

**Via**

Tourism Review

24 | 2023

Les destinations lune de miel : l'apparence et l'envers du décor

---

## Honeymoon Tourism as Romantic Consumption in China

WeiQi Yan, Junmin Liu and Yujie Zhu

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/viatourism/10331>

ISSN: 2259-924X

**Translation(s):**

Le tourisme de lune de miel en tant que consommation romantique en Chine - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/viatourism/10369> [fr]

**Publisher**

EIREST Équipe interdisciplinaire de recherches sur le tourisme - Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

**Electronic reference**

WeiQi Yan, Junmin Liu and Yujie Zhu, "Honeymoon Tourism as Romantic Consumption in China", *Via* [Online], 24 | 2023, Online since 19 December 2023, connection on 22 December 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/viatourism/10331>

---

This text was automatically generated on December 22, 2023.



The text only may be used under licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

---

# Honeymoon Tourism as Romantic Consumption in China

Weiqi Yan, Junmin Liu and Yujie Zhu

---

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Peer-reviewed article

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This research is funded by Australian Research Council (DP230100344).

## Introduction

- 1 Masa and Jiasan, a newly married couple of Japanese and Chinese origin (respectively), have recently gained popularity on China's internet. They first met in 2015 when Masa was studying in Guangzhou, China. In 2019, Masa returned to Japan. Due to the strict travel restrictions imposed by China during the Covid-19 pandemic, Jiasan and Masa had to engage in a long-distance relationship that lasted for three years. In March 2022, Masa successfully proposed to Jiasan online, and in July of the same year, Jiasan travelled to Japan to unite with her partner. After a prolonged separation, they ignored the usual wedding traditions and decided instead to use travel to 'reconstruct the time they had not spent together' with a particular focus on recording their journey.
- 2 In the past, wedding ceremonies in China were commonly viewed as a way to showcase social relationships and cultural aspirations (E. Ma, 2006). The purpose was to integrate newly married couples into an existing social system and emphasise the unity of the community (Ching, 2013). As individualism continues to evolve in contemporary China, the traditional wedding ceremony, which emphasises collective family responsibility

and traditional social order, has become controversial. Many young couples, like Masa and Jiasan, are gradually assigning less significance to wedding ceremonies in their marriage plans but considering the post-wedding honeymoon as an indispensable part of their journey towards married life. This phenomenon prompts us to examine what this transformation signifies and its underlying reasons.

- 3 Honeymoon travel is traditionally seen as part of the wedding ritual, displaying social relations and cultural desires (E. Ma, 2006). Compared with other types of tourism, honeymoon travel emphasises more about the couple's separation from their original family, their self-awareness and the autonomy of their emotions, and the emotional link and romantic experiences between them. Furthermore, changes in how honeymoons are conducted reflect broader changes in society since these trips now carry different social meanings than they did in the past (Isański, 2013).
- 4 This study examines the role the honeymoon plays in young couples' marital and intimate relationships in China today. Drawing upon van Gennep's theories of 'rites of passage' (1960), we argue that the experience of a honeymoon reflects stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. We examine the motivations and implications of honeymoon tourism through one-to-one interviews and analysis of these narratives from social media. Our research shows that honeymoon tourism reflects young Chinese couples' pursuit of individual happiness and autonomy resulting from the modernisation of their social and economic development. The honeymoon is no longer only viewed as a secondary event to a wedding ceremony held for and by the couple's families and their network. Couples use honeymoon tourism as a transition point - to break away from the traditional family, explore oneself and the relationship, and record the present experience for a better future. Honeymoon tourism in China is not simply a hedonistic quest for romantic experiences but a cultural production that responds to rapid modernisation and sociocultural changes.

## I. Honeymoon tourism: Separation, transition, and incorporation

- 5 Since the 18th century, Western countries have undergone a process of rapid industrialisation, resulting in the development of capitalist societies. Concurrently, the proliferation of liberal democratic ideals, as well as the advent of technological innovations such as the steam engine, have contributed to the growth of the modern tourism industry, with travel becoming an increasingly important leisure activity (Şengel, 2021; Zhu, 2021). People travel to find pleasure, relaxation, and insight in a place far from their familiar surroundings. Thus, modern tourism has been considered a '*pursuit of pleasure and an escape from everyday realities*' (Zuelow, 2016, p. 9).
- 6 The social transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution in European countries have also been reflected in the evolving concept of marriage. Before the 19th century, marriage was understood as an economic union, with the household serving as the primary unit of the family (Gillis, 2004). However, as the 19th century progressed, individualised weddings became more widely accepted by society. In upper-class British society, the trend of luxurious bridal tours, or 'honeymoons', emerged as the desire to prioritise conjugality became more prevalent among the upper classes (Gillis, 1985). This trend, originally exclusive to the upper echelons of society, gained

widespread popularity due to the rapid expansion of the middle class. Initially, the primary purpose of bridal tours was to visit relatives and friends who were unable to attend the wedding ceremony. However, by the late 19th century and early 20th century, the practice of embarking on a private, post-wedding honeymoon trip had become a widespread custom in Western societies. Top of Form Bottom of Form

