

**Family on the Move:**  
**Family and Marriage in a Hakka Village under the Process of**  
**Urbanization**

**Author: Guo Xunyu**

**School of Sociology and Anthropology,**

**Sun Yet-san University**

**Supervisor: Professor Duan Ying, Professor Tan Chee-Beng**

**Content**

- 1.Introduction
- 2.Background of Baihou village - The Changing Banks by the Meitan River
  - 2.1 Location of Baihou
  - 2.2 Historical Background
  - 2.3 The Changing Society Since the Reform and Opening
  - 2.4 Research Methods
- 3.Marriage - "Uncontrollable" and "Simplify the Rites"
  - 3.1 Looking for a Mate - "Young People being Outside, Parents' Power Decline."
  - 3.2 Marriage Custom- Tradition's fading and Rites' Simplifying
- 4.Married Life - "Living Cross-local"and "Blurring the Division"
  - 4.1 "Cross-Local" Living Mode

#### 4.2 The Division of Labor Within Couples Being Blurred

#### 5. Conclusion - Individualism of Rural Households

### **[Abstract]**

This paper tries to discuss the changes in rural China under the process of urbanization since the Reform and Opening Up. Viewing from the aspects of marriage and family, we points out that urbanization has not only transformed urban area. Being connected by the large amount of migrant workers, it has also done great impacts on rural China. This essay is based on a-month-research in Baihou, a Hakka village in Northwestern China. By analyzing the marital choice and married life of Baihou people, at the same time comparing to the concept “ifamily” put forward by scholar Shen Yifei, we find that similar to families in cities, the rural families also shows a trend of individualism.

### **[Key Words]**

marriage; family; rural China; urbanization; individualism

### **1. Introduction**

Family has always been a vital part of Chinese life. Previous studies on Chinese family have point out that China is a family-standard society, that family is the most important thing in one’s life. This pattern can be also extended to the rules of the whole society. Professor Fei Xiao-Tong once put forward the concept “The Pattern of Difference Sequence” to describe this special phenomenon. However, decades passed, things changed. In resent years, the word ‘individualism’ is becoming more and more popular in Chinese society. This new phenomenon does do great impacts on the mode of Chinese’s

families and marriages.

'Individualism' is not a new concept. It was put forward since industrial period. Today, the main representatives of individualism theory is Bauman, Giddens and Beck. Yan Yunxiang had once get them conclude, considering individualism to have three main ideas: First, "deintercalation", which means individual is increasingly detached from the external social constraints, such as family, kinship and class status. Second, the "forced and obligations of independence", meaning that the structure of modern society is forcing people to take full responsibility for their own problems. Third, "create our lives through conformity", which refers that advocating choice, freedom and personality does not bring outstanding. On the contrary, the dependence to the social system will eventually lead to a fairly consistent life.<sup>1</sup>

Yan Yunxiang had also discussed about change of the consideration of love and family in a village during recent fifty years. In his work, he shows the privatized family and the individualized of youths, at the same time he put forward the emerge of self-centered and incivism morality in today's society.

Insufficiency of Yan's study had been pointed out. Some scholars argued that changes are not that acute, since family is still been emphasized in some new forms and under specific situations.

Scholar Shen Yifei use a new word "ifamily" to named the contemporary Chinese urban households. Hers idea "ifamily" has four characteristics: First, individual becomes the center of a family. Individual has shaped the family rather than being decided by family. Second, intergenerational relations remained close, while the range of it has become

smaller. Third, the female lineal, and the male lineal are gradually come to an equal level. Fourth, the individual household is a fluid, uncertainty structure, which can change at any time. In addition, Shen propose that the function of a family is both economical and emotional; internal parent-child relationship is showing inverted spindle; and as for the rights in a family, young women has gained them from the olds.<sup>2</sup>

Migrant workers, sometimes described as a group of labor army in cities, also play an significant role in the urbanization of toady's Chinese society. These people, mostly young adults, depart from their home in town or in countryside and then join the labor stream into cities to make a living. Some of them make good jobs and even earn large money, but most of the fellow-villagers still struggle for life. Still, common point remains, that despite however far away they go and whatever they do, the majority of these migrant workers still take their roots firmly in their hometown. They own land and houses in the countryside, as well as leaving their elder parents and youth children there. As for the workers themselves, 'migrant birds' can be a vivid metaphor, which means they live in cities for work in most of the year, and go back to their hometown only during special days, for instance, spring festivals. In China, special phenomenon such as Spring Rush is a result not only of the Urban-Rural Dual Structure, but also of the important family concept among Chinese people.

Thus, city and country are just like two sides of a coin while we were talking about family and marriage, especially of migrant workers. Urbanization has bond the two areas together. As for family, these migrant workers turn to have two homes-- the urban one and the rural one. Boundary between the two family is not fixed. It changes in different life

stages of a people and in different time of a year. And these kinds of mobility shows the changing cognition and treatment on family and marriage of today's rural people. Therefore, while studying the process of urbanization, we should also see the family life of migrant workers through the rural one, instead of concentrating only one urban area.

So, I don't mean to portray an overall modern family picture of the migrant workers. Neither will I talk wholly about these workers' life in cities, which has already been described a lot. Instead, I would discuss more on the view of the countryside about the impact that current urbanization had on migrant workers' families and marriages. Since when talking about the family of migrant workers', we should not focus simply on their lives in cities, but should trace back to their roots, to the place they called hometown, and to the people that tie them with blood. Therefore, in this research, I choose Baihou ( Meizhou, Guangzhou) , a Hakka village, as my field.

Through the research, I'll try to find out the changes on Baihou people's families and marriages during these few decades, discuss how urbanization effected the rural family and what efforts they did to adapt the new situation. As an response to Yan's and Shen's study, I'll discuss the differences of modification between urban family and rural family under urbanization, and how does these two link with each other, in what degree and how did the urban family effect the rural one. Besides, since this is a Hakka village, which is famous for its virtuous, hardworking women, I'll also involve some discussion on the change of women status in modern marriage and family.

