

## **Love, Law and Legality: Marriage Law Campaigns in the Early People's Republic of China**

On May 1, 1950, Zhou Enlai, prime minister of the People's Republic of China, announced the promulgation of the Marriage Law. Inscribing, amongst others, freedom of marriage and gender equality, this law was soon famed as „the People's Republic of China's first law“ and praised as a manifestation of the people's newly gained freedom and democratic rights. From 1950 through 1953, the Marriage Law's contents were repeatedly popularized and promoted in large propaganda campaigns. These efforts culminated in an intense, one-month nationwide „Campaign to Fully Implement the Marriage Law“ in March 1953. Such legal education campaigns, their scope and methods of familiarizing a lay population with legal stipulations, were unprecedented in the history of Chinese law. Marriage Law and its popularization were therefore one of the many efforts carried out by Communist party-state leaders and local cadres to solidify their rule through the creation of a legal system that could lend legitimacy, legality as well as political supremacy to the young republic and its ruling regime, both domestically and internationally. This process, however, was far from being unified. Instead, local variations and diverging opinions as to how to install a socialist legal rule shaped the implementation of the Marriage Law.

Using the example of these Marriage Law campaigns, this thesis argues in five chapters that Chinese socialist implementation of law in the early 1950s was the result of diverse interactions and negotiations between a multiplicity of institutional and individual agents, rather than the outcome of a centrally-led process instigated by a unified, unanimous party state. Mass legal education – i.e. the mass-scale, nationwide dissemination of legal stipulations via popular, semi-official, and official media – as one approach to state-building and “national liberation”, was a phenomenon particular to New-Democracy China. An examination of mass legal education's organizational structures, associated propaganda, background contexts, and the cultural production which supported it thus questions received narratives of PRC history, and challenges us to revise our understanding both of the position law occupied in China prior to the pronouncement of socialism, and of the ways in which the legal realm interacted with daily grassroots politics and a contested cultural industry. The thesis thus brings together two emerging fields of scholarship: the study of modern China's legal history and the study of law in its cultural context. In doing so, it sheds light on law's lives outside of the courtroom, an aspect often overlooked in studies of PRC legal history.