

## Analysis on the social mechanism and governance path of high dowry price in Henan countryside

Xiangfei Chen<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Labor and Social Security, College of Social Affairs, Henan Normal University, China

*Received 14 April 2024, Revised 18 July 2024, Accepted 01 October 2024*

---

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to deeply explore the social mechanism behind the formation of high dowries in the rural areas of Henan province.

**Design/Methodology/Approach** – Based on the four dimensions of the village network, mutual benefit, trust, and norms, a comprehensive analysis is carried out. (Nie, Cao, & Wu, 2022)

**Findings** – This paper studies the interaction between the village social relationship network and resource elements. Through in-depth research, it reveals that due to the psychology of comparison, the rural social network is disrupted by the pressure of the bride price. The trust and expectations among villagers contribute to the normalization of high bride prices, while the mentality of comparison solidifies the social norms related to them and undermines the reciprocity principle.

**Research Implications** – In the management of rural social affairs, this study has significant implications. It puts forward practical paths, including building a favorable social network environment, improving the social governance system, strengthening the constraints of reciprocity rules, and establishing a village norm system. These measures aim to offer theoretical references and practical guidance for the transformation of rural customs and practices, thus promoting the healthy development of rural society.

---

**Keywords:** high dowry price; Keep up with the Joneses; Change customs and customs

**JEL Classifications:** J12,O15,Z13

---

<sup>a</sup> First Author, E-mail: 13213602065@163.com

## I. Introduction

The No.1 document of the Central Committee pointed out for four consecutive years that it is necessary to continue to promote the change of rural customs and customs, adhere to the combination of dredging and blockage, treating both symptoms and root causes, innovating the carrier of changing customs and customs, and continuously promoting the comprehensive treatment of prominent problems such as high bride price, grand conduct, and scattered mass burial.

In the current rural society, under the influence of the "face" culture, the problem of high dowry is increasingly serious. Such as "do not move" and "all red and green" and other forms of bride price, not only make the long-term savings of rural families have been drained, aggravate family poverty, but also cause the fear of marriage among young people of the right age. "The bride price can not afford, marriage can not afford" has become a true portrayal of the current situation of rural marriage. The high bride price not only increases the economic burden of the family, but also restricts the development of rural economy and the construction of rural culture, distorts the nature of love and marriage, and damages the social atmosphere. Therefore, it is of great significance to deeply study the relationship between comparison and high dowry price and explore effective management strategies for promoting rural customs change and grassroots social governance.

## II. Analysis of the current situation of high dowry price in rural areas driven by the psychology of comparison

In recent years, due to factors such as gender imbalance and accelerated urbanization, the rural marriage market has been squeezed. Women gradually occupy the active position and possess high "capital" for marriage, which provides the basis for high bride price (Chen, & Wang, 2021). In this case, the expectation and pressure of both parents helped the amount of bride price rise, and finally reached an agreement in the interactive process of "asking price - responding price" (Liu, & Xiang, 2023). The herd mentality and the impetuous social mentality of "saving face, ostentatious and getting rich overnight" lay the foundation for the formation of high bride price (Jin, 2019). As the main body of ritual consumption in rural society, the wedding (He, 2017) can directly show its face and superiority (Lu, 2014). Under the influence of the comparison of marriage concepts, marriage habits and marriage behaviors, most families will use the amount of bride price as a tool of competition and comparison, thus forming a competition between the upper class and the middle class. The marriage competition pattern squeezed by the bottom (Wang, 2021), the bride price continues to rise, forming a flood of high bride price.

High dowry prices are rampant in social life, and all subjects are affected to varying degrees in this process. Under the influence of traditional concepts, the male father bears the main responsibility of paying the bride price (Chen, Wang, & Kang, 2018), and about 60% of rural families have debts due to marriage (Yang, 2024), which increases the family's economic burden and inter-generational exploitation. In addition, some women's families have "marriage fraud" in order to obtain high bride price (Lin, & Huang, 2019), and the fear of marriage is widespread among young rural men (Tian, & Chen, 2016). In addition, high bride prices aggravate regional poverty, hinder the freedom of marriage, cause family conflicts and disputes, and disturb social order (Cai, & He, 2021). To sum up, the mentality of keeping up with the competition is an important factor in the formation of high dowry price, and high dowry price has adverse effects on all subjects. It is urgent to

control the problem of high dowry price. This paper urgently needs to realize the high-quality development of changing customs and customs in rural areas, and provide help for the grassroots social governance of villages and communities.