## **2.Background of Baihou village - The Changing Banks by the Meitan River**

## 2.1 Location of Baihou



(Figure 1: Location of Dabu County)

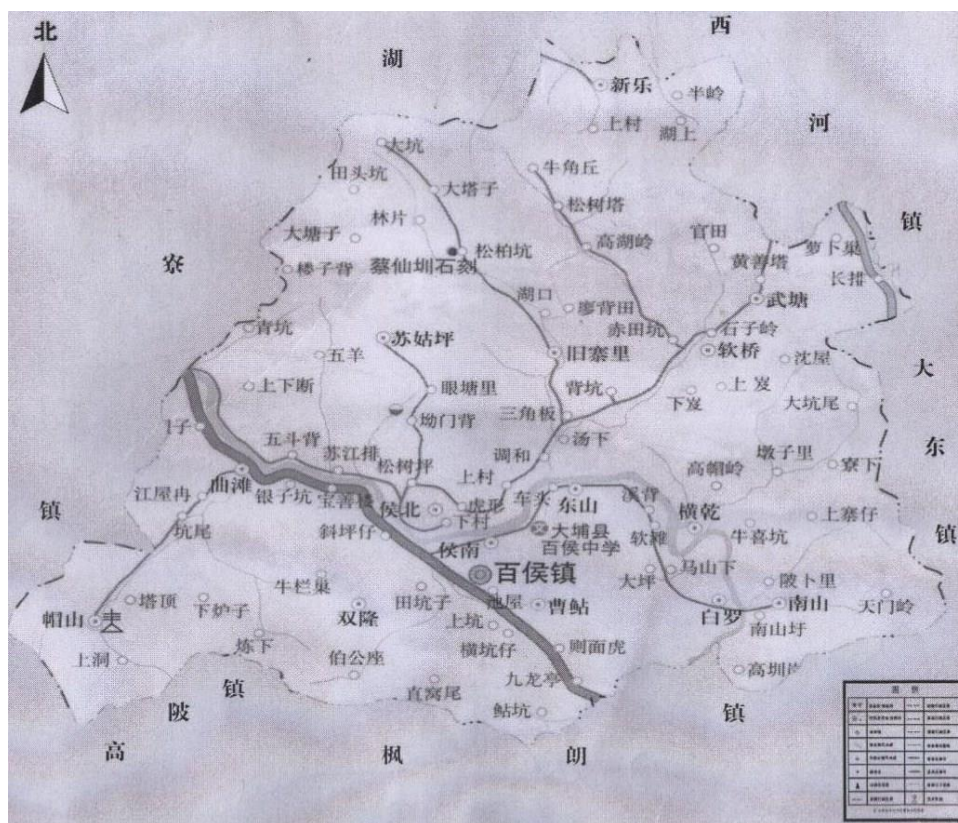
Dabu County (Figure I) is located in the eastern part of Meizhou City, Guangdong Province, China. Being a transition zone connected coastal plain and inland montana area, It sits in mountain, south to Chaozhou, bordering Fujian Province in the northeast, not far away to offshore in the south-east. The climate type here is Subtropical Monsoon Climate, which is mild with abundant rainfall. The annual average temperature is around 21.2 °C, and the annual average rainfall is around 1659.5 mm.



(Figure 2: Administrative Area of Dabu County)

Baihou Town (Figure 3) is located in the east of Dabu, 11km westward from the central county (Huliao) , having jurisdiction over 14 administrative villages. Center of the town is a 20 square kilometers inverted triangle basin, surrounded by 97 square kilometers mountainous area. Meitan River, one of the main tributary of Hanjiang River originated in southern Fujian Province, flows across the middle of the basin. <sup>3</sup>





The scope of this research is the center basin of the Baihou--- Hounan Village and Houbei Village (Figure 4). Meitan River flows across the mid of the basin from east to west and divide the basin into two halves--- the south one is Hounan Village, and the north is Houbei Village. On the east of Hounan Village, there is a southwest-northeast street,



called Baihou Street, which is also the town center. The town government is located at the southern end of the Hounan Village. Obviously, Baihou Town is a typical example of town-village integration.

Many people and little land is a significant feature of both two village. According to statistics of 2012, the total number of Hounan households was 1519, with a population of 5295. And the farmland was 1781 mu(Chinese measurement unit, 1mu=0.1647acre) , while the mountain area was 2550 mu; As to Houbei, there were 978 households, 3668 residents in 2012. By June 2011, besides 4946 mu mountainous area, the total farmland of Houbei was 1245.56 mu, consisted of 1087.76 paddy field, 157.8 dry field. <sup>4</sup>The average farmland per person in each village(Hounan and Houbei) is only 0.33 mu.

All in all, the geographical features of Baihou, on the one hand plays a pivotal role between land and sea, mountains and valleys, Fujian and Guangdong Province, occupies an important geographical location; on the other hand, it has severe development restrictions caused by the shortage of arable land and its large population. But at the same time, under both of the joint action, the locals were forced to go outside the village to develop and find a livelihood. Many people then turn to develop the forest, start business, find jobs outside, as well as study hard and enter politics.

## **2.2 Historical Background**

Baihou, Dabu(The following 'Baihou' mostly refers to Baihou basin, including Hounan and Houbei) is a famous Hakka areas. In 413 A.D. , the earliest county here was set by the DongJin Dynasty.

In the late Ming Dynasty, Baihou local society has undergone tremendous change. It

began to pay much attention to education. Since then, population, clan, education and people entering political stratum had become prospered. Because of its rapid population growth, the condition of many people and less land became more severe. Starting from Qing Dynasty, many villagers started looking for more development path. Lots of Baihou people (mainly males) made a living by doing business outside. First they gathered in Chaozhou, Suhang, later extended to Shanghai, Shantou.<sup>5</sup> Many people even went to Southeast Asia and other places (mainly in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam) to do business, then send money home to support their family and their clan. And so Baihou became a famous "hometown of overseas Chinese." .

Frequent outreach continued till the 1950s. From the People's Commune Movement to the end of the Cultural Revolution(1977), the development of Baihou was greatly affected. On the one hand, the villagers are incorporated into the People's Commune in the production of labor and migrant flows (short and long term) is strictly limited, very few villages migrant workers. On the other hand, overseas contact with the mainland had also been greatly control, internal and external communication was very difficult. Many overseas relationship became estranged and even cut off.

