

RESEARCH NOTE

Disaster Tradition and Change: Remarriage and Family Reconstruction in a Post-Earthquake Community in the People's Republic of China*

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INTRODUCTION

On July 28, 1976, a devastating earthquake struck the Chinese city of Tangshan, killing over 200,000 and injuring more than 160,000 people. Following this disaster, researchers from the Institute of Sociology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing began studying the reconstruction of the survivors' families through rapid and extensive remarriage. The study focused on Lunan District, one of the five urban districts in Tangshan Municipality.¹ The earthquake left over 3,000 people in this district widowed. Within three years, over 2,000 of them had remarried. Data on one neighbourhood in Lunan District reveal that remarriage accounted for 14.7 percent of the total marriages during the 1977-1983 period. In contrast, China's remarriages as a share of all marriages averaged only 0.6 percent annually in 1978-1983 (CSA, 1989:22).

The extent and rapidity of post-earthquake remarriages in Tangshan rise some fascinating sociological questions. This paper presents perspectives and evidence on why so many remarriages occurred in a society where remarriage was traditionally considered a violation of established norms. It also examines why some widows and widowers from

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¹ Tangshan Municipality had five urban districts, each of which was divided into a number of *Jiedao* (streets or wards) administered by *Jiedao Banshichu* (ward offices). Each ward was subdivided into a number of units, which were governed separately by *Jumin Weiyuanhui* (resident or neighbourhood committees), which in turn look after individual households. For a more detailed description of the residential structure in Chinese cities, see Whyte and Parish (1984:22-23).

the Tangshan earthquake remained unmarried. Through these analyses, this study explores interactions between a natural disaster and changing social norms in facilitating remarriage of the widowed in a Chinese community.

First of all, this paper briefly describes the disastrous physical and social impact of the Tangshan earthquake. The second section evaluates how the perspectives of disaster studies on social consequences may apply to remarriages as an adaptive response in the wake of the Tangshan earthquake. We also review the historical and existing arguments and evidence on remarriage of Chinese widows. Section three advances four testable hypotheses derived from the literature review. The fourth section discusses the sample and fieldwork for the research on remarriage in Tangshan. The fifth section presents and interprets the results. Lastly, we discuss the broader significance of this research and draw the conclusions. Physical and Social Impact of the Earthquake.

Early in the morning of July 28, 1976, an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale struck Tangshan Municipality in Hebei Province of China. This was the most devastating earthquake worldwide in recent times,² the estimated death toll in Tangshan and vicinity reached 217,087 (Wu, 1986). Of the 1.2 million population in Tangshan's urban districts, 135,919 persons died, of which 61,423 were male and 74,496 were female (Dai, 1985). According to official statistics, 7,218 families were totally destroyed, and thousands more were broken up. The quake left 4,204 orphans and over 1,000 elderly people with no family member to take care of them (Zhu, 1986:10). There were an estimated 50,000 widows and 70,000 widowers in Tangshan and surrounding areas (Dai, 1984).

Physical reconstruction in Tangshan began soon after the earthquake. In 1978 the city's industrial and agricultural outputs returned to the levels prior to the earthquake. However, the recovery and rehabilitation of human lives was more difficult and complex. To set up the proper context for examining remarriage in Tangshan as a response to a disaster, we review selected studies of the impact of disasters on changes in individual and social behaviors.

THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Social Consequences of Disasters

Erikson (1976:253) has defined a disaster as "an event with a distinctive beginning and a distinctive end; it is by definition extraordinary—a freak of nature, a perversion of the natural process of life." Natural disasters, which include hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, droughts, and so forth, can "cause damages of sufficient severity and

² The Tangshan earthquake killed many more people than any earthquake in recent decades. The Managua earthquake in Nicaragua in December 1972, registering 6.2 on the Richter scale, killed about 15,000 (Rommer and Ledbetter, 1987). With a magnitude of 7.8 on the Richter scale, the earthquake that hit Mexico City in September 1985 claimed nearly 10,000 lives. In November 1988, two severe earthquakes (one measuring 7.6 and the other 7.2 on the Richter scale) killed 730 people and seriously injured 3,472 in China's Yunnan Province (Zheng, 1989:15). In December 1988, a devastating earthquake struck the Soviet Armenia and left a death toll of 45,000 (*Time*, 1988). A strong earthquake (7.1 on the Richter scale) occurred in northern California in October 1989, killing 67 people. A recent devastating earthquake (7.7 on the Richter scale) struck northern Iran in June 1990, claiming at least 45,000 lives (*Time*, 1990).

magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance" (Murphy, 1985:6) Since the 1970s, sociologists interested in disaster studies have shifted from being concerned primarily with the physical aspects of disasters to exploring the social disruption and changes brought about by the physical agent and its impact (Quarantelli, 1978).