### **III. The social logic of high bride price in rural areas driven by comparison: network interworking, identity convergence and reciprocity destruction**

#### **1. The breakdown of social networks: based on the perspective of interoperability**

Social network is an important carrier of social capital. In traditional Chinese rural society, social network of acquaintances is built by geographical and blood relationship. Marriage is an important way to expand social network, and bride price is a key link. In rural areas, betrothal gifts not only promote the development of geographical relations, but also expand the network of human relations. However, in the acquaintance society, villagers understand each other, inevitably breeding the psychology of comparison, and the high bride price is the product of comparison psychology. If the betrothal price paid is not up to the group's expectation, the family will face the pressure of public opinion. In order to avoid the risk of public opinion, each subject is forced to participate in the comparison. Challenging the society of acquaintances and refusing to pay a high dowry may lead to difficulties in getting married and social isolation, which in turn causes a partial breakdown of the social network and pushes the dowry price to continue to rise.

#### **2.Reinforcement of trust and expectation: based on a sense of identity perspective**

Social trust and expectation are key factors in rural group interaction and cooperation. Rural society is relatively closed, and most economic activities are based on family units. Trust among villagers is consolidated based on blood ties, neighborhood relations and shared living experience. And the group expects that through the formation of common culture and values, individual behavior will conform to group norms. Therefore, after the high dowry price is normalized in the village, the villagers subconsciously regard the high dowry price as the recognition of the woman's family and the demonstration of their own economic strength. This trend of cultural identification makes individuals gradually accept the high dowry price, which has become the norm of rural marriage.

#### **3.Consolidation of high bride price norms: from the perspective of convergence**

As an invisible informal system, social norms are the code of conduct and standards that social members follow, which have a profound influence in rural areas. Dowry has become a fixed custom in rural marriage, and villagers internalize these customs through observation and learning, and follow the established standards of dowry, forming a subconscious norm in rural areas. With the development of economy, the amount of bride keeps rising. Although some villagers have doubts, they are affected by group norms and comparison psychology. In order to avoid isolation and maintain social status, they still choose to pay high bride, forming an atmosphere of imitation and competition, which further consolidates the social norm of high bride and makes it evolve from a part of the group norm to the social norm of the whole village.

#### **4.The destruction of the principle of reciprocity: based on the destructive perspective**

Social reciprocity is the dynamic basis of social capital formation, which should be universal in marriage customs. But in reality, high dowry prices prevail in rural areas. Men pay far more than their families can afford, while women, affected by village norms, have a relatively small dowry. The mismatch between dowry and dowry undermines the principle of reciprocity. At the same time, some people make marriage utilitarian, emphasize material conditions, destroy the sincere spirit of mutual assistance in reciprocity, so that the color of reciprocity gradually fades, from the damage of both men and women to the village and even the social level, which is not conducive to personal development and social harmony and progress.

### **IV. Analysis on multiple paths of controlling high bride price in rural areas from the perspective of causes of comparison**

#### **1. Build a good social network environment**

##### **1.1 Link all sectors of society and promote the virtues of love and marriage**

The construction of a social network environment cannot be separated from the efforts of all sectors of society. National government departments need to clarify the goals, tasks, measures and division of responsibilities for controlling high bride price, curb the spread of old and bad habits, and lay a foundation for local governance. Local governments should actively respond to the call of the central government, formulate and implement implementation plans, so that the government's policies will not fail. Relevant departments can organize group weddings, improve marriage services and promote the construction of marriage information platforms to deal with the problem of high bride prices in rural areas. The media should play a guiding role in public opinion and guide the public to establish correct views on marriage and love by reporting typical cases. Schools should strengthen the education of students' views on love and marriage, and cultivate the consciousness of civilization, frugality and non-comparison in marriage. Social service agencies should integrate the strength of community women's organizations and set up "village matchmaker studios" to provide one-stop services such as marriage and dating, emotional counseling and marriage problem mediation for young people, so as to integrate the new fashion of civilization and thrift into marriage customs.

