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# **Analysis on the Phenomenon of High Betrothal Gifts in Rural Areas from the Perspective of Social Exchange Theory**

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**Abstract:** In today's society, betrothal gifts accounts for an increasing proportion of the whole marriage expenditure, the unhealthy trend of blindly following the trend of high betrothal gift has emerged, which has brings heavy pressure to the life of farmers and the overall poverty alleviation, and affects the harmony and stability of rural society to a certain extent. Therefore, it has gradually attracted people's extensive attention. This paper analyzes the phenomenon of betrothal gifts price in rural areas from the perspective of social exchange theory, and analyzes the reasons for the occurrence of high bride price in rural areas, hoping to provide some help for future research.

**Keywords:** Rural Marriage; High Dowry; Unhealthy Atmosphere

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## **1. Formulation of the problem**

There is a long history of betrothal gifts in our country. There are six rites for marriage, namely, accepting gifts, asking names, naji, accepting zheng, telling the date and welcoming the parents. One of the "accepting zheng" refers to sending betrothal gifts.<sup>[1]</sup>The bride price originally originated in the Western Zhou Dynasty and played a role of marriage agreement. If a man wanted to reach a preliminary marriage agreement with his wife, he would give the bride price and betrothal money as an important ceremony for the bride to tie the knot. Therefore, the bride price has a profound cultural heritage in China.

In the countryside, especially in China's rural areas, children's marriage is a family of priority, in order to the priority, many parents was born a son began to save money, to prepare for the future bride price, hope you can assume expenses, betrotha gifts has been as a traditional folk custom has a long history in China, but with the increase of farmers' income in some rural areas, the bride price began rising, gradually the dowry has lost its original meaning, now in some parts of the dowry has become, female direction the man a way for wealth, for the economy a little bit poor family, in order to betrothal gifts borrowing everywhere, with a high debt, poor form taking a marriage for a lifetime, more even had to use the bride married daughter used to pay for their son get married gift, at the expense of her daughter's happiness some parents for their son's bride price high, it will indirectly lead to family relationships between internal tension, some parents willingly sacrifice themselves to cobble together a son bride price money, some parents are forced to perform such obligations, this kind of parental pay, some people think it is the son in the disguised exploitation, some people think it is another kind of gnawed behavior, this kind of phenomenon shows that the bride price is no longer the original agreement function, become the woman's family with the daughter and the man's family in exchange for wealth medium. Feng Tian believes that the high bride price puts heavy economic pressure on the male parents and affects the production and reproduction activities of the male family. At the same time, the high bride price will aggravate the contradiction between the newlyweds and affect their relationship after marriage.<sup>[2]</sup>

## **2. Social exchange theory**

Social exchange theory holds that there are three factors affecting social interaction: social rules, relative resources and minimum interests. Social rules refer to the norms of behavior that affect people's interactions, including both moral norms and legal provisions. Relative resources refer to any material material that can facilitate communication, including education,

appearance, family and so on. The least interesting is the relative status of the members of society. Those who are more interested in social relations are usually in a weaker position. Influenced by these three factors, the two parties in the relationship will measure the reward obtained and paid, which can be either material money, service, etc., or intangible information, love and other psychological comfort. Betrothal gift is an embodiment of the social exchange between the husband's family and the wife's family.

Based on the perspective of social exchange theory, this paper analyzes the exchange of resources, asymmetric exchange of information and exchange of social capital, and analyzes the reasons for the emergence of high betrothal gifts from the perspective of the exchange of tangible and intangible rewards between the two parties to a marriage.

### **3. Analysis of the causes of high bride price from the perspective of social exchange theory**

#### **3.1 Exchange of resources**

Social members basically abide by the principle of benefit maximization in material exchange, and people often want to obtain the maximum benefit at the lowest cost. Similarly, the principle of benefit maximization is also followed in the field of mate selection, that is, the attraction of a specific opposite sex is determined by the resources it can provide. In the process of marriage, the man is the beneficiary to a certain extent. In the history of China, the woman was married to her husband since ancient times, and the daughter raised by the woman's family for many years was directly sent to the man's family, so the woman's family lost the labor force, so the man's family gave the woman's family a certain amount of money. It is natural to compensate for the hard work and expense of raising a daughter. In today's society, China is currently in a state of imbalance between men and women. The number of men is far more than that of women, and women are in the leading position in the marriage market. In this unequal situation, men need to pay more economic or social and political costs if they want to obtain these resources, and bride price is one of them.

