Published in final edited form as:

J Marriage Fam. 2019 June ; 81(3): 567–583. doi:10.1111/jomf.12559.

Economic Resources, Cultural Matching, and the Rural-Urban Boundary in China's Marriage Market

Yun Zhou

Population Studies and Training Center, Brown University, 68 Waterman St, Providence, RI, 02912, yun_zhou@brown.edu

Abstract

Objective: This article investigates marital sorting by household registration status (*hukou*) and education in contemporary urban China, paying special attention to individuals who have achieved rural-to-urban *hukou* mobility before marriage.

Background: Existing theoretical frameworks of assortative mating have highlighted economic resources and cultural matching as two key dimensions. These two frameworks place different emphasis on individuals' achieved versus ascriptive characteristics, and hold different implications for understanding the link between marital sorting patterns and social openness/closure. With a focus on *hukou* converters, this study examines the relative importance of achieved versus ascriptive traits in China's marriage market and contributes to the evaluation of the two frameworks.

Method: This study adopts a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative analysis uses the harmonic mean marriage function to analyze the nationally representative 2006 China General Social Survey. The qualitative data consist of 115 in-depth interviews collected in two Chinese metropolitan areas between 2016 and 2017.

Results: Quantitative results showed that *hukou* converters and urban-born individuals both had the highest propensity of marrying a spouse of the same *hukou* trajectory. Qualitative results further revealed the gap between converters and their urban-born peers to be hierarchical. Although both groups emphasized the importance of shared values and habitus in evaluating prospective partners, urban-born individuals regarded *hukou* converters as a culturally distinct and less desirable option.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the power of cultural matching in China's urban marriage market. *Hukou* converters' rural origin remains visible and acts as a source of lasting symbolic distinction despite adulthood status attainment.

Keywords

culture; demography; inequalities; marriage; mate selection; mixed-methodology

INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have documented patterns of assortative mating by individuals' ascriptive or achieved characteristics in different societies, across time, and along a multitude of dimensions such as race/ethnicity (e.g., Fu, 2001; Qian & Lichter 2007), family background

and parental wealth (e.g., Charles, Hurst, & Killewald, 2013), education (e.g., Mare, 1991; Schwartz & Mare, 2005; Smits, Ultee, & Lammers, 1998), and occupation (e.g., Hout, 1982; Kalmijn, 1991, 1994). Marriage signifies the acceptance of others in one of the most intimate senses. Marriage—or the lack thereof—between members of different social groups has long been viewed as an indicator of the relative permeability of group boundaries (e.g. Kalmijn, 1998; Lieberman & Waters, 1988) and the rigidity of the stratification system (e.g. Blossfeld, 2009; Blossfeld & Timm, 2003).

Existing theoretical explanations of assortative mating fall largely into two camps, i.e. economic competition and cultural matching (Kalmijn, 1994). The two frameworks differ in their respective takes on the relative importance of individuals' ascriptive versus achieved traits in the marriage market, and therefore have different implications for understanding the link between marital sorting patterns and the relative openness or closure of the stratification system. The economic competition framework posits that individuals always prefer partners with greater economic resources in order to maximize family income (see Kalmijn, 1994). This framework would suggest that advantages in status attainment could mitigate disadvantages in individuals' ascriptive characteristics. If marital sorting indeed follows the logic of economic competition, such a scenario would point to greater social openness, as individuals are able to move beyond their social origin stratum through adulthood status attainment in the marriage market. The cultural matching framework, on the other hand, highlights the importance of shared norms, values, and cultural capital in assortative mating and emphasizes the lasting power of ascriptive traits in forming intimate relationships (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Kalmijn, 1994, 1998; Streib, 2015). Correspondingly, the enduring effect of individuals' ascriptive traits in the marriage market would implicate a higher degree of rigidity and closure in the stratification system.

To explicate the link between assortative mating patterns and the degree of social openness/closure, China, with its household registration (*hukou*) system, presents a unique setting to examine the relative importance of economic resources vis-à-vis cultural matching in the marital sorting process. This study focuses on marital sorting by *hukou* status and educational attainment in contemporary China's urban marriage market, paying special attention to individuals who have achieved rural-to-urban *hukou* mobility prior to marriage entry (hereinafter referred to as *hukou* converters).

Promulgated in the 1950s as a population control strategy, the *hukou* system that categorizes individuals as either agricultural (rural) or non-agricultural (urban) has been one of the major sources of social stratification in contemporary China (Whyte, 2010). Urban residents are entitled to welfare, benefits, and opportunities that are not available to their rural counterparts (Chan, 2009). This discriminatory institutional setting has led to profound social inequalities by *hukou* status, creating what some scholars have called "one country, two societies" (Whyte, 2010). In addition to the rural-urban gap in various socioeconomic realms, rurality is imbued with a cultural meaning and is often denigrated, stigmatized, and devalued (see Otis, 2011).

Individuals' *hukou* status is largely ascriptive. With tight control and a strict quota, rural-to-urban *hukou* mobility exists for a selective segment of the rural-born population.

Educational attainment at the tertiary level is one of the primary channels for achieving *hukou* mobility. *Hukou* converters are thus often viewed as “the best and the brightest of the rural population” (Wu & Treiman, 2007, p. 419). As such, *hukou* converters occupy a unique space within contemporary China’s urban marriage market. They have obtained urban *hukou* as part of adulthood status attainment, yet the question remains whether and to what extent converters’ rural *hukou* origin continues to be a source of lingering disadvantage. This study addresses the following questions: Is there any distinction between urban-born individuals and *hukou* converters in China’s urban marriage market? If *hukou* converters are perceived and treated differently than their urban-born counterparts, what are the sources of such differences? Examining marital sorting patterns with a focus on *hukou* converters sheds light on the relative importance of achieved versus ascriptive traits and the degree of social openness in the context of the marriage market. For individuals who have achieved urban *hukou* status later in life, understanding how their rural origin is perceived and evaluated further illuminates the relative explanatory power of the economic competition and the cultural matching theoretical frameworks.

Answering these questions requires a methodological approach that is equipped to uncover individuals’ reasoning, ideation, and decision-making in marriage transition. With few exceptions (e.g., Lui, 2016, 2017; Streib, 2015), research on assortative mating has predominantly relied on survey data and quantitative analysis of established unions. Such analysis treats marriage as a realized outcome, and thus obscures key underlying mechanisms in understanding how individuals evaluate potential mates, perceive various spousal traits, and come to their marriage decisions. I adopt a mixed-methods approach that combines nationally representative survey data and 115 in-depth interviews with both never-married and married individuals. The quantitative analysis provides a broad descriptive account of contemporary Chinese marital sorting patterns. The qualitative analysis further illuminates the reasoning behind individuals’ mate selection preferences and marriage decisions. In doing so, I come back to the overarching question in the assortative mating literature on the link between marital sorting patterns and social openness/closure, i.e., to what extent the disadvantages in individuals’ social origins remain despite adulthood status attainment. With an innovative empirical framework, this study makes a theoretical contribution by elucidating how individuals evaluate, perceive, and attach meaning to various spousal traits, thereby highlighting the sources of (under)desirability for members of different social groups, and contributing to the evaluation of the economic competition vis-à-vis cultural matching theoretical frameworks.

BACKGROUND

Theoretical Issues: Economic Competition and Cultural Matching

What makes a “good” match from a pool of potential mates? The economic competition framework highlights the central role of economic resources in driving marriage outcomes. The framework encompasses several different theoretical models.