##### **1.2 Give play to the role of villages, create a good atmosphere**

Fully mobilize the strength of villages, and encourage villagers to take the initiative to participate in building a social network of healthy marriage customs. The community should set up a "high bride price persuasion" volunteer service team composed of five old people and retired cadres, accurately grasp the situation of marriageable young people, carry out publicity and guidance work, and urge the young people of the right age and their parents to change their concepts and resist high bride price. Party members should play an exemplary role in leading the new fashion of marriage customs and passing on healthy and civilized marriage and love concepts. Families also need to shoulder the responsibility of promoting the change of customs and customs, jointly resist the high bride price and comparison, and create a healthy, harmonious and civilized environment

for marriage and love.

## **2. Improve the social trust governance system**

### **2.1 Promote civilized marriage and raise public awareness**

The combination of offline and online approaches can improve the social trust system to the greatest extent. Offline through the theme of propaganda, party members and cadres into the household to hand out leaflets and other ways, face- to-face communication with the masses, explain the dangers of blind trust and comparison psychology. The community builds a propaganda and education base for marriage custom culture, holds special exhibitions of family tutoring and family style, builds a marriage custom culture corridor, and carries out the publicity of marriage custom culture. Relying on the New Era Civilization Practice Center (station), the village committee invites legal experts and social celebrities to carry out law education on changing customs and customs, improve residents' legal awareness, and promote the work of changing customs and customs. Online answering activities can be organized, and new platforms such as Weibo, Kuaishou and Douyin can be used to publicize the change of customs and customs, pass on positive information, advocate the masses to be the promoters of the change of customs and customs, and improve the social trust governance system.

## **3. Strengthen the reciprocity rule constraint**

### **3.1 Curb consumerism, highlight typical demonstrations**

Dig around typical, do a good job in the selection of outstanding villagers, civilized families and other advanced typical work, and take the special control of high bride price as an important indicator. Give full play to the leading role of moral models and good people around, and commend the good deeds of rural ordinary people. Party members and cadres should play an exemplary and leading role and strive to be leaders and practitioners of changing customs and customs. We should deepen activities to build civilized towns and villages, build demonstration villages for changing customs and customs, and form experience that can be used for reference and promoted. We will promote the policy of rewarding simple weddings, award honorary titles to families that hold simple weddings, and encourage villagers to return to simple folk customs.

### **3.2 Change the local customs and customs, set up a good reciprocity norm**

To curb the high bride price, it is necessary to change the rural customs and customs and rebuild the simple principle of reciprocity. All parties in the village should work together to mobilize villagers to participate in the establishment and maintenance of reciprocity norms. Through improving the incentive mechanism, using the "red and black list", "points supermarket" and other incentive and restraint mechanisms, to establish a typical benchmark of "zero bride price", "low bride price", new marriage, simple marriage. Formulate the "Civilized Points Management Scoring Rules", which will actively participate in village-level affairs, volunteer service, change customs and other behaviors into the civilized points management, drive the emergence of advanced models, drive the transformation of village and people's customs with good family customs, and stimulate the endogenous power of villagers to change customs and customs.

## **4. Establish the village standard system**

### **4.1 To unify the removal of differentiation**

Simplify the marriage registration procedure, optimize the process, improve work efficiency, provide one-stop services, and integrate related service resources. Establish village marriage norms, cooperate with wedding and catering companies, set up unified wedding halls, banquet locations, etc. Encourage village cadres' families to take the lead in using, guide villagers to accept unified marriage services, in order to remove the comparison brought by differentiation, reduce economic pressure, and reduce high bride price.

### **4.2 With autonomy to break the heart of comparison**

In-depth implementation of the "one rule constraint, four meeting governance" model, improve the rural moral fashion and change of customs and customs related provisions, focus on boycotting high bride price, against grand conduct and comparison of wealth. Set up the "Red and White Council" in various ways, refine the charter, improve the organizational structure, clarify the autonomy of members, and form a standardized working mechanism. Promote the function of village committee in the rectification of high bride price, upload and transmit, and implement the policy of changing customs and customs to the villagers.

