The History and Ancient Literature of "Naodongfang": Chinese Wedding Games prior to 1912

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Abstract:

This article focuses on archiving and translating Chinese written form materials about Naodongfang (鬧洞房): the obscene wedding games from ancient times to 1912. Naodongfang refers to pranks with sexual innuendo carried out by participants during the wedding nights and literally means "disturbance in ta bridal chamber." Based on twenty-seven references in classical Chinese historical texts, I outlined the development of Naodongfang. The records include various types of literature, such as official history books, scholars' comments, folk ballads, regional records, travel accounts and poems. Historiography here proves the existence of Naodongfang for over 2000 years and its geographical spread across China.

Keywords: Naodongfang, Chinese customs, wedding games, folklore, Chinese literature

There is a long history of recording and collecting folklore in China that extends from the pre-Qin period (1100BCE-221BCE) until now. Comprehensive published historical materials are always Chinese humanities studies' advantages. As a branch of Chinese folkloristics, historical folklore studies stand unique in the world because of the wealth of centuries-old Chinese texts and ancient documents (Xiao, 2002). Based on a compilation and comparison of texts, folklorists read, annotate and translate various dynasties' histories, and finally construct the history of certain traditions. Therefore, this English collection is not only important to construct a chronological history of Chinese Naodongfang, but also allows for rich historical and comparative studies, such as exploring meanings of wedding customs in the earlier stage of human history.

According to Huang Huajie (黃華節), the first modern scholar who tried to define Naodongfang, "during the period of the wedding, the guests and relatives come to prank, mock, trick and molest the bridal couple without regard for morals, etiquettes and laws, [it] is called Naofang/Naodongfang" ([1934] 1999, 193). "Naodongfang" falls on the spectrum of "Chinese obscene wedding games" and it is the general term to refer to all wedding games. This term was established in the late Qing Dynasty around 1869-1928 (Xv Ke) when Naodongfang, and its

abbreviated version "Naofang," appeared in a book by Zhong Qi (鐘琦 1818-1904) and other regional records. However, before the term "Naodongfang" was widely used in the Qing Dynasty, the spectrum of "Chinese obscene wedding games" includes various wedding customs such as beating the groom (打聳), teasing the bride (戲婦), seeing the bride (看新婦), teasing the wedding family (謔親), eavesdropping under the window (聽房), blocking the wedding carriages (障車), and so on.

To trace the history of Naodongfang, I have located twenty-seven references on Chinese wedding games from the pre-Qin period (1100BCE-221BCE) to the Revolution of 1911, the end of the feudal empire. This documentation shows that Naodongfang's core elements of dirty jokes and sexual pranks remained stable over its long history but that the custom adapted to each dynasty. Historical collections include but are not limited to *The Book of Songs* (《詩經》) (around 1100BCE-600BCE), *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (《左氏春秋》) (around 403BCE-386BCE), *Records of the Grand Historian* (《史記》) (around 104BCE-91BCE), *The History of the Former Han Dynasty: Geographic Records* (《漢書·地理志》) (around 32-92), F*olk Customs and Traditions* (《風俗通義》) (around 153-196), *BaoPuZi · Disease and Absurdness* (《抱樸子·疾謬》) (around 317-420), *Youyang Miscellaneous Morsels* (《酉陽雜俎》) (around 803-863), *Book of Old Tang Dynasty* (《舊唐書》) (around 945), *Splendour Dream of Eastern Capital* (《東京夢華錄》) (around 1102-1125), *Dream of Past Capital Lin'an* (《夢粱錄》) (around 1274), and *Classified Records and Anecdotes in the Qing Dynasty · Marriages* (《清稗類鈔·婚姻》) (around 1869-1928). These materials include scholars' comments, folk ballads, myths, regional records, travel notes and diaries. Contributors include historians, biographers, scholars, poets and illustrators. I also refer to *Dunhuang Scripts* (敦煌寫本) and Tang poems (唐詩) to analyze the custom of "blocking the wedding carriages" (障車). Drawing on rich historical texts, I examine what Naodongfang was and how it has developed over its long history.

Scholars hold different views of the genesis of Naodongfang. Some consider the earliest recorded reference to Chinese Naodongfang to date from the Pre-Qin period (2100BCE- 221BCE). Pre-Qin people sang rhythms and songs on many festive and ritualistic occasions. *The Book of Songs* (《詩經》(1100BCE-1600BCE), collected by Yinjifu (尹吉甫), includes 311 folk songs/rhymes that depict many aspects of Pre-Qin people's lives. Confucius (孔子) censored and finalized the collection as *300 Songs* (《詩三百》), promoting it as a classic requisite for his disciples in the Confucian School. Scholars have noted the significance of *The Book of Songs* to the study of ancient Chinese folklore, including wedding customs. Late Qing Dynasty scholars such as Ma Ruichen (馬瑞辰 1782-1853) (1989, 346) and Fang Yurun (方玉潤[1811-1883] 1986) considered "Tang Feng· Chou Mou" (《唐風·綢繆》) from *The Book of Songs* a wedding song. Later, contemporary scholar Chen Zizhan (陳子展 1898-1990) argued that this song's lyrics depict a Naodongfang occasion held on the wedding night when guests congratulated and embarrassed the bridal couple by singing songs (Chen 1982, 4). Its classic Chinese text is as follows:

綢繆束薪，三星在天。今夕何夕? 見此良人。子兮子兮, 如此良人何!
綢繆束芻，三星在隅。今夕何夕? 見此邂逅。子兮子兮, 如此邂逅何!