Bates *et al.* (1963) have distinguished between the three periods of pre-disaster, disaster, and postdisaster. The pre-disaster period concerns the state (i.e., extent of equilibrium) of a social system prior to the onset of a disaster. The disaster period encompasses warning, impact, and remedy, whereas the postdisaster phase is characterized by recovery and rehabilitation. The outcomes of disaster in terms of adaptive behaviors constitute change from the conditions before the disaster. Bates *et al.* have accounted for this process of change by identifying three independent variables and one intervening variable. *Sociocultural structure* means the values, beliefs, and norms regarding how people should feel and behave. *Personality* includes the biological and psychological attributes of the individual affected by the disaster, as well as his or her particular traumatic experience. The *situation* refers to the immediate physical and social environment of the victimized individual. *Social interaction* referring to the social control process in the disaster context, intervenes with the other three factors. These factors interact to produce certain pattern of behavioral responses to the disaster.

This hypothesis was tested in Bates *et al.*'s study of the impact of Hurricane Audrey on Cameron Parish, Louisiana, in July 1957. The study found increasing bureaucratization of the previously personal social relationships, as the number of secondary groups increased, and some family functions disappeared. These changes, as the study concluded, were already under way before the storm and only accelerated by it; they also were attributable more to the rehabilitation efforts rather than to the disaster itself.

Elder's (1974) study of the Great Depression in the United States has documented the economic impact of the Depression on children through (a) changing the division of labour (e.g., boys seeking jobs in response to family and personal needs); (b) reshaping family relationships (e.g., boys seeking jobs in response to family and personal needs); (b) reshaping family relationships (e.g., mother's power in both middle and working class families was increased); and (c) creating social strains, including uncertain identity and rising emotional sensitivity.

These studies suggest that emotional and behavioral responses to the consequences of tragic events vary according to political, cultural, and geographical conditions. Studies of natural disasters in developing societies tend to focus on assessing the economic impact of relief programs and assistance on physical reconstruction (see D'Souza, 1986; Kolawole, 1987; Mendez, 1986). While a rare study (Ashton *et al.*, 1984) has revealed that a massive food shortage contributed to a demographic crisis of almost 30 million excess deaths during the famine of 1958-1961 in China, there is a lack of studies of how disasters may change the familial and social behaviors in developing or state-socialist societies, and how these changes are either facilitated or constrained by the interaction between the cultural tradition and sociopolitical structure of these societies.

The impact of the Tangshan earthquake on remarriage provides a timely opportunity

to examine the extent to which a natural disaster helped to reshape traditional values and behaviors in a developing and state-socialist society. This working assumption call for a careful review of the existing perspectives and evidence on the idealistic aspects of remarriage of the widowed in Chinese society.

Widow Remarriage in China: Ideal Or Reality?

While the Chinese family and marriage have received much scholarly attention, there are no focused studies of remarriage due to a lack of systematic data. The limited discussion of remarriage in the literature revolves around the central contentious issue of whether and how the sociocultural taboo against remarriage of widows is often violated. According to Olga Lang (1946) and C.K. Yang (1959), two of the earliest students of the Chinese family, remarriage was considered violation of the Confucious cultural ideal that women remain faithful and chaste to their dead husbands. Restrictions on remarriage of widows included the pressure of public opinion, reinforced symbols of the monuments to faithful widows, and the required approval of remarriage by the paternal family and clan head. A widow who wanted to remarry faced such additional constraints as not being allowed to take her children (particularly her sons) or any family property except her own belongings. In essence, the proscription on widow remarriage not only had a deep cultural meaning but reflected social inequality between the two genders in traditional society. Culturally, Chinese widows were supposed to embody and exhibit such values as loyalty and chastity to their first husbands by maintaining widowhood. More important, restrictions on widow remarriage reinforced women's subordinate position to men (husbands, sons) in the family and society. In contrast, there were practically no institutional barriers against remarriage of widowers, except for poverty and old age.

Several earlier studies (Barclay, 1954; Levy, 1956; Wolf and Huang, 1980) have provided arguments and evidence that remarriage was an option for widows under certain circumstances. In rural areas remarriage was frequent, and almost inevitable, if widows were young and lacked grown sons, whereas remarriage of widows among the gentry was frowned upon. Remarriage was also an alternative for the poor peasants who could not afford the dowry of the first marriage (Levy, 1956). Barclay's (1954) historical study of population change in Taiwan has shown frequent remarriage of widows in the 1920s, provided that there were more widows than widowers, and the widows were young.