There are two main clan in Baihou--- Surnamed Xiao in Hubei and Yang in Hounan. Historically, because of bazaars, waterways and compete for other resources, there were quarrels and frights between clans from time to time. At the same time, marriages and cooperation were common, too.

### **2.3 The Changing Society Since the Reform and Opening**

People's Commune System in rural area and the urban-rural household registration

system strict Baihou people on their home land, bringing them a period of time almost solidified in space and in lifestyle. However, followed by the Reform and Opening up(1978), all the solidification started to melt.

Planned economic and Rural People's Communes System dissolved. Farmers have turned to have more produce space. Coastal cities in PRD(The Pearl River Delta) were the first group to develop, creating a lot of work opportunities. Farmers began to pour into these cities. From the 1980s and 1990s, led by young adults, Baihou people went into cities from the countryside, setting off a wave continues to today. This wave, much larger than the time "to Southeast Asia", has brought the little village more profound impact.

Influence is reflected in the structure of the local population. In the field, we find that the vast majority of young adults aged between 20-50 are outside for work (male migrant workers are more than female. A small number of young women stay at home to look after their children). Working places are mostly in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and other cities in Guangdong, the developed Pearl River Delta province. And the people stay at home are mostly school-age children and elder people over age fifty or sixty. The population float is intensified, especially during Spring festival and summer vacation. Around Spring Festival, most of the young man will return home from work, and summer time is the peak for rural school-age children to go to cities to stay with their parents. In addition, population floating between mountainous area and basin also worth concerns. Under urbanization, a variety of resources have been integrated into the central area. Labor, health, education resources in mountains area is fading away. People living in mountainous area were forced to move down to the town basin or to larger cities for better

education and jobs. Therefore, in terms of population, the Reform and Opening Up has brought dramatic population movements to Baihou, leaving problems such as apart couple, left-behind children, empty nesters, empty village to this village.

As for the economic structure, Baihou also tend to diversify its economy. Agricultural income used to be the main source of income for most households, but now it is replaced by incomes earned by migrant workers. However, agricultural production is still the focus of most Baihou people staying rural, yet agricultural crops have changed. In recent years, a large number of household land contract to a unified pomelo planting. Meanwhile, the government also began to plan to develop the tourism industry in order to improve the local economy.

At the same time, social development and progress of science and technology has accelerate the spread of information. Large numbers of people shuttling between different areas (urban and rural) has greatly expanded people's horizons. Through the media and offsite experience, young people have accepted the new culture, at the same time bringing collision and even intergenerational conflict between cultures. This kind of ideology changes have also affect Baihou people in all aspects of life.

Family and marriage, as the basic organizational unit of a community, without doubt is deeply influenced. Therefore, in this study, it will be particularly meaningful to look into the changes in marriage and family in Baihou since Reform and Opening Up. Through the marriage and married life in rural Baihou, we hope, In this research, to observe what impact have urbanization done on rural family and marriage, how does the people do to adapt the changing world, and what further problems can we see behind the

phenomenon.

## **2.4 Research Methods**

This research was an anthropology undergraduate internship fieldwork. Leading by two teachers, it was divided into several group with different themes to launched a month-long community research. In this essay, the author get touch with local farmers mainly through home interviews and chatting. Also we contacted with the local town government, to understand the overall situation of the village and to collect some statistical data. The general method is, we initiative talk to villagers on the street, in the shop and by the gate. Then we'll be invited to their home to have a tea and continue the chat. During the interview process, we will generally introduce them our identity and purpose. In this case, we were often able to get the trust of the locals. In all those interviewees, I chose a person or two to be my key reporter and asked him or her to introduce more villagers. However, due to the limit time and experience, the research and analysis might be somehow immature or have some inevitably problems. Hope to improve the shortages in the future.

## **3.Marriage - "Uncontrollable" and "Simplify the Rites"**

### **3.1 Looking for a Mate - "Young People being Outside, Parents' Power Decline."**

Talking about marriage, shall we start with the beginning of a marriage---"mate choosing" We will analysis it through three aspects---choosing methods, age of marriage, and spouse requirement.

Firstly, "ordered by parents, introduced by matchmakers" had always been a golden

rule while choosing a spouse since the ancient China. So did it work in Baihou. In ancient time, the local marriage was usually used as a means of political alliances. In this case, young people rarely have autonomy chose, but arranged by parents and by the big family.

After China was founded, young people started to have a little right to speak besides parents in the choice of spousing. As far as we know, most of the elders' marriages were decided by their parent. But a few of them were able to choose the partner themselves at first, and then go to ask for parents' permission. Even "negotiation" occurred sometimes. Young people might try to persuade parents to admit the marriage. Yet, under this kinds of situation, boys were always the more initiative one while girls usually shows a acquiescence, compromise attitude.

Mrs. Yang, who is over 60 years old now, was chased by her husband in their early twenties. The couple got acquaint with each others in a town fair. Mr. Yang fell in love with Mrs. Yang and wanted to marry her. However, the girl's family objected to the match for the boy's family was too poor and "mountainous"(an adjective commonly used by local people. It means the family lives in remote mountain area which is too difficult for living in all aspects). Mrs. Yang herself did not have much idea, it was all up to her father. But Mr. Yang did not give up. He visited the girl's family frequently and helped the housework. In the end, the girl's parents were eventually persuaded and agreed the marriage.

As time went by, more and more young Baihou had took over the power in deciding their marriage. Before the 1990s, married by introduction still occupy the mainstream. However, it was not in the traditional way that youths were excluded in the arrangement, but would ask for their agreement. By 1980s and 1990s, the matchmakers even often

skipped the parents and ask for young people's satisfaction first.

People married after 1990s seldom described their marriage as being introduced. Instead, they would say, "I chose my spouse myself, we were free love." Most couples were former classmates or got acquainted with each other at work. They fell in love and were brought to see each other's parents after they decided to marry. The process of "meeting parents" almost became a mere formality. The marriage will not be canceled unless it is strongly opposed to.

Therefore we can see that the youth Baihou has gradually got rid of orders from parents and has won more power and freedom in deciding their marriage and future.

In addition to spouse choosing, the youths is no longer fully obey their parents in the age of marriage.