- 7 Nowadays, the term ‘honeymoon’ refers to a trip that newlywed couples take, either domestically or internationally, following their wedding ceremony (Lee *et al.*, 2020). Honeymoon tourism is considered an extension of the wedding ceremony and aims to strengthen or celebrate the romantic relationship through an intimate journey (Fakfare and Lee, 2019).
- 8 Weddings, as traditionally understood, are culturally rooted rituals that are performed in accordance with societal conventions (Ching, 2013). They are recognised as significant milestones in the lives of individuals and may take the form of either formal ceremonies or informal gatherings.<sup>1</sup> Young couples typically spend a day or several days in a ceremony, emotionally separating themselves from their previous groups, and ‘become united into a new solidary group in their own nuclear family’ (Pentikäinen, 1979, p. 158). However, as Ching (2013) notes, although the wedding ceremony allows newlyweds to complete their separation from the past and construct a new relationship, pre-wedding romance does not necessarily directly translate into post-wedding personal fulfilment. Additionally, the growing demand for personalisation has led new couples to focus more on themselves than others or society in their wedding experience. This trend begs the question of whether this represents new interpretations and modifications of matrimonial customs.
- 9 Inspired by van Gennep's (1960) framework of ‘rites of passage’, we examine the implications of honeymoon tourism for married couples by looking at the processes of separation, transition, and incorporation. Isański (2013) claims the theory of *rites of passage* best explains the significance of the honeymoon. Because of its prolonged duration and privacy (Fakfare *et al.*, 2020), it refers to breaking away from societal norms and venturing into uncharted possibilities (Franck and Stevens, 2006). To summarise, the honeymoon encounter encapsulates three phases: a separation from the initial living surroundings and societal standards, the suspension of prior expectations and future uncertainties to enable complete immersion, and an elevation sustained by the individual journey and liminal encounter (Bristow and Jenkins, 2020). In other words, honeymoon travel can be regarded as a liminal space that symbolically exists outside the mundanity of everyday life and enables individuals to develop their intimate relationships freely (Ching, 2013).
- 10 During the first phase, the rite of separation breaks down society's frameworks and transports the participants to a place different from the daily life (Insoll, 2020). Honeymoon travel naturally displays the characteristics of modern tourism—a short escape from everyday reality. It allows couples to spend quality time with each other, away from the distractions and pressures of their daily routines or family settings (Ünal *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, a newlywed pair embarks on a trip to a far-off place, symbolically and physically abandoning their past lives (Isański, 2013).
- 11 During the second phase of this transition period, newlyweds may gain a degree of independence (van Gennep, 1960). The highly personalised and private needs of honeymoon travel are often tailored to the preferences and commonalities of newlyweds (Jericó and Wu, 2017). This means that newlyweds have sufficient time to

spend alone together, independently create their initial set of shared memories, and develop perceptions about their life together as a married couple (Fakfare *et al.*, 2020). In so doing, the honeymoon trip can also be seen as a process of negotiation and cooperation between the newlyweds, requiring them to make plans and travel based on each other's needs.

- 12 Van Gennep's third phase, 'incorporation', encompasses symbolic phenomena and actions that signify the subjects' re-entry into their new, relatively stable, and well-defined status within the larger society (Turner, 1982, p. 24). The conclusion of the honeymoon journey serves as a rite of passage for newlyweds, marking their return to their residence and the initiation of their adaptation and integration into married life (Isański, 2013). Through this cooperation, they can gain insights from each other and create a space to assert their independence (Fakfare and Lee, 2019).

## II. The emergence of honeymoon tourism in modern China

- 13 It is crucial to examine honeymoon tourism's historical and broader social context to understand the current situation in China. Historically, traditional Chinese marriages were associated with maintaining the continuity of the family and social stability. Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (1998) views this traditional patrilineal family system as a 'corporate enterprise'. Marriages established within this collective family organisation did not focus on emotional compatibility and communication between individuals. Instead, they were organised around the division of labour and cooperation in economic and reproductive endeavours (Fei, 1998, p. 199). Due to internal power dynamics within the family, patriarchs were naturally granted supreme authority to make marriage decisions for their descendants, severely limiting the freedom and autonomy of individuals to choose their own partners. In ancient China, the Analects of Confucius have a saying: *'While one's parents are alive, one should not travel to distant places; if it is necessary to travel, there should be a clear direction'* (父母在不远游, 游必有方). This saying reflects the foundational value of that society, filial piety, highlighting the *'obedience to and care for and respect for family elders'* (Jacka *et al.*, 2013, p. 27). Because individual social activities are associated with social morality, it was thus impossible for a married couple to take an outside trip after the wedding.
- 14 Towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, in order to combat the prevalent practice of arranged marriages, some cities and metropolises in coastal China, such as Shanghai, Guangdong and Tianjin, began to adopt a new form of wedding ceremony known as the 'civilised marriage (文明婚礼)' which simplified wedding ceremonies and combined traditional Chinese and Western elements (Zuo, 2009). However, for the general public, the new style of weddings still required a significant input of financial resources and time. To encourage participation in these new weddings and to promote the 'New Life Movement' launched in 1934, group weddings (also known as collective weddings) emerged as an alternative, quickly gaining popularity nationwide. Participants in group weddings only needed to pay a small fee. It was conducted without an usher and instead was attended by the mayor or social bureau chief conducted the ceremony and issued marriage certificates and souvenirs.<sup>2</sup>