First, a longstanding theorization of marriage regards mate selection as a process of specialization and exchange for joint utility maximization (Becker, 1973, 1974, 1991). The “specialization and exchange” model assumes that individuals enter into different,

specialized roles upon marriage, with the husband in paid labor and the wife in unpaid housework (Becker, 1985). Marriage thus represents a bond of mutual dependency and an exchange of resources between rational actors with differential comparative advantage in the household and the labor market (Raymo & Iwasawa, 2005; Yu & Xie, 2015). The “specialization and exchange” model has been used to explain the observed patterns of status homogamy: Having advantageous socioeconomic positions, great economic resources, and promising potentials translates into high desirability and large probability of attracting an equally desirable spouse. Furthermore, as gender roles become less specialized, men will begin to seek and compete for women with greater economic resources just as women have traditionally valued and sought out economically advantageous men (Kalmijn, 1994).

An alternative model under the economic competition framework is the “marriage-search” theory (Oppenheimer, 1988), which again emphasizes the role of economic incentives and resources in driving mate selection outcomes. The marriage-search model acknowledges that high-status individuals in the labor market make more attractive marriage partners (Oppenheimer, 1994, 1997). One caveat is that with the “gender revolution” (Goldin, 2006) in women’s employment and earnings, highly educated women are now more able to support themselves and may carry out a longer and more thorough search (Yu & Xie, 2015). The economic incentives for seeking out mates with high socioeconomic status may also decrease. Instead, highly educated women may be willing to “marry a man who is unlikely to be a great provider but who is highly desirable in many other respects” (Oppenheimer, 1994, p. 315).

These two theoretical models predict different patterns of status homogamy in the long run. However, both emphasize the role of economic resources in driving marriage outcomes. Here, economic resources have largely been operationalized as adulthood educational and labor market attainment. In a sense, the economic competition framework is forward-looking: it is the present status and the future prospect that matter. A group of scholars have indeed argued that the ascribed “past” has lost its importance in marital sorting for individuals who share comparable adulthood class positions, because as adults, these individuals have undergone similar educational trajectories, hold occupations of comparable prestige, and have similar access to earnings and networks (e.g., Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Erickson, 1996; McFarland & Pals, 2005, see also Streib, 2015).

Unlike the economic competition framework that largely focuses on individuals’ current socioeconomic status attainment, the cultural matching framework draws on the Bourdieusian notions of cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) and emphasizes the importance of shared norms, tastes, and values in mate selection and union formation. Shared cultural capital “ensures a common basis of conversation, provides confirmation of one’s norms and values, and reduces friction within marriage that may arise from dissimilarity in tastes” (Kalmijn, 1994, p. 423). The cultural matching framework points to the lasting effect of social origin on forming intimate relationships (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Kalmijn, 1994). Different classes are viewed as possessing distinct tastes, norms, values, and moral worth (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont, 1992, 2000). The lasting cultural differences thus make marriage formation across social class lines difficult (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Kalmijn, 1994). Newer research on highly educated U.S. couples of different

class origins has taken on a more optimistic tone and suggested that the cultural distinctions produced by differences in social origins were not always divisive (Streib, 2015). Such research nonetheless highlights the enduring imprint of social origin on individuals' mate selection processes and married life.

To what extent does the past vis-à-vis the present matter? The economic competition and the cultural matching frameworks speak to the profound implications of assortative mating on social openness and closure. On the one hand, if economic resources were the primary driving force in mate selection, such a scenario would point in the direction of greater social openness. Here, advantageous adulthood status attainment could offset disadvantages in ascriptive traits. Status attainment enables individuals to transcend their social origin stratum in the marriage market. On the other hand, under the cultural matching framework, individuals' ascriptive characteristics have a lasting effect in the form of enduring cultural distinctions that cannot be fully negated by adulthood status attainment. If marriage formation were governed more by the logic of cultural matching, such a scenario would be indicative of the "power of the past" (Streib, 2015) and a lasting cleavage between members of different social groups based on ascriptive traits.

To evaluate these two theoretical frameworks, some limitations exist within the assortative mating literature to date. Studies that start with established unions cannot adequately elucidate individuals' decision-making in the mate selection and marriage entry process as it happens. Moreover, quantitative assortative mating studies have largely focused on studying marital sorting along a singular dimension and estimating the effect of a given characteristic in driving marriage outcomes, net of other factors. Theory testing and evaluation have relied primarily on the relative size and significance of coefficients (e.g., Bruze, 2011; Kalmijn, 1994). Statistical results are imbued with meaning and are used to extrapolate individuals' reasoning and ideation, leading to what Aage Sørensen has aptly labeled as "variable-based theorizing" (Sørensen, 1998).

In the Chinese context specifically, recent research has generally focused on marital sorting along a singular dimension, i.e., educational attainment (e.g., Han, 2010; Smits, 2003; Song, 2009). Research that explicitly considered *hukou* conversion is rare, with one exception (Wang & Schwartz, 2018) that examined the macro-level determinants and trends of rural-urban marriages between 1958–2008. Almost exclusively based on quantitative analysis of established unions, these studies suffer from some of the common limitations discussed above. Individuals' reasoning, logic, and decision-making in the mate selection process are not fully illuminated. Although these studies have provided thorough descriptive accounts of the trends and patterns of education-based assortative mating in post-1949 China, more work is needed for theory evaluation.

In the following section, I highlight how the present study contributes to the theoretical discussions by focusing on *hukou* converters. In particular, I consider the duality of *hukou* as a characteristic that can be both ascriptive and achieved, and both a social and a symbolic boundary.

The Chinese Context: The Duality of Hukou

China's *hukou* system was originally set up as a population control strategy to cope with the state's demand for rapid industrialization (Chan, 2009; Wang, 2005). In doing so, the state deliberately created a "dual economy and society" (Chan, 2009, p. 200). Strong state support was given to the industrial sectors located in urban areas. The agricultural sector was designated as non-priority, although it encompasses the majority of China's population (Chan, 2009; Wu & Treiman, 2004, 2007). The *hukou* system is "an important mechanism in distributing resources and determining life chances in China" (Wu & Treiman, 2007, p. 418). Urban *hukou* holders alone are entitled to a variety of state-provided social welfare and benefits such as housing subsidies, health care, and pensions (Chan, 2009; Wang, 2005; Whyte, 2010; Wu & Treiman, 2004, 2007). Extensive scholarship has documented the rural-urban gap along multiple dimensions throughout individuals' life course, such as educational attainment (e.g., Hannum, 2003; Hannum, An, & Cherng, 2011), income (e.g., Xie & Zhou, 2014), intergenerational occupational mobility (e.g., Wu & Treiman, 2007), and health (e.g., Chen, Yang, & Liu, 2010; Zhang & Treiman, 2013).

China's rural-urban gap is thus a prime example of a form of social boundary, i.e. the "objectified forms of social differences" reflected in different groups' unequal accesses to resources and opportunities (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 168). In addition, the gap is a symbolic boundary as well, that is, the conceptual categorization of individuals that creates senses of (dis)similarity and group in/exclusion (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Studies have shown that across the world, rural and urban populations are viewed as having distinct values, attitudes, and tastes (e.g., Hofferth & Iceland, 1998). In China's popular discourse, rurality has been associated with being less modern and under-civilized. Rural residents are regarded as backward, uncultured, and having lower overall worth (e.g., Otis, 2011; Whyte, 2010). Studies have consistently shown that the social stigma associated with rurality and experienced by rural-to-urban migrants negatively affects their mental health and life quality (e.g., Li, Stanton, Fang, & Lin, 2006). Newer research on marriages between rural migrant women and urban-born men also indicated that these rural wives often needed to strategize to perform "urban-ness" despite already being a member of the urban family (Lui, 2016, 2017).