The Hakka region attaches great importance to early marriage and procreation. Before the mid-1970s, women basically got married before the age of 20. Many of them got married in their 18 and 19. Men got married around 20 to 24.

But now the age of marriage is greatly delayed. The legal age of marriage in China is "Men no earlier than 22 years, women no earlier than 20 years old". So few is married so early as before. Middle-aged or elderly parents generally think it better to get married before 23,24 (girls), and 25,26(boys). One of our interviewee Mrs. Xiao has a 23-year-old son and a 22-year-old daughter. When we comes to their marriage age, Mrs. Xiao thought for a second or two, and said: "Oh, they are still young! They can wait for a few year more!"

However, the reality is, many young people(a large number of them are working



outside) in Baihou did not get married until 27,28 years old. In this regard, most of the parents feel anxious and helpless: "Of course we are anxious! But what does that help? We can't force them to marry anyway!" Thus they can only enlighten themselves, "Well, they are spending many years in school and better educated, so they cannot get married too soon!" Besides, these young people are mostly working outside that beyond their parents' reach. In the end, the only thing the elders can do is to shake head and sigh.

But apparently, although the elders feel anxious about their children's marriage age, the entire community of Baihou has not put so much pressure of public opinion as the early years. People might occasionally mention it when chatting, feeling accustomed to it. Parents will not force their children to get married except to nag them sometime. Actions such as introducing and blind date is also declining.

In addition to choosing methods and the age of marriage, the spouse requirement of young people is also different from their elders.

"Industrious" has always been an important characteristic of Hakka people, especially for women. Therefore, "industrious, virtuous, filial piety" are the most valued character a wife should have in local middle-aged, elder people's mind. Secondly, living nearby is also important. Hakka in Baihou would be the best, next Dabu or Meizhou. A husband or wife from outside Meizhou would be a bit far away.

However, young people's idea is more influenced by popular culture. In recent years, Korean TV drama and pop idol culture has become popular. Influenced by beautiful girls and handsome boys in drama, young people tend to take "tall,rich,handsome/beautiful" as their choosing standards. Of course, they are more of an imagination, but it does affect

people's notion. Besides, other than economic condition, 'love' is a significant valuation.

Then things such as the location of the family will be less concerned. We can find it from the table of marry condition of our interviewees.

Year of Marriage	Marriage within Baihou Basin(Hou nan and Houbai)	Marriage Cross-villages within Baihou Town	Marriage Cross-towns within Dabu County	Marriage Cross-city within Guangdong Province (Including Cross-counties)	Domestic Marriage Cross-provinces	Subtotal
1960	2	1	2	1	0	6
1960s ~1970s	3	2	3	0	0	8
1980s ~1990s	3	5	2	2	2	16
2000 ~today	4	1	1	6	3	15
Subtotal	12	9	8	9	5	Total 43

(Table:Family Location in Marriages of Interviewees' and Their Children's;Unit:Case)

From the table, we can conclude that Baihou people mainly choose people within Dabu County to marry before Reform and Opening up. Since the 1980s, especially in the

last decades, acquires for emotional thing(love) are increasingly important, instead of demands for family location(yet it doesn't mean location is not valued).People hope to "get emotional satisfaction from their spouse, which former couples did not have or did not require before. "6 This in one aspect reflects the youths are influenced by Western cultures, on the other hand shows an independent of nuclear family's separating from traditional extended family. Young people can look for off-site wife freely, not to worry too much about the conflict between the two family cultures(admittedly this contradiction exists). First, most of the acquaintances of these youths are from other places, fellow villagers are limited. More importantly, in most of the time, the couples are living in cities far from home and far from parents, thus this will not cause much conflicts.

All natural phenomenon have natural causes. As an Chinese old saying goes, " When the general is leading a war outside, even the emperor can not totally control him". It can also be used on children and parents in rural Baihou.

Most of the young people in Baihou nowadays are working outside, even high school students like to go out for work during vacation. In this case, the youths are economic independent. Parents can not control their children somewhat from the economy.

On the other hand, young people leave home as soon as they finish high schools and even junior high school. They come back home once a year. In the normal they contact with their parents on telephone. In this case, parents hardly have the opportunity to pay close attention to the child's living conditions, not to say their romantic life. Many youths bring their boyfriend/girlfriend home just before they get married. In the interview, one sentence was said by almost every parents,"They choose their own spouse. We can only

give references to them but not decide anything. Anyway, they live too far away from us, our words are useless! Well, as long as they are happy, its okay for us." Parents seem to feel a little helpless and accustomed to it. As for those stay single, they can only urge and nag them without methods.

In addition to "uncontrollable", this is also kinds of decentralization from parents. In the past, the elders want to give their children an exact living route, to which children must obey. But now, parents tend to say, "I just hope my children to be happy, they can decide things themselves." The same in choosing a spouse, "As long as they like them and can well, it'll fine for me."

### **3.2 Marriage Custom- Tradition's fading and Rites' Simplifying**

The changes in marriage custom in Baihou since reform and opening mainly reflected in the disappear of a variety of traditional marriage and the simplify of marriage ritual.

Baihou, being a Hakka region as well as a hometown of overseas Chinese, used to have a variety forms of marriage.

"Child Bride" and "Deng Lang Mei(girl wait for the birth of the husband)" used to be popular in Hakka's history. "Child bride" refers to adopt or buy a baby girl to be the future wife of the boy in the family. In her childhood, the girl was taken as a daughter. She and the boy called each other brother and sister. Later the girl should undertake the housework and farm work in the family. When they grew up, the girl and the boy must get married. "Deng Lang Mei" is a kind of marriage similar to the "Child Bride". The difference between them is that the boy was not born before the girl came to the family, that they are waiting for the birth of their future husband. Some of them waited until the young husband

was born and married him when he grew up. Some weren't that fortunate. The expectative child never came. Then these girls would remain a widow or be regard as a daughter and have an uxoriocal.<sup>7</sup> These kinds of old customs was banned after the liberation. In our research, we only met two such cases, in which the old ladies are almost a hundred years old.

