

Analysis on the Differences between Chinese and Western Marriage Culture in the Film *The Wedding Banquet*

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ABSTRACT

The Wedding Banquet is a movie directed by Ang Lee and released in the United States in 1993. The film tells a series of absurd stories from the wedding of Wai-tung, a gay man. The movie shows the two generations' absolute different attitudes towards marriage issues, vividly demonstrates the different marriage cultures in China and the west, and creates a strong contrast. This paper takes the content of the movie into account, and specifically explains the differences between Chinese and western marriage culture from three aspects: wedding ceremony, purpose of marriage and attitude toward same-sex marriage, and analyzes the reasons for the differences from the level of different cultural backgrounds in China and the west.

Keywords: *The Wedding Banquet, marriage culture, China and the west, differences*

1. INTRODUCTION

Director Ang Lee, born in Taiwan, China, has lived and studied in the United States for many years, and he is well versed in the characteristics and differences of Chinese and Western cultures [1]. The unique cultural background has created Ang Lee's unique film perspective, while his works are good at using film language to vividly show the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. *The Wedding Banquet* is one of the most representative works.

The protagonist Gao Wai-tung of *The Wedding Banquet* is a homosexual and has a very good relationship with the same-sex person Simon. Nevertheless, his parents on the other side of the ocean hope that Gao will marry a wife and have children as soon as possible to continue the incense for Gao's family. Gao's tenant Wei-wei desperately needs a green card, which led Simon has a plan to make Wai-tung and Wei-wei fake marriage, and the three of them hit it off. However, Gao accidentally makes Wei-wei pregnant, and the relationship with Simon is also on the verge of breaking. At the end of the movie, Wai-tung confessed everything to his mother, father accepted Simon, at the meantime, Wei-wei also decided to give birth to a child, which was a happy ending.

This paper explains the differences between Chinese and western marriage culture in three aspects: wedding ceremony, purpose of marriage and attitude toward same-sex marriage, and analyzes the reasons for the differences from different cultural backgrounds in China and the West.

2. SPECIFIC MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN MARRIAGE CULTURE IN THE FILM *THE WEDDING BANQUET*

2.1. Differences in wedding ceremony

From the ancient times, in the traditional Chinese concept, the biggest feature of weddings is grand and festive. Three letters and six rites were needed to get married in old days. "Three letters" referred to the letter of engagement, the letter of rite and the letter of wedding, and "six gifts" referred to the acceptance of a match-making, asking for birth date, auspiciousness, the most solemn ceremony, selecting a fortune hour and a lucky day and wedding. All three letters and six rites were indispensable, and it took a year or two to prepare for the wedding, even a few years for noble family. Though weddings are not as complicated as in ancient times, the host family also wants to set up a banquet to

entertain relatives and friends, whilst the more guests, the more lively the wedding, and the more the host family is more proud [2]. In the movie, after Wai-tung told his parents that he was going to register for marriage with Wei-wei, his father left angrily, and his mother sadly said: "For providing you with a good marriage, we collected more than 30,000 cash in Taiwan, but how can I explain your attitude to others?" Later, when they met the father's old friend and that person proposed to organize a grand wedding for Wai-tung, the parents immediately showed a smile.

While in the western concept, the form and pomp of the wedding is not important, it should be the embodiment of happiness and free will. They agree to hold the wedding in a solemn church, and also agree to simply register the marriage in the town hall. The pomp and excitement of the wedding cannot be the standard to judge whether the marriage is happy or not. For western people, the choice of the form of wedding is entirely up to the couple, not a show for others. Wai-tung has lived in the United States for many years and has long accepted western ideas. It is natural for him to choose to register his marriage with Wei-wei in the town hall [3]. However, his choice is not simply unconscionable and deviant to his parents, but lives up to the expectations of all the people around them.

2.2. Differences in the purpose of marriage

Mencius said that "there are three types of filial piety, and having no children is the most serious one." Since Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty "Dismissed hundred schools of thoughts, dominated Confucianism", the ethical principles of Confucianism have been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people and firmly have the dominant position [4]. In the feudal society of the past few thousand years, the marriage of men and women has always obeyed the orders of their parents and the words of the matchmakers. Men and women are married for the flourishing and prosperity of the family, and the most important thing is to carry on the family line and perpetuate the family. Marriage is not a matter for two people, but a major matter related to the survival of the family, while getting married and having children at an appropriate age is an obligation to the family. In the movie, Wai-tung's father only commented on Wei-wei as "good, can have children can raise children". After the mother learns the fact that Wai-tung is homosexual, she still tries to persuade Wei-wei to keep the child. Gao's father sees through everything but pretends not to know, also in order for Wei-wei to give birth to a child. At the end of the movie, Wei-wei's decision to leave the child made everyone cheer.

The western concept of marriage ethic is a free-love ethic developed from Greek and Hebrew cultures [5]. In the western concept, love and marriage should be free, which is the result of free choice of individual will.

