The Present Situation, Problems and Governance Path of the Sky-high Betrothal Gifts in Jiangxi Rural Areas

Yuqiao Wang*

Department of social work, Shanghai Lixin University of Accounting and Finance, Shanghai, China

*Corresponding author: yuki06028@outlook.com

Abstract. The sky-high betrothal gifts in rural areas has become a prominent problem that restricts the construction of rural civilization and rural revitalization. Current research has insufficient attention to the governance of regional differentiation within central provinces, and the analysis of micro-level obstacles in policy implementation requires further deepening. This paper takes Jiangxi province as the research object, adopts the method of literature analysis, systematically combs the status quo, causes and policy practice of the betrothal gifts in Jiangxi province. The research finds that the characteristics of the betrothal gifts in Jiangxi province are regional differences, complicated additional expenses, increasing disputes year by year, which are closely related to cultural tradition, life reality, interest chain and insufficient policy guidance. The current policy has achieved the effect of reducing the average amount of betrothal gifts by 35% and revising the village rules and regulations by 89%, but it faces difficulties such as uneven regional implementation and poor interest guidance. This paper puts forward the optimization suggestions of differentiated governance and interest chain guidance, which provides practical reference for the governance of betrothal gifts in central provinces and fills the gap of precise governance in a single province.

Keywords: literature analysis; sky-high betrothal gifts in rural areas; governance optimization; Jiangxi Province; changing customs.

1. Introduction

As a core component of China's traditional wedding etiquette, the betrothal gifts was originally a symbolic material expression of the groom's family conveying their sincerity in marriage to the bride's family, carrying the ethical connotation of "naxing" in the "Six Rites" culture [1]. But under the multiple factors of social transition, the betrothal gifts in some rural areas gradually deviates from the category of "ritual", and becomes a marriage transaction with monetary quantification. The phenomenon of "astronomical betrothal gifts" becomes a prominent problem in rural social governance. Among these, rural areas in Jiangxi Province permanently rank among the highest in China for betrothal gifts amounts. According to 2024 data, the average bride price in rural Jiangxi reached 286,000 yuan. The betrothal gifts in the traditional phyle settlement areas of Jiujiang and Shangrao in northern Jiangxi province is universally over 300,000 yuan. Some counties still exist hidden bride price standards like 'three jin and three liang' (weight-based pricing in RMB) and 'a sea of green with myriad hues' (cash combinations of different denominations), with total wedding costs exceeding 500,000 yuan [2].

In terms of economic compatibility, the per capita disposable income of rural residents in China's Jiangxi Province in 2024 was only 22,673.47 yuan [3]. The average annual income of rural families typically ranges between 50,000 and 80,000 yuan. The sky-high betrothal gifts equal the total net income of an average rural family over 5 to 10 years, far exceeding their financial capacity [4]. This kind of "high consumption of marriage" not only squeeze the family productive input and living expenses, but also produce a series of social problems such as returning to poverty due to marriage, alienation of love and marriage, and intergenerational conflicts [5].This paper takes the sky-high betrothal gifts in Jiangxi rural areas as the core research object, and systematically sorts out its regional characteristics and evolution logic. The problem analysis is divided into two modules: the social problems caused by the sky-high betrothal gifts and the practical obstacles in the governance of the sky-high betrothal gifts. Based on 15 academic papers and 2 English research results, this paper

constructs a targeted governance path, aiming to provide theoretical reference for the construction of rural wedding customs civilization and the practice of grassroots governance.