綢繆束色，三星在戶。今夕何夕? 見此粲者。子兮子兮, 如此粲者何!

Arthur Waley translated *The Book of Songs* and his version is relied on widely by English language academics. He put "Tang Feng· Chou Mou" under the categorization of "marriage," indicating that he also believed it was a ritual wedding song. Arthur Waley translated the lyrics as follows:

> Fast bundled is the firewood; the Three Stars[1] have risen. Is it to-night or which night, that I see my Good Man? Oh, masters, my masters, what will this Good Man be like?
> Fast bundled is the hay; the Three Stars are at the corner. Is it to-night or which night, that shall see this meeting? Oh, masters, my masters, what will that meeting be like?
> Fast bundled is the wild-thorn; the Three Stars are at the door. Is it to-night or which night, that I see that lovely one? Oh, masters, my masters, what will that lovely one be like? (Waley 1960, 87)

At first glance the Naodongfang elements are barely visible in this translation. They emerge more clearly, however, when Wang Wenjun (王文君) points out that the folk song would have been sung in an antiphonal way by male and female participants. Wang contends the first stanza was sung by female guests to tease the bride, the second stanza that pokes fun at both sides of the bridal couple would have been a chorus for male and female guests, and the last stanza directed towards the groom would have been performed by male guests (Wang 1984, 41). While Wang's interpretation (1984, 39) differs from that of Liu & Yang (2008), Jiang Linchang (江林昌 2009, 42), and Li Shan (李山 2017), these modern scholars all agree that "Tang Feng· Chou Mou" is a folksong depicting Naodongfang and that it includes an obvious joking and bantering scene. Drawing on their translations, I read the last four sentences of each stanza as follows:

> What is the night tonight? You have met a Good Man as excellent as him. You, you, what will you do with him? (Females)
> What is the night tonight? You two could be such excellent partners to each other. You, you, what will you do tonight? (All participants)
> What is the night tonight? You have met such a lovely one like her. You, you, what will you do with her? (Males)

In contrast to my interpretation, Arthur Waley thought the song was intended to be sung by the bride or the groom rather than by other participants. Concerning the translation of "子兮," he used "oh masters, my masters," and in a footnote explained that "子兮" "may merely be a meaningless exclamation" (1960, 87). Other scholars who regard "Tang Feng· Chou Mou" as a Naodongfang song, have argued that the translation of "子兮" should not be read as a "meaningless exclamation" but as "you," the second-person pronoun. Considering the apparent gender implications of "良人" and "粲者," which respectively indicate good boys and pretty girls, the antiphonal characteristic is distinctive. That said, despite the evidence of bantering and joking,

and lyrics that have obvious sexual connotations, the song does not explicitly describe characteristic pranks and tricks of Naodongfang. Rather, it leaves us imagining what Pre-Qin's weddings looked like.

Some scholars believe that Naodongfang originated in the custom of "seeing the bride" (Wang Shaoxi 王紹璽 1933). According to *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (《左氏春秋》 403BCE-386BCE), when the leader Zhuanggong (莊公) married Madam Aijiang (哀姜夫人) in 670BCE, he invited ministers and women from royal families to "see the bride." Curiosity to see the bride, as well as gossiping and making judgements about her, arguably contributed to the lively atmosphere that made up the Naodongfang event.

In contrast to these above two interpretations that only a few scholars supported, most Chinese academics trace Naodongfang back to the late period of Warring States Time (戰國 500BCE-221BCE) (Chen [1935] 1990, 269; Chen 1998; Qu 2002; Shang 2000; Zhu 2009) through a historical description of Prince Dan (?-226BCE) of the Yan State. They regard this as the earliest official reference to Naodongfang. The text and my translation are as follows:

> 初太子丹賓養勇士，不愛後宮美女，民以為俗，至今猶然。賓客相過，以婦侍宿，嫁取之夕，男女無別，反以為榮。後稍頗止，然終未改。
>
> At first, Prince Dan of the Yan State raised and supported valiant warriors in his palace for defending against the other states during the wars. He did not value beautiful women in his palace; on the contrary, he used those women to serve and entertain warriors. Hence the custom spread from the palace to commoners. Things are the same today. When guests arrive, people greet guests by sending women (wives, daughters, concubines, etc.) to sleep with them. Men and women do not have any sense of gender segregation during the wedding night. They are proud of that. There is no fundamental change until today, even though some minor adaptions have been made. (*The History of the Former Han Dynasty: Geographic Records* (《漢書·地理志》, Ban Gu 班固 32-92AD)

In my view, the story of Prince Dan of the Yan State may refer to communal marriage and promiscuity dating from the early stages of institutionalized marriages as indicated by the statement that "men and women do not have any sense of gender segregation during the wedding night. They are proud of that." The passage also lends possible support to Zhu Jiantai's view that during the Warring States Time there was a social ethos toward audaciousness and frivolity that spread outwards from the Yan area through the influence of Prince Dan, the member of its governing class (2009, 10).