In addition to Child Brides, "Two Places Two Marriages(Liang Di Hun)" and "Marriage Across Sea(Ge Shan Jia/Ge Hai Jia)" used to be common in Baihou, too. The former means man overseas were to marry separately, both at hometown and at the place he work in Southeast Asia. The latter refers to overseas Chinese marry at hometown because there needed somebody to take care the home. Since he hardly came back to hometown, people usually take a cock substitute of the man, and had the woman carry rituals with the cock.<sup>8</sup> These two forms of marriage were mainly for overseas Chinese. Since the middle of last century, the number of "to southeast Asia"became smaller. So these marriages also decreased quickly. In the interview we just occasionally heard people mention them when it comes to early Chinese stories, but did not see such marriages ourselves.

Other scholars had also mention "Widow Remarry" in addressing Dabu's marriage customs. Professor Fang Xuejia in his *The Origin of Hakka* has said "Widow's remarry was actually rare typical in real life." "There was a virtually shackle (some unilateral concept of chastity) trapping them during their whole life "<sup>9</sup> . However, Zhao Jian holds a different idea. After several multi-site visits in Dabu, he points out that "remarry was an important form of marriage in Hakka regions".<sup>10</sup> In our research, both were saw in our

cases.

Mrs. Huang married her late husband at hers 19<sup>th</sup> in 1950s. A few years after they married, her husband died in disease, leaving two sons with her. Mrs. Huang was 25 at the time. She wanted to go back home and wait for remarry if possible. However, it was against by her father and brother. They agreed to provide her rice, oil and basic necessities for life, the only demand is Mrs. Huang must stay at her husband's family, bringing up the children, never marry again. Huang was too powerless to resist them, so she lived in widowhood for a whole live, brought up her sons and three grandsons on her own. When telling her story, Mrs Huang kept saying that: "Live is too hard! Too hard!"

Mrs. Luo is another type of cases. Luo is now fifty years old. She used to lived and had a marriage in mountain area nearby. She and her past husband had one son and two daughters. When the children was around ten years old, her husband died in a car accident. Later, through someone's introduction, she remarried a men in Houbei, bring with her three children. Her current husband is a disabled person but has a rich brother. Revealed by a neighbour, the brother-in-law had signed an agreement with Luo, promise that he'll pay for her children's living and education, in return, Mrs. Luo must look after her husband for a whole life. In the research, we found that Mrs. Luo is more or less excluded or be a subject of gossip in the village.

Apparently, female is seriously constrained by chastity in tradition Baihou. "Villagers nearby generally took an approval attitude for traditional Baihou female, supposing them to have a strong concept of conservative and chastity. And thus they were proud of marrying to a Baihou female."<sup>11</sup> . However as far as the writer concerns, attitudes above

might not be the true thinking of female themselves, but rather a choice under the pressure of family and the society. To the modern days, especially after the Reform and Opening Up, such convention has become more open. Although being discussed by some people, or not having a good choice, many women still choose to remarry after divorced or widowed. One of the reason is because women nowadays usually have her own job that they can take charge of their economic but not rely on men.

Today in Baihou, except for remarriage has increased slightly, other forms of marriages above have become very rare.

As for marriage rituals, since we did not come across any wedding during our fieldwork, we can only grasp its rituals by people's descriptions. As far as people describe, today marriage rituals in Baihou is rather simple comparing to other places in countrysides and in cities.

Marriage rituals used to be simple in Dabu history, The situation lasted until period of Emperor Kangxi in Qing Dynasty. With the rise of the gentry class, the Confucian ethics gradually took the place traditional practices. Since Qing Dynasty, the local wedding procedures and rituals began to imitate the ancient "Six Manners(six specific procedures of marriage in traditional China)" . But the local tradition "marriage does not count on money" still remained.<sup>12</sup> To the late 20th century, the traditional Confucian ritual was criticized.

Some old men in the village introduced, marriage rite in Baihou was quite simple before the Reform and Opening Up. There did have bride-price, but not much, usually 9 yuan, 10 yuan, 19 yuan, 21 yuan or 31 yuan. Some rich family will give 51yuan. The girl's



family do not have dowry loopback. Local people consider this just a symbolic of bride-price, not so formal. Mr. Xiao, a 70-years-old old man, memorized the price level at that time: pork was 8 jiao 3 fen RMB 500g, brown sugar was 4 jiao 500g, eggs 8 fen 500g. At that time (the 1960s), a middle school teacher earned 99 yuan a month, which was a very high wages. In terms of the wedding, it was very easy, too. No wedding band, no bridal sedan chair. Usually the bride walk to the groom's family on her own, with few relatives accompanied. Neither was there a wedding feast. All they had was a few close relatives(even don't include the bride's parents) gathered together and had a meal.

Mrs. Wang comes from Fenglang, a mountain area nearby Baihou. She married Mr. Xiao in Houbei in 1968. On the wedding day, no people from the groom's family went to take her from home. She walked miles from her family to her huaband's family, accompanied only by an uncle and an umbrella. Reached the groom's home, they had a lunch with some close relatives of the family. Then the uncle went back home and Mrs. Wang stayed and began her new life.

Relatives invited to the wedding meal would not prepare red packet, but would sent some keepsakes such as cups, water bottles and so on.

After the reform and opening up, more and more people go out of the village. Affected by external culture, marriage rituals also have some changes. Firstly, with the increase in income of migrant workers, marriage bride-price has improved, too.

Mr. Xiao is a prestigious old man in Houbei. He married in 20c 60s. At that time, he gave the bride's family 21yuan as bride-price, and his wife did not have any dowry. In 1980s, their eldest son got married. They gave 300yuan to the girl's family. In return, the

bride brought bicycle and sewing machine with her. Xiao's youngest son got married in the late 1980s, prepared a red packet of 1,000 yuan as bride-price. Now, his granddaughter is going to marry soon. "The boy's family is going to give us 20,000 yuan, and we are going to prepare some gold jewelry for her. Its almost balanced."

Since Mr. Xiao is prestigious in Baihou region, and his elder son is a businessman living in city, we can take them as a typical mode of upper class in Baihou.