- 15 Meanwhile, Chinese people began to understand the concept of a honeymoon as a derivative activity of Western wedding ceremonies. Some young people who had received a Western education began adopting Western-style weddings and going on a honeymoon after getting married. In March 1928, architects Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin held their wedding in Ottawa, Canada, after completing their studies at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States, and then went on a honeymoon to Europe. They visited countries such as Greece, Italy, Spain, and France and returned to China in August of that same year. As the modes of production and economic structure of society itself did not undergo significant changes, the popularity of the honeymoon culture and the reconstruction of traditional marriage customs remained at a preliminary stage (Zuo, 2009).
- 16 Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the country underwent profound transformations in its political and social structures. One of the most notable changes was the creation of a collective organisation the 'people's commune', which replaced the traditional 'family' system to maintain social stability and strengthen the connection between individuals and the state (Yan, 2010; Zhu, 2023). Marriage was considered a 'political action' (Yan, 2010, p. 503). Personal expression of emotions, romantic love, and activities involving privacy, such as a honeymoon, were not encouraged and were viewed as a reflection of a capitalist and bourgeois lifestyle (Zhu, 2018a, p. 20).
- 17 In 1978, the 'reform' and 'opening up' policies facilitated population mobility and promoted individualisation in social structures (Yan, 2010). At the same time, the state began to withdraw from its intervention in people's private lives, and there was a growing number of options for individuals. Chinese society became increasingly diverse, and alterations began to penetrate everyday Chinese life, shifting it towards the more individualistic end of the spectrum (Cao, 2009). Additionally, with the implementation of the 1984 '*Trial Regulations of the People's Republic of China Resident Identity Card*', citizens were legally granted '*individual identities that were not controlled by the leader of their collective farm, work unit, street committee, or household head*' (Kipnis, 2012, p. 2). Modernisation in China has brought about a '*proliferation of identity schemes and freedom of self-construction and self-expression*' (Jacka *et al.*, 2013, p. 183). The distinct Chinese modernity resulting from a blend of socialist, capitalist, and state-driven modernisation has given rise to a honeymoon culture that has followed a path different from that of the West (Kim, 2011).
- 18 Over the past century, Chinese society has undergone significant transformations in the social meanings attached to marriage and weddings. In traditional Chinese society, stable family relationships were primarily based on blood ties or political affiliations. Marriage was primarily for procreation and strengthening the collective (Fei, 1998). With the rise of individualism, personal needs and desires have become more prominent, and the stability of marriages is now based on the emotional connection and intimacy between partners rather than collective responsibilities. This shift towards individualism has also led to some instability in maintaining relationships as emotions are often 'ego-focused' (Cao, 2009, p. 44). This is mirrored in China's rising divorce rate, which increased from 0.90‰ in 2002 to over 3‰ in 2020. In addition, the marriage rate has been declining. As a result, marriage's traditional, stable and lasting condition is being challenged.

19 Against this background, with China's economic reform, the tourism industry has developed rapidly and become a strategic pillar industry in China. By 2019 (before the outbreak of the pandemic), domestic tourists in China had reached 6.006 billion, with an annual total tourism revenue of 6.63 trillion RMB (approximately 0.96 trillion USD).<sup>3</sup> China, with its vast geography and large population, has enormous potential for honeymoon travel. According to the 'Wedding Industry Insight White Paper' released by Tencent in 2021, despite the impact of the epidemic and the decline in the proportion of marriages in China, the average cost of a wedding per couple is still as high as 174,000 yuan, which is 8.8 times the average monthly income of both parties.<sup>4</sup> Honeymoon travel has also become popular among the middle class in China, and prior to the pandemic, 60% used the opportunity to travel overseas.<sup>5</sup> Young people are eager to seize this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to travel widely, and among newlyweds, nearly 60% wish to go on a honeymoon.<sup>6</sup> During the pandemic, outbound travel was restricted. Because honeymoon travel is considered by the government to be a profitable and stable market, with spending at least three times that of other types of travel, many local governments vigorously promoted domestic honeymoon tourism to boost the local economy during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

### III. Research methods

- 20 The nature of the study requires exploration of the experiential aspects of human social existence and their significance. We follow Fossey *et al.*'s (2002) qualitative research methodology by developing a mixed-method approach to the collection and analysis of data. To show the experience of honeymoon tourism and its context within the social environment, we examined the posts headlined - 'honeymoon trip' - on China's popular internet platforms, including Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu), Douyin, Bilibili, and WeChat. Currently, these platforms feature slogans like 'recording life', 'inspiring lives', 'embracing life' and 'lifestyle', which provided a significant number of primary sources for this study.
- 21 According to the report from the China Internet Network Information Centre (2022), the number of internet users in China has surpassed 1.051 billion.<sup>8</sup> Amidst the burgeoning growth of China's internet infrastructure, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of ordinary individuals sharing personal experiences on various social media platforms. The motivation behind such self-disclosure is to connect with others while offering insights and knowledge to a wider audience. China's social media platforms provide a revealing glimpse into young Chinese people's life attitudes and worldviews. These platforms host many users who willingly share their honeymoon travel experiences. Many have shifted the focus of their marriage celebrations from the wedding ceremony to the honeymoon travel experience. These stories give us insight into their motivations for such a shift, their independent cognisance of emotional and marital life, and how they utilise honeymoon travel to consume and construct an envisioned, ideal future.
- 22 Given the historical particularities of the development of Chinese honeymoon culture, our research investigates both the underlying reasons for the popularity of honeymoon travel in China and the impacts of honeymoon culture on newlywed couples and their families. We conducted a discourse analysis of narratives shared by 20 couples to gain insights into the motivations and consequences of their honeymoon travel.



Additionally, we employed a combination of online participatory observation and semi-structured interviews with 16 married people who had completed their honeymoon trips. The questions have drawn out issues concerning their experiences of honeymoon tourism, decision-making, motivations, tensions, and reflections.

