



The Chinese Wedding

By MISS SZE ME TSUNG

THE CHINESE wedding, according to the old custom, is a very interesting ceremony. Although each province has some distinct feature, yet generally the custom is more or less the same. The description of a wedding given here takes place in well-to-do families and still holds in the interior of China.

A lucky date is selected by the parents of the groom and sent to the parents of the bride before anything can be arranged. If it is agreeable to both sides they begin to make preparations for the special occasion. When the appointed day comes near both families send out the announcements together with their invitation. These invitations are sheets of red paper about five by eight inches in size on which gilt characters are printed. They are in red envelopes of the same size. When the relatives and friends get them they prepare gifts for the bride such as silver or porcelain dishes and curios, beautiful silks, and gold ornaments. As for the groom, his friends do not give him things like that, but present him with large red satin scrolls four by six feet in size, on the centre of which is a great gold paper character meaning "double happiness." These scrolls are used to hang on the walls of the big hall where the marriage ceremony is going to be held.

Usually three days before the wedding day the bride's parents invite all of their friends and relations to dinner and at the same time they show them the bride's trousseau, ornaments, jewels, and bedding. A bride is supposed to have eight trunks of clothes at least, eight or ten different kinds of fur lined garments, silk and cotton ones. She must have sufficient clothing of every kind for each season to last three years, also silver dishes, bowls, chop sticks, and different kinds of embroideries with other decorative things.

Then the beautiful jewel-flowers made of pearls, pearl necklaces, bracelets, rings and ear rings are given to her. When the guests have finished seeing the things, a feast is served at which everybody considers it a duty to tease the bride. On the next day the bride's things are carried to the groom's home. The long, bright coloured procession passing along the street is a pretty sight.

The night before the wedding day a farewell dinner is given to the bride at which only the members of her family are present. Before the dinner comes to an end everybody drinks a toast to the bride. The groom's family also invites people to their house and lets them see the beautifully decorated bridal chamber. These guests usually stay for dinner.

ON THE wedding day there are many guests in both of the homes. They come in the morning to give their hearty greetings. The groom's family sends the bridal chair accompanied by a band to the bride's home. Everything connected with the ceremony has a symbolic and fortunate meaning, so even the hour when the bridal chair leaves the groom's house and the hour when the bride enters it to go to the groom's home are carefully selected. The band plays continuously as the chair arrives. By this time the bride is already dressed in red silk heavily embroidered with gold and silver as well as with rainbow colours. A crown of countless imitation pearls, jades and rubies is on her head, and a heavy red silk cloth, ornamented with strings of pearls, hangs over her face. A crown of genuine pearls and jades is used in the wealthier families. The last thing which the bride puts on is the red satin embroidered shoes which have red paper pasted on the bottoms.

This is done to prevent the bride from taking away any dirt from her old home to the new. Before the bride enters the chair the groom comes to her house and kow-tows to her parents and meets her friends and relatives. After a little while he leaves without having seen the bride however. Then the bride comes down from her room attended by four maids. She bids farewell to her ancestors by kow-towing before the altar of her forefathers and then before her parents and near relatives. As soon as she gets into the chair the red papers which are on the bottom of her shoes are torn away. Soon the beautiful screen of the chair is put down and eight men carry the chair away while the different instruments are being played.

The groom's home is easily distinguished by the decorations at the great entrance. An arbour of red and green silk artistically designed is formed outside of the door. Six or eight large red lanterns add to the beauty of the scene. Guests are arriving all the time and being announced by the orchestra that is seated just inside the first entrance. Crossing an open court the guests pass through a beautifully decorated doorway into the main hall, which is also nicely arranged. On the walls the beautiful red scrolls are hung; the chairs and tables have the most exquisitely embroidered red satin covers. This hall is full of well-dressed, merry men, women and children. All are expecting and waiting for the arrival of the bride. When the continuous music of the bridal band approaches they crowd on both sides of the room, leaving a big empty space in the middle for the bride.

SOON the gorgeous chair appears and is stopped at the entrance of the hall. Usually the bride is kept in the chair for one hour or more for it is believed that the longer she is kept there the better temper she will have. Afterwards the big red candles are lighted. The first thing for the bride and groom to do is kow-tow to each other. There is a saying that whoever kneels first will be under the control of the other, so neither of them wants to do it first. This causes much merriment and always takes a long time. Finally they kneel down together. Because the bride is so heavily veiled and crowned she is helpless in the hands of the maids who bend her body at the proper time. The bride and groom kow-tow to the groom's ancestors and then to heaven, finally to his parents and his near relatives. When the ceremony is over the pair of big candles is removed and carried to the bride's room and put on the dresser which is near the bed. Then the groom leads the bride by two strips of green and red silk to the bridal chamber. They sit side by side on the bed for a few minutes and then the groom's mother comes in to take off the bride's veil.

After that the visitors go out and have their feast while the bride and groom have their dinner by themselves in their room. But the guests will come back soon, for they want to have more fun teasing and playing tricks on the bride. Of course that is rather hard on her as she is very timid and blushes over lots of things. When it gets late in the night the guests begin to leave.

On the third day the bride must be well-dressed again and returns to her parents' home with the groom to see their mother. A great feast is prepared for them. They remain for the meal but return to their home before dark.

This practically ends the old fashioned wedding, but since everything is changed so greatly many of these customs are not kept. The Christian families especially have much the same ceremony as is common in the west.

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