Individuals' *hukou* status is largely determined at birth based on parents' registration status. Not all rural-to-urban migrants are able to obtain urban *hukou* status. Educational attainment, along with party membership and military service, has been the major channel for *hukou* mobility (Wu & Treiman, 2007; Zhang & Treiman, 2013). *Hukou* mobility is therefore inextricably linked to other forms of socioeconomic status attainment, with *hukou* converters occupying the upper echelon among the entire rural-born population. Yet as noted above, rurality is denigrated, devalued, and viewed as culturally distinct. For *hukou* converters the question thus becomes: To what extent does transcending the social boundary aspect of the rural-urban gap enable individuals to cross the symbolic divide as well? More generally, to what extent does the achieved "present" negate and offset the disadvantages of the ascribed "past"?

Examining marital sorting outcomes for *hukou* converters, particularly, how *hukou* converters are perceived in the urban marriage market, therefore contributes to the evaluation

of the economic competition vis-à-vis cultural matching frameworks. If economic resources, understood as educational and labor market attainment, were the primary driving force in marital sorting, we would expect that for *hukou* converters, the disadvantages associated with rural origin would be offset by their adulthood status attainment. We would also expect *hukou* converters to no longer be perceived differently than their urban-born peers, as they have arrived at the same current standing (i.e. both urban). Conversely, if the logic of cultural matching holds greater explanatory power, we would expect there to still be a distinction between *hukou* converters and urban-born individuals in the urban marriage market, despite both appearing urban on paper.

STUDY DESIGN

Quantitative Analysis: Model; Data and Measures

Model.—In analyzing marriage tables, the current standard approach of log-linear and log-multiplicative modeling incorporates only established unions and cannot fully account for the population at risk of marriage. The sometimes-employed event-history models that consider the unmarried population are generally single-sex approaches that do not address variability in marriage entry by age-sex compositions, thereby leading to the “two-sex problem” (Kashyap, Esteve, & Garcia-Roman, 2015; Schoen, 1988). I relied instead on the harmonic mean marriage function proposed by Schoen (1981, 1988, see also Gshur & Okun, 2003; Kashyap, Esteve, & Garcia-Roman, 2015; Okun, 2001; Qian & Preston, 1993; Raymo & Iwasawa, 2005), which offers an elegant solution to the “two-sex problem” and accounts for the population at risk of marriage.

The model in its simplest form is specified as follows (Qian & Preston, 1993):

$$N_{ij} = \alpha_{ij} \frac{M_i F_j}{nM_i + mF_j} \quad (1)$$

N_{ij} refers to the number of observed marriages between males aged i and females aged j in some period. M_i and F_j are the numbers of unmarried males and females of ages i and j respectively in the middle of that period, i.e., the male and female populations at risk of marriage. When i and j are specified as age intervals, m and n are the lengths of the intervals in years (see Qian & Preston, 1993). α_{ij} is the “force of attraction” parameter between males aged i and females aged j . α is estimated based on the number of marriages contracted between males and females of a set of characteristics and the corresponding male and female populations at risk. Qian and Preston (1993) provide a succinct and straightforward substantive interpretation of α_{ij} : Suppose males aged i and females aged j meet at a “place” in the marriage market. Assuming men and women go to this “place” at equal rates and encounter at random, α is a composition-independent measure of marriage propensity that “reflects both the rate of encounters and the proportion of such encounters that lead to marriage” (Qian & Preston, 1993, p. 483). In other words, assuming random encounter at equal rates between two groups, a higher rate of such encounters resulting in marriage is reflected by a higher α , i.e., a higher “force of attraction” (see also Kashyap, Esteve, & Garcia-Roman, 2015, p. 188).

The simplest form of age-sex composition (Equation 1) can easily be generalized to different kinds of pairings between males and females of certain traits. Equation (2) extends upon Equation (1) by further incorporating individuals' *hukou* trajectory and educational level.

$$N_{ijklpq} = \alpha_{ijklpq} \frac{M_{ikp} F_{jlq}}{nM_{ikp} + mF_{jlq}} \quad (2)$$

Similar to previous notations, N_{ijklpq} is the number of marriage between men of age i , educational level k , and *hukou* trajectory p and women of age j , educational level l and *hukou* trajectory q in some period. M_{ikp} is the number of eligible males of age i , educational level k , and *hukou* trajectory p , whereas F_{jlq} is the number of unmarried females of age j , educational level l , and *hukou* trajectory q in the middle of that period. m and n are the lengths of the age intervals i and j . α_{ijklpq} is the corresponding “force of attraction” parameter.

Hukou converters make up a subset of all rural-to-urban migrants. Not all migrants of rural origin that reside in urban areas and are thus exposed to the urban marriage market have or are able to obtain urban *hukou* status. Therefore, *hukou* trajectory (p and q) includes three scenarios, i.e., rural-born urban-residing non-converters, rural-born *hukou* converters, and urban-born individuals. Equation (2) estimates the marriage propensities between men and women of various age, *hukou* trajectory, and educational pairings. Equation (2) thus demonstrates if and to what extent the effect of rural *hukou* origin may persist for those who have achieved similar educational and *hukou* status as their urban-born counterparts. Suppose urban-born individuals are equally likely to encounter other urban-born individuals as they are *hukou* converters, if for a given educational level and age configuration, the attraction parameter of the *hukou* converter/urban-born pairing is lower than that of the urban-born/urban-born pairing, this would indicate that for urban-born individuals, the propensity to marry another urban-born spouse is higher. Such a result points to a gap between *hukou* converters and their urban-born peers, despite adulthood educational attainment and *hukou* conversion.

Data and measures.—To estimate the attraction parameter α , micro-level data are required for both the population at risk of marriage and the marriages that have occurred over the period of interest. I used the 2006 China General Social Survey (CGSS; <http://cgss.ruc.edu.cn/>), which covered both urban and rural China and surveyed a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adults. Urban and rural marriage markets are largely segregated from each other. I thus restricted my analysis to the urban marriage market using the urban sample ($N=6013$). To the best of my knowledge, the 2006 CGSS is the only national survey that included detailed marriage histories and recorded married respondents' and their spouses' *hukou* information at the time of marriage, rather than at the time of survey, thus allowing the proper specification of individuals' *hukou* trajectory prior to marriage entry. In the urban sample, 4,581 respondents were married at the time of the survey. To avoid bias introduced by differences between first and later marriages, I limited the analytical sample to first marriages contracted within the last ten years (i.e., 1997–2006) of the survey ($N=1014$). The ten-year frame was motivated by the need for aggregating

marriages over some time period to avoid sparse cells in the marriage table, while ensuring the marriages were relatively recent to mitigate possible bias introduced by marital dissolution (see also Gshur & Okun, 2003; Raymo & Iwasawa, 2005 for similar approaches). I constructed the first-time married male and female samples based on the self and spousal information reported by the married respondents.

Given the ascriptive nature of *hukou* status, based on the survey instrument, I defined *hukou* converters as individuals with urban *hukou* at the time of marriage and whose parents were of rural *hukou* status. Educational level was classified in three categories: “lower secondary education and below” (i.e., compulsory schooling only), “upper secondary and vocational education,” and “some tertiary education and above.” Age at marriage was classified in three categories: “17–21,” “22–27,” and “28–35” for first-time married women and “17–23,” “24–29,” and “30–39” for first-time married men. The offset male and female age categories were employed to reflect the normative age differences in married couples. There was extremely little first-time marriage activity among women older than 35 and men older than 39 between 1997 and 2006. Of the first-time married women in the sample, 98.82% married between 17 and 35, and 98.12% of the first-time married men married between 17 and 39. The analysis thus excluded individuals whose first marriages happened at older ages, which reduced the married sample size to N=989 unions. Data missingness was negligible. I adopted the complete-case analysis approach (see Gelman & Hill, 2006). The final married sample included N=988 couples. The appendix provides additional details on constructing the married sample. Table 1 presents the descriptive sample statistics.