Wolf and Huang (1980) have argued strongly against the idealized notion that a young widow refused to remarry in order to be commemorated as a *Lie-Nu*.³ Using historical household registers in Taiwan, they confirmed Barclay's census analysis that widows under thirty were more likely to remarry than those over thirty. For the proportion of the widows under 30 who remained unmarried, the two practical reasons were: (1) retaining the rights as the mother of her children and her best hope for old-age support; and (2) maintaining effective control over her husband's share of the family estate to be economically independent. But a young widow was often forced to remarry by her husband's brothers,

³ The two Chinese characters refer to a "virtuous widow" committing suicide for her dead husband; this traditional practice goes back as far as the Western Han Dynasty which lasted from 206 B.C. to 24 A.C. (Barrett, 1985).

who wanted to take away her share of the family property (Wolf and Huang, 1980:226-227).

Stacey (1983) has suggested that the cultural norms, as embodied in the legal code of the Qing Dynasty, was intended to encourage widow chastity by allowing the dead husband's family to appropriate a widow's dowry if she remarried. The unintended consequence was that many poor families to appropriate a widow's dowry if she remarried. The unintended consequence was that many poor families forced widows into remarriages to claim their property or collect a second bride-price (see Stacey, 1983:57-58).

Other recent studies of the Chinese women and elderly have made limited or passing reference to remarriage by highlighting both its ideal and realistic manifestations. Croll (1980:28) has pointed out that widows among peasants and urban poor often remarried for economic reasons. Johnson (1983:14) has emphasized the decision of a widow's in-laws in whether she was to remarry, regardless of the Confucian norm that a widow was supposed to remain faithful to her dead husband, his family and ancestors for life. While the traditional taboo against remarriage of the elderly widowed remained strong in rural places, there was a greater acceptance of remarriage for the widowed at older ages in urban areas (David-Friedmann, 1983:79).

After the Communist Revolution of 1949, the Chinese government made great efforts to improve the status of women both in and outside the family. In 1950 China enacted its first marriage law which provided clear statements aimed at abolishing the so-called feudal norms and marriage practices, and prohibiting interference in the remarriage of widows (Baker, 1979; Engel, 1982). The Chinese government also used the mass media and other forms of public education to promote equal status of husbands and wives in family and social life. Increasing involvement of Chinese women in the labor force helped to improve their social and economic status. The once popular saying, "women hold up half the sky," shows that the Chinese women have come a long way from their subordinate familial position in old China. The legal code and public policy, coupled with more equal employment opportunities for women, have undermined some of the traditional norms underlying the taboo against women making an independent decision in marriage and remarriage.

The literature on social change in China before and after 1949 suggests a lack of empirical evidence on widow remarriage. The post-earthquake situation in Tangshan offers an opportunity to examine more systematically the hypotheses about the effects of social, psychological, and economic factors on remarriage of the widowed in China. In addition, the Tangshan case permits an examination of how the specific factors behind remarriage are mediated by persisting traditional norms and the lingering impact of a natural disaster. More generally, as research in the United States (cf. Cherlin, 1978) has suggested that remarriage is an "incomplete" institution and more likely to lead to divorce than first marriage, we also use the Tangshan data to evaluate the unstable factors in remarriage in a post-disaster situation.

HYPOTHESES

Research on marriage and the family in Chinese society demonstrates inconsistency and mismatch between the traditional ideal constraining remarriage and the realistic conditions conducive to remarriage. Given this basic premise, we advance four hypotheses which will be tested with the Tangshan data.

Hypothesis 1: The rapid and extensive remarriage in Tangshan was caused primarily by urgent economic and social needs for partners and support of both young and old in the wake of a natural disaster.

Hypothesis 2: Given the closely integrated Chinese family and politically controlled social system, family members, peers, and institutional intervention played a role in facilitating remarriage of the widowed.

Hypothesis 3: Widowers were more likely to remarry than widows and to marry women previously unmarried, and younger widows were more likely to remarry than older ones, due to (a) the lingering effect of the traditional proscription on widow remarriage, and (b) the conventional practice of men marrying women younger than themselves.

Hypothesis 4: Such tensions as uncertain identity and emotional sensitivity created by a natural disaster, coupled with remarriage being an "incomplete" institution, tended to make earthquake-induced remarriages unstable and lead to divorces.

