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국제학석사학위논문

**Break Up to Make Up: China's Divorce Trends and  
Regional Disparities Since 1980**

1980년대 이후 중국의 이혼율 추세와 지역적 차이

2015년 2월

서울대학교 국제대학원

국제학과 국제지역학전공

유 인 선

**Break Up to Make Up: China's Divorce Trends and  
Regional Disparities Since 1980**

A Thesis Presented

By

**In Sun Yoo**

To

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master

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**Seoul National University**

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# 1980년대 이후 중국의 이혼율 추세와 지역적 차이

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이 논문을 국제학 석사학위논문으로 제출함

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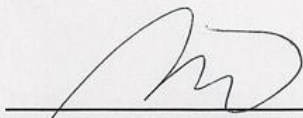
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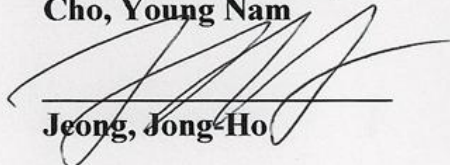
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## **Abstract**

### **Break Up to Make Up: China's Divorce Trends and Regional Disparities Since 1980**

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Being the most populous country in the world, China has been pushing through the miraculous economic transformation with significant socio-demographic changes since 1978. Other than the tremendous economic achievement, China has been experiencing a constant rise in divorce rate ever since the reform. From 1978 on, divorce has largely become a common method of ending a marriage, and its rate has been increasing rapidly along with the economic growth in China. However, relatively much less attention is paid on the social issues such as family, marriage, and divorce. Thus, to offer better understandings on the social issues such as divorce in post-reform China, this research examines the national and regional divorce trends of divorce and attempts to provide possible explanations.

There are many rationales responsible for the continuous increase of divorce rate in China and for such regional disparities. First of all, legislative changes on marriage law and consequences related to rapid economic growth since the reform seem to account for the nationwide increase of the divorce rate in China. This effect is observed the most in metropolitan cities such as Tianjin, Beijing, and Shanghai.

For the autonomous regions, religious and cultural traditions are considered as major reasons for high or low divorce rates. For instance, combination of orthodox Islamic tradition and distinctive local marriage practices contribute to high divorce rate in Xinjiang. In Tibet, stratification in social stratum and different marriage practice respectively are responsible for low divorce rate.

Relatively high divorce rate observed in northeastern and western part of China is illustrated by connecting the level of unemployment to divorce rate at certain period of time. In this part of China, state-owned enterprise restructuring seems to influence the unemployment rate the most, which in return pushes up the divorce rate of these regions.

This indicates that whether the cause of divorce is accompanied by the effect of culture or policy changes since the reform, not a single factor contributed to the decline of divorce rate in China other than Tibet.

**Keywords : China, divorce, regional disparity, national trend, family**

**Student Number : 2013-22067**



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## **Chapter I . Introduction**

Reintroduced capitalist principles and private property ownership after the reform changed the core of the Maoist economy in China. Since 1978, Chinese government issued a series of policies such as family planning policy, household registration system reform, decollectivization, and privatization of state-owned enterprise to support economic growth. This privatization shift not only affected the economical aspects, but also influenced numerous social components in China.

During the Maoist period, Chinese government was legitimately involved in private lives of people, even intervened in marriage and divorce. However, government control over the people's lives started to deteriorate since the economic reform. Revived private property ownership brought about changes in marriage economics and inflow of outside values reestablished the meaning of the intimate relationship in post-Mao China.

In other words, privatization of institution for marriage and divorce has also occurred as a consequence of the economic reform. In the midst of these changes, many research focus on the effect of reform policies in terms of China's miraculous economic growth, whereas much less attention is paid on the social issues such as family, marriage, and divorce. Thus, this research aims to examine the changes in divorce rate and how the divorce system in China transformed after the economic reform, hoping to enhance understandings on the social issues such as divorce in post-reform China.

Being the most populous country in the world, China has been experiencing a constant rise in divorce rate since the reform. From 1978, China has been pushing through the miraculous economic transformation with significant socio-demographic changes. Divorce ever since has largely become a common method of ending a marriage, and its rate has been increasing along with more economic growth in China. Especially, official government statistics used in this research well illustrate the trend of rising divorce rate. Economic transition and associated policy implementation are known as the major factors responsible for the current divorce phenomenon in China(Davis and Harrell, 1993; Bullough and Ruan, 1994; Yi and Deqing, 2000; Wang and Zhou, 2010; Yu, 2013; Davis, 2014). Additionally, legislative changes, and influence of foreign culture and individualism also account for the increasing divorce in post-reform China(Palmer, 2007; Wang, 2001; Gu, 2013;).

Because China is geographically a huge country, considering regional disparities along with the national trend is important when discussing a certain phenomenon. Thus, variation in culture, history, and economic policies across the different regions in China are likely to offer some interesting insights for understanding divorce in current Chinese society.

Hence, this study examines the national and regional disparities in crude divorce rates over the past two decades, attempting to document changing divorce pattern in China and offer possible explanations.

### 1. Research question

China's economic reform and associated consequence such as inflow of foreign culture are behind the scene of the rising divorce phenomenon in China. Even though China's divorce rate is not as high as many other countries, constant increase in divorce rate since the reform raise a few questions: how did the divorce rate change over the past twenty years and what are the national and regional trends of divorce rate in China?

### 2. Research methodology

To examine the general divorce rate change and possible regional disparities, raw data is retrieved from the Statistical Yearbook issued by the National Bureau of Statistics of China. This study was able to have access from the 1995 Statistical Yearbook to 2013 Statistical Yearbook. Therefore, the data in this research reflects the trend from 1995 up to 2013. Unfortunately, the access was denied for Statistical Yearbook of 1996 and 2003. Thus, 1996 and 2003 data are missing in the reconstructed tables and graphs in this paper.

On regional population, subject population is specified in the Statistical Yearbook as usual residents(常住人口). In 2013 Statistical Yearbook, it states the population data by region is composed of usual residents from 2005. However, a comment for years prior to 2005 is not found.

According to Guo et al, usual resident population in the Statistical Yearbook refers to the following; First, “(P)ersons staying at home regularly or for over 6 months during a year and integrated with the household economically and in terms of living.”(Guo et al 2014, 433). Second, “(M)embers of the household staying away from the household for over 6 months but keeping a close economic relation with the household by sending the majority of income to the household are regarded as usual resident of the household.”(Guo et al 2014, 433). Third, “(G)overnment staff and workers or retirees living as close members of the household are also considered as usual resident.”(Guo et al 2014, 434). However, “(S)ervicemen, students of secondary technical schools or schools of higher education and persons with stable jobs and residence outside the household - excluding those visiting relatives or seeking medical service are - not included as resident population of the household.”(Guo et al 2014, 434).

This research retrieved a selection of data, which are necessary to calculate the crude divorce rate. Total population, regional population, number of divorce, and number of divorce by region are collected from

1995 Statistical Yearbook to 2013 Statistical Yearbook. In this study, crude divorce rate is calculated because it is the standard indicator used worldwide to identify and compare divorce trends. Crude divorce rate expresses the annual number of divorces per 1,000 population. It is calculated by dividing annual number of divorce to population of specific year. To show the parts per thousands, per mil unit is used.

### 3. Limitation of this research

Limitations of this research come mainly from the statistical and analytical issues. First of all, flaws found in analysis using macro data exist in this research. Also, problems associated with transparency issue of the statistics remains. Because the findings are retrieved from the official statistics released by the Chinese government, variables such as age, gender, and education level are not reflected. Findings in this research do indicate the general trend of how the divorce rate changed over time. However, they do not show how different it is depending on various variables. In other words, findings are unable to offer the specific trends.

Furthermore, one important point to note is that divorce statistics released by the statistical bureau does not consider migrant population. Instead, divorce statistics are based on the household registration. This suggests that the data used in this research excludes the floating population such as migrant workers. To account for more accurate reflection of divorce

in current Chinese society, collecting primary data through the field research is necessary.

Moreover, remaining transparency issue related to the official statistics released by the Chinese government hinders the accuracy of the findings. Hence, the findings in this research could merely reflect the official stance of the Chinese government on the matter of divorce. Whether the government is trying to report the reduced size of the actual divorce in China or not, continuous rise observed in the official statistics do confirm that divorce is a rising social phenomenon in contemporary Chinese society.