2. The Current Situation and Characteristics of the Sky-high Betrothal Gifts in Jiangxi Countryside Section Headings

2.1. Regional Differentiation and Implicit Rising of the Amount of Betrothal Gifts

The monetary value of betrothal gifts in Jiangxi shows a clear geographical distrubution pattern.It is higher in the north,lower in the south,and higher in counties compared to urban areas. In rural areas of Xiushui County in Jiujiang and Poyang County in Shangrao, Jiangxi Province, the betrothal gifts typically range from 250,000 to 350,000 yuan. The total wedding expenses,including a wedding house in the county town and a family car,exceed 800,000 yuan.In regions like Ganzhou and Ji’an in southern Jiangxi,while the betrothal money are relatively lower(150,000-20,000 yuan), the substantial phyle culture requires additional hidden expenses such as "phyle gift money" and "matchmaker red envelopes," resulting in actual expenditures comparable to those in northern Jiangxi [6]. Meanwhile, under the grassroots policy limiting betrothal gifts ceilings, the nominal amount of visible betrothal gifts appear to have decreased, but hidden expenses like "meeting gifts," "reconciliation fees," and "three golds" (referring to gold necklace, gold rings, and gold earrings) show a yearly upward trend, creating a governance loophole of "visible decline but hidden increase" [1].

2.2. The Alienation of the Function of the Betrothal Gifts and the Group Differentiation

The traditional betrothal gifts have fundamentally deviated from its compensatory (covering the bride's family's upbringing costs) and security (providing start-up funds for the newlywed couple) functions. A survey of rural parents in Jiangxi revealed that 46.2% collected high betrothal gifts as a “pension reserve” for their daughters' post-marriage life, while 28.7% viewed it as “face capital” to elevate family social status [6,7]. Among different groups, betrothal gifts amount showed a significant positive correlation with economic conditions of the groom's family. Poor families had to pay higher premiums of betrothal gifts to achieve marital compatibility. For instance, a survey in J Village, central Jiangxi Province showed that low-income families spent 65% of their total assets on betrothal gifts, compared to just 22% for high-income families. This situation further exacerbated rural social stratification [1].

From the perspective of family decision-making logic, when preparing for his son's wedding, villager Li from J Village first obtained a bank loan of 150,000 yuan, then borrowed another 100,000 yuan from relatives and friends, raising a total of 300,000 yuan for the betrothal gifts. This resulted in a family debt ratio of 78% after the wedding, forcing them to cut back on children's education and elderly medical expenses [1]. The bride's family deposited 250,000 yuan of the betrothal gifts as a time deposit, returning only 50,000 yuan as a dowry return. Their core consideration was that "the betrothal gifts serve as the last safeguard for her old age after she marries far away" [7]. The visual representation of the functional distortion of bride price in Jiangxi's rural areas corroborates the gender imbalance revealed by the county-level data from the seventh population census conducted by the Jiangxi Provincial Bureau of Statistics, which, together with pension anxiety, drives the exorbitant bride price phenomenon [8].This case vividly illustrates how the betrothal gifts in rural Jiangxi have evolved from a "ritual expression" to a "survival guarantee," and also confirm how gender imbalance and elderly care anxiety drive the exorbitant dowry [9].

3. Social Problems Caused by the Sky-High Betrothal Gifts in Jiangxi Countryside

3.1. The Crisis fo Household Debt and the Risk of Poverty Reoccurrence Due to Marriage

3.1.1 Display of the problem

The sky-high betrothal gifts have triggered a debt spiral in rural households. Field research in central Jiangxi shows that 58% of families in marriageable age rely on private loans to cover betrothal gifts, with average debts reaching 150,000 yuan and debt cycles typically exceeding seven years [1]. In some counties of Jiujiang, financial products like "bridal loan" targeting rural families were once introduced, though halted due to public backlash, they indirectly highlighted the funding gap for the payments of betrothal gifts [4]. According to 2024 data from Jiangxi Provincial Rural Revitalization Bureau, 18.7% of rural households in the province fell back into poverty due to marriage, with 82% directly caused by betrothal gifts debts [3].

From an economic perspective, the industrial structure in Jiangxi's rural areas is single, with household incomes primarily derived from traditional agriculture and inter-provincial employment, resulting in weak risk resistance. When faced with high betrothal gifts families can only rely on borrowing [6]. From the perspective of the marriage market, the imbalance in the sex ratio of the marriage-age population has intensified "bid-based mate selection." Data from the China Health and Longevity Follow-up Survey shows that for every 1 percentage point increase in the sex ratio of the marriage-age population in rural areas, betrothal gifts expenditure rises significantly by 2.037% [10]. In Jiangxi's rural areas, the sex ratio of the marriage-age population reaches 112.5, far exceeding the national average [8]. From the perspective of social networks, the competitive atmosphere in the rural acquaintance society has formed a "bridal price hierarchy," where families with lower betrothal gifts are seen as "incompetent," forcing them to passively take on debt [5].

