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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Bare Branches and Social Stability: A Historical Perspective from China*

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Abstract "Bare branches," the name given to unmarried men in China, have historically posed a great threat to social stability in that country. Based on historical records and literature, the findings in this study reveal that female infanticide, coupled with the practice of polygyny, meant that during the Ming and Qing dynasties and the Republican Era, up to twenty percent of males remained single. As a result, underclass bare branches turned to less socially accepted marriage practices. And if they were still unable to find a suitable marriage partner, they would turn to prostitutes, adultery with married women, or might even resort to sexual assault. Humiliated by their social status, bare branches tended to drift away from their hometowns and form brotherhoods, secret societies, bandit gangs and even military groups, posing a real threat to social stability. In extreme cases, they engaged in armed conflict, taking over government offices, clashing with government forces, destroying social infrastructure, and helping to topple dynastic regimes. Such extreme violence and disorder led to the reduction of local populations by the thousands or even millions, creating a subsequent negative effect on social development.

Keywords bare branch, social stability, infanticide, marriage, China

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Background

In China, a higher-than-normal sex ratio at birth, coupled with high rates of child mortality in females has brought about an imbalanced sex ratio among the population at large, which contributes to males' difficulties in finding wives. These unmarried males are known as "bare branches" (*guanggun*) in China, a term referring to males who are over a certain age but, involuntarily, have been unable to get married, and thus have no wife and children, like a bare branch without leaves.[1] Worldwide, single males commit a high proportion of all crimes. The larger the number of single males, the more violence and antisocial behavior they exhibit. When single males congregate, organized aggression may increase.[2] Bare branches lack the possibility of getting married and tend to be more risk-taking and destructive, which leads to an increase in violence and crime. This is causing widespread concern for China's future domestic stability. Some studies even attempt to draw connections between China's bare branches and international stability.[3]

The phenomenon of bare branches has existed throughout China's history. The deeply rooted patrilineal family system produced discrimination against girls, and even infanticide in extreme cases, and gave rise to an imbalanced sex structure, with a shortage of females.[4] Moreover, the acceptance of polygyny distributed females disproportionately among different social classes, and caused a mass of bare branches.[5] Historically, bare branches have existed in different periods and different regions, sometimes in a high proportion, especially among the underclass.[6]

Over the course of China's history, the existence of large masses of bare branches has often brought about multifaceted consequences. Their single status often triggered conscious and unconscious behaviors, including illegal and immoral behaviors, which were regarded as threats to the morality of marriage and family, as well as social stability.[7] Most bare branches were single involuntarily; they sought solutions in less respectable forms of marriage and sexual outlets, leading to the increased popularity of non-mainstream marriage forms and a rise in adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, and sexual assaults.[8] These insecure young males—with a disadvantaged socio-economic status and almost no chance of establishing their own families—tended to collaborate with other bare branches, in order to enhance their status through violence and crime.[9] Bare branches were the primary source and foundation for secret societies, bandit groups and cults, many of which were antisocial. Consequently, bare branches, of which these groups were principally made up, were recognized as one of the main threats to social stability.[10]

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[1] Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer, *Bare Branches: The Security Implications of Asia's Surplus Male Population* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 187–88.

[2] David T. Courtwright, *Violent Land, Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 46; Lionel Tiger, *Men in Groups* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 176.

[3] Dudley L. Poston and Peter A. Morrison, "China: Bachelor Bomb," *International Herald Tribune*, September 14, 2005; Hudson and den Boer, *Bare branches*, 4.

[4] Stephan Klasen and Claudia Wink, "A Turning Point in Gender Bias in Mortality? An Update on the Number of Missing Women," *Population and Development Review*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2002), 285–312.

[5] Elizabeth E. Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China: 1845–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980).

[6] Guo Songyi, *Lunli yu shenghuo—Qingdai de hunyin guanxi* [Ethics and life: The marriage relationship in the Qing dynasty] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2000), 525–26; Wang Yuesheng, *Qingdai zhongqi hunyin chongtu touxi* [Marriage conflicts during the middle Qing dynasty] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 166–67.

Bare branches today are attracting widespread attention due to their potential threat to social stability.[11] However, although some historical studies have examined individual cases of bare branches and their antisocial behavior, there have been few studies which have systematically addressed the threat to social stability stemming from bare branches in China's past. This paper, based on historical archives and literature, explores imbalanced sex structure, bare branches, and social stability in China's history. We describe the negative consequences of bare branches: their individual behavior related to marriage and sex, and their collective actions as well. We emphasize their organizations, which serve as a bridge from individual behavior, generally regarded as not so harmful, to collective actions that are often cited as being much more destructive. This bridging function of organizations has been underexplored in previous studies of bare branches. Below, in Section 2, we will provide a general description of infanticide, polygyny, and bare branches. In Section 3, we seek to analyze the less accepted marriage forms and sexual outlets available to bare branches, while in Section 4, we will explore their migration and the formation of their brotherhoods and bandit groups, which enabled them to move from individual to collective action. In Section 5, we will further explore how organized bare branches started rebellions, having a negative impact on social stability. Lastly, in Section 6, we will provide a general summary and conclusion.

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[7] Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 101–28.

[8] Guo Songyi, *Lunli yu shenghuo*, 525–26; Wang Yuesheng, *Qingdai zhongqi hunyin chongtu touxi*, 166–67.

[9] Hudson and den Boer, *Bare Branches*, 190–91.

[10] Tan Ping, "Xingbili shitiao yu guojia de zhiluan xingshuai [Imbalanced sex ratio and social stability], *Chengdu daxue xuebao* (Journal of Chengdu University), no. 3 (2002), 24–29; Liu Zhongyi, "Daling weihun nanxing yu nongcun shehui wending-chusheng xingbiebi shenggao de shehui houguo yucexing fenxi zhiyi" [Old single males and rural stability—One prediction of the social implications of an increasing sex ratio at birth], *Qingshaonian fanzui wenti* (Juvenile delinquency study), no. 5 (2005), 17–22.

[11] Jiang Quanbao and Li Shuzhuo, *Nüxing queshi yu shehui anquan* [Female deficit and the security of society] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009), 3; Hudson and den Boer, *Bare Branches*, 4; Poston and Morrison, "China: Bachelor Bomb."

