only. Components for each association were added to the subsequent models accordingly.

assumes that the father's *hukou* is associated with his own ($\lambda^{HFocc-HFhukou_{km}}$ and $\lambda^{WFocc-WFhukou_{ln}}$) and his adult children's occupational status ($\lambda^{Hocc-HFhukou_{im}}$ and $\lambda^{Wocc-WFhukou_{jn}}$), respectively. As the associations in the baseline model are not the primary focus of this research, I apply the full interaction (FI) specification to all baseline associations.

$$\log F_{ijklmn} = \lambda + \lambda^{Hocc_i} + \lambda^{Wocc_j} + \lambda^{HFocc_k} + \lambda^{WFocc_l} + \lambda^{HFhukou_m} + \lambda^{WFhukou_n} + \lambda^{Hocc-Wocc_{ij}} + \lambda^{Hocc-HFocc_{ik}} + \lambda^{Wocc-WFocc_{jl}} + \lambda^{HFocc-HFhukou_{km}} + \lambda^{WFocc-WFhukou_{ln}} + \lambda^{Hocc-HFhukou_{im}} + \lambda^{Wocc-WFhukou_{jn}}$$

As shown in Panel B of Figure 1, I first test Hypothesis 1a by examining whether there is an association between the occupational status of an individual's father and of his or her spouse, net of all baseline associations. I then test Hypothesis 1b regarding the net association between the *hukou* of an individual's father and the occupational status of an individual's spouse, above and beyond the occupational status of his or her father (Panel C). Furthermore, I test Hypothesis 1c by examining whether the occupational status and *hukou* of an individual's father interact with each other in determining the occupational status of an individual's spouse (Panel D).

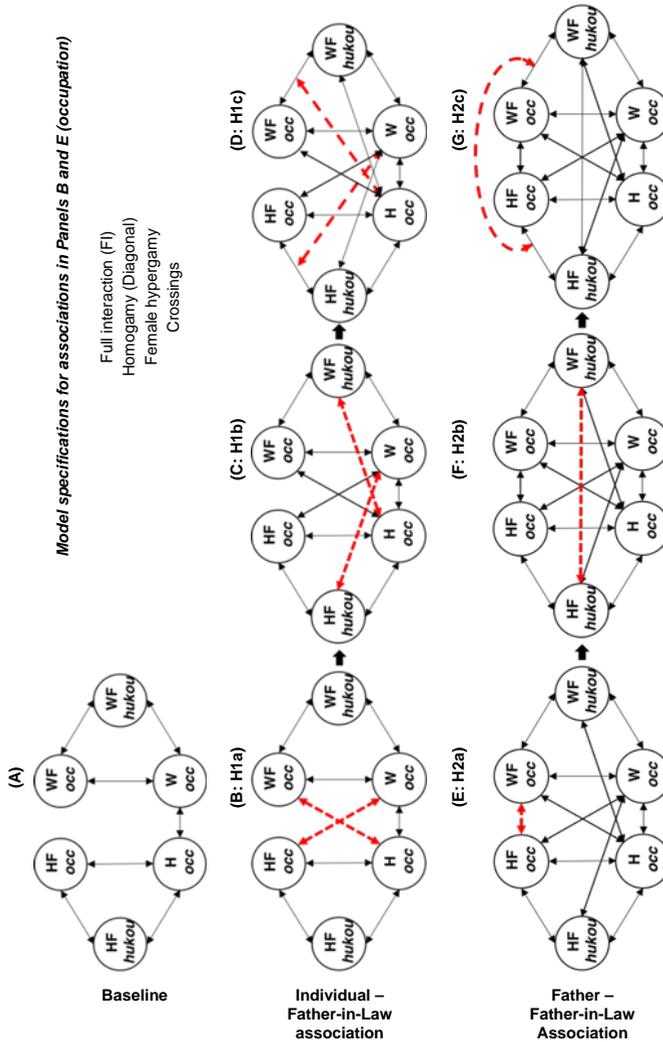
Next, as depicted in Panel E, I test Hypothesis 2a regarding the net association between the occupational status of an individual's father and his or her father-in-law, net of all associations depicted in Panel C. Please note that the interaction terms between the father's occupational status and *hukou* depicted in Panel D are not included in Panel E because the interactions are not statistically significant according to preliminary tests. As delineated in Panel F, I then include the association between the *hukou* of an individual's father and his or her father-in-law in order to test Hypothesis 2b. Finally, I test Hypothesis 2c regarding the interaction between occupational status and *hukou* in the association between the backgrounds of an individual's father and his or her father-in-law (Panel G).

