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Marriage Reforms in Communist China: A Successful Break with Tradition?

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Oral Presentation O9.1

**MARRIAGE REFORMS IN COMMUNIST CHINA: A SUCCESSFUL
BREAK WITH TRADITION?**

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After 2500 years of Confucian tradition guiding social and familial relations in early twentieth century China, attempts to alter gender roles and marriage customs by the Communist Party from the 1920s through the 1970s, met with mixed results and difficulty. Women's equality represented a key element of the Communist ideology, and the party often successfully initiated radical, wide-scale laws and campaigns to promote gender equality. However, personal accounts indicate that within individual homes, equality did not always prevail. In this project, I am investigating how gender equality was promoted through marriage reforms both in the public realm of society and the domestic sphere of private households. Comparing the private and domestic element of marriage to the public and political institution, for the periods of the United Front, the civil war, New Democracy, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the post-Mao period, this research suggests that the tradition of 2500 years was so entrenched that the party's sweeping reforms and propaganda could not make true equality within the private home possible, even as women's role in public life and equality grew.