Infanticide and Polygyny Leads to Bare Branches

Infanticide

Worldwide, both male and female infants have been subject to infanticide, but female infants have accounted for the majority of victims. Similarly, in China, where sex selection can be traced back as far as 2000 BCE, victims have been mainly female infants. Female infanticide existed in most parts of ancient China, especially in southern China.[12] Under the Ming dynasty, female infanticide was rampant in Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Fujian provinces, and quite prevalent in Hunan and other provinces.[13] Under the Qing dynasty, female infanticide took place in Jiangsu, Anhui, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, Hubei, Hunan, Sichuan, Guangxi, Shanxi, and Henan, while it was most serious in Fujian and Guangxi provinces.[14]

During the Qing dynasty, female infanticide was so widespread that all social classes were involved in it. According to the *County Annals of Xiaogan*, in the reign of Qing Emperor Guangxu, in Xiaogan County alone over ten thousand female infants escaped death due to rescue work by a prefecture magistrate with the surname Zhang.[15] In 1843, a missionary detected a serious incidence of infanticide in the Tongan region of Fujian province. In some parts of Tongan, up to 70% or 80% of female infants suffered infanticide, and at least 10% of female infants were killed throughout the region, regardless of the socio-economic situation of the families involved.[16] In the late nineteenth century, a missionary questioned 40 women aged fifty or above. Together they had borne 183 sons and 175 daughters, but 126 sons and only 53 daughters survived to age ten; they had killed 78 daughters.[17] Another survey involved 160 women aged fifty or more. These women gave birth to 631 sons and 538 daughters, and killed 158 daughters but not a single son. These 158 daughters represented 30% of all girls born in this group. Among the 160 women, only 4 raised more than 3 daughters; one could not remember exactly how many daughters had been killed; another had killed 11 daughters.[18]

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[12] Bernice J. Lee, "Female Infanticide in China," *Historical Reflections*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1981), 163–77.

[13] Chang Jianhua, "Mingdai niying wenti chutan" [A study on infanticide during the Ming dynasty], in *Zhongguo shehui lishi pinglun (disiji)* [Review of China's social history (the fourth issue)] ed. Zhang Guogang (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2002), 123.

[14] Xiao Qian, "Qingdai jiangxi ninü zhuangkuang yu jinjiewen" [Infanticide and prohibition in Jiangxi province during the Qing dynasty], *Shilin* [Historical review], no.1 (2001), 63–68.

[15] Guo Songyi, *Lunli yu shenghuo*, 138–40.

[16] Lee, "Female Infanticide," 169.

[17] Arthur P. Wolf and Chieh-Shan Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China, 1845–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 230.

Even among the royalty, some female infants were killed. A study of 33,000 members of the Qing dynasty born from 1700 to 1840 indicated that infanticide over this whole period was around one tenth, and up to one-fifth of those born in the late eighteenth century. The mortality rate on the first day after birth for females was 72 per thousand, ten times as high as that for males. The mortality rate in the first month was 160 per thousand for females and 45 per thousand for males.[19]

Infanticide was caused mainly by a strong preference for sons. When resources such as food and money were limited, female infanticide was a means to make sure that boys could receive relatively more resources and survive. In addition, female infanticide was also employed because of the high cost of a dowry, or used as a method of birth control.[20]

Infanticide led to a shortage of females and an imbalanced sex structure. As indicated in Table 1, from the Ming dynasty to the founding of the People's Republic of China, the sex ratio fluctuated, but generally exceeded the normal range.[21] After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the sex ratio declined to 107.6 in the 1953 census and 105.5 in the 1964 census.

Table 1 China's Sex Ratio (Total Population) since the Ming Dynasty

Year	Sex ratio
1381–1391	113
1749–1845	116–121
Around 1875	118
1909–1928	120–123
1932–1936	112
1946–1947	110
1953	107.6
1964	105.5

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[18] Gilbert Wales and Henry Norman, *Longqixia de chenmin* [The society and etiquette of China in the turn of 20th century] (Beijing: *Guangming ribao* chubanshe, 2000), 325.

[19] James Lee, Wang Feng and Cameron Campbell, "Infant and Child Mortality among the Qing Nobility: Implications for Two Types of Positive Check," *Population Studies*, vol. 48, no. 3 (1994), 1–17; James Lee and Wang Feng, "Malthusian Models and Chinese Realities: The Chinese Demographic System 1700–2000," *Population and Development Review*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1999), 33–65.

[20] Jiang Quanbao and Li Shuzhuo, *Nüxing queshi*, 18–21.

[21] Jiang Tao, "Chuantong renkou de xingbie yu nianling jiegou" [The sex and age structure of populations in ancient China], *Jindaishi yanjiu* [Modern Chinese history study], no. 6 (1997), 1–22.

Polygyny

The practice of taking concubines can be traced back to as early as the Zhou dynasty, over 2000 years ago. Polygynous marriage was legal in China, but taking concubines was not a universal practice across all classes, and no more than five percent of families included concubines during the Ming and Qing dynasties.[22] The decision whether to take a concubine, and how many to take, was closely linked to a man's social status and economic situation. The higher his social status and economic situation, the more likely it was a man would take concubines. Government officials, local squires, and other prestigious figures were generally much more likely to take concubines, while many underclass poor men remained single involuntarily.[23] 14.28% of males from the prominent Chen clan in Haining took concubines,[24] while in the 1930s, between one third and one half of the wealthy class in Guangzhou did so. The prevalence of polygyny made finding a spouse much more difficult, in a situation where an imbalanced Chinese sex structure had already reduced the number of available females.

Bare Branches

Widespread infanticide created a seriously distorted sex structure, which, coupled with polygyny, made it impossible for many males to find a spouse. There are numerous archives relating to the marriage dilemma in regions where infanticide was prevalent.

During the Qing dynasty, in Longyou county in Zhejiang province, the female population was less than one third of the male population; in Guidong county in Hunan province, males outnumbered females by seventy percent; in Guangxin in Jiangxi province, rampant female infanticide led to males outnumbering females by thirty to forty percent; in Wenzhou in Hunan province, infanticide was so widespread that eighty percent of males could not form their own families, and fertility also declined. Similarly, in Yongzhou in Hunan province, poor families could not keep their daughters, and poor males could not get married; in Zhuangpu county in Fujian province, sixty to seventy percent of the male population was comprised of bare branches; in Guangxin county in Jiangxi province, there were large numbers of bare branches over the age of thirty.[25] A study based on a Qing dynasty archive shows the proportion of males that remained single in different age groups, in Table 2, below.

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[22] Yu Xinzhong, *Zhongguo jiatingshi (disijuan: Mingqing shiqi)* [China's family history (Volume 4: the Ming and Qing dynasties)] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2007), 98–100.