The Han Dynasty saw the formation of Naodongfang in today's sense. For example, Yang Shuda (楊樹達 1885-1956) believed that Naodongfang became popular during the Han Dynasty (202BCE-220AD): "Guests and hosts drank alcohol and laughed loudly; their behaviours did not have taboos and restraints. As with contemporary Naodongfang, this tradition had already existed in the Han Dynasty" (《漢代婚喪禮俗考》 *Textual Research of Customs and Etiquettes for Marriages and Funerals in the Han Dynasty*. [1933]1989, 23). Moreover, other materials

record a custom called "eavesdropping outside the bridal chamber" (聽房), which is a type of Naodongfang. This custom was recorded in *The History of the Former Han Dynasty* (《漢書》): "During the wedding nights, people eavesdropped below the windowsill of a bridal chamber to catch sounds, such as movements, conversations and even moaning, from a newly married couple. People regard this as an entertainment and gossip what they have heard during the next day" (Ban Gu 32-92 AD).

The most vivid and exciting proof in the Han Dynasty comes from archaeological evidence. In the archaeological site of Shenliuzhuang Han Dynasty Tomb in Ju County (莒縣沈劉莊漢代畫像石墓) in Shandong Province, archaeologists discovered a stone relief of a woman and man who seem to be kissing (Figure 1). The archaeological field reports noted, "the lower frame shows three people; a man and a woman stand in the centre and face each other. They are embracing each other, and it seems like they are kissing. A woman who looks like a maid stands behind the women. The maid pushes the woman's head by her hands to make/force them to kiss. Relief shadows above those figures' heads indicate bed curtains, which means that this is an indoor occasion" (Su & Zhang 1988, 797). Liu Yuxin (劉玉新) argues that the carving vividly depicts an indoor occasion of joking and pranking during a wedding proving that Naodongfang was popular in the Han Dynasty (Liu 1998, 70). Shang Huipeng supports Liu's hypothesis (2000, 178).

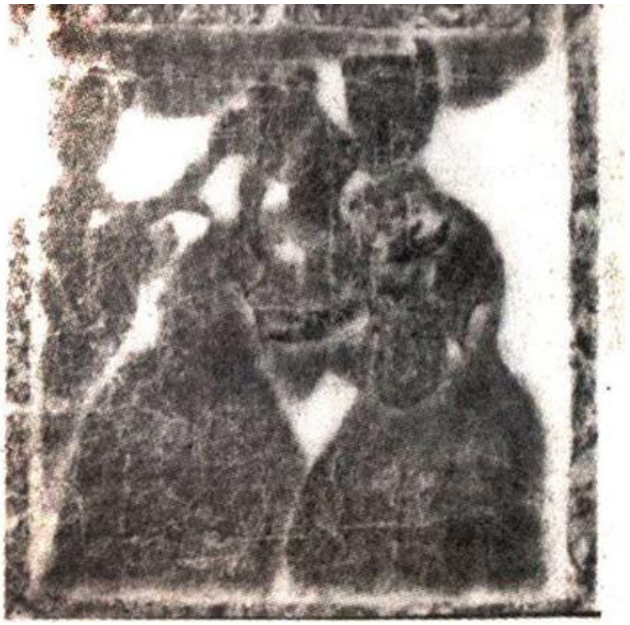

Fig. 1. Unearthed Han Dynasty Stone Relief Shows "A Picture of Woman and Man Kissing" (Liu 1998, 70)

From the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), scholars began to criticize Naodongfang openly. Comments in *Flourishing Speech* (《昌言》) by Zhong Changtong (仲長統) are frequently cited as the earliest criticism of the custom of Naodongfang: "Nowadays, during the wedding period, people tease the bridal couple and threaten them with rods; they drink a lot and induce the newly married couple's sex desires by liquor. People advocate for obscenity in public and expose privacy among clans and relatives. These traditions are extremely obscene, and it is easy to indulge people in illicit sexual relations. No other tradition could influence people like this. It should be prohibited"[2] (See also Qu 2002; Wang 1997). His opinion of Naodongfang was shared by other ancient literati and officialdom who obeyed Confucian morals and codes.

Fengsu Tongyi (*Folk Customs and Traditions*《風俗通義》) was the first to use "folk customs (風俗)" in the title of a book, proving that ancient Chinese folklorists realized the importance of folk customs by around 153-196AD. In this publication, Ying Shao (應劭 153-196) documented the earliest tragedy associated with Naodongfang. He described how in the Ru'nan

(汝南) region, a man called Zhang Miao (張妙) knew another man named Du Shi (杜士) who was getting married. After the banquet and liquor, guests started playing around and joking. Zhang Miao tied Du Shi up and hit him twenty times with a rod. Then he hanged Du Shi upside down by tying his toes together. Although Du Shi died from this treatment, officer Bao Yu (鮑昱) judged the death accidental as a result of drinking liquor. He concluded that Zhang Miao did not intentionally mean to kill Du Shi and therefore he received a reduced penalty (Sheng 1993; Wang 1997). This is the earliest record of a lethal accident associated with Naodongfang.[3]

In the Jin Dynasty (around 265-420), Naodongfang became a controversial topic among scholars. Ge Hong (葛洪) directly appealed to forbid Naodongfang in his book *BaoPuZi · Disease and Absurdness* (《抱樸子·疾謬》) (around 317-420), and he has been widely quoted:

