

# Traditional chinese culture and chinese marriage theology religion essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Marriage is an important part of life. Different cultures have their own tradition to celebrate this big event. Through understanding the traditional customs of marriage, we could learn more about the nation's culture and values. In this essay, features of traditional Chinese marriage will be introduced and we will look at how Chinese Culture and traditional values are involved and influence the traditional Chinese marriage culture.

## **Introduction**

First of all, we should have some brief understanding on some basic traditional values about families and the ancient Chinese society. In traditional Chinese culture, the family units are the basic units of the society which forms the nation. When the family units are well-ordered, the society will then become well-organized and eventually form a harmonious nation. And for thousand years, Confucianism has a very deep influence to Chinese culture and has significant impact in different aspects of the Chinese society. Confucianism is a philosophy which emphasizes on the moral ethics of people's behaviours in daily life. It is a set of moral and ethical rules or ideas that dictate how a person should behave. It plays a key role in forming the social norms of the Chinese society (Yu 69).

## **Patriarchal Society and values**

Traditional Chinese families are clan and patriarchal based. A clan is composed by descendants of the same ancestors and families which inherit the same surname. A clan emphasis greatly on kinship and blood relationship, they are regarded as an extension and the continuity of the family. Traditional family always put the clan's interests above personal interests and personal honor as the clan's honor and shame are closely

<https://assignbuster.com/traditional-chinese-culture-and-chinese-marriage-theology-religion-essay/>

related to one self. These values play a significant role in traditional Chinese marriage culture.

## **“ Marriage” in WuLun (ä°” å€«)**

In Confucianism, one of ethical and moral rules on the individuals and social interaction is WuLun (ä°” å€«) . WuLun indicates the five major relationships within a society. The Five Relationships are King to subject, Father to son, Husband to wife, Elder brother to younger brother and Friend to friend (Yu 94). Maintaining good relationships will stability and prosperity of the society and embrace the whole nation to live in harmony. One of the relationships which I would like to mention is Husband to wife, in other words, it is about marriage. To the Confucians, marriage is important to both the clan and the society. The marriage not only symbolizes the joining of two individuals but also the joining of two families with different surnames. Therefore, marriage can act as a medium to connect different families and clans to form a society and even nations. To certain extent, a good relationship of marriage is believed to bring harmony to the society and the whole world is a big family.

## **Arranged Marriage and matching**

For traditional Chinese marriage, lots of constraints were also attached with. First of all, a marriage is always pre-arranged by parents, but not based on the couple’s love and own choice. One of the reasons is that the marriages are usually associated with political reasons and benefits. But the most important one is that the marriage is a major family event and it is a matter of the clan, therefore the marriage must be decided by the parents and individuals must subject to eldership. Brides and grooms will only see or know each other until the wedding day comes ( Gu 137).

<https://assignbuster.com/traditional-chinese-culture-and-chinese-marriage-theology-religion-essay/>

Moreover, as the Chinese said, “ Bamboo door to bamboo’s one, wood door to wood’s one”. To choose an ideal partner, the wealth and social status of the family must also take into consideration. To the male side, the marriage is directly affecting the prosperity and the reputation of their family in the future. The fame of the family and social status of the family is extremely important in traditional Chinese value. People would tend to look for potential families who had similar or same social status as they were to marry with. Therefore a boy who comes from a wealthy family will never be permitted by his parents to marry a girl from a poor family.

### **Confucians emphasize on “ Li” 禮**

“ Li”, or the rites, are the guidelines for people to behave properly. It emphasizes respect to others and surroundings through rules and ceremonies. The ideas of ‘ Li’ are closely related to ethics, human nature and social order in society. Li is essential and favourable to society because it encourages and reminds people to aware and fulfills their responsibilities towards others.

### **“ Three Letters Six etiquettes” 三書六禮**

Marriage also has guidelines and rites to follow and procedures are written down in the Book of Rites. Each of the complex procedures has its own symbolic meaning and part of the essential processes in traditional Chinese wedding are the “ Three Letters Six etiquettes”. The “ Three Letters” are the betrothal letter, gift letter and the wedding letter. These letters are the formal documents with the meaning of engagement, gift and confirmation of the marriage. The “ Six etiquettes” are proposal, assessing birth date,

presenting betrothal gifts, presenting wedding gifts, setting a wedding date, and finally the wedding ceremony (Chinese Social Customs).

### **” Proposal:**

After the parents of the male side choose a girl, they would then find a matchmaker and her role is to

propose and present the male family's request to the girl's family and parents.

### **Birth date assessment:**

If the bride's parents did not oppose to the marriage, the matchmaker would ask the birth date and hour of the bride to ensure the couple's compatibility.

If there were signs of conflicts between the numbers, which is believed to bring disasters to both families, then the proposed marriage will be abandoned immediately.

