

CHINESE INTERNET MARRIAGE DISCOURSE

Marta LABASHCHUK

Student Uniwersytet Warszawski (POLSKA)

DOI 10.25128/2304-1222.21.52.08

ABSTRACT

The article describes social as well as cultural aspects of both traditional and modern marriage practices in China. It focuses on studying some social aspects of Chinese marriage practices, such as the role of parents in marriage, the value of material foundation, the division of gender roles in marriage, etc. The way traditional social aspects of marriage influence contemporary marriage practices are presented in the paper on the basis of internet resources. At the same time, the article also examines marriage practices from linguistic point of view, presenting various lexical units concerning marital practices. These lexical units include some set phrases, neologisms, internet language memes, precedent texts, etc. The practical material of the studies has been drawn from the web. The article shows how both language and social phenomena intertwine and influence each other on the example of Chinese Internet Marriage Discourse.

Key-words: marriage in China, internet discourse, discourse analysis, neologisms, internet memes.

Artykuł opisuje społeczne i kulturowe aspekty zarówno tradycyjnych, jak i nowoczesnych praktyk małżeńskich w Chinach. Dana praca skupia się na badaniu niektórych społecznych aspektów chińskich praktyk małżeńskich, takich jak rola rodziców w małżeństwie, znaczenie statusu materialnego, podział ról płciowych w małżeństwie itp. Przedstawiono sposób, w jaki tradycyjne społeczne aspekty małżeństwa wpływają na współczesne praktyki małżeńskie w pracy na podstawie zasobów internetowych. Jednocześnie w artykule dokonano analizy praktyk małżeńskich z punktu widzenia językowego, omawiając różne jednostki leksykalne dotyczące praktyk małżeńskich. Wspomniane jednostki leksykalne obejmują pewne utarte zwroty, neologizmy, internetowe memy językowe, teksty precedensowe itp. Praktyczny materiał opracowań został zaczerpnięty z zasobów internetowych. Artykuł pokazuje, w jaki sposób zarówno język, jak i zjawiska społeczne przenikają się i wpływają na siebie na przykładzie chińskiego internetowego dyskursu małżeńskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: małżeństwo w Chinach, dyskurs internetowy, analiza dyskursu, neologizmy, memy internetowe.

Стаття описує соціальні та культурні аспекти як традиційної, так і сучасної шлюбної практики в Китаї. Увага зосереджується на вивченні деяких соціальних аспектів китайської шлюбної практики, таких як роль батьків у шлюбній церемонії, важливість матеріальної бази для молодої сім'ї, розподіл гендерних ролей у шлюбі тощо. На матеріалі інтернет-джерел показано вплив традиційних соціальних аспектів одруження на сучасні шлюбні практики. Водночас статті розглядаються весільні традиції з лінгвістичної точки зору, показано особливості вживання різних лексичних одиниць, що стосуються одруження, мовні кліше, неологізми, інтернет-меми, прецедентні тексти, які побутують в сучасному китайському інтернет дискурсі. У статті показано, як мова і соціальні явища переплітаються та впливають один на одного на прикладі сучасного китайського шлюбного дискурсу.

Ключові слова: шлюб у Китаї, інтернет-дискурс, аналіз дискурсу, неологізми, інтернет-меми.

Along with the globalization and changes that keep emerging in the world, China has undergone various changes in its cultural and social life. One of those aspects is the modification of marriage practices in China. Let us focus on some of the social as well as cultural aspects of marriage in China. Being a country with lots of different cultures and mentalities, it may be hard to find one general tendency of what does the concept of marital status in China mean nowadays. We can observe several tendencies of the perception of marriage as well as family life in China among people. What is more, the opposite perceptions of the image of marriage or family life may function simultaneously, to one extent or another.