> Among commoners, there is a tradition to tease the bride. The bride stands in the middle of a group of people; relatives test her with obscene questions. If the bride answers slowly or with hesitation, people will embarrass and blame her. The obscenity of this custom is hard to mention. People often beat the groom and even hang him upside down with toes tied up. They are drunk and alcoholic; they do not know anything about limits and restrictions. These behaviours leave people bleeding, bruised, bent or with broken limbs. What a pity it is! Ancient people felt sad when they left home (for marriage), so that they did not snuff out a candle; they felt upset and did not play music or sing during weddings. According to ancient etiquette, wedding families were ashamed, and people did not celebrate. Nowadays, people fail to abide by classical etiquettes which would make them admired by folks and trusted by neighbours. People should berate these behaviours and change them. How could we tolerate those folks and develop this custom with them? However, folklore has been practised for a long period. People never think it wrong. Only fierce criticism and rigorous punishment could stop it. (Ge Hong [317-420] 1954, 148)

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (南北朝 420-589), regimes were frequently replaced by northern nomadic groups. Governors of Northern and Southern Dynasties were famous for their non-Han ethnic identities. The Xianbei (鮮卑) who are regarded as ancestors of Mongolians and other nomadic groups from Northern China, are thought to have beaten grooms during their weddings and made them "exhausted and weakened" (大委頓者). Accordingly, a wedding custom with strong nomadic influences, known as "beating the groom with rods" (杖婿), emerged around this time. In the book *Youyang Miscellaneous Morsels* (《酉陽雜俎》) (around 830-863), Duan Chengshi (段成式) described this custom: "In the Northern Dynasties, people set up a tent close to the residence. This tent was called Qinglu[4] (青廬). People held weddings there. Depending on the level of luxury or frugality, the groom's family gathered hundreds or tens of lads. These young men gathered around the wedding carriage and kept yelling, 'hurry up and come out, the bride' (催妝). Yelling would not stop until the bride came out and boarded the carriage. During the day of picking up the bride, the bride's family members and friends all came. They used rods to beat the groom and regarded this beating as a token of joyfulness. Sometimes the groom would be extremely exhausted and weakened after these tortures" (Li 2002, 159).

Another example suggests the prevalence of "beating the groom with rods" in royal families. According to the *History of Northern Dynasties* (《北史》), an emperor whose name was Gao Yang (高洋 526-559), was teased by his sister-in-law during his wedding, causing him to hold a grudge against her. Gao Yang was the emperor of Northern Qi (北齊). When he married Duan Zhaoyi (段昭儀), Yuan Shi (袁氏), the wife of Duan Zhaoyi's brother Duan Shao (段紹), played pranks on Gao Yang that were popular among commoners. This resulted in Gao Yang developing hard feelings towards her, and he reportedly yelled at Duan Shao, "I will kill your wife." Yuan Shi felt afraid of him and hid in the palace of Lou Taihou (mother of Gao Yang); she never dared to go out until after the emperor died. Scholars, such as Shang Huipeng (2000) and Zhu Jiantai (2009), agree that Yuan Shi probably beat or whipped Gao Yang with rods or bamboo. Gao Yang and his noble families were of Xianbei descent, so the custom of beating the groom would have been known to them, and it is therefore not surprising if the emperor was beaten and tricked at his wedding (Chen [1935]1990, 270; Shang 2000; Zhu 2009). The report is interesting, however, because it provides evidence that even members of royal families could not avoid Naodongfang during their weddings; they could not suppress the power of customs during ancient times.

Centralized power re-emerged in the Sui and Tang Dynasties (618-907). According to Chen Peng, the custom of "blocking wedding carriages" (障車) became of paramount importance in the Tang Dynasty. The *Chinese Encyclopedia of Etymology* (《辭源》) explains the term as follows: "when Tang people held weddings, crowds waited for the wedding troops and they blocked streets and doors. When the wedding carriage came, it cannot pass. Hence, there were proses and verses made to accompany this custom. Most of them are blessings and congratulatory sayings" (Fang et al. 1931). When the wedding carriage or sedan chair was on the way to deliver the bride to the groom's family, villagers gathered together to try to stop it and demanded food and liquor in return for letting it go on. From emperors (aristocrats) to commoners, it appears that no one escaped being blocked during their weddings (Chen [1935]1990, 250). According to *Old Book of Tang* (《舊唐書》945AD), Left Silangzhong (左司郎中 the title of an official rank) Tang Shao (唐紹) made a proposal to the emperor to curtail the custom of "blocking wedding carriages" in the first year of Taiji (太極元年 712AD):

> Wedding ceremonies and rituals should follow the *Six Etiquette*[5] that is why marriages and weddings should be reported to clan temples and seniors. The bride is supposed to be delivered at dusk and greet her parents-in-law and seniors in the morning. However, some obscene and vulgar peasants will stop wedding parties and carriages on their way to deliver the bride to the groom's family. They ask for food and drinks for frivolity. Recently, the custom has become more and more popular and even with aristocrats. They gather together and play music, stop the wedding party and block their passage. The path is blocked for a long time, and wedding schedules are delayed. Expenses that attribute to these people are over 10,000 (Tang Dynasty currency). The expenses to satisfy these people even exceed the expenses of betrothal presents and dowries. Even though the occasion is full of songs and