THE SAMPLE AND FIELDWORK

Research on remarriage and family reconstruction in Tangshan had three phases. The purpose of the first phase was to obtain information about the impact of the earthquake on the population in Tangshan in order to select a sample for study. In December 1983, more than seven years after the earthquake, a small research team from the Institute of Sociology in the Chinese Academy of social sciences visited the various government agencies of Tangshan Municipality, including the Trade Union of Tangshan, the Civil Affairs Department of Tangshan, and the People's Courts of Tangshan and Lunan District⁴. The group also visited six neighborhood ward offices in Lunan District. Based on information obtained through these visits, the research group selected two neighborhoods—*Wenhua Beijie* (North Cultural Street) and *Fuxingjie* (Fortune Star Street). Lunan District was chosen as the study site because (a) it was the epicenter of the earthquake; (b) a great number of families was broken, with approximately 3,000 men and women widowed; and (c) a high remarriage rate was observed after the earthquake.

⁴The Trade Union of Tangshan Municipality was responsible for the social welfare of the workers. The Civil Affairs Department was in charge of taking care of the orphans, the disabled and childless elderly from the earthquake. The People's Courts processed divorce cases of those who had remarried after the disaster.

The second phase of the survey, which began in January 1984, focused on interviewing the 100 remarried couples in which either the husband or wife had been widowed. Ten college students in the social sciences joined the research team from Beijing as interviewers who were briefed on the purpose of the study and trained to conduct the interviews. Remarried couples who had a harmonious relationship were interviewed together. Separate interviews were conducted with husbands and wives who were experiencing remarital problems and did not want to answer questions in each other's presence. Using a prepared questionnaire, the interviewers checked off the standard items on the spot and completed answers to the open-ended questions after the interviews. The average interview lasted three hours, and it took 15 days to interview all 100 couples. Most of the subjects were open and willing to answer questions. Children, step-children, relatives, and friends were interviewed separately to identify their attitudes toward remarriage of the widowed.

The third and last phase of the fieldwork was intended to identify factors behind the decisions of some widowed not to remarry. For this purpose, a nonrandom sample of 343 widowers and widows who remained unremarried were interviewed in September 1984, and these interviews lasted 20 days. The findings from the third phase of the study would complement the interviews with the 100 remarried couples in revealing more fully how the earthquake and traditional barriers led to different social behaviors under the same post-disaster circumstances. Main results from all phases of the research will be presented and interpreted here.

There were two potential biases in the sample of 100 remarried couples. First, it was a small and nonrandom sample of a large widowed population, and the results might not be easily generalized. It is very different, if not impossible, to draw a representative sample in a post-disaster situation; the targeted population is seriously disrupted, and a nonrandom procedure must often be used to select people who can be conveniently located (Cisin and Clerk, 1962). Second, since the sample was selected with the help and information provided by the politicized neighbourhood committees, it could be biased toward a heavier representation of those who had a happy remarriage. To reduce the first potential bias, we eschew unwarranted generalizations from the small sample. The second potential bias is somewhat mitigated by studying both the problems haunting the remarried and the concerns that prevented some widowed from remarrying.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Of the 100 remarried couples interviewed, one couple got remarried by the end of 1976, 41 couples in 1977, 26 in 1978, and the remaining 22 couples did not remarry until three to seven years after the earthquake. Both husbands and wives of these 100 couples were asked to rate the relative importance of ten factors might have influenced their decisions to remarry when they were widowed.

Over half of the widowers and widows rated having a partner for economic support and social companionship as the most important factor in their decision to remarry (row 1). A smaller number of widowers and widows chose the need to support the young and the old

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS IN FAMILY RECONSTRUCTION FOR REMARRIED WIDOWERS AND WIDOWS, LUNAN DISTRICT, TANGSHAN, 1984

Table 1

Widower	First Important	Second Important	Third Important	Fourth Important	Fifth Important
1. Need partner ^a	55	20	11	5	2
2. Unable to support children	14	9	3	2	0
3. Unable to support parents	6	9	12	12	5
4. Unable to manage new family	18	30	14	16	4
5. Belief in managing new family	0	1	2	5	20
6. Romantic love for spouse	0	2	2	2	4
7. Sympathy for spouse	1	3	7	9	7
8. Policy influence ^b	1	1	4	2	4
9. Persuasion by family, friends and colleagues	4	22	36	18	12
10. Persuasion by the remarried	0	2	6	21	15
11. Reasons unclear	1	1	3	8	27
N =	100	100	100	100	100

Widow	First Important	Second Important	Third Important	Fourth Important	Fifth Important
1. Need partner ^a	54	18	9	9	1
2. Unable to support children	16	15	0	2	1
3. Unable to support parents	2	8	15	6	5
4. Unable to manage new family	0	0	0	4	1
5. Belief in managing new family	1	0	13	23	20
6. Romantic love for spouse	0	2	3	4	9
7. Sympathy for spouse	3	6	11	6	1
8. Policy influence ^b	2	9	2	5	8
9. Persuasion by family, friends and colleagues	9	31	26	6	7
10. Persuasion by the remarried	0	3	11	19	9
11. Reasons unclear	13	8	10	16	38
N =	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Second stage of survey conducted by the second author.