Secondly, most of the wedding feasts in Baihou are of small-scaled. The usual way is inviting some close friends and relatives(about 3-5 tables,usually8-10people a table) to the town street and have a meal. One of the table is for guests from the bride's family, and the rest are from groom's. The meals often cost 800-1000yuan each table. Guests will give red pocket containing 50 yuan, 100 yuan, 200 yuan or so, some friends and relatives very close will give more. Before the meal, people will set off firecrackers. The couple do not pay too much attention on their dressing, no wedding dress, just some usually good clothes. But some young people may go to photo studio to take wedding photography. Besides, since most young people live and work in cities, lot of them will host a wedding feast in the workplace with their colleagues and friends. Some may even pick their parents there, host only one ceremony rather than once each place.

Obviously, tradition is still affecting Baihou people's life. Style of plain living remains. After Reform and Opening Up, although Baihou's economic has developed a lot, alongside the culture and concept have been influenced a great deal by modern media and migrant workers, tradition still plays an important part in local people's life, as well as in their marriage cunton. Compare to cities and many other rural areas in China, marriage

rites are relatively simple here. Of course, economic is an vital part in a match. But beyond this, "love", which was taken highly of since modern time, has also been more and more emphasized in young people's marriage,

#### **4.Married Life - "Living Cross-local"and "Blurring the Division"**

##### **4.1 "Cross-Local" Living Mode**

Traditionally, Hakka regions, including Baihou, was carrying the patrilocal living mode, which means that the married couple live with the husband's paternal relatives after married. Even until today, a married woman still live with her husband's family under most circumstances. In this living mode, labor resource flow from girl's family to boy's family. However, in Baihou, it is not totally patrilocal living mode, but kind of modification under the needs of labor demands and emotional connection. In another words, the flow of family labor force here is relatively flexible. When labor force in the husband's family can meet their needs(for instance, the husband's mother is still capable. After all, women are the main labor force in Hakka areas), then sometimes the wife(before she had a child) will be allowed to go back to her parents home for help. After the younger generation was born, the wife should pay all her attention on the child-rearing that she will be no longer available to return home occasionally. In modern times, lots of the husbands work outside the village, leading to the weakening of the bond between the wife and her mother-in-law. In this case, many daughter-in-laws, whose parent's and parents-in-law live nearby, tend to spend more time with their own parents rather than with her husband's parents. This also indirectly reflects a shift of the concept of marriage obligations under the influence of

contemporary culture in Baihou: marriage is to marry a man, rather than marry a family.

However, as for today's Baihou young couples, they are more likely to choose a living mode including "neolocal residence" and a new way of living. Here we call it "cross-local residence". "Neolocal residence" refers to a married couple left both side of the relatives and live independently in their own home. "Cross-local residence" here we means the husband and wife live separately in different places for long-term. The usual way is the wife lives in the husband's family in village, while the husband works and lives in city. The couple will meet in either place at a certain time each year or every a few years. In some aspects this can be described as "a floating marriage".

"Floating marriage" is not new to Baihou people. In traditional "Two Places Two Marriages(Liang Di Hun)" and "Marriage Across Sea(Ge Shan Jia/Ge Hai Jia)", it was common to see couples separated in different places, difficult to see each other for a long period. But those were not quite the same with today's floating and separation. The most important differences are brought by today's convenient transportation and communication. Benefit from them, couples nowadays have more opportunities to keep in touch with as well as meet each other. What's more, emotion bond is becoming gradually significant in a marriage relationship. At the same time, this kind of living mode is not a permanent arrangement. It usually occurs in the early stage of children-rearing. Therefore, for most of the young couples in Baihou, they are actually combining "cross-local residence" and "Neolocal residence" together, carrying out different types during different stages of life.

As mentioned above, the majority of Baihou young people have been out(mainly in

Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai) for work once they graduated from high school and even middle school. They live and work in cities for most of the time, many married non-Baihouers. Even for the spouses both came from Baihou, they go back to hometown only during special days such as Spring Festivals. Thus, in the beginning of the marriage, young people usually leave their parents to build their own home outside the extended family. Things change from the time the wife get pregnant. Many wives would choose to go back to Baihou, staying with parents-in-law, to wait for the birth of the child. After the child was born, the mother will feed the child for a period of time until weaning. Then a number of them will go back to cities to continue working, leaving the child to its grandparents; others will stay at home with children, starting the "separation" life with husband. This separated condition is not fix. If the child was well-behaved, then the wife might go out for work at an appropriate time and have the grandparents rearing the child in the village. If not, she'll stay at home to look after the young and the olds. During "separation", the couple would contact frequently via telephone, caring for each other's living conditions and the growth of the child's. They meet very few times every year. Men will return home Spring Festival. Except for this, many school-age children will go to cities during summer vacation, accompanied by their mother or grandparents.

Further more, "cross-local residence" is not only seen among young couples. It becomes a new mode more and more commonly seen in the olds. Under the economic stress, although some wife will stay at home for the child, more prefer to look for a job outside. In this case, the burden of rearing children finally fall on the grandparents, which lead to the cross-local residence phenomenon among old couples.

There are two typical types of old couples living cross-local .

Akai's grandmother Mrs. Yang is known as "hero grandma" in Baihou, since she has reared five grandchildren alone in Hounan. Among them, the eldest one Akai has even admitted to a university in Guangzhou. Mrs. Yang and her husband used to lived in Jiuzhai, a mountain area near Baihou. Because of the economic integration, school in Jiuzhai was canceled that all the kids must go to school in Hounan. Yang's sons and daughter are at work in cities, entrusting their children to the old couple. But in the same time, their farmland in Jiuzhai need to be looked after. In the end, Yang and her husband decided to living separately in order to both take care of the children and the land--- her husband stay in the old house to keep ploughing, while Yang and the five children rent a house in Hounan so as to go to school more easily. The old man will pass by his wife and grandchildren's house a few times a month when he go to the town fair. But just stay for a short time and go back home before afternoon. In the rest time, they just get other's information by neighbors back and forth, because Mr. Yang is hard of hearing that they cannot communicate via phone.

Mrs. Yang's situation was very common in neighboring area. Many "mountain" people were forced to move down to the center town because of the child's education. Usually the old couples will move down together. But some must look after the farmland uphill, so they may leave one behind.

