Family Relations and Remarriage Post-Divorce and Post-Widowhood in China

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Abstract

Analyzing event history data from the 2010 China Family Panel Studies and 13 qualitative interviews, we examine the complex and gendered relationship between family relations and remarriage in China. Distinct roles are played by the presence of pre-school, school-age and adult children in configuring the remarriage of women and men after divorce and after widowhood. The remarriage of widows but not divorcées is positively associated with the presence of parents and siblings respectively. Remarriage is more likely in the presence of large extended families. Whereas single and remarried divorcé(e)s equally provide care to their children, such care provision is less likely among remarried than single widow(er)s. Compared with their single counterparts, remarried divorcé(e)s and particularly widow(er)s are less likely to receive care from their children. We underline the importance of considering the "linked lives" of family members and comparing distinct life-course circumstances in the study of remarriage. We demonstrate that remarriage is far from an "individualized" institution, and that the state's privatization of marriage seems to reinforce the "familialization" of remarriage practices in China.

Key Words

Care Exchange, China, Divorce, Event History Analysis, Family Relations, Gender, Remarriage, Widowhood

Introduction

In the last few decades, the rate of remarriage has grown rapidly in China. As illustrated in Figure 1, the annual number of people registering remarriage increased from fewer than 1 million in 1990 to more than 2.8 million in 2010. While remarriages accounted for approximately 8% of all marriage registrations in 1990, nearly 23% of marriage registrations in 2010 involved at least one remarrying spouse (Wang & Zhou, 2010). The importance of remarriage in China lies not only in its numerical increase. Against the backdrop of drastic socio-economic, cultural, and institutional transformation in modern China, the rise of remarriage serves as a kaleidoscope reflecting dynamic changes in the Chinese family and the shifting landscape of intimate relationships. Moreover, the institution and practice of remarriage—deeply embedded in complex family relations—raise a number of issues that have long interested social scientists: care provision, step-parenthood, inheritance, and family finances (Hans, 2008, 2009; Sweeney, 2010). Although a number of studies have been conducted on remarriage in the Chinese context, prior researchers have either focused on population-level trends (Wang & Zhou, 2010) or drawn on small-scale region-specific qualitative evidence (Huang, 2012). In this study, we aim to fill the gaps in existing research by providing an up-to-date, nationally representative individual-level analysis of remarriage in modern China.

[Figure 1 about here]

The study of remarriage requires the consideration of "linked lives" (Elder & Giele, 2009). The "incomplete" institutionalization of remarriage (cf. Cherlin, 1978) is vividly reflected in the state of existing research on remarriage, which relies heavily on the opportunity-preference framework developed for the study of first marriages (Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003). As individuals make decisions on remarriage in the wake of preceding life-course events (Cherlin, 2009), and previous marriages often entail "indisposable" ties with

people such as children and in-laws (Koo & Suchindran, 1980), theories based on first marriage are unlikely to fully capture the distinctive features of remarriage. The need to consider family relations is particularly pertinent to the study of remarriage in China, where marriage is largely a family rather than an individual affair (Croll, 1981; Hu, 2016a). As a result, the presence of nuclear and extended family members may play crucial roles in configuring the probability of remarriage. Furthermore, the dynamic social interactions sustained by such family relations may also differ between remarried individuals and those who remain single after marital disruption (Palmer, 1995). In the Chinese family, women and men are also known to assume differentiated gender roles and relate to other family members in distinct ways (Chen & Li, 2014). Therefore, the first objective of this research is to explore the gendered relationship between family relations—both their structure and the dynamic exchange associated with such relations—and remarriage.

It is also crucial to differentiate and compare distinctive life-course trajectories that lead to remarriage. Few previous researchers have distinguished between remarriage after divorce and remarriage after widowhood (Huang, 2012; Wang & Zhou, 2010). However, divorce and widowhood may entail drastically different life experiences, emotional contours, and circumstances. Although a small number of researchers have distinguished between remarriage post-divorce and post-widowhood, they have tended to focus on one or the other, not both (Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Sweeney, 2010). Only a few have compared post-divorce and post-widowhood remarriage in Western societies (Berntsen & Kravdal, 2012; Hans, Ganong, & Coleman, 2008). Therefore, it is our second objective to explore the similarities and differences in the relationship between family relations and remarriage after divorce and after widowhood in China.

Analyzing data from the 2010 wave of the China Family Panel Studies, we examine the roles played by a diverse array of family relations in configuring the probability of

remarriage after divorce and after widowhood, as well as how the dynamic care exchange sustained by such family relations differ between remarried and single divorcé(s) or widow(er)s. We further supplement and elaborate on our quantitative findings using qualitative evidence from 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews with respondents who have remained single and respondents who have remarried since divorce or widowhood.

Background and Theoretical Considerations

Changing Context of Remarriage in China

Remarriage is not a new phenomenon in China. In the feudal and imperial eras, remarriage was common among widows from less well-off families. Despite the then-dominant moral ideal of the "chastity widow," which obliged widows to remain faithful to their late husbands (Waltner, 1981), a lack of inherited assets made remarriage a viable strategy for subsistence for socio-economically disadvantaged women, especially given women's limited participation in the labor force at this time (Huang, 2012). Due to the rarity of divorce in feudal and imperial China, most remarriages followed widowhood rather than divorce (Waltner, 1981).