[23] Gao Kai and Li Pingfang, "Lun Zhongguo gudai renkou xingbili shitiao wenti" [A study of the sex ratio in ancient China], *Shixue yuekan* (Journal of historical science), no. 3 (1998), 105–11; Guo Songyi, *Lunli yu shenghuo*, 377.

[24] Lai Huimin, "Mingqing Haining Zha Chen liang jiazu renkou de yanjiu" [A demographic study of the Zha and Chen clans in Haining during the Ming and Qing dynasties], *Dalu zazhi* [The continent magazine], nos. 3–4 (1989).

Table 2 Percentage of Unmarried Males in Different Age Groups[26]

Age group	Unmarried Percentage
15–19	21.74
20–24	26.80
25–29	32.77
30–34	26.85
35–39	22.67
40–44	22.16
45–49	16.52
50–54	5.17
55–59	2.55
60 and above	3.85

According to China's tradition, marriage at twenty-five for males was late. Table 2 shows a high proportion of unmarried males aged twenty-five and above.[27]

In Fujian province, between 1649 and 1659, about half of the population in one prefecture region was made up of bare branches; by 1743, around 60% to 70% of marriage-aged males in this area were unmarried.[28] In the 1930s, the rate of unmarried males was 36.6% in Yishu in Fujian province, but only 5.2% for females.[29]

A similar survey on marital status conducted from 1929 to 1934 in ninety-nine villages in eight districts indicated that 41.5% of males and 28.7% of females were single.[30] Table 3 shows the proportion of unmarried males and females in a widespread survey from the beginning of the 1930s.

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[25] Jiang Quanbao and Li Shuzhuo, *Nüxing queshi*, 28–29.

[26] Wang Yuesheng, "Shiba shiji houqi Zhongguo nanxing wanhun ji buhun qunti de kaocha" [An investigation of China's late married and unmarried males in 18th century], *Zhongguo shehui jingjishi yanjiu* [Researches in Chinese economic history], no. 2 (2001), 16–29.

[27] Wang Yuesheng, "Shiba shiji houqi," 18.

[28] T'ien Ju-k'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988).

[29] Lin Yaohua, *Yixu de zongzu yanjiu* [Study of clans in Yixu] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2000), 191.

[30] Qiao Qiming, *Zhongguo nongcun shehui jingjixue* [Social economics in rural China] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947).

Table 3 The Percentage of Population Unmarried in 1929–1931[31]

Age group	South China		North China	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
25–29	14.1	0.5	21.7	0.4
30–34	7.7	0.01	11.5	–
35–39	5.1	0.02	10.0	X
40–44	3.9	0.2	7.9	X
45–49	2.9	0.2	6.8	–

Note: X indicates less than 0.05

In the early 1940s, another survey on marital status carried out by Professor Chen Da in nine counties showed that on average 19–20% of males were single, while the figure was only 8–9% for females.[32] During the Republican Era, a survey carried out by Mo Zedong in rural Changsha showed that poor peasants made up 70% of the total population, moderate-income peasants 20% and rich peasants and landlords 10%. While the rich peasants and landlords were all married, and some even had concubines, 10% of moderate-income peasants and 30% of poor peasants were single. Thus, a total of 23% of these peasants were bare branches, calculated as follows: (70%×30%) ＋ (20%×10%) ＋ (10%×0) = 23%.

During the period from the sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century, over 20% of all males in China were considered bare branches. Statistics from the early 1800s show that about one-fourth of males over thirty were single, and that 10–15% percent of forty-five year-old males were bare branches.[33]

Marriage and Sex

Historically, bare branches were not single by their own choice. As they were unable to marry through traditional channels, they turned to other forms, resulting in the appearance and subsequent prevalence of forms of marriage such as marriage to child brides, marriage by purchase, marriage by exchange, and so on, in which the women involved were regarded as inferior to those who married into somebody's household in an open and proper manner with a formal wedding.[34] As some men remained single throughout their lifetime, they turned to alternative behaviors to find a sexual outlet, including illegal behaviors such as adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, and sexual assault.

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[31] John Lossing Buck, *Land Utilization in China* (Nanking: University of Nanking, 1937).

[32] Zhang Qingwu, *Zhongguo lidai renkou tongji ziliao yanjiu (minguobian)* [A study of population statistics in all historical period in China (the Republican period)], (Beijing: Gaige chubanshe, 1996), 1417–18.

[33] Cao Shuji and Chen Yixin, "Malthusian lilun he Qingdai yilai de Zhongguo renkou—ping Meiguo xuezhe jinnianlai de xiangguan yanjiu" [Malthusian theory and China's population since the Qing dynasty—Comments on the recent study by American scholars], *Lishi yanjiu* [History research], no.1 (2002), 41–54.

Marriage

In China, marriage has traditionally been a symbol of adulthood. As a result, unmarried males, regardless of age, are not regarded as adults and are treated discriminatorily.[35] While these involuntarily single males would certainly seek to get married, poor living conditions and inability to pay wedding fees, and other similar issues led to the prevalence of these forms of marriage that were less socially acceptable.

One option was to marry later in life. In situations with a low supply of marriageable females, men may take longer to find a spouse, as the imbalanced sex ratio lengthens the matching process and postpones the time of marriage.[36] In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a survey in Shanxi province showed that the mean age at first marriage was 16 for females and 26.2 for males, mainly due to the shortage of eligible women, as a result of which, males had to postpone their marriages.[37]

According to Lee and Wang's study on the Qing dynasty[38], even at ages thirty and forty, a relatively large proportion of males remained unmarried, as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 Percentage of Unmarried Males in Various Regions of China

Time period	Region	By age 30	By age 40	Sample size
1700–1724	Anhui	8.2	NA	1,040
1640–1724	Beijing	13.0	7.0	1,103
1750–1774	Anhui	16.1	NA	1,949
1774–1973	Liaoning	20.4	16.0	3,547
1800–1819	Anhui	12.6	NA	2,353
1820–1839	Anhui	14.1	NA	2,567
1929–1931	North China	11.5	7.9	21,560
1929–1931	South China	7.7	3.9	24,374
1900–1925	All China	13.7	6.7	6,538

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[34] Guo Songyi, *Lunli yu shenghuo*, 486–98; Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society*; Wang Yuesheng, *Qingdai zhongqi hunyin chongtu touxi*, 39–48.

[35] Jiang Quanbao and Li Shuzhuo, *Nüxing queshi*, 4–5.

[36] Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer, "A Theory of Marriage Timing," *American Journal of Sociology*, no. 94 (1988), 563–91.