A series of two-sample t-tests were conducted to compare educational attainment and age at first marriage among men and women of the three *hukou* trajectories. Both male and female rural-born non-converters married at significantly younger ages, as compared to their *hukou* converter and urban-born peers ($p < .01$ in all t-tests). Age at first marriage was slightly higher for urban-born males than their converter counterparts ($p < .05$). Age at first marriage did not differ significantly between female converters and urban-born women. Although educational level was recorded for both married respondents and their spouses in the 2006 CGSS, detailed information on years of schooling was available only for survey respondents. Unsurprisingly, rural-born non-converters, both men and women, had significantly much less schooling than their *hukou* converter and urban-born counterparts ($p < .01$ in all t-tests). Male *hukou* converters had slightly more schooling than urban-born men ($p < .05$). Female *hukou* converters had slightly less schooling than urban-born women ($p < .05$). The educational differences across groups again showed that *hukou* converters were indeed at the top of the rural-born population. *Hukou* converters and their urban-born peers were largely comparable, which further supported the above-mentioned assumption of random encounter between urban-born individuals and *hukou* converters, as both groups were likely to occupy similar social spaces.

To construct the at-risk sample, following Raymo and Iwasawa (2005), I expanded the 2006 CGSS urban sample into a person-year record form. An observation was created for each year a female respondent was between 17 and 35 and a male respondent was between 17 and 39 during the period of 1997–2006. An individual entered the risk set in the year that s/he turned 17 and remained at risk until s/he got married, aged past 35 or 39, or until the year of

the survey, depending on which event happened first. The age-sex-education-*hukou* trajectory-specific at-risk population was defined as the sum of the eligible mid-year populations in each of the ten years, i.e., $M_{ikp} = \sum_{t=1}^{10} M_{ikp}^t$ where M_{ikp}^t referred to the number of eligible men of age i , educational level k , and *hukou* trajectory p at the middle of year t ($t=1997, 1998, \dots, 2006$). The mid-year eligible populations included all non-married individuals in year t , plus one-half of those whose marriages were contracted exactly in that year (see also Raymo & Iwasawa 2005, p. 810). Additional information on the at-risk sample construction is available in the appendix.

Qualitative Analysis: In-depth Interview Sample, Protocol, and Analysis

Sample.—The qualitative data consist of 115 in-depth interviews with men and women in two Chinese metropolitan areas conducted between January 2016 and July 2017. The central goal of the qualitative analysis is to uncover individuals' stated attitudes, preferences, and reasoning in the mate selection process. I thus primarily relied on interviews with never-married men ($N=32$) and women ($N=39$) who were in the process of searching for partners and/or making marriage decisions. I drew on 44 supplementary interviews with men ($N=14$) and women ($N=30$) in their first marriages to further explore how decisions surrounding marriage transitions were made.

To examine how rural origin is evaluated and perceived in the urban marriage market, the majority of the interviewees were urban-born. Among the 17 rural-born respondents, 13 had urban *hukou* at the time of the interview. To qualify for the study, one had to be heterosexual, aged 22–36, and have completed some form of tertiary education. Considering the limitations of a small- N design, I imposed strict selection criteria to ensure variability and avoid over-fragmentation in the sample. As noted earlier, tertiary education is one of the major channels for *hukou* mobility. To understand any potential persisting adverse effects of rural *hukou* origin, I have thus limited my sample to highly educated respondents. This approach allows me to examine whether *hukou* converters are truly viewed as equals by their urban-born peers. Table 2 provides an overview of the qualitative sample characteristics.

The respondents were recruited via snowball sampling. The married respondents were not in union with each other. To allay the concern of excessive network clustering, I interviewed a maximum of three referrals from the same “seed” in the referral chain. I stopped interviewing when saturation was reached. That is, I considered the sample to be sufficient when no salient new themes emerged with each additional interview (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Protocol.—The interview protocol focused on respondents' desired spousal traits and reasoning behind such preferences. To explicitly evaluate the logics of economic competition vis-à-vis cultural matching, I asked each respondent to rate the importance of a battery of socioeconomic and demographic factors when selecting a potential partner. Respondents were further probed about their reasoning for the ratings. These factors include spousal educational level, income, occupation, family background, sibship size, and age. I asked all respondents specifically whether they would marry a spouse of a different *hukou* origin. All urban-born respondents were further asked explicitly whether they would

consider marrying a *hukou* converter. To ameliorate the concern of social desirability bias and to further gauge how the impact of rural *hukou* origin on individuals' desirability may be intervened by additional socioeconomic attributes, I provided multiple vignette-like descriptions of hypothetical partners. I kept rural *hukou* origin as a constant while varying other socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (e.g., assigning the hypothetical partner higher income, higher educational level, more prestigious occupation and school). I asked respondents to rate their relative acceptance levels of these hypothetical partners and further probed into their reasoning. To ensure consistency, I conducted all interviews myself. Interviews were recorded and ranged between 1.5 to two hours on average.

Analysis.—I wrote a short memo summarizing my immediate impressions after each interview. Over the course of data analysis, I returned to each interview multiple times, listening to the recordings, taking detailed notes, and writing in-depth analytical memos. The listening method enabled me to fully capture the mood, flow, and emotional cues in the conversations. Using these detailed notes and analytical memos, I inductively identified key themes that emerged from the data. The analytical memos painted a holistic picture of the process through which respondents had come to their mate selection preferences and marriage decisions. The qualitative data and findings from a small-N non-random design are not intended for providing any representative description of China's marital sorting patterns. Rather, the qualitative results serve to complement and triangulate the quantitative findings of the aggregate patterns, through uncovering individuals' deep-held values and preferences, and illuminating the underlying reasoning in their marriage decision-making processes.

FINDINGS

Forces of Attraction, Hukou Conversion, and Educational Attainment

With three age groups, three educational levels, and three *hukou* trajectories, the full marriage table includes 27*27 pairings. Here, I focus on the forces of attraction among individuals who have obtained some form of post-compulsory schooling (i.e., upper secondary and tertiary education). Table 3 presents results of four sorting-by-education scenarios: 1) homogamous pairings with tertiary education; 2) homogamous pairings with upper secondary education; 3) hypergamous pairings (i.e., men with tertiary education and women with upper secondary education); and 4) hypogamous pairings (i.e., men with upper secondary education and women with tertiary education).

As evident from Table 3, sorting by age was a forceful mechanism. Very little marriage activity occurred between women aged 17–21 and men aged 30–39. Recall that as shown in Table 1, the mean ages at first marriage were 26.76 (SD=3.40) for men and 24.50 (SD=2.96) for women in the married sample. The marriage table here became sparse due to the high number of cells. For a streamlined presentation of results, Table 4 focuses on the forces of attraction between men aged 24–29 and women aged 22–27 across the three *hukou* trajectories in the four educational sorting scenarios.

We begin with educationally homogamous pairings. Here, the highest attraction parameters were all observed between individuals of the same *hukou* trajectory. Between college-educated men and women, the attraction parameter of the urban-born/urban-born pairing

was 1.85, much higher than the 0.56 of the male converter/female urban-born combination and the 0.48 of the female converter/male urban-born union. Suppose men aged 24–29 and women aged 22–27 with tertiary education and current urban *hukou* randomly encountered at equal rates, the differences in the attraction parameters meant that the rate of such encounters leading to marriages between two urban-born individuals was more than three times greater than that between male converters and urban-born females. Similarly, the rate of such encounters resulting in marriages between female converters and urban-born males needed to be more than three times greater than its current size for the attraction parameter to reach the level of that between two urban-born individuals. Between male and female high school graduates, again, the attraction parameters were the highest between individuals of the same *hukou* trajectory. Taken together, these findings pointed to a strong tendency of homogamy by *hukou* trajectory. Unsurprisingly, a large gap existed between rural-born non-converters and individuals with current urban *hukou* status. Urban-born individuals had the lowest propensity of marrying an urban-residing rural-born non-converter. *Hukou* converters also had higher propensities of marrying an urban-born individual than a non-converter.