The establishment of a socialist regime in 1949 and China's subsequent socio-economic reforms brought about considerable and gendered changes in the context of and motivation for remarriage, as well as its sociocultural and symbolic meanings. First, the socialist revolution boosted women's labor-force participation to more than 90% in the socialist era (Hu, 2016a), enabling Chinese wives to enjoy unprecedented economic independence. Therefore, economic deprivation is less likely to encourage remarriage for the sake of subsistence, as it did in pre-socialist China (Holmgren, 1985). Second, the 1950 Marriage Law conferred on Chinese men and women equal rights to marry and divorce according to personal will (Chen & Li, 2014). Third, the "open-door" policy implemented in late 1978 exposed Chinese people to Western ideals of individualism. The resulting

prevalence of divorce, particularly in big cities, has created a major path to remarriage, along with widowhood (Wang, 2001). Furthermore, as cultural and legal changes erode the ideal of the "chastity widow", traditional moral imperatives may no longer impede women from remarrying. Indeed, it is widely argued that the growth of individual autonomy in modern China has contributed greatly to the individualistic pursuit of intimate relationships and therefore remarriage (Huang, 2012; Yan, 2003, 2009).

"Linked Lives": Family Relations and Remarriage

Given the ongoing influence of family relations on marital decisions, the "individualization" of remarriage remains an empirical question. Existing scholarship has consistently shown that nuclear and extended families continue to play an active role in events such as matchmaking, mate selection, and the sanctioning of marriage in China today (Croll, 1981; Hu, 2016a; To, 2015a, 2015b). Although prior research has focused on the relationships between individuals and particular family members such as children, parents, and relatives, investigating their *respective* influence on the probability of remarriage (Hans, 2008; Hans et al., 2008; Koo & Suchindran, 1980), research comparing distinct sets of family relations is scarce. It thus remains unclear whether and how different family members influence individuals' remarriage in distinct ways. Furthermore, family relations are experienced not only through the structural presence or absence of family members, but also through complex and dynamic care, resource and emotional exchange sustained by such structure (Ngan & Wong, 1996). Therefore, it is crucial to provide a systematic assessment of the ways in which the presence or absence of distinct family members may configure the probability of remarriage, and whether and how the patterns of care exchange differ between those who have remarried and those who have remained single since marital disruption.

In China, family relations have two major dimensions: intergenerational, between parents and children; and horizontal, between extended family members such as siblings and

relatives (Hu, 2016b). As gender roles are highly segmented between men and women in the Chinese family, both dimensions of family relations are gendered (Chen & Li, 2014). Intergenerationally, parents were traditionally considered to be a major impediment to remarriage (Huang, 2012), whose presence was believed to reinforce one's sense of filial obligation as well as the traditional ideal of chastity (Sommer, 1996; Waltner, 1981). This might not still be the case in modern China. In the wake of divorce or widowhood, parents may often serve as the first resort of help and support. In the modern era, the traditional moral ideal of "chastity wife" is being replaced by a rising sense of individualism that locates personal fulfilment in intimate relationships (Yan, 2003, 2009). This concurs with recent evidence that some parents are seen to encourage divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s to seek a fulfilled personal life and old-age security through remarriage (Stacey, 2011).

The presence of children was considered as another major impediment to remarriage. Under the influence of patrilineal traditions (Hu, 2016b), minors were often considered to be undesirable "baggage" that may diminish one's chances in the remarriage market, particularly for women (Koo & Suchindran, 1980). In addition, the widespread vilification of stepfamilies for harming children's development has led to an image of remarriage as an option for "selfish" parents (Li, 2009). However, recent research suggests that the rising divorce rates may have contributed to a decline of the negative stigmas attached to stepfamilies in post-reform China, particularly in urban areas (Kuan, 2015). Moreover, single parents, especially those with young children, are increasingly challenged by the soaring costs associated with childcare and child-rearing to consider remarriage (Kuan, 2015).

The legitimacy of marriage in modern China is sanctioned by law as well as by the recognition of a broader circle of extended family members (Croll, 1981; Hu, 2016a). Compared with those operating intergenerationally, care and resource exchanges between extended families and relatives are far less intense. However, social recognition from

extended families, as a "generalized reinforcer" (Homans, 1958), may play an important symbolic role in legitimizing and reinforcing social norms pertaining to remarriage. Because marriage is considered an integral part of a fulfilled personal life—particularly for women—in modern China (To, 2015b), marital dissolution and widowhood may generate anxiety among extended family members, who may consequently pressure divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s to seek personal fulfilment through remarriage. Therefore, the presence of extended family members is likely to facilitate remarriage.

Comparing Remarriage Post-Divorce and Post-Widowhood

The need to differentiate post-divorce and post-widowhood remarriage is motivated by three major considerations. First, divorce and widowhood represent distinct life-course trajectories (Trivedi, Sareen, & Dhyani, 2009). A comparative analysis may yield important insights into the implications of the two major types of marital disruption for subsequent life-course developments. Second, divorce and widowhood tend to occur at distinct stages of the life course. Whereas divorce usually takes place in mid-life in China, widowhood is more likely to occur later in life (Wang & Zhou, 2010). This means divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s may have very different personal concerns over issues such as financial (in)dependence and old-age security and divergent life aspirations for intimacy and marriage. Third, divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s are also likely to have family members who are at different stages of their life course. In turn, this may demand divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s to respond to the needs that are specific to the life-course circumstances of their family members (Elder & Giele, 2009). For instance, due to the absence of state welfare for childcare, single parents with young rather than adult children may particularly view remarriage as a source of care and resources. Although we are prevented by the scarcity of prior research from deriving systematic hypotheses, our key aim is to explore whether and how the interrelations between family relations and remarriage differ between divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s.

Method

In this research, we adopted a two-stage mixed-methods exploratory design. We first analyzed nationally representative survey data to identify the relationship between the structure of family relations and the likelihood of remarriage after divorce and after widowhood, respectively; and to examine the patterns of association between remarriage and care-exchange activities. To further elaborate on our quantitative findings, we drew on in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore how individuals make sense of their remarriage considerations.

Quantitative Data and Sample

Our quantitative data were drawn from the adult panel of the 2010 wave of the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS; Xie & Hu, 2014). The CFPS was conducted by the Institute of Social Science Survey at Peking University in collaboration with the Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan. Multistage probability-proportional-to-size sampling was used, with samples weighted in proportion to population structure at the administrative levels of county (or equivalent), village, and household. The survey covered 33,600 adults from 16,000 households from 25 provinces. The response rate was 81.28% at the household level.