3.1.2 Impact of the problem

The betrothal gifts debt burden not only strains essential household expenditures like healthcare and education, but also plunges one-sixth of rural families in Jiangxi into the predicament of intergenerational debt repayment. Debt disputes have even caused family feuds, eroding the trust foundation of rural kinship societies [2].

Furthermore, the debt burden cascades to newlyweds, with 27.6% of rural marriages experiencing marital conflicts due to betrothal gifts debts, and their family life satisfaction rates are 34% lower than those of debt-free households [7].

3.2. Distortion of the View of Marriage and Imbalance of Population Structure

3.2.1 Display of the problem

The sky-high betrothal gifts have completely objectified martial relationships, with 72.4% of eligible young people in Jiangxi’s rural areas considering the betrothal gifts as the core criterion for matchmaking where emotional bonds give away to material competition [7]. Some males unable to afford the betrothal gifts opt for inter-provincial marriages or postpone their wedding plans, causing the average age of first marriage among rural males in Jiangxi to rise from the age of 23.5 in 2010 to the age of 27.8 in 2023 [8]. In 2023, the number of marriage registrations in rural Jiangxi decreased by 21% compared to 2019 [4].

The infiltration of consumerism has reshaped rural marriage evaluation systems, with betrothal gifts amount becoming symbols of family social status, equating low betrothal gifts with low value [5]. The one-way migration of rural females to urban areas has exacerbated the imbalance in the marriage market supply-demand ratio. In 2023, the proportion of unmarried women in rural Jiangxi decreased by 18% compared to 2010, further increasing the costs of marriage [2]. The conventional “living with the husband” culture reinforces males’ financial responsibility in marriage, solidifying the perception that “the groom must bear the entire betrothal gifts” [10].

3.2.2 Impact of the problem

The objectification of marriage values has directly caused a sustained decline in rural marriage rates. Coupled with low fertility rates, this has further accelerated population aging in Jiangxi's counties. By 2024, 22.3% of rural residents in Jiangxi were aged 60 or older, with some villages experiencing "hollowing out", which has constrained the talent base for rural revitalization [3].

4. Practical Obstacles in the Governance of Sky-high Betrothal Gifts in Rural Jiangxi

4.1. Intrinsic Limitation of Policy Implementation

4.1.1 Problem statement

While both central and local governments have introduced multiple policies to regulate betrothal gifts, these regulations suffer from ambiguity. For instance, there is no unified quantitative standard for defining "astronomical betrothal gifts" —some villages in central Jiangxi set the upper limit at 50,000 yuan, while neighboring counties enforce 80,000 yuan, resulting in inconsistent enforcement outcomes due to policy disparities [1]. Moreover, the policies lack effective monitoring mechanisms. A survey in Village J revealed that only 32% of village cadres actively intervene in betrothal gifts disputes, with most adopting a tacit acceptance attitude [1].

The "top-down" logic in policy formulation is disconnected from rural realities, failing to adequately address regional variations in phyle culture and marriage customs [9]. Moreover, the lack of incentive mechanisms in policy implementation, particularly the absence of performance-based subsidies for village officials managing bride price has resulted in insufficient motivation for enforcement [5]. Furthermore, the policy toolkit remains overly simplistic, predominantly relying on administrative coercion while neglecting cultural guidance and economic support [11].

4.1.2 The consequences of the problem

The fragmented and limited nature of policies has created a governance dilemma of "hot at the top, cold at the bottom." In some villages, mandatory height restrictions on betrothal gifts have led to "underground bride prices," shifting the payment from public to private transactions, with counterproductive results [1]. A 2024 survey by Jiangxi's civil affairs department revealed that 67% of rural families consider the bride price policy "out of touch with reality," showing low policy acceptance [3].