In educationally hypergamous pairings, the attraction parameter between urban-born women and men ($\alpha=0.68$) was roughly three times higher than that between male converters and urban-born females ($\alpha=0.23$). In other words, when “marrying up” educationally, urban-born women still had higher propensity of marrying urban-born men than male converters. Again, the marriage propensities between rural non-converters and current urban *hukou* holders were the lowest.

The attraction parameters told a slightly different story in educationally hypogamous pairings. On the one hand, the attraction parameter between two urban-born individuals ($\alpha=0.37$) was higher than that between female converters and urban-born men ($\alpha=0.30$). On the other hand, the attraction parameter between educationally advantageous female *hukou* converters and urban-born men ($\alpha=0.30$) was higher than that between two *hukou* converters ($\alpha=0.19$). When “marrying down” educationally, educationally advantageous female converters were more likely to marry urban-born men than converter males. In this sense, for female *hukou* converters, educational advantage served to exchange for a partner’s urban *hukou* origin. Along the same line, the attraction parameter was even smaller ($\alpha=0.17$) between educationally advantageous urban-born women and male converters, which pointed to a low propensity for women to “marry down” both educationally and *hukou* origin-wise.

Together, these findings demonstrated that in contemporary China’s urban marriage market, *hukou* was a powerful sorting mechanism: individuals had the highest propensity of marrying a spouse of the same *hukou* trajectory. More importantly, urban-born individuals had higher propensity of marrying other urban-born individuals than *hukou* converters, despite both groups having the same current urban status. Such a tendency held true across educationally homogamous, hypergamous, and hypogamous pairings. One caveat was that for educationally advantageous female converters, when “marrying down” educationally, they were more likely to “marry up” *hukou* origin-wise.

The patterns reported in Table 4 generally held when we examine additional age configurations in Table 3. In college-educated educationally homogamous pairings, looking

at men aged 24–29 and women aged 28–35, the attraction parameter between two converters ($\alpha=1.52$) was more than four times higher than that between male converters and urban-born females ($\alpha=0.37$), and more than two times higher than that between female converters and urban-born males ($\alpha=0.74$). Although urban-born men had similar propensities of marrying converters ($\alpha=0.74$) and urban-born women ($\alpha=0.72$), the attraction parameter of the male converter/female urban-born pairing ($\alpha=0.37$) was about one half of that between two urban-born individuals ($\alpha=0.72$). In educationally homogamous pairings of high school graduates, the attraction parameter between urban-born men aged 30–39 and urban-born women aged 28–35 ($\alpha=1.24$) was more than two times greater than that between urban-born men and female converters of the same age configuration ($\alpha=0.46$). For urban-born women aged 17–21, the attraction parameter between them and urban-born men aged 24–29 ($\alpha=0.13$) was more than two times greater than that involving male converters of the same age category ($\alpha=0.05$). Similarly, between men aged 24–29 and women aged 28–35, the attraction parameter of the male converter/female urban-born pairing ($\alpha=0.52$) was just about one half of that between two urban-born individuals ($\alpha=0.98$). In educationally hypergamous pairings, the attraction parameter between male converters aged 30–39 and urban-born women aged 22–27 ($\alpha=0.57$) was higher than that between two converters ($\alpha=0.31$). Even so, the attraction parameter between two urban-born individuals ($\alpha=1.17$) was two times greater than that of the male converter/female urban-born pairing.

The only anomaly worth noting in Table 3 is that in educationally hypergamous pairings, for men aged 17–23 and women aged 17–21, the marriage propensity was the lowest between two urban-born individuals. As shown earlier, urban-born individuals marry at a slightly older age than *hukou* converters. Given the young ages, the pattern found here may be reflecting the difference in marriage age norms. That is, encounters involving *hukou* converters are more likely to result in marriages than those between two urban-born individuals, at young ages.

Taken together, we have consistently observed a strong sorting by *hukou* trajectory across educational and age configurations. Furthermore, urban-born women across age and educational levels overall had a much stronger propensity of marrying urban-born men than male converters. The gap between urban-born women and male converters was consistently salient, and more pronounced than that between urban-born men and female converters.

Lastly, I have also aggregated all age groups and estimated the force of attraction parameters by educational level and *hukou* trajectory. Again, the same pattern as those reported in Table 4 has emerged. Table A1 in the appendix presents the findings.

The attraction parameters have shown that both *hukou* converters and urban-born individuals generally had the highest propensity of marrying a spouse of the same *hukou* trajectory. Was this gap observed between the two groups horizontal or hierarchical in nature? In other words, did people simply prefer marrying a partner that was similar, or was one group perceived as the less desirable option, making it more difficult for them to “marry out”? On this note, we turn to the qualitative findings.

Marrying a Hukou Converter: Perceived Differences, Lasting Distinction

When asked whether they would marry a rural-born partner (i.e., a *hukou* converter, given the context of the interview), nearly all urban-born respondents, both men and women, quickly stated that they would. However, this seemingly forthright acceptance was not without equally quick qualifications. After saying that “rural-born men are fine,” Leiya (female, aged 25, never married, all names are pseudonyms) quickly added:

“As long as we hold similar world views. However, I do think it would be less likely [that we would hold similar world views], given how different his family, the rural environment he grew up in must be. If I’m attracted to him, that’s fine. But I don’t think I will be attracted to someone like that in the first place.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by a large majority of the never-married urban-born respondents across the gender line. When explaining their hesitancy in marrying a *hukou* converter, the most common reasoning provided was that rural-born partners were “different.” For example, Jing, a 31-year-old unmarried urban-born man, stated:

“No, I don’t think I can marry a woman from a rural family. I don’t mean this in a disparaging way, but we would just be so different.”

Interviewer “Different how?”

Jing “Everything. Our upbringing—how we are raised—would be so different. We would naturally think about things differently—like our views on money, childrearing, family, everything. Those values would all be different.”

Conspicuously absent from these stated reasoning was the less advantageous socioeconomic position commonly associated with rural *hukou* origin, or any perceived financial precariousness of a prospective spouse’s rural natal family. Rather, rural-born individuals were viewed as being different and lacking shared views, values, and experiences. Of course, it was entirely possible that frames such as “having different world views” were merely used as socially acceptable reasons for rejection, thereby masking any unspoken reasoning that followed the economic competition logic. To address this concern, I turned to the vignette-like probes that provided respondents with different configurations of rural *hukou* origin alongside other achieved traits. If individuals’ unspoken reasoning for mate selection indeed followed the logic of economic competition, respondents would be more accepting toward hypothetical rural-born individuals with more attractive achieved traits. However, for respondents who previously expressed hesitation in marrying a *hukou* converter, making the hypothetical partner more attractive on other achieved traits did little to ease such hesitation. When evaluating the attractiveness of a hypothetical spouse, more advantageous socioeconomic positions did not seem to offset the undesirability of rural *hukou* origin.

A telling example was Nana (female, aged 28, never married), who grew up in an affluent family and had a well-paying job herself. Nana described her parents as “hands-off,” giving her a “relaxed and independent” upbringing. Nana explained her hesitation of marrying a converter partner as follows:

“The parent-child relationship in rural China is just so different from what I’m used to...So even if he or his family were financially well-off, I would still say no...I wouldn’t be able to get along with his parents. Our values are different, and it would be difficult.”