## IV. Findings

### A. Separation from the original family

- 23 Firstly, our study shows that newly married couples treat honeymoon tourism as a way of separating from their original families, highlighting their ability to make their own choices and pathways. The honeymoon has long been considered an extension of and accessory to the wedding ceremony; however, both are perceived differently in today's China. In November 2021, a tag titled *'How to Treat Young People's Unwillingness to Have a Wedding Ceremony'* appeared on Weibo's Hot Search List. By December 2022, it had been read 210 million times and discussed 13,000 times. A poll was conducted by Weibo's official account Wenyu Xinshuo (文娱新说) under this tag, asking, *'Do you think it is necessary to have a sense of ritual concerning the wedding ceremony?'* Of the 57,000 people who participated, only 16,000 believed it was necessary. In a wide range of online discussions of the topic, some people thought that the wedding belonged to parents, relatives, and even company leaders, but not themselves; others thought that opposing the wedding ceremony is more about resisting the old ideas behind it.<sup>9</sup> Guanchao Jun'er, a Weibo Key Opinion Leader with nearly one million followers, stated: *'The wedding is more like a drama. The ceremony is also quite troublesome. If my future lover agrees with me not holding the wedding, I will not do so; instead, I will take her on a honeymoon outside the country.'*<sup>10</sup> This Weibo post received two thousand likes under the tag *'How to Treat Young People's Unwillingness to Have a Wedding Ceremony'*.
- 24 Honeymoon travel is no longer seen as just an accessory to a wedding; for some young people, it holds more importance than the wedding ceremony itself. The honeymoon appears to be separated in couple's minds from the traditional wedding ceremony; the latter often involves many relatives and friends and has complicated procedures. Many interviewees in this study conveyed varying degrees of disregard for the wedding ritual; some even admitted that the wedding was more for their parents.
- 'With the participation of elders, we would have to adhere to traditional customs and practices that we do not personally agree with.'* (from the interview with Jia on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022)
- 'The preparations for the wedding were all done by our parents. We didn't understand [the wedding preparations], nor did we have the time to learn about them. The entire experience made me feel quite awkward.'* (from the interview with Wei on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2022)
- 'The meaning of marriage varies for different individuals. Therefore, my intention at the time was to have a unique honeymoon experience.'* (from the interview with Cai on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022)
- 25 One of our interviewees, Jia, was strongly resistant to a wedding ceremony. She initially did not plan on having a traditional wedding ceremony; instead, she wanted to take a trip with her partner. Although she eventually compromised and agreed to have a small-scale ceremony - due to multiple factors, including parental pressure, an eased local epidemic situation, and relaxed gathering restrictions - it was preceded by their honeymoon.



26 As this study shows, a wedding for these Chinese couples is primarily concerned with family responsibilities and bonds, while the honeymoon experience is exclusively devoted to the enjoyment and enrichment of the newlywed couple. The honeymoon is a cherished cultural activity for newlywed couples, marking a milestone celebration for their relationship and providing an opportunity to celebrate their marriage in a private and intimate setting.

27 The attempt to separate from parents and traditional values can be seen not only in the wedding ceremony but also in the child-parent relationship. Interviewees all expressed a desire not to repeat the previous generation's emotional states or relationship patterns.

*'My expectations for life are not particularly high, and it's easy for me to be content. This might be related to my family background. When I was a child, I lived with my grandparents. They often quarrelled, so from then on, I felt that the other person's personality was very important. I hope that when I grow up, my life will be stable and conflict-free.'* (from the interview with Wei on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2022)

*'I have a strong belief in love because my parents have a great relationship, but I don't want to repeat their relationship pattern. They are more traditional in gender roles. My father is the main decision-maker and not involved in household chores. I hope that in my own marriage, there will be more balance and equality.'* (from the interview with Jia on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

28 The interviews above also shed light on the self-awareness of contemporary youth. Marital autonomy and independence have been regarded as the critical characteristics of family transformation from the traditional to the modern (Ma *et al.*, 2011). However, our study provides evidence that the interviewees reported still maintaining a solid connection with their original families after marriage. For instance, one said:

*'I live with my parents since I got married, but I believe that we will eventually move out of my parent's home. I think people still need a sense of distance. Keeping a distance can make things look better.'* (from the interview with Jia on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

29 This study revealed that most newlyweds in China today have achieved marital autonomy but not self-sustaining lives (Ma *et al.*, 2011, p. 197). Young people rely heavily on parental subsidies to finance home purchases as well as betrothal gifts or dowries. Parents also naturally believe their children have certain obligations to support them in their old age (Ma *et al.*, 2011, p. 197). Maintaining close contact between newlyweds and their parents is a common practice in China.

30 However, the honeymoon provides a short escape from reality for the new couple. When newlywed couples are on their honeymoon, they generally also want no disruption (Fakfare and Lee, 2019). Their parents and friends also politely withdraw from their lives during the honeymoon period, allowing the couple to immerse themselves fully in their new relationship; this phenomenon was apparent in our interviews.

*'My mom can even have eight phone calls a day, with no real matter, just to call...But during the honeymoon, they were conscious and didn't call us much.'* (from the interview with Lan on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2022)

31 As shown above, when compared to the wedding ceremony, the honeymoon has developed as an opportunity for personal space, allowing couples to temporarily separate from their families and fully embrace their new life together. This phenomenon reflects the broader trend of individualisation in China since the reform and opening-up policies. There is an increasing emphasis on emotionality and desire

for a private life as more individuals prioritise their own needs, interests, and goals (Smith *et al.*, 1998). In the past, the individual's existence was meant to ensure the continuation of the collective, and personal interests were set aside for the sake of the group when necessary (Yan, 2010). Nowadays, Chinese people especially the middle class have begun to pursue their own lifestyle choices and acknowledge the need for individual emotional needs. They seek romantic love and marriage freedom and place more emphasis on personal privacy. The establishment and maintenance of small families have also become a social focus, with the status of large families gradually being replaced.

## B. Relationship building

- 32 Our study also shows that the honeymoon is about enjoyment of the moment, reflecting the newlyweds' cognition of emotion and how they explore the marriage relationship based on such awareness. The ability of individuals to handle emotion in intimate relationships is often influenced by their parent's marriage and emotional patterns (Conger *et al.*, 2000). On August 11, 2021, Sanlian Life Weekly launched a public vote on Weibo, asking 'Does your parents' status affect your views on marriage?'<sup>11</sup> Nearly 10,000 people participated in the vote, and 90% of them believed that their parents impacted their views on marriage. The stories of the interviewees in this article also acknowledged that the marriage patterns of their parents or elders impacted their understanding of love, marriage, and romance. After separating from their immediate families through marriage, the couples we interviewed showed their understanding of romantic love, their intimate relationships, and how they practised what they knew.