Another limitation of this research lies upon how the analysis is based on the indirect sources. Because the possible explanation for regional difference of divorce is derived from the indirect sources, the depth of this research is limited. However, it is very difficult to obtain the primary data for each region and province considering the vastness of China. For improvements, the possible explanation indicated in this piece of work could be verified and replaced by the regional-specific research conducted through the extensive field studies.

## **Chapter II . Family and divorce in China**

Because this research taps on the issue of divorce in China, review on the research of Chinese family as well as on divorce is necessary. Review on the previous literature of Chinese family is divided into three different time periods; traditional China prior to 1949, Maoist China from 1949 to 1978, and China after the reform. This would help identify the changes that Chinese family undergone from traditional China to contemporary society according to the policy transformation accountable to the different time periods. Literature on Chinese family depicts how the ideal meaning of family evolves over time and indicates the effect of new policies on Chinese family in each era.

Moving on, literature review on divorce is separated into two major parts; the effect of rapid economic growth and law amendment on Chinese divorce. Existing literature on the relationship between economic growth and divorce in China elaborates on how the related consequences of the economic reform became the significant variables responsible for rising divorce rate in China(Davis and Harrell, 1993; Bullough and Ruan, 1994; Yi and Deqing, 2000; Wang and Zhou, 2010; Yu, 2013; Davis, 2014). Literature on divorce and marriage law amendment indicates the change between 1980 and 2001 marriage law, clarifying its effect on rising divorce rate in post-reform China(Palmer, 2007; Davis, 2014).



## 1. Family in traditional China

In traditional China, family is an economic unit responsible for production. This makes the size of the traditional Chinese family to be highly dependent on the size of the family fortune. Moreover, family is a social unit that makes up the regional life in traditional China. Traditional Chinese family is characterized by strong patriarchy rooted upon filial piety, and this patriarchal aspect in family is known to resemble the structure of the state itself(Lee, 1953; Freedman, 1961). Thus, traditional family in China could both be the economic and social unit of the society. This patriarchal aspect of traditional Chinese family is important because it acts as a controlling agent in the society. Filial piety and obedience to the authority practiced everyday in family and kinship could easily be extended to the loyalty and obedience to the state(Freedman, 1961). In other words, traditional Chinese state consolidated its authority based on the patriarchal obedience and control embedded in filial piety(Freedman, 1961). Playing the role of both social and economical unit, traditional Chinese family is thus very much a significant ground for understanding Chinese society(Freedman, 1961).

The perception on ideal family in traditional China is dominantly based on patriarchal extended family(Lee 1953; Freedman, 1961). Because strong economic affluence is necessary for forming extended family, only the wealthy Chinese people could maintain the structure of extended family.

In traditional China, power of the father is based upon his rights over land, housing, and elements that are essential for the survival of other family members(Lee, 1953; Freedman, 1958; Freedman, 1961; Parish and Whyte, 1978; Ebrey, 1984). This naturally makes the relationship between wealth and maintenance of extended family being equal to social power. Therefore, extended family became the ideal family structure in traditional China(Lee, 1953; Freedman, 1961).

## 2. Family in Maoist China

Maoist Revolution in China called on for the start of the new era. Unlike the past, rapid industrialization and urbanization policies were initiated under the command economy. Chinese government heavily pressured family for the sake of economic development. Political and economical pressure produced by the policies at the time triggered the convergence in Chinese family(Lindbeck, 1951; Lee, 1953). During the Maoist period, standardization of family structure occurred depending on whether the population is rural or urban(Lee, 1953). For instance, urbanization and industrialization concentrated in urban area implemented the public education system, bringing improvement in education level among urban population(Lee, 1953). Urban population acquired new perception by education, and this heterogeneity of culture in household attacked traditional values such as patriarchal rule in the family(Lee, 1953).

After the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949, such policies as land reform, collectivization of the economy, and abolition of private ownership destroyed the basic economical unit that supported father's authority in traditional China(Lindbeck, 1951; Lee, 1953). In planned economy, the government leads the distribution of labor and scarce resource and controls people's mobility. Thus, wealth of the parents and hierarchical social status does not influence the future of the child as much as it did in traditional China. From then on, the transformation of family structure from stem or extended family in traditional China to nuclear family started(Chen, 1985). The status of old patriarch is weakened as all economic activities are no longer based on the family unit in Maoist China, changing the meaning of family in this time period(Lee, 2005). The traditional Chinese economical foundation had gone through the major attack, and family size decreased during the Maoist period(Chen, 1985).

In addition, policy towards women and family at the time put identical pressure on the traditional structure of Chinese family. Under the Maoist ideology and planned economy, women could equally have financial independence. Moreover, passing of the new marriage law guaranteed the rights for divorce, freedom of mate choice, monogamy, equal rights between men and women. Also, this new law prohibited polygamy, dowry, and concubinage. These family reform policies were put into practice through law, education, political pressure, and sometimes strict regulation. Therefore,

family under the Maoist China is a by-product of the Maoist ideology and such policies that went under at the time(Lindbeck, 1951; Wolf, 1986; Han, 1998).

Indeed, change in political system resulted in some shift in Chinese family. However, some scholars contend that Chinese family maintained the traditional values even during the Maoist period(Whyte, 1979). Family under Maoist China still remained as an important economical unit, and family was largely responsible for the social welfare system. For instance, Article 13 of new marriage law announced in 1950 states “children have the duty to support and assist their parents.”(qtd. in Parish 1975, 622). This shows the contradictions of the Chinese government; policies at the time attacked feudalistic family value from traditional China, but the government emphasized the role of children in supporting their parents. As a consequence, traditional value such as son preference remained among Chinese people even in the Maoist era(Parish, 1975).

Furthermore, household registration system limited the freedom of migration and mobility, which contributed in survival of traditional family value. Even after collectivization, most men worked on physically demanding projects and activities to earn work points, whereas women, elderly, and children did house chore and much related works(Parish, 1975). For example, women and children collected herbs to sell at the market and elderly stayed home cooking, cleaning, and sewing. This division of labor at

home after collectivization in rural area indicates that the Maoist government did not bring changes to the roles that each family member plays(Parish 1975). Thus, Chinese family inherited traditional value from above generation even though the family under Maoist China seems to have undergone many changes on the surface(Parish, 1975; Whyte, 1992).

### 3. Family in post-Mao China

Maoist period was not the end of the radical change in China. In 1978, new reform policies focusing on economic growth were introduced. As a result, China shifted from the planned to the market economy. From the reform on, Chinese economy rapidly grew, and is still developing at a very fast pace. Nevertheless, it is not just the economy that changed after the reform. Family in post-Mao China transformed according to many reform policies announced during this time period as well.

Out of many policies, one-child policy representatively brought changes to Chinese family on the surface. One-child policy put direct restriction on the size of the family by limiting the number of births per household. Being able to have only one child, absence of siblings became the most common case in Chinese family. This further suggests the decrease in number of in-laws, uncles, and aunts. Therefore, one-child policy contributed in trimming down the average size of the Chinese family by manipulating the physical number of the family member(Chen, 1985). As a

consequence of one-child policy, natural birth rate continued to fall, whereas the proportion of nuclear family increased after the reform(Chen, 1985).

In addition, more financial opportunities and transformation of family function in post-Mao China fostered increasing number of nuclear family in both urban and rural area. In rural area, huge number population migrated from hometown to elsewhere in China for better economic opportunity since the reform. As a result, more nuclear family is also found in rural area. There is no doubt that nuclear family structure in China is becoming increasingly common regardless of rural or urban area after the reform. Nonetheless, Chinese family still maintain the close parent-children relationship despite the change in physical family structure(Greenhalgh, 1993; Whyte, 1993; Ikels, 1993; Li et al, 2003).

Then, financial and physical independence from parents became one of the most important elements for the Chinese family to consider after the reform(Unger, 1993). Moreover, better economic condition in each family with less number of children re-introduced the expensive dowry at marriage after the reform(Chen, 1985). Not only for marriage and physical number of family member, one-child policy also triggered changes in education of children. In urban area, parents started to equally invest in their daughter's education as much as their son's(Shin, 2001). For urban family who only has one daughter expects her to receive the best education and acquire professional occupation(Shin, 2001). This change in education trend in

urban area after the reform indicates the improved education level regardless of sex in urban area, further putting much more significance on the role of daughters in Chinese family(Whyte, 2005; Yu, 2013). In the past, sons were highly preferred for preserving the genealogy and securing the elder lives. However, implementation of one-child policy turned this sex dynamics in Chinese family impotent. Regardless of gender, each child equally became important for parents in China after the reform(Lee, 2005). This effect resulted from one-child policy provided better education and financial opportunity for females, giving much more significance to females in post-Mao Chinese family. In fact, 44 interviews conducted in Beijing by Yu in the summer of 2004 shows that wives are not willing to give up their financial independence(Yu, 2013). This result suggests that the traditional breadwinner-homemaker model is being diluted in Chinese society after the reform(Yu, 2013).