Huiwen, a 25-year-old never-married woman, was more direct and explicit in her answers:

“I have the same standard for everybody. It’s not that if he is a converter and he has really high education or a good job then it would be OK. No, I want all my partners to have high education and good jobs regardless.”

Taken together, among urban-born individuals, the overwhelming hesitation to marry a rural-born partner stemmed from a perceived lack of shared values, norms, and habitus, which could not be negated by economic resources and advantageous achieved traits.

Of course, not all urban-born respondents rejected *hukou* converters as (potential) partners. Among them, a pattern too emerged.

At the time of the interview, Le was 32 and had been married for almost four years. Le and his wife went to universities with similar rankings in the same city. Le was urban-born, and his wife obtained urban *hukou* after finding a public sector job upon graduation. Throughout their dating and married years, the couple had similar income levels. When describing his married life, Le attributed the frictions to the “urban-rural differences” in the upbringings he and his wife experienced.

Le was not a singular example. Although frictions were commonplace in all marriages, in urban-born/converter unions, it was often the perceived rural-urban differences in values, attitudes, and habitus that were invoked to explain and make sense of such frictions. In Le’s case, the rural-urban gap as a symbolic boundary remained between the two spouses, who by various achieved measures, were comparable and similar.

For never-married urban-born individuals who were open to marrying a converter partner, when discussing their acceptance, they frequently highlighted an affinity with individuals of rural origin, often by pointing out a rural connection in the family or the childhood experience of growing up in small towns. For example, Mu (female, aged 28, never-married) stated that a rural-born man would be acceptable:

“I am not exactly an urban girl myself. I grew up in a very small town and my parents are just your average blue-collar workers. It’s not like I come from a fancy family. We really are not that different.”

Like the second side to the same coin, individuals’ reasoning for accepting partners of rural origin followed a similar logic that hinged on the importance of shared values and experiences, perceived similarity, and small social distance.

The Other Side of the Story: Hukou Converters and Marrying an Urban-Born Spouse

Pei, a 33-year-old married woman, grew up with her sisters in rural China. At the time of the interview, Pei had a successful career as an editor and had been married for two years to a husband who was also of rural origin. Her previous romantic partners included both

converter and urban-born men. When describing past relationships and desired spousal traits, Pei stated:

“I prefer a partner who is also rural-born. This way he understands me better. For example, I have siblings, and it’s important for my husband to be able to understand the bond I have with my sisters. If he is rural-born, he is likely to have siblings [due to the rural-urban difference in the one-child policy implementations —author’s note] so he can relate.”

The cultural matching logic was similarly salient among *hukou* converters as well. When describing ideal partners, mutual understanding based on comparable upbringing and shared experiences was framed as a top consideration. However, unlike urban-born individuals whose preference for spouses with the same *hukou* trajectory often meant an active rejection of *hukou* converters as prospective partners, among *hukou* converters, an urban-born partner was not viewed as a less desirable option. For example, when I asked Qizhong (male, aged 23, never married) about his preference regarding spousal *hukou* origin, he stated:

“I’m rural-born myself so that’s obviously fine.”

Interviewer “How about an urban-born woman?”

Qizhong “That’s fine with me, as long as it’s fine with her.”

Consistent with the quantitative findings, both *hukou* converters and urban-born individuals preferred spouses with the same *hukou* trajectory. The qualitative findings further showed that the gap between urban-born individuals and *hukou* converters was not horizontal, but rather hierarchical in nature. Although both groups have relied on the cultural matching logic and emphasized shared values, experiences, and habitus in mate selection, among urban-born individuals, the possibility of marrying a *hukou* converter was often regarded as an undesirable option and was actively rejected from consideration. For *hukou* converters, on the other hand, such an active rejection was absent.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Using a mixed-methods approach, this article investigates marital sorting patterns in contemporary China’s urban marriage market, paying special attention to rural-born individuals who have achieved *hukou* mobility prior to marriage entry. By disentangling the relative importance of economic resources vis-à-vis cultural matching, this study speaks to the overarching question in the assortative mating literature: to what extent does individuals’ social origin remain visible, despite adulthood status attainment?

Quantitative and qualitative results both pointed to a salient boundary between *hukou* converters and their urban-born peers. Findings based on the harmonic mean marriage function showed that in homogamous, hypergamous, and hypogamous pairings across educational levels, in general, urban-born individuals and *hukou* converters both had the highest propensity of marrying a spouse of the same *hukou* trajectory. The qualitative analysis further revealed the gap between *hukou* converters and urban-born individuals to be hierarchical. Although both groups highlighted the importance of shared values and habitus

in evaluating prospective partners, urban-born individuals further regarded *hukou* converters as a culturally distinct and less desirable option. Findings from the vignette-like probes additionally suggested that among urban-born individuals, the perceived lack of common values and shared experience between themselves and *hukou* converters cannot be fully compensated by converters' advantageous status attainment. This result was further corroborated when examining marriages between urban-born individuals and *hukou* converters. Here, although both partners were in fact comparable with respect to achieved traits, the perceived rural-urban differences in their social origins and upbringings were still frequently invoked as explanations for marital frictions. For individuals who have successfully transcended the rural-urban gap on paper through *hukou* conversion, the rural-urban boundary as a symbolic distinction has largely remained intact and visible. In this sense, even with the possibility of rural-to-urban *hukou* mobility, the rural-urban cleavage created by the *hukou* system continues to be deeply entrenched.

On the theoretical front, this article gives greater primacy to the cultural matching framework in understanding marital sorting in China's urban marriage market. On the empirical front, this study highlights the fruitfulness of combining multiple lines of methodological inquiries. Survey-based quantitative analysis is suitable for demonstrating aggregate patterns, whereas qualitative analysis is particularly useful for elucidating the underlying meaning and mechanisms. Each method provides a unique vantage point in uncovering pieces of the whole puzzle.

I highlight three remaining issues for future research. First, in discussing preferences, the interview respondents have overwhelmingly adopted an individualistic language that gave little weight to parental endorsement or censure. Given the nature of a highly educated urban sample, such an individualistic framing may not be surprising. However, the question remains whether, to what extent, and for whom natal family matters in marital sorting. Additional research is needed to further explore how marriage decisions may be jointly made within the context of the entire family, and whether there exist generational perceptions of the rural-urban gap that may be transmitted and reproduced. Secondly, the quantitative analysis in this article has shown a clear gendered pattern, with a consistently salient boundary between urban-born women and male converters. In addition, when "marrying down" educationally, educationally advantageous female converters have a higher propensity of "marrying up" *hukou* origin-wise. The qualitative findings, on the other hand, did not exhibit a clear gendered pattern. The cultural matching logic was widely employed across the gender line among both *hukou* converters and urban-born individuals. Future research is needed to further disentangle any gender dynamics in *hukou*-based marital sorting. For example, whether and to what extent have the norms and practices surrounding hypergamy evolved? Finally, China's *hukou* system has undergone several reforms in recent years, with varied local policies and implementations. Understanding China's spatial inequality thus requires a more nuanced approach beyond the dichotomous rural-urban distinction. Correspondingly, future assortative mating research should further consider the social and symbolic boundary-making across geographical locations, beyond a simple rural-urban divide.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

I thank Mary C. Brinton, Alexandra Killewald, Zhenchao Qian, Susan Short, and Martin Whyte for their invaluable feedback on previous drafts of this article. This research was supported by fellowships from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University. I am also grateful to the Population Studies and Training Center at Brown University, which receives funding from the NIH (P2C HD041020), for general support. Earlier versions were presented at the 2016 Fairbank Center 60th Anniversary Symposium at Harvard University and the ISA Research Committee on Social Stratification and Mobility (RC-28) 2016 Summer Meeting.