*'I think the person who understands me, understands my thoughts, or resonates with me at a certain point. This moment of spiritual pleasure is romance...'* (from the interview with Wei on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

*'I think the most important aspect [of a honeymoon trip] is being with the person you love, and I believe that romance is more of a 'state of mind' in which ordinary moments can be romantic.'* (from the interview with Jia on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

*'During my growth, I've come to believe that romance is about the little things, quietly accompanying and supporting each other without the need for grand gestures. That's exactly how our honeymoon was.'* (from the interview with Lu on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

- 33 These insights are based on their personal experiences and perceptions of romance, becoming a shared sentiment between the couple. Meanwhile, this level of understanding also manifests itself in their honeymoon trips. For example, interviewee Jia believes being in the present with loved ones is romantic.

*'It is a beautiful memory in a beautiful and strange place, which belongs only to the two of us, such as drinking coffee and watching the sunset together at the foot of a snowy mountain, driving under snow-capped peaks while listening to shared favourite songs, walking and talking hand in hand by Erhai Lake, and viewing fireflies in Xishuangbanna Botanical Garden and searching for constellations in the night sky.'* (from the interview with Jia on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

- 34 All the couples interviewed here married after relatively long relationships and saw their honeymoon as a way of getting to know each other better. As author Qian Zhongshu wrote in the novel 'The Siege', 'Travel is the best test of a person's behaviour. Travel is the most exhausting and troublesome, making people's nature fully visible. After a long and difficult journey, people who are not tired of each other can become friends. The honeymoon travel after marriage should be reversed. It should be a month's travel first. If, after a month of

*hardships, both parties have not seen through and become tired of each other and still maintain the original marriage contract, this kind of marriage is reliable.*' The sentiments expressed in this passage are widely recognised on the Chinese internet. The interviewees also conveyed this perspective, either directly or indirectly.

*'It is a form of commemoration without a special form. I heard that travelling can test whether two people are really compatible. Although we don't need to travel to test our compatibility, travelling can really deepen our understanding of each other, whether it is advantages or disadvantages.'* (from the interview with Jia on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

*'Of course, it is the first time we went out as a married couple, and there is still novelty during the honeymoon period. We actually are different from other couples. We are in a long-distance relationship and only see each other about once or twice a month, so naturally, every trip is more anticipated and treasured.'* (from the interview with Lu on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

*'At the beginning of a marriage, who wouldn't want to have an unforgettable honeymoon trip for a lifetime?'* (from the interview with Cai on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

- 35 The interviewees we spoke to planned the trip based on individual preferences and desires without being constrained by the expectations or rules of their families. For instance, for couple Wei and Lan, their honeymoon was planned with a relaxed itinerary and a slower pace to allow them to experience the tranquillity and timelessness of a slower-paced life. This is the reason why they ultimately chose two famous European romantic cities, Rome and Paris, in the hopes of strolling the streets in the birthplace of western culture and 'slowly' experiencing private time during their honeymoon trip.

*'I think the honeymoon should also be relaxed, where the two people can walk hand in hand aimlessly in unfamiliar, nice-looking places, not having to think about anything, just going wherever they feel like. My honeymoon was as expected and I felt it was good.'* (from the interview with Wei on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022)

- 36 The rapid growth of the economy and the development of individualism have brought a more liberal social atmosphere to contemporary China. This has also provided young people with more opportunities and ways to construct their emotional lives, such as extended dating experiences, pre-marital cohabitation, and exclusive travel with one another. Such things were once impermissible in China, both morally and legally. A honeymoon facilitates the creation of a shared sense of identity and the development of a lasting relationship between spouses. Beyond just providing romantic memories, the honeymoon allows newlyweds to invest in and plan for their future together. It presents an opportunity to form and establish a new intimate relationship, aiding in overcoming difficulties that may arise in marriage and family life (Liu *et al.*, 2019).

### C. Incorporation through recording

- 37 The romantic experience during a honeymoon can help newlywed couples create a sense of eternity; however, it is ultimately temporary. As a result, many individuals employ various techniques to preserve this feeling and prolong the experience. The use of recordings as material representations of memories has served as a significant landmark in consolidating their new family life, akin to the third phase 'incorporation' as indicated in 'rites of passage'. Our study highlights the third function of honeymoon tourism: Through documenting, sharing and reviewing, young couples record their honeymoon experience to conquer their fear and anxiety about the uncertainty of their future.

- 38 The need for recording experience has led to the emergence of different cultural products such as souvenirs, photography, videography, and social media support. Multimedia presentations can effectively convey and communicate factual and emotional information (Alamäki *et al.*, 2019). As romance is an ambiguous emotional message, multimedia presentations such as editing, filming, and post-production text editing can assist in conveying the honeymoon experience. The couples who participated in our interview consumed and experienced many products with commemorative meaning during their honeymoons.

*'We went to Plaza de España, the famous scene from "Roman Holiday", and Wei also had gelato. We took a lot of pictures along the way.'* (from the interview with Lan on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022)

*'This is my first online journal entry, and I am presenting it in the most ceremonious way to commemorate our unforgettable honeymoon trip.'* (from the interview with Cai on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

- 39 Additionally, a growing number of people share their honeymoon experiences on the internet by posting location tags, photographs, and videos. Photography and travel have a close intrinsic connection, and photographs can capture and shape the travel experience (Lo *et al.*, 2011). These products, marketed as having memorial significance, allow for the freezing of this personalised honeymoon moment and the further satisfaction of the feeling of eternity. Interviewees for this study posted various photos of their honeymoon on social media. For instance, among the images Jia shared on Xiaohongshu, many are of her and her husband holding hands - walking through the landmark buildings of Xizhou ancient town or hanging out in Dai costumes. This type of hand-holding photo is common among the couple photos on Xiaohongshu and often receives a lot of positive feedback and appreciation, being marked as 'romantic' and 'happy'.