Table 2: Parameters for occupational crossings model

Occupational status of the wife/the wife's father	Occupational status of the husband/the husband's father			
	IVc+VIIb	IVa/b+VIIa	V+VI	I+II+III
IVc+VIIb (peasant)	1	λ_1	$\lambda_1 + \lambda_2$	$\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + \lambda_3$
IVa/b+VIIa (semi/unskilled manual, small business owner)	λ_1	1	λ_2	$\lambda_2 + \lambda_3$
V+VI (foreman, skilled manual)	$\lambda_2 + \lambda_3$	λ_2	1	λ_3
I+II+III (professional, nonmanual)	$\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + \lambda_3$	$\lambda_1 + \lambda_2$	λ_3	1

Note: Adapted from Qian and Qian (2014).

Figure 1: Illustration of modeling strategies and hypotheses



Note: HF = Husband's father, WF = Wife's father, H = Husband, W = Wife, occ = occupation. Red dashed arrow-headed lines indicate additional tests that build on the preceding models. All models include the main effects of all six variables to net out any difference in the marginal distribution of each variable.

For the associations in occupational status depicted in Panels B and G, I test four model specifications to find a conceptually plausible and statistically parsimonious solution to explain the observed data in the contingency table. First, I assume full interaction (FI) for the associations. Second, in line with previous research on assortative mating (Xu, Ji, and Tung 2000), the occupational homogamy specification limits the associations to the diagonal cells of the contingency table. Third, because Chow and Chen (1994) found that Chinese women actively seek upward social mobility in the marriage market in contemporary China, the female occupational hypergamy specification limits the associations to the cells in the contingency tables in which (a) the husband had a higher occupational status than his wife's father, (b) the wife had a lower occupational status than her husband's father, and (c) the wife's father had a lower occupational status than the husband's father at the time of marriage. Finally, as Table 2 shows, the odds of marriage across distinct occupational status categories may depend on how many levels of difference an individual crosses (Qian and Qian 2014). As it may be less difficult for individuals to marry a partner in an adjacent occupational status category than across two or more categories, the occupational crossings specification assumes that the odds of an individual crossing each (additional) occupational barrier in the contingency table differ (see Qian and Qian [2014] for further information on the crossings model).

