

Introduction were not
supposed to finish the



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Introduction

The era of Mao lasted from 1949 to 1976 when Mao Zedong died.

It was during this period when China experienced many reforms in most of its institutions especially marriage. Mao led the promulgation of the 1950 Marriage Law on 1st May the same year[1]. The implementation of this law led to many changes in the marriage institution. These changes, according to Mao, brought freedom to women in the Chinese society. Mao believed that the captivity of women in the Chinese society hindered economic development and by implementing this law; women would be free to participate in economic development. Marriage is a very important institution in any society though prior to the Mao era, the people did not award it much attention and respect. The Mao era brought flexibility in marriage in the Chinese community. The promulgation and the implementation of the 1950 Marriage Law ensured that one man married one wife only.

Before marriage

During the Mao era, if someone wanted to get married s/he was free to look for a mate of his/her own choice. In the pre-communist period, this was an abomination since parents chose the mates for their sons/daughters. It allowed the breaking of barriers that the pre-communist community upheld regarding marriage.

Some of these barriers were social classes in that, people from the wealthy families could not freely interact with leave alone marry, the poor people. However, there were age limits in that the minimum age of the man was seventeen years while that of the woman fifteen to qualify for marriage[2]. It

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is important to mention that betrothal was not a prerequisite for marriage and none of the parties would specify compliance to the agreement. Unlike in the pre-communist era, marriage presents were not necessary and if present, the parties gave them as donations. In the Mao era, the law did not allow polygamous marriage in the Chinese community and through such, the sale of young females within the society ended. It also the society to improve the attention awarded o the girl child.

The society did not give much attention to bride price and dowry as before. However, the bridegroom's family had to pay some amount of money to the bride's family. According to the Chinese customs, the bride's family was to return a portion of the money to the bridegroom's family as dowry as a sign of goodwill.

Marriage

On the success of the betrothal, the parties proceeded to marriage. An open wedding ceremony marked the union of the two parties in marriage. The wedding ceremony followed the traditional Chinese procedure.

The bridegroom picked up the bride from her home where he respectfully greeted her parents. The two then proceeded to the bridegroom's home for the bride to greet her in-laws. The two parties greeted the parents with a cup of tea and in return, daughter(s) in-law received some money inside a red packet.

Just like any other form of wedding, this ceremony required witnesses as the two were officially getting married. In some parts of China, the parties were not supposed to finish the fish served to them. They were not to touch the

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head, tail and the whole skeleton of the fish. By doing so, they symbolised a good start and end of their marriage.

Once married, the wife and the husband would stay in the husband's home. The statutory scheme provided for a number of arrangements regarding matrimonial property. However, the husband had the right to manage the property and enjoy the fruits of the wife's contribution to matrimonial property. Dissolution of marriage could occur through death or divorce. In the pre-communist era, the husband was the only one with the right of initiating a divorce. It was not the case during the Mao's reign where divorce could only occur through mutual consent of the parties involved. The legal formality of divorce was a written document signed by two witnesses.

The judiciary allowed divorce under several circumstances^[3] including bigamy, adultery, ill-treatment of one of the parties by the other, in case one of them suffers a malignant disease or a mental disease, and continual desertion of bad faith. Divorce could also occur if one party was uncertain of the existence of the other for three years or when the other party served a jail term for more than three years. When divorce occurred, the children remained in the custody of the husband, unless otherwise stated in the agreement.

Conclusion

During the Mao era, the Chinese community experienced many changes as far as marriage is concerned. It was in Mao's attempts to free women from male captivity to enhance their productivity. Planned marriages ended

allowing people free to make their choices when it came to choosing spouses.

Women were also empowered to make major decisions in the marriage institution. It brought a sigh of relief to the young females from humble backgrounds whose families hitherto sold them as concubines to rich men in the society.

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