For centuries, China had been a country with some visible conservative beliefs. For example, such practices as arranged marriages were a common thing in the past. Parents often took part in seeking for a wife or a husband for their children, thus, making decisions about the development of their future private lives. Nowadays, while arranged marriages may be abolished, the traces of them still remain in the mentality of Chinese people. Family has still a great influence on the way marriage functions in newly formed families nowadays. When it comes to the life of young people, traditional models (such as, the necessity of having a wedding ceremony, buying house and having children) are often imposed by their families (Malovic, 2018: 210). Jun, et al. (2014: 119), on the other side, points that the way parents try to influence the romantic relationship of their children as well as to find a partner for them is mostly a result of ongoing economic and demographic pressures that are present in China nowadays rather than some traces of the past traditional practices. Traditional marriage in China put material foundation of marriage over feelings in family life. Nowadays, we can observe a different tendency of the way marriage should work in China. We can observe the above-mentioned economic pressure on the example of the rising costs of a wedding ceremony, house prices, etc. Parents may have a little less influence on the lives of their children nowadays than in the past, as children choose their own partners as well as make their own decisions. One of the important aspects that still shows how parents control the marital situation of their children, is how parents can help children with their materialistic foundation at the beginning, for example, buying a flat or offering a newlywed couple housing together with them, which consequently results in parental involvement concerning some decisions about marriage (Riley, 1994: 798).

The way parents influence their children's life can also be seen on the example of the above-mentioned arranged marriages. Arranged marriages have been a common practice in China for centuries, where parents were the ones who sought spouses for their children. Parents often looked and chose partners for their children based on their material status. Nowadays, arranged marriages might have lost their original power, however, they still remain an important part of Chinese marriage practices for some people as well. The form of contemporary arranged marriages has undergone a great number of changes comparing to the old ones. However some forms of arranged marriages can also be seen today as well, for example, in the existence of marriage markets. Some of the common marriage markets happen in public parks, where parents gather in one place in order to find a suitable match for their children. They bring some advertisements, where the requirements of the potential husband or wife are written. The requirements usually include the origins of the potential husband or wife, their salary, material possessions, etc. Arranged marriages, among other examples, show the importance of material status as well as the importance of parents' involvement in children's marriage life in China.

Speaking about economic aspect of marriage, materialistic possessions and wealth of a potential husband or wife were an important factor for making a decision about entering into marriage in China.

Thus, materialism and marriage have always been closely connected in the Chinese marriage worldview. For instance, betrothal gifts had had an important place in China in the past. The quality of bride's wedding festivities and betrothal gifts in China defined her place in society (Watson, et al., 1991: 321). Women, on the other side, had to present a dowry while entering into a marriage. Watson, et al. (1991: 7) describes this phenomenon as: "any material possession the bride brought with her into marriage, no matter how meager, her dowry. This could include clothes, jewelry, bedding, money, land, and so on". Thus, the possession of material goods had been an important part of entering into marriage in China for both parties. The importance of material possessions as well as materialistic values in marriage remained in China till now. For example, another reason why many view marriage in China as a materialistic arrangement, is a present capitalistic system that exists in the country. In that way, capitalistic aspirations lead to the fact that money and reputation are valued higher in marriage than emotional connection between the couple (Malovic, 2018: 208).

Speaking about the changes in marriage practices, social worldview has begun to visibly deviate from conservative one in China since 1980s, which has also influenced the perception of the concept of marriage as well as family life (Lu, 2013: 62). Similarly to other countries, Chinese family life was based on wife being inferior to her husband. For example, starting from Confucian ideology, filial piety (*xiǎo 孝*) described human hierarchy, such as inferiority of ministers towards ruler, sons towards father, wives towards husband, etc., which also defined the position of wife to her husband. Visible attempts at achieving equality between men and women were seen during Mao's time (Yang, et. al, 2017). A significant part of marriage transformation in China was the passage of New Marriage Law in 1950. The law changed several aspects of marriage arrangement that were not present in China before, including enabling divorces as well as abolishing arranged marriages. Besides, social focus became directed at equality between men and women during that time.

