

CHAPTER 3

Golden Marriage: An Exemplary Marriage and a Harmonious Society

Following discussion of the (non-)profit-driven subject and the implications of his acts with regard to the self, family, and community in Part I, Part II turns to the investigation of the socialist spirit in sexual terms and the control and the negotiations of the representations of sexual subjects. While Chapter 1 discusses the ideal selfless acts of ideal Party officials as presented in state-sanctioned Chinese media, this chapter will provide us an angle from which to glimpse the qualities of state-approved ideal citizens in their domestic setting, with a focus on their sexual virtue. The disintegration of the sublime figure notwithstanding, the state remains active in curbing overindulgence in sexual desire by creating faithful sexual subjects in the service of establishing a harmonious society and eliminating social instability in the familial structure. Even though contemporary on-screen sexual subjects and the off-screen general public appear to have more freedom than previously to embrace their personal sexual pleasure per se, state-sponsored productions attempt to shape people's off-screen sexual subjectivity by creating an on-screen exemplary sexual subject and encouraging the institutionalization of sexuality in the form of marriage.

In this chapter, I will study how the *zhuxuanlü* TV drama *Jinhun* (金婚 Golden Marriage, 2007) attempts to reinvigorate traditional concepts of familial integrity through the depiction of a fifty-year marriage and faithful sexual subjects on the screen in order to curb excessive sexual desire and stabilize family structure on the screen. This cultural production aims to promote the idea of social harmony, a concept that the CCP adopts to legitimate its governance in the cultural realm, under the assumption that a loving, harmonious family unit can serve as a sign of harmony in society at large. An analysis of *Golden Marriage* will lead us to an in-depth understanding of the

contemporary political conceptualization of a harmonious society as a fusion of socialism, Confucianism, and democratic individualism. We will also see how this societal harmony is characterized with the ideal citizen's dialectical political stance—a stance that involves embracing socialist patriotism with minimal actual political engagement.

To analyze *Golden Marriage* as a *zhuxuanlü* production, I first briefly review the on-screen portrayals of sexual infidelity and marital crises that came before *Golden Marriage* in relation to the real-world changes in marriage behavior in order to introduce the social background against which *Golden Marriage* appears on the screen. At a time when TV dramas focusing on fictional affairs and broken marriages abound and a rising divorce rate becomes a real social concern, some cultural producers who side with the government aim to counteract such symptoms of societal disharmony by portraying conservative sexual morality and faithful sexual subjects on screen. *Golden Marriage* is one drama that exemplifies this reactive trend. It attempts to reprimand and domesticate its sexually unruly fictional subjects while constructing ideal, faithful sexual subjects who observe three kinds of boundaries: institutional, temporal, and motivational.

In order to understand how *zhuxuanlü* pursues popularity for the sake of both commercial and ideological success, I will also scrutinize the narrative of *Golden Marriage* and see how it attracts an audience by straddling the line between the market and SARFT's campaign to sanitize the screen. Furthermore, I pay attention to the extent to which the narrative is able to mute all other kinds of negotiated and/or alternative discourses of marriage and extra-marital affairs so as to purely promote the hegemonic state ideology in which an ideal, faithful subject has a long, monogamous marriage. But given the presence of sexual connotations and discursive rupture in *Golden Marriage*, how do cultural producers ensure their TV drama is able to win the state's favor? Similarly, what virtue should a common citizen possess in order to become an ideal citizen? To address these questions, I will examine the ostensible patriotic elements in *Golden Marriage*, which, on the textual level, remind viewers of the efficiency of the current political regime, and on the production level, promise official organs that the show is a state-friendly production that actively participates in the maintenance of political and social stability. Through these lines of inquiry, we can gain a better understanding of the ways in which the state promotes political stability through the revitalization of a form of familial integrity whose foundation lies on personal cultivation—a philistine form of self-restraint—and development coupled with a dialectical political (dis) engagement.

Sex, Marriage, and Divorce On and Off the Screen

Following increasing individualism and the pursuit of personal desire in Chinese society, the Chinese government simultaneously tightened and loosened its control over marriage by expanding the Marriage Law to address extra-marital affairs while simplifying the procedures for divorce. Perceiving extra-marital affairs as a cause for the breakdown of marriage and disintegration of family,¹ in 2001, the state added Article Four to the Marriage Law, stating that “husband and wife shall be loyal to each other and respect each other,” thus turning fidelity into a nebulous legal mandate. A short time later, the 2003 new Marriage Register Regulation (*hunyin dengji tiaoli* 婚姻登記條例) rendered couples less dependent on the state’s approval for marriage and divorce. Specifically, when filing for divorce, individuals are no longer required to obtain a recommendation letter from their work unit, villagers’ committee (*cunmin weiyuanhui* 村民委員會) or residents’ committee (*jumin weiyuanhui* 居民委員會).² Statistically, the effects of this procedural change were clear. From 1995 to 2000, the divorce rate in China rose only 9 percent. In contrast, in the 2000–2005 period, during which divorce regulations were in transition, the divorce rate surged by 41 percent. In 2008, the number of divorce cases stood at 1.71 per thousand residents.³

