

On the Marriage Differences between China and Western Countries

Author Details:

Xiaoling Yang-Foreign Language School Nanchang Normal University

Abstract: *With the development of technology and transportation, the communication between China and the west has increased in almost every field such as economy, culture, and politics. Obviously, marriage as the most important part of life is a hit issue of cross-cultural communication. This paper aims at exploring the differences between marriage concepts between Chinese and western cultures and giving some proposals on how to minimize the communication mistake in marriage and marriage purposes. It will be helpful in cross-cultural communication about marriage concepts.*

Keywords: *marriage customs; spouse preference; marriage purposes; China and western countries*

1. Introduction

For the past few years, with the development of the society, people's ideas are continuously changing, which leads us to face the challenge of the opinion of marriage. Everyone desires to have a happy and perfect marriage, and he or she wants to be stronger and wealthier as well. It is essential that we should be careful to deal with the differences between China and western when it comes to marriage. Culture is the practice process of the human social history which includes material wealth and spiritual wealth. The development of culture can reflect a nation of basic quality and comprehensive conditions. So, in a sense, culture can stand for the spirit of a nation. Nowadays, in the trend of globalization, more and more Chinese girls marry foreign people, boys love a foreign girlfriend. Discussing and comparing Chinese and western culture become more important. Many scholars have done such researches.

In ancient Chinese book of "rites faint meaning," which prescribed the meaning of marriage is praying for the temple and carrying on the family line. In the book of "essential of traditional culture," written by Xiao Shang jun, points out that Chinese culture emphasizes "family standard," while western pursue "individual standard." So, for many Chinese, family influence is much more important than their own emotion. That's why "meeting parents" is a decisive part of the whole marriage. Liu Ya li, a scholar, working on marriage views. She thinks that marriage value consists of the opinion about love, people's view of love, expectation about lover and opinions about a large number of marriage forms. Xu Ming thinks, marriage views have answered the question that why people fall in love, what kind of lover they choose and how to pursue love.

2. On marriage customs

Marriage customs is the reflection of traditional culture, also the marker beacon directing the degree of national civilization. It demonstrates the value, religion, love and marriage view of national people and aesthetics, national mental. Through a country's marriage customs, people can know their outlook on social life. Different cultures have different marriage customs, so it is obvious to see these people's different attitudes toward marriage. Comparing the marriage customs of two cultures comprehensively and analyzing the opinions and views about marriage so as to conclude the internal reasons. Only in this way can cross-cultural communication have a better meaning and effect. Marriage customs, in our daily life, include manner, clothes, food, building, music, art and so on. In this paper, Some of them will be introduced.

2.1 Contrasts of wedding clothes between two cultures

Clothes are a symbol of human civilization, expressing the development and change in society. As a special kind of clothing, wedding clothes has a long history. Wedding clothes in China and the west have been influenced by the moral concept, cultural tradition, customs, religious thought and so on. As the living standard improving, our aesthetic consciousness to clothes has much increased and have a higher taste of clothing, especially pay more attention to wedding clothes.

In China, phoenix coronet and robes of rank are the types of traditional Chinese wedding in the 20s. It belongs to the Qing Dynasty, regarded as a symbol of power and status. It looks like luxuriant and magnificent due to its jewels and other precious stones, often admired by the common people. However, when a girl comes from an ordinary family, she always wears a red dress. They don't have so much money to afford such an expensive dress. After that, influenced by the western culture, some of the bridegrooms wear a suit with a tie, some wear robes with a western hat and sunglasses. In the meantime, the bride can choose to wear a wedding dress or a cheongsam. Traditional Chinese wedding clothes absorb the fashion element and gradually adapts to the taste of a young couple who have a higher request about their memorable wedding. It contains both classical charm and the popular element. It is Chinese wedding clothes that have been modernized. On the whole, red plays an important role in the Chinese wedding, and most of the wedding dresses are red though now white is also popular.