All these social aspects can be seen on the example of the language we use nowadays. Along with changes that are emerging in society, the language, as we know it, is changing as well. A lot of neologisms are appearing in language all the time. Different social phenomena influence the way new words are formed (for example, various lexical units, such as idioms, metaphors, precedent texts, borrowings, etc.). Among them, there are some neologisms which are connected to the concept of marriage. Many of the lexical units that can be found in the language concerning marriage practices are the ones that are used in the internet. Let us take a look at some lexical units about the concept of marriage that were found on the web. For example:

bìhūn 毕婚 — 'a marriage where a couple gets married shortly after graduating';

bùhūnzú 不婚族 — 'a group of people who does not get married';

èrhūntóu 二婚头 or *èrhūnr* 二婚儿 — 'a woman who gets married for a second time';

jīhūnzú 急婚族 — ‘a group of people who rushes to get married’;

luǒhūn 裸婚 — ‘a naked marriage’, an above-mentioned type of marriage, where a couple gets married without owing any or almost any material positions (no house, no car, no wedding rings, no honeymoon or wedding ceremony, etc.);

shǎnhūn 闪婚 — ‘a flash marriage’, a type of marriage where a couple gets married quickly after meeting each other for the first time;

shìhūn 试婚 — ‘a trial marriage’, when a couple decides to get to know each other better before getting married, for example, to live together, to practice sexual relations, and afterwards decide whether to get or not to get married;

xiān yǒu hòu hūn 先有后婚 as well as *yīn yùn ér hūn* 因孕而婚 — ‘a marriage caused by unplanned pregnancy’;

xínghūn 形婚 — ‘a sham marriage’, a marriage between a homosexual man and a homosexual woman;

yǐnhūn 隐婚 — ‘a hidden marriage’, a marriage where a couple hides from society the fact of being married.

What is more, despite the lexical units about some marriage practices that are mentioned above, there have been various proverbs, sayings or precedent texts about marriage in the Chinese language. Some of them date back to the ancient times, while other appeared not so long ago. For instance:

(1) Sayings with two opposite forms (describing the materialistic qualities or possessions (in most cases) of the potential husband): *Yǒu chē yǒu fáng yǒu cúnkuǎn / Wú fáng wú chē wú cúnkuǎn* 有车有房有存款 / 无房无车无存款 ‘Having a car, a house, a bank deposit / Having no house, no car, no bank deposit’; or similar sayings where some of the other materialistic possessions are described. For example: *Yǒu fáng yǒu chē yǒu zuànjiè / Wú chē wú fáng wú zuànjiè* 有房有车有钻戒 / 无车无房无钻戒 ‘Having a house, a car, a diamond ring / having no car, no house, no diamond ring’.

(2) *Fángzi jiù hǎobǐ shì wǒmen de yīfú kùzi, chēzi jiù hǎobǐ shì xiézi, hūnlǐ hé zuànjiè jiùshì màozi hé wéijīn* 房子就好比是我们的衣服裤子，车子就好比是鞋子，婚礼和钻戒就是帽子和围巾 ‘The house is like our clothes and trousers, the car is like our shoes, and the wedding and diamond ring are like hats and scarves’.

(3) *Miànbāo huì yǒu de, àiqíng yě huì yǒu de* 面包会有的，爱情也会有的 ‘There will be bread, so there will be love’.

(4) *Hūnyīn shì àiqíng de fénmù* 婚姻是爱情的坟墓 ‘Marriage is the tomb of love’.

The social perception of marriage in language can be seen in various forms that are different from the ones that were mentioned before, for example, in some graphical representations on the basis of internet resources: memes, that can be observed in the graphical pictures that appear on the internet forums, weblogs, etc.. Let us also take a look at some of the graphical representation of marriage perception in some of the memes that can be found on the web.



Picture 1. A representation of ‘a naked marriage’².

On Picture 1 we can notice a man and a woman in a shape of heart holding together a red wedding certificate, while the man is thinking in the thought bubble: *Wú chē wú fáng wú zuànjìè, bù bàn hūnlǐ bù mìyuè* 无车无房无钻戒 · 不办婚礼不蜜月 ‘No car, no house, no wedding ring, no wedding ceremony, no honeymoon’. We can also notice a caption written below the certificate on the bodies of the couple: *luǒhūn* 裸婚 ‘a naked marriage’. The balloons floating in the air show different words on them, such as (from left to right): a blue one – *fángzi* 房子 ‘house’, a green one – *zuànjìè* 钻戒 ‘diamond ring’, a yellow one – *chē* 车 ‘car’, a pink one – *mìyuè* 蜜月 ‘honeymoon’. We can assume that the balloons that are floating into the sky can represent material possessions that the couple does not have.