[37] Qiao Qiming, "Shanxi Qingyuanxian 143 nongjia renkou diaocha zhi yanjiu" [Study of the demographic survey of 143 rural households in Qingyuan county of Shanxi province], *Zhongguo renkou wenti* [Journal of Chinese population] (1947), 292.

[38] Lee and Wang, "Malthusian Models," 44.

Another option was to take a child bride. At least among the poor, taking a child bride was a prevalent and generally accepted form of marriage. Child brides were generally adopted girls, who were usually less than ten years old when adopted.[39] Some poor families would give away their female children, with other poor families adopting them and bringing them up in the family to be a future bride to one of the adoptive parents' sons.[40] Before 1949, in rural areas in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, around 10% of families had a married or unmarried child bride.[41] In 1936, a survey done in Wujiang in Jiangsu province showed that 74 of the 439 married women surveyed were child brides, 17% of the total. Among unmarried women, 95 were child brides, making up 33% of the total. On average there was one child bride for every 2.7 families.[42] In 1945, a survey of 1,479 households in seven villages showed that 51%, 756 households, had child brides. In these households, there were 880 child brides; hence, in some homes, there were actually more than one.[43]

A third option was marriage by purchase. It was quite common to buy girls as brides, concubines or servants. Furthermore, among lower class families, remarriage of females was quite commonplace. Female remarriage with some element of buying and selling was also prevalent. The insufficient supply of females increased their value in the marriage market and enabled many families to benefit from such female remarriage.[44] The large numbers of bare branches made it easy to find buyers for widows who wanted to remarry, as well as for some wives and daughters-in-law sold by their husbands or parents-in-law, or even sometimes by abductors. Wealthy people often bought unmarried girls as servants or concubines, but only lower class bare branches bought other men's wives.[45] According to the Hefei *xianzhi* (Gazetteer of Hefei), under the reign of Jiaqing in the Qing dynasty, people were often buying other men's wives and this provoked many legal disputes.

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[39] Wolf and Huang, *Marriage and Adoption*, 230–41; Guo Songyi, *Lunli yu shenghuo*, 251–58.

[40] *Nanchang xianzhi* [Gazetter of Nanchang], vol. 56, *Fengtu* [Customs], stereotype edition in 1934.

[41] Pan Yunkang, *Jiating shehuixue* [Family sociology] (Beijing: Zhongguo shenji chubanshe, 2002), 41.

[42] Deng Weizhi and Xu Rong, *Jiating shehuixue* [Family sociology] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001), 157–58.

[43] Guo Songyi, "Qingdai 403 zong minxing anli zhong de sitong xingwei kaocha" [Investigation into adultery based on 403 criminal cases during the Qing dynasty], *Lishi yanjiu* [Historical reviews], no. 3 (2003), 51–67.

[44] Hu Zhongsheng, "MingQing Huizhou xiaceng shehui de feichangtai hunyin jiqi tedian" [Abnormal marriage in the underclass in Huizhou during the Ming and Qing dynasties], *Anhui shixue* [Historical research in Auhui], no. 1 (2001), 5–12.

[45] Zhang Yan and Mao Liping, *19 shiji zhongqi Zhongguo jiating de shehui jingji toushi* [Perspectives on the socioeconomics of Chinese families in the middle 19th century] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2003).

A fourth option was marriage by kidnapping. As many poverty-stricken people could not pay all the expenses related to marriage, some went so far as kidnapping in order to obtain a wife. In much the same way as in the other forms of marriage mentioned above, kidnapping was also caused by the males' poverty and by the shortage of females. Families at the bottom of society often forcibly abducted females for brides, and sometimes kidnapping widows.[46] In Jiangsu in the late Qing dynasty, due to the high cost of marriage, many poor people remained single until well into their 30s or 40s, and so marriages by kidnapping became quite common.

Yet a fifth option was marriage by exchange. This practice, a variation of marriage by purchase, was usually agreed between two or more families, who would give up a daughter in exchange for a daughter-in-law. This form of marriage was common in ancient China, and was mostly employed by extremely poor families, such as in the ancient Chaozhou region, where when two impoverished families had bare branches and unmarried daughters, they would come to an agreement on an exchange marriage.[47]

A sixth option was uxorilocal, or matrilocal marriage. In China's patrilineal society, patrilocal marriage dominated and was the generally accepted model. Matrilocal males were disdained and regarded as subordinate in many important matters, such as carrying on the family lines and resource allocation, and this restricted their endowed power as husband and father. Nevertheless, many bare branches in needy families actively sought matrilocal marriages, resulting in a prevalence of matrilocal marriage in the lower strata of society.[48] According to, Cai Shiyuan, a tutor of Emperor Qianlong in the Qing dynasty, in his essay *A Strict Ban on Female Infanticide*, wrote: "Why are uxorilocal marriages so rampant? Because of the large number of excess males and bare branches due to the practice of female infanticide. Those males intend to get a wife and don't care about their own family line at all."

Finally, a seventh option was levirate marriage, in which a widow was married, involuntarily or willingly, to one of her late husband's brothers. This was an ancient marriage institution, whose origins were unrelated to distorted sex ratios and excess males. Nevertheless, China's out-of-balance sex structure and shortage of females led levirate marriage becoming a widely accepted form of marriage, even though those that participated ran the risk of execution.[49] In the case of poor, lower class bare branch males, levirate marriage reduced the burden of marriage-related expenses, and at the same time guaranteed the support of the widow and her children by keeping them in the same family.[50]

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Chen Hanchu, "ChaoShan hunyin jiusu mianmianguan" [Old customs in marriage in Chaoshan], *Guangdong shizhi* (Guangdong historical record), no. 4 (2001), 42–48.

[48] Guo Songyi, *Lunli yu shenghuo*, 314–24.

[49] Hou Chunyan, "Jindai Shanxi hunjia luncai xianxiang de shehui wenhua huanjiang" [The socio-cultural background of wealth-oriented marriage in modern Shanxi province], *Jinyang xuekan* [Jinyang study], no. 4 (2003), 78–81.

In Chinese society from the 1700s to the founding of PRC, males found it very difficult to plan their marriage. Due to the long-term shortage of females and the limited economic resources available to compete for a bride, parents were forced to adopt a child bride or find a wife for their son after he was fully grown by one of these irregular means. Those who chose not to raise a child bride were generally forced to opt for uxorilocal or levirate marriage in order to avoid the high expenses of a regular marriage. Those males who unable to marry even through one of these irregular marriage forms had no choice but to remain single.[51]

Sex

In societies with a high sex ratio, prostitution flourish and homosexuality and "polyandrous" marriage increase.[52] In the Qing dynasty, their inability to participate in normal married life forced bare branches to seek other sexual outlets, including adultery, hiring prostitutes, and even rape.