### **Presenting betrothal gifts:**

After both of the birth dates and hours were approved, the bridegroom's family would ask the matchmaker to arrange and present betrothal gifts to the bride's family along with the betrothal letter.

### **Presenting wedding gifts:**

The bridegroom's family would send wedding gifts formally to the bride's family. Gifts usually include tea, beans, oranges, pomegranates, bridal cakes, coconuts, wine, red hair braids, lilies and many other delicacies, each with symbolic meaning in the wedding and the gifts can also show the family's wealth

## **Setting a wedding date:**

An auspicious date is select for the wedding ceremony.

## **Ceremony:**

On that day, the bridegroom departs his own home and play loud and cheerful music along the way to the bride's home. During the wedding ceremony, both bride and groom have to stand side by side and make "three bows". "Three bows" is the most important rites in the ceremony. The first bow is made to the Heaven and Earth and ancestors. The second bow is to parents and the third one is to each other. "

(Chinese Wedding traditions)

From the above wedding procedures "Three Letters Six etiquettes", two main traditional Chinese values can be observed.

First, under the Confucian worldview, Chinese believe that the world is structured by sancai (Heaven, Earth and Human) and they all share the same nature and this nature is characterized by harmony. Confucian considers people and nature as a whole and any confrontation with the nature will destroy the harmony. Therefore, assessing birth dates and hours for choosing the correct bride and setting an appropriate wedding date is to avoid any confrontation between the nature and human. Choosing the right bride and right date can avoid any disasters from happening and prevent bad luck, and the marriage is then considered as "auspicious", which brings good fortune.

Second, the ceremonies show the significance of filial piety.

“ Amongst the 100 virtues, filial piety come first”. Filial piety can be referring to full respect and unquestioning obedience to parents. But it is more than that. Confucians consider filial piety as the most important virtue and must be shown not only towards to parents and elders, but also the dead. Reverence for ancestors and worship them is also part of the filial piety. People believe that the ancestor in heaven will bring peace and happiness to the clan descendants. Filial piety, by extension, is showing respect to the past and to the whole nation. We could see this virtue easily from the “ Three Bows” in the wedding ceremony. The wedding ceremony takes place at the family hall because it is an important event for the family, the clan and ancestors. The “ three bows” first shows great respect to the nature and then show filial piety to ancestor and parents. And in another ceremony, tea ceremony, the new couples have to kneel down while serving tea to parents and elder in order to show filial piety to them (Katie).

### **Male superiority in Chinese traditional family**

As mentioned earlier, the traditional Chinese adopted Patriarchy. It is a social system that male is central to both family and society, and where men hold authority and power over children and women. It shows the higher status of male than female, in terms of power and marriage.

In traditional Chinese society, men were thought to be the one to continue on with the family line. For this reason, men had a higher status than women in both family and society, as they were the powerful ones who could lead and organize the whole family, even to sustain the continuity of the family (Lan, Peng, Mei 126 )

For women, they were only being characterized as assisting men in traditional family; they had relatively low social status by then. The saying 'A woman lacking in talent and learning is virtuous' shows the difference between men and women, which women's role would only be a stay-home mother who takes care of the rest and breed.

### **Inheritance of the family line is the most important**

Under the influence of patriarchy, another reason for having marriage is to give birth to the next generation, as the major role of women back then. In order to successfully give birth to a boy, men would get married with more than one wife, which were allowed in the traditional society. It was not being seen as problematic because having children and sustaining a family was vital for all in the old times.

In the other hand, this also shows the low status of women in traditional Chinese society. The 'seven reasons' for divorce can best illustrate the phenomenon. The seven reasons is a list of behaviors for which a man would be justified in divorcing his wife. The most concerned one criterion in relation to the continuity of family would be the third one - 'a woman could be divorced if she did not bear a child'.

People see family as the most important element in society. Although women's social status was relatively low, they had played an important role in giving birth to children. This was also their mainly function in a marriage life. That is why if a woman is incapable of carrying a child, the meaning to the marriage to her husband would be gone. So men could use such reason to marry another wife or divorce the wife who couldn't give birth to a child.



## **Conclusion**

Lots of Chinese traditional culture and values are found in the culture of Chinese marriage. For traditional Chinese marriage, the benefits of families were always more important than individuals. The traditional Chinese marriage was pre-arranged between parents of two families. And traditional Chinese marriage involves lots of complex procedures. Among them, they shows the great emphasis on rites (Li) in Chinese traditional culture and among the rites and the rules, we could easily observe one of the most important virtues ' filial piety'. Children should always respect parents and ancestors. Traditional Chinese people also emphasis on maintain harmony with the nature, they believed that human and nature were united, that is why the new couples have to bow to the Heaven and Earth first during the Three Bows. In Patriarchal society, male are superior to female and the inheritance of the family line is significantly important. To do so, male can get married with multiple wives and divorce any wife that couldn't give birth to child.

(Word Count: 2020)