- 40 For couples who have embarked upon this new chapter of family life, the act of recording and documenting their honeymoon can serve as an effective means of evoking the cherished moments they shared during the initial stages of their marriage. As shown from the interview,

*'After returning, we bought a Fiat Lego set, which was the convertible car we rented in Rome. Now it sits in our living room. It was perfect for a keepsake of our memories.'* (from the interview with Wei on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022)

*'Taking photos, checking in at popular tourist spots, eating and drinking, these are all of course essential. On my honeymoon, everything felt just like it did when we first met, and it's that unchanged feeling that makes me feel romantic.'* (from the interview with Lu on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

- 41 These photos, videos, and souvenirs, brimming with the memories of the newlyweds, not only serve as reminders but also inject vibrancy into their everyday lives, fostering fresh expectations for the future and fortifying their bond as a couple.

*'When we looked at these photos, we missed our honeymoon, especially the world with only two of us. We are looking forward to having such a journey again.'* (from the interview with Wei on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023)

*'Now we have a baby, and we miss the world of two of us at that time, so we recall the scenery, the food, and the culture that we experienced in our honeymoon together, and we also make fun of some bad experiences. Whether good or bad memories, they all can increase our emotional connection when we recall together.'* (from the interview with Jia on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2023)

42 Meanwhile, the internet, television, and other media forms have significantly influenced individual's understanding and imagining of romantic relationships. These mediums, which were virtually non-existent during the Maoist period, have now become powerful forces in shaping societal perceptions of romantic love (Jacka *et al.*, 2013). Commercial advertising promotes eternal love, creating fantasies that emphasise the unyielding, continuous, persistent nature of 'family' or 'community'. The interviewees in this study often mention words such as 'stability', 'companionship', and 'in the long term' when discussing their understanding of romance, which indicates an idealised expectation of an everlasting future. As shown from the interviews, their individual expectations for the future and their disappointment with reality lead to anxiety about the future. Such anxiety has created a greater desire for the illusion of control, stability and permanency that marriage can bring. These motivations have driven these young couples to experience, spend, and document their honeymoon through modern technologies such as photography, blog and social media.

## V. Discussion: Honeymoon tourism as romantic consumption

- 43 This study uses the *rite of passage* concept (van Gennep, 1960) to examine honeymoon tourism in China, a modern phenomenon inspired by Western influences that amalgamate wedding celebrations and tourism. According to Franck and Stevens (2006), ceremonial demonstrations of liminality are essential to shaping one's identity by exploring and cultivating novel self-concepts. As a liminal space, the honeymoon represents a transitional phase between the past and the future, occurring after separating old patterns of behaviour but before fully accepting new ones (Nora, 2001). It is a pivotal transition period from separation to integration, allowing couples to savour and appreciate the present moment. As Thomassen (2014, p. 4) argued, *'liminality reminds us of the moment we left our parents' home, that mixture of joy and anxiety, that strange combination of freedom and homelessness, that pleasant but unsettling sensation of infinity and openness of possibilities which - at some moment, sooner or later - will start searching for a new frame to settle within.'*
- 44 By examining sociocultural changes associated with honeymoon tourism in China across the past four decades, this study illustrates the motivations behind this tourism and its implications for the married couples and their families. Our study shows that China offers more than just a footnote to the global honeymoon tourism phenomenon. Instead, we examine how the rise of honeymoon travel in China contributes to the intellectual discussion beyond tourism. More precisely, honeymoons in China reflect the post-Mao economic reform of the past decades that shapes people's lives in modern society. It also shows the ongoing negotiations and tensions between traditional social values and the changing societal norms in present-day China.
- 45 In *Heritage and Romantic Consumption in China*, Zhu (2018a) examines ethnic and heritage tourism in China as a particular form of tourism consumption driven by the individual's desire to search for authentic experiences deemed exotic and different from the urban mundane. This idea of romantic consumption is deeply rooted in the Chinese dissatisfaction with a pre-designed pathway in life, and has led to the emergence of self-conscious consumption. Romantic consumption is in a sense the

marketization of these liberated individual desires for instant, hedonistic gratification. People on such a quest seek to extend beyond the consumption of physical commodities to encompass affective and emotional experiences such as travel and lifestyle migration, with the experience itself being the ultimate consumption goal (Zhu, 2018b).

- 46 Honeymoon tourism reflects a microcosm of China's modern quest for romantic consumption. This framework allows us to understand the phenomenon from two perspectives. Firstly, our study shows how young Chinese couples manifest their sense of autonomy and emotional understanding and shape their marital identity through their romantic experiences on honeymoon trips after they unlink from their respective familial structures. Honeymoon tourism as romantic consumption can be seen as a response to their dissatisfaction with the existing modes of the wedding ceremony and their desire for meaning-making. As part of the wedding 'package,' honeymoon travel shows the newly married couple's interest in separating and establishing independence from their immediate families, their search for extraordinary experiences beyond the ordinary, and their transition to an uncertain future in new family life.
- 47 Secondly, honeymoon tourism, as a form of romantic consumption, plays a pivotal role in enabling the newly married couple to solidify their connection and incorporate into their new family life. This is achieved through the process of documenting, sharing, and revisiting their tourism experiences.
- 48 Despite the challenges and uncertainties that lie ahead in their future, the temporarily idealized image of the honeymoon, captured through memories, videos, and photographs, enables the couple to assimilate these cherished experiences into the intricate complexities of reality. By preserving and revisiting these memories through visual materials, they can sustain a perpetual sense of romance, love, and stability in their newfound family life, transcending the uncertainties and challenges that may arise.
- 49 These intentions, either reflexive or embodied, lead to the consumption of various romanticised practices and products within their honeymoon travel, including wedding photos, celebratory rituals and vlog-making. Through purchasing souvenirs or sharing experiences on social media, the couples use various cultural techniques to record the temporary but idealised journey. As an active embrace of modern consumerism, these cultural products symbolise a collective impetus to seize and monumentalise love relationships through the 'tourism moment', which they hope will build and consolidate their new family relationship. This type of tourism contributes to their desire for romantic love associated with the ideals of permanence, happiness and freedom. In so doing, honeymoon tourism as romantic consumption in China is not simply a hedonistic search for a romantic experience but a cultural production in response to rapid modernisation and sociocultural changes.