Other than on the physical number of the family member, such reform policies and condition at the time influenced the co-residence pattern and household division of the post-Mao Chinese family. For example, limited supply of housing at the beginning of the reform era made the household division for the married couples impossible(Unger, 1993; Whyte, 2005). Hence, married couples depended on their parents for raising their child for better efficiency in their economic activity, whereas elder parents counted on their grown up child for supporting their old lives. This mutual

help and postponed household division of married couples after the reform are the by-product of reform policies as well as the problem of welfare policy(Zhang, 2004).

Furthermore, interesting form of co-residence pattern appeared after the reform. As a consequence of the improved status of women in Chinese family, non-normative uxori-local co-residence pattern started to grow in numbers(Pimentel and Liu, 2004). Nevertheless, uxori-local co-residence pattern is very much concentrated in urban areas.

Unlike urban areas, extended family structures started to be back in rural areas since the reform. In post-reform rural areas, family shifted from the reliance on agricultural production. The more market economic principles absorb the rural economy, the more opportunities for non-agricultural production became available for rural Chinese family. Then, interesting revival of extended family structure started to occur in rural areas; increase in number of family business after the reform facilitated the extended family structure to return. For people running a family business, forming extended family was much more convenient for them; extended family lowers the risk in family business, makes it easier to work out the distribution of budget, and brings better harmony with efficient allocation of family labor(Chen, 2009). Additionally, patrilineal structure of family consisted in rural China after the reform(Johnson, 1993).



Another aspect to pay attention to in the Chinese society after the reform is that perception of consumption has changed since then. Changes in the perception of consumption challenged the traditional meaning of family in contemporary Chinese society by bringing in new values from the outside. For example, growing number of young generation in urban China considers individual values and satisfaction in life the important element, and more people are marrying late(Davis and Harrell, 1993).

#### 4. Divorce in post-reform China

According to the 1957-1970 divorce research, Chinese divorce decreased continuously in the late 1980s and irregularly fell in the 1960s and 1970s(Platte, 1988). However, current research confirms that divorce in China is on the constant rise since 1980s(Wang and Zhou, 2010).

Economic reform in China brought education and financial opportunities to those who could not have access to such before. Above opportunities made possible for people to separate themselves from one another based on personality, economic wealth, and personal values. Then, husbands and wives now could reach a divorce having personality differences. Since the reform, divorce was filed against the lazy spouses who could not adapt to the new economic opportunities in rural areas. In urban areas, improved education level caused more divorce(Wang, 2001). Moreover, issues closely related to the individual life such as unfair division

of house chores, extramarital affairs, and unsatisfactory sex life became the reasons for divorce after the reform(Wang, 2001). Economic growth in China created an environment that individual happiness and quality of life are considered the important key to good life. As a matter of fact, many places for personal leisure such as dance hall and karaoke increased in number since the reform, providing more opportunities of extramarital affairs(Shin, 2001).

In the Maoist period, although women were provided with economical, social, and cultural grounds for divorce, they could not reach to actual divorce. However, women's negotiation power in divorce grew after the reform; freedom for economic activity is closely connected to the freedom of choice, and many young Chinese women prioritize careers over private lives. They consider financial independence as the most important rights given to them after the reform(Gu, 2013), which helps women to leave unhappy marriage. According to the econometric analysis done by Wang and Zhou, even the relationship between GDP per capita and divorce and remarriage rate is positively correlated(Wang and Zhou, 2010) in China.

Nonetheless, economic change is not the only significant factor related to the rising divorce rate in China since the reform. Legal reform after the establishment of People's Republic of China deserves equal attention for discussing the increasing divorce phenomenon in China.

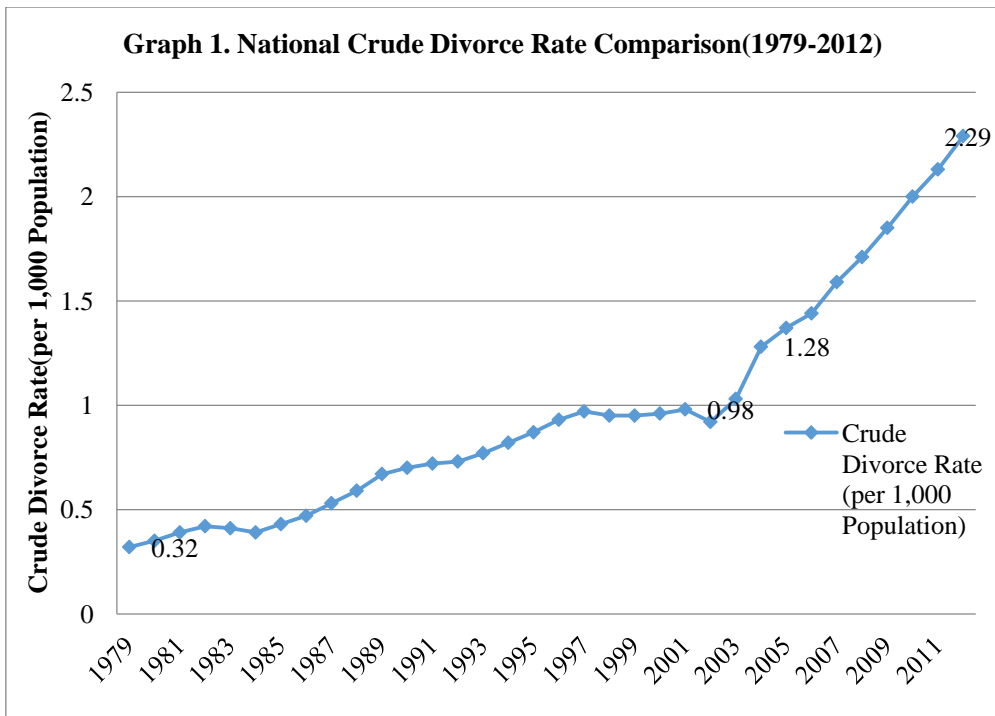
First of all, new marriage law was announced in 1950 by the Chinese government. 1950 marriage law guarantees the freedom of mate choice, abolishment of dowry, monogamy, and equal rights among spouses. Unlike how men demanded for divorce in traditional China, this change in marriage law in 1950 turned more than 70% of divorce to be filed from women's demand(Bullough and Ruan, 1994). Unfortunately, this freedom was very much limited to the urban elites, whereas rural area was largely excluded from the government's divorce freedom campaign. In rural area, this campaign and legal change did not contribute much in divorce because blood ties and personal network blocked the fair negotiation for divorce(Kim, 2006).

Second, there happens another marriage law reform in 1980. Amendment of marriage law in 1980 guarantees the right for no-fault divorce(Gu, 2013). This could explain the rise of divorce rate in China after the reform. However, more important marriage law amendment is announced in 2001. Article 18 and 19 from the marriage law amended in 2001 states that authenticated prenuptial contract can have legitimate use in court and the property owned before marriage belongs to individual who acquired it(Palmer, 2007; Davis, 2014). This suggests that Chinese government now has more distance from the private lives of people, whereas strengthening the individual property. In Maoist China, government

had control over people's private lives. On a contrary, now the private lives are free to be decided by the people themselves in post-reform China.

### Chapter III. Divorce Trend in China Since 1980

#### 1. National divorce rate trend from 1979 to 2012



Data source from 1979-1994: qtd. in Wang 2001, 176

Data source from 1995-2012: National Bureau of Statistics of China

Table and graph arranged by the author

The national crude divorce rate from 1979 to 2012 summarized in Graph 1 suggests that there has been a continuous increase in crude divorce rate since the economic reform. Significant increase is obviously observed, ranging from 0.32‰ in 1979 to 2.29‰ in 2012. This means that current crude divorce rate in China is almost 7 times higher than the one in 1979. Moreover, there is a rapid rise of crude divorce rate from 2001 to 2004, ranging from 0.98‰ to 1.28‰; it is interesting that the rate significantly increased approximately 1.3 times from 2001 to 2004.