This social trend has become a prominent subject of representation on the TV screen, particularly beginning in 2004, when SARFT issued a regulation removing crime-themed TV programs from prime-time programming.⁴ Essentially, following market demand, the ban of one sensational entertainment topic left a gap in programming that was quickly occupied by another. Among various TV genres, the marriage-romance genre (*hunlian ju* 婚戀劇) took center stage, and marital crisis, including divorce, extra-marital affairs, and infidelity, has occupied a significant position in this genre. Even before the ban on crime dramas, television dramas discussing marital crises, especially relationships involving extra-marital affairs (*hun wai lian* 婚外戀) or the third party/the other woman (*di sanzhe* 第三者) that result in divorce or break-up, had been appearing with increasing regularity since the 1990s. Early in 1998, the popular TV drama *Qian shou* (牽手 Holding Hands) set a new precedent by no longer demonizing the third party, instead depicting her as pure and innocent. Since then, extra-marital partners have become increasingly common on the small screen. Along with *Holding Hands*, some other well-received dramas involving a mistress include: *Zhongguo shi lihun* (中國式離婚 Chinese-Styled Divorce, 2004), *Jiehun shinian* (結婚十年 Ten Years of Marriage, 2003), *Lailai wangwang* (來來往往 Coming and Going, 1998), *Rang ai zuo zhu* (讓愛作主 Love Comes First, 2000), *Zou guo xingfu*

(走過幸福 *Walking with Happiness*, 2003), *Cuo'ai* (錯愛 *Wrong Love*, 2006), and *Zhongnian jihua* (中年計劃 *Middle-aged Plans*, 2006).⁵ Works mentioning divorce are also common: *Banlu fuqi* (半路夫妻 *Halfway Couples*, 2005), *Shiyue huaitai* (十月懷胎 *Ten Months of Pregnancy*, 2005), *Xin jiehun shidai* (新結婚時代 *New Age of Marriage*, 2005), and *Lihun jinxing shi* (離婚進行時 *In the Process of Divorce*, 2005).

Coupled with TV dramas that focused on sexual relations and troubled marriages were a number of speed dating shows that disclosed women's preference for rich men. Media exposure of such "decadent" value systems elicited official criticisms of vulgarism, promotion of materialism, and money worship. SARFT eventually promulgated a temporary regulation of TV programs on May 29, 2006, which restricted themes and plots that involved "obscene" (*yinhui* 淫穢), "erotic" (*seqing* 色情), "vulgar" (*yongsu* 庸俗), and "unrefined" (*diji* 低級) material. These negative labels included in particular the representations of pre-marital pregnancy (未婚先孕), extra-marital affairs (婚外戀), openness to sex (性開放), sexual freedom (性自由), and direct and indirect implications of sex.⁶ Cultural critiques even claimed that detailed portrayals of the third party or extra-marital affairs would sabotage social harmony and stability.⁷ This defense of marital harmony through TV sanitization was probably designated to pave the way for the 2007 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which pushed forward the high-profile theme of "building a harmonious society." In October of the same year, SARFT held a Working Conference of Anti-vulgarity on Chinese Radio and TV (抵制低俗之風) to sanitize the small screen of vulgar and kitschy elements, particularly sex.⁸ The Deputy Director of SARFT stressed TV's role in promoting only healthy concepts of family, romance, and marriage, and instructed TV producers to terminate the commercialization, connotation, or exploitation of sex.⁹

Golden Marriage: Zhuxuanlü TV Drama Portraying Model Sexual Subjects

Under this state discourse of a harmonious society and the policies of SARFT toward sex, cultural producers in good standing with the government took the opportunity to produce TV programs that supported the state ideology in order to earn the state's favor and official recognition. Director Zheng Xiaolong, member of the China Film Producers Association and director at the Beijing Television Art Center, is one such example. Since Zheng and his affiliated organization, Beijing Television Art Center, were on good terms with the government, he received support through his affiliation and financial aid from the bank to produce *A Native of Beijinger in New York*

(北京人在紐約), a well-received *zhuxuanlü* TV series.¹⁰ Beijing Television Art Center also acquired special favors from the government, such as a long-term permit for TV drama production from SARFT. Zheng Xiaolong claimed that watching too many programs featuring divorce and affairs would impose negative psychological effects on audiences, and thus he intended to produce a TV drama that focused on a long marriage.¹¹ His assertion implies that television dramas have a direct impact on viewers, indirectly suggesting that his goal was to create a long marriage on screen in order to influence or correct real-life situations. In other words, Zheng is a representative member of a group of cultural producers who, like any other producers, negotiate between commerce and politics but prioritize the state's preferences.

I read *Golden Marriage* as a *zhuxuanlü* production due to its production background and the governmental awards it received. *Golden Marriage* garnered first prize at the *Feitian jiang* (飛天獎 Apsaras Awards), which are organized by SARFT and are therefore widely perceived as a state award in China. It also took top honors at other awards ceremonies and earned the Award for Excellent TV Drama (long drama serial) and the *Wu yi jiang* (五一獎 Five-Achievement Award) at the Golden Eagle Awards. The fact that the Five-Achievement Award is organized by the Propaganda Department of the CCP further convinces us that *Golden Marriage* is ideologically compliant with and pleasant to the state.