² Picture 1. Retrieved from: <http://www.jiajum.com/zhidao-view-id-20087.html> [access: 28.02.2021].
83 Studia methodologica, ISSN 2304-1222, No. 52. 2021



Picture 2. A representation of 'a naked marriage' ³.

On Picture 2 we can see a man and a woman standing on a heart with a word *luǒhūn*: 裸婚 'a naked marriage' written on it. The woman seems to be running away from the man who wants to keep her. The woman is holding a card where a word *líhūn* 离婚 'divorce' is written. We can also notice a following sentence in a thought bubble: *Zài yě wúfǎ rěnrshòu méiyǒu fángzi de rìzi* 再也无法忍受没有房子的日子 'Can't stand the days without a house anymore'. A cloud in the sky holds a house. We can notice a word *gāofángjià* 高房价 'high housing costs' written inside the cloud.



Picture 3. A representation of 'a flash marriage' and 'a flash divorce'⁴.

³ Picture 2. Retrieved from: <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/28587673> [access: 06.03.2021].

⁴ Picture 3. Retrieved from: <https://www.jiawuzi.com/minglijiehuo/921/> [access: 28.02.2021].

On Picture 3 we can see two creatures with angry expressions on their faces standing beside each other on the left and right side, being separated by a lightning where words *shǎnli* 闪离 ‘a flash divorce’ and *shǎnhūn* 闪婚 ‘a flash marriage’ are separated. Below in the ground there is a plant of so-called flash marriage which later on results in a flash divorce as it grows. A thought bubble on the right side of the picture has a word *hēng* 哼 ‘an expression of groan’ written inside of it.



Picture 4. A representation of ‘a hidden marriage’⁵.

On Picture 4 we can notice a couple that seems to say goodbye to each other before going to work. Below in the ground stands a heart with a word *yǐnhūn* 隐婚 ‘hidden marriage’ written inside of it. The representation of the picture could show how the couple needs to conceal their relationship from the world, as if putting their emotional feelings inside the ground, where the society can not notice it.

⁵ Picture 4. Retrieved from: <http://sh.sina.com.cn/news/s/2011-04-12/1431179180.html> [access: 28.02.2021].
85 Studia methodologica, ISSN 2304-1222, No. 52. 2021



Picture 5. A representation of ‘a naked marriage’⁶.

A couple is laying in a tent that is made of a marriage certificate (*jiéhūnzhèng* 结婚证) on Picture 5. The word ‘marriage certificate’ is written on the tent. We can assume that the tent represents a house of the couple referring to ‘a naked marriage’. A picture with a house and a car can be noticed inside of a circle above in the sky. The man and the woman appear to be looking at this picture in the circle. The tent has also a word *xǐxǐ* 喜喜 ‘a double happiness’ written on it. The characters are often written on various wedding decorations or wedding presents in China.



Picture 6. A representation of *jíhūnzú* 急婚族 — ‘a group of people who rushes to get married’⁷.

⁶ Picture 5. Retrieved from: <http://roll.sohu.com/20110715/n313481190.shtml> [access: 06.03.2021].

⁷ Picture 6. Retrieved from: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/急婚族/7002238> [access: 12.06.2021].

On Picture 6 we can see a couple that is most likely dressed up in their wedding clothes. On the right side there is a sentence written in a pink color which says: *Guǎn tā shéi a! Gǎnjīn jià! 管他谁哩! 赶紧嫁!* ‘It doesn’t matter who he is! Let’s get married quickly!’ The picture represents the so-called *jīhūnzú* 急婚族 ‘a group of people who rushes to get married’, showing how the couple often does not particularly pay attention as to who he or she marries, but rather pays more attention to marry this person as soon as possible.



Picture 7. A representation of *bīhūnzú* 毕婚族 — ‘a group of people who gets married shortly after graduating’⁸.

