

WEDDING COMPLICATIONS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Nobody can really understand what is a wedding and its complications than those couples who have been through it. This paper intends to investigate the ‘formidable’ [but not impossible] problems happening when two people in China decide to marry. Not only from the legal stand point, but from a moral one. Further, what goes into planning a wedding, setting everything to near ‘perfection’, and all to place attention to detail on every single aspect of tradition which goes into the ceremony. China, although presently modernizing, does follow a lot of traditionalism from olden times. Those practices reflecting proudly on 5,000 years of: cultural-history, heritage, and have stood the test of time. Through this investigation, it is to show the steps on how to get married. From the period of courtship to the alter and after. Men and women plan this ceremony; whether for suitability, compatibility, economic wealth or love. But one thing is certain, the new mixes with the old in this society. And as the older generation influences on the wedding, the younger tries to make their points of view heard or try to break away from the old ways, when East meets West. One main point of the wedding to consider, it cannot be performed without the input of the ‘almighty’ tiger-mother/mother-in-law. She will be at every turn to wade her point of view; whether it is asked from her or not. The mother and mother-in-law will typically border on intrusiveness. For this reason, not only holding to traditions is important for most Chinese, but it is still a culture guided by parents—even when their children are young adults.

Key Words: Chinese marriage-ceremony, wedding tea-ceremony, vows, tradition, courtship, 5,000 years, wedding, Tung Shing, suitable, culture and Chinese.

1. INTRODUCTION

Weddings are a big deal in China. The event, as all over the world is marked with a festive occasion; as two people join to start a new life together and begin a family in the way of ‘forever after’.

In China particularly, it begins with a shy encounter between two people and the over-complicated method which ensues among the Chinese.

Often you’ll hear the word ‘suitable’. It is just another word for compatibility. But in reality, what is ‘suitable’ for most Chinese? In olden days, it was about being part of the same social class, ethnicity, status, living in the same province or adjacent to each other and the last big one, the approval of parents. This still means a lot for many traditional Chinese, who consider this act as their ‘courtship and marriage blessings’ once it is approved by the parents (Chua, 2011).¹

But this is slowly changing, because marriages are skyrocketing between foreigners and Chinese (Costa, 1997). Therefore, certain traditions have become more flexible and are being broken to become part of the changing times. Currently with the limited access of females versus males in this society—it has caused another problem. Therefore, people frequently will go outside their own ethnic group, city, province or country to find an appropriate candidate (Christina, 2013). The other fact that is changing among young Chinese are to dispense with the stereotypes of old.

Women are pushed inside the population to marry in their 20s, since they are still a ‘flower in the garden’. However, with the economy, demands of career and rare dating encounters—few Chinese date unless it is through family-friendly ‘set-ups’ on blind dates. The other issue affecting most young women throughout China is the fact that the majority will remain unmarried by the time they hit their early 30s. The latter is considered in China a ‘death sentence’, since the female is treated already like an ‘old lady’ or ‘auntie’. Therefore, here ensues the desperation to find a mate! Plus, it’s considered ‘dangerous’ to have babies in their 30s. This tragic method is unrealistic for most; while you have parents pressuring their adult-children to marry soon after university and have a baby already by their late 20s. Whether the economy of the couple permits it or not, they must have a grandbaby, like it or not. In other words, have a courtship when you’re 24, get married by the time you’re 26 and literally ‘pop out’ a baby before you’re 28 years of age. For this simple reason, some adult-children whom are still bachelors and bachelorettes don't want or refuse to go home during *Spring Festival* and *National Holiday*; because of the pressure from parents can be so overwhelming/overbearing and the adult child doesn't want to hear this litany and bombardment of criticism.

The other issue that has arisen in the last decade are the marriages of convenience (Otero, 2018). These marriages aren't only for money, but to hide a person's sexuality. Gay love is banned in China, so what gays and lesbians do to hide their sexuality, is to meet and marry a person that will cover-up their respective genders; while still producing a baby for the family's sake (Otero, 2015).¹ This stress is causing young Chinese to engage in loveless unions and later, and this is the sad part—has given to a continuous climb in divorce rates throughout China. Something that is presently spiraling out of control with marriages lasting less than five years, as fewer adults feel the commitment to stay together or even marry.