It was under the context of a rising divorce rate and increasing number of representations of “unhealthy” sex and marital crises on the TV screen that we encounter the fifty-episode TV drama *Golden Marriage*. Depicting a fifty-year marriage, this TV drama celebrates a lasting and faithful relationship and condemns sex that transgresses conjugal boundaries. *Golden Marriage*, although with a pedagogical mission, is far from insipid or dogmatic. Since its production aims to popularize the idea of a long marriage, it maintains humorous sexual connotations in order to achieve a high viewing rate throughout China.¹² To further promote the TV drama and capitalize on commercial demand, the scriptwriter of *Golden Marriage* revised the script and published it in novel form in 2007. The show's high viewing rate also afforded *Golden Marriage* canonical status, prompting imitation and expansion. Its popularity motivated the same director and scriptwriter to cooperate anew to produce a sequel called *Jinhun fengyu qing* (金婚風雨情 Golden Marriage Two, or Golden Marriage: Love in the Storm), which first aired in 2010.

Featuring an annalistic style, each episode of *Golden Marriage* displays one year of the quotidian life of the couple, Tong Zhi and Wen Li, against the historical backdrop of a period of time ranging from 1956 to 2005. Through

the course of the series, the couple meets, falls in love, gets married, raises four children, and finally arrives at their golden wedding celebration. Tong Zhi, a factory engineer, belongs to the worker class, while Wen Li, an elementary school teacher with bourgeois taste, is a member of the intellectual class. Their class differences lead to continuous fights over aesthetics, family life, and work ethic. They experience starvation, poverty, public criticism, and illness, but still find their marriage to be a happy one, in that they care for and love each other. Their marriage is at risk when Tong Zhi falls in love with a coworker, but Tong Zhi keeps his love for Wen Li in mind, and the couple is able to save their relationship.

The characterizations of Tong Zhi and Wen Li are products of cultural producers who aim to play a supportive role in the discourse of social harmony through the lionization of a faithful couple and stable familial structure. Tong Zhi and Wen Li save themselves for marriage, have no physical relationships outside of marriage, and work through both difficult and good times to make their love last for fifty years. These exemplary models not only express the qualities of sexually faithful citizens who implicitly abide by a state marriage law deployed to manage the private lives of citizens but their long-lasting relationship speaks to three types of boundaries that an ideal sexual subject should simultaneously observe: intention, institution, and temporality. I turn here to textual analysis to explicate the ways in which these three dimensions of an ideal sexual relationship simultaneously correspond to the legal boundary of the Marriage Law and morality as a pretext for the state's intent to build a harmonious society.

The key traits of an ideal sexual subject are sexual purity before marriage and sexual fidelity within an institutionalized marriage. From the orthodox perspective as expressed through state discourse, sexual intimacy has to be institutionally constrained in a legal marriage, and a legal marriage has to mean literally "till death do us part." Accordingly, Tong Zhi and Wen Li remain pure until their wedding night. In episode one, as Wen Li's mother tries to explain to Wen Li what sexual intimacy means before her wedding, Wen Li emphasizes Tong Zhi's honesty (*laoshi* 老實) and the fact that there has been no sexual activity between them up to that point (*shenme dou meiyou* 什麼都沒有). Even Tong Zhi admits his lack of carnal knowledge to his newly wedded wife on their wedding night. These quaint and sentimental characterizations of the couple promote the confinement of sexual desire within legal marriage and serve to create two pure, ideal sexual subjects who abide by the law.

Institutionalizing marriage does not necessarily require a mechanically restrictive rule; in fact, according to Tong Zhi and Wen Li, love, or feelings (*ganqing*), is the most important motivation for marriage. An institutionalized

love relationship (i.e., marriage) is the best manifestation of sexual desire, according to the state. The critical factor that enables Wen Li to accept Tong Zhi is their common perspective on feelings; both of them put love at the center of their marriage. Their courtship takes place in episode one, which is set in 1956, not long after the CCP launched the anti-feudal Marriage Law Campaign, which promoted free love over arranged marriage. The TV drama constantly reminds audiences that Tong Zhi and Wen Li's relationship is based on feelings (*ganqing*) rather than carnal desire or social coercion. To demonstrate the concept of contemporary love, Wen Li once quotes Engels, stating that "a marriage without love is immoral." Tong Zhi, when questioned about his decision to marry Wen Li, says that he believes that the most important motivation for marriage is feelings.¹³ Tong Zhi and Wen Li are legally married; their marriage fulfills the General Provisions of the Marriage Law. Article Two of the Law states that "A marriage system based on the free choice of partners, on monogamy and on equality between man and woman shall be applied."¹⁴

Temporality is the third dimension required to construct an ideal sexual subject who has entered a legal marriage based on free love. Tong Zhi and Wen Li spend fifty years together, experiencing various reform movements, raising four children, supporting each other in coping with the political climate of the day, and are rewarded for their endurance with a golden marriage celebration at the end of the TV drama. They manage to survive the unsettling era of the Anti-rightist campaigns in the 1950s, poverty and starvation due to the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, and the Cultural Revolution persisting into the 1970s. These difficult times allow them to show care and support for each other, deepening their love. Through the Great Leap Forward depicted in episode six, they stay united in their fight against hunger and poverty: Tong Zhi and Wen Li try to save the little rice they have for each other; but the rice goes bad in the end because neither one of them will eat the other's portion. They also experience marital crises and almost file for divorce because of their fights, but they choose to remain in their marriage because of their long-term attachment.

