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Chinese Weddings

Courtney Muse
courtneyjenkins96@live.com

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Justen Kho
Pleasant Grove, Utah
November 2017

“Chinese Weddings” Wedding Custom

Informants:

Justen is 24-year-old male attending Brigham Young University. He is currently living in Pleasant Grove with his wife, Brielle, who is my best friend. Brielle and Justen have been married a little over a month. Justen is studying physical therapy and is graduating this spring. He likes all types of sports but especially football and soccer. Justen’s dad is from China and his mom is from Hong Kong. His parents were married in Hong Kong and then came to Utah to attend Brigham Young University and ended up staying in Utah to raise their family. Justen has 3 sisters, they all speak fluent English and Cantonese, Justen served an LDS mission in Taiwan and speaks Mandarin as well.

Context:

I asked Justen to explain what Chinese wedding customs were performed the night before his wedding. I was a bridesmaid and participated in the ceremonies he explains, the first ceremony was in Draper, Utah and the second in Pleasant Grove, Utah. For this interview, we just FaceTimed, I was in my apartment in Logan and Justen and Brielle were in their apartment in Pleasant Grove. Justen was doing homework when I called, I talked to Brielle for a little while before I started asking questions about the Chinese wedding customs but once I started asking questions, Justen gave his full attention to explaining the customs. I haven’t ever heard of these Chinese customs before but Justen explained that it is very popular and almost expected in China.

Text:

Justen: The custom came from my family, like everyone in China does this kind of custom because of what it is symbolic of. The first one that we did was, I would arrive with, all my groomsmen and there is supposed to be a train of cars [motioning with his hand] so just like train of cars all decorated and it is supposed to be a big procession kind of like a big deal type of thing, we only had like 7 cars so it wasn’t like a, it was still meant to be that way. Anyways, [laughs and long pause trying to catch his words] um so I arrive with all of my groomsmen and the bride [pointing to his wife] is inside the house in a room somewhere hidden from us. And, you open the door, well we knock, and the bridesmaids open the door and it’s kind of like I

have to prove that I'm worthy, or like pass the tests of the bridesmaids to gain their approval because they are the bridesmaids who give up the bride, if that even makes sense. So the groomsmen are all in on it because they're, [trying to find words] they help me pick up the bride. So anyway the challenges are presented there's a couple customary ones, um [long pause] but we didn't do some of the customary ones cause [Brielle laughs] we did a variation of them

Brielle: [Leans over and whispers] It's because we Americanized them

[Someone knocked on their front door and Justen went to answer the door].

Justen: No one was there. Anyways, so what we did is we took the tradition and made a variation of it, made it a little more American because she [pulling Brielle in for a hug] isn't Chinese. So we made it a little bit more our own but the end result is still that I had to pass the tests or these challenges to prove that I loved her and that I deserve her. And that approval comes from the bridesmaids because technically I've already talked to her parents and their like yeah, that's fine [Brielle points to herself indicating she said yes too] well of course you. Next is the bridesmaids because they are the most important people in her life so, their approval is good too. So after that approval, I get to pick her up and then take her home. And I mean to my family's home and that is symbolic too because it is supposed to be the journey, [pause trying to get the right words] the longer the journey, the more fortune and blessings you receive. Even in China when they live across the hall from each other in an apartment or something, they have to pick the bride up, go out in the car and circle the building a couple of times then go back up. So the longer the journey, the more fortune and blessings you receive.

Brielle: Good thing there was traffic that day

Justen: It's a Chinese saying, I don't remember how it goes exactly but it's just as the road become longer to go home you get more blessings. Anyways, so then the ceremony goes to me bringing her into the home and it's like, that ceremony is called [finding words] it is literally translated going through the door. It is me bringing my bride home to my parents and saying, I'm bringing my wife home, like here she is type of thing. The tea ceremony is symbolic as a sign of respect so in, China like pouring tea and offering it to someone is one of the greatest signs of respect. So in this way we offer tea to the parents and say like mom and dad here is my wife and she offers tea and now she is your daughter type of thing. And then when they accept it, it is symbolic of them accepting her into their life and so, we usually do the bride's parents first, and in China they usually do it when they pick up the bride at their home. But we do the bride's parents first as kind of like me thanking them for letting me marry their daughter, it's a sign of appreciation then when we go to my home then we say mom dad, here is my wife. Once the tea is accepted, it is the end of the ceremony

Brielle: And everyone gets money [laughs]

Texture:

Justen was talking with hands and seemed to pause a lot when he was trying to translate the customs into how we would say it in English. Him and Brielle were laughing a lot and made it fun even though Justen was taking it seriously and trying his best to explain to me why we did the things we did when they got married. When Justen was telling me about the wedding customs in China, he had a respect for his family and their heritage. Most of his extended family still lives in Hong Kong and he has participated in these wedding ceremonies in Hong Kong, that is why he added little details like the apartment and bringing the bride home. Brielle listened intently to what Justen had to say and added little comments, mostly funny little comments. Because Brielle and I knew a little bit about the Americanized way that we were a part of, Justen was teaching us a little bit more than what we knew. He seemed happy to be teaching about the customs. If his parents who grew up in Hong Kong and China were there, he might not have been as confident in what he was telling us.

Courtney Muse
Utah State University
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Dr. Lynne McNeill
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