Homosexuality was practiced by lower class bare branches, though it can be attributed to many factors as well as being unable to find other sexual outlets.[53] During the Ming dynasty, in southern Fujian, large numbers of lower class bare branches enjoyed homosexual relationships with popular acceptance: such relationships were stable and open, acknowledged by their families and the community. Instead of bringing shame, such relationships could be shown off in public.[54] Homosexuality was also prevalent in brotherhood associations and military groups. *Guolu*, a brotherhood association once active in Sichuan province, consisted mainly of bare branches. Within the *Guolu* brotherhood associations, bare branches often formed "godfather-godson" relationships, which were actually a form of homosexual relationship.[55]

Another sexual outlet for bare branches with no socially approved way to marry was to visit prostitutes. During the Ming dynasty, in the Luomahu area, a suburb of Tianjin, lower class prostitutes built primitive frame huts and plied their trade inside. Many unskilled workers, including street dealers, wagoners and the like, who could not marry and lacked sufficient money to visit more formal brothels, were visitors to such huts.[56] In the late Qing dynasty, such huts were prevalent throughout Hechuan (now a county in Chongqing). A third of males over thirty were unmarried, and two fifths of males over twenty were unmarried; these males were the primary clientele.[57] During the Qing dynasty, a severely distorted sex ratio in Beijing led to a large number of bare branches who brought about a sharp rise in prostitution, with lower class males being the primary clientele.[58] Similarly, in the Republican Period, vast numbers of young rural males swarmed into the cities. In 1936, the sex ratio was 161.9 (females, 100) in Tianjin, 160.18 in Beijing, 150.29 in Nanjing, 147.29 in Hangzhou, 145.90 in Qingdao, 121.41 in Guangzhou, and 133.14 in Hankou.[59] Lower class prostitutes were generally viewed as a social nuisance, challenging traditional social order and posing a potential threat to public health through the transmission of STDs. In 1927, the prevalence rate of STDs exceeded 35% among soldiers and policemen in the Suzhou, Beijing and Shanghai. It was repeatedly reported that over half the population of Shanghai was infected with STDs, 90% of whom had been infected by prostitutes.[60]

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[50] Chen Hanchu, "Chaoshan hunyin."

[51] James Z. Lee and Wang Feng, *One Quarter of Humanity: Malthusian Mythology and Chinese Realities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 96.

[52] Courtright, *Violent Land*, 66–68.

[53] Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (California: University of California Press, 1992).

[54] T'ien Ju-k'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*.

[55] Chang Jianhua, *Qingdai de guojia yu shehui yanjiu* [A study of China and Chinese society in the Qing dynasty] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), 218.

Adultery was found to be another form of sexual release amongst bare branches with no traditional sexual outlet. According to Cai Shiyuan's *A Strict Ban on Female Infanticide*, 60–70% of marriageable males in Zhuangpu (a county now in Fujian Province) were involuntarily single, which led to many extramarital sexual relationships and adultery. Cai identified the fundamental cause of this phenomenon as the infanticide of female children, leading to a shortage of marriageable females. Examination of the Qing archives for capital crimes has showed that, for 398 cases of adultery, 297 cases involved single males, 73.87 percent of the total. In traditional China, a society which greatly valued the chastity of women, adultery was a grave threat to family stability, which could provoke major conflicts and even homicides. The consequences of adultery were serious and provocative of further vice.[61]

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[56] *Guanyu Tianjinshi jinü gaizao wenti de chubu yijian ji diaocha ziliao* [Preliminary decision and investigation materials on reforming prostitutes in Tianjin] (1950), Tianjinshi gong'anju dang'anguan [Public Security Burea of Tianjin City], Archive no. 3-64-4.

[57] *Hechuan xianzhi* (minguo jiunian) [County annals of Hechuan], Ninth year of Republican Era (1920).

[58] Zhang Baiqing, "Zhongguo chengshi zaoqi xiandaihua guocheng zhongde changji wenti" [Prostitution in China's early period of urbanization], *Shixue yuekan* [Journal of historical science], no.1 (1999): 99–103.

[59] Zhang Qingwu, *Zhongguo lidai renkou*, 1355.

[60] Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (California: University of California Press, 1997), 226–41.

[61] Wang Yuesheng, *Qingdai zhongqi hunyin*, 170–74.

Some bare branches, especially among the lower echelons of society, turned to sexual assault for sexual release. An examination of middle Qing dynasty legal archives has shown that 59.18% of rapists were unmarried males. As for their occupation, various classes of peasants made up more than 30% of offenders.[62] In an analysis of 58 rapists, of whom 28 had a clear marital status recorded, only four were married, and the other 24 were single. Taking account of their poverty and profession, they would likely not get married in the future. During the Qing dynasty, most men who committed rape were unmarried.[63] Having suffered both physical and psychological trauma, many female rape victims committed suicide. Men who raped were often beaten by their victim's relatives, and in some cases were even killed, creating a serious threat to social order.[64]

Migration and Congregation

Unable to establish their own families, bare branches were generally unconcerned about family or inherited wealth, and thus more readily migrated and sought their fortunes far away from their hometowns. Unstable young males, faced with unfavorable social status and the virtual impossibility of starting their own families, tended to collaborate with other bare branches in order to attain a better socio-economic situation through violence and crime.[65] Secret societies and brotherhood associations increased in number at a rapid pace when men were emancipated from families and traveled far away from home in search of employment or security. Bare branches were a primary recruiting source for secret societies, bandit groups and cults. Such groups engaged in smuggling, gambling, kidnapping, selling opium, running brothels, trafficking in women and children, and street begging, which undermined social order. As the main source of recruitment for such groups, bare branches were widely regarded as a major threat to social stability.[66]

Migration of Bare Branches

A study of 147,956 males from 50 family trees during the Ming and Qing dynasties showed that 18,691 males, or 12.64 %, migrated from their place of origin. A great number of these migrants were destitute peasants, with single males making up a large percentage.[67] A survey on rural migrants from the Republican Period in Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hebei provinces further demonstrated this trend among migrants. Data from the survey showed that males made up over 85% of all migrants, with over 75% between the ages of twenty and forty.[68] Another two studies carried out in 1987 and 1991, focusing on the characteristics of migrants in pre-1949 Shanghai, found that two-thirds of the 191 males studied were single.[69] Similar trends were found in northeastern China, where most migrants were found to be single young men; women made up a very small proportion of the migrant population. During the period from 1921 to 1927, males were found to account for between 80.1% and 94.8% of all migrants annually.[70] The bare branches among them were unlikely to find a suitable spouse because the majority of them worked as day laborers or were unemployed; their lowly status and poverty made them unattractive suitors, and few women would marry them.