The 2010 CFPS data are suited to the current research for a number of reasons. First, the survey contained a large nationally representative probability sample of remarried individuals in China ($N = 798$). Second, the survey is representative of households from the eastern coast to the western hinterland, which is crucial given the considerable regional variation in remarriage rates across China (Wang & Zhou, 2010). Third, the CFPS collected event history data on both marriage trajectories and family relations.

To construct our analytical sample, we first excluded 30,382 never-married respondents, those in first marriages and those who had experienced both divorce and

widowhood. We then deleted 23 higher-order remarriages and 126 cases with missing values for our variables. We used the *mcartest* package in Stata to identify any potential biases resulting from our list-wise deletion of cases with missing values. As the Little's test was not statistically significant at the 10% level, the results confirmed that the list-deleted cases were missing completely at random (Li, 2013). Our final analytical sample comprised 3,069 individuals who had experienced either divorce or widowhood, of whom 722 had remarried for the first time.

Based on the event history data from the CFPS, we restructured the cross-sectional (wide) dataset into the person-year format. Following the method recommended by Singer and Willet (2003), the data were structured such that the first person-year record represented the year in which the divorce or widowhood took place and the last person-year record represented the year of remarriage for those who had remarried by 2010 or the year of survey (i.e., 2010) for those who had not remarried as of 2010. This restructured (long) dataset contained a total of 33,964 person-year observations, i.e. each respondent was observed for an average of 11.07 years. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the analytical sample.

[Table 1 about here]

Measures

Marital History

Based on the respondents' current marital status and marital history, we distinguished between divorcé(e)s who had remained single (0) and remarried divorcé(e)s (1), and between single widow(er)s (0) and remarried widow(er)s (1). In our analytical sample, 830 respondents had previously divorced, of whom 49.2% had remarried; and 2,239 respondents had experienced widowhood, of whom around 14% had remarried. The proportions of divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s in our analytical sample are consistent with evidence from the 2010 Census, which showed that single widow(er)s accounted for around 5.4% and single

divorcé(e)s accounted for around 1.4% of the Chinese population (Lu & Wang, 2013). We also derived a variable recording the year of divorce or widowhood. The respondents experienced divorce or widowhood between 1958 and 2010, with the average marital disruption occurring in 1997. On balance, divorce and widowhood occurred when the respondents were 33.37 and 53.67 years old, respectively. The previous marriage lasted an average of 9.02 years for divorcé(e)s and 32.81 years for widow(er)s. The average time between marital disruption and remarriage was 4.03 years for divorcé(e)s and 4.24 years for widow(er)s.

Structure of Family Relations

Based on the respondents' marital history and their children's demographic information (e.g., date of birth and decease), we derived a series of time-varying variables to capture the presence or absence of pre-school children aged 0-6, school children aged 7-17 and adult children, respectively, for each person-year observation. We coded the presence of children as binomial categorical variables, because only a small number of respondents had more than one child in each category at any given time. Our further checks indicated that no respondent had a child with their remarriage spouse prior to their remarriage. As no change was noted in the sibship status of the respondents in our observation window, we captured the presence of sibling(s) using a time-constant dummy variable (89%). Due to the lack of detailed life history data (e.g., time of decease) on parents and extended families, we coded the presence of living parent(s) (30%) and the size of the extended family ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 2.23$) as time-constant variables based on the information in 2010. Although the presence of parents and extended family members tends to predate the event of remarriage, we are careful to interpret the results for these variables in terms of association rather than causality due to the use of time-constant proxies.

Care Exchange Activities

We also measured the respondents' provision of care to their children and their reception of care from children in the six months prior to the survey. We defined "care" in a broad sense to include financial assistance, financial management, domesticity, and childcare. We coded the respondents as "active care providers" (23%) if they provided their children with one or more types of care. Similarly, we coded those who received one or more types of care as "active care recipients" (35%). Due to cell-size considerations, we coded care provision and reception as binomial categorical variables because the proportion of respondents who received or provided each specific type of care is relatively low. Unfortunately, the CFPS did not measure care exchange between the respondents and other family members, and only current but not event history data on care exchange were collected. This means our analysis only provides a correlational snapshot of whether and how the patterns of care-exchange activities differed between single and remarried respondents after marital disruption. Collecting and analyzing fine-grained longitudinal data on care exchange should be an important agenda for future research on remarriage.

Covariates

We controlled for the respondents' gender, and 62% of the respondents were female. We included respondents' age as a linear regressor, as preliminary work showed this to be the most parsimonious specification. The respondents ranged between 29 and 82 years old, with a mean age of 60.99 (SD = 14.80); and the divoré(e)s were considerably younger than the widow(er)s. Whereas the remarried divorcé(e)s and single divorcé(e)s were similar in age, the remarried widow(er)s were significantly younger than the single widow(er)s (t = 16.19, p < .001).

We controlled for the respondents' years of schooling (M = 3.83, SD = 4.73). As younger cohorts enjoy more educational resources than their predecessors in China and the divorcé(e)s were substantially younger than the widow(er)s, it is not surprising that the

divorcé(e)s had received more education than the widow(er)s. We took account of whether a respondent had ever held a formal job for more than 6 months, and 25% of the respondents had never worked. In the absence of event history data on the respondents' income, we necessarily relied on the time-constant measure of individual income in 2010 (in the logarithm form due to its skewed distribution) as a proxy of one's socio-economic status.