Notes: ^aReferring to the need for economic support and social companionship.

^bThis includes allowing remarried couples to have another child, regardless of how many each spouse already had, and permitting women from suburban countries of Tangshan or other countries to move their household registration into the city of Tangshan.

as the primary reason for remarriage (rows 2 and 3); while more widows were concerned about child care, more widowers perceived care of the elderly to be important. Although a large number of widowers decided to remarry because of their inability to manage household chores, the factor hardly concerned widows (rows 4 and 5). This suggests that the traditional reliance of Chinese men on women for household chores and maintenance persisted after a natural disaster.

Romantic love was perceived as largely unimportant for the widowed in considering remarriage (row 6). The practical concerns and needs confronting the widowed in the post-disaster situation, coupled with a lack of opportunities for normal courtship, took precedence over romantic love in causing remarriage. This is confirmed further by the result that more widowers and widows rated sympathy for spouse over romantic love (row 6 vs. row 7)

Institutional intervention in remarriage took the form of special policies. For example, urban registration in Tangshan was granted to widowed rural residents in surrounding counties marrying widowed urban dwellers. Since remarried couples and their families demanded new and sufficient living space, the local government accelerated housing construction. By 1983, about 85% of all families in the city had been settled into new dwellings (Dai, 1985). This not only reduced crowding but encouraged remarriage. Although these policies played a lesser role in facilitating remarriage than economic needs, more widows considered policy incentives as important for remarriage than widowers (row 8.) Family and friends' persuasion had a stronger effect on widows than on widowers to remarry (row 9). The interviews revealed that about 25 percent of the widows had been persuaded three or more times before they decided to remarry, compared with only five percent of the widowers who needed such persuasion. The testimonies of those who had already remarried had a strong influence on other widowers to follow suite (row 10,) reflecting certain degree of "conformative behavior" in post-disaster situations (see Erikson, 1976). The key finding here is that the remarriages in Tangshan were based predominantly on expedient rather than on sentimental grounds. Rational and expedient criteria (e.g., income, housing) turned out to be stronger determinants than romantic love in mate seeking and first marriages in China under normal conditions (see Whyte and Parish, 1984). The reasons for remarrying under the unusual circumstances were expected and proven to be based on expediency instead of sentiment.

If economic and social needs for a new spouse played a primary role in lifting the traditional taboo against widow remarriage, this change should be reflected in the general attitudes of family members and friends toward remarriage.

ATTITUDES OF FAMILY MEMBERS, RELATIVES AND FRIENDS TOWARD REMARRIAGE BY WIDOWERS AND WIDOWS (IN PERCENTAGE)

Table 2

Widower	Support	Basically Support	Do not Care	Basically Oppose	Oppose	Total
Children	62.8	12.9	18.6	1.4	4.3	100.0
Parents-in-law	57.1	14.3	0.0	28.6	0.0	100.0
Parents	83.3	0.0	10.0	0.0	6.7	100.0
Relatives	94.7	2.7	0.0	1.3	1.3	100.0
Friends	95.2	4.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Widow						
Children	25.0	7.7	36.5	17.3	13.5	100.0
Parents-in-law	42.9	9.5	14.3	19.1	14.3	100.0
Parents	78.3	2.2	10.9	6.5	2.2	100.0
Relatives	68.5	5.5	8.2	9.6	8.2	100.0
Friends	90.0	0.0	3.3	1.7	5.0	100.0

Source: Same as Table 1.

Although most of the family members, relatives, and friends supported the remarriage of the widowed, there were major differences in the responses toward the remarriage of widowers vs. widows, especially among children and parents-in-law. While only 5.7

percent of the children either *basically opposed* or *opposed* the remarriage of their widowed fathers, 17.3 and 13.5 percent of the children fell into these two categories against their widowed mothers. There was 14.3 percent of the parents-in-law *opposing* widow remarriage, compared with none *opposing* widowers to remarry. These findings suggest that widows continued to face stronger resistance to remarriage, especially from their children and parents-in-law.