To control the problem of high bride price in rural areas, it is necessary to take a multi-pronged approach, starting from the social network environment, trust governance system, reciprocity rules and constraints, and village norms system, etc., in order to effectively curb the trend of comparison, promote the healthy development of rural marriage customs civilization, and create a harmonious and beautiful social environment.

## **V. Conclusion**

Marriage, as the sacred symbol of love union in human society, carries the profound connotation of emotion and responsibility; The bride price is supposed to be the embodiment of the auspicious meaning to promote the harmony of two families and open a happy new road. However, with the profound changes of modern social and economic structure and the complex evolution of social concepts, the traditional connotation of marriage and dowry has been alienated to a certain extent. At present, in some areas, especially in rural areas, the bride price has gradually become an external sign to show the economic strength of the husband's family, and a tool for villagers to compare with each other. The phenomenon of high dowry not only deviates from its original cultural significance, but also becomes a key hindrance factor that seriously restricts the promotion of rural spiritual civilization construction and the implementation of rural revitalization strategy, causing a negative impact on the development of social civilization in rural areas that cannot be ignored.

In response to the above problems, based on the long-term consideration of social development and the actual needs of rural governance, the government has promulgated and implemented a series of policies and measures aimed at changing customs and customs, and guided the rural social atmosphere to develop in a healthier, civilized and harmonious direction by enriching the rural cultural life and reshaping the rural cultural ecology. It can be predicted that in the future social development process, a wave of changing customs and customs will be set off across the country, and all sectors of society will pay more attention to the cultural value and symbolic significance contained in betrothal gifts, rather than just focusing on its economic value.

At the same time, grassroots mass autonomous organizations, such as village committees and neighborhood committees, will gradually restrain and even eliminate the unhealthy social phenomenon of sky-high bride price by strengthening publicity and education and promoting communication and communication, so as to return marriage to the essential state based on emotion, prevent love from being overly materialized, and promote the formation of healthy and civilized marriage views and values in rural society.

## References

- Cai, H., & He, C. (2022). Research on high-priced betrothal gifts of the Yi people in the Liangshan area. *Journal of Ethnology*, 13(3), 67-74+145.
- Chen, Q., Wang, H., & Kang, L. (2018). Family support: An analysis on formation mechanism of high bridal price in rural youth marriage. *Contemporary Youth Research*, (5), 48-53.
- Chen, W., & Wang, X. (2021). Generation mechanism of high betrothal gift: From custom to market. *Gansu Social Sciences*, (5), 16-24.
- He, S. (2017). The Inflow of Money into Rural Areas and Value Distortion: A Discussion on the Formation and Social Foundation of Exorbitant Dowries. *China Youth Study*, (9).
- Jin, X., & Duan, Z. (2019). Bottomless bride price: Wedding costs born by Chinese rural men in urbanization. *Journal of Chinese Women's Studies*, (6), 18-31.
- Lin, S., & Huang, J. (2019). The negative influence of the high price of betrothal gifts on young women in rural areas: A case study of a village in Putian. *China Youth Study*, (2), 73-79.
- Liu, H., & Xiang, J. (2023). The generation mechanism of high priced betrothal gifts in rural areas: An interpretation framework based on "culture-life". *Hubei Social Sciences*, (9), 42-50.
- Lu, X. (2014). An Investigation of Rural Competitive Comparison Phenomenon from the Perspective of Social Comparison Theory: A Case Study of 10 Villages in 3 Cities of Shandong Province. *China Rural Survey*, (3), 65-72.
- Nie, J., Cao, M., & Wu, Y. (2022). Social capital in the village and realization of mutual support for the aged in rural areas: An empirical analysis based on the supply willingness of rural elder care services. *Journal of Southwest University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 48(6), 52-66.
- Tian, F., & Chen, Z. (2016). Analysis of the Problem of High Dowry for Rural Youth's Marriage: A Case Study of Datian County, Fujian Province. *Journal of Chinese Youth Social Science*, 35(2), 62-67.
- Wang, X. (2021). The generation mechanism and governance of "sky-high priced betrothal gift" in China's rural areas. *Journal of Southwest University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 47(5), 37-46+223-224.
- Yang, H. (2024). Social mechanisms for pricey marriage presents, or betrothal gifts in the countryside. *Journal of Chinese Women's Studies*, (2), 1-15.