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[62] Wang Yuesheng, "Shiba shiji houqi."
[63] Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society*, 102.
[64] Wang Yuesheng, "Shiba shiji houqi."
[65] Zhou Yumin and Shao Yong, *Zhongguo banghui shi* [A history of Chinese gangs] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 67–68.
[66] Tan Ping, "Xingbili shitiao," 27; Liu Zhongyi, "Daling weihun nanxing," 17.

Chinese peasants used to be diligent, honest, and tolerant. Upon leaving their home environment, they tended to lose such virtues, and instead tended to subscribe to a “chaotic philosophy”; that is, they developed a tendency towards violence.[71] Migrant bare branches, lacking any obligations as husband or father, and without the supervision of relatives and friends, experienced no feelings of dishonor, and began to live according to a different ideology from common peasants. They often led hard lives, and were sometimes rejected by mainstream society, leading to confrontations and disruptions of social order.[72] Bare branches tended to dominate within migrant groups. As a marginal group, isolated from mainstream society, they generally had no stable employment or source of income and were more likely to form criminal organizations such as secret societies and brotherhood associations. They plundered resources, lived contrary to moral and social norms, and engaged in other illicit activities such as kidnapping, theft, and blackmail. In the Qing dynasty, the infamous *Guolu* groups consisted of migrant bare branches and the local unemployed:[73] they would blackmail, gamble, steal, plunder, rape, and even kill.[74]

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[67] Liu Cuirong, *Mingqing shiqi jiazu renkou yu shehui jingji bianqian* [Lineage population and socio-economic changes in the Ming-Ch’ing periods] (Taipei: Institute of Economics, Academia Sinica, 1992).

[68] Chen Hansheng, *Gudong nongcun shengchan guanxi yu shengchanli* [Relations of production and productivity] (Shanghai: Zhongshan wenhua jiaoyuguan, 1934).

[69] Lu Hanlong, “Shanghai jiefangqian yimin tezheng yanjiu” [Characteristics of migrants before 1949 in Shanghai], *Shanghai shehui kexueyuan xueshu jikan* [Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences research quarterly], no. 1 (1995), 135–43.

[70] Ozawa Moichi, *Shandong bi’nanmin jishi* [Documentaries of Shandongese referees in northwester China] (Dalian, 1928).

[71] Lü Junwei and Wang Yaosheng, “Beiyang junfa tongzhi shiqi Shandong tufei chengyin qianxi” [Bandits in Shandong during the Beiyang warlord period], *Yantai daxue xuebao* [Journal of Yantai University], no. 3 (1997), 88–93.

[72] Wang Xuetai, *Youmin wenhua yu Zhongguo shehui* [Vagrant culture and Chinese society] (Beijing: Tongxin chubanshe, 2007), 231–32.

Congregation of Bare Branches

In Chinese tradition, the family held the central position in daily life and culture, and kinship relations were so important that close friends and neighbors were also often referred to as "older brother" or "uncle."[75] When members of a clan migrated, their traditional social bonds were weakened or severed. As isolated individuals, their long-term vagrancy created a dire need for migrant bare branches to build up new social networks to satisfy their material and spiritual needs. Once accustomed to enjoying the protection of their clans, migrants needed pseudo-kinship systems for protection and mutual aid to survive in the struggle of life. Secret societies and brotherhood associations, which united people sharing the same fate and strengthened their confidence and their ability to survive and prosper, became substitutes for family or community, and arguably became even more important to the migrant bare branches. They provided both psychological and physical security, and served as a consoling replacement for kinship relationships, and offered a robust method of making a living unattainable by other methods.[76] Secret societies and bandit groups increased rapidly in number when migrants traveled far from home in search of employment and security, emancipated from the familial bond. The formation of secret societies was closely related to political oppression: one motive that brought these males without stable employment together was to antagonize the social order. Secret societies in China were a major antisocial force, not submissive to local authorities, not reconciled with the central government, and inclined to cause provocation and subversion.[77]

Bandits operated outside the confines of the legal system, disrupting society through violent crimes such as murder and rape.[78] During the late Qing dynasty, episodes of banditry in northern Jiangsu province filled the pages of newspapers and government reports.[79] In northern Jiangsu, few towns and villages were exempt from disturbance by bandits.[80]

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[73] Liu Cheng-yun, "Kuo-lu, a sworn-brotherhood organization in Szechwan," *Late Imperial China*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1985), 56–82.

[74] Chang Jianhua, *Qingdai de guojia*, 219.

[75] Yang C.K., *Chinese Communist Society: The Family and the Village* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965).

[76] Wang Xuetai, *Youmin wenhua*, 431–32.

[77] Lionel Tiger, *Men in Groups*, 137–38.

[78] Cai Shaoqing, *Minguo shiqi de tufei* [Bandits during the Republican Period] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1993), 2–7.

[79] Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 62.

The lack of a wife was what drove many bare branches to banditry. Most bandits were bare branches.[81] Oftentimes the motivation for many young males to join bandit groups was precisely to find a wife; many bandit groups routinely lured young males to their ranks by promising to select female captives for them. Many bandits not only established their masculine self-esteem by obtaining a wife, but took concubines as well.[82]

In addition to normal bandits, there were also soldier bandits. In ancient China, soldiers were regarded as being of almost the same social status as bandits. China's armies could not easily be distinguished from bandits; when defeated, they would often start to act as bandits. Bandits, if they accepted amnesty and surrendered, might be transformed into a formal army. Some groups of soldiers caused more trouble to the people than bandits did.[83] Hence, some researchers have commented that "The army are bandist, bandits are an army; armies and bandits are one family."[84] Amongst poor people struggling to make a living by farming, many males joined the army, if for no reason other than to be fed.[85] During the reign of the Beiyang warlords, joining the army was the most desirable profession for young males.[86] China's military leaders could easily gather a large army. In 1924, the warlord Wu Peifu enrolled soldiers in Shandong Province. Prefectures such as Caozhou in Jinan were crowded with enrollment banners, and young males eagerly joined its army.[87] While they were underpaid, they enjoyed certain privileges such as free meals, and were generally given free reign to engage in other activities such as rape or plunder of the local population, or smuggling opium.[88] From 1912 to 1922, 179 mutinies occurred.[89] On the night of March 18, 1912, mutinying soldiers in Laizhou in Shandong robbed more than thirty pawnshops, private banks, and private firms, and injured a dozen people. On the night of March 21, 1912, a garrison of soldiers in Qingzhou in Shandong collaborated with bandits in plundering more than twenty pawnshops and private banks. They also sacked the post office and set fire to it, along with many houses[90]. Defeated, dismissed or mutinied soldiers would turn to banditry, and amnestied bandits would then join the army. China's soldiers might be respectable and decent defenders of the nation one day, but the next day they would point their guns at the people to seize wealth and women.[91] Such soldier bandits, heavily armed and well trained, ran rampant, burning, plundering, raping and killing, and were more devastating than actual bandits.[92]