After Tong Zhi and Wen Li become a legal couple, they remain physically faithful to each other for fifty years, during which the husband restrains himself from engaging in extra-marital affairs. Such emphasis on the husband's part in sexual loyalty not only suggests that there is a higher chance for a male to be involved in extra-marital relationships but also that loyalty to one's wife is a great (and perhaps sometimes unexpected) virtue in a man, as patriarchal practices and imaginations tolerate or encourage concubinage. Tong Zhi faces sexual temptation from two different women during his marriage. The first temptation comes from his former coworker, Fang Zhuoya,

who complains to him about her unhappy marriage and attempts to establish an intimate relationship with him in both the third and fifteenth episodes. Tong Zhi rejects Fang both times without any hesitation. The second temptation is almost irresistible and nearly develops into a corporal affair. Tong Zhi meets a young coworker, Li Tianjiao, while working in a remote factory, and soon finds that Li shares his work ethic and ideals. They maintain only a platonic bond, even though other characters assume that they are romantically involved. Tong Zhi describes their connection as spiritual and pure and expresses that he does not want to damage his family's integrity. He even withdraws his hand from Li's when she sees him off at the train station. In fact, their hands do not come into contact until their third reunion, at which time they have been friends for twelve years. The method they use to keep in contact demonstrates their spiritual bond: During the third period of time during which they are employed in the same factory, they share their romantic feelings merely by listening to the same music while on the phone, without talking. Unlike extra-marital affairs involving sexual intimacy, Tong Zhi's relationship with Li Tianjiao stays physically pure. His positive characterization advocates for sex only within marriage, as his emotional attachment to Li Tianjiao does not seduce him into adultery in the conventional sense.

Tong Zhi's physical fidelity brings to mind the latest version of the Marriage Law, which, amended on April 28, 2001, was modified in response to the new love and romance trend in contemporary China characterized by an increasing number of extra-marital affairs. Love affairs outside marriage (*hunwaiqing* 婚外情) violate Article Four of the Marriage Law, which states that "Husband and wife shall be loyal to each other and respect each other"; yet, violators are merely subject to moral or administrative punishment by work-units, not legal penalty.¹⁵ During the lawmaking process, the regulation and legality of extra-marital affairs became controversial. Those who opposed criminalizing extra-marital affairs believe that feelings or romance lie outside of the law or regard infidelity as a strictly moral issue. "Loyal" here, according to the official explanation, mainly refers to physical loyalty, meaning that a married individual should never have extra-marital intercourse. Thus, it ambiguously and implicitly tolerates extra-marital affairs that do not involve sexual intercourse.¹⁶ Hence, Tong Zhi's platonic feelings for Li Tianjiao do not violate the legal definition of loyalty, and thus, Tong Zhi remains legitimate as a moral leader who restrains his sexual desire and never physically betrays his wife.

The production of a *zhuxuanlü* TV drama walks a fine line in serving the state and avoiding violation of regulations while also entertaining the audience through inclusion of heated topics. While the production agenda of

Golden Marriage includes a pedagogical goal of promoting orthodox, long, and healthy marriages while avoiding vulgar and unrefined content in accordance with the Anti-vulgarity Campaign, *Golden Marriage* is full of sexual connotations in order to ensure both its commercial and pedagogical success. After all, a production has to appeal to a large number of audience members in order to allow for the widespread dissemination of the ideology of long marriage. Therefore, the question of how to portray sex positively on the screen without violating the anti-vulgarity campaign became vital for *Golden Marriage*'s production team, as they had to handle sensitive topics with care. The final product of these constraints often depicts humorous sex between the married couple. The institutionalized sex of Tong Zhi and Wen Li and humor are necessary frames for the portrayal of sex, because the former maintains legality and social stability while the latter entertains the viewer without "contaminating" the screen. Borrowing Freud's concept to analyze TV drama, we can understand that obscene jokes on the screen attract viewers by providing viewers with sexual pleasure by proxy. Freud argues that while civilization represses our psyche and prevents us from laughing at undisguised obscenity,¹⁷ the purpose of a joke is to incite pleasure and that an obscene joke works by exposing sex and satisfying the libido in a more socially acceptable way.¹⁸ I would like to extend that proposition and examine the ways in which *Golden Marriage* employs sex jokes to appeal to viewers while promoting "healthy" sexual concepts and conforming to the requirements of the Anti-vulgarity Campaign.

Sexual drive figures prominently in portrayals of Tong Zhi's married life. However, in this context, the obscenity appears to be more refined or acceptable because of humorous elements. For example, on the second day following his wedding, Tong Zhi's best friend, Da Zhuang, publicly asks him how many times he had sex with his new bride. Tong Zhi is annoyed and casually replies "six times," even though the TV viewers know that he did not succeed at all due to the couple's sexual ignorance. Da Zhuang then gives Tong Zhi the nickname of "Six Times Tong" (Tong Liuci). The two best friends continue to tease each other concerning their sexual potency over the years. Another obscene joke takes place in episode forty-one when the Tong couple, now in their sixties, realizes that their second son-in-law suffers from sexual impotency after recovering from testicular cancer. Tong Zhi and his wife visit every medical practitioner they can to find an antidote for their son-in-law. One doctor misunderstands and suspects that Tong Zhi is the impotent patient and embarrasses him by teasing him for having sexual desires at the age of sixty-five. This scene and the laughter it causes are enjoyable because they allow viewers to enjoy the repressed pleasure of sex in a socially acceptable manner.