We also included a time-constant dummy variable distinguishing between residence in a rural area affiliated with a village committee (50%) and residence in an urban area under the jurisdiction of a neighborhood committee in 2010. Due to the lack of data on the respondents' migration history, this time-constant measure may not have captured the respondents' geographical mobility in our observation window. Nevertheless, we also controlled for one's *hukou* (household registration) origin, using the *hukou* status of the respondents' parents distinguishing between rural (83%) and urban types, which predates the event of remarriage and is unlikely to change over time. In China, *hukou* origin plays a prominent role in determining one's family values (Hu, 2016b) and marital mobility (Lui, 2017). Irrespective of one's location of residence in rural or urban areas, *hukou* origin is a major cause of segregation in the marriage market in contemporary China (Hu, 2016a; Lui, 2017).

Statistical Analysis

In our analytical sample, 19.3% of the cases included more than one respondent from the same household and the households were further nested within provinces. To account for the hierarchical nature of the data and unobserved heterogeneities at the household and province levels, we fitted all models using a multilevel framework with random intercepts at the household and province levels (StataCorp, 2015). First, to examine how the structure of family relations configures the probability of remarriage, we fitted separate multilevel Cox proportional hazards event history models for remarriage post-divorce (Model 1) and post-

widowhood (Model 2) using the long person-year dataset. The Cox specification was used because (1) it makes no assumption about the underlying distribution of event time, (2) our key focus is on the predictors rather than the timing of remarriage, and (3) the specification provides a more parsimonious solution given our long window of observation (Singer & Willet, 2003). Our additional tests using the discrete-time specification yielded results consistent to those reported here. In Model A, we included the structure of family relations and all control variables. We then added the interactions between gender and the structure of family relations in Model B. We then nested Model 1 and Model 2 to conduct cross-sample comparison of the regression coefficients.

Second, to compare the patterns of care exchange between the single and remarried respondents, we fitted multilevel binomial logistic regression models predicting the odds of care provision to children and care reception from children in 2010, using the wide dataset. The models were first fitted only with the main effects of all variables, and we then included the gender interactions for the care exchange measures. Notably, we used the respondents' remarriage status in 2009 rather than 2010 to ensure the key predictor (i.e., remarriage status) predated the dependent variables (i.e., care exchange). Given the dynamic and time-sensitive nature of care exchange, we are also careful to report and discuss the results in terms of association rather than causality. In both sets of models, the variance inflation factor (VIF) test was conducted and the VIF values were well below the conservative threshold of 2.5 for all our key variables (de Jongh et al., 2015).

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

To elaborate on our quantitative findings and explore how individuals make sense of remarriage considerations, we drew on qualitative data from in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted between 2015 and early 2016. Snowball sampling was used to recruit 13 single and remarried divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s with distinct

experiences of remarriage from a number of cities in southern China. The interviewees ranged from 42 to 66 years old, with a mean age of 52. Of the 13 interviewees, 10 were female, 5 had experienced widowhood rather than divorce, and 5 had remarried since divorce or widowhood. With an overarching focus on people's considerations and decisions pertaining to remarriage, the interviews explored the respondents' family relations and biographical trajectories since their divorce or widowhood. Lasting for an average of 47 minutes (ranging from 30 to 65 minutes), the interviews were conducted in Chinese, audio-recorded where possible, and transcribed.

A combination of selective and axial coding was used to analyze the qualitative data (Yin, 2010). As the main purpose of our qualitative procedure was to illustrate and enrich the interpretation of our quantitative findings, our initial coding of the qualitative data was necessarily guided by the patterns identified in our quantitative analysis. Here we paid close attention to the occurrence of themes that corresponded to our key variables. Axial coding was then used to identify and establish potential relationships between different themes (Yin, 2010). At this stage, we paid particular attention to how the interviewees subjectively experienced and made sense of their family relations when considering remarriage.

Results

Table 2 presents the results from the multilevel Cox proportional hazards regression models predicting the transition into remarriage after divorce and after widowhood, respectively. Coefficients are reported in Table 2. As we report the results, we also present the hazards ratios (HR) in the body of the text, where a value greater than 1 indicates a greater likelihood and a value less than 1 indicates a lower likelihood of having remarried rather than remaining single after divorce or widowhood. Figure 2 depicts the marginal differences in the odds of care provision to children and care reception from children between the single and remarried respondents.

[Table 2 and Figure 2 about here]

In Model 1A, the results show that there is a positive association between the presence of pre-school children and the probability of remarriage after divorce (HR = 1.88, *p* < .01). In contrast, the presence of school-age (HR = 0.92, ns) and particularly adult children (HR = 0.47, *p* < .05) are associated with a reduced likelihood of remarriage after divorce. In Model 1B, the results further reveal the gendered pattern of association between the presence of children and the likelihood of remarriage. Divorced men are particularly more likely to remarry in the presence of pre-school children (HR = 2.53, *p* < .001; gender difference: *p* < .10); and divorced women are particularly less likely to remarry in the presence of adult children (HR = 0.20, *p* < .001; gender difference: *p* < .10). The presence of school-age children has divergent influences on divorced women and men (gender difference: *p* < .10): While divorced women are less likely to remarry in the presence of school-age children (HR = 0.55, *p* < .05), divorced men are more likely to remarry in the presence of school-age children (HR = 1.42, ns). As depicted in Panel B of Figure 2, the association between care exchange and remarriage after divorce is also gendered, as remarried men (Odds Ratio [OR] = 0.93, *p* < .001) but not remarried women are less likely to receive care from their children, compared with their single counterparts. The quantitative findings are further nuanced by our qualitative interviews, as evident from the following excerpts.

> I would be very concerned about my daughter if I were to remarry. I watch all these news reports of men harassing their stepdaughters. That's why very few women [with young daughters] remarry. It would be OK if I had a son. Look at Woody Allen and his adopted daughter. How can he touch her? She's his daughter! They married, even. His poor wife. (53, female, divorced, one 24 year old daughter)

It's very hard to find a man who can take care of you and your children. You're old already. (45, female, divorced, no children)

Citing media portrayals and popular stereotypes, the divorcé(e)s, particularly the females, almost unanimously expressed concern about the adverse effects of stepfamilies on their children's well-being. This echoes the widespread perception of stepfamilies as detrimental to the development of children and young adults (Huang, 2012). Meanwhile, (dependent) children from previous marriages were widely perceived as burdensome and unwelcome "baggage" in the remarriage market. Due to the persistence of patrilineal traditions in China, single mothers with children from previous marriages find it particularly difficult to remarry; in the words of one interviewee, "who wants to foster someone else's bloodline?!" (42, female, divorcée, one 12 year old son).