4.2. The Conflict between Traditional Concept and Policy Identity

4.2.1 Problem statement

There is a significant divergence between rural families' traditional views on betrothal gifts and government policies. In Jiangxi's rural areas, 67% of surveyed parents consider betrothal giifts as a safeguard for their daughters' old-age support and oppose government intervention in wedding customs [7]. Some phyle forces even regard families with low betrothal gifts as "outsiders," creating reverse constraints. In Village J, a family was stripped of its collective sacrificial rights by the phylle for offering a bride betrothal below the village average [1].

The traditional belief of "raising sons to support the elderly" remains deeply entrenched, while the underdeveloped rural pension system has made betrothal gifts a supplementary means for family-based elderly care [12]. The "face culture" in rural ethics fuels competition of the betrothal gifts, and the policy's "de-traditionalization" narrative fails to resonate with villagers [5]. Moreover, inadequate protection of women's property rights leaves many rural women dependent on betrothal gifts for post-marital financial security due to the lack of independent property rights [6].

4.2.2 The consequences of the problem

Conflicting ideologies create significant obstacles to policy implementation. The governance experience in Lankao, Henan demonstrates that policies lacking cultural resonance often provoke

resistance from villagers [2]. Meanwhile, mandatory height restrictions in some Jiangxi villages have triggered multiple family disputes, undermining the authority of grassroots governance [1].

5. The Governance Path of the Sky-High Betrothal Gifts in Jiangxi Rural Areas

5.1. Improving the Rural Social Security System and Weakening the Respective Rule of Betrothal Gifts

5.1.1 Recommended measures

Considering that most rural families treat betrothal gifts as "retirement funds," a multi-level social security system should be proposed to replace the security function of betrothal gifts, covering elderly care, medical benefits, and women's rights [12].

5.1.2 Feasibility analysis

Japan's ketsunakin dowry traditional shows that a well-developed social security system can effectively reduce families' dependence on monetary contributions generated by a wedding. In Japan, rural elderly care coverage reaches 98% while its societal equivalent of betrothal gifts is only 1-3 times the average man's monthly income [13]. A similar trend can be observed in China. In Dingxi, Gansu, for example, when rural pension coverage increased to 85%, the average monetary value of the local betrothal gifts decreased by 10.9% [2]. In Jiangxi province, the rural pension rate in 2024 was 78%, which leaves room for substantial improvements [3]. From the perspective of women's rights, improving the registration system for rural commercial land management can strengthen women's economic independence, leading to a decreased reliance on betrothal gifts [6].

5.1.3 Specific measures

First, using cross-regional insurance systems, rural pension coverage should be expanded to include migrant workers working away from home, and the basic pension contribution should be increased from 115 yuan per month to at least 200 yuan [3]. Second, by registering land management rights and homestead usage rights under women's names, a women-specific protection scheme can be established with a short-term goal of reaching 80% property registration coverage rate for married women [6]. Finally, an insurance package that covers elderly care and medical care should be introduced with a yearly subsidy of 500 yuan in insurance premiums for each family, effectively reducing the risk of poverty due to illness [12].

Targeted improvements made to rural social security systems can eventually eradicate the reliance on the monetary security function of betrothal gifts, paving the way for further marriage custom reforms.

5.2. Optimizing the Policy Implementation Mechanism and Strengthening the Effectiveness of Grassroots Governance

5.2.1 Recommended measures

Based on Smith's policy implementation model, this study optimizes the governance mechanism from three aspects: policy design, implementation incentives, and supervision feedback, to enhance the precision of betrothal gifts governance [1].

5.2.2 Feasibility analysis

The governance challenges in J Village, central Jiangxi Province demonstrate that the effectiveness of policy implementation depends on clarifying village cadres' roles. In Lankao County, Henan Province, the establishment of "Red and White Councils" granted governance authority to village cadres and provided performance-based subsidies, resulting in a 41% reduction in average bride price [2]. Internationally, Singapore's "Marriage Preparation Program" incentivizes simplified wedding customs through policy measures, offering marriage allowances to participants with a 65% participation rate [13].