While in the west, the wedding dress usually is low collar sometimes even doesn't have a collar. As a tight-fitting dress, it always highlights the good figure of the bride. In Renaissance, people started to use staff to make a three-dimensional effect. Gradually, after the mixture of neoclassicism, romanticism, and doctrine of back to the ancients, wedding dress began to have the element of the veil. In 1840, Queen Victoria wore an elegant white robe in her wedding, which settled the status of the white wedding dress as the formal wedding suit. So, white is the mainstream color for the western wedding.

2.2 The wedding process between two cultures

Nowadays, underwater wedding, bike wedding, bus wedding, horse-riding wedding are quite popular with the young people. A few days ago, a new wedding couple, their wedding ceremony held in a helicopter. It sounds cool. However, according to insider revealed, it took at least 60 thousand yuan for renting the helicopter, and the whole expense of the wedding estimated more than 20 thousand yuan. It has to commit that, with the improving living standard, the wedding ceremony becomes more and more luxurious and sumptuous, striving to be ostentatious and extravagant. Today, wedding ceremony gradually evolves a “money” stage. But, it can make sense that a magnificent stage and complex process of wedding surely costs much. To the couple are about to marry, whose economic condition is comparatively rich, a grand ceremony always is preferred to them. Also, it is symbolizing the beginning of a happy life. For the couple, however, not so much rich family, they may find it a little pressure for such an extravagant ceremony. In the past, people rarely talked about the luxurious ceremony, let alone holding such a ceremony. Today, we can. It is due to the change of ideas and lifestyles. A wedding connects two families together, so people pay much attention to it. Chinese wedding ceremony bears the weight of the relative's focus and blessings, what they have put in the ceremony highlights the importance degree of the two families.

In China, the process of the wedding is complex. It is famous for three letters and six rites and three knocks nine. This kind of etiquette is typical of the Chinese wedding. Letters of appointment remain its status until today, so it must be familiar to every Chinese people. During the preparation for the wedding, it must experience some big activities, which have a lot of taboos and etiquette customs. For example, in the bride's room, there must have scissors, ruler, sugar tablets the , vase, copper basin, shoes, quilt with dragon and Phoenix, a pair of the pillow and two pairs of chopsticks and bowls tied with a red rope. Every good have its particular meaning and its sequence during the wedding going. Generally, first is the ancestor worship, people want to get the blessings from God or ancestors. The hen, the bridegroom, sets out always accompanied by strings of fire cakes. He is going to pick up the bride, before getting at the room of bride, he must experience some tests that the girl's relative prepare for him. Usually, the bridegroom has to prepare plenty of red paper envelope containing a gift of money, giving around the sisters and children. When he has already picked the bride up, he should just give her a princess hug and not stop until they have arrived at their wedding car. After the couple gets at the bridegroom's house, the wedding feast will begin. In the banquet, the bride and bridegroom must have to propose a toast to the guests at each table and get everyone blessings. When the feast ends, the wedding arriving at a conclusion, just see the visitors out. Finally, the happy ending is entering the bridal chamber. In a word, Chinese wedding is a little bit complex but exciting.

Let's look at the west; there are also lots of customs. For example, the bride always takes with a white handkerchief. As far

as the western people concerned, a white handkerchief signifies good luck. According to folk-custom, farmers thought that the bride's tears on that day could nourish the crops. Later, It became a good sign of happiness life when the girl tears on the wedding day. Second, during the process of the wedding, the bride always stands to the left of the bridegroom. The custom came from a tale. It is said that only in this way can the bridegroom protect the girl from being taken away by the love rival .Third, when the wedding begins, it is always accompanied by a beautiful wedding cake. According to ancient stories, when the wedding is ending, people will break a baguette up over the head of the bride. Wheat signifies fertility and crumbles symbols of good luck. Different culture have different customs; we should have an attitude of mutual reference and influence.