Nevertheless, although our interviewees reiterated their preference as "good mothers" to stay single to protect their children, they also hinted at an inner desire for remarriage, as "life would be so much easier if there were someone to share the [parental] responsibilities" (47, female, divorced, one 21 year old son). However, despite the negative stigmas attached to single parenthood and stepfamilies, remarriage may function as a source of economic support that allows divorced mothers with young children to spend time on childcare rather than paid work, particularly in the absence of state welfare provision (Koo & Suchindran, 1980). Meanwhile, divorced men may view remarriage as a viable source of care for their young children and themselves, as women rather than men are expected to be the major care providers in China (Hu, 2016b).

Similar to the results for Model 1A (predicting post-divorce remarriage), the results for Model 2A indicate that the probability of remarriage after widowhood is negatively associated with the presence of school-age (HR = 0.32, $p < .001$) and adult children (HR =

0.13, $p < .001$), similarly for women and men as shown in Model 2B. Furthermore, the comparison between Model 1A and Model 2A indicates that the negative association between the probability of remarriage and the presence of school-age and adult children are significantly stronger among widow(er)s than divorcé(e)s (between-model comparisons: $p < .05$). Different from post-divorce remarriage (between-model comparison: $p < .10$), the presence of pre-school children is negatively associated with the remarriage of widow(er)s (HR = 0.69, ns).

The patterns of care exchange also differ considerably between single and remarried widow(er)s. As depicted in Panel C of Figure 2, remarried widows are less likely to provide care to their children, compared with their single counterparts (OR = 0.82, $p < .001$). As depicted in Panel D, both remarried widows (OR = 0.77, $p < .001$) and widowers (OR = 0.86, $p < .01$) are less likely to receive care from their children, compared with their single counterparts. The findings may have two possible explanations. First, remarriage may be a cause of the observed differences in the patterns of care exchange. As remarried widow(er)s are closely involved in their conjugal lives, they may have less time and space for care exchange with their children. As one's spouse may serve as a source of care provision, the need for care provision from children may also be lower among remarried than single widow(er)s. Second, remarriage may be a consequence of pre-existing care exchange activities. In the absence of welfare legislation, the concern over old-age security constitutes a major driver for remarriage in China (Chen & Li, 2014). Therefore, pre-existing care with children may lessen widow(er)s' need of remarriage. Moreover, elderly widow(er)s in China often help their (working) children with daily chores and look after their grandchildren. The provision of care for family members may anchor care providers both functionally and emotionally in their family relations, and thus decreasing the perceived need of remarriage (Arber & Timonen, 2012).

While we are not able to determine the causality between care exchange and remarriage using cross-sectional data, our qualitative evidence reveals the concurrent existence of both mechanisms. In the interviews, some of the widow(er)s expressed their hope to relieve their children of the burden of old-age care provision through remarriage. The other widow(er)s we interviewed were keen to enumerate their various forms of engagement with their offspring, and described a sense of security in the knowledge that they had families "to fall back on" in old age (61, male, widowed, 2 sons and 1 daughter).

They said, "Grandma, you're so outdated, you don't know how to play video games." They helped me download apps. They gave me their stylus pen. I said, "Then you won't have one." They said that their dad had given them three [stylus pens], so they were able to give me one. My sons both come back for dinner every night. They live with me. I cook from 5 to 6, and then I am free to watch TV and listen to the radio, and read... I have no time to think about these things [dating]. (66, female, widowed, 3 sons)

I follow my daughter wherever she goes. (65, female, widowed, 1 daughter)

We observed a positive association between the presence of living parent(s) and the likelihood of remarriage for widow(er)s (HR = 1.97, $p < .01$) but not divorcé(e)s (between-model comparison: $p < .05$). The positive association is stronger among widows (HR = 2.92, $p < .01$) than widowers (HR = 1.06, ns; gender difference: $p < .05$). Parents are often the first resort for support in the wake of widowhood. Different from Hans, Ganong, and Coleman's (2008) finding in the USA that remarriage is associated with a lower level of attachment to parents, our interview data vividly illustrate that parents' provision of such support often

creates a strong sense of emotional attachment and filial obligation in their children. Our interviewees were particularly vociferous in their gratitude to their parents for being a "reliable" cushion on which to fall back. The resulting feeling of "indebtedness" to one's parents was also a prominent theme in the narratives of the divorcé(e)s. Moving on from marital disruption, however, it is also evident from our interviews that the elderly parents are closely concerned about the old-age security of the widow(er)s (who are elderly themselves), and thus encourage their children to pursue a fulfilled personal life and old-age security through remarriage.

We also found a significant positive association between the size of extended family and the likelihood of remarriage for both divorcé(e)s (HR = 1.05, $p < .10$) and widow(er)s (HR = 1.13, $p < .01$). These observations may be attributed to the widespread belief in modern China that marriage is crucial to a fulfilled personal life (To, 2015b)—a belief that may be reinforced by extended family members. Indeed, a number of interviewees reported that their singlehood was often questioned during gatherings with siblings and relatives. Extended family members customarily aired their concerns over the well-being of the singletons by encouraging them to "move on" to find happiness in a new relationship, as indicated in the following extract.

