

Research on Early Marriage of Rural Female Youth

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Abstract—This paper has studied the early marriage of rural female youth and relevant countermeasures, and put forward some reflections in order to attract the attention of the relevant personnel. By referring to related researches of domestic and foreign scholars, the author found that there are a few researches about this phenomenon after 1990s in domestic documents. The gender-specific researches are much fewer, and lack theoretical explanation. The foreign scholars mainly focus on empirical research, and we can only learn from their relevant theories and research methods. Therefore, it is very necessary to research the early marriage of rural female youth under the background of social transformation.

Keywords—*rural female youth; early marriage; domestic and foreign researches*

I. INTRODUCTION

Early marriage refers to a marriage that takes place under the age of the upper age limit for protection under Marriage Law. The married couple only hold wedding according to local customs, or use other methods to get a marriage certificate from local governments. According to related data of Chinese Statistical Yearbook, we found that the fertility rate of women ranging from 15 to 19 was respectively 5.26%, 6.16%, 6.16% and 6.72% from 2008 to 2011.

II. CURRENT DOMESTIC RESEARCH STATUS

Since the founding of the PRC, there are many domestic discussions on early marriage. They were the most prosperous in 1990s, involving in sociology, anthropology, law, history and so on. Scholars of different fields have different research purposes and research perspectives. They discussed the historical development, causes, results, influence and corresponding reflections from different angles.

- Some scholars have studies early marriages in China from the perspective of historical development. For example, Wei Lixue has detailed listed the historical change of marriage ages in China in his article *Primary Study of Marriage* (in 1993). He thought China has always had the tradition of early marriage. In ancient times, in order to increase population for economic development, wars and other reasons, the rulers of past dynasties were inclined to lower the legal marriage age standard. Fu Jiancheng (in 1994) has studies the popular early marriages in the Yellow River Basin in Hebei, Shanxi, Henan and Shandong during the period

of the Republic of China. He pointed that seen from both the age of engagement and marriage, early marriage occupies a prominent position in rural families. At the same time, due the influence of different family economic background and inter-regional sex ratio and other factors, the phenomenon of early marriage has differences between the rich families and poor families. Wang Yuesheng described the changes on marriage age, intermarriage circle, reproductive behavior, family structure, family scale, relation between generations, the separation of family in rural areas during the sixty years under the background of social transformation in his article *Research on Rural Marriage Family Changes in North China – Based on the Investigations in Southern Hebei under the Background of Social Transformation* (in 2002). He concluded that marriage in social reform was directly influenced by social system.

- Regarding the causes of early marriage, different scholars have different research perspectives. But most were the summary analysis in general sense. Some scholars believe that the lagging development of local economy is the main cause of early marriage of the youth in rural areas. Nie Jianliang pointed out that the underdeveloped economy and the production mode of smallholder economy caused the conservative thoughts and ideas of people, prompting formation of early marriage in his article *Causes of Early Marriage of Male Youth in Rural Areas – Taking T Village in North China for Example* (in 2008). From the aspect of social customs, scholars believed that the backward concept of marriage was an important cause of early marriage of rural youth. Zheng Meiqing described the high bride prices in Fujian Putian and pointed out that the traditional custom has developed into a marriage means in his article *Current Situation of Early Marriage of Rural Female Youth – Taking Fujian Putian for Example* (in 2013). Wang Fude thought due to the influence of the traditional concept of rearing children for old age, parents hoped their children could get marriage earlier, and they could save supporting resources for elderly by taking advantage of their young age in his article *Forcing Marriage to Support the Old Age: A Perspective to Understand Current Rural Early Marriages* (in 2012). From the aspect of social gender, Jiang Tao has analyzed the early marriage situation of a

certain county in Yunnan in his article *Investigation on Early Marriage of Rural Population in Mengdongyao Town, Malipo County, Yunnan* (in 2009). He pointed out that the concept of preferring boys to girls was prevailing, which has resulted in the situation of fewer women than men. The male youth that cannot find marriage partners among same age group put their eyes on local small-age female group. Scholar Tao Zixiang believed that the social structure of gender inequality and gender imbalance resulted in that parents wanted their daughter get marriage early to reduce the risk of their son staying single in his article *High Bride Prices: A Perspective to Understand the Rural Intra-generation Exploitation Phenomenon – Thinking on Rural Female Early Marriage from the Perspective of Gender* (in 2011). From the aspects of management and law, scholars believe that the lax management of social management and unsound laws and regulations, and other factors in rural areas lead to the early marriage of rural youth. Li Hemin (in 1992) argued that a major cause of early marriage and childbearing is the disjointed management of basic administration and marriage and childbirth.

