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**Traditional Chinese marriage**

As with every culture, marriage in the Chinese culture is a very important ceremony, and a lot of efforts go into its planning. In fact, for a long time in china, there was a popular saying stating that the most three delightful moments in life are: successfully passing the imperial examination to become an official, getting married and the birth of one’s son. For more than two thousand years, the importance of marriage in china was far more than finding the right partner, as marriage was of key importance in determining the prosperity and the fame that both families may enjoy in the future.

To this day, marriage is still very important in the Chinese culture. And even if the marriage ceremony and its rituals might have changed a bit during recent times, the important rituals are still present to this day. Hereafter are some important practices that take place in traditional Chinese marriages.

As it is the case in many cultures, one important step that takes places before marriage is matchmaking. But even though this practice is present in many cultures, it is of a greater importance in the Chinese culture. For this, the elders (usually from the groom’s family) or a designated matchmaker (usually a woman) would ponder over the advantages and disadvantages of this possible union. They would consider carefully the families’ and couple’s reputation, social standing, future prospects, financial situation and other aspects before selecting the future bride. After the matchmaking comes the three letters and six etiquettes.

The first letter is the betrothal letter, which is sent by the groom’s family and it contains his vows and his intention of marrying the bride. The second letter has a record of the gifts to be expected. As for the final letter, it’s called the wedding letter and it is sent to officially welcome the wife to her new husband’s family.

As for the six etiquettes, they refer to the five steps that lead to the sixth step, which is the marriage ceremony. The first of those steps is “the proposal”, in which the parents and elders of the groom’s family go to the bride’s family to propose. The second step is “the birthday matching”. In this step, the groom’s family would go to a fortune teller and provide him with both the names and birthdays of the couple. The fortune teller would then proceed to predict whether the marriage is going to be a happy one or not. If the fortune teller’s predictions turn out to be auspicious, the groom’s family would go to the bride’s family with gifts in hands to inform them of the results. And that is the third step, “sending the betrothal gifts”. The fourth step is “sending the wedding gifts”. It is a very important step of the whole process and is second only to the marriage ceremony in importance. The gifts sent this time are of a higher value and number than the betrothal gifts, and are meant to symbolize the capability of the groom to provide a good life for the bride, as well as kindness and respect for her family. It is customary for the bride’s family to return half of the gifts to show that they accepted the proposal and that their intentions are to have a good relationship with the groom’s family. The last step before the ceremony is “the choice of the wedding date”. The families will consult a fortune teller, a monk, or refer to a fengshui expert to help them predict the most auspicious date to have their wedding at. This prediction is based on the birthdays and zodiac signs of the couple, and it is said that the bride’s birthday is usually preferred to that of the groom’s in this choice. The marriage ceremony, which is the sixth and last step of the six etiquettes, is the most important step and can last up to three days with many rituals and traditions taking place. This step may also vary in details and rituals from one ethnicity to another.

In contrast, in the Arabic culture for example, the choice of the bride is not nearly as important and careful as it is in the Chinese culture. Since the Arabic culture is closely tied to their religion, Islam, marriage is seen as a necessity to continue the lineage, but the choice of the partner is not that important. So the choice of the partner can be based on looks, reputation, might, or any other aspect.

From this, it is possible to see how important the choice of the life partner for Chinese people is. This choice is taken after a very careful consideration, and not only for the couple’s, but also their families’ future well-being and prosperity.