> Before I got together with my current wife, my family and particularly my brothers constantly prodded me to find someone with whom to start over. They said things like, "Look at the mess you are in, you need a woman to sort you out…not to mention that your son needs a mother." They told me to move on [from the divorce], and they went on and on... (41, male, remarried after divorce, one 17 year old son)

The results reveal both similarities and differences in the patterns of association between family relations and remarriage after divorce and after widowhood. Particularly, the differences must be considered in relation to the distinct demographic profiles and marital histories of divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s. As shown in Table 2, compared with women, men are less likely to remarry after divorce (HR = 0.71*, p* < .01), but they are more likely to remarry after widowhood (HR = 1.48, *p* < .05). Notably, these gender differences are mediated and thus explained by the inclusion of gendered family relations in Models 1B and 2B. The likelihood of post-widowhood remarriage decreases with the age at divorce. A longer previous marriage is negatively associated with the probability of remarriage for widow(er)s (HR = 0.94, *p* < .001) but not divorcé(e)s. We found that both divorcé(e)s (HR = 0.62, *p* < .01) and widow(er)s (HR = 0.51, *p* < .05) of urban *hukou* origin are less likely to remarry than their counterparts of rural *hukou* origin. Although socio-economically disadvantaged widows in feudal and imperial China relied on remarriage for subsistence (Holmgren, 1985), a lack of economic activity and income today does not seem to be associated with an increased probability of remarriage. We also found a positive association between one's years of schooling and the probability of remarriage after widowhood (HR = 1.07, *p* < .001).

Discussion and Conclusions

The increasing rate of remarriage is often considered to reflect broader social changes in modern China. Prior research on the aggregate population trends of divorce, widowhood, and remarriage in Chinese settings has tended to attribute these phenomena to macro social trends such as socio-economic development and the massification of education (Wang, 2001; Wang & Zhou, 2010). Research drawing on nationally representative individual-level data is scarce; most individual-level analysis has focused on remarriage either after divorce or after widowhood, not both. Drawing on data from the 2010 China Family Panel Studies and 13 in-

depth qualitative interviews, we address these gaps by exploring the gendered relationship between family relations and remarriage. In particular, we compare divorce and widowhood as two distinct life-course trajectories leading to remarriage.

Our findings suggest that remarriage is far from an "individualized" affair. It is widely assumed that the prevalence of remarriage in modern China is caused by a trend of societal individualization (Yan, 2009). However, informed by the perspective of "linked lives" (Elder & Giele, 2009), we find that remarriage is closely associated with "indisposable" ties with children, siblings, parents and extended families. Indeed, we find that the probability of remarriage is closely shaped by the structure of family relations, and that the patterns of care exchange vary considerably by remarriage status. Above and beyond the structural presence or absence of family members, we find that the life-course circumstances of family members matter just as much in that children at distinct life-course stages were seen to configure the probability of remarriage in considerably different ways. In addition, distinct sets of family relations seem to play different roles in configuring the probability of remarriage, and these roles also differ between divorcé(e)s and widow(er)s.

We argue and demonstrate that rather than considering remarriage as an (incomplete) institution (cf. Cherlin, 1978, 2009), it would be useful to conceptualize remarriage as a social practice that responds flexibly to the diverse constellations of life-course circumstances. The relationship between family relations and remarriage may differ between widow(er)s and divorcé(e)s because they cluster at distinct stages of the life course and thus have very different life circumstances. Among divoré(e)s, we find a strong sense of "structural ambivalence" resulting from conflicting ideals and constraints in China's remarriage market. The divorcé(e)s we interviewed—particularly those with young children—expressed a desire to remarry. However, the structural presence of minor and young-adult children was perceived as a formidable constraint on divorcé(e)s' remarriage.

This is not only due to the widespread cultural stigma attached to step-parenthood (Li, 2009), but also because the odds are stacked against those with children from previous marriages (i.e., "baggage") in the marriage market (Koo & Suchindran, 1980). Compared with divoré(e)s, the widow(er)s viewed the structure of family relations as an inhibiting "constraint" to a lesser extent; and the remarriage of widow(er)s seems to relate more closely to their "practice" of family relations. As vividly illustrated in our interviews, widow(er)s were seen to actively provide care for their offspring. Such care provision often generates a sense of emotional attachment and fulfillment that seems to lessen the perceived need for fulfillment through intimate relationships. Moreover, care provision might prevent widow(er)s from dating and getting remarried by consuming their available time and resources.

The results should also be interpreted with reference to the distinctive institutional features of modern China. Due to the absence of childcare subsidies and social-service provision for single parents, the lack of state legislation for old-age welfare and care, and the persistence of patrilineality, Chinese families are often responsible for cushioning the repercussions of divorce and widowhood. This is consistent with Davis's (2014) finding that Chinese marriages are being privatized from the state's perspective. Paradoxically, however, due to the lack of alternative service and welfare provision, which has obliged individuals to fall back on their families in the wake of divorce and widowhood, remarriage and its considerations have become no less "private" from the individual's perspective. In other words, complex family relations continue to play a prominent role in shaping the institution of remarriage. Therefore, the state's privatization of the marital institution seems to reinforce the "familialization" of remarriages in China, which embeds remarriage practices further in the traditional familial system instead of de-anchoring it from traditional moorings as argued by individualization theorists (e.g., Yan, 2009).