3. Spouse preference and marriage purposes

Spouse preference, just as its name implies, is choosing a partner for the whole life. It is a stage before young people are going to get married. Spouse preference is the practice of love and marriage. Why do we choose a spouse in our life? It can end the life of living on one's own. People and his or her spouse enter into marriage life hand in hand, consisting of a happy home. Both of them are voluntary to run their home well. Living with the one you choose, no matter what has changed, it remains no remorse. Loving each other and facing all the difficulties together in your daily life. If one chooses a spouse based on these e premises, he or she must have surpassed the effect of attracting by each other's appearance the and sex. He or she prefers spiritual need to the shallow love. That's the mature spouse-preference concept of love, marriage, and family. People who are the first to choose their spouse, always think too much and analyze every situation that may be happening in their future life if they were to be a couple. Because a partner who is going to spend her or his who ofle life with one. It is an important choice to make in our life. Choosing who be your spouse will influence your own life. Let's look at the differences in spouse preference between China and western.

3.1 Contrasts of the spouse-preference manner

Today, parents are usually worried about their children's marriage. People who are mature and have the right or freedom to fall in love with others, however, have to listen to their parents' advice. If the parents don't agree with their marriage, the ere must be some risks if the by the couple is still in love. So, “meeting parents” becomes an essential ritual of deciding their relationships. “Older single youth” usually refers to whom gets at the marriage age but hasn't gotten married. It is an arduous assignment to deal with his or her marriage problems for all the relatives. In China, most people find their partner through a match maker’s introduction. It is the result of Chinese people focusing on interpersonal interdependence. In traditional Chinese culture, people depend on each other. Children before getting married usually depend on their parents, when their parents are getting old, they have the responsibility to support parents and let them enjoy their later life. This kind of interdependence relationship let the parents regard their children's marriage as part of their life. In the subconscious of parents, they don't believe the ability of their children that they can solve their own marriage problems by themselves. In western, people put more emphasis on the cultivation of individual independence. From family education to school education, they pay much attention to the cultivation of independent thinking and judging. The western youth don't need others' introduction to find a heterosexual friend. “Blind date” and other kinds of parties often used to make friends with the opposite sex. Western people choose a spouse to value their degree of mutual agreement more than the decision of parents. They don't need the agreement or approval of their parents. The older people will not interfere so much in children's private affair. No matter what age the children are getting at, parents will not worry to solve the problem, let alone thinking of some ways especially. Just because of the tradition of individualism, particularly emphasizes that no one has the right to interfere in other's private life. Spouse preference is an important aspect of giving expression to individual independence.

3.2 Contrasts of the spouse-preference standard

According to Dinglan’s survey, Chinese youth on spouse preference will continue the pattern of “men higher than women.” While western countries advocate equality between men and women. In ancient China, the most important factors are chastity and that social position and economic status should be harmony. Chastity is often used by men first to look at the

girl's condition. When parents choose a girl for their son, they will first examine whether the girl is virginal. In their opinion, the only pure girl will she abide by the principle of women and filial to parents. As for the well-matched in social and economic status in marriage, also, it's an essential prerequisite for parents to choose daughter in law. Usually, if a destitute nerd falls in love with a rich family girl, they will encounter the most intense pullback. If a destitute girl wants to marry a son coming from a rich and powerful family, she can only be a concubine. Nowadays, people are still affected by these principles, though not so hard. While in western, the most important thing is whether they agree with each other and how much are the degree of their mutual compatible. Other things like family background, educational status are not so crucial. So, a rich girl may choose a common man in the economy just because of his sense of humor. In western fairy tales, the love story of a prince and Cinderella often happens in real life. Prince Charles chooses Camila as his wife, who is very ordinary in family and economy, just because they have the compatible character and common hobby.