REFERENCES

- Aschaffenburg K, & Maas I (1997). Cultural and educational careers: The dynamics of social reproduction. *American Sociological Review*, 62(4), 573–587. 10.2307/2657427
- Becker G (1973). A theory of marriage: Part I. *Journal of Political Economy*, 81(4), 813–846. 10.1086/260084
- Becker G (1974). A theory of marriage: Part II. *Journal of Political Economy*, 82(2), S11–S26. 10.1086/260287
- Becker G (1985). Human capital, effort, and the sexual division of labor. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 3(1), S33–S58. 10.1086/298075
- Becker G (1991). *A treatise on the family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Blossfeld HP (2009). Educational assortative marriage in comparative perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, 513–530. 10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-115913
- Blossfeld HP, & Timm A (Eds.). (2003). *Who marries whom? Educational systems as marriage markets in modern societies*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Bourdieu P (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruze G (2011). Marriage choices of movie stars: Does spouse's education matter? *Journal of Human Capital*, 5(1), 1–28. 10.1086/660108
- Chan KW (2009). The Chinese hukou system at 50. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 50(2), 197–221. 10.4324/9781315159003-1
- Charles KK, Hurst E, & Killewald A (2013). Marital sorting and parental wealth. *Demography*, 50(1), 51–70. 10.3386/w16748 [PubMed: 23001458]
- Chen F, Yang Y, & Liu G (2010). Social change and socioeconomic disparities in health over the life course in China: A cohort analysis. *American Sociological Review*, 75(1), 126–150. 10.1177/0003122409359165 [PubMed: 20379373]
- DiMaggio P, & Mohr J (1985). Cultural capital, educational attainment, and marital selection. *American Journal of Sociology*, 90(6), 1231–1261. 10.1086/228209
- Erickson BH (1996). Culture, class, and connections. *American Journal of Sociology*, 102(1), 217–251. 10.1086/230912
- Fu VK (2001). Racial intermarriage pairing. *Demography*, 38(2), 147–60. 10.2307/3088297 [PubMed: 11392904]
- Gelman A, & Hill J (2006). *Data analysis using regression and multilevel/hierarchical models*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldin C (2006). The quiet revolution that transformed women's employment, education, and family. *American Economic Review*, 96(2), 1–21. 10.3386/w11953
- Gshur B, & Okun BS (2003). Generational effects on marriage patterns: Jewish immigrants and their descendants in Israel. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65(2), 287–301. 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00287.x
- Guest G, Bunce A, & Johnson L (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82. 10.1177/1525822x05279903

- Han H (2010). Trends in educational assortative marriage in China from 1970 to 2000. *Demographic Research*, 22, 733–770. 10.4054/demres.2010.22.24
- Hannum E (2003). Poverty and basic education in rural China: Villages, households, and girls' and boys' enrollment. *Comparative Education Review*, 47(2), 141–159. 10.1086/376542
- Hannum E, An X & Cherg HS (2011). Examinations and educational opportunity in China: Mobility and bottlenecks for the rural poor. *Oxford Review of Education*, 37(2), 267–305. 10.1080/03054985.2011.559387
- Hofferth SL, & Iceland J (1998). Social capital in rural and urban communities. *Rural Sociology* 63(4), 574–598. 10.1111/j.1549-0831.1998.tb00693.x
- Hout M (1982). The association between husbands' and wives' occupations in two-earner families. *American Journal of Sociology*, 88(2), 397–409. 10.1086/227679
- Kalmijn M (1991). Status homogamy in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(2), 496–523. 10.1086/229786
- Kalmijn M (1994). Assortative mating by cultural and economic occupational status. *American Journal of Sociology*, 100(2), 422–452. 10.1086/230542
- Kalmijn M (1998). Inter-marriage and homogamy: Causes, patterns, trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24(1), 395–421. 10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.395
- Kashyap R, Esteve A, & Garcia-Roman J (2015). Potential (mis)match? Marriage markets amidst sociodemographic change in India, 2005–2050. *Demography*, 52(1), 183–208. 10.1007/s13524-014-0366-x [PubMed: 25604846]
- Lamont M (1992). *Money, morals, and manners: The culture of the French and American upper-middle class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lamont M (2000). *The Dignity of working men: Morality and the boundaries of race, class, and immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lamont M, & Molnár V (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 167–195. 10.1146/annurev.soc.28.1.10601.141107
- Li X, Stanton B, Fang X, & Lin D (2006). Social stigma and mental health among rural-to-urban migrants in China: A conceptual framework and future research needs. *World Health & Population*, 8(3), 14–31. 10.12927/whp.2006.18282 [PubMed: 18277106]
- Liebertson S, & Waters MC (1988). *From many strands: Ethnic and racial groups in contemporary America*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Lui L (2016). Gender, rural-urban inequality, and intermarriage in China. *Social Forces*, 95(2), 639–662. 10.1093/sf/sow076
- Lui L (2017). Marital power in inter-hukou families in China: An intersectionality approach. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39(5), 1165–1190. 10.1177/0192513×17692378
- Mare R (1991). Five decades of educational assortative mating. *American Sociological Review*, 56(1), 15–32. 10.2307/2095670
- McFarland D, & Pals H (2005). Motives and contexts of identity change: A case for network effects. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 68(4), 289–315. 10.1177/019027250506800401
- Okun B (2001). The effects of ethnicity and educational attainment on Jewish marriage patterns: Changes in Israel, 1957–1995. *Population Studies*, 55(1), 49–64. 10.1080/00324720127678
- Oppenheimer VK (1988). A theory of marriage timing. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94(3), 563–591. 10.1086/229030
- Oppenheimer VK (1994). Women's rising employment and the future of the family. *Population and Development Review*, 20(2), 293–342. 10.2307/2137521
- Oppenheimer VK (1997). Women's employment and the gain to marriage: The specialization and trading model. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23(1), 431–453. 10.1146/annurev.soc.23.1.431
- Otis E (2011). *Markets and bodies: Women, service work, and the making of inequality in China*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Qian Z, & Lichter D (2007). Social boundaries and marital assimilation: Interpreting trends in racial and ethnic intermarriage. *American Sociological Review*, 72(1), 68–94. 10.1177/000312240707200104

- Qian Z, & Preston S (1993). Changes in American marriages, 1972 to 1987: Availability and forces of attraction by age and education. *American Sociological Review*, 58(4), 482–495. 10.2307/2096072
- Raymo J, & Iwasawa M (2005). Marriage market mismatches in Japan: An alternative view of the relationship between women's education and marriage. *American Sociological Review*, 70(5): 801–822. 10.1177/000312240507000504
- Schoen R (1981). The harmonic mean as the basis of a realistic two-sex marriage model. *Demography*, 18(2): 201–216. 10.2307/2061093 [PubMed: 7227585]
- Schoen R (1988). *Modeling multi-group populations*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Schwartz C, & Mare R (2005). Trends in educational assortative marriages from 1940 to 2003. *Demography*, 42(4), 621–646. 10.1353/dem.2005.0036 [PubMed: 16463914]
- Smits J (2003). Social closure among the higher educated: Trends in educational homogamy in 55 countries. *Social Science Research*, 32(2), 251–277. 10.1016/s0049-089x(02)00049-2
- Smits J, Ultee W, & Lammers J (1998). Educational homogamy in 65 Countries: An explanation of differences in openness using country level explanatory variables. *American Sociological Review*, 63(2), 264–285. 10.2307/2657327
- Song L (2009). The effect of the Cultural Revolution on educational homogamy in urban China. *Social Forces*, 88(1), 257–270. 10.1353/sof.0.0246
- Sørensen AB (1998). Theoretical mechanisms and the empirical study of social processes In Hedström P & Swedberg R (Eds.), *Social mechanisms: An analytical approach to social theory* (pp. 238–266). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Streib J (2015). *The power of the past: Understanding cross-class marriages*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Wang F (2005). *Organizing through division and exclusion: China's hukou system*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Wang Y, & Schwartz C (2018). Hukou intermarriage and social exclusion in China. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 56, 28–39. 10.1016/j.rssm.2018.06.002 [PubMed: 30122798]
- Whyte MK (2010). *One country, two societies: Rural-urban inequality in contemporary China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wu X, & Treiman D (2004). The household registration system and social stratification in China: 1955–1996. *Demography*, 41(2), 363–384. 10.1353/dem.2004.0010 [PubMed: 15209045]
- Wu X, & Treiman D (2007). Inequality and equality under Chinese socialism: The hukou system and intergenerational occupational mobility. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113(2), 415–445. 10.1086/518905
- Xie Y, & Zhou X (2014). Income inequality in today's China. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(19), 6928–6933. 10.1073/pnas.1403158111
- Yu J, & Xie Y (2015). Changes in the determinants of marriage entry in post-reform urban China. *Demography*, 52(6), 1869–1892. 10.1007/s13524-015-0432-z [PubMed: 26391287]
- Zhang Z, & Treiman D (2013). Social origins, hukou conversion, and the wellbeing of urban residents in contemporary China. *Social Science Research*, 42(1), 71–89. 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.08.004 [PubMed: 23146599]