4. Results

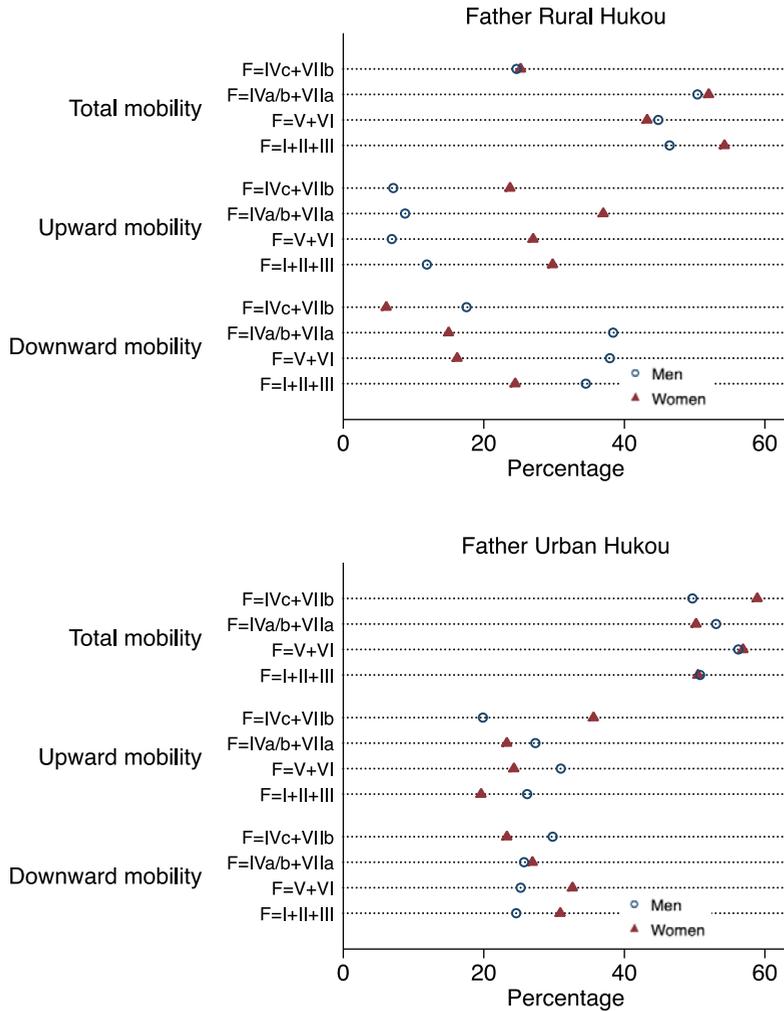
4.1 Absolute marital mobility rates

Figure 2 presents the absolute mobility rates based on the three-way contingency tables cross-tabulating the occupational status of the respondents, their fathers, and their spouses, separately for men and women by the father's *hukou* status. Here, upward mobility means that an individual's occupational status was lower than that of his or her spouse; and downward mobility means that an individual's occupational status was higher than that of his or her spouse at the time of marriage. Take the first line of the upward mobility section in the upper panel of Figure 2 as an example: among the individuals who had a peasant father ($F = IVc + VIIb$) with a rural *hukou* at the time of marriage, 7.1% of the men married a wife with a higher occupational status, and 23.7% of the women married a husband with a higher occupational status. It is clear from the results that the father's occupational status and *hukou* both matter for the individual's marital mobility. There are also considerable gender differences in the absolute marital mobility rates.

The upper panel of Figure 2 shows that the total mobility rates for men (24.7%) and women (25.2%) with a peasant father are substantially lower than those of people with a father who had a nonagricultural occupation (> 40%), if the father had a rural rather than an urban *hukou* at the time of marriage. Among the individuals with a father who had a rural *hukou*, the men had considerably lower upward mobility rates and higher downward mobility rates than the women (upper panel of Figure 2). However, the gender gaps were less stark for individuals with a father who had an urban *hukou* (lower panel of Figure 2). It therefore appears that among Chinese men, having a father with a rural *hukou* hinders both their marital and their occupational upward mobility (Wu and Treiman 2007). This is not surprising, as compared to having an urban *hukou*, having a rural *hukou* is associated with a lack of socioeconomic resources, limited access to social welfare benefits, and low symbolic status. Moreover, because rural residents had been strictly prohibited by the *hukou* policy from moving up the urban chain before these restrictions were relaxed in the 1980s (Chan and Zhang 1999), having a rural *hukou* also limited the opportunities of rural residents to meet a partner who (or whose father) worked in a nonagricultural sector. Indeed, the results show that among 87.3% of the respondents, their father and father-in-law had the same type of rural or urban *hukou* at the time of marriage. Furthermore, the observation that rural *hukou*-origin women have higher upward mobility rates than rural *hukou*-origin men concurs with the findings of Chow and Chen (1994) that Chinese women actively seek upward social mobility in the marriage market in the cotemporary era.