To illustrate this sharp rise in divorce rate from 2001, documenting change in marriage law in China is necessary. In April 28<sup>th</sup> 2001, marriage law was amended in accordance with the decision adopted from the 21<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee of the 9<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress. Amendment of 2001 marriage law extensively differentiates it from the previous marriage law of 1980, making the ambiguous term emotional breakdown as legitimate grounds for divorce.

2001 marriage law is distinctive from 1980 marriage law on areas such as domestic violence, monogamy, and matrimonial property. Concerns such as extramarital affairs and domestic abuse were not specified as acceptable grounds for divorce in previous marriage law of 1980. This indicates that 2001 amendment clearly defines the legitimate reasons for such breakdown. In 1980 marriage law, there are total of 10 articles from Article 24 to 33 for divorce in entire Chapter IV("The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China(1980)", 268-269). On the other hand, the number of articles for divorce increased to the total of 12, from Article 31 to 42 in amended marriage law in 2001.

To see how 2001 amendment of marriage law made the divorce to be more prevalent in contemporary Chinese society, comparing second article of the marriage law Chapter IV for divorce in 1980 and 2001 is necessary. Specific contents of the articles are stated below:

**1980 Marriage Law Chapter IV: Article 25(“The Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China(1980)”, 268)**

**Article 25** When one party insists on divorce, the organizations concerned may try to effect a reconciliation, or the party may appeal directly to the people’s court for divorce.

In dealing with a divorce case, the people’s court should try to bring about a reconciliation between the parties. In cases of complete alienation of mutual affection, and when mediation has failed, divorce should be granted

**2001 Marriage Law Chapter IV: Article 32(“Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China”, npc.gov.cn)**

**Article 32** If one party alone desires a divorce, the organization concerned may carry out mediation or the party may appeal directly to a People’s Court to start divorce proceedings.

In dealing with a divorce case, the People’s Court shall carry out mediation; divorce shall be granted if mediation fails because mutual affection no longer exists.

In one of the following cases, divorce shall be granted if mediation fails:

- (1) where one party commits bigamy or cohabits with another person of the opposite sex;
- (2) where one party indulges in family violence or maltreats or abandons family members ;
- (3) where one party indulges in the gambling, drug taking, etc. and refuses to reform after repeated persuasion;
- (4) where both parties have separated from each other for two full years for lack of mutual affection;
- (5) other cases which lead to the shattering of affection between husband and wife.

Where one party is declared to be missing and the other party starts divorce proceedings, divorce shall be granted.

As seen in the Article 25 from 1980 marriage law above, couples were strongly encouraged to stay together. Organization concerned such as

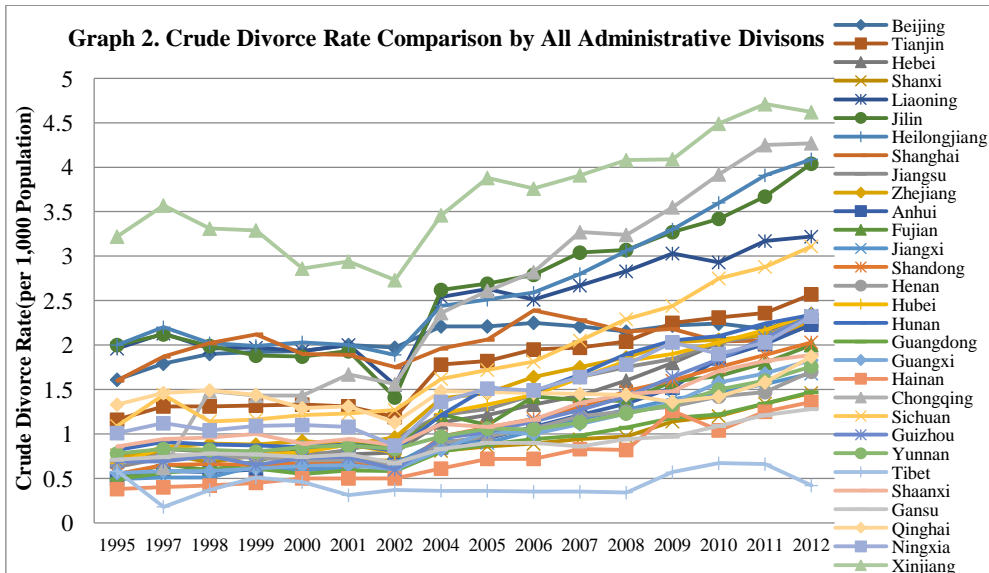
danwei, collective communes, or workforce was responsible for reconciliation of couples on a verge of divorce. By making this process necessary, divorce cases were dragging out in family court for years and divorce was granted only when there is an approval from the organization concerned before 2001 amendment(Gu 2013, 541). Also, there is strong emphasis on reconciliation in 1980 marriage law. On the other hand, the word ‘reconciliation’ is no longer present in Article 32 of 2001 marriage law. This means that couples who have been hindered by the old legal process for divorce could now reach an actual divorce much quicker. Moreover, additional clauses under Article 32 of 2001 marriage law define legitimate reasons for emotional breakdown unlike Article 25 of 1980 marriage law; this includes clauses on bigamy, domestic violence, and having had two years of separation.

Before 2001 amendment of marriage law, a couple had to go through difficult reconciliation process and had to get a reference from an employer or supervisor as part of the divorce procedure. Even though 1980 marriage law guaranteed uncontested divorce, the divorce process was time consuming or sometimes never reached to an actual separation. After the new law, such emotional breakdowns are specified so that people can have clarified legitimate reasons for divorce. In addition, because the reconciliation process by organization concerned is excluded from divorce process after the amendment of marriage law in 2001, bureaucratic part of



divorce has also been streamlined. In other words, divorce process became much simpler and more clarified, causing the nationwide hike in crude divorce rate from 2001 in China.

## 2. Regional divorce rate trend



Data source from 1995-2012: National Bureau of Statistics of China  
Table and graph arranged by the author

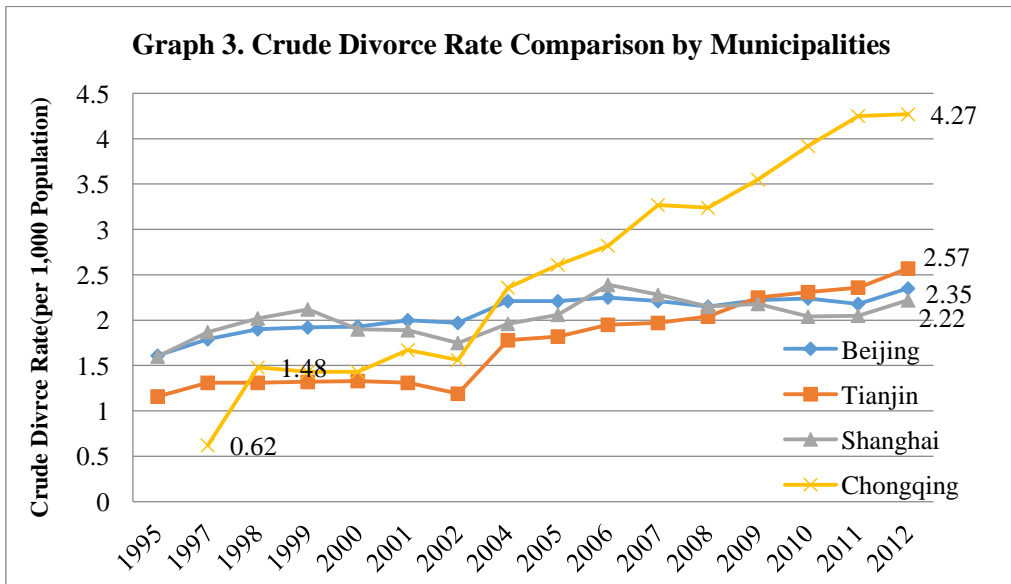
Because China covers vast geographical area, considering regional differences in divorce rate along with the national trend is important. Above Graph 2 shows crude divorce rate comparison by all administrative divisions from 1995 to 2012.

Although many of the administrative divisions have steady increase in divorce rate, areas such as Xinjiang, northeast China, and metropolitan cities stand out by having relatively high divorce rate. Tibet on the other

hand exhibits the lowest divorce rate, which is obviously shown in the very bottom line.

For clearer visualization of the regional disparities in divorce rate, separate graphs for metropolitan municipalities, autonomous region, and northeast China are shown below.