Golden Marriage not only implies sex in jokes, but also explicitly portrays sexual intimacy. The fact that such portrayal receives no criticism from the state suggests that sex acts are acceptable on the screen provided that they are within a legal marriage and are depicted in a humorous manner. Among the frequent sex scenes between Tong Zhi and Wen Li, the one during the Cultural Revolution in episode twelve is particularly outrageous. Set in an out-of-town hostel room, the husband breaks the wooden bed by rocking it too hard while being intimate with Wen Li. This is an obvious portrayal of a sexual act, in which television viewers see Tong Zhi lying on top of his wife and rocking the bed. This absurd scene also reveals Tong Zhi's strong sexual impulses, because it takes place during his business trip in Tianjin—despite the fact that he is on a business trip, he still attempts to have sex with his wife. In Freud's terms, the laughable sex scene exposes libidinal desire;¹⁹ however, the absurd scene of breaking the bed smothers the scene's erotic connotation. Explicit sexual intimacy also embarrasses the couple after they realize that Tong Zhi's mother, who sleeps next to their bedroom, can clearly hear every sound that they make in bed. The husband immediately has a soundproof wall built between the two bedrooms and believes the mother will no longer hear their pleasurable moments. Nevertheless, in the next episode, we see that the mother is still able to hear them and uses cotton as earplugs so that she can fall asleep.

Familial Harmony and Social Harmony

How does the depiction of familial harmony contribute to the construction of social harmony? To rephrase, why does the state care about the marital status of its citizens? While Shuyu Kong rightly explains how the impact of women writers and the concerns about the impact of urban social transformation on the personal and familial level have accounted for the emergence of TV dramas centered on family dynamics throughout the 1990s and the 2000s,²⁰ I argue that the emphasis on family integrity in the mid-2000s has its own historically specific political significance. The ideological manifestations of the TV drama display a more accurate meaning of the ideological content of the campaign for a harmonious China. The reinvigoration of the nuclear family is a strategy to encourage citizens' management of, and attention to, domestic rather than public affairs in order to make citizens apolitical and, therefore, complacent and toothless in the face of political mismanagement. A harmonious society is a hierarchical fusion of conventional Confucian ideas, socialist legacy, and a more liberal individualistic freedom, which is exemplified in the contesting perceptions of sex, marriage,

and gender roles. *Golden Marriage* portrays Tong Zhi and Wen Li's marriage from a nostalgic perspective and makes a claim for the superiority of conventional values, aiming to promote the localized socialist values embodied by the CCP. As newer ideas such as individualism and casual sexual relations become fads, Tong Zhi and Wen Li's fidelity is positioned as a superior and threatened conventional virtue. Such patterns of opposing virtue and conduct invite us to draw a parallel with the way in which socialist history and ideas are challenged by the newer social values that come along with a new economic mode.

The temporal structure of *Golden Marriage* sets the narrative in a nostalgic mode and suggests that sexual morality, among other virtues, is rooted in the revolutionary past, cultivated by the Party and the socialist spirit. The TV drama associates endurance of socioeconomic hardships with a long and faithful relationship, neutralizing or even crediting social unrest for the development of mutual support between husband and wife, and indirectly gaining political capital for the TV drama itself by putting a positive spin on its more controversial moments. In her research on post-communist Soviet cultural phenomena, Svetlana Boym argues that nostalgia was prominent in the 1990s in popular culture all over the world and that "nostalgia became a defense mechanism against the accelerated rhythm of change and the economic shock therapy."²¹ *Golden Marriage* seeks to restore the mythical sexual fidelity of the revolutionary past. The model of an ideal couple rooted in the past is pitted against the stereotypical contemporary problematic marriage. Boym proposes the concept of "restorative nostalgia" to explain a tendency to "rebuild the lost home" and believes that "rebuilding the lost home" is about rebuilding the truth.²² The TV drama situates the "origin" of a faithful marriage in the 1950s—the socialist era during which the Party had just commenced to build a new China and promulgated the first Marriage Law. Tong Zhi and Wen Li meet in the 1950s; their love and marriage in the new China, according to Wen Li's mother, is like living a sweet life in a honey jar. If the aim of creating a model of a long and faithful marriage and sexual subjects on the screen is simply to regulate excessive desire in everyday life, the narrative background could have been any historical setting, as long as the sexual subjects living in it are faithful. However, the TV drama intentionally sets the leading couple's story in the 1950s, as cultivating sexual virtue in the materially lacking period is intended to credit the socialist era, in contrast to contemporary society in which individualistic ideas and materials flood and contaminate the socialist spirit, particularly sexual moralities. This also suggests that a return to the native origin—the socialist spirit—is the remedy for the current marital crisis brought by the

opening-up policy. In this way, the temporal home for a virtuous sexual subject is established, and the Party-state is legitimated, because the mythic socialist origin is the source of virtue to which we have to return. In other words, the popular TV production associates the good sexual subject with an idealized socialist past, in which Chinese citizens purportedly upheld moral virtues.