Marriage is only about the two sides of the marriage object. From knowing and falling in love to entering the palace of marriage, they should be happy and willing. Marriage is just a form, and the purpose is only to enable the two sides to stay together better without any sense of moral restraint. In the film, Simon can even let Wai-tung and Wei-wei get married under false pretenses in order to solve Wai-tung's problems. A marriage certificate does not mean anything, two hearts knowing each other is the most important thing.

2.3. Differences in attitude toward same-sex marriage

In fact, homosexuality has existed in China since ancient times. "Addiction of Longyang" and "Friendship of Broken Sleeves" all mean homosexual love. But for a long time, homosexuality has been a frightening word in China. So far, it has not been accepted by the public, let alone recognized by the law. In the film, Wai-tung would rather have been perfunctory to deal with the blind date arranged by his mother than telling their parents that he is gay, which indirectly reflects the image of homosexuality in the eyes of Chinese people, especially the traditional Chinese parents. After Wai-tung confessed to her mother, the mother still worked tirelessly and refused to give up to matching Wai-tung and Wei-wei. Gao's father accepts Simon, sees through everything but does not say anything. On the one hand, he wants to have his grandson; and on the other hand, he does not want to tell his relatives and friends that his son is gay.

In western history, homosexuality has also been strictly prohibited. Because Westerners devoutly believe in Christianity, and in the Christian doctrine, same-sex love is the most unforgivable crime and evil behavior [6]. In the Middle Ages, homosexuals suffered severe persecution. As the development of the economy, the mind has become increasingly open, and the attitude towards homosexuality has also turn open and tolerant. In recent years, the west has become more and more accepting of homosexuality. In the United Kingdom, Canada and other countries and regions, homosexuality is even recognized and protected by law. So in the movie, Wai-tung would rather be perfunctory to his parents than tell the truth that he was gay, but he could live a normal and happy life with Simon in the United States.

3. REASONS FOR THE DIFFERENCES IN MARRIAGE CULTURE BETWEEN CHINA AND THE WEST

Director Ang Lee adopted lively lens language in the film to fully demonstrate the discrepancy between Chinese and western marriage cultures, and the factors

for this difference must be discussed from the different cultural background levels of China and the west.

3.1. Chinese cultural background

China is located inland, with vast plains and fertile land. It is a typical farming nation. This type of production is characterized by stability, requiring a certain scale of producers and the ability to work hard day after day, year after year. In this context, it is essential to the inheritance and growth that the whole family is prosperous and can be passed on from generation to generation. Since then, the issue of marriage has been elevated from a personal issue to a family issue, and the family must rely on the marriage of the younger generation to pass on the family name, continue the family lineage, make the population grow, so that the family will continue to prosper. The number of wedding guests and the solemnity of the wedding are important indicators of the prosperity of a family, thus forming the tradition of a lively and grand Chinese wedding.

Additionally, another characteristic of agriculture civilization is collective labor, which forms the Chinese collectivism tradition [7]. In a collectivist culture, the interests of the collective are greater than the interests of the individual, which means as a member of the family, the individual needs to assume his own responsibilities. In traditional thoughts, getting married and having children is a person's greatest obligation to the family. Even though the protagonist of the movie Wai-tung lives in the United States all year round, he was educated in Chinese culture when he was young, he is still a traditional Chinese in his bones. At the end of the movie, Wei-wei decides to keep the child, and Wai-tung has a relieved smile on his face. This fully shows that, as a homosexual, he also pretty wants to have children who inherit his genes and fulfil/complete his mission in the family

3.2. Western cultural background

Western culture originated in ancient Greece. Ancient Greece relied on ocean advantages to develop commerce, which is a typical ocean commercial civilization [8]. The nation bred by this civilization has the characteristics of openness, freedom, and independence, with a typical brand of individualism, which are also deeply reflected in western marriage culture.

On the one hand, western marriage is free and open, which can be clearly seen from the wedding form. In contrast to Chinese weddings, western weddings are simple and efficient, unconventional in terms of pomp and form, no need to care about the appearance resulted from different marriages, but more concerned with people's inner happiness; on the other hand, in contrast

to the traditional Chinese collectivist culture, the Western maritime civilization has bred a distinct individualism. Everything starts from one's own happiness. Parents do not need to burden too much pressure for child's future, and child do not need to take too much responsibility for the family. In the film, compared to Wai-tung, Simon, who is also gay, is not bound by his parents, and he is free to follow his own heart and choose the life he wants.

4. CONCLUSION

The difference between Chinese and Western marriage culture is, in the final analysis, the difference between Chinese and western cultural background, the former is only one aspect of the latter. With the deepening of globalization, cultural exchanges between China and the West are also increasing. At the end of the movie, Wai-tung's father accepts Simon, and Simon also accepts the children of Wai-tung and Wei-wei, different cultures are harmoniously blended together and it is a happy ending. *The Wedding Banquet* provides us with a good reference about how to deal with the difference between Chinese and western culture, which demonstrates that in cross-cultural communication, we must adhere to the concept of harmony but difference, uphold the attitude of seeking common ground while reserving differences, and learn from each other, accept different concepts and cultures, and live in harmony with them.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

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