### 3. Divorce rate in metropolitan cities



Data source from 1995-2012: National Bureau of Statistics of China Table and graph arranged by the author

Crude divorce rate for each municipality from 1995 to 2012 is summarized in Graph 3; crude divorce rate in Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin converged in 2009, whereas Chongqing does not follow the trend of three other municipalities. After 2009, Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin exhibit similar path with 2012 divorce rate ranging from 2.22‰ to 2.57‰. With an

exception of Xinjiang and northeastern region, divorce rate in all the municipalities are observed to be relatively high.

To account for the reasons why divorce rate is high among metropolitan municipalities, views from various angles must be considered. First of all, concentrated economic growth could contribute to relatively high divorce rate in metropolitan municipalities. China's economic reform policy initiated in 1978 began by setting up the special economic zones in coastal cities. Because coastal cities in China such as Tianjin and Shanghai are the very first beneficiaries of the economic reform, wealth concentration in these areas over other administrative divisions was inevitable. On the relationship between economic wealth in a region and a divorce rate, Wang and Zhou found the positive association between per capita GDP and divorce in their 2010 research(Wang and Zhou 2010, 266). This suggests that economic growth will contribute to increase in divorce, which currently seems to occur in metropolitan municipalities. According to the statistics published in 2013 by the national statistical bureau, Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai ranked for top three municipalities with highest per capita gross regional product; Beijing 87,475 yuan, Tianjin 93,173 yuan, and Shanghai 85,373 yuan respectively(National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2013). Applying Wang and Zhou's finding to this statistics, high divorce rate in metropolitan municipalities is an expected phenomenon.

Furthermore, rapid growth and institutional restructuring after the reform intensified the initial privatization and commodification of the economy in urban area. This puts more significance on the role of money and property in the city. For instance, improvement in housing conditions and development of housing market since the economic reform made possible for many urban Chinese to consider a divorce with loosened worry about where to live after the divorce(Wang 2001, 182). This could have contributed in rising divorce rate in metropolitan areas since the reform.

In addition, change in people's perception on quality of life and emphasis on personal happiness could be another important contributing factor of increasing divorce rate in metropolitan area(Wang 2001, 182). Exposure to new ideas and foreign cultures since the economic reform brought changes in standards for good life and happiness among citizens living in these areas. Being the biggest beneficiaries of the economic reform, this effect is much greater in metropolitan areas than in rural areas. In fact, factors such as unsatisfied sex life, extramarital affairs, and different career goals newly emerged as reasons for divorce in the 1980s and 1990s(Wang 2001, 183). In current Chinese society, a young mistress became a status symbol that reflects the business owner's wealth and high position(Gu 2013, 552). Additionally, a study sponsored by the Institute of Sexuality and Gender, Renmin University, found that extramarital affairs are the number one cause of divorce(qtd. in Gu 2013, 542). This study confirmed that

number of divorces caused by extramarital affair is much higher in developed coastal cities(Gu 2013, 543).

Undoubtedly, urban Chinese have become more consumer-oriented and westernized since the market reforms, especially in metropolitan cities. With economic reforms and improvements in living standards, the shift from collectivism to individualism occurred in city areas(Xu, Zhang, and Amato 2011, 289). Being a financial hub, center of administration, and a coastal city, Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin most clearly exhibit the prevalence of individualism more than any other areas in China. Heightened individualism in these metropolitan areas resulted in higher tolerance for premarital sex, non-marital cohabitation, and even divorce among people(Xu, Zhang, and Amato 2011, 289). Such traditional values on sexuality are being challenged with increasing development.

Consequently, center of family relations shifted to husband-wife from parent-child in current Chinese society. Likewise, marriage quality in contemporary China became much more important for addressing the issue of marriage and divorce, as the state started to retreat more and more from the private sphere since the reform.

To account for above social changes and value shift among citizens of urban area in more detail, Erwin analyzes two telephone counseling hotlines centers based in Shanghai. According to Erwin, hotlines have contributed to a vibrant public discussion of family and sexual matters in

urban China(Erwin 2000, 147). In other words, these hotlines represent China's modern openness. Counseling hotline was firstly formed in Tianjin. Then, Beijing and Shanghai followed Tianjin's path. Although early advice hotlines were mainly for preventing suicide, the perceived purpose of the hotlines has shifted in recent years; other than crisis intervention, it provides advice on love, marriage, family, and sexuality(Erwin 2000, 150).

Hotlines Erwin observed are Shanghai-based The Women and Children's Hotline and The Psychological Health Hotline. Calls received in The Women and Children's Hotline defined main problems among dialing women as marital problem concerned infidelity and divorce(Erwin 2000, 154). Even though this observation was taken place in the early and mid 1990s, the topics being talked about over the hotline shows that disclosure of marriage and family problems in the public sphere is becoming more prevalent in urban area. In addition, Erwin's findings from The Psychological Health Hotlines also show that similar problems are most commonly discussed(Erwin 2000, 155). Issues related to sex and sexual fulfillment both inside and outside of marriage were the common problems being discussed over the hotline. This indicates that personal matters and private concerns are more public than ever before, and the extensive discussion of personal well-being seems to reject the official state power and influence in daily life(Erwin 2000, 170). Pursuit of greater personal

fulfillment arose shortly after the economic reform, and this effect is much greater among the three metropolitan cities mentioned above.

After the reform, digression of Chinese government from the private lives of people marked the start of prevailing individualism in urban area. It is significant to note that individualism is in the center of pursuit of happiness; this happiness and quality of life, including marital quality and expectation break the barrier of divorce that existed before 1980. Thus, in metropolitan cities where they received the most influence from new outside values, divorce seems to flourish much more easily than other areas of China.

Overall, combination of economic wealth and socio-cultural consequence since the reform brought about dramatic changes especially to metropolitan area, contributing to relatively high divorce rate in particular metropolitan cities.

Unfortunately, above discussion cannot fully illustrate the reason for exploding divorce rate in Chongqing. Graph 3 summarized change in Chongqing's divorce rate ever since its establishment in 1997. Surprisingly, the rate started as low as 0.62‰ in 1997 and reached 4.27‰ in 2012.

To figure responsible factor for above statistics on Chongqing's divorce, it is important to understand the background of Chongqing's separation to municipality. Chongqing is different from three other municipalities because it has fairly a short history as an independent

municipality. There exist both political and economical reasons for Chongqing's separation; however, the more immediate genesis of Chongqing's elevation to provincial status lay in considerations of both its industrial development and the development of the Three Gorges Dam Project(Hong 2004, 450).

Even though Chongqing's independence was to support Chongqing in terms of economic growth, its economic performance for first few years after the independence was rather below the expectation. The concentration of state-owned enterprise(SOE in short) seems to be the reason for this disappointing achievement; historically, large number of SOEs was built in Chongqing, particularly those associated with the defense industries. And statistics covering years after Chongqing's independence show that local SOEs continued to deteriorate after several years of making a loss. In 1997, 44.3% of the largest SOEs and 55.5% of the state-controlled shareholding enterprises suffered a total loss of 2.64 billion yuan(Hong 2004, 452). Such poor performance of the SOEs led to a rapidly growing number of laid off workers in Chongqing. From 1997 to 1998, the number of people who received relief subsidies in urban areas jumped approximately 2.3 times from 68,753 to 159,504(Hong 2004, 453). Interestingly, the rise of divorce rate over the same period of time in Chongqing ranges from 0.62‰ to 1.48‰, which also indicates approximately 2.3 times increase. And because there is a positive correlation associated with unemployment and divorce,



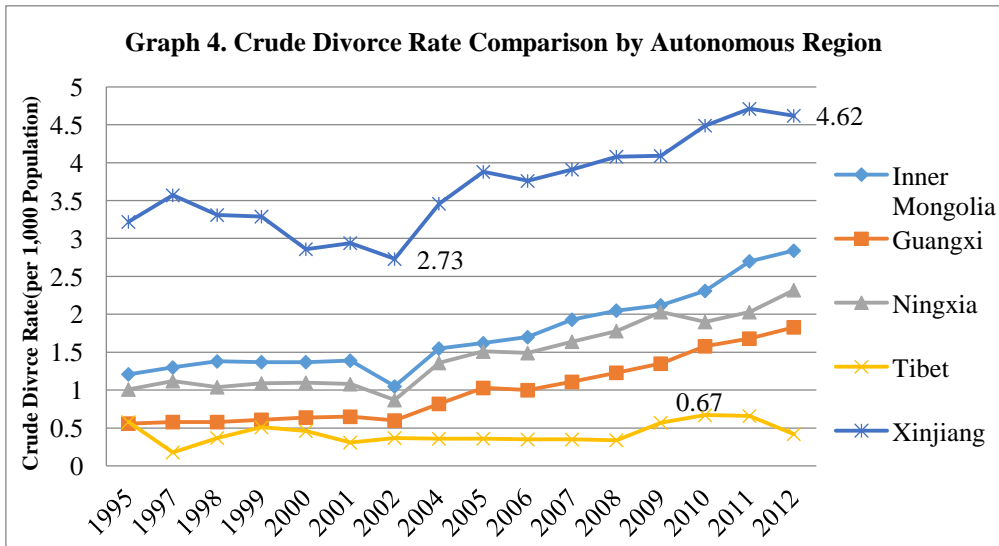
hundreds of thousands of unemployed SOE workers from disintegration and restructuring process of SOEs in Chongqing could be a factor contributing to such hike in divorce rate from 1997 to 1998. Because Chongqing's SOE restructuring is very much similar to the northeastern region's problem, This aspect of Chongqing will be addressed more under the section that accounts for Northeast China.