## Conclusion

- 50 While Western practices have influenced Chinese honeymoon traditions, the latter also exhibit distinct characteristics that reflect the changing aspirations and values of Chinese society. The popularity of honeymoon tourism in China has benefited from top-down policy changes that promote the rapid development of individualization brought about by social transformation from a collective to modern consumer society.



As personal autonomy and freedom become increasingly important in China, the popularity of honeymoon travel among young couples is likely to continue to rise.

- 51 Moreover, as a type of romantic consumption, honeymoon tourism mirrors China's contemporary pursuit of romantic indulgence, promoting the personal pursuit of joy and achievement within modern Chinese society (Zhu, 2018a). The development and popularity of honeymoon trips in China, at the individual level, reflects how people make choices for themselves. At the same time, it is also a cultural microcosm of social development in China and a cultural production that responds to rapid modernisation and sociocultural changes.
- 52 However, as technology advances and the world becomes even better connected, travel may become part of daily life that loses its social function. Honeymoon travel, once a rite of passage for newlyweds, may no longer be as essential in establishing and solidifying marital relationships. As Isański (2013, p. 125) notes, '*the honeymoon travel—this unique and first joint experience of the married couple—has nowadays become yet another holiday time spent together, resembling more of a “long weekend” rather than a “honeymoon”*'. The future of honeymoon travel in China and elsewhere will depend on how couples adapt to these changing circumstances and how society redefines the institution of marriage. It is, therefore, important for researchers to closely examine the evolving nature of honeymoon travel and its impact on couples and families in China and beyond.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alamäki, A., Pesonen, J. and Dirin, A. (2019), Triggering effects of mobile video marketing in nature tourism: Media richness perspective. *Information Processing & Management*, Vol. 56 No. 3, pp. 756–770. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2019.01.003>
- Bristow, R. S. and Jenkins, I. S. (2020), Spatial and temporal tourism considerations in liminal landscapes. *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 219–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1725618>
- Cao, J. (2009), The Analysis of Tendency of Transition from Collectivism to Individualism in China. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 42–50.
- Ching, A. H. (2013), *Barefoot on the beach: The destination wedding as discursive cultural practice* [University of Hawaii at Manoa]. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/100580>
- Conger, R. D., Cui, M., Bryant, C. M. and Elder Jr, G. H. (2000), Competence in early adult romantic relationships: A developmental perspective on family influences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 79 No. 2, pp. 224.
- Fakfare, P., and Lee, J.-S. (2019), Developing and Validating a Scale for Multidimensional Attributes of Honeymoon Tourism. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, Vol. 43 No. 8, pp. 1199–1224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348019850279>



- Fakfare, P., Lee, J.-S. and Ryu, K. (2020), Examining honeymoon tourist behavior: Multidimensional quality, fantasy, and destination relational value. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 37 No. 7, pp. 836–853. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2020.1835786>
- Fei, X. (1998), *From the soil & The institutions for reproduction* (乡土中国: 生育制度). Peking University Press.
- Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F. and Davidson, L. (2002), Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 36 No. 6, pp. 717–732.
- Franck, K. A. and Stevens, Q. (2006), *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life*. Routledge.
- Gillis, J. R. (1985), *For better, for worse: British marriages, 1600 to the present*. Oxford University Press.
- Gillis, J. R. (2004), Marriages of the Mind. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 66 No. 4, pp. 988–991.
- Insoll, T. (Ed.). (2020), *The Oxford handbook of the archaeology of ritual and religion*. Oxford University Press.
- Isański, J. (2013), Honeymoon as a Rite of Passage: Sociological Analysis of Changes in the Phenomenon. *Folia Turistica*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 109–129.
- Jacka, T., Kipnis, A. B. and Sargeson, S. (2013), *Contemporary China: Society and Social Change* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139196178>
- Jericó, C. A. and Wu, M. (2017), Characteristics of honeymoon tourism: Chinese tourist approach. *Cuadernos de Turismo*, Vol. 40, pp. 637–640.
- Kim, T.-S. (2011), Three faces of Chinese modernity: Nationalism, globalisation, and science. *Social Semiotics*, Vol. 21 No. 5, pp. 683–697. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2011.632996>
- Kipnis, A. B. (Ed.). (2012), *Chinese Modernity and the Individual Psyche*. Palgrave Macmillan US. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137268969>
- Lee, J.-S., Fakfare, P. and Han, H. (2020), Honeymoon tourism: Exploring must-be, hybrid and value-added quality attributes. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 76, 103958. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.103958>
- Liu, Y., Wang, S. and Jie, X. (2019), *Experiential Honeymoon Tourism Study from Perspective of Embodied Cognition*. pp. 327–331. <https://doi.org/10.1109/INFOMAN.2019.8714675>
- Lo, I. S., McKercher, B., Lo, A., Cheung, C. and Law, R. (2011), Tourism and online photography. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 725–731. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.06.001>
- Ma, C., Shi, J., Li, Y., Wang, Z. and Tang, C. (2011), Trends and Latest Discoveries in the Transformation of Chinese Urban Families (中国城市家庭变迁的趋势和最新发现). *Social Science Research*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 182–216. <https://doi.org/10.19934/j.cnki.shxyj.2011.02.008>
- Ma, E. (2006), Realising Wedding Imaginations in South China. *Visual Anthropology*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949460500373975>
- Nora, A. (2001), The Depiction of Significant others in Tinto's "Rites of Passage": A Reconceptualisation of the Influence of Family and Community in the Persistence Process. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.2190/BYT5-9F05-7F6M-5YCM>
- Pentikäinen, J. (1979), The symbolism of liminality. *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*, Vol. 10, pp. 154–166.

