

Research on Chinese Middle Classes' Marriage View From Perspective of Marxism

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the views on marriage based on the middle social classes' culture formed in China. It suggests that China has social class, and the culture creates different cognition and views on marriage. The paper is less concerned about the economic mode of production but more toward class interaction and how economic and social structures shape people's perceptions. Firstly, the paper briefly defines culture, the Chinese social classes, as well as marriage that is relevant to Marxist theories. It concludes the middle class view on marriage and focuses on the condition when picking whom to marry with.

Keywords: *Maxist theory, middle class, marriage*

1. INTRODUCTION

When talking about marriage, it was love that first came into people's mind. However, there are so many factors, other than this common emotion people experienced, which lead into people walking the line through the altar. Culture is critical in influencing the view of marriage since it shapes people's cognitions and faith. Although Karl Marx himself does not fully develop the concept of culture and used the word 'culture' very seldom, he believed that culture is the result of all men's social activities. [1] Development of culture could be interpreted as the satisfaction of elementary needs, or, in other word, the inventions of tools to satisfy new needs. Different Marxist philosophers interpret general conceptions of culture with their own means but all of them would agree with the basic Marxist concept that everything is the result of economy and social class. As Marxist philosopher A.I. Arnoldov formulated, culture is 'the synthesis of the material and spiritual value achieved by the society' [1]. To further evaluate on this extent, each social class would have their unique material and spiritual value. Or, each social class has a unique culture that is influencing people's view on marriage.

It is vital to create a clear definition of 'class' in order to understand the middle class's culture and its view of marriage behind it, but it is hard to define China's social construction because of its special government system that's based on Mao's ideology[2]. After China's economy reformation, class differences reemerged and a socialist state was formed. The social structure in a socialist state is

slightly different than a capitalist state due to the fact that political monopolistic and social construction are indivisible [3]. Though there is no unified definition of "middle class", since it has been used commonly and diversely in different concepts, theories, and schools, 'middle class' marriage is still a popular topic in daily conversation.

With the rise of the internet in China, it became easy to find out middle class people's view on marriage: how they are similar but different. Based on the 1980s China Marriage Law, marriage is the freedom to choose one's partner, the practice of monogamy, and equality of the sexes'[4]. Almost all people would agree that marriage is a legal union and a social contract between two individuals, though the reason they chose a person to be unified with could be completely different due to the social class culture. Then the question is raised: what is the view of marriage in this newly formed social class in China.

2. RESEARCH OBJECT AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The research analyzes the newly formed Middle Class's view on marriage. Information is gained from research articles. Lots of findings in this paper are based on two interviews and daily conversations with middle class people: both middle class parents and their children. A big amount of ideas emerges from the biggest 'question to answer' website ZhiHu, functioning similar to Quora. In the website, users are mostly middle class, there are tons of questions that reflect people's view on marriage and their marriage ideology. To gain quantitative information,

a twenty people anonymous questionnaire is constructed: it supports the idea of gaining what people are missing through marriage. Questions focusing on the proportion of different factors, economic, social, political and ect.

3. PRINCIPLES OF MIDDLE CLASS MARRIAGE

Karl Marx believes that if marriage was not the basis of family, it would not be subject of legislation, such as friendship [5]. Indeed, marriage, for most modern Chinese people, is to create a family-another way to enlarge their assertions, passes down their legacy, and strengthens their social status. Among three main principles, what is most important for the middle class is to use marriage to gain or secure their asset and property. When looking for a partner, people focus mainly on how the partner would enrich their life, material life particularly.

3.1. Women

Women 's class position, sometimes in the Chinese society, depends on their husband. Furthermore, based on the gender ideology that men are the backbone of the society and family. Women, instead of working to achieve financial independence, should rely on their husband economically. At the same time, for those who wanted to become the 'powerful women', it is much harder for them to reach financial equality with their husband since men. The result of this is quite obvious: lots of women try to use their husbands as a 'tool' to achieve their desirable lifestyle.

A woman will date a man if he looks nice but won't marry him if he only looks nice. For instance, a man have to own a house in a city and a car when trying to marry a middle class woman. Most women in the middle class come from the suburbs and try to settle down in a big city. However, a large percent of them couldn't financially afford the price of a house. Therefore, they choose other ways to get what they need, and the most performable and moral way is to marry a man that satisfies their desires and provides their needs. It is not 'gold digging' but a common model of 'marrying upward', a culture advocating women to marry someone with a higher social status, both economically and politically [6].

In a conversation with a middle class mom, she expressed her dissatisfaction with her daughter's boyfriend: Though my girl is much better looking than the boy, he goes to a better university than my daughter. His family has one apartment in the city, so do we' In others' eyes, this is a well matched couple. Although, do remember that this boy cannot enrich the material life of the girl's family. As a consequence, 'marrying upward' causes lots of middle class women to think men should, with no doubt, be 'better' than them in most aspects and look down to those well- matched men who have equal social status with them.

However, women know that men are not stupid enough to marry someone that is too well behind their range, said otherwise, they need to have at least an aspect to catch a man's eye. Other than inner capabilities, the outside, namely the appearance, is what middle class women would focus more on. For example, the middle class mom thinks of her daughter's appearance as an absolute advantage, the most important characteristic for her daughter to 'marry upward'. In an overall environment that advocates for more women rights in the workplace, some women from the middle class think that appearance is the key element, other than family background. Maybe the thoughts are the result of a clear disadvantage of women in the workforce and political status, but examples of celebrities marrying into the bourgeoisie class strengthen some middle class women's view. Gradually, they disapprove of marriages that have reversed gender roles. Women get paid higher than their husband and they consider that marriage will eventually become a failure[6]. For those middle class women, being inferior to men is the key element to receive a stable life.