The limitations of this research suggest several important directions for future research. First, the quantitative results yielded from the analysis of cross-sectional data should be interpreted in terms of association rather than causality. Although the respondents are likely to provide accurate information on life events as important as marital disruption and remarriage, it is possible that the event history data may be susceptible to recalling errors. In future research, longitudinal analysis will be crucial to unpack the life-course dynamics of remarriage post-divorce and post-widowhood. Second, our qualitative procedure relied on convenience sampling. Therefore, we cannot claim to have obtained representative narratives, simply narratives that shed further light on our quantitative findings. Third, while our analysis took place at the individual level, it is important for future scholars to conduct dyadic analysis to address the tethered lives of remarried couples. Furthermore, given the rapid sociocultural and institutional changes ongoing in China, it will be crucial for future researchers to examine the over-time developments in the dynamics of family relations and remarriage.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Min	Max	All M (SD)	Single post-divorce M (SD)	Remarried post-divorce M (SD)	Single post-widowhood M (SD)	Remarried post-widowhood M (SD)
Structure of family relations							
Pre-school child(ren) (0–6) [a]							
In 2010	0	1	.05	.08	.23	.00	.06
Remarriage t–1	0	1	.70		.69		.71
School-age child(ren) (7–17) [a]							
In 2010	0	1	.12	.25	.37	.03	.19
Remarriage t–1	0	1	.19		.20		.18
Adult child(ren) (18 and above) [a]							
In 2010	0	1	.84	.57	.55	.96	.84
Remarriage t–1	0	1	.04		.02		.06
Has sibling(s)	0	1	.89	.91	.93	.87	.94
Has living parent(s)	0	1	.30	.73	.64	.13	.35
Extended family size	0	8	3.29 (2.23)	2.16 (1.83)	2.74 (2.13)	3.59 (2.26)	3.64 (2.10)
Care exchange							
Active care provider to child(ren)	0	1	.23	.03	.07	.32	.11
Active care recipient from child(ren)	0	1	.35	.05	.05	.51	.18
Control variables							
Age in 2010 [b]	29	82	60.99 (14.80)	45.79 (10.37)	46.33 (11.18)	68.09 (11.13)	56.91 (12.57)
Age at divorce/widowhood [b]	20	80	48.18 (15.81)	35.83 (8.16)	30.83 (7.03)	56.06 (13.25)	39.01 (12.39)
Year of divorce/widowhood [b]	1958	2010	1,997 (10.87)	2,000 (8.25)	1,994 (11.86)	1,998 (10.65)	1,992 (11.72)
Length of previous marriage (year)	0	60	26.38 (16.90)	10.54 (7.41)	7.45 (6.00)	35.43 (13.57)	16.75 (11.98)
Time between remarriage and last divorce/widowhood	0	22	4.12 (4.77)		4.03 (4.50)		4.24 (5.11)
Male (ref = female)	0	1	.38	.58	.53	.29	.43
Urban residence (ref = rural)	0	1	.50	.71	.60	.44	.45
Urban *hukou* (ref = rural)	0	1	.17	.41	.26	.11	.10
Never worked (ref = ever worked)	0	1	.25	.15	.18	.29	.19
Individual annual income in 2010 (log)	1	13	6.14 (3.59)	7.95 (3.02)	7.21 (3.59)	5.49 (3.51)	6.33 (3.58)
Years of schooling	0	21	3.83 (4.73)	7.82 (4.58)	6.83 (4.83)	2.25 (3.85)	4.23 (4.52)
N (person)			3,069	422	408	1,925	314

Note: Dummy variables indicated by a minimal value of 0 and a maximal value of 1. Standard deviation in parenthesis for continuous variable. For categorical dummy variables, the mean score indicates percentage. Column percentages may not add up to 1 due to rounding. [a] Time-varying variable. [b] Bottom and top 1% of values replaced to be equal to the 1st and the 99th percentile, respectively.

Table 2. Multilevel Cox Proportional Hazards Regression Models Predicting Remarriage Post-Divorce and Post-Widowhood
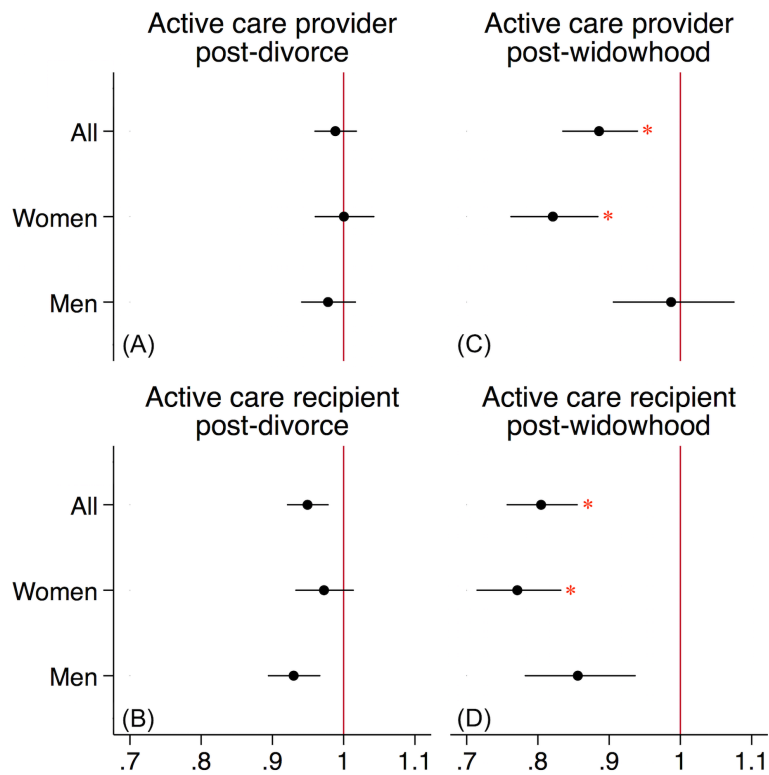
	Post-divorce				Post-widowhood			
	1A		1B		2A		2B	
Predictor	*B*	*(S.E.)*	*B*	*(S.E.)*	*B*	*(S.E.)*	*B*	*(S.E.)*
Structure of family relations								
Pre-school child(ren) (ref = no) [a]								
All [b]	0.63	(0.20)**			−0.37	(0.35)		
Women [b]			0.44	(0.26)+			−0.77	(0.50)
Men			0.93	(0.28)***			0.07	(0.48)
School-age child(ren) (ref = no) [a]								
All [b]	−0.08	(0.21)			−1.14	(0.36)***		
Women [b]			−0.59	(0.30)*			−1.32	(0.50)**
Men [b]			0.35	(0.28)			−1.02	(0.51)*
Adult child(ren) (ref = no) [a]								
All [b]	−0.76	(0.33)*			−2.06	(0.42)***		
Women			−1.60	(0.57)**			−2.16	(0.57)***
Men [b]			−0.19	(0.40)			−2.03	(0.60)***
Living parent(s) (ref = no)								
All [b]	−0.06	(0.13)			0.68	(0.18)**		
Women			−0.10	(0.18)			1.07	(0.22)**
Men			−0.03	(0.16)			0.06	(0.28)
Sibling(s) (ref = no)								
All	−0.15	(0.22)			0.15	(0.31)		
Women [b]			0.08	(0.36)			0.56	(0.47)
Men			−0.20	(0.27)			−0.26	(0.42)
Extended family size [a]								
All	0.05	(0.03)+			0.12	(0.04)**		
Women			0.10	(0.04)*			0.12	(0.05)*
Men			−0.01	(0.04)			0.13	(0.06)*
Control variables								
Age at divorce/widowhood [b]	−0.04	(0.01)***	−0.04	(0.01)***	−0.02	(0.01)	−0.02	(0.01)
Year of divorce/widowhood	−0.00	(0.00)**	−0.00	(0.00)**	−0.00	(0.00)***	−0.00	(0.00)***
Length of previous marriage [b]	−0.01	(0.01)	−0.01	(0.01)	−0.06	(0.01)***	−0.06	(0.01)***
Male (ref = female) [b]	−0.34	(0.12)**	−0.35	(0.56)	0.39	(0.15)*	0.78	(0.79)
Urban residence (ref = rural)	−0.09	(0.13)	−0.08	(0.13)	0.01	(0.16)	0.01	(0.16)
Urban *hukou* (ref = rural)	−0.48	(0.15)**	−0.44	(0.14)**	−0.67	(0.26)*	−0.73	(0.26)**
Never worked (ref = ever worked)	0.06	(0.14)	0.03	(0.14)	−0.35	(0.18)+	−0.37	(0.18)*
Individual annual income (log)	−0.00	(0.02)	−0.00	(0.02)	−0.01	(0.02)	−0.01	(0.02)
Years of schooling [b]	0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)	0.07	(0.02)***	0.06	(0.02)***
Province variance parameter	0.04	(0.04)	0.04	(0.04)	0.12	(0.09)	0.14	(0.10)
Household variance parameter	0.12	(0.13)	0.03	(0.13)	1.25	(0.32)***	1.18	(0.32)***
Log-likelihood	−1,462		−1,454		−1,416		−1,408	
Bayesian-information-criterion	3,074		3,110		3,006		3,051	
N (event)			408				314	
N (person)			830				2,239	
N (person-year)			6,638				27,326	