For these reasons, a person will decide not to marry within her group (this is the case for most females). She will usually, out of desperation, will try to meet a person within her working area. That's the easiest choice. Or for Chinese whom become more liberalized in their thinking, they meet-up with foreigners who have liberal points of view (if the case should apply) and marry to have children. Typically, with these types of marriages, the foreigner will (as in most cases) end-up staying in China.

Chinese culture is rapidly changing for the practical means of matrimony. Whether parents agree to it or not, some people are impulsively marrying out of desperation to quiet the voices/mumbles of family members or the keep the parents happy. But in truth, marriage is still a big part of Chinese tradition, even if the couple is in love or not. The ultimate goal is to rapidly marry and produce an offspring.

This investigation intends to explore the romantic and traditional side of things. Going back to its origins and later focusing on those who are married or still a bachelor/bachelorette and are presently in a courtship.

Complications will arise with a culture who is too shy and things are harder to express. But this is also changing across the spectrum of society, because of the challenges females are facing with their choices and males with too little opportunities in finding a suitable partner. Therefore, big cities in China have become the ‘common ground’ to meet, fall in love and get together to wed. Because young people in the countryside have fewer prospects. Therefore, marriages in certain parts of China are still set-up between families with introductions and if the couple gets along, then a ceremony is performed (Lam Ping-fei, 1986).

This act is still the most important one in any culture. It is done hopefully for the benefit of love and the continuum of our global-society.



Photo is a courtesy of Ye Qing. Here is a wedding with the Western-Styled elements.

2. METHODOLOGY

As with any investigation, the historical aspects of Chinese weddings will be covered in this paper. With a leading focus on how this ceremony has evolved through the millennium on time tested traditions. But things have been slowly changing/evolving in the last 40-years, with foreign influence/presence and businesses coming into China—weddings have become more Westernized. That is the truth! This practice has mushroomed into the use of the white dress for purity and exchanging it for what was the traditionally red one (Lam, 2015). Two ceremonies have become the norm instead of one to appease both families if such is the case, when they are Chinese. Placing more economic burdens on the couple and their respective families. This will usually take place [if they’re from the same Province] in their respective hometowns.

The investigation isn't only historical, but it is covered through a series of interviews: focusing on people who are young to middle-aged adults. The interviews intended to get further in-depth of the Chinese weddings, culture and their complexities. All of the people interviewed in English were mainland-born Chinese who have married, divorced, are single or have presently married foreigners, etc.

What are the weddings standards for contemporary Chinese?

The purpose of this investigative paper is to show how traditions are molding out and becoming more practical for those who struggle with economical problems. There's an adaptation of sorts. Because, it doesn't matter how much people dream, they still have to adapt to their surroundings and reality.

This paper although 'semi-traditionalist', will focus on the rising problems with divorces (Otero, 2018).² However, this part will only be covered briefly, since it is to pinpoint more on this happiest of moments and how traditions are important inside a culture for it to continue uninterrupted through a timeline and to flourish.

Historical perspectives will be thrown into the mix, from references and sources researched. But it will likely continue with some of my own references and experiences gathered; stories I have written on the laws of attraction, why do people marry and [at a smaller scale] the issues taking place with divorces in China (Otero, 2020).¹ The purpose is to give this research a better standing when applying it to the current affairs throughout the country.





Photos are a courtesy of Ye Qing. Notice the bridal dress is traditional-Chinese style (*Qun Kua*), while the rest of the maids & gentlemen wear Western-styled fashion clothing.

3. HISTORY OF WEDDINGS IN CHINA

For the majority of Chinese, marriage is an ingrained part of the cultivation in *Confucian values* (The Knot, n.d.). For some, it is about culture and traditions that must be strictly followed; not necessarily in the ways of marriage ceremony, but ‘tying the knot’ and ultimately bringing a baby or babies into the world; with the now, ‘two-child policy’. But, how did marriages begin in this society?

In the first place, it was mythological in its origins.

When *Nuwa*, the sister and *Fuxi*, the brother were involved. Their intimate involvement made them ashamed and they went up the *Kunlun Mountains*. They prayed for a blessing to deliver them from their shame. What happened after, was that the heavens allowed them to hide when mist was delivered. The mist surrounded them from their shame. Because the mist covered *Nuwa*’s shy and blushing face (Char4U, n.d.).¹

Hence, from this story, in certain villages in China, there is the use of fans or different styles of head-pieces to cover the bride’s blushing or shy face (Chinese Historical & Cultural Project, n.d.).