> dances, laughter and chatting, it is of no help to the marriage. This custom disturbs social order, impairs finances and should be restricted. It does not fit into the etiquette that nobles should abide by. I propose that people who are participating in blocking wedding carriages must be punished. People who have warrantors should list their names in the crime book. People who do not have warrantors need to be beaten 60 times and then convicted. (Zhou [1930] 2011, 44; Zhu 2009, 13)[6]

Tang Shao was clearly unsuccessful in eradicating the custom of "blocking wedding carriages" given that this tradition is still widely practised today in China with vehicles replacing carriages and sedan chairs. While Tang Shao was not happy to see the custom of "blocking wedding carriages" continue, the tradition of composing prose and verse about it became popular among the aristocratic classes and then spread to lower economic levels. Before the Tang Dynasty, there were no verses about "blocking wedding carriages." It was just the hustle and bustle of the crowds. During the Tang Dynasty, a new literary genre developed to congratulate newlyweds and their families. This genre was called "prose and verses about blocking carriages" (障車文). During the preparation of weddings, aristocratic families invited (or hired) famous poets, literati and scholars to write prose about blocking carriages. These proses would be recited at weddings to show off the wedding families' high level of literacy and decency[7]. Sikongtu (司空圖), wrote a "Prose about Blocking Carriage," and this piece was included in the *Full Collection of Tang Literature* (《全唐文》). The work was well polished; its main body emphasized how physically and mentally suited the bridal couple was, how splendid the wedding was and how graceful the newlyweds' virtues were.

By the Tang Dynasty, many wedding customs were well established. For instance, the customs of "blocking wedding carriages" (障車 Chen [1935]1990, 250), "speeding up the bride" (催妝 Chen [1935]1990, 248), "putting down the fan" (卻扇 Chen [1935]1990, 256) and "seeing the bride" (看新婦 Chen [1935]1990, 278) were prevalent in the Tang Dynasty. Meanwhile, as a representative genre of classic Chinese literature, Tang Poetry (唐詩) reached its peak. Therefore, in the Tang Dynasty, the tradition of making poems and verses combined with diverse wedding customs was invented and shared. As mentioned above, during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, wedding guests gathered outside the bride's family home to loudly urge her to finish her make-up (妝) and to come out of the house. The bride generally did not want to leave her natal family and often felt sad about the separation. Plus, the bride's family sometimes intentionally hampered her departure and tried to delay the wedding schedule. However, the wedding schedule was strictly governed by Chinese beliefs and taboos that were thought to bring good fortune; for the sake of auspicious time (吉時), the groom's family and friends gathered around the bride's family home and tried their best to speed up the departure. Meanwhile, making poems about "speeding up the bride" (催妝詩) and "putting down the fan" (卻扇詩) became part of wedding customs in the Tang Dynasty. Bai Juyi (白居易), a revered poet in the Tang Dynasty, composed a poem about "speeding up the bride":

《和春深二十首 十九》
何處春深好，春深娶婦家。
兩行籠裏燭，壹樹扇間花。
賓拜登華席，親迎障幰車。
催妝詩未了，星鬥漸傾斜。

The spring has so blossomed. In late spring, someone is holding a wedding. Two rows of candles, flowers and fans are decorating the room. Guests are standing on the gorgeous carpet and greeting each other. The carriage is blocked by guests when picking up the bride. The competition of exchanging "催妝詩" (poems of speeding up the bride) never ends. Stars come to fade in the horizon and morning is coming.

The Tang emperor asked Lu Chang (陸暢) to write a poem of "speeding up the bride" for his sister Princess Yun'an (雲安公主) during her wedding:

《雲安公主下降奉詔作催妝詩》
雲安公主貴, 出嫁王侯家;
天母親調粉, 日兄憐賜花。
催鋪百子帳, 待障七香車;
借問妝成未? 東方欲曉霞。

How noble Princess Yun'an is. She will marry an aristocratic family. The mother of the emperor helps her make-up. The emperor gifts her flowers and hair accessories. Her wedding bed has already been decorated with "curtains with the pattern of hundreds of children" (百子帳). People have already prepared to block the "carriage of seven fragrances" (七香車). May I dare to ask whether the Princess has dressed well and finished her make-up? The rosy dawn is coming from the east[8].

"Putting down the fan" poems are based on a traditional Chinese aesthetic concerning the beauty of shades and covering. The ideal for ancient Chinese women was to be shy and reserved and, as a result, they often held up fans to cover their mouths when they were smiling. Thus, holding a fan not only invoked an image of a bride's beauty and reserved nature, but also had a symbolic meaning in Chinese aesthetics. Poems of "putting down the fan" were composed when the bride arrived at the groom's family or during Naodongfang. As is easy to imagine, in the space of Naodongfang in the evening, the room was full of people, liquor and noise. People in their neighbourhoods were curious to see what the bride looked like. Was she pretty or not? Did she have a good personality? The bride felt shy and bashful, so she used a fan to cover half of her face. According to the *Dunhuang Scripts*, people who were good at making up verses and poems would narrate as follows: "you don't need to cover your beauty with thousands of layers of fans. A beauty like you is rare to see. Please don't feel attached to your past lives, because finally, you will belong to your husband's family."[9] For the wedding of Princess Yun'an, Lu Chang also

created a poem of "putting down the fan" that compared the Princess to the goddess of the moon, Heng'e (姮娥):

> 寶扇持來入禁宮，本教花下動香風。
> 姮娥須逐彩雲降，不可通宵在月中。
>
> You held a precious fan and stepped into the forbidden moon palace. Your skirt blew the flowers, and the wind became fragrant. You cannot stay in the moon palace during the whole night. You should descend with seven colours' clouds and land in the mortal world.

