

001112 Wedding Bells Corollary

My friend Peter Wung who lived in Taiwan sent me an email in response to my discussion of Chinese Weddings. Pete's email answered some of my questions and he granted me permission to share his insight with you.

Chinese weddings:

I am not sure if these folks follow the same traditions as we do but here goes. The families usually meet after the couple has decided to wed. There is a go between for the groom who comes to visit the brides family. They talk, drink tea and shoot the bull until he brings up the wedding. Essentially he asks how many wedding cakes would the brides family want. That is an indication of how many people they want to invite to the banquet. They haggle and then they agree. The number of wedding cakes is the number of people the bride's family is allowed to invite. Each wedding guest gets a small wedding cake at the wedding. It is made with lard and is really nasty. Next the go between will ask for the dowry. Basically they ask for the furnishings and daily wares for a household, because the groom's parents pay for the wedding and the bride's parents pay for the furnishings in the new household. They haggle over that.

The day of the wedding is the day to show off. Which is the reason for the flowers on the hood of the car, the pictures at the popular spots. The banquet is the main deal. Each table is supposed to seat ten, that is how you keep track of the number of guests. You don't open up tables until you fill up the unfilled tables because you are charged by the table, not by the person. So sometimes you get stuck in tables with people that you don't know. This is when the serious eating starts because since you don't know each other there is very little conversation, all you can do is eat. The going around to each table by the bride and groom is traditional. The happy couple is going around to thank everyone for coming. This is when you try to get them drunk. So they have to do ganbai : Dry glass at every table. The groom has to be gallant and do double at each table if his bride don't drink. Brutal stuff. The changing of the dress is another show off thing. This is to show the wedding guests that the bride came with a big dowry, that her family is wealthy and can afford to give the daughter the best of everything. So those dresses are part of her going away wardrobe made just for the wedding. In the old farmer societies, the dowry is usually stacked up next to the banquet so that everyone can ooh and ahh over the expensive dowry.

At the end of the evening, the single or younger guests would find out where the couple will spend the wedding night and hang out there so that they can't get to bed. They play games, they make the couple do things and they generally make their life miserable because they want to ostensibly to get on with the action. The groom has to do all he can to bribe his buddies so that he can spend his wedding night with his wife. Kind of cold, but I was in on a couple of the weddings when I was a kid and it was fun to fluster the groom.

Pete

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