Figure 3 presents the outflow mobility rates in the three-way contingency tables by cross-tabulating the occupational status of the respondents, their fathers and their spouses, separately for men and women by the father's *hukou*. The figure delineates the percentage of men and women from each of the four occupational status categories who married a spouse from each of the four categories by the father's occupational status. The gradient pattern clearly shows that for both men and women, their upward marital mobility rates increase along with their own occupational status. Meanwhile, net of their own occupational status, men and women with a father who had a higher occupational status had slightly higher upward marital mobility rates. Consistent with the results from Figure 2, Figure 3 shows that both men and women had higher upward marital mobility rates if their father had an urban rather than a rural *hukou* at the time of marriage.

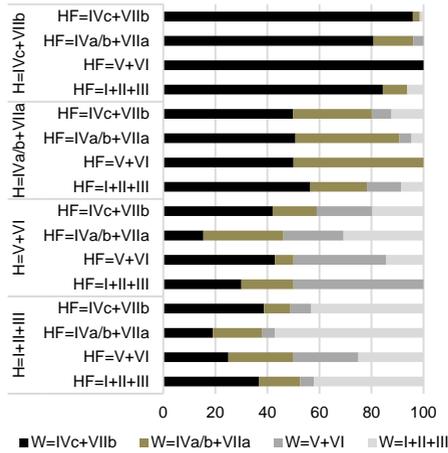
Figure 2: Marital mobility rates of men and women by the father's occupational status and hukou



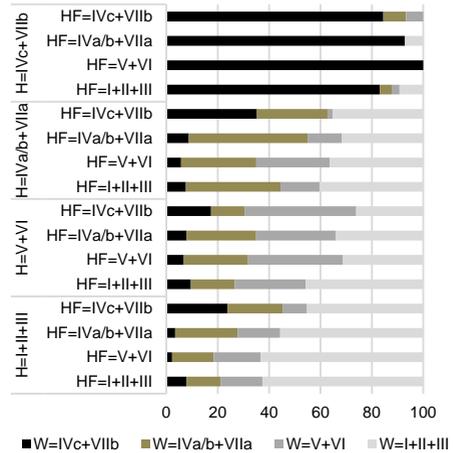
Note: For men, F = Husband's father; for women, F = Wife's father. IVc+VIIb = Peasant; IVa/b+VIIa = Semi/unskilled manual, small business owner; V+VI = Foreman, skilled manual; I+II+III = Professional, nonmanual. Calculation based on the husband's father's and the wife's father's hukou, respectively for men and women.

Figure 3: Outflow rates of men and women to spouses by the father's occupational status and hukou

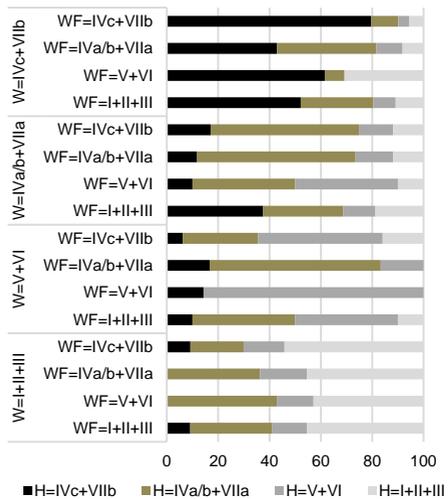
(A) Men (father rural hukou)



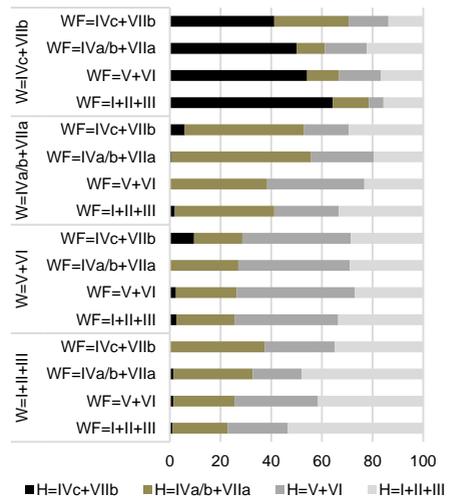
(B) Men (father urban hukou)



(C) Women (father rural hukou)



(D) Women (father urban hukou)



Note: WF = Wife's father, HF = Husband's father, H = Husband, W = Wife. IVc+VIIb = Peasant; IVa/b+VIIa = Semi/unskilled manual, small business owner; V+VI = Foreman, skilled manual; I+II+III = Professional, nonmanual.