From 1998 to 2000, divorce rate in Chongqing seems to be stabilized. However, divorce rate is on the rise again from 2000 on. The year 2000 is significant for Chongqing because this is the year the government launched the campaign to Open Up the West. This western development plan has been strategically important for Chongqing ever since. Then, what would be the relationship between the Open Up the West campaign and the divorce rate in Chongqing? The western development plan was a rescue for Chongqing to take off from the difficulties it experienced ever since the elevation to provincial-level municipality; the central government would seem to have some preference for favoring city economies, like Chongqing, over provincial or sub-provincial economies such as Sichuan or Chengdu(Hong 2004, 464). As a result in 2002, Chongqing's GDP had increased by 68.9%; the added value of industry had increased by 80.5%; the total value of consumption had risen by 71%; local government revenue had increased 1.7 times; all compared with 1996(Hong 2004, 464). These

results suggest that Chongqing's economic takeoff started in 2000 along with the launch of western development policy from the central government.

Then, referring back to the discussion above on three other municipalities, Chongqing's economic development from 2000 could have accelerated the inflow of foreign culture and exposure to new ideas. Similar to three other municipalities, a survey conducted in 2004 by Chongqing Marriage Crisis Service Center suggests that extramarital affair is the leading cause of the divorce taking up 70% of the divorce cases they investigated(Wang, 2004). Overall, grounds for Chongqing's high divorce rate seem to be related to both economic growth and unemployment. Unlike other metropolitan municipalities in China, Chongqing has the highest divorce rate as its historical legacy of being an old industrial base is being closely intertwined with the economic growth policy in Chongqing.

#### 4. Divorce rate in autonomous region



Data source from 1995-2012: National Bureau of Statistics of China  
Table and graph arranged by the author

The crude divorce rate from 1995 to 2012 summarized in Graph 4 indicates two interesting patterns in autonomous regions. First, the rate is extraordinary in Xinjiang, ranked the highest among all autonomous regions as well as all other provinces in China. Xinjiang's crude divorce rate ranges from the lowest 2.73‰ to highest 4.62‰. On the contrary, a fairly constant rate is observed in Tibet. Highest crude divorce rate in Tibet over the past two decades is 0.67‰, which is the lowest value in whole China. Wang and Zhou relate high crude divorce rate in Xinjiang to region's ethnic composition and cultural tradition, suggesting culture of ethnic minorities could be a factor responsible for distinct divorce trends in autonomous regions (Wang and Zhou 2010, 261).

To account for high divorce rate in Xinjiang in terms of its culture, it is important to note the orthodox Islamic attitude towards divorce and Xinjiang's local practices that encourage divorce. First of all, Islamic culture does not regard divorce as disgraceful, and women can easily find economic support after divorce(Zhou 2013, 27). In fact, a divorced woman in Islamic societies around the world historically are not necessarily been a woman scorned(Benson 1993, 241). Moreover, teachings written in Koran state that divorce is not regarded as disgraceful for women(Yi and Deqing 2000, 217). In addition, the Islamic religion approves of polygamy, allowing men to have up to four wives and to divorce their wives easily(Yi and Deqing 2000, 217). Thus, the influence of religious approval of divorce seems to contribute to high divorce rate among Xinjiang Uygurs. Yet, the question remains whether other Islam based minorities in China such as Huis and Kazakhs also have the high divorce rates. Interestingly, the answer is no. Both Huis and Kazakhs share the similar Islamic beliefs and traditions, however, their divorce rates remain far below that of Xinjiang Uygur's(Yi and Deqing 2000, 217). This suggests that high divorce rate in Xinjiang can be addressed by Uygur's distinct practice or tradition in combination with the orthodox Islamic teachings on divorce.

Even though Xinjiang Islamic society is not totally beyond the orthodox Islamic norms, there exist such marriage practices distinctively local to Xinjiang Uygurs(Benson 1993, 242). According to Uygur

informants who work at the Family Planning Office, the divorce rate among Uygurs in northern city such as Turpan is low, though it is high in southern city such as Kashgar(Rudelson 1998, 88). This confirms that north-south divide in local marriage tradition is contributing to high divorce rate in Xinjiang.

To go in to the more details about Xinjiang's distinct practice related to divorce, there is a claim that Uygur women married many times over, thereby increasing their value on the marriage market(Benson 1993, 242). However, this does not apply to whole Xinjiang; it is known to be a common practice solely limited to southern area. Turpan Uygurs illustrated that men in southern cities such as Kashgar marry beautiful women to gain prestige(Rudelson 1998, 88). Thus, the more beautiful the women are, there existed higher chance for divorces; in south, beautiful women have been married nine or ten times, initiating divorces to get better husbands if unhappy in their present marriages(Rudelson 1998, 88).

Moreover, Uygurs in Turpan explained that divorce is much more common in southern Xinjiang because there is a fewer betrothal gift being exchanged for marriages, making divorce not as expensive(Rudelson 1998, 88). These findings from Rudelson's work are consistent to the anecdotal account and articles quoted in Benson's research. For instance, from the article published in China on marriage and divorce in Kashgar 1985, out of about 80 participated Uygurs workers at Kashgar Cotton Spinning and

Weaving in this research, 35% had been married twice; 11% had married three times and two individuals had married 4 times. When separated by gender, 41% of the 39 men had married twice, 12% had married three times(Benson 1993, 242). Of the 41 women, 10 had been married twice, and 4 had been married 3 times, but none had married 4 times or more(Benson 1993, 242). Though this study is very limited, it does offer a possibility that relatively relaxed and eased attitude toward divorce for both men and women is prevalent in southern Xinjiang.

Furthermore, Yi and Deqing(2000) note that Uygur women can return to their natal homes to obtain financial and emotional support after divorce. Also, arrangements for the care of children after divorce in Uygur society are generally flexible(Yi and Deqing 2000, 217), reducing the cost of divorce.

In sum, combination of orthodox Islam tradition that advocates divorce and southern Xinjiang's distinct marriage practice seems to be responsible for granting Xinjiang the notorious status of the highest divorce rate in China. Whether this trend would continue is a matter to be monitored over time. Overall, divorce seems to be more common among Islamic Uygurs, whereas counterparts such as Kazakhs and Huis have low divorce rate despite sharing the basis of orthodox Islam tradition.

Unlike Xinjiang, Tibet is on the other side of the extreme; it has the lowest divorce rate among all 31 provinces in China. In Tibet, marriage

and divorce is different for each social stratum. Therefore, the system of marriage and divorce cannot be understood outside the framework of stratification. Hierarchical strata in Tibet are differentiated into two major status; aristocratic lord and serf. Demographically, most of the population belongs to the stratum of serfs except approximately 300 aristocratic families(Goldstein 1971, 65). Because serfs account for the majority of the Tibetan population, marriage tradition and divorce pattern of serfs could be the useful index to illustrate possible explanation for divorce phenomenon in Tibet.