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of Married Population, 2006 China General Social Survey

Mean age at first marriage (all husbands)	26.76 (3.40)	Mean age at first marriage (all wives)	24.50 (2.96)
Rural non-converter	25.59 (3.17)	Rural non-converter	23.77 (3.13)
<i>Hukou</i> converter	26.64 (2.77)	<i>Hukou</i> converter	24.63 (2.89)
Urban-born	27.24 (3.53)	Urban-born	24.85 (2.82)
Total number of unions	988		
N of <i>hukou</i> converter husbands	165	N of <i>hukou</i> converter wives	166
N of urban-born husbands	594	N of urban-born wives	531
Mean years of schooling (male respondents)	11.59 (3.07)	Mean years of schooling (female respondents)	11.20 (2.99)
Rural non-converter	9.45 (2.43)	Rural non-converter	9.46 (2.56)
<i>Hukou</i> converter	13.00 (2.96)	<i>Hukou</i> converter	11.43 (3.25)
Urban-born	12.01 (2.93)	Urban-born	12.15 (2.69)
N of male non-converters	99	N of female non-converters	169
N of male <i>hukou</i> converters	71	N of female <i>hukou</i> converters	82
N of urban-born men	270	N of urban-born women	293

Standard deviation in parentheses

Table 2.

Qualitative Sample Characteristics

Sample characteristics by union and <i>hukou</i> trajectory (N=115)			
	Rural-born non-converter	<i>Hukou</i> converter	Urban-born
Never-married male	0	9	23
Never-married female	2	1	36
Married male	1	1	12
Married female	1	2	27
Union formation by <i>hukou</i> trajectory for married respondents (N=44)			
	Male non-converter	Male <i>hukou</i> converter	Male urban-born
Female non-converter	2	1	0
Female <i>hukou</i> converter	0	2	4
Female urban-born	0	2	33

Table 3.

Estimated Forces of Attraction by Age- Education-Hukou Trajectory, 1997–2006

Educationally homogamous pairings: Both spouses with some tertiary education and above										
	Wife	Rural non-converter			Converter			Urban-born		
Husband		17–21	22–27	28–35	17–21	22–27	28–35	17–21	22–27	28–35
Rural non-converter	17–23	0.12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	24–29	-	0.36	-	-	-	-	-	0.25	-
	30–39	-	-	5.11	-	-	-	-	-	-
Converter	17–23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	24–29	-	0.10	-	0.10	1.25	1.52	-	0.56	0.37
	30–39	-	-	-	-	0.64	3.00	-	-	0.73
Urban-born	17–23	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.05	0.13	-
	24–29	-	0.16	-	0.08	0.48	0.74	0.05	1.85	0.72
	30–39	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.13	1.65	0.62
Educationally homogamous pairings: Both spouses with upper secondary education										
	Wife	Rural non-converter			Converter			Urban-born		
Husband		17–21	22–27	28–35	17–21	22–27	28–35	17–21	22–27	28–35
Rural non-converter	17–23	0.03	-	-	0.04	-	-	-	-	-
	24–29	0.12	0.82	-	-	0.08	-	0.05	0.06	-
	30–39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.63
Converter	17–23	-	-	-	-	0.22	-	-	0.05	0.16
	24–29	0.06	0.08	-	-	0.68	0.46	0.05	0.55	0.52
	30–39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Urban-born	17–23	0.02	0.11	-	-	-	-	0.03	0.17	-
	24–29	-	0.35	0.18	-	0.46	-	0.13	2.10	0.98
	30–39	-	0.24	0.44	-	0.27	0.46	-	0.64	1.24
Educationally hypergamous pairings: Husband with tertiary education; wife with upper secondary education										
	Wife	Rural non-converter			Converter			Urban-born		
Husband		17–21	22–27	28–35	17–21	22–27	28–35	17–21	22–27	28–35
Rural non-converter	17–23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	24–29	-	-	-	-	0.15	0.52	0.12	0.13	-
	30–39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Converter	17–23	-	-	-	0.07	-	-	0.05	0.06	-
	24–29	-	0.06	0.20	0.12	0.56	0.89	0.04	0.23	-
	30–39	-	-	0.44	-	0.31	0.68	-	0.57	-
Urban-born	17–23	-	0.04	-	0.08	-	-	0.03	-	-
	24–29	-	0.13	-	-	0.31	-	-	0.68	0.14
	30–39	-	-	0.29	0.14	-	-	-	1.17	0.73
Educationally hypogamous pairings: Wife with tertiary education; husband with upper secondary education										
	Wife	Rural non-converter			Converter			Urban-born		

Educationally homogamous pairings: Both spouses with some tertiary education and above										
Husband		17–21	22–27	28–35	17–21	22–27	28–35	17–21	22–27	28–35
Rural non-converter	17–23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	24–29	-	0.11	-	-	0.09	-	-	-	-
	30–39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Converter	17–23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	24–29	-	-	-	-	0.19	-	-	0.17	-
	30–39	-	-	-	-	0.56	-	-	0.52	-
Urban-born	17–23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.03	-
	24–29	-	-	-	-	0.30	-	-	0.37	-
	30–39	-	-	-	-	-	0.78	-	0.31	0.98

– No observation

Table 4.

Estimated Forces of Attraction by Education and Hukou Trajectory between Men Aged 24–29 and Women Aged 22–27, 1997–2006

Educationally homogamous pairings: Both spouses with some tertiary education and above				
	Wife	Rural non-conv.	Converter	Urban
Husband	Rural non-conv.	0.36	-	0.25
	Converter	0.10	1.25	0.56
	Urban	0.16	0.48	1.85
Educationally homogamous pairings: Both spouses with upper secondary education				
	Wife	Rural non-conv.	Converter	Urban
Husband	Rural non-conv.	0.82	0.08	0.06
	Converter	0.08	0.68	0.55
	Urban	0.35	0.46	2.10
Educationally hypergamous pairings: Husband with tertiary education; wife with upper secondary education				
	Wife	Rural non-conv.	Converter	Urban
Husband	Rural non-conv.	-	0.15	0.13
	Converter	0.06	0.56	0.23
	Urban	0.13	0.31	0.68
Educationally hypogamous pairings: Wife with tertiary education; husband with upper secondary education				
	Wife	Rural non-conv.	Converter	Urban
Husband	Rural non-conv.	0.11	0.09	-
	Converter	-	0.19	0.17
	Urban	-	0.30	0.37

– No observation