What evolved later with the upper or *Shi classes* were the steps for a couple to become engaged.

The customs were commenced with a dowry. This dowry is basically compelling the female/woman to become a man’s property. It’s basically buying all her rights away from the female’s family.

Special circumstances didn’t require a dowry, but it was considered dishonorable. These situations were relevant to a concubine or if she was in slavery, because she was already considered property.

For widows it was even more complex. If her husband died, she belonged to her husband's family. The only way she was given back to her parents is through a ransom. However, the children stayed with the father's family. This was the tragic and cruel part of the system.

From the period of the *Ming Dynasty* all the way to the *Qing* (1368 - 1912), there were codes implemented for people to follow and wed. For example, in the *Ming Code* (Da Ming Lu) strict steps were followed to preserve these traditional unions. Following *Duke Wen's Family Rules* (Wen Gong Jia Li). There was a marriage broker implemented. The marriage proposal had to come from both families and they had to be highly influential.

The six etiquettes to follow went this way. It was from generation to generation and for hundreds of years without skipping any of the rules implemented and avoiding any fault.

1) First step was the proposal. 2) After this, the births of the male and female had to match in the order of the constellations. 3) Then came the evaluation of the bride's wealth and if she was good enough for the groom's family. 4) The fourth part were the designation of the wedding gifts from each corresponding family member and their respective families. 5) There was then, the arrangement of the 'Tung Shing' (黃曆, the "Yellow Calendar"), according to the *Chinese Lunar Calender* (Wikipedia, n.d.). This began with *Wok Lik*, the Yellow Emperor; as the story was passed down from generation to generation.

In other words, when the nuptials could take place. 6) The last part, once everything was settled, the marriage ceremony. There were a total of six steps. The last changes occurred during the Qing Dynasty with 'Tung Shu' (通書).

The day of the nuptials had to be done in four different steps. The process was long, drawn out and complicated. Tiresome to say the least. Taking place from the morning, when the bride's face was entirely covered and she was fetched from her home. When the bride and groom had to eat entire portions of noodles. The noodle had to be slurped down without breaking any, to indicate longevity. Other traditions have been changed according to the Province. But the basic concept remains the same. Once the bride and groom were taken covered with a red mantle to the ceremony. Then the nuptials began with four bows, something still practiced solemnly until this day: 1) The first bow was to heaven and earth, 2) The second was in remembrance of their ancestors, 3) The third went in respect for each others' parents, 4) The fourth was the final step to be married, with the spouses (husband and wife) bowing to each other (Magaux, 2018).

In contemporary times, this gives way to the celebrations of music, festivities with fireworks and a dinner with drinks. The reception hall is a gala done at a hotel, if the family can afford it or in other venues like the home or rented place. Most of the decorations in the hall are in red with traditional-Chinese lanterns overhead (Mack, 2018).

The bride and groom get their gifts through packets of money for their future life and household.

Traditions are still upheld highly in some parts of China.

With the corresponding couple being suitable for each other if they are from the same: status or social class, they have similar careers or interest, they are from the same province (although this is progressively changing) and the marriage is held within a two-day period. This is to say, that one ceremony will be held in the groom's hometown and the other will be held in the bride's hometown whenever possible. The order will always be conducted first for the groom and after, for the bride. To understand that, it is still a patriarchal society.

Changing for what was ongoing in the past, and nowadays for the Western fashion, such as: using the white-wedding dress to mean purity in the essence of the bride. But still, the bride will still use the lovely red for the dress, buy a 'qipao' (cheongsam) or have one made for the ceremony (Otero, 2017).

One of the intricate parts which has been added to the ceremony, whether it's before or after. It is followed with the photographs. Taken also from the Western concept of weddings. Couples will pose in idyllic areas like a: beautiful shoreline, international site, beach, garden, mountain, trees, around flowers or the ancient pagodas and historical structures reflecting longevity (Otero, 2020).² Therefore, showcasing some of the Chinese-cultural values and historical sites, etc.

In many aspects, the traditional wedding ceremonies had been conducted in almost the same fashion for a better part of 3,000 years. It was at the latter part or the last 700 years when things started to change for a customary permanence between the *Ming and Qing Dynasties* (Kelly, 2019).

Novels like 'The Good Earth' showed to an extent in literature what was happening in China at the beginning of the Twentieth-Century (Buck, 1931).