The analysis thus far lends strong support to the first hypothesis. An overwhelming proportion of the widowed chose to remarry because of various practical needs. The second hypothesis receives relatively weak support, as family and institutional intervention played a limited role in facilitating remarriage. However, it should be noted that the widowers and widows responded more sensitively to the intimate direct support and persuasion from family members and friends than to the less direct, bureaucratic intervention. This indicates that the closely-knit family and social network in China continued to provide primary social support for victims after a natural disaster.

A test of the third hypothesis calls for the type of data in Table 3.

Table 3
FORMER AND CURRENT SPOUSES OF THE REMARRIED WIDOWERS AND WIDOWS BY AGE GROUPS AND MARITAL STATUS

	Age Groups					Marital Status				
	-20	21-40	41-60	61-80	Total	Unmarried	First Marriage	Second Marriage	Third Marriage ^b	Total
Widower										
Former wife	1	39	55	5	100	1	91	8	—	100
Current wife	—	28	60	12	100	—	1	86	13	100
Widow										
Former husband	3	38	34	8	83 ^a	16	75	8	1	100
Current husband	—	12	69	19	100	—	16	78	6	100

Source: Same as Table 1.

Notes: ^aSeventeen cases missing.

^bBetween either spouse who had divorced from an earthquake-induced remarriage.

On average, there were more widows marrying older men. Seventy-two remarried women aged 41 and above, compared with 88 men in the same age range who married widows. On the other hand, the number of remarried widows in the younger age group of 21-40 more than doubled that of men aged 21-40. The Chinese tradition that men tended to marry slightly younger women appears to have continued in the post-earthquake remarriages.

With regard to marital status, 99 women remarried for the second or third times, compared with 84 men who did so. Of the 99 remarried women, 90 were widowed during

the earthquake, five became widows after their husbands died of illness, and the remaining four lost their husbands through divorce or other reasons. That the lifting of taboos carried over to some non-disaster cases suggests that the emergency situation helped to liberalize the general attitude of widows toward remarriage. The sample included 16 couples in which single men married widows, compared with only *one* wife who experienced first marriage. This greater willingness of men to marry widows also reflects the weakening social taboo against remarriage.

The data provide mixed evidence on the third hypothesis. The part of the hypothesis that states traditional age difference in remarriage between men and women is supported, as average age of remarried widowers was higher than that of widows. But that more widows married single men challenged the traditional practice that widowed men were more likely to remarry and to wed women previously unmarried. That the average remarried widows tended to be older also counters the hypothesis that younger widows were more likely to remarry than older widows. Considering that the older widows were more likely to be bound by tradition, their remarriage indicates an attenuation of the cultural taboo.

While remarriage was accepted by many widowed as a practical way of relieving sorrow and reconstructing family life, there were inherent unstable elements in remarriage as an institution, especially when the remarriage occurred hastily in a post-disaster situation. The first unstable element stemmed from the growing size and complexity of the reconstructed family.

Table 4 FAMILY SIZE BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE, AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE AND BEFORE REMARRIAGE VERSUS AFTER REMARRIAGE

Family Size	Before Earthquake		After Earthquake/Before Remarriage		After Remarriage
	Husband	Wife	Widower	Widow	Reconstructed Family
1	2	7	22	22	—
2	4	7	27	22	19
3	12	20	20	28	21
4	23	25	14	15	39
5	19	11	12	7	15
6	19	9	5	4	4
7	14	6	—	1	1
8	6	6	—	—	—
9	—	1	—	—	—
N =	99 ^a	92 ^b	100	100	100

Source: Same as Table 1.

Notes: ^aOne case missing.

^bEight cases missing.

The average size of the family increased with post-earthquake remarriages. Thirty percent of the widowed had four or more persons in their families before the earthquake,

whereas 60 percent of the reconstructed families had four or more members. The share of families with five members increased from 10 percent before to 18 percent after the remarriages. Three-generation families rose from 7.5 percent of the sample before the remarriages to 10 percent after the remarriages took places.

The second destabilizing factor in earthquake-induced remarriages involved a set of problems and concerns troubling the remarried or those contemplating remarriage. It is revealing here to examine the factors in widowers and widows' decisions not to remarry.

Table 5 FACTORS IN WIDOWERS AND WIDOWS' DECISION NOT TO REMARRY

	1 Concern for Children	2 Concern for Health and Age	3 Unable to find Suit- able Mate	4 Feudal Ideas ^a	5 Concern for Aging Parents	6 Fear for Bad Rela- tionship	7 Unknown Reasons	Total
Widower	57	27	35	0	2	2	36	159
Widow	76	17	1	14	7	2	67	184
Total (%)	133 (38.8)	44 (12.8)	36 (10.5)	14 (4.1)	9 (2.6)	4 (1.2)	103 (30.0)	343 (100.0)

Source: Third stage of survey conducted by the second author.