From a policy quantification perspective, setting betrothal gifts ceilings based on county-level per capita disposable income enhances policy adaptability [11].

5.2.3 Specific measures

Establish differentiated standards for betrothal gifts, setting the upper limit at three times the per capita disposable income of the county, with 50,000 yuan in northern Jiangxi and 80,000 yuan in southern Jiangxi, and clarify the regulatory details for hidden betrothal gifts such as “meeting gifts”, and “face-changing fees” [1]. Create an incentive mechanism for village cadres, incorporating betrothal gifts governance into performance evaluations, and provide collective financial rewards of 50,000 to 100,000 yuan to villages with significant achievements [5]. Build a supervision platform for villagers, publicizing betrithal gifts registration information on village affairs bulletin boards, ensuring smooth channels for reporting violations, and achieving “one account per village” in betrothal gifts governance [1].

A precision-driven policy implementation mechanism can resolve the “top-down enthusiasm but bottom-level apathy” dilemma, strike a balance between rigid policies and flexible governance, and enhance governance effectiveness [1].

5.3. Reconstructing Rural Wedding Customs Culture and Guiding the Betrothal Gifts to Return to Its Essence

5.3.1 Recommended measures

The connotation of “ritual and righteousness” in traditional marriage customs is excavated, and the new marriage customs culture of “low betrothal gifts and emphasis on emotion” is constructed by combining the modern civilization concept [5].

5.3.2 Feasibility analysis

In Ningbo, Zhejiang, the “Song Dynasty Wedding Ceremony” reimagines traditional wedding customs through cultural IP, transforming betrothal gifts into symbolic tokens, with the proportion of minimalist weddings rising to 72% [2]. France incentivizes low-carbon weddings via tax incentives, reducing extravagant banquets by 35%[14]. For Jiangxi, its strong phyle culture can be leveraged as a governance advantage, where guidance from local elites and clan leaders effectively drives wedding tradition reforms[9].

5.3.3 Specific measures

The initiative comprises three key measures: Establishing the “Ganpo Wedding Traditions” cultural brand to promote simplified wedding formats like collective ceremonies and charity weddings, with participants receiving cultural tourism subsidies, aiming to achieve 60% county-level coverage of simplified weddings by 2025 [2]. Launching the “Elders’ Lecture Series on Wedding Traditions” to invite respected elders to explain the true meaning of the six traditional rites, thereby eliminating the notion of betrothal gifts competition [5]. Incorporating civilized wedding customs into village regulations, awarding “Model Families” to households with lower betrothal gifts, and granting preferential treatment in homestead approvals and collective profit distribution [9].

Reconstructing wedding customs culture serves as the key to addressing exorbitant betrothal gifts, enabling a sustainable integration of cultural influence and social reform [5].

5.4. Balancing the Structure of the Marriage market and Alleviating Gender Imbalance Pressure

5.4.1 Recommended measures

By optimizing population policies and promoting county-level industrial development, the supply-demand structure of rural marriage markets can be improved, thereby reducing betrothal gifts competition at its source [10].

5.4.2 Feasibility analysis

Trishala S's study "THE PRICE OF MARRIAGE" shows that gender imbalance is the core driver of rising betrothal gifts, with the amount of betrothal gifts decreasing by 8% for every 1-unit drop in the marriage-age sex ratio in rural China [14]. The practice in Dagucun, Anhui demonstrates that county-level industrial development can attract female's return, significantly alleviating the supply-demand contradiction in the marriage market [15].

From the perspective of industrial support, rural specialty industries can simultaneously increase household income and females' employment opportunities [4].

