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**Ruling Divorce, Ruling Gender: How Does Gender Affect
Court's Judgment on Contested Divorce Cases in China?**

Yu Wang / Ya Su

*University of California San Diego, Max Planck Institute for European Legal History /
University of Notre Dame*

In sync with the changing demographic realities, gender relations and the ideals of its legal reform, China has updated its Marriage Law numerous times over the past 70 years. Since its inception in 1950, Marriage Law of P.R.China has played a vital role in shaping, regulating and policing Chinese family and marriage. Through the power in deciding contested divorce petitions, legal system is entwined with the practice of marriage and divorce in China. Existing literature has noted not only is gender essential to understanding the interactions in courtroom, but the very institution of judicial system is also organized along gender line. Drawing on 10,674 first-instance judgments from the basic courts under the jurisdiction of Beijing, our research examines how gender of both litigants and judges affects court's decision on contested divorce petitions in Beijing. We propose three hypotheses in theorizing the operation of gender in court's judgment: ruling on a. marital realities; b. gender justice; c. gender affinity. We calculate the propensity score of plaintiff as female in a contested divorce case and build a set of multilevel models with propensity score strata to investigate the causal mechanisms between court's decision and gender. We find the gender of litigants holds a strong causal effect on court's decision in ruling contested divorce cases, but the gender of judges does not work in a similar way. Not only does our research present empirical evidence to unveil the long-hidden operation of law in China and demonstrate the role of gender in shaping judicial decision, but it also provides a new way to revamp the use of exploding textual data with respect to the longstanding methodological tradition in social science.