- It is the influence of early marriage in rural areas. Hu Min (in 1987), through investigation on the early marriage of the youth in certain county, found that most early marriage were arranged by parents and it easily led to martial disharmony, resulting in dispute and divorce. It affects the family harmony and stability. Han Chengji (in 1989) believed that the early marriage of rural youth affected normal development of adolescent body, and led to the education interruption of the teenagers, which is not conducive to the further development of rural youth. Yu Xuejun (in 1994) has studied the early marriage and childbearing status of China in the 1980s, and he found that the early marriage has caused early childbearing and multi-childbearing, and increased the fertility rate in certain period and shortened the generation interval. Yang Zhixin (in 2004) proposed that women become the biggest victim in early marriage. Early marriage usually leads to early childbearing, which is extremely unfavorable to women's physical development. The sickness rate of early married women is higher than that of general women. Tian Xianhong pointed out the rural immigrant employment economy has greatly affected the love and marriage pattern and the marriage concept of rural youth in his article *Influences of Employment Economy on Marriage Life of Rural Youth* (in 2008), endowing the marriage life of rural youth with modern and romantic features.

Through above analysis we can see that current early marriage researches in the academic circles are presented in the form of paper. There are few monographs. And these early marriage studies mostly are carried out from the perspective of early childbearing. They focus on the demographic consequences of early marriage and early childbearing. The discussion on early marriage itself is seriously neglected. Overall, the research results of previous studies on early

marriage have showed us the marriage traditions in China since ancient time, and summarized the causes and effects of early marriage in a general sense, providing a basis for later research. But there are shortcomings in these studies, for they neglected the objectivity and independence of early marriage behavior. The academic results of early marriage mainly concentrated in the 1990s. There are few studies under the background of new era. Rural women to be vulnerable groups have received little attention. Only a few scholars have specifically studied on rural women. We lack analysis from the causes and influences, and lack reference of foreign theories and researches. Gao Huisong pointed out that early marriage was associated with social environment and national tradition in his article *Early Marriage Phenomena of Hui Females in Yunnan* (in 2001). Wang Haixia pointed out that the main factors influencing the first marriage age of Xinjiang Uighur rural women include religious obligations and the responsibility of parents, virgin complex and face view, economic factors, education, and so on in his article *Factors Influencing First Marriage Age of Xinjiang Uighur Rural Females* (in 2005). Leng Wenjuan pointed out that the relationship circle of new generation of migrant workers was relatively small, and their love and marriage were objectively restricted by their vocation, and subjectively affected by their experience in his article *Research on Marriages of Rural Immigrant Female Workers of New Generation – Based on the Investigations on Female Workers in the D Electronics Factory, S District* (in 2011).

III. FOREIGN RESEARCH STATUS

Compared with the domestic researches, most foreign studies on marriage age are empirical analysis, and often focus on the analysis of the consequences of early marriage. For example, Professor Bane (in 1986) studied and found that early marriage usually brought high divorce rate, low wages and a larger family size, which might produce the intergenerational transmission of poverty, and thus increase the government's financial burden. From the angle of economics, Rabin (in 2001) treated early marriage as the short-sighted behavior of teenagers. He thought the root of early marriage was that they couldn't correctly predict the relationship between short-term benefit and the long-term cost of early marriage. The Russell Sage Foundation in 1992 has made an empirical research on child marriage. They investigated 240 women getting marriage before 16, and found that the marriage before legal marriage age would terminate children's childhood and bring serious consequences to body and martial relations of women with early marriage.

In addition, a part of scholars have made theoretical analysis on the issue of marriage age from the macroscopic level. For example, Goode (in 1986) believed that the development of modern society will make more and more spouses' age roughly same. The difference of marriage ages of two genders will become smaller and smaller, and the marriage age of women will relatively increase. Fan and Huang (in 1998) argued that the age at first marriage also would be affected by the intermarriage circle. The enlargement of the intermarriage circle can increase the first marriage age of both men and women, and gradually expand the difference of marriage age

of two genders. The reason is that the floating population is helpful to improving the age at first marriage.

In short, foreign scholars generally deny early marriage due to its negative consequences. They also have made general discussions on marriage age in the background of modernization, which has provided a good reference for our research on early marriage. However, in particular, the age of early marriage referred by foreign researchers is lower than that of early marriage in China, because foreign legal marriage age is generally smaller. Many countries stipulate the legal marriageable age about 16 to 18.

IV. REVIEW OF DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN RESEARCHES

By referring to domestic and foreign researches, we find that the number of domestic researches on early marriage of rural youth is relative more than that of foreign researches. Both domestic and foreign researches have made analysis from the macroscopic, mesoscopic and microscopic angles. From the macroscopic angle, domestic and foreign researches mainly start from population, economy, social culture and other social backgrounds. From the mesoscopic angle, they mainly start from the influence of intergeneration changes. From the microscopic angle, they mainly start from the influences of early marriage on themselves and their family. All of them deny early marriage. The different is that foreign scholars pay more attention to empirical research and theoretical analysis on marriage age, while domestic scholars pay more attention to the influences of early marriage. There are few domestic and foreign researches on early marriage of rural female youth. The domestic researches only have analyzed the causes of early marriage. So, there is still a large space for us to carry out research on relevant issues on early marriage of rural female youth. We need to make empirical research under the background of social transformation, combined with related sociological theory, and fundamentally solve the problem of early marriage of rural female youth.

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