Another example is Mrs. Lin in Houbei. Lin has two sons and one daughter. Each child working in different cities has now gave birth to their own child. The daughter is a housewife so she can look after her child on her own. But the two sons' children needs

people to take care of during daytime. So now the situation in Lin's family is, Lin live with her elder son in Guangzhou to look after the eldest grandson, and her husband in Baihou for the other one.

Apparently, "cross-land resident" not only occurs in the young couples, but also limits the old generation's life, under the demands of child-rearing.

As many people said: "Nobody don't want to stay at home! But you see, there're too many people and too little land here. We have to go out to struggle for living. In many situations, we(the spouses) can do nothing but to live separately."Such "cross-land resident" mode is a forced choice when facing the dilemma of livelihood and family unite. Although feeling and emotion is an element becoming more and more important in an marriage, it cannot fight against the reality of survival. Money earning, children rearing and kin passing are still playing the fundamental goals in Hakka people's lives.

#### **4.2 The Division of Labor Within Couple Being Blurred**

In China, Hakka women are famous for their diligent and hardworking since ancient time. So do Baihou women.

In our chatting, many older women sighed to us: " Women in the past were too hard, too tired!"

Before the Reform and Opening Up, Baihou women must undertake a large amount of work everyday, including housework, farmwork, taking care of children, serving parents-in-law, and so on. "We never napped when we were young. There're too much work to do that women could never rest! Collecting and carrying water from wells or from stream, collecting firewood uphill, cultivate vegetables and rice, carry barrels of



manure...when coming back home, you still need to wash clothes, prepare meals, do all kinds of housework...in a word, a wife should do everything!"said Mrs. Wang, an old lady of 64 years old. Some men will do things such as fishing, taking care of the vegetable garden, cutting firewood and do the cooking, looking after children at home. But more did nothing. A 80-year-old lady sighed and complained to us : " I did all the works! And he (her husband) did nothing but eating and sleeping. You see, he is now watching TV in the room."

But when asking Mr. Xiao, an 63-year-old old man, he gave us another answer a little different to the above. He said the working division between spouses in Baihou is "men for outside, women for inside". The so-called "outside" refers to thing related to financial matters, such as subsistence, work from the production team, borrowing money, and to look for temporary work to supply the family income. Relatively, "inside" means things related to family life, such as farmwork, housework, cooking, children, etc. And in the period of the production team, each person, no matter men or women, must do work that can count to enough points every year. Men's workload were more than women's. So wording that "men do little work in Hakka" is not correct. This description from Mr. Xiao is similar to Professor Fang Xuejia's research based in Meixian, a nearby Hakka county: "Men usually go out for work, selling coolies to supplement the family income. Women host the housekeeping at home, also charges the pastoral farming." <sup>13</sup>

After the Reform and Opening Up, technology has developed a lot. Tap water instead carried water, gas stove replaced firewood, rice cooker occurred..... Many work once done by women has gradually replaced by technology, rescuing women from heavy

housework. Nowadays, women still need to do the cooking, housework, feeding chicken, do farmwork at home, but no longer that toilsome. Many middle-aged women said with envy: "Wives today are much more easy than we were! They have things like gas and electric, houseworks are no longer hard." Although women are still undertaking most of the "inside" housework, the mode of labor division in today's Baihou is no longer purely "men for outside, women inside". Rather, some men began to do some of the housework. Further more, women have begun to work outdoor, supporting a large part of the family income. With the rise in economic status alongside growing propaganda of "gender equality", Baihou women have finally win an enhance in their overall status.

Obviously, in today's Baihou society, although division that "men work outside, women charge domestic work" still works in many families, it's gradually becoming blur. Rather than say husbands are showing understanding and sympathy to their wife, we may say technology liberated them. And then the wives, after upgraded in economic status and with the help of modern culture, conversely influenced their men, transformed them.

## **5. Conclusion - Individualism of Rural Households**

Shen Yifei has put forward the concept "ifamily" after a thorough research among households in urban Shanghai. In this concept, "I" is the key point. Shen Yifei believes, for the families in urban China, "individual" has become the center of the family, shaping the form of it. In this case, family has become a serving unit for individual. Inside "ifamily", relation between generation remain close, supporting many functions of the family. However the range of involved members tends to be smaller, limited mainly between

parents and children. On the other hand, the wife's family has become as equally important as the husband's family, the power between the two young couples tends to be balanced. Finally, "ifamily" is a fluid form that can change at any time. At different levels, the connotation and denotation of "ifamily" are different, which is specifically reflect on its multi-fluid residential patterns. <sup>14</sup>

After the field research in Baihou, Dabu, Meizhou, the author suppose that "ifamily" phenomenon occurs not only in the developed cities in China, but is becoming more and more apparently in rural societies under the process of urbanization.

First, since the Reform and Opening Up, autonomy in marriage among young people has been significantly enhanced. From "ordered by parents, introduced by matchmakers" to free love, marriage, no matter mate choosing or marriage age, is now mainly decided by youths themselves. Parents can only give some suggestions but not make decision for them. Also, people no longer purely marry for family link and kin's inheritance. Individuals turn to stand on the center of the family, patriarchy is relatively weakened. The increase of "neolocal residence" is also a symbol of young families being gradually independent, that they no longer rely on their parents neither big family to survive. Of course, this is also related to the improvement in living level due to migrant working. Especially for the off-site daughter-in-law of son-in-law, living long-term in cities, they don't need to try hard to integrate into Baihou society, neither do they need to spend much energy on getting on well with their spouse's parents.

Second, economic and emotional functions have become a basic gauge for young people to starting a home. Traditionally, Hakka was an area concerning procreating,

putting economic and emotional element on a secondary stage in a marriage. From the amount of bride-price and dowry, we can see that people do not take marriage as an important means of economic exchange as some other areas, they care more about the long-term marriage and mutual support to each other. Meanwhile, many old people cultivated their affection only after they got married. But today, affection has become an indispensable factor in determining a marriage, so as the economic situation. In the marriage, love will gradually turn into family affection and family will be like an "economic cooperation". At this point, the couple will give priority to the best way of supporting the family, rather than young people's romantic life.