During the Song and Yuan dynasties, Naodongfang did not change significantly. Even though intellectuals' negative comments and assessments pervade historical materials, Meng Yuanlao (孟元老) nostalgically depicted wedding customs in his book *Splendour Dream of Eastern Capital* (《東京夢華錄》1127). He writes: "During the wedding day, the groom's family dispatched carriages or sedan chairs towards the bride's natal house. The bride's family was responsible for greeting guests. They put colourful ribbons on the carriage. While musicians played music, people began urging the bride to board the carriage and depart (催妝). The wagoner and sedan chair lifters refused to depart and asked for 'Lishi' (利事、利是、利市 red packets with money or gifts like foods, cigarettes and candies). This tradition was called 'lifting the sedan chair' (起檐子). When the wedding family satisfied the people's requests, they finally lifted the sedan chair and departed. When the wedding party came back to the groom's house, followers, wagoners and sedan chair lifters would again ask for money, gifts and decorations. This tradition was called 'blocking the door'(攔門)" (Meng [1127] 1982; Chen [1935] 1990, 248).

In his book *Dream of Past Capital Lin'an* (《夢粱錄》) (around 1274), Wu Zimu (吳自牧) made a thorough record of a complete Song Dynasty wedding routine which is very similar to a modern Chinese one:

> Before the wedding day, the groom's family needs to set up the schedule and gather groomsmen (行郎) in advance. These boys hold vases, candles, fragrant balls, curtains, towels, dressers, mirrors, skirt boxes, costume cabinets, auspicious knots, shade umbrellas, chairs, and so on. Masters of the schedule, executives and female entertainers ride on horses and head to the bride's family. Musicians are playing instruments. Flower sedan chairs or brown sedan chairs follow the team. The bride's family treats the party with the etiquette of liquor. Colourful flakes are dispersed; sliver plates and gift money are distributed. Musicians play instruments to speed up the bride. The master of the schedule informs the group of the auspicious time and urges the bride to board soon. The masters of tea and liquor exchange poems and verses, also speeding up the bride to come out and board. After the bride has boarded, sedan chair holders are refusing to lift the chair and depart. Poems and rhymes are continually exchanged until sedan chair holders are satisfied by money and liquor. When they lift the sedan chair, musicians start playing. When the team arrives in front of the groom's house, the schedule is just caught. Musicians, female entertainers and masters of tea and liquor start to exchange

> verses and rhymes, ask for red packets and gifts through blocking the entrance. The master of the schedule holds a flower bucket and disperses five types of grains, beans, candies and pastries in front of the entrance. Children compete to pick up these gifts. This custom is called "Dispersing beans and grains" (撒谷豆), for repressing the evil spirit of Qingyang (青陽煞).[10]

Compared to the above writers who neutrally wrote down the wedding routines, many officialdoms focused on the negative aspects of Naodongfang. Hong Mai (洪邁 1123-1202) wrote a book titled, *Textology of Folk Customs* (《俗考》). He commented: "today, people still practise this custom. In the bridal chamber, the groom is invisible, but a gang of young men come to molest the bride. This custom is called 'Xueqin' (謔親 bantering wedding families). They lift the bride's clothes and use needles to stick into her; or take off her shoes and stare at her feet, which makes the bride, who is supposed to be seriously displayed and serve in clan temples, now behave like a prostitute who is leaning against a doorframe to tout" (Jiang 1927, 151; Shang 2000, 179). Quoting Ge Hong's *BaoPuZi,* Hong Mai raised a point that still puzzles researchers today: "This custom is undoubtedly bad. However, according to *BaoPuZi,* from the Jin Dynasty until now, this custom has been popular for thousands of years and has not changed. How strange this is!" (Jiang 1926, 151; Shang 2000, 179).[11] Also drawing on *BaoPuZi*, Yang Shen (楊慎 1488-1559) questioned why the obscene practice of Naodongfang/Xueqin had continued for so many years in his book, *Minium (Red Lead) Extension* (《丹鉛續錄》).

In the Ming Dynasty, Tian Yiheng (田艺蘅 1524-?) recorded Naodongfang in his book *Liuqing Diary* (《留青日札》): "Among the Huizhou area (徽州), when the bride arrives at the groom's home, all relatives try their best to trick and molest the bride. People call it 'teasing the bride.' Sometimes accidents can happen, and newlyweds can die from pranks and tricks." He mentioned an interesting method the newlywed used to defend themselves from Naodongfang: "It is said that newlyweds often carefully seam their clothes and shoes to avoid being torn off by crowds. Yet this method still does not always work during the chaos." He traced back the custom to the Tang Dynasty but suggested its origins lie in ethnic groups in the south of China: "How do customs and traditions get corrupted like this? This custom was practised in the Tang Dynasty under the name 'Nongxinfu' (弄新婦, 'teasing the bride'). It is indeed the remnants and influence of Southern ethnic savages. Nowadays, in the Yue region, relatives and friends will definitely make the groom drunk in the bridal chamber" (Chen [1935]1990, 271; Tian 1985, 701).