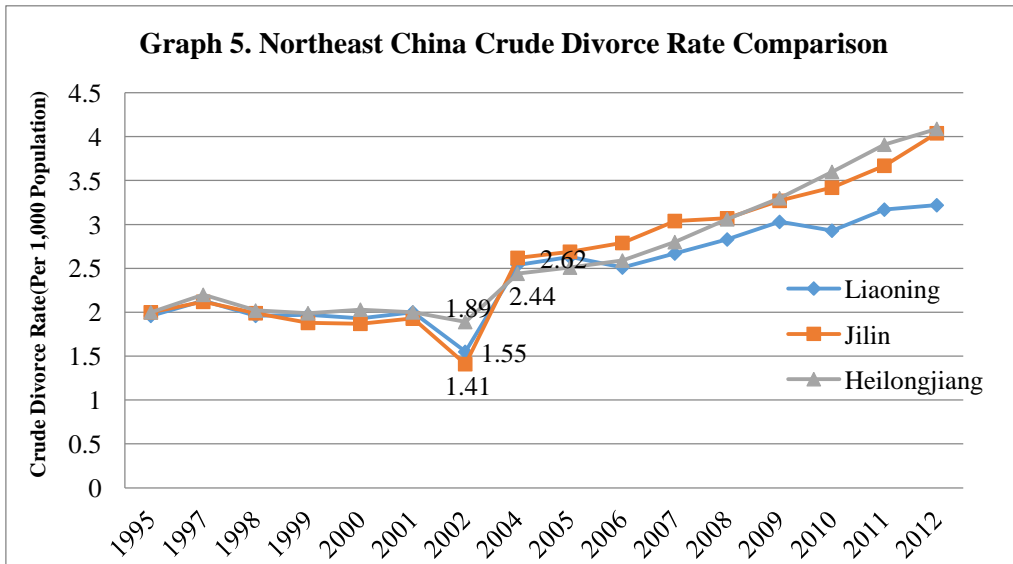
Serfs in Tibet are subdivided into two classes; Tre-ba and Du-jung. Tre-ba status is superior to Du-jung in terms of prestige, political authority, and even wealth(Goldstein 1971, 66). Marriage in Tre-ba serfs are known to be more stable because they are closely related to continuity of families and estates as well as other properties(B. Hong 2004, 225). Tre-ba serfs strategically apply the practice of polyandry and polygamy to protect their land from being dispersed and divided by the process of marriage(B. Hong 2004, 226). On a contrary, Du-jung serfs are not bounded to land. Therefore, the importance of continuing the family becomes much more trivial among Du-jung stratum(B. Hong 2004, 226). Du-jung serfs lack the solid material grounds for polyandry or polygamy, which simplifies the marriage process to monogamy(B. Hong 2004, 227). Because Du-jungs have no property to pay betrothal gifts or dowry, couples willing to marry and come to live

together without the formal procedure. Thus, the divorce procedure is also absent when Du-jung marriages are disintegrated(Ma 2001, 111).

Based on the discussion above, divorce in Tibet is easier, simpler, and higher among the group of poor serfs. Because there is no formal procedure for marriage and divorce for poor Du-jung serfs, there is a possibility that Tibet's actual divorce rate could be higher than what is shown in the official statistics. In fact, there had been no restrictive marriage registration system in Tibet for a very long time, making divorce a relatively simple issue(Ma 2001, 110). It seems that grey area in official divorce statistics for Tibet is created taking marriage and divorce tradition of Tibetans into account. Though the official statistics suggest the low divorce rate in Tibet, the phenomenon seems to be limited to the affluent serfs or to the aristocracy. Further systematical and longitudinal research on marriage and divorce of Tibet should be encouraged to fill this gap in statistics.



## 5. Divorce rate in northeast China



Data source from 1995-2012: National Bureau of Statistics of China  
Table and graph arranged by the author

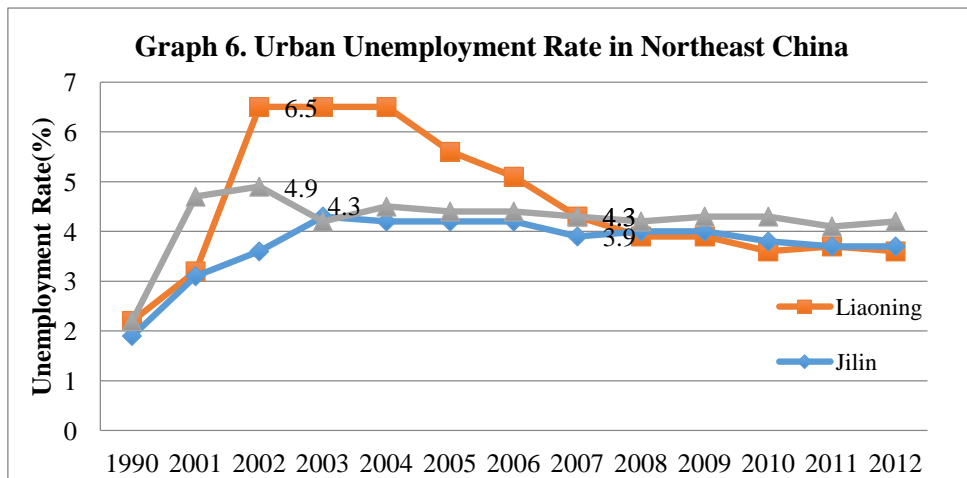
Crude divorce rate for northeast China is summarized in Graph 5; divorce rate seems to be very much converged in all three northeastern provinces as their data similarly overlaps. Interesting point to note from the graph is that the northeastern provinces experienced sudden hike in divorce rate from 2002. Between 2002 and 2004, divorce rate in Jilin and Liaoning increased about 1.9 times and 1.7 times respectively. In Heilongjiang's case, the rate ranges from 1.89‰ to 2.44‰, suggesting 1.3 times increase over the same time of period. To account for the convergence and increasing trend of divorce from 2000 in northeast China, it is important to understand the background of this region and related policy.

For China, large unemployment occurred around state owned enterprise(SOE) after the reform. Chinese government began to privatize SOEs for the purpose of economic restructuring, consequently producing major labor dislocation. The laid off workers resulted from the aggressive privatization of SOEs are also known as xiagang. Such massive unemployment of SOE workers started in late 1997, when Chinese government decided to shut down the SOEs that were not efficient and unprofitable(Hu et al. 2010, 718). As a result of this SOE restructuring, about 25 million workers were laid off from 1995 to 2002(Hu et al. 2010, 718). More importantly, among the unemployed about 60% or more are female workers(Hu et al. 2010, 717). So, this makes xiagang women an important research subject for examining the relationship between unemployment and marital quality in northeast China and Chongqing, where xiagang problem is a prevalent phenomenon.

Both Chongqing and northeast China are known as the largest old industrial base that exercised substantial influence over the economy during the Maoist period. These regions lost the economic power since the reform, which shifted the focus of regional policy from the inland areas such as northeast China to coastal areas. In 1997, central government launched a three year restructuring plan on SOEs, leaving considerable consequence in old industrial bases like the northeast. However, the real problem for this region came in 2002; according to the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report, it

emphasized to support the northeastern region and other old industrial bases in accelerating their structure adjustment and transformation(Zhang 2008, 113). Since the initiation of revitalizing policies, over 90% of the SOEs in northeast have been reformed to be shareholding system(Zhang 2008, 114). In spite of such success in restructuring SOEs, it continues to release large number of unemployment in northeast China. Combination of deterioration of northeast old industrial base and intended SOEs reforms for the future development resulted in very pervasive unemployment across the northeastern region.

Graph 5 shows the hike in divorce rate in northeast China from 2002 to 2004. To figure whether there is an overlapping hike in unemployment rate between 2002 and 2004, graph on urban unemployment rate in northeast China is constructed below:



Data source from 1990-2012: National Bureau of Statistics of China  
Table and graph arranged by the author

The case of Liaoning and Heilongjiang reached the peak of urban unemployment in 2002. At peaks, Liaoning's urban unemployment rate is recorded at 6.5% and at 4.9% respectively in Heilongjiang. Jilin reached its highest in 2003, with the urban unemployment rate of 4.3%. The highest point of urban unemployment rate in all three northeastern provinces occurred between 2002 and 2004. Interestingly, divorce rate in Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang also experienced a hike between 2002 and 2004. Similar to the case of Chongqing, massive labor dislocation related to SOE reform seems to be responsible for high divorce rate in northeast China.