#### **3.2 Asymmetric exchange of information**

Asymmetric information refers to the mate for some reason to get both sides of each other's information is wrong, etc., so as to reach its initial results, in the process of rural marriage concluded, the matchmaker is often provide information on both sides of the key characters, plays an important role, but the intervention of the matchmaker, often make the freedom of marriage has changed shape, has brought the information asymmetry. On the one hand, the role of the matchmaker is usually selected by the groom's family, are usually the man's neighbors or relatives, if not the neighbors and relatives, also meet acquaintances, so in the match-making phase, the matchmaker relative to the man, as is often the case, the matchmaker when introduce the man to woman's family is relatively true, and when the matchmaker to introduce men to her family home, Usually, the man's family is said to be much better than the actual situation, which is inevitably exaggerated. Of course, there are also cases where the matchmaker does not have a comprehensive understanding of the man's family, which is why the promises made by the man and the matchmaker become empty talk in many cases, and it is difficult to fulfill after marriage. It is also a wise decision for women to ask for betrothal gifts in order to protect themselves.

#### **3.3 Exchange of social capital**

Jieqiong Lei believes that there is a phenomenon of ostentatious marriage in rural China, and the high expenditure in marriage is conspicuous consumption under the psychology of blind comparison. The marriage consumption appears the extravagant waste phenomenon of different degree. <sup>[3]</sup>In the countryside, the bride price how many, how much is not only a digital directly involve the side face of both sides, the Chinese people care about most is the face, thus can arouse people's most peer, "you out ten thousand betrothal gifts I went out of the twenty thousand", thus increasing gradually in the process of comparing to, did not fall down, will seriously affect the rural society. The difference between rural areas and cities lies in that rural areas are relatively closed and narrow communities in which social mobility is relatively slow and people form a "differential pattern" relationship network on the basis of frequent interaction and communication. In this, social capital

determines people's status, and the more capital will be relatively in the network of the center position, become elites, some people have less social capital, so marginalized in the network, has become the common people. Rural residents to show the way of the capital is not that you have two kinds, one kind is everyday life, another is weddings and other events of sexual activity, people usually are very familiar with here, ancestral here, was in the countryside is the wind of advocating frugality, if in our daily life can display own superiority, not only will not get everyone's recognition, on the contrary will be discussed and laughed at by everyone, is considered to be luxury and waste. However, if you show yourself in major events, it will play a very good effect, not only will not cause criticism, but also often bring great face to the party concerned, and provide the party with the opportunity to show their strong capital. Rural community is a relatively stable and calm community, people in this community day after day repeat, all kinds of events and activities are few and far between. Marriage, as a life priority, is undoubtedly one of the most important of these few events and activities, and it is also the best opportunity to show their capital ability. By sending a high bride price in the marriage process, it not only shows their family background, status and ability, but also earns enough face for the man and the woman.

### **3.4 Summary and enlightenment**

Although the bride price as a traditional Chinese custom has a history of thousands of years. However, it is undeniable that the appearance of high bride price has brought many social disputes and seriously affected the stability of rural society. It brings heavy pressure to farmers' life and overall poverty alleviation and affects the harmony and stability of rural society to a certain extent. Many social problems caused by the disputes over betrothal gifts have seriously affected the long-term stability of rural society. In recent years, the country began to rectify the phenomenon of sky-high bride price. "High-price bride price" occurred frequently, and the phenomenon of "one million brides" was repeatedly banned. The Civil Code, which will take effect on January 1, 2021, clearly prohibits the claim of property by marriage. Therefore, it is necessary for us to take certain mechanisms and measures to effectively intervene and interfere in the prevailing phenomenon of bride price in the process of rural marriage, so as to reverse this bad habit and promote the smooth progress of rural modernization. ①Regulate marriage customs and limit betrothal gifts. ②Formulate relevant laws to prohibit the sale of marriage. ③Carry out ideological education to correct the psychological comparison. ④Increase cultural propaganda, promote civilization and frugality, etc.

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