The nostalgic mode enables *Golden Marriage* to dichotomize the sexual value systems of the older generation and the younger one, extolling the merits of the older. The negative portrayals of modern sex acts bespeak *Golden Marriage's* effort in denouncing vulgarity on the screen and are indicative of the Anti-vulgarity Campaign at work. As mentioned above, Tong Zhi and Li Tianjiao are never physically involved and thus vaguely conform to the sexual virtue of fidelity, one of the healthy concepts that the Campaign advanced in relation to marriage, romance, and family. Through Tong Zhi and Wen Li's perspective, *Golden Marriage* frowns upon what SARFT disfavors—unruly sex. Wen Li, before her second daughter's marriage, disdainfully suspects that her daughter is no longer a virgin and laments that females of the younger generation no longer maintain their purity before marriage as she had. Her comment suggests that her sexual conduct belongs to a higher moral standard that is in decline among younger people. The reckless attitudes toward sex of their third daughter, rebellious and sexually promiscuous Duoduo, result in two pre-marital pregnancies and subsequent abortions. As a type of karmic punishment, her health dissipates and she has difficulties in finding a husband even when she begins to conform to orthodox family structure and sexual mores in later episodes. As a complementary character to Duoduo, her younger brother, Dabao, enjoys casual sex through access to limitless condoms. The number of condoms found in his suitcase surprises Tong Zhi and Wen Li, leading to a father-son talk on sexual morality.

Upset by his son's addiction to casual sex and romantic flings, Tong Zhi initiates the talk with Dabao in episode forty-four. The father condemns the son for not understanding love and just having casual sex with those for whom he does not have feelings (*ganqing*). The father clearly sees his son's sexual behaviors as irresponsible. The son defends his actions by drawing on generational differences and the resultant changes to concepts of sex and romance. He claims that his generation separates sex from love and embraces the consumption of sex as a means by which to satisfy libidinal desire and that he would prefer to be a happy pig than a pained philosopher like his father. The happy pig and the pained philosopher form a contrast because of their divergent values toward physical pleasure: The former pursues instant satisfaction of desire while the latter constrains desire and maintains strict moral

standards. Dabao's identification with a happy pig dovetails with an inclination toward deregulation of sexual relationships and secularization in general in contemporary China. This father-son talk dichotomizes and hierarchizes two sets of values on sexual morality: the traditional/higher moral standard as represented by the father figure and the modern/lower moral standard symbolized by the son. Putting these two perspectives on sex in a father-son dialogue and favoring the father's while downplaying the son's, *Golden Marriage* upholds the sanctity of ties between sex and love, requires one's attitude toward sexual relationships to be serious and responsible, and disapprovingly views sex without love as animalistic and irresponsible. Although unhealthy concepts of sex make their presence known in this *zhuxuanliu* product, the characterization of Dabao merely functions as a foil to Tong Zhi and Wen Li's lasting love and fidelity. The purpose of Dabao's presence is not to encourage rebellion against conventional sexual morality, but to show how it is possible to right what is wrong through Dabao's transformation from a playboy to a faithful husband who, like his sister, ultimately affirms sexual orthodoxy.

Another layer that establishes the conflicts and resolutions between conventional Confucian virtues and liberal individualistic pursuits is the contestation of gendered roles and gender equality, best illustrated by the disputes between Wen Li and her mother-in-law. While viewers mostly perceive Tong Zhi and Wen Li as figures of the older, conservative generation, flashbacks reveal that a young Wen Li was once rebellious and unconventional when compared to her mother-in-law. According to Wen Li's mother, Wen Li is capricious, willful, and incapable of doing house chores for her natal family; yet Wen Li changes gradually but significantly after marriage. As an intellectual in 1950s' urban Beijing, Wen Li receives and embraces the liberal ideas of gender equality. On the other hand, her mother-in-law embodies both socialist and Confucian value systems: Her peasant status and rural background suggest socialist leanings while her insistence on women's duties to the family is inherited from the Confucian concept of a dutiful daughter-in-law. Their differences in class, education, and geographical background lead to a series of fights. Wen Li, a liberal and individualistic woman, believes that love and romance are strictly between two individuals until she meets Tong Zhi's mother and realizes that marriage also involves taking care of the household and serving her mother-in-law. Initially, to hide her own inadequacies and push forward her intellectual agenda, Wen Li assigns Tong Zhi as the family cook. When the mother-in-law first meets her daughter-in-law in episode five, the mother picks on Wen Li for her inadequate cooking skills and her concept of gender equality. In another scene in episode eighteen, Wen Li criticizes as unhygienic the mother-in-law's practice of feeding the little grandson with her mouth. Wen Li's continuous fights with Tong Zhi's

mother eventually drive Tong Zhi to relocate to a remote factory where he meets Li Tianjiao. In order to build a harmonious family, someone has to compromise. But who? In the world of *Golden Marriage*, when liberalism is in conflict with conventional values, the former always yields to the latter. It is the individualistic modern woman, Wen Li, who changes into a conventional virtuous wife and dutiful daughter-in-law, serving as the family chef and caring for her aging relatives. The transformations that occur in Wen Li and her children underline the TV drama's promotion of conventional and heterogeneous collective values and respect for existing authority. This practice in which the young bend to the will of the old, when put in the political context, calls for people's submission to the Party and its older (and therefore higher) moral standards as newer social values systems provide competition in the new century.