To further support this point, illustration on the relationship between unemployment and divorce is shown as followed:

Table 1. Studies Included in Subsection "Marital Instability"(qtd. in Ström 2003, 407)

Author(s), Year	Country/ Countries	Data Type	Sample Size and Observa- tional Unit	Method(s)	Results
Angell 1936	United States	Cross section	50 families	Qualitative interviews	+, -
Cherlin 1979	United States	Longitudinal	2,126 women	Regression analysis	+
Conger et al. 1990	United States	Cross section	76 couples	Descriptive statistics, path analysis	+
Jensen and Smith 1990	Denmark	Longitudinal	3,024 married couples	Regression analysis	+
Komarovsky 1940	United States	Cross section	59 families	Qualitative interviews	+, -
Lampard 1994	Great Britain	Event data	4,901 individ- uals	Hazard re- gression	+
Ross and Sawhill 1975	United States	Longitudinal	1,894 couples	Regression analysis	+
Sander 1992	Great Britain	Cross section	6,862 men	Regression analysis	+
Starkey 1996	United States	Longitudinal	1,514 families	Hazard re- gression	+

NOTE.—A + indicates a positive relationship between unemployment and divorce propensity, and a - indicates a negative relationship.

Above literatures in the table provide evidence for a positive relationship between unemployment and divorce. Angell and Komarovsky found that strong cohesion in the marital relationship prior to unemployment actually strengthened the relationship even after the unemployment(qtd. in Ström 2003, 408). However, all the other literature in Table 1 shows the evidence for strong positive relationship between unemployment and divorce. Ross and Sawhill found that unstable male incomes are a risk factor for divorce(qtd. in Ström 2003, 406). Similar to Ross and Sawhill's findings, Jenson and Smith found that male unemployment is associated with a greater risk of divorce, while the risk appears to be unrelated to gross household incomes(qtd. in Ström 2003, 407). In addition, Cherlin, Sander, Starkey and Lampard also suggest that low incomes or economic hardship in combination with unemployment are a risk factor for divorce regardless of gender(qtd. in Ström 2003, 406).

In sum, support for the positive relationship between unemployment and divorce is much stronger among existing literatures. Yet, above literature merely exhibit the cases of the West. Then, the question follows; can this relationship be applied to China?

Interestingly, the research examining the relationship between unemployment and xiangang females in Chengdu found that China's case is congruent with findings from the Western literature(Hu et al. 2010, 731). Their survey result shows that being unemployed and experiencing

economic hardship substantially contribute to decreased marital affection and increased marital tension, whereas the opposite was true for being reemployed(Hu et al. 2010, 730). In other words, loss of wives' income to the family by unemployment could be the source of marital conflict in China, because wives' income constitutes substantial amount of income to the family (Hu et al. 2010, 720).

Simply put, positive correlation between unemployment and divorce could be the rationale behind the high divorce rate in old industrial bases like Chongqing and northeastern region. As shown by the Graph 6, urban unemployment rate in all three northeastern provinces reached highest between 2002 and 2004. Although not perfectly proportionate, divorce rate also hiked the most between the same periods of time. Hence, high divorce rate in old industrial bases like northeast China and Chongqing are likely to be connected to the massive unemployment caused by the aggressive SOE restructuring policy.

## **Chapter IV. Concluding remarks and implication**

Although getting a divorce in China used to be a complicated time consuming process, this is no longer the case in current Chinese society; legislative changes over the past decades streamlined the divorce procedures and economic growth since the reform resulted in exposure to new ideas and foreign cultures. Now, uncontested divorces can be settled in a matter of minutes and factors such as domestic violence, unhappy sex life, and extramarital affairs could be the legitimate grounds for divorce in China. Even if the divorce rate is still low judging from the Western standards, consistent increase since the 1980 suggests that divorce in China is a newly emerged social phenomenon. Regarding this issue, this paper examines the nationwide and regional divorce trend in China over the past two decades.

There are many rationales responsible for the continuous increase in divorce rate in China and for such regional disparity. Legislative changes on marriage law and economic growth related consequence since the reform seem to account for the nationwide and urban - mainly the metropolitan areas - increase of the divorce rate in China. For autonomous regions, religious and cultural traditions are considered as major reasons for high or low divorce rates. For instance, combination of orthodox Islamic tradition and distinctive local marriage practices contribute to high divorce rate in Xinjiang. In Tibet, stratification in social stratum and different marriage practice respectively are responsible for low divorce rate. Relatively high

divorce rate in northeast and western part of China is illustrated by connecting the level of unemployment to divorce rate at certain periods of time. In this part of China, SOE restructuring seems to influence the unemployment rate the most, which in return pushes up the divorce rate of this region.

In sum, many different rationales and reasons are intertwined with one another, producing interesting regional disparities of divorce trend in China. However, important aspect to remember is that all divorce associated factors indicated in this research are contributing to increasing divorce rate in China. In other words, whether the cause of divorce is accompanied by the effect of culture or policy changes since the reform, not a single factor contributed to decrease of divorce rate in China other than Tibet.

This implies that future prospect of divorce rate in China is definitely on the rise. Now, the question is if China would follow the Western divorce trend or eventually create the unique Chinese divorce pattern. Many speculate that divorce pattern and rate in China would later converge to the Western path. However, this is too soon to judge; constant monitoring of divorce rate and continuous research on factors for divorce in China are needed to discover better answers to this remaining question.



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## 국문초록

### 1980년대 이후 중국의 이혼율 추세와 지역적 차이

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개혁개방 이후의 눈부신 경제성장은 국제적으로 중국의 지위를 상승시킴과 동시에 중국 사회에 여러 문제점들을 양산하기 시작했다. 대표적으로 이혼은 1978 년 이후 현재까지 약 7 배의 성장률을 기록하면서, 개혁기 이후 중국은 정치경제적인 측면뿐만 아니라 사회적인 부분 역시 격변하고 있다는 것을 알 수 있다. 따라서, 본 논문은 지금까지 많은 주목을 받지 못했던 이혼 현상에 초점을 맞추므로써 현대 중국 사회에 대한 이해 증진에 도움이 되고자 한다.

현재까지 지속적으로 증가하고 있는 중국의 이혼율은 이것이 지난 20 년간 어떻게 변화하였는지, 그리고 이혼율의 국가적, 지역적 추세는 어떠한지에 대한 의문들을 남긴다. 본 논문은 국가통계수치와 타 학자들의 연구를 통하여 중국 이혼율의 국가적, 지역적 추세를 나타내고, 또한 그 차이에 대한 타당한 답안을 제시하고자 한다.

중국의 증가하는 이혼율과 그것의 국가적, 지역적 차이는 크게 법의 변화, 경제성장정책의 결과, 그리고 문화적 차이로 설명될 수 있다. 전체적인 차원에서 이혼율은 개혁개방 이후의 결혼법 제정, 그리고 새로운 가치 유입과 같은 경제성장정책의 결과가 함께 작용하면서 증가하였다 볼 수 있다. 하지만 특히 이혼율이 높거나 낮은 직할시, 소수민족자치구, 그리고 동북지역은



위에 제시된 부분을 적용하여 분석하기에는 다소 무리가 있다. 직할시의 높은 이혼율은 많은 부분 경제성장정책의 결과로 설명할 수 있지만, 소수민족자치구와 동북지역은 문화적, 역사적 차이가 정책과 얽혀 이혼율의 차이를 만들어 낸다. 대표적으로 신장과 티벳은 중국 내 가장 높고 낮은 이혼율을 나타내는데, 신장의 경우는 남쪽 지방의 결혼풍습과 이슬람의 종교적 가르침이 높은 이혼율에 기여하고 있다. 티벳 역시 고유한 귀족문화와 사회계층 차이가 낮은 이혼율을 만들어 낸다. 동북지역의 경우 마오시기의 잔재로 국유기업이 많이 남아있던 상태로, 타 지역에 비교하여 국유기업 개혁정책으로 인한 실업이 지역사회에 미친 영향이 매우 컸다. 실업과 이혼이 가진 밀접한 관계는 개혁개방 이후 높은 실업률의 타격을 입은 동북지역의 이혼율 증가에 상당부분 기여하였다.

결과적으로, 각 지역마다 이혼현상에 대한 상이한 기여요인이 존재하지만, 티벳을 제외한 다른 모든 지역의 이혼율은 개혁개방 이후 꾸준한 증가추세에 있다는 것을 알 수 있다. 이러한 점은 앞으로 이혼현상이 현대 중국 사회를 이해함에 있어 중요한 부분이 될 것이라는 점을 시사한다.

**주요어** : 중국, 이혼, 지역적 차이, 국가적 추세, 가족  
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