By the Qing Dynasty, criticizing Naodongfang became "political correctness" among literati. For example, Gong Wei (龔玮) discussed Naodongfang under the title of "Malicious Marriage Customs" in his book *Chaolin Critics Extension* (《巢林筆談續編·嫁娶惡習》). This attitude was also reflected in *Textual Research on Puberty Rites, Weddings, Funerals and Sacrifices* (《冠婚喪祭考》):

> Among the secular world (民間), there is a custom called "seeing the bride" (看新婦). After the wedding ceremony, no matter old or young, the relatives and friends who come from the clans or

> neighbourhoods will come to see the bride for consecutive days... Nowadays, not only do people privately practise this custom, but in a very formal and public way. For example, seniors and children gather in a line to wait to see the bride... During commoners' weddings, there will be a large crowd gathering around. They may embarrass the bride through strict rules or trick the groom through pranks or jokes... They claim that these behaviours will cheer up the crowd and make the newlyweds more affectionate... many harsh pranks are practised in some remote villages. For example, to frighten the couple, people pour water on them or throw firecrackers towards them. Some brides get sick after this. Hence the wedding families always suffer a great loss of money because of this custom. (Chen [1935]1990, 271; Zhu 2009, 14)

In the Qing Dynasty, Xv Ke (徐珂 1869-1928) used the full term "Naodongfang (鬧洞房)" in his book *Classified Records and Anecdotes in the Qing Dynasty · Marriages* (《清稗類鈔·婚姻》) (around 1869-1928). "In Huai'an (淮安), when a bride walks into a bridal chamber, all the guests follow her. People try their best to make the bride laugh. Jokes, riddles, bantering and obscene speeches spread through the chamber... The purpose of doing Naodongfang is to insult brides and bridesmaids. They exchange dirty jokes or gossip about a bride's appearance; they paint their faces with the bride's make-up powder or rouge to entertain each other. They will not stop until they get satisfied. The wedding families will not do anything to stop them but let them do whatever they want without interference" (Wang 1997, 50). Meanwhile, Zhong Qi (鐘琦 1818-1904) wrote, "There is a folk custom during the wedding night. Relatives and friends gather and come to the bridal chamber. They yell and laugh, sit or lay down until late-night, or even stay up until the daylight. People call it 'Naofang' (鬧房 an abbreviated version of Naodongfang). This custom spreads in Jiang, Zhe, Yue and Min areas (江、浙、粵、閩 roughly covering today's southeastern China including Jiangsu Province, Zhejiang Province, Guangdong Province and Fujian Province). How loud the room and the crowd are will depend on the appearance of a bride. If a bride is plain, people would laugh loudly and drink a lot while bantering her. If a bride is ugly, people will make fun of her. If a bride is pretty, people would definitely try their best to tease her and get close to her. Generally, the crowd will not allow the bridal couple sleep for the whole night. Sometimes clan members and relatives also join Naodongfang, which is very malicious" (Chen [1935] 1990, 272).

Wu Youru, an illustrator in the late Qing Dynasty, published a book called *Wu Youru Paintings Compilation* (《吳有如畫寶》, 1884) in the traditional Chinese ink and brush painting style that includes a wedding night accident (Figure 2). In Ningbo (寧波), Zhu held a wedding for his son. Zhu was the servant of Fan's family and Fan's son came to the wedding. After the banquet, Fan's son snuck into the bridal chamber and hid in the couple's bed with the quilt covering him. After a while, the newlyweds went into the room and did not realize Fan's son was there. The couple began preparing to go to sleep. Fan's son spied on the groom taking off his clothes and the bride taking off her shoes. He giggled and the bed shook. The bride was shocked and jumped to escape. Fan's son lifted the quilt and revealed himself. The groom got so angry that he grabbed a

pair of scissors and stabbed Fan's son's shoulder, severely injuring him. The groom's mother rushed into the couple's bedroom when she heard the noise. Discovering that her son had stabbed their master's son, she pleaded for forgiveness, but Fan's son cursed loudly and left (Wu [1884] 1998, 41).

Fig. 2. *A Wedding Night Accident (鬧房受刺)* Illustrated by Wu Youru (Wu [1884] 1998, 41)

This brief overview of historical references attests to Naodongfang's long history. It illustrates that the custom took various forms throughout Chinese dynasties. At first, out of people's curiosity, people came to see the bride (看新婦) in the Spring and Autumn Period and mischievously eavesdropped outside the bridal chamber (聽房) in the Han Dynasty. Later, during the Northern and Southern dynasties, grooms were fiercely "beaten" (打聳), while in the Tang Dynasty entertaining and economic functions are discernable through "blocking the wedding carriages" (障車). In Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, Naodongfang appears to have been more widely practised and there are more references in this time period, but sources also show that it was harshly criticized by intellectuals. Over 2000 years, Naodongfang has reserved the same elements, and all these forms of wedding games are still visible today. Naodongfang may have been one of the most stable traditions among all Chinese folk customs. Even though it never gets official and academic recognition, the unsuccessful efforts that past governments and intellectuals have made to criticize, ban and stigmatize Naodongfang, proves that this custom has significant meanings for past and current Chinese societies and people. The cultural inertia and resilience of folklore, gender dynamics and power negotiations within the space, have been discussed in my doctoral thesis (Memorial University, 2022).