The drama's depoliticized depictions of social unrest during the revolutionary era reveal several requirements of a state-sanctioned harmonious society. First of all, citizens in a harmonious society should be able to endure multiple hardships without questioning the source of large-scale problems; rather, they should consider their silent suffering a form of achievement. The episode in which Tong Zhi and Wen Li save food for each other is one of many examples illustrating how righteous citizens in *Golden Marriage* try their best to survive without questioning the reform movements pushed forward by the state or even searching for political sources of widespread suffering. How does *Golden Marriage* portray socioeconomic hardship without straying into taboo political territory? The producer of *Golden Marriage*, Zao Ping, claims that the production presents a republican history of the New China, and some critics follow suit, eulogizing it as a true representation of the home country's fifty years of transformation.²³ What kind of Chinese history is "truly" depicted? The way Chinese history is imagined in this work explains the politics of historical representation. Restorative nostalgia can apply not only to a construction of sexual virtues, but also to a rebuilding of the political past. The TV drama constructs history in a (de)politicized way that focuses on the pleasant everyday lives of particular commoners and downplays both national and alternative narratives. The TV drama's treatment of the Cultural Revolution, which neutralizes that era's widespread violence, is a key example of how apolitical historical revisionism operates. Michael Berry argues that the Cultural Revolution remains as a centrifugal trauma in certain popular conceptions of that historical moment, as shown in the TV drama *Wuye Yangguang* (Midnight Sunlight),²⁴ which features a painful memory of that historical course. However, instead of visualizing images of possible painful memories, *Golden Marriage* focuses only on joyful memories of the Cultural Revolution, such as the one in which Tong Zhi's friend, Da Zhuang, enjoys national alliance

activities (*dachuanlian* 大串聯), which allowed Red Guards to experience free travel around the country to promote revolutionary ideas.

These selective and beautified retrospections of the CCP history legitimizes the current political regime in the eyes of both the older and younger generations while diverting attention from the present to the past and portraying moments of unrest as harmless inconveniences and festive political movements. The beautification of the past and exultation of sacrifice facilitate the reshaping of the memory of viewers who have personally experienced reform movements and construct a particular positive understanding of collective reforms in younger viewers. The drama's muted, sentimental portrayals of citizens' ability to endure sacrifice, such as Tong Zhi and Wen Li's decision to change a daughter's birth date in order to receive more ration coupons or Wen Li's purposeful transformation from a strong-willed egoist into a compliant and supportive wife, imply political disengagement, on the one hand, and a focus on familial bonding and personal growth, on the other. The message is that one should be flexible and should exhaust emotional and intellectual resources to ensure the family's survival during bad times rather than focusing on large-scale activism.

The other side of the dialectics of social harmony is socialist patriotism. When ideal citizens disengage from political activism, they indirectly unconditionally support the CCP's governance. *Golden Marriage* legitimizes the Party's power through the legal marital status of Tong Zhi and Wen Li. Their marriage bespeaks their submission to the Party's legal system, which defines their proper rights to intimacy, both legally and morally. The dominant reading of the narrative suggests that the drama praises institutionalized marriage for bringing pleasurable sex to married participants, while sex outside marriage is portrayed as worrisome. The positive depiction of the main couple's disciplined sex dovetails with Foucault's viewpoint on family and sexuality. Foucault argues that family interweaves the law and pleasures of sexuality; it also lends permanent support to sexuality.²⁵ Through the Foucauldian lens, sexual pleasure is allowed within the legal boundary. In this light, *Golden Marriage* celebrates and recognizes the state's power in regulating sex and in providing a foundation for sex through the pleasurable sex of Tong Zhi and his wife. This positive portrayal of the state power also explains why sexual depictions are acceptable on the screen, despite the fact that the Anti-vulgarity Campaign was in full force when the drama was aired. Sexual depictions in *Golden Marriage* illustrate that even though the state's censorship board formally criticizes and attempts to eliminate erotic scenes on the screen, it sometimes co-opts images and dialogue related to sexual pleasure, provided that these elements lend support to the law, and thus, to the Party-state.

Socialist patriotism is also explicitly, and awkwardly, expressed in Tong Zhi's conversation with his friend, Da Zhuang, on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which takes place in episode forty-eight, demonstrating his unconditional patriotism. SARS, a highly contagious virus, spread through China in early 2003, and led to the quarantine of suspicious patients. Chinese citizens wore masks in public areas in order to prevent infection. The TV drama continues to chronicle Tong Zhi's normal family life against the remarkable background of that year. In the beginning of that episode, Tong Zhi and his friend glorify the CCP's efforts in dealing with such a medical and social crisis:

Tong Zhi: It's been the ninth day that no one has died. It's lucky that the epidemic took place in the current times. Had it happened in the past, it would have cost lots of lives. After all, the CCP is good.

Da Zhuang: Of course, the CCP is the best. When there are natural or man-made disasters, the CCP mobilizes the whole nation to the rescue, including the Liberation Army.

Tong Zhi: That's true. If we tell the younger generation that the CCP is good or the Liberation Army is good, they'll think we're repeating propaganda slogans. For me, it could be good to have a big challenge so that they could know the CCP is good.

Comparisons with other discourses reveal Tong Zhi's nationalistic tone and *Golden Marriage's* agenda in reconstructing a patriotic collective memory of SARS. Dissident discourses on China are available locally and internationally. In the beginning stage of the epidemic, Zhong Nanshan, director of the Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Diseases in south China's Guangdong Province, publicly questioned the official stance on the number of deaths and the possibility of outbreak throughout China. His dissident medical observations and discoveries on the cause of SARS turned him into a hero for curing SARS and earned him national awards.²⁶ Internationally, the World Health Organization has expressed its distrust of China's official death toll figure and suspicions regarding China's cover-up on the outbreaks.²⁷ Comparing Tong Zhi's dialogue with those of local and international medical experts, we can see that *Golden Marriage* tries to construct a patriotic collective memory of historical events and glorify the Party's efforts in protecting its citizens.