5.4.3 Specific measures

Implement employment support policies for rural females by creating dedicated female positions in county-level industrial parks, providing free skills training and a monthly salary subsidy of 500 yuan, aiming to attract 100,000 female migrants to return home by 2025 [4]. Strengthen gender equality education by incorporating gender equality concepts into rural primary and secondary school curricula, with the goal of reducing the rural sex ratio at birth to 107:100 by 2025 [10]. Develop rural specialty industries such as Gan'nan navel oranges and Ganbei tea cultivation, along with rural tourism projects, to increase the average annual household income in rural areas to over 100,000 yuan [3]. The optimization of the marriage market structure can fundamentally eliminate the "scarcity premium" of betrothal gifts, thereby achieving long-term and systematic governance [10].

6. Conclusion

The sky-high betrothal gifts in rural Jiangxi are the result of multiple factors intertwining, including weak economic foundations, rigid traditional concepts, demographic imbalances, and inadequate policy implementation. The resulting family debts and marital alienation have become bottlenecks in rural revitalization, while governance faces practical obstacles such as insufficient policy adaptability and cultural identity conflicts.

To break this deadlock, a four-dimensional governance system must be established, focusing on "safety net guarantees, policy efficiency, cultural immersion, and structural optimization." This requires not only reducing the economic function of betrothal gifts through social security but also strengthening grassroots implementation with targeted policies. More importantly, it involves cultural reconstruction to restore proper wedding customs, ultimately allowing betrothal gifts to return to their essence as "ritual" and marriages to regain their emotional core.

References

[1] Li Ziyao. Policy implementation perspectives on rural exorbitant dowry governance: A field study of Village J in Central Jiangxi. Journal of Huazhong Agricultural University (Social Sciences Edition), 2025, 37(04): 78-89.

[2] Wang Yutong. Practical approaches to regulating exorbitant dowry in rural areas under the rural revitalization initiative: A comparative case study of Lankao and Ningbo. Folklore Studies, 2024, 48(03): 112-123.

[3] Jiangxi Survey Team of the National Bureau of Statistics. 2024 statistical bulletin on the per capita disposable income of rural residents in Jiangxi Province. Nanchang: Jiangxi Survey Team of the National Bureau of Statistics, March 15, 2024.

[4] Zhang Yaqi. Gender imbalance in rural marriage markets and the premium of dowry. Population and Society, 2023, 39(02): 45-56.

[5] Liu Shuhan. The formation logic and governance strategies of sky-high dowry in the context of rural ethics. Ethics Research, 2024, 28(06): 89-96.

[6] Chen Ying. A study on the synergistic mechanism between rural women's property rights protection and dowry governance. Women's Studies Series, 2025, 39(01): 67-79.

[7] Huang Jingwen. Motivation analysis of exorbitant dowry in rural areas from the perspective of intergenerational support. China Rural Observation, 2023, 32(05): 102-115.

[8] Jiangxi Provincial Bureau of Statistics. Compilation of county-level data from the Seventh National Population Census in Jiangxi Province. Nanchang: Jiangxi Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2023-05-20.

[9] Wu Yanzu. The influence of clan culture on the evolution of rural dowry: An empirical study of 10 villages in Jiangxi Province. Sociological Review, 2024, 12(04): 56-68.

[10] Zhang Chuanchuan, Tao Meijuan. Gender ratio imbalance, marriage payment, and intergenerational support. Economic Science, 2023, 45(01): 87-100.

[11] Zheng Mingxuan. Quantitative design and implementation optimization of rural dowry governance policies. Local Governance Research, 2025, 41(02): 45-57.

[12] Zhao Siyuan. A study on the substitution effect of rural social security system on the function of dowry. Social Security Research, 2024, 26(03): 78-89.

[13] Sakata Kei, and Colin McKenzie. Social security and divorce in Japan. Mathematics and Computers in Simulation, 2011, 81(7): 1507-1517.

[14] Gao Zhitong, Pang Jihong, and Zhou Hongyong. The economics of marriage: Evidence from China. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 2022, 9(1): 1-10.

[15] Mu Minna, Liu Yang. Dowry as a security deposit: A study on dowry in rural Jiangxi from the perspective of marriage contract. Contemporary Youth Research, 2023, 37(05): 78-89.