4.2 Log-linear models

Table 3 presents the model fit indices – the deviance and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) statistics – from the log-linear models that examine the patterns of marital sorting based on paternal occupation and *hukou*. Model selection is a key component of log-linear models. The goal of model selection is to find the most parsimonious model with the lowest degree of deviance from the observed pattern in the data. In this context, a smaller deviance statistic and a smaller (i.e., more negative) BIC statistic indicate a better fitting model.

Model 1 is an independence model that includes only the marginal distributions of the occupational status of the wife, the wife's father, the husband, and the husband's father, as well as the *hukou* status of the wife's father and the husband's father, assuming there is no association between these variables. With a deviance of 25,357.50 and a BIC of 16,448.81, the model fits poorly with the data. Building on Model 1, Model 2 includes the occupational assortative mating between the husband and wife, the intergenerational occupational mobility between the husband and his father and between the wife and her father, and the associations between the father's *hukou* and his own and his adult children's occupational status. As may be expected, the inclusion of these associations significantly increases the model fit, reducing the deviance to 3,240.45 and the BIC to -5,323.90.

Model 3 tests Hypothesis 1a regarding the net associations between the occupational status of an individual's father and of his or her spouse, using the full interaction (FI) specification. The hypothesis is supported by the results in that both the deviance (2,460.98) and the BIC (-5,944.45) indices are substantially decreased from Model 2. In Models 4 and 5, the specifications of homogamy and female hypergamy, respectively, between the occupational status of an individual's father and spouse improve on Model 2 (the baseline model) in terms of model fit. However, both the deviance and the BIC indices are larger for Models 4 and 5 than for Model 3 (the FI model). Thus, the results indicate that the association between the occupational status of an individual's father and of his or her spouse is not necessarily constrained to the homogamous diagonal; and that a woman does not necessarily have a lower occupational status than her father-in-law, and a man does not necessarily have a higher occupational status than his father-in-law. Compared with Model 3, Model 6, the occupational crossings model, provides a more parsimonious fit for the data (BIC = -6,012.41), despite having a slightly greater degree of deviance (2,498.96) than Model 3 (the difference is not statistically significant at the 5% level). This supports the assumption that the likelihood of marriage varies by the degree of difference between the occupational status of an individual's father and of his or her spouse.

Table 3: Fit statistics for log-linear models (N = 6,831)

Hypothesis tested	Model specification	df	Deviance	BIC
Preliminary models				
	1 Independence model	1,009	25,357.50	16,448.81
	2 Baseline model (Panel A, Fig. 1)	970	3,240.45	-5,323.90
H1a (Panel B, Fig. 1)	2 + Father–spouse association in occupational status (2 + HF _{occ} * W _{occ} + WF _{occ} * H _{occ})			
	3 Full interaction ^a	952	2,460.98	-5,944.45
	4 Homogamy ^a	968	2,734.22	-5,812.47
	5 Female hypergamy ^a	968	2,876.00	-5,670.69
	6 Crossings ^a	964	2,498.96	-6,012.41
H1b (Panel C, Fig. 1)	6 + Association between father's <i>hukou</i> and spouse's occupational status			
	7 6 + HF _{hukou} * W _{occ} + WF _{hukou} * H _{occ}	958	2,344.66	-6,113.74
H1c (Panel D, Fig. 1)	7 + Interaction between father's occupational status and <i>hukou</i>			
	8 7 + occupational crossings (HF _{occ} * W _{occ}) * HF _{hukou} + occupational crossings (WF _{occ} * H _{occ}) * WF _{hukou}	952	2,323.94	-6,081.48
H2a (Panel E, Fig. 1)	7 + Father–father-in-law association in occupational status (7 + WF _{occ} * HF _{occ})			
	9 Full interaction ^b	949	1,505.33	-6,873.60
	10 Homogamy ^b	957	1,621.02	-6,828.55
	11 Female hypergamy ^b	957	1,836.72	-6,612.85
	12 Crossings ^b	955	1,633.15	-6,798.76
H2b (Panel F, Fig. 1)	9 + Father–father-in-law association in <i>hukou</i>			
	13 9 + WF _{hukou} * HF _{hukou}	948	1,129.48	-7,240.62
H2c (Panel G, Fig. 1)	13 + Interaction between father's and father-in-law's occupational status and <i>hukou</i>			
	14 13 + WF _{hukou} * HF _{hukou} * WF _{occ} * HF _{occ}	909	874.66	-7,151.11