Endnotes:

1. The Belt of Orion.
2. The original Chinese text of Zhong Changtong's critique is as follows:
   今嫁娶之會，捶杖以督之戲謔，酒醴以趨之情欲，宣淫佚於廣眾之中，顯陰私於親族之間，汙風詭俗，生淫長奸，莫此之甚，不可不斷者也。
3. *Youyang Miscellaneous Morsels · Odd Rituals* (《酉陽雜俎·禮異》) (around 830-863) recorded a similar tragic accident. When Jia got married, his friends Yi and Bing tricked him. Yi and Bing put Jia in a cabinet and covered the cabinet with quilts. Jia was smothered to death (Wang 1997).
   In the Qing Dynasty, scholars still cited the example of "Zhang Miao beat Du Shi to death" from Ying Shao (應劭 153-196)'s manuscript. For example, in his *Guisi Reserved Scripts* (《癸巳存稿》), Yu Zhengxie (俞正燮) asked, "...these accidents are exactly what Du Shi experienced. From the Han Dynasty to the Jin Dynasty, the folklore did not change. Was it the fault of Bao Yu (the judge) who lightly sentenced the murderer and did not outlaw the custom that it has thrived until today?" (Qu 2002; Sheng 1993)
4. The colour of the tent could be either green or black. There is not yet consensus among scholars due to the ambiguity of classic Chinese characters.
5. Generally initiated by the groom's family, the "Six Etiquettes" consisted of six procedures required to arrange a marriage and hold a wedding: Na Cai (納彩 letting a matchmaker representing a man's family, visit a woman's family to make a proposal), Wen Ming (問名 asking for the woman's name, birth date and Ba Zi (八字 Chinese horoscope)), Na Ji (納吉 going to temples to foretell whether the man and the woman match well with each other according to their names, birth dates and Chinese horoscope), Na Zheng (納征 delivering the man's betrothal presents to the woman's family), Qing Qi (請期 asking for the consent of the woman's family and deciding on the most auspicious wedding date), and Qin Ying (親迎 the process of transporting the bride to the groom's family and formal wedding ceremonies) (*Book of Etiquettes and Rites*《儀禮》, 221BCE).
6. The original Chinese text: 又士庶親迎之儀，備諸六禮，所以承宗廟，事舅姑，當須昏以為期，詰朝謁見。往者下俚庸鄙，時有障車，邀其酒食，以為戲樂。近日此風轉盛，上及王公，乃廣奏音樂，多集徒侶，遮擁道路，留滯淹時，邀致財物，動逾萬計。遂使障車禮貺，過於聘財，歌舞喧嘩，殊非助感。既虧名教，實蠹風猷，違紊禮經，須加節制。望請婚姻家障車者，並須禁斷。若有犯者，有蔭家，請準犯名教例附簿；無蔭人，決杖六十，仍各科本罪。
7. For example, Zhong Chuan's daughter was married to Du Hong's son in Jiangxia. Until the dusk, someone came to ask for "proses of blocking carriages" from Tang Yun. Yun ordered his four servants to prepare for paper, ink and brush. They waited next to the horse for minutes, and Yuan immediately finished four proses. The original text in Chinese: 唐末汤筠"俱以书奏受惠",晚年辅佐江西钟传,"传女适江夏杜洪之子时,及昏暝,有人走乞《障車文》。筠命小吏四人各执纸笔, 倚马待制, 既而四本俱成"(Fan 2005: 813).
8. According to the above Tang poems, we can tell that in the Tang Dynasty a wedding generally was held at nighttime. Nowadays, some areas of China still begin a wedding before dawn according to the divination of auspicious time.
9. 千重羅扇不須遮，百美嬌多見不奢。侍娘不用相要勒，終歸不免屬他家。
10. The original Chinese text: 至迎親日，男家刻定時辰，預令行郎，各以執色如花瓶、花燭、香球、沙羅洗漱、妝合、照臺、裙箱、衣匣、百結、青涼傘、交椅，授事街司等人，及顧借官私妓女乘馬，及和倩樂官鼓吹，引迎花檐子或粽檐子藤轎，前往女家，迎取新人。其女家以酒禮款待行郎，散花紅、銀碟、利市錢會訖，然後樂官作樂催妝，克擇官報時辰，催促登車，茶酒司互念詩詞，催請新人出閣登車。既已登

車，擎檐從人未肯起步，仍念詩詞，求利市錢酒畢，方行起檐作樂，迎至男家門首，時辰將正，樂官妓女及茶酒等人互念詩詞，攔門求利市錢紅。克擇官執花門，盛五谷豆錢彩果，望門而撒，小兒爭拾之，謂之"撒谷豆"，以壓青陽煞耳。

11. The original Chinese text: 今此俗世尚多有之，娶婦之家，親婿避匿，群男子競作戲調，以弄新婦，謂之謔親。或寒裳而針其膚，或脫履而規其足，以廟見之婦，同於倚門之倡，誠所謂敝俗也。然以《抱樸子》考之，則晉世已然矣，歷千余年而不以變，可怪哉。

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