- şengel, Ü. (2021), Chronology of the Interaction between the Industrial revolution and modern tourism flows. *Journal of Tourism Intelligence and Smartness*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 19–30.
- Smith, P. B., Dugan, S., Peterson, A. F. and Leung, W. (1998), Individualism: Collectivism and the handling of disagreement. A 23 country study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 351–367.
- Thomassen, B. (2014), *Liminality and the modern: Living through the in-between*. Ashgate.
- Turner, V. W. (1982), *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*. Performing Arts Journal Publications.
- Ünal, C., Dursun, A. and Caber, M. (2017), A study of domestic honeymoon tourism in Turkey. *European Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 65–74. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ejthr-2017-0006>
- van Gennep, A. van. (1960), *The Rites of Passage* (D. I. K. T. by M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee, Trans.). University of Chicago Press. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/R/bo38180827.html>
- Yan, Y. (2010), The Chinese path to individualisation: The Chinese path to individualisation. *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 61 No. 3, pp. 489–512. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01323.x>
- Zhu, Y. (2018a), *Heritage and romantic consumption in China*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Zhu, Y. (2018b), Lifestyle mobility: Shifting conception of home in modern China. *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp.357-374.
- Zhu, Y. (2021), *Heritage tourism: from problems to possibilities*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zhu, Y. (2023), Memory, homecoming and the politics of diaspora tourism in China. *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 25 No.1, pp. 95-112.
- Zuelow, E. G. E. (2016), *A History of Modern Tourism*. Macmillan Education UK. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-36966-5>
- Zuo, Y. (2009), From "Civilised Marriage" to "Group Wedding": Changes in Marriage Customs in the Republic of China from the Perspective of Wedding Ceremonies (由“文明结婚”到“集团婚礼”——从婚姻仪式看民国婚俗的变化). *China Folklore Network*. <https://www.chinafolklore.org/web/index.php?Page=1&NewsID=5981>

## NOTES

1. *Cambridge Dictionary*, online at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/rite-of-passage>
2. 'Wu Tiecheng and "New Life Collective Marriage"', *Shanghai tong*, 15 April 2020, online at: <https://www.shtong.gov.cn/difangzhi-front/book/detailNew?oneId=5&bookId=258714&parentNodeId=258714&nodeId=258741&type=147>
3. 'From 1.3 trillion to 4.5 trillion; the tourism industry in China has quadrupled in the past 10 years', 9 January 2021, *Tencent News*, online at: <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20210109A0E2JU00>
4. 'Tencent wedding industry insight white paper' (2021), *Tencent Marketing Insight*, online at: <https://file.tencentads.com/web/pdf/index/17e64686ac2268ad>
5. '2017 Honeymoon tourism consumption report' (2017), *Ctrip*, cited from: [https://www.sohu.com/a/143997979\\_123753](https://www.sohu.com/a/143997979_123753)

6. 'Research on the Development Trend and Investment Prospect of Honeymoon Travel Industry in China (2022-2029)' (2022), *Insight and Info*, online at: <https://www.chinabaogao.com/baogao/202206/600855.html>
  7. For example, the government of Deqing County, Zhejiang, launched a promotional campaign for honeymoon tourism to attract newlyweds. 'The domestic tourism market opened with a high sweet', 25 May 2020, *Xiaoxiang Morning News*, Online at: <http://sc.people.com.cn/n2/2020/0525/c345167-34040170.html>
  8. Online at: <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/n4/2022/0914/c88-10226.html>
  9. 'Young people who hate weddings: only get certificates, no ceremonies', 20 October 2022, online at: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/SGkhvIrvaPy30QcblNXP\\_g](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/SGkhvIrvaPy30QcblNXP_g)
  10. Online at: [https://m.weibo.cn/status/4706647367487266?wm=3333\\_2001&from=10D2293010&sourcetype=weixin](https://m.weibo.cn/status/4706647367487266?wm=3333_2001&from=10D2293010&sourcetype=weixin)
  11. Online at: <https://m.weibo.cn/7005349222/4669021288402290>
- 

## ABSTRACTS

This article explores the rise of honeymoon tourism in China, a modern phenomenon inspired by Western influences that amalgamates wedding celebrations and tourism. By examining the sociocultural changes associated with honeymoon tourism across the past four decades, this study explores the motivations behind this tourism and its implications for Chinese society. Honeymoon tourism is a microcosm of modern China's quest for romantic consumption. Inspired by the framework of 'rites of passage,' this study shows that honeymoon travel reveals newly married couples' interest in separating from their original families and their search for extraordinary rather than mundane experiences. These intentions, either reflexive or embodied, lead to the consumption of various romanticised practices and products, including photos, celebratory rituals and vlog-making. As an active embrace of modern consumerism, these cultural products symbolise a collective impetus to seize and monumentalise love relationships through the 'tourism moment'. In so doing, honeymoon tourism as romantic consumption in China is not simply a hedonistic search for a romantic experience but a cultural response to rapid modernisation and sociocultural changes.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** honeymoon tourism, China, romantic consumption, wedding, Rite of Passage

## AUTHORS

### WEIQI YAN

Weiqi Yan is an emerging scholar on heritage and museum studies. Her research mainly focuses on intangible cultural heritage in China. Australian National University

**JUNMIN LIU**

Junmin Liu is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, City University of Macau. Her research interests include cultural heritage and folklore studies. Australian National University

**YUJIE ZHU**

Yujie Zhu is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies, Australian National University. His research focuses on the cultural politics of the past within diverse heritage and tourism spaces. Australian National University