Note: ^aThese refer to the feeling of shame for remarriage and filial loyalty to the former husband.

Close to 40 percent of unmarried widowers and widows interviewed in the third phase of the study mentioned concerns for children as the reason for not pursuing remarriage. Among them, widows were more concerned about children than widowers. The second most important deterring factor was concern for health and age. More widowers chose this as a barrier to remarry. Third, 35 widowers did not remarry because they were unable to find a suitable mate, while only *one* widows said so. Fourth, 14 widows avoided remarriage because of traditional ideals, which had no effect on widowers. More widows were afraid that getting remarried might affect the care for their aging parents.

Just as children were the primary concern for avoiding remarriage, they were at the heart of the problems for the remarried. While about 20 percent of the 100 remarried couples reported quarrels, 37 percent of them occurred because one spouse was dissatisfied with the way the other party treated his or her own children. Concern with the well-being of children led some widowed parents to delay remarriage. Although remarriages as a share of total marriages declined rapidly from 49.4 percent in 1977 to 4.4 percent in 1982, seven percent of the total marriages in 1983 was accounted for by remarriages. This not only reflects a larger deviation from the traditional ideal in the earlier post-disaster period but suggests the various constraints made some widowers and widows wait a long time before they eventually decide to remarry.

The survey also found difficulties in the relationship between the step-children. This is consistent with the established research evidence that the presence of step-children

creates problems for families of remarriage (Huber and Spitze, 1988). As research in the United States (e.g., Goetting, 1985) has suggested, the problems with step-parenthood have multiple causes, among them, poor articulation of the role of step-parents, the tradition of the step-mother being described as wicked and cruel, and lack of marital role expectations between husband and wife prior to remarriage.

Another important indicator of the unstable remarriages was the high rate of divorces of remarried couples in the immediate post-earthquake period. The divorce cases of earthquake-induced remarriages made up 96 percent the total divorces in Tangshan in 1977. In 1979 Lunan District had 59 divorce cases, 37 of which (62.7 percent) were filed by either of the remarried couples. Similar to the factors working against remarriage, problems with the economic and social support of step-children were the primary factor contributing to divorces. According to Tangshan's People's Courts, 70 to 80 percent of the divorce cases involving remarried couples were caused by problems related to raising step-children. A few couples tried sustain their remarriages but had to part eventually because their children could not get along with one another, or the children could not develop a positive relationship with their step-parents (Dai, 1985).

Like remarriage, divorce, especially for women, could be regarded as socially shameful and distasteful in traditional China. But there was historical evidence that 10-15 percent of the Taiwanese marriages ended in divorce in the first part of this century (Barclay, 1954:221). Freedom of divorce officially became an integral part of freedom of marriage in China with the promulgation of the 1950 Marriage Law, and was reaffirmed in the 1980 Marriage Law (Croll, 1983). The divorce rate in China, however, has been relatively low. During 1980-1985, China's annual divorce rate stayed just above 0.08 percent (except for 1984), rising slightly from the late 1970s (CSA, 1989:22). This implies that unhappy married couples tend to resolve their problems through mediation by colleagues, relatives or friends without resorting to divorce.

The high rate of divorce among remarried couples shortly after the earthquake was not an unexpected departure from the norm that constrains divorce. Research in the United States (cf. Reiss and Lee, 1988) has suggested that remarried couples are more likely to divorce than first-marrieds because they are better prepared for the difficulties in breaking up a marriage. The weakening of the remarriage taboo after the earthquake also made it easier for remarried couples who could not get along to divorce. If those couples had already overcome the feeling of shame in getting remarried, they would probably care less about the implications of divorce.

The data and interviews lend supporting evidence to the fourth hypothesis. The post-earthquake remarriage lacked stability due to the combination of several factors. They not only troubled some remarried couples but made some of the widowed forgo remarriage and led to divorces for some of the remarried.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have attempted to provide some insights into a fascinating sociological

phenomenon that occurred in the wake of a natural disaster. We have done so by placing remarriage in Tangshan in the theoretical context of disaster and family research. The theoretical perspectives have specified linkages between micro-and macrolevel changes *before, during* and *after* a disaster, showing how sociocultural structure (macro), personality (micro), the situation (micro), and social interaction (macro-micro) are related in generating responses to a disaster (Bates *et al.*, 1963).