Conclusion: Zhuxuanlü TV Drama and Social Harmony

Producers of TV programs who angle not only for viewers and profits but also for official recognition contribute to the promotion of state ideology with

their *zhuxuanlü* cultural products. The invention of the protagonists Tong Zhi and Wen Li illustrates the ways in which *zhuxuanlü* TV drama reacts to and participates in the discursive construction of sex and marriage as well as reacting to the Anti-vulgarity Campaign. *Golden Marriage* counteracts the existing trope of romance and marriage that spotlights marital crises by setting an opposite trend: glorifying a long-lasting marriage. Tong Zhi and Wen Li maintain a long marriage regardless of the political situation or the status of their wealth and health and observe physical fidelity during their fifty years of marriage. The narrative frowns upon on “bad” sexual subjects who happen to be members of the younger generation growing up in reform-era China and who engage in casual sex and even experience pre-marital pregnancy. Despite the fact that *Golden Marriage* was produced under the backdrop of the Anti-vulgarity Campaign, which opposed sexual implications on the screen, *Golden Marriage* makes use of sexual humor and renders its ideology palatable to its viewers, avoiding confrontation with the campaign while keeping appealing elements in its narrative.

The ways in which *Golden Marriage* addresses the third-party or potential extra-marital affairs improve our understanding of *zhuxuanlü* production. Although *zhuxuanlü* production aims to conform to, reinvigorate, and even raise the standard of morality through the portrayals of moral leaders, *Golden Marriage*, as an award-winning *zhuxuanlü* production, does not detach itself from social reality to depict perfect protagonists who live like saints, nor is the setting an isolated utopia where black and white are absolutely defined. It discourages extra-marital affairs by portraying Tong Zhi’s control over his feelings for Li Tianjiao, but it never vehemently criticizes or demonizes the third party. *Golden Marriage* follows the trend set by *Holding Hands*, which depicts the other woman in a positive light such that Li Tianjiao’s characterization does not fall into either of the binary “good” or “bad” categories. Her tender and thoughtful personality is different from the stereotypical fierce third party who requests money or forces the man to divorce his wife. In fact, she is never overtly called “the third party” in any of the episodes. This term only appears when the Tong couple worries that their eldest daughter is becoming the third party when dating a to-be-divorced man. Instead, Li Tianjiao is a pitiable character who is unable to stay with her true love due to Tong Zhi’s marital status. After her second meeting with Tong Zhi, she marries a man whom she does not love and spends her marriage separated from her husband. In addition, her spiritual, not carnal, bonding with Tong Zhi renders her a pure character who longs for spiritual satisfaction rather than sexual fulfillment. Her factory coworkers treat her well, even though they are aware of her romantic feelings for Tong Zhi. Her talents earn her a higher ranking than Tong Zhi and success in business. Thus, her good ending—being

rewarded with a thriving career rather than punished—discloses the narrative's ambiguous attitude toward a third party. This sexual infidelity exemplifies the heterogeneous nature of *zhuxuanliu* production: Aiming to create a sublime moral figure for viewers, the narrative tolerates some morally ambiguous romantic relations.

The emphasis of popular culture on the maintenance of familial integrity and harmony reveals to us three layers of the ideal politically determined harmonious society—selective appropriation of Confucian and liberal ideas in Chinese socialism, dialectical socialist patriotism, and a focus on citizens' personal growth and family alone. *Golden Marriage* also refers to the consolidation of conventional values by rendering Tong Zhi and Wen Li exemplary moral leaders who benefit from the liberal idea of free love promoted by the CCP in the 1950s but also support the conventional Confucian ideas of familial duty and virtue. Dialectical socialist patriotism refers to simultaneous political disengagement and fervid patriotism. The focus on the domestic space/personal cultivation and political disengagement are two sides of the same coin, meaning that the preoccupation with private affairs indirectly shifts attention from public affairs. The practice of personal cultivation is highly gendered, as seen in Wen Li's transformation from a willful woman who upholds the modern concept of gender equality to a sacrificial virtuous daughter-in-law who devotes herself to the well-being of her family and building a harmonious domestic space. Men have to cultivate virtues such as loyalty and fidelity to their wives but must also develop appropriate attitudes toward capital and entrepreneurship. In the portion of the TV drama featuring the 1990s, during which capitalism becomes a popular concept and trendy capitalist terms like *foreign investments* and *entrepreneurship* abound, Tong Zhi teases/criticizes his friend and his son for being money oriented and running a business dishonestly. His explicit complements directed at the CCP throughout the drama, along with his personal loyalty and distrust of capitalism, mark him as a politically ideal citizen in an era during which the socialist legacy is fading from people's daily lives.

These officially approved qualities of common citizens are arguably appropriated from the famous Confucian conceptualization of proper governance. *The Book of Rites* (Li Ji) states that "Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy."²⁸ The appropriation here in *Golden Marriage* encourages citizens to observe the first two rules but discourages them from partaking in the actual process of government, eliciting two possible and related readings.

The first one paints *Golden Marriage* as an attempt to pacify viewers, to make them believe that a peaceful utopia is on its way as long as they are doing their part in the private sphere while authorities are running the country righteously and wisely from afar. The second reading takes the drama as a gentle warning to citizens to work on their families alone and not step into any of the larger issues of the state.