Note: Reference category in parenthesis. [a] Female-male between-slope difference for remarriage after divorce statistically significant at the 10% level or below. [b] Difference between remarriage post-divorce and remarriage post-widowhood statistically significant at the 5% level or below, based on Model 1A and 2A for control variables. + *p* < .10, * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001.
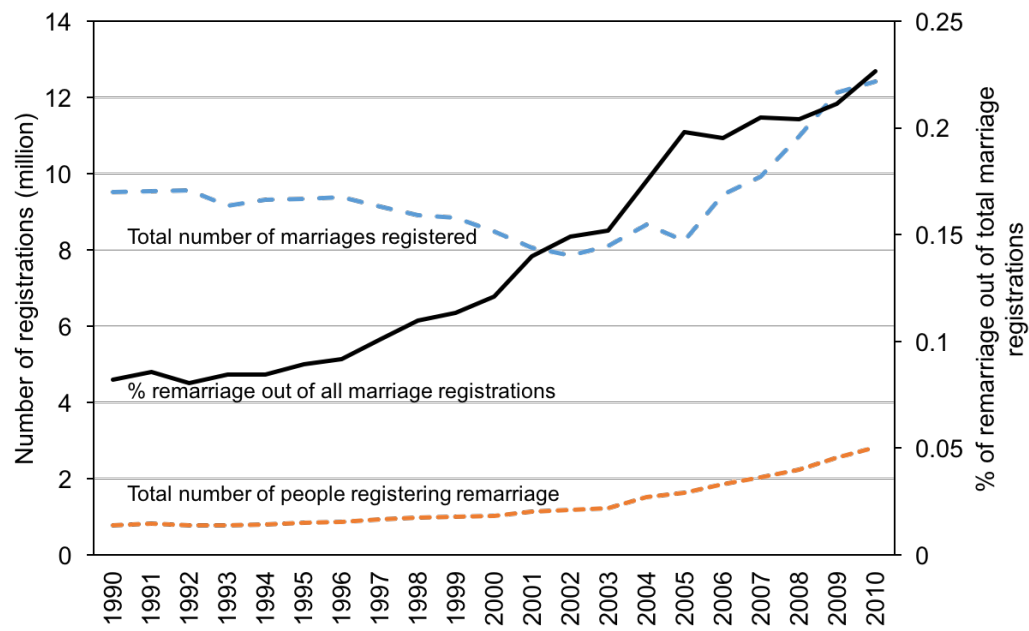
Figure 1. Trends of Marriage and Remarriage in China 1990–2010.

Source: China Statistics Yearbook 2016. Accessed October 10th, 2017:
http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2016/indexch.htm

Figure 2. Marginal Differences in the Odds of Providing Care to Children and Receiving Care from Children in 2010 by Remarriage Status in 2009, Post-Divorce and Post-Widowhood (Baseline = Single).

Note: Caculations based on three-level logistics regression models with random intercepts at the province and household levels. All models controlled for all variables listed in Table 1. Full regression results available upon request from the authors. Austerix star (*) indicates statistically significant difference beteween post-divorce and post-widowhood remarriage significant at the 5% level or below.