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[80] Zhang Jiehou, "Huaibei nongmin zhi shenghuo zhuangkuang" [Living situations in northern Jiangsu province], *Dongfang zazhi* [Orient magazine], no. 16 (1927), 73–74.

[81] Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries*; David Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China: The Formation of a Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 66–67; Patrick Fuliang Shan, "Insecurity, Outlawry and Social Order: Banditry in China's Heilongjiang Frontier Region, 1900–1931," *Journal of Social History*, no. 3 (2006), 25–54.

[82] Wu Zhongdao, "Huabei zhanqu feihuo zhi zong jiantao" [A review of bandit activities in the war zone of northern China], *Xin zhonghua* [New China], November 25, 1933, 19.

[83] Chi Zihua, *Liumin wenti yu shehui kongzhi* [Vagrants and social control] (Guilin: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 2001), 129.

[84] Xu Youwei and Phil Billingsley, *Yu Zhongguo tufei tongxing—yangren yangzhong de minguo shehui* [Walking with Chinese bandits—Republican society in a foreigner's eyes], *Dang'an yu shixue* [Archives and history], no. 1 (1997), 76–80.

[85] Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Teh* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1956).

[86] Lü Junwei and Wang Yaosheng, "Beiyang junfa," 90.

[87] Shuofu, "Zhixi junfa matixia de Shandong renmin" [Shandong people under the hooves of Zhili faction of Beiyang warlords], *Xiangdao zhoubao* [The guide weekly], November 22, 1924.

Rebellion

Female infanticide and polygyny led to an excess of males, many of whom were consequently marginalized as they could not be fully employed within their family, clan or community. Population pressure caused by high rates of fertility intensified their predicament.[93] Since the early Qing dynasty, secret societies and brotherhood associations had been highly popular among these marginalized young males, especially in the south-eastern coastal regions.[94] They not only plundered, blackmailed, and smuggled opium, but also organized and participated in uprising and rebellions. During the Qing dynasty, there were numerous mass actions annually, as can be seen from Table 5. Secret societies and brotherhood associations were responsible for most of these mass actions and rebellions.[95]

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[88] Nagano Akira, *Zhongguo shehui zuzhi* [China's social organizations] (Beijing: Guangming shuju, 1930).

[89] "Minguo yilai yibai qishijiu ci bingbian" [179 mutinies since the Republican Era (1912)], *Dongfang zazhi* [Orient magazine], January 20, 1923.

[90] "Shandong dahuan bingfei" [Shandong trampled by soldier bandits], *Shenbao* [Shen newspaper], April 3, 1912.

[91] Hong Ruizhao, "Difang zhengzhi gaige chuyi (xu)" [On reform of local politics, II], *Sanmin zhuyi yuekan* [Three principles of the people monthly], vol. 1, no. 2 (1933).

[92] Chi Zihua, *Liumin wenti*, 129.

[93] James W. Tong, *Disorder under Heaven: Collective Violence in the Ming dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 76–95.

[94] Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies*, 31.

[95] Qin Baoqi, "Shiba shiji zhongguo mimi shehui yu nongmin jieji de lishi mingyun" [Secret societies and the fate of the peasant class in the 18th century], *Qingshi yanjiu* [Studies in Qing history], no. 1 (1995), 80–91.

Table 5 Mass Actions in 1836－1911[96]

Period	Mass actions	Average per year
1836－1845	246	24.6
1846－1855	933	93.3
1856－1865	2,332	233.2
1866－1875	909	90.9
1876－1885	385	38.5
1886－1895	314	31.4
1896－1911	653	133.6
Total	5,772	76.0

The Tiandihui group is widely considered to be one of the most important and influential secret societies in China's history. It developed rapidly and soon spread to other regions, its growth attributed to the mass of vagrants during the late Qing dynasty.[97] It began as a self-defensive secret society made up of unskilled laborers in the coastal regions of Fujian, Guangdong, and Guangxi provinces. Confronted with unstable employment and oppression, the day-laborers of the region organized to defend themselves. Tiandihui thus began as an association of lower class people dissenting against mainstream society. Once fully developed, it began a revolt under the pretext of social conflicts.[98] In the southeastern coastal provinces, Tiandihui was a symbol of rebellion against the government.[99]

The foundations of such secret societies were what are known in today's China as "floating populations," namely migrants. Due to demographic or social transformations, floating populations left their hometowns to seek their fortune, in ways frequently regarded as illegal by governmental authorities.[100] Without stable income or employment, they were more likely to join secret societies or bandit groups. The top leaders and organizers of these groups were mainly knights-errant, swordsmen, vagrant monks, Taoist masters, street performers, and practitioners of witchcraft and alchemy, but migrants, bankrupt peasants, craftsmen, street dealers, boat haulers, salt smugglers and the like also sometimes rose in the organization.[101] According to the legal archives, 235 leaders, organizers, and senior cadres of the Tiandihui were engaged in the occupations listed in Table 6.

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[96] Yang, C. K., "Some Preliminary Patterns of Mass Actions in Nineteenth Century China," in *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China* eds. Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Carolyn Grant (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 174–210.

[97] Dian H. Murray and Qin Baoqi, *The Origins of the Tiandihui—The Chinese Triads in Legend and History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 38–88.

[98] Qin Baoqi, *Zhongguo dixia shehui* [China's underground societies] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), 258

[99] Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies*, 55.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Shao Xunzheng, "*Mimi shehui, zongjiao he nongmin zhanzheng*" [Secret societies, religion and peasant wars], *Beijing daxue xuebao* [Journal of Peking University], no. 3 (1961), 1–7; Wang Xuetai, *Youmin wenhua*, 442–44.