Note: ^a Model specification for the association between the occupational status of an individual's father and spouse. ^b Model specification for the association between the occupational status of an individual's father and father-in-law. BIC (Bayesian-information-criterion) = $L^2 - df * \ln(N)$. HF = Husband's father, WF = Wife's father, H = Husband, W = Wife, occ = occupation.

Building on the best fit model (Model 6) for the net association between the occupational status of an individual's father and spouse, the inclusion of the association between the *hukou* of an individual's father and the occupational status of an individual's spouse in Model 7 further reduces the deviance (2,344.66) and the BIC (-6,113.74) indices. This finding supports Hypothesis 1b, as it underlines the significant role played by the father's *hukou* in an individual's marital mobility above and beyond the father's occupational status. Putting Hypothesis 1c to test, Model 8 assumes that the occupational status and *hukou* of an individual's father interact with each other in determining the occupational status of an individual's spouse. However, this hypothesis is not supported by the results, as Model 8 does not improve on Model 7.

Expanding on Model 7, Models 9 to 12 further test Hypothesis 2a regarding the net association between the occupational status of an individual's father and father-in-law. Model 9 assumes full interaction for the association, which substantially decreases the deviance (1,505.33) and the BIC (-6,873.60) indices. Therefore, the results support Hypothesis 2a, which asserts that there is a strong net association between the occupational status of an individual's father and father-in-law. In addition, the specifications of occupational homogamy, hypergamy, and crossings, respectively, for the association in Models 10 to 12 do not improve the model fit further to Model 9 (the FI model).

Building on Model 9, Model 13 tests Hypothesis 2b, and further includes the association in *hukou* status between an individual's father and father-in-law, which substantially reduces the deviance (1,129.48) and the BIC (-7,240.62) indices. This finding confirms that the parents' *hukou* plays a pivotal role in marital sorting, in addition occupational status. Building on Model 13, Model 14 tests Hypothesis 2c regarding the interaction between occupational status and *hukou* in the association between the backgrounds of an individual's father and father-in-law, which substantially reduces the deviance (874.66) statistic. However, the BIC (-7,151.11) statistic for Model 14 is larger (less negative) than that for Model 13, which indicates that Model 14 provides a less parsimonious fit for the data than Model 13. Therefore, the results do not support Hypothesis 2c, which asserts that the father's occupational status and *hukou* interact with each other in shaping the pattern of marital sorting.

5. Conclusions and discussion

My aim in this research was to help address the dearth of research on marital mobility in China by examining the pattern of marital sorting by parental background in the contemporary era. Drawing on analyses of the 2006 CGSS data, this is one of the first

studies to provide nationally representative evidence of the persistence of the tradition of marriage of matching doors in contemporary China. My results confirm the assumption that both the occupational status and the *hukou* of an individual's father play significant roles in determining the occupational status of his or her spouse, net of the occupational assortative mating between the husband and wife, as well as the intergenerational mobility between parents and children. The findings further indicate that there is a significant net association between the backgrounds (i.e., occupational status and *hukou*) of an individual's father and father-in-law. However, the father's occupational status and *hukou* do not seem to interact with each other in configuring an individual's marital mobility.