This is one example that properly illustrated traditional marriages and the way of life in rural China back in the old days and by the end of the *Qing Dynasty*.

As with the changes transpiring in China by 1911, *Pearl Buck* focused on the social issues affecting China at that time. What were the positives and negatives? How the concept of marriage was changing for one of practicality. How a family-centered culture was transforming itself as one of individualistic values, and how it goes back and forth throughout the 1900s. She mentioned the turmoil affecting the country at that time and how rural life was changing completely for landowners (Otero, 2013).

Three of the biggest changes would happen in China throughout the Twentieth-Century: *1911, 1949 and 1980*. With these changes came how the traditional weddings would be performed then and in the future.



Photo by Daniel Otero, taken at the Bund, Shanghai. Showcasing the future bride and groom preparing for their photo shoot before their wedding date.

The majority of marriages in China were arranged for thousands of years. Rarely it was done out of love, and it was based on what benefits one could/can get out of the other. It was a rare thing for a couple to choose each other out of love or select your own spouse. For millennium these choices were made by mediators, intermediaries and family members of higher stature (which were usually the parents).

This changed radically/dramatically when *Deng Xiaoping* came to power and literally ‘open the doors for business’ in China. After 1980, the laws abolished the old practices and a person was allowed to select their own partner. Since then, it’s been 41 years. This doesn’t mean that marriages in China aren’t still arranged in the countryside by parents and family members. They do get involved out of desperation/the need to see their offspring married and to produce a child for the family. But we can see the following with certainty, marriages are shifting more and more from loveless into love. It’s becoming more of a romantic union and less of an arranged affair. And that’s the positive occurrence in all of this. For now, Chinese will continue with their traditionalism and these won’t go away anytime soon.

What we presently see is only a fraction of the customs since the medieval period in history. Presently, what is still continued with utter passion as a symbol of customary delight are the following: 1) redness of the decorations, 2) dress for the bride in the traditional ‘qipao’ (cheongsam), 3) covering the face and 4) the four-bowing nuptials. Somethings are mixed in with Western traditions. But overall, the ceremony in itself is for the most part entirely Chinese. As more Chinese go, come and immigrate abroad, this will change—but certain smaller details still remain from ancient times (Char4U, n.d.).²



Photos by: Daniel Otero (Jinbo, Chengdu, China), typical-red cheongsam with flowers embroidered on the chest and side slit is a favorite among the females getting married.



Other favorite versions of the cheongsam are the long versions for weddings in gold or a variation of yellow, white and red (check the dress above to the extreme right).

With this concludes the historical portion and changes in the ceremony.



Photo is a courtesy of the author, Daniel Otero. Photo taken at the Shenzhen Museum, Guangdong, China. This photo is of a bride and groom in a traditionally-styled wedding.

As the reader will notice, most of the items are in red; a color symbolizing one of prosperity for the majority of Chinese people.



Photo is a courtesy of the author, Daniel Otero. Photo taken at the Shenzhen Museum, Guangdong, China of a minority-styled wedding.

4. THE CHINESE TEA-CEREMONY

This Chinese Tea-Ceremony (敬茶) began 1,200 years ago in China by the period of the Tang Dynasty, then it later spread into Japan through Japanese-monks who saw how the custom was performed and quickly adopted it into the Japanese-cultural setting. These tea ceremonies are still practiced by traditionalist in both cultures; therefore, leaving a valuable legacy behind (Winnika, n.d.).

It began as a way to show respect for an elder. Spreading not only to customary ceremonies, but to weddings when those getting married would serve their parents for all the years of love, sacrifice and care the couple [as children] received as a show of gratitude. Furthermore, showing a sign of respectful obedience.

It typically begins with two red-cushions, since the couple getting married has to bow first to the parents of the groom, grandparents and uncles. The groom is on the right and bride to the left in front of their elders. There will be a traditional tea-set to offer the precious liquid once the family members gather. A kettle with plenty of hot water will also be available to rinse and serve the tea cups for the following group of elders coming in (Top China Travel, n.d.).

Therefore, in olden times, the bride would serve her family tea in the ceremonial way a day before at her home. The same had to be done for the groom's family. It is customary for the bride to wear a *Qun Kua* (群褂) or a version in a silk dress (Teasenz, 2015).

In this patriarchal society, the bride would get up first to serve her parents and grandparents the morning tea and later, she would do the same with the groom's parents and grandparents at their home. If more people were involved: then came the uncles, aunts, great-uncles and great-aunts. Presently, this has changed and for those who want to continue practicing the ceremony; the

couple will now do it for both in-laws. Furthermore, the groom's parents are served first and later come the grandparents (paternal and maternal). Moreover, the same is done with the bride's.

This ceremony in the past would be done separately, presently for some couples to save time and money, they'll do it with everybody gathered in a hall—where it is performed for all to see. There a document is signed and stamped to make the ceremony official.

As the bride and groom serve, the elders will extend 'lucky red-envelopes' (These are called, *lai see* in Guangdong and Hong Kong; and across China the envelopes are known as *hong bao*). The envelopes are placed on the tray where the tea is served. What is being promoted here is the respect for the older generation and one's elders.

Commonly what's inside the envelope is money. Other times the gift can be in the form of jewelry; which is traditionally in gold.

People use variations of green tea; however, it is important that the tea is served with red dates (枣) and lotus seeds (莲子). The red dates are supposed to be sweet, as the tea represents/indicates a happy life. The lotus seeds are to symbolize the blessing of children. Longans (桂圆) are also served with the tea; this will mean the strength of the dragon and hopefully a male heir will be born soon after (Fercility, 2017).

This is how an 'official' tea ceremony is performed. In the end, it will all depend on the couple and their respective ideas on how they want the ceremony performed or not (taking into consideration if they are liberals or traditionalist). But several things cannot be denied: it is like a tree with the roots of: continuity, love, loyalty, traditionalism to foster a better and healthier family-love life in society, etc.



Photo is a courtesy by Ye Qing.



The bride in traditional cheongsam ('qipao') for her wedding day. However, and as in previous photographs, she will also wear a Qun Kua (silk dress) for the wedding & tea ceremonies. Photo is a courtesy of Ye Qing.

5. INTERVIEWS

I began this process inside a period of 23 months, taking time between March, 2019 to February, 2021 to complete this study. Conducting interviews about the 'traditional' or liberal-wedding styles incurring in contemporary China. My interviews took place in Guangdong Province. The conclusion for this study only came after an update, completing the written portion of the tea-ceremony and a visit to the *Shenzhen Museum* to better understand the history of weddings in China. Those questioned were mostly directed towards: educators, administrators and accountants of Chinese background. Here are their answers for all to learn something about the mysteries and not so mysterious Chinese weddings. Because China can sometimes be a closed-off society and at the same time, this new intellectual elite is opening-up to tell all about the real China.

Candy, a professional educator and arts teacher at a private institution in Guangdong Province told me the following, "There is the right time when it is suitable to marry. For me, it was the thoughts and ways on how we would dress for that special day. Every little girl's dream, right? After, I realized I was in love and my biggest worry was on how we would live together. For me, I stood on middle ground with this; the courtship and getting to know the person has to take at least half-a-year or longer, if the feeling is right. But in my case, it took two to three years. I

didn't have any qualms about getting married and there weren't any fears! I wanted my wedding in the Westernized-style, that was my dream, a dress in white—with the long train and in many ways I did. My man was handsome, honest, tall, kindhearted. Better for him to be rich... (she gives a quick-soft smile). It was better for us if we had kids and parents would be more accepting. What started with a wedding list of thirty guests, went to become an extravaganza of three to four-hundred invitations in a 'traditional-Chinese' wedding style. Yes, I wanted a wedding in a Western style; however, while in China, I do believe it ought be in the Chinese way. But I still had my white dress with decorative train. For our honeymoon, it was from Greece to South Africa and Bali. During the ceremony, we didn't drink too much and kept the traditions simple. At most, we did everything in 90-minutes, around noon time to coincide with lunch."

The following person was anonymous and didn't want her name stated; since she had recently gone through a painful divorce and wanted to keep this truth from her three daughters, "I actually met my husband through a family introduction and we had three girls after we married. We had to first impress our parents and grandparents, because they are traditional (conservative) in thinking. There

wasn't much fear when we wanted to marry. We were married for 25-years. But my dream man was the artist, Wu Tiang Lu (she tenderly laughs when looking back). About my husband, I wanted him to love me, take time to care for me and not become so busy! I wanted a man who could talk about everything! In our wedding, it was rather small, we had 20 to 30 guests. In my case, for the dress, I had that day three dress changes between the wedding dress, 'qipao' (cheongsam) and another in white, red and blue. We celebrated our vows in Jiangxi Province. It was a happy day of love, hoping that the rest of our lives we could share the burden of care. The wedding ceremony started at 9 a.m. and continued for another 12 hours," she ends with a worried bitter-sweet smile. She later described herself as a passive-female when she married versus her outgoing-former husband: who is a person good with English, great with computers and is also a good singer as she described before finalizing!

The above interviews are examples of a semi-traditional wedding (mixture between East and West) style and how things are changing in China with the escalation of divorces. In this case, *Anonymous* was extremely private about her divorce and barely anybody knew about her separation to protect her work, save face and personal status. In her situation, her divorce came after a quarter-a-century of marriage. Demonstrating the pressures of an evolving society: that this overworked generation was growing apart due to stress, financial difficulties, incompatibility in the first place and as in most cases, simply infidelity. The latter problem of disloyalty made-up for 34% of the divorce cases, according to the *Ministry of Civil Affairs* in Hunan, China (Weber, 2019).

But this study isn't about the topic of divorce. This study is more about how Chinese fully respect and follow the concept of traditionalism or semi-traditional ways. It doesn't matter what they are suffering or going through internally, it is more about how they can 'save face' and show the rest of the world. Matrimonial vows are still considered something of great respect, importance, honor, value, romance and love—in spite of the growing changes in China. There is

also another issue to focus/reflect on and as it was mentioned before, Chinese society will try not to 'lose face'; but nowadays the concept of matrimony is more about love than status or material wealth, etc. This is a stark contrast than what it is was about 75-years before. It is still a county that holds deeply to its traditions; whether a person agrees or not with the cultural setting.

For teacher Danny Gan, here's a chance to get a different perspective on a more traditional style of courtship and wedding. "I dated my wife for six to seven years before we decided to marry in a traditional-Chinese ceremony. That was when we made the decision to ask our folks and see if they could give us their blessing to wed. If they agreed, we would continue with the relationship and if they didn't, we wouldn't continue. By the time of the wedding, relatives came, but everything was set in my parents home and it would extend for two-days. Because, we moved from my home to hers. We are both from Hubei, only 40-minutes away from each others' respective hometowns and we practically have the same customs. Since it was separately and away from another (my wife's) family. My parents and wife's parents gathered. The date was tricky. It's the busiest time of the year in China. Therefore, we did it before Spring Festival (it was before February); so later the marriage date and day was before we had our ceremony. After, we could enjoy fully our Spring Festival with the lucky money we received and give back to our families! In my case, I purchased a suit. For my wife, she was more practical. She rented a wedding dress in white. After the wedding, we planned/waited one-year before we had a child."

Here, the above couple did everything mostly in a 'traditional manner', with the two-day gathering period; except for the wedding dress, which was in white. Showing the influence of Western culture in contemporary-Chinese society. But it shows the practicality of most couples nowadays; offsetting traditions to be more economical and save money for a house, apartment or car, etc.

Mister Yang Jun came to me on March 19, 2019 and with jumpy-excited emotion. He wanted to talk to me about his wedding-marriage experience. Only married recently, six months, he still showed or carried the emotion of a new-groom. In a soft-spoken and corrective way, to not mess up his English, he slowly explained to me on how it went, "Our courtship was only six-months long. We thought, my wife and I that traditions are necessary to uphold. So we planned or managed for our wedding three months. It was actually (he laughs), planned by her mother! Both families thought we had suitable qualities for each other. When we made the guest list and wedding invitations, my nucleus is only composed of my aunts and uncles; they are basically four siblings. [He laughs again], while I had 14 guest, my wife invited 200 (whopping numbers, indeed)! We are both from Hunan Province; therefore, we celebrated our vows one day in her hometown and the other in mine." I asked him about his feelings, "I was tired, stressed-out and at the same time, excited for everything! Because we are young people; however, these traditions are sometimes overwhelming and complex." He continued, "My father-in-law is a famous teacher in that area in which we live; he definitely invited some colleagues. One of the most important parts of the wedding was her dress. For us, moreover, for Chinese it is imperative the color red. This symbol is one beloved in our country and to show good luck for

the future,” with this concluded the talk with Mister Yang after half-an-hour! I thanked him and after, it was to have a sit down with his wife, to listen and understand her side of the story.

For his (Yang Jun’s) spouse, Bing Zhe Zhao (March Zhao), she had a practical outlook about her suitors and view about her wedding, “In my case, I lived in Denver, Colorado (U.S.) and came back for my parents. Here in China, once parents reach an elderly age, you’re supposed to take care of them. I guess it’s the traditional factor in most Chinese. For us, traditional weddings are normal, but warning, the celebrations are extremely tiresome. What I recalled, apart from my husband, were three-days of nuptials. We were up till midnight. Two-days for the wedding in our hometowns, his and mine; and finally an eight-hour holiday. The cost in our wedding came to a total of 17,000 RMB (Approximately \$2,633.30 USD; however, this for some people in China can be almost three-months salary. Furthermore, some weddings average in China, \$12,000 USD or 77, 503.20 RMB (Verot, 2015)).¹ We could have traveled to other countries, but we wanted to invest more on the wedding and the people we love. My father thought of my husband as suitable for me, and after a courtship of two months, we were given the blessing for our vows. Originally my parents thought of a suitor for me, an old-family friend and History Professor. But I thought about it, and it would have been boring, since I don’t like history!” She smiles looking away and blushing, “I thought my husband was a better choice. We are both from Hunan Province. Our respective hometowns are in Yingzhou and Handong, only one-hour away by train, relatively close. We had a total of 200 guest who came to our nuptials; especially on my side.” I asked her about babies/children in the near future, “Since we are not so rich, the plan is to have a honeymoon two-years later after we have saved some money. As we plan for the future, then we’ll have a baby. I’m not a romantic person and believe in being close to my parents. We can have one baby, but I don’t think we’ll have two, at least not yet!”

In Jun and March’s case, the courtship was rather speedy. The husband indicating it was a six month courtship, while the wife mentioned it was only two. But they still [as a young generation] celebrated their vows according to the traditions followed since ancient China. This young couple were at the perfect-marrying age. Typically, the couple would have a child on their second-anniversary or go and celebrate it on a holiday. The most important thing was to save money for their future and stability.

Another important part to notice, for March it was actually necessary to return from the U.S. to take care of her parents. This is a very important aspect in Chinese culture, and to have family living with one-another. For example, after marriage, it was usual for the bride to move in, or her parents come and live with the married couple. Her parents will usually take care of the baby. However, this is also changing, because there is a rather big distance between parents; because their offspring moved away to live and work in Guangdong Province, a considerable distance from their places of origin.

For Mister Oscar Ma, an educator/language translator and unmarried in a relationship, he gave a technical point of view, “What’s the suitable age for marriage in China? That’s the question which most people ask. Well, for females, the pressure is on once they reach their 18 to 20 years in rural areas. For males living in the countryside, it’s around 22 years of age. If you’re living in an urban area, your prospects of marriage will usually become much later. The ages in which

city parents will start asking their offspring to find a suitable mate commences around 25 for females and 28 for males (years of age). Because once a female reaches over 30 years, her prospects become harder and harder. She is sadly considered 'worthless' after 30. Therefore, marriage is one of the most important basis and established achievements for women in China. For men, here is where the unfairness begins and sexism, because men in their 30s are still literally, 'roses in the garden'. This truth is only partial, when you consider the changing times. Some professionals are studying now, and more than ever are educating themselves into their 30s; and go for College education into their

Master's degree and furthermore, work career (The fact of the matter is that some people in China who are already hitting their 30s from the millennial generation (1990s onward) aren't getting married and think of it as a waste of time just to suffer and later get divorced (Gan, 2021)). With family changing, people start acting like a couple once they start dating. So, whether it is love or out of desperation, people already engage one-year into the relationship. Usually going for a traditional ceremony, and the season to marry is around autumn, September or October. This is quite true with people from Hunan (where my girlfriend is from) and Shanxi (where I'm from). The parents desire the girlfriend to be closer to the boyfriend. This is my case. Because it is still a tough sell for me." He smiles and gives a charming laugh, "For her (my girlfriend), her parents are open (liberals). Now, going back to the traditional-wedding ceremony and life thereafter. Once the couple is married, the parents of the couple already want grandchildren. That same year or (at the latest) three-seasons later, a baby will come from the union. My dream for a honeymoon is Thailand for the tropical climate and foods, etc. We are now 29 (girlfriend) and 30 (for myself). The plan is to marry two-years later." He concludes, "We'll follow the traditional rules: man's family will ask for approval from the woman's family, marriage, honeymoon and children."



Here one can notice the playful moods and how things are changing to a more 'liberalized' wedding version with some traditional elements. Photo is a courtesy of Ye Qing.



The author and his wife Xiao qin married in Changsha, Hunan. Photo is a courtesy of Daniel Otero.

6. CONCLUSION

With the high rate of pressure to marry, there's also a high rate of divorces and mental breakdowns in China. Customs are essential in any culture, this fact is true; however, it isn't at the sacrifice of a person's happiness, mental state, suffering and well being. This is the commonality with weddings in China, the over-complication and high cost that increases year after year. Unions are difficult enough in a loving relationship, imagine one which is loveless; even tougher to bear and stomach. Plus, there is another factor, young people are less committed to stay together than with previous generations. The present generation is far more selfish, materialistic and there is less commitment in marriages across the board; whether in China or worldwide.

The other thing is the desperation to marry by the 'sheng nu' (剩女 - leftover women). Typically in the west, what we consider a prime age to marry, for Chinese women in their 30s the prospects are low. Chinese men will prefer brides in their 20s for babies, later than that, they consider brides less attractive to have children and consider them [the women in their 30s] a dangerous period in pregnancy to have children. Therefore, most of these 'older' women will choose to marry outside their culture or live in major cities, where people have more liberalized views and less pressure to marry once that person is away from their parents (Chua, 2011).² For foreigners and those living in international hubs, the standard is much more flexible and less strict in marriage. However, in China, the stress is still on; especially in the rural areas, etc.

The ceremony is built into three layers in contemporary society. 1) One are the *vows*, which basically take place in a government office to solidify the union. 2) Two is to focus on the *wedding photos*. The first-two are taken months (apart) in advance before the ceremony. 3) The third step is the *ceremony* itself, which is a complex movement and planning of dates to be able to marry within the couples province and adjacent cities.

Now, this is changing rather quickly and dramatically. Because the younger-generation of Chinese are departing from traditions. They are marrying outside their provinces, and even doing their ceremonies abroad. Then you have those who marry foreigners, and in these two instances, the marriage is performed possibly in a single ceremony.

Some are pushing aside traditions all together for practicality. The couple marries and if they didn't get enough money with their wedding gifts, will be saving for either: a car, apartment/home and saving the 'hóngbāo' (红包 - red envelopes with money inside) in a savings account for their offspring.

Those giving the wedding gifts in money must observe Chinese customs when handing in the red envelopes. For one, avoid any amounts with the number four; the four symbolizes bad luck and death!

Colors used for the wedding in decorations or in dress are: in red-to symbolize good luck, white to represent purity or gold to stand for economic prosperity. Chinese weddings are still something beautiful to see and with the traditions upheld become a cultural experience. And one thing is essential to understand and ought to be made perfectly clear: the wedding in essence is to showcase the bride-it is basically, her day-and to exalt her beauty.

With communism shifting more towards commercialism, there is an \$80 billion (USD) or 517 billion (RMB) industry to benefit from in Modern China

(Verot, 2015).² However, there is one truth, whether a person is born in China or a Chinese expat, traditions will be followed very closely by the second and third generations. Therefore, once there is the economy, these traditions shouldn't be given up so easily, but pushed on to be enjoyed by future generations.

The common goal is to change for the better, stay together and give a continuance to life in love (Otero, 2017). This is what one hopes for with these wedding traditions: to keep the culture alive, grand and well. Even when things change a little here and there.

The biggest issue with this study was the gathering of information; since things in China can sometimes become secretive, private and obscure. Therefore, the digging for information took the longest to achieve and many of the references that this study is based upon came from the internet, my own views and few books on weddings, etc. This is all because, although things are opening up in China; however, there is also limited access to these types of information in the country and most people are still shy about giving-up this kind of data. And this doesn't mean, this study wasn't flawed. I still had my points of view inserted and with that said, possibly held

to my own standards of subjectivity. Therefore, careful scrutiny ought to be incorporated when reading this paper. Even when things are changing at 'light-speed'. But things are also turning around for the best/better, with more openness and broad-minded people out there—who were extremely helpful in this investigation.

For these reasons, I am thankful. Here concludes this Humanities investigation on, "Wedding complications in China". Thank you for your time in reading and kindest regards. Good day!

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