Third, the status of women in the family is improved. Concept like "men work outside, women inside" continue to occupy the mainstream in Baihou's family, but it is also becoming blurred. Most women have joined the crowds of migrant workers, many become an pillar of their family economy. Men also began to undertake some housework. Women tend to have more right to speak at home. Shen Yifei's explained this phenomenon as "young women getting power from the olds" .<sup>15</sup> However in Baihou it's more than that. I would say, Baihou women get power from two ways. One is the widespread modern value of "gender equality", which must thanks to media like television as well as those migrant workers. Its them who have brought new ideas to the small and remote village. Besides this, the greater reason women getting power is because they have more opportunities to go out for work and supply the finance of the family. And this, we have to admit, attributed to the development of modern technology. In some aspects we can say, technology liberated rural women.

Finally, I agree with Shen Yifei's discussion on "parent-offspring being the chief axis".

The rising importance of intimate relationship haven't lead to the shift of "parent-offspring being the chief axis" being replaced by the "spouses being the chief axis". Importance of the child is never weakened, but even more prominent.<sup>16</sup> Not to say most of the parents work to "make money for the children to study" (which is often used in local parlance), from the large number of "cross-local residence" of parents generation and grandparents generation, we can understand the vital position of a child(especially a boy) in a family.

This concept is apparently consistent with traditional fertility idea in Hakka area.

The geographic feature of many people and little land, accompanied by the gradually free flow of men between regions, finally form the scaled phenomenon of migrant working, which is undoubtedly the biggest change since the Reform and Opening Up in this small village. Urbanization in the whole country, have not only had great affects on cities, but also influenced rural areas, in the end brought new look to this Baihou village, and the other rural areas as well.

## References

- 【1】肖文评 著：《白垵乡的故事：地域史脉络下的乡村社会建构》，北京：生活·读书·新知三联书店，2011. 7
- 【2】罗伟纯 主编：《人文百侯》，广州：广东人民出版社，2009. 2
- 【3】谭元亨 主编：《广东客家史（下册）》，广州：广东人民出版社，2010
- 【4】房学嘉 著：《客家源流探奥》，广州：广东高教出版社，1994
- 【5】房学嘉，肖文评，钟晋兰等 著：《客家梅州》，广州：华南理工大学出版社，2009. 6
- 【6】房学嘉，宋德剑，钟晋兰等 著：《客家妇女社会与文化》，广州：华南理工大学出版社，2012. 4

- 【7】温廷敬 总纂：民国《大埔县志》
- 【8】沈奕斐 著，《个体家庭 iFamily：中国城市现代化进程中的个体、家庭与国家》，上海：上海三联书店，2013.3
- 【9】[挪]贺美德，[挪]鲁纳 编著；许烨芳等 译：《“自我”中国：现代中国社会中个体的崛起》，上海：上海译文出版社，2011.11
- 【10】阎云翔 著；龚晓夏 译：《私人关系的变革：一个中国村庄里的爱情、家庭与亲密关系：1949~1999》，上海：上海书店出版社，2006.1
- 【11】费孝通 著：《乡土中国 生育制度》，北京：北京大学出版社，1998.5
- 【12】房学嘉：《关于女性在传统社会中地位的思考——以梅县客家妇女为例》，客家妇女论丛，2004 年第 7 期
- 【13】赵剑：《客家妇女与“二婚亲”——兼与房学嘉先生商榷》，中华女子学院学报，2001 年第 2 期
- 【14】孙进：《文化适应问题研究：西方的理论与模型》，北京师范大学学报（社会科学版），2010 年第五期（总第 221 期）
- 【15】百侯派出所：人口及其变动情况统计年报表，2012 年度
- 【16】网页：大埔县百侯镇人民政府-百侯概况，<http://www.baihou.gov.cn/about.asp>

---

<sup>1</sup> 沈奕斐 著，《个体家庭 iFamily：中国城市现代化进程中的个体、家庭与国家》，上海：上海三联书店，2013.3:25

<sup>2</sup> 沈奕斐 著，《个体家庭 iFamily：中国城市现代化进程中的个体、家庭与国家》，上海：上海三联书店，2013.3:279-281

<sup>3</sup> 罗伟纯 主编：《人文百侯》，广州：广东人民出版社，2009.2:26

<sup>4</sup> 以上人口及土地统计数据部分来自百侯派出所：2012 年度人口及其变动情况统计年报表；部分来自罗伟纯 主编：《人文百侯》，广州：广东人民出版社，2009.2:44-45

<sup>5</sup> 罗伟纯 主编：《人文百侯》，广州：广东人民出版社，2009.2:119

<sup>6</sup> 费孝通 著：《乡土中国 生育制度》，北京：北京大学出版社，1998.5:154

<sup>7</sup> 谭元亨 主编：《广东客家史（下册）》，广州：广东人民出版社，2010:525,527

<sup>8</sup> 谭元亨 主编：《广东客家史（下册）》，广州：广东人民出版社，2010:527

<sup>9</sup> 房学嘉 著：《客家源流探奥》，广州：广东高教出版社，1994：278

- 
- <sup>10</sup> 赵剑：《客家妇女与“二婚亲”——兼与房学嘉先生商榷》，中华女子学院学报，2001年第2期。
- <sup>11</sup> 肖文评 著：《白垩乡的故事：地域史脉络下的乡村社会建构》，北京：生活·读书·新知三联书店，2011.7：276
- <sup>12</sup> 肖文评 著：《白垩乡的故事：地域史脉络下的乡村社会建构》，北京：生活·读书·新知三联书店，2011.7：273
- <sup>13</sup> 房学嘉：《关于女性在传统社会中地位的思考——以梅县客家妇女为例》，客家妇女论丛，2004年第7期。
- <sup>14</sup> 沈奕斐 著，《个体家庭 iFamily：中国城市现代化进程中的个体、家庭与国家》，上海：上海三联书店，2013.3:279-281
- <sup>15</sup> 沈奕斐 著，《个体家庭 iFamily：中国城市现代化进程中的个体、家庭与国家》，上海：上海三联书店，2013.3:284
- <sup>16</sup> 沈奕斐 著，《个体家庭 iFamily：中国城市现代化进程中的个体、家庭与国家》，上海：上海三联书店，2013.3:283-284