Table 6 Social Status of Leaders and Organizers during the Jiaqing and Daoguang Reigns[102]

Occupation	Number of people	Percentage
Peddlers	32	14.2
Hired laborers	9	4.0
Farming	9	4.0
Farming and peddling	58	25.7
Agricultural craftsmen	4	1.8
Craftsmen	4	1.8
Day laborers	36	15.9
Poor intellectuals	18	8.0
Monks	4	1.8
Rich	2	0.9
Factotums	6	2.7
Unknown	44	19.5
Total	235	100.0

In the third year (1813) of the reign of the Jiaqing Emperor, an uprising of the Xiaodaohui (the 'Small Sword Society,' a branch of the Tiandihui) took place in Danshui, Taiwan, leading to the arrest of 12 men. The men arrested ranged from twenty-one to forty-eight years old, and none had a wife, children or family.[103] According to testimony given by captives held in the Lin Shuangwen uprising, also in Taiwan, the majority of participants in the uprising were unmarried.[104]

In Taiwan, the term *Luohanjiao* referred to males with no land, no property, and no wife or children. They were bare branches, who wandered the countryside and eventually congregated in large towns or cities, where they could gather in their hundreds, or in small towns and villages, where they gathered in smaller groups. Their existence accounted for Taiwan being so difficult to govern.[105] According to Yao Ying, a governor of Taiwan in the late Qing dynasty, many *Luohanjiao* who had illegally immigrated to Taiwan from Fujian went on to form the Tiandihui. Like other armed bandit groups, they stole, plundered, attacked policemen, gambled, and fomented unrest, thereby posing a major threat to social stability.[106]

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[102] Qin Baoqi, "Tiandihui dang'an shiliao gaishu" [An overview of historical archives on Tiandihui], *Lishi dang'an* [Historical archives], no. 1 (1981), 113–19.

[103] Zhou Yumin and Shao Yong, *Zhongguo banghui shi*, 127.

[104] Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies*, 56.

[105] Chen Shengshao, *Wensu lu* [Documentaries of customs and societies in Fujian and Taiwan] (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1983/1827), photoprint document.

[106] Liu Xinhui, "Shilun Lin Shuangwen qiyi hou Qingting de shanhou cuoshi" [Countermeasures by the imperial authority after the Lin Shuangwen uprising during the Qing dynasty], *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan yanjiushengyuan xuebao* [Journal of the Postgraduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences], no. 5 (2001), 66–75.

Conclusions

For rural families, sacrificing female offspring in favor of male ones seemed a rational choice, but this practice led to a severe surplus of males. Widespread female infanticide and polygyny made it impossible for many males to get married. In China, these unmarried males are known as bare branches, and have existed, to a greater or lesser degree, throughout the country's history.

Bare branches sought to exploit every possible form of marriage, which often led to tragic consequences: many criminal cases arose, for example, from unharmonious relationships in marriages involving child brides. Men who were still unable to marry even through such irregular means visited prostitutes, committed adultery, or engaged in sexual assault, with serious consequences for society.

High sex ratios have usually been seen as leading to violence.[107] Lower class bare branches were the least stable elements of the population, and were inclined to commit crimes and generally harm the social order. They played a major role in collective conflicts and were the main source of membership for secret societies, brotherhood associations, bandit groups, and other similar organizations.[108] Bare branches often violated social norms and laws, and were involved in many rebellions against imperial authority.

Although the argument that an excess of males threatens social stability has been seen as quite controversial, there is historical evidence that large numbers of bare branches create widespread unrest. In medieval Portugal, bare branches resulted from the tradition of investing heavily in firstborn sons to maintain familial accumulation of resources. These bare branches demonstrated their power to influence foreign as well as domestic policy in the country.[109] In Oudh in colonial India, young adult males without resources formed small armies of bandits, who, besides plundering and murdering, went into open revolt against the government.[110] In Taiwan, from the late 1600s to the late 1800s, serious revolts took place roughly every three years; a primary aggravating factor in these appeared to be Taiwan's very high sex ratio, a result of the large volume of single male emigration from mainland China.[111]

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[107] James L. Watson, "Self-defense Corps, Violence, and the Bachelor's Subculture in South China: Two Case Studies," in *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Sinology* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1989), 216.

[108] Daniel Little, Understanding Peasant China: Case Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 145–86; Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 99–100.

[109] James L. Boone, "Nobel Family Structure and Expansionist Warfare in the Late Middle Ages," in *Rethinking Human Adaptation: Biological and Cultural Models* ed. Rada Dyson-Hudson and Michael A. Little (Boulder: Westview, 1983), 79–96; James L. Boone, "Parental Investment and Elite Family Structure in Preindustrial States: A Case Study of Late Medieval-early Modern Portuguese Genealogies," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 88, no. 4 (1986), 859–78.

[110] P. D. Reeves, Sleeman in Oudh: An Abridgement of W. H. Sleeman's A Journey through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849–50 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

As has been the case throughout its history, China is now and will in the future be confronted with a large proportion of bare branches, due to a higher than normal sex ratio at birth and excess female child mortality, especially following the implementation of China's one-child policy.[112] As in the past, today's bare branches, usually disadvantaged in social status, are going to all possible lengths to get married, including resorting to marriage by exchange and by purchase. The larger the number of single males, the more violence and antisocial behavior they exhibit. Compared with married men, bare branches are more inclined to partake in vice and violence for self-satisfaction, and most violent crimes are committed by unmarried and low-status males.[113] This group, at a disadvantage in the marriage market, may engage in anti-social behavior and violence, and pose a threat to social stability and national security.[114] With women choosing to migrate in order to make a better marriage, bare branches are more concentrated in poor areas where they form a "bare branch class" or "bare branch villages." These bare branches, disadvantaged and having little stake in the generally accepted social system, may be readily inclined to take collective action to improve their own situation and status, engaging in violence and crime, if necessary.

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[111] Hudson and den Boer, *Bare Branches*, 209–10.

[112] Shripad Tuljapurkar, Li Nan, and Marcus W. Feldman, "High Sex Ratios in China's Future," *Science* 267 (1995): 874–76; Zeng Yi, "Options for Fertility Policy Transition in China, *Population and Development Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2007), 215–46.

[113] Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer, "A Surplus of Men, a Deficit of Peace: Security and Sex Ratios in Asia's Largest States," *International Security*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2002), 5–38.

[114] Therese Hesketh and Zhu Weixing, "Abnormal Sex Ratios in Human Populations: Causes and Consequences," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 103, no. 36 (2006): 13271–75.

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