3.3 For marriage purposes

In ancient China, the purpose of marriage is for the family rather than love. One old saying goes like that “the combination of gender, ancestral temple on the matter, but also the next generations to continue.” In other words, the purposes of ancient Chinese marriage first is maximizing the strengths of both families through marriage, extending kinship alliance, to become attached to each other. The second is for men to descent from a family. We can also say that is to have a son to carry on the family name. For common people, a couple gets together just because of the need for survival. Women marry a man just to find a life dependence, while men find a woman only for some kinds of physical needs. Although, with the deep communication between China and western, more and more Chinese youth choose marriage with the principle of “love supreme.” There are still many examples of choosing marriage to carry on the family line.

While in western, “love supreme” is popular with everyone. Women and men may cost everything to get the love that belongs to them. For western people, marriage means to find a congenial, everlasting life partner; thereby, they can get satisfaction in physically, mentally and socially. In the western world, individualism is so popular; they think marriage are just two people combine and not a business of others. The foundation of marriage is love and deeply attracted and attached to each other. Therefore, a lot of silver weddings and golden weddings appear. In their view, a marriage without love is a bad marriage, a low quality marriage. So, pursuing true love is the most vital marriage purpose for the majority.

4 The reasons for the differences

There are many reasons causing marriage differences. I choose three main reasons from the point of history, religion, and social development.

4.1 Contrasts of the history

China has a long history of more than 5000 years. The feudal society had ruled ancient China for more than 2000 years. Traditional Confucius culture has influenced China in many aspects of course including marriage views. Under the guidance of “unification” from Confucius culture, two people get married not only the combine of two families but the combine of all the relatives. Also, the thoughts like “husband guides wife” and “male host outside the female home” still affect people in today. “The parents' order and the words of a matchmaker” continues until now for at least several thousand years.

America has a history only for 200 years. It is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural state, with the economic and cultural level is relatively high, democratic freedom and independent equality. From its beginning, it created by capitalism, which is pursuing freedom, universal fraternity, and individual success. So in their marriage concepts, they are comparatively free, open and equal.

4.2 Contrasts of religious belief

Buddhism was widely popular at that time in China. It has a history of more than one thousand years. People believed that

Lord Buddha was handling everything in the real world. It converted to the rule of social development, which is a man and woman should get married on coming of age. However, Buddhism advocated that no marriage in the life of a person, which is typical of abandoning their homes and to become a monk or nun. In western, especially in England and America, people believe in Christianity, which stands for the harmony between men and women is the most important fundamental part of marriage life. Male and female should be mutual good, mutual love and promote each other. Different ideologies in religious belief must cause different marriage views.

4.3 Contrasts of economic development and social mores

Since the reform and opening up, as economic development and deep communication between China and western, the young have more chances to choose their spouse. Though many youths start to love freely, when it is time to get married, the first thing they have thought may still be the matched marriage. For women, men's economic status is still the first considerations. China is still a developing country. In China's mid-west, there are still many poor areas. Thus, many people regard marriage as a higher stage in their life. If they marry a rich family, they just like a rebirth. Oppositely, America is a developed country and has a high level of education with a short history which has no influence from feudal thoughts. What's more, their industrial revolution comes much earlier, the economic status of men and women is not very different. Usually, they will not consider a partner's family background, education degree. What's the most important for them to choose a lover is having an affinity for each other and the same aspirations.

5. Conclusion

Marriage culture is an expansive concept. It is difficult to give a concrete definition of it. In general, it is a social phenomenon and a result created by social history. Marriage customs happens with love and marriage. It is the cognition of people's attitude toward life, family, outlook on life, values, the standard of culture. Different countries have different marriage customs. And we should respect each other's marriage differences, then absorb some excellent cultures. Marriage differences represent local culture and also the hope of praying and longing for a better life. As China has been a member of the international group WTO, the connection between China and the western world becomes closer and closer. In order to get a better understanding of each other, we set the research topic to learn the custom and culture of the western world. Through the research and study of the comparison of the different customs and culture between China and the western world, we can know more about the western history and learn the advantage of theirs. By studying this, we can be more couple of dealing with problems and difficulties as well.

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