First, the findings call into question the conceptualization of marriage as an individualized and privatized institution in contemporary China (Davis 2014; Yan 2009). In recent research on marital mobility, there has been a growing tendency to focus on the couple's own characteristics, rather than on their family backgrounds (Kalmijn 1991; Han 2010; Qian and Qian 2014). A key rationale underlying the assumption that assortative mating is occurring and that the spouses' parental backgrounds can be neglected is that marriage has become increasingly "de-institutionalized" (Cherlin 2004), "privatized" (Davis 2014), and "individualized" (Yan 2009) in modern societies and, thus, that individuals are entitled to autonomy in choosing their spouse, even if they continue to be constrained by the preferences and opportunities conferred by their own social position. In this research, the finding of a strong net association between individuals' parental backgrounds and their levels of marital mobility indicates that marriage is a family affair as well as an individual matter in contemporary China. Therefore, the results clearly show that the influence of (extended) families and kinship persists, despite changes in the structure and function of the Chinese family in the past few decades (Davis 2014; Yan 2009).

This research also has important implications for the production and reproduction of social inequalities in China. Given the findings of occupational crossings between an individual's father and spouse, and of a significant net association between the occupational status of an individual's father and father-in-law, it is clear that the odds are stacked against people marrying outside of the socioeconomic circumstances into which they were born. The results also reveal that the parents' *hukou* plays an important role in shaping the pattern of marital mobility above and beyond the parents' occupational status. It seems that for rural men, having a rural *hukou* inhibits not only their occupational mobility, as reported by Wu and Treiman (2007), but also their prospects of upward marital mobility. It thus appears likely that the persisting tradition of marriage of matching doors will cement or exacerbate the existing socioeconomic inequalities in contemporary China (Xie and Zhou 2014).

Furthermore, the failure of the analysis to find empirical support for the hypothesis that the father's occupational status and *hukou* interact in determining who marries whom may not be surprising. This result may be explained in part by the high degree of correlation of rural and urban *hukou* status with distinctive sets of occupations, particularly as a large proportion of the individuals with a rural *hukou* are peasants. The correlation between *hukou* and occupation may also lead to an underestimation of the net effect of *hukou* after the association between occupations is modeled as reported in this research. Indeed, the initial aim of the CCP in reinstating *hukou* in 1951 was to tie the labor force to distinct sectors of production (e.g., agricultural, industrial) (Chan and Zhang 1999). Although the CCP lifted the ban on geographic mobility between rural and urban areas in the 1980s, changes in an individual's *hukou* status are still closely associated with his or her occupational and educational mobility (Hu 2016). To obtain an urban *hukou*, rural Chinese are usually required to secure a job in certain urban occupations and to have high educational qualifications (Chan and Zhang 1999). However, changes may be underway: the diversification of the occupational structure and the increase in the number of nonagricultural entrepreneurs in rural China (Li 2015) may have important implications for future research on the intersectionality between *hukou* and occupational status in marital sorting.

The limitations of this study pose several challenges for future research. Instead of attempting to determine the causal mechanism of marital sorting, my goal in this study was to describe the patterns and to assess the salience of the tradition of marriage of matching doors in contemporary China. Marital sorting is certainly shaped by an individual's preferences and available opportunities (e.g., Becker 1973; Ermisch, Francesconi, and Siedler 2006). Individuals who are acculturated in a distinct socioeconomic class tend to be limited by their educational, work, and social experiences in their opportunities to meet potential spouses; and they tend to develop an implicit preference for a spouse from a similar background (Kalmijn 1991). Given the changing landscape of gender roles and values in China (Hu 2015; Hu and Scott 2016), future research should incorporate the occupational status of the mother and the mother-in-law when such data become available. Unfortunately, my limited sample size and cell-size considerations prevented any further disaggregation that would have allowed for a comparative analysis of distinct time periods in contemporary China. Examining changes over time in the pattern of marital sorting by parental background in China should be an important agenda for future research.

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