Similarly, on Picture 7 we can see a girl who is jumping from one place to another. Behind her there is a door where a word *bìyè* 毕业 ‘to graduate’ is written. The girl is coming out of the door rushing to get into another building. A sign with a word *hūnjiè* 婚介 is placed near the building where the girl runs to get in. *Hūnjiè* 婚介 that means ‘matchmaking’ by itself, is also used to describe a marriage agency, where people who want to get married can come for help to gain some information about some potential candidates that could be suitable for marrying¹⁶. The girl is thinking in a thought bubble: *Hǎo lǎobǎn bùrú hǎo lǎogōng* 好老板不如好老公 ‘A good boss is worse than a good husband’ or ‘A good boss can’t compare to a good husband’. The picture describes two phenomena *jīhūnzú* 急婚族, where the girl rushes to get married as soon as possible as well as a second phenomenon: *bīhūn* 毕婚族 ‘a group of people who gets married shortly after graduating’, where the girl reportedly wants to get married right after graduation placing finding a future husband in the marriage agency above her future career.

⁸ Picture 7. Retrieved from: <http://www.chinanews.com/edu/xyztc/news/2007/07-30/990337.shtml> [13.06.2021].

To sum it up, we can notice how social as well as cultural phenomena that happen in the world have their influence not only on the general worldview of society, but also on the language we speak. In this way, various social occurrences have their imprint on the language we use everyday. This imprint can be noticed on the example of some neologisms, set phrases, precedent texts that appear in the language.

The article has focused on describing some of the social and linguistic features of the Chinese marital practices. It has paid attention to some of the social aspects of Chinese marriage practices, analysing their features and showing how they have been changing in time. For example, the role of material possessions in the marriage (betrothal gifts, dowry), the role of parents in the marriage (arranged marriages), the marriage hierarchy of Chinese marriages on the basis of the gender (filial piety), etc. The social perception of marriages in society has also proved to have its influence on language, that is why various linguistic units concerning the concept of marriage have also been presented as well as analysed in the paper. Those linguistic units list some neologisms, word-formations, set phrases, internet memes that are somehow connected to the concept of marriage that are the part of the Chinese Internet Marriage Discourse. Those language features can be observed in the forms of simple sentences found on the web in the text or written on top of the various photographs that are also somehow connected to the idea of marriage. The linguistic units found in the course of studies show that along with the rapid changes occurring in the world, various social occurrences influence the language we use.

REFERENCES

- Lu, Jiehua 陆, 杰华; Wang, Xiaofei 王, 笑非 (2013), *20 Shìjì 90 niándài yǐlái wǒguó hūnyīn zhuàngkuàng biànhuà fēnxī* 20 世纪 90 年代以来 我国婚姻状况变化分析 (Change of the Marital Status in Mainland China since 1990s), Department of Sociology, Peking University, Beijing 100871, China.
- Malovic, Dorian (2018), *Miłość made in China*, Kraków: Znak Horyzont.
- Riley, Nancy E. (1994), "Interwoven Lives: Parents, Marriage, and Guanxi in China". *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 56 (4), 791-803.
- Shmid, V. (2008), *Narratologiya*, Moscow: Yazyki slavyanskoy kul'tury.
- Watson, Rubie S., Buckley Ebrey, Patricia (1991), *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yang, Wenqi, Yan, Fei (2017), *The annihilation of femininity in Mao's China: Gender inequality of sent-down youth during the Cultural Revolution*. Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0920203X17691743>. [access: 15.04.201.].
- Zhang, Jun and Sun, Peidong (2014), "When Are You Going to Get Married? Parental Matchmaking and Middle-class Women in Contemporary Urban China", from: *Wives, Husbands, and Lovers: Marriage and Sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Urban China*. Publisher: Stanford University Press, 118-144.

LIST OF PICTURES

- Picture 1. A representation of 'a naked marriage'. Retrieved from: <http://www.jiajum.com/zhidao-view-id-20087.html> [access: 28.02.2021.].
- Picture 2. A representation of 'a naked marriage'. Retrieved from: <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/28587673> [access: 06.03.2021.].
- Picture 3. A representation of 'a flash marriage' and 'a flash divorce'. Retrieