

Chinese Traditional Wedding Ceremony

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According to the traditional Chinese culture, birth, marriage, and death are most important in one's life. Especially, marriage is the only event that can be controlled by human beings. Thus, wedding has been held in China as a magnificent ceremony for thousands of years. The Chinese traditional wedding ceremony shows not only the fortune of the two families involved, but also the abundant heritage of Chinese civilization. This essay introduces the symbols, preparation, and procession of the traditional Chinese wedding ceremony.

The most intriguing part is possibly the kinds of symbols of Chinese traditional wedding. In a Chinese legend, the God-in-moon, who was known as the god of love in tales, would tie a red string between the man and the woman who were meant to become a couple in the future. Therefore, no matter how long the distance was between these two persons, the red string would bring them together. Finally, the magic power of the red string would have them get married. Hereafter, red was considered to have a powerful meaning and used on many royal occasions, especially at weddings. Since red was the symbol of utmost happiness and joy, almost all the backgrounds of Chinese traditional wedding ceremonies were red. Traditionally, the red double happiness (Shuang-xi) as well as the red dragons & phoenixes design was thought to be meaningful and indispensable in weddings. The former signified a happy future for the newlyweds, while the latter demonstrated the firm relationship between them. In addition, special flower decorations showed the characteristic of Chinese culture. Contrary to the flowers used in Western weddings, traditional Chinese never used white flowers in ceremonies except funerals. The flowers for weddings were red peonies and orchids, connoting love, new life, safety and peace.

Since it was a grand ceremony in one's life (particularly in history, it was rare the wedding required systematic and elaborate preparation. Firstly, as the traditional wedding meant the joining of not only two people but also two families, the householders of these two families would have a formal meeting to discuss the wedding, especially the wedding date. They would pick an auspicious day as the wedding day according to astrological signs. After the meeting, these two people who might have never seen each other before were considered as legally engaged. Secondly, the groom's family would present the betrothal gifts called "Grand Gifts" to display their sincerity and financial ability. Additionally, the number of gifts should have connotational meanings, which must be even numbers or contained the number 9, a homophone of a word meaning "lasting forever" in Chinese. For instance, red eggs should be wrapped in pairs, which meant "good things in double"; Li Shi money should be 99 or 999 yuan, which meant "good luck forever". A few weeks before the wedding day, the bride was not encouraged to go out any more in order to show attachment to the family, friends and relatives. Therefore, the bride's family would have time to prepare dowries and household accessories, such as bedding or dining facilities, for the new home; meanwhile, the bride could make her wedding dress with the help of her unmarried girlfriends. At the same time, the groom's family would decorate the bridal home or house with auspicious accessories such as "double happiness" signs, red dragon & phoenix designs, and red candles. Nine days before the wedding day, the bride's family would send the dowries to the groom's home,

which might be an appropriate opportunity to show their love to their daughter as well as their wealth.

The wedding day procession, solemn and meaningful, was divided into several steps. First, two rituals would be held in the bride's and the groom's homes on the morning of the wedding day. "Hair dressing" ritual was performed in the bride's home. The lucky woman, who had living parents and parents-in-law, children and husband, would help the bride to make her hair in a bun, which was the common style for traditional married women. Similarly, "capping" ritual was performed for the groom usually by his mother. The changing of hairstyle of these two people meant they had become adults. After that, the groom would set off for the bride's home with Li Shi money wrapped in red paper. In order to bring his bride home, the groom would play "door games" with the bride's relatives and friends. For example, the groom should answer many questions about the bride to show how much he cared about her. Also, he should give Li Shi money to them, meaning "please let her go". Finally, the new couple would perform a tea ceremony to their parents (mothers first) to show their filial respect for them. Moreover, the parents would give the newlyweds Li Shi money and peanuts, which were considered to encourage them to have children as soon as possible. After this ceremony, the new couple would leave the occasion together for their bridal room.

In conclusion, the Chinese traditional wedding ceremony is considered a spiritual ceremony. Not only the symbols and preparation but also the procession of the wedding displays the long history and the plentiful heritage of China. Although this kind of wedding is no longer common in modern cities, its quintessence is worth remembering.