3.2. Men

Middle class men, when choosing their partner, ideally, want someone that could benefit their career path, in other word, improve their social status or economic status. Due to the influence of traditional family ideology, men have the responsibility to earn money for the family, expected to provide living necessities [7] . Since men are the one who need to work for achieving good material conditions, they would prefer a wife that could make their road to promotion easier. Money, of course, is what a middle class man would think of. His wife does not have to be wealthy herself, but, at least, does not have parents that think of him as a cash cow and drag his financial situation down. Obviously, choosing a wife with a strong family background with a rich parent is clearly an advantage for middle class men. When meeting troubles, middle class men could rely on their wife's family because, based on the culture of the family, her parents are his parents, and they would have the duty to help [7]. In a nepotist society like China, it is clearly a shortcut to further success.

In reality, only a small percentage of middle class men would have this fortune of marrying a wife richer than him due to the 'marrying up' culture, and they deeply know that. So, more and more of them look for whether a woman is 'XianHui' when choosing a wife. 'XianHui' is a word containing a commendatory sense originating from ancient chinese culture. 'Xian' means good virtue and 'Hui' means tender and obedience. Describing one's wife as 'XianHui' is one of the best praises a man would want to hear. What a 'XianHui' woman does is to center her life around her family. In order to support her husband during his career path, a 'XianHui' wife would put her career aside. She also understands her husbands' situation.

The other meaning of 'unsterand' is that the wife has to agree with her husband. She is understanding enough to put her personal feelings aside and do what favors her

husband. A wife like this would try to save money in every aspect because she understands that it is not easy for her husband to earn money. Without a time consuming job, she would spend lots of time nurturing her children in order to become a qualified person to inherit her husband's legacy in the future. In short, a woman called 'Xianhui' follows her husband, listens to his parents, and obeys the society setting for women. She is the free teacher for kids, nanny, and housekeeper. Upper and lower class men would focus less on this characteristic because one is rich enough to hire other people to do the jobs and the other only wants a woman that is willing to reproduce a boy for him .

For some middle class men, appearance is not the key element of marriage. By contrast, some may not want to marry a woman that is pretty because it is out of their 'control range'. For them, they feel no sense of security around popular pretty people since lots of other men are threatening their position. Additionally, pretty women are out of their controlled 'economic range'. Some middle class men prefer a wife that could improve his economic status. Only being pretty cannot help with that, or could act as opposite. Sometimes, being pretty means spending more money on herself, hence dragging down a middle class man's material condition owning the fact that most of them still need to save money for a house and pay off debts.

4. CALCULATION OF MIDDLE CLASS MARRIAGE

Interestingly, there are movies around the world saying that marriage could be calculated using equations. Excellent examples are a movie named *The Rise of A Tomboy* and British-American romantic movie *Bridget Jones's Baby*. In movies, they suggest that whether two people are suitable for marriage is calculable. Indeed, for a middle class marriage, it could be calculated, but not using a precise math equation like in the movie.

When talking to a man raised in a middle class family, he underlines the importance of wishing to gain factors that he is lack of from his spouse. 'I come from a business family, so I would want my wife to have some political background. A combination of political and business background will make my life in China much easier in every aspect. At the same time, I could marry a girl from a lower class, but she needs to have traits that suit me, either her background will benefit my career path or my family from the future.'

Using random sampling, twenty people were chosen to complete a questionnaire. They ranked four important things or qualities, other than personal characteristics, they wish their spouse would have and four qualities they are lacking. After that, they answered what is the biggest advantage you have in the marriage market, what is the most important characteristic or quality you wish your spouse acquired, and what do you wish to gain in a marriage.

Each person has their own point of view, and people do want their spouse to acquire things they don't have. A few examples include a college student wants her future husband to have a city 'HuKou', also known as a household registry, so she could 'formally' settle down in the city and easily enjoy the city welfare; a workaholic man wishes to marry a woman that is willing to be a stay home wife that could take care of the family. To say it in other ways, calculating middle class marriage is like playing Tetris: protruding parts filling hollow parts forming a perfect square. The calculation is to 'balance things out'.

When balancing marriage out, love could not even be put in as a crucial factor: a middle class marriage that is mostly based on love is fragile: so many engaged couples break up because they fight about the amount of 'CaiLi'. CaiLi means money that groom give to bride's family before marriage, or adding whose name on the house property certificate [8]. Compared to money and power, Love itself could not satisfy the three main principles mentioned in the beginning. It is not saying that no middle class marry based on love is successful.

On the other hand, marrying someone they love is the intrinsic quality of marriage, but, for the middle class, a marriage that is only based on love, that could not enrich their life, improve their economic condition, or strengthen their social status, is hard to maintain. All the positive results of marrying based on love have common characteristics: although, at the time they married, they did not balance up, but gradually after marriage with both's great efforts, their different aspect of life, especially material life is improving. So successful marriages like this satisfy main reasons middle class people try to seek a marriage. Unlike most couples that 'balance out' before marriage, those couples 'balanced out' afterward.

5. CONCLUSION

The concept of marriage is unified around the world, but different cultures create different views on marriage, resulting in people having distinct reasons to get married and diverse standards when picking whom to marry. This paper studies the view on marriage of the newly formed middle class using Marxist concepts. Though it may not represent every case in reality, it suggests that the middle class is seeking from protection and improvement through marriage. They hope to secure their legacy and social status through eligible offsprings, at the same time, wish to gain assets and enrich life with their spouse. Women fulfill their life to 'marry up', and men seek for 'XianHui' wife that help their road to promotion easier. When picking whom to marry, they compare their disadvantages with their partner's advantages and try to balance out. Everything boils down to the three principles: enlarge their assertions, pass down their legacy, and strengthen their social status.

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