The Tangshan experience fits well into the above framework of disaster-induced social attitude and behavior. After the earthquake, remarriage emerged as an adaptive response to ameliorate human suffering and to restore a normal life. The type and extent of the response was triggered and reinforced by the interaction between several individual and institutional factors. First, the cultural ideal discouraging remarriage, especially for widows, gave way to the reality as many widows and widowers had a strong desire to find a new spouse. Second, remarriage became possible and acceptable through personal, situational, familial, and organizational means. The data show that fulfilling economic needs was the primary reason for remarriage. The interviews also indicate that both family ties and workplaces played a role in facilitating remarriage, as they tended to foster the matching of people for first marriage (Whyte and Parish, 1984). In some cases, children's interests helped to seal the remarriage bond between widowed parents. Government also played a role by loosening its control on migration to the city and speeding up housing construction. These types of institutional support and bureaucratic intervention in the remarriage of disaster survivors are characteristic of socialist China and unlikely to happen in a Western society.

This study has demonstrated a relationship between a disastrous earthquake, cultural norms, and extensive remarriage in Tangshan, China. It has also shed some light on the extent to which the earthquake may have accelerated broader changes in familial and marital norms already under way prior to the disaster. Bates *et al.* (1963) have pointed to the fact that Hurricane Audrey and the subsequent rehabilitation effort quickened and strengthened the forces that were already modernizing a traditional community in Louisiana. Durkheim stresses that the forces of social change are invisible until societies are broken, like walking into a plate-glass window (Collins, 1985). The speed and extent of remarriage after the earthquake suggest that the taboo against remarriage was not as prohibiting as it was conventionally perceived. Earlier research (cf. Levy, 1968) has suggested that the Chinese family had been changing from a "traditional" to a "transitional" from under modern influence. Chen (1985) has argued that the Chinese family has been experiencing further change in structure and norm as a result of population policy and modernization. More specifically, recent journalistic sources (e.g., Jing, 1985) have reported on a growing tendency among single elderly persons to seek remarriage. These evidence suggest that the disregard for traditional norms in one disasterstricken community would not have been as promote and extensive if they had not already been eroded more broadly before the earthquake.

The process of remarriage in Tangshan, as this paper shows, was not all smooth, or acceptable to everyone who had an opportunity to select a new spouse. It took some widows a long time to think through the consequences of remarriage. Some delayed remarriage for fear that a new spouse would not be patient and fair with their own children. About 20

percent of the remarried couples in our sample did not remarry until after 1980, four years after the earthquake. The difficulties with remarriage also were reflected in a large number of unmarried widowers and widows and a high but declining rate of divorces after the earthquake.

This study also suggests that although it was easier for the survivors of the earthquake to set norms aside in an emergency, remarriage as a response to disaster may be difficult for some to initiate, and temporary departure from the established norms, which would be reinstated after the emergency period was over? The data do not permit locating a direct and definitive answer to this question. However, some research findings on disaster response and remarriage help to illuminate the Tangshan experience. In some disaster situations, there are inconsistencies between responses to disasters perceived as appropriate and the actual responses shaped by various constraints (Kolawole, 1987). Remarriage after the earthquake was deemed an appropriate response to cope with economic and social depression; yet the actual behavior of remarriage was limited by the practical concerns and persisting traditional values.

Research (cf. Cherlin, 1978) has found that in the United States remarriage lacks institutional support in terms of language and the law. Adding the prefix of "step" to parents and children causes bad feelings and confuses functions of family members; legal regulations and precedents concerning families of remarriages are deficient. It has turned out that the concern with step-parents and step-children was the primary barrier to some getting remarried and the main threat to the stability of other remarriages. Unfortunately, such important issues pertaining to step-parents and step-children as property inheritance and family name were not addressed by the survey. The post-earthquake remarriages' lack of stability reflects not only the lingering disaster impact and the potentially shaky nature of remarriage but the additional complications imposed by traditional Chinese values on step-parenting.

To conclude, family reconstruction through remarriage in Tangshan is a good example of limited social change accelerated in response to the sudden impact of a natural disaster. It provides an illuminating opportunity for understanding the flexibility and adaptability of marital behavior under emergent circumstances. The earthquake suddenly cast thousands of people into the status of widowhood, creating common social demands for remarriage, although some individuals were hesitant to pursue it. The disaster propelled the struggle between survivors and daily existence to the fore, overshadowing whatever conflict that might exist between people and values. Thus remarriage became generally accepted.

While this paper has described and explained an interesting and yet isolated situation, we do not intend to generalize the Tangshan experience to remarriage of the widowed in other parts of China or other societies with different cultural traditions and social structures due to the use of a local sample and a lack of similar events and comparable studies. However, like other case studies of disasters' social impact, our research on remarriage after the Tangshan earthquake does offer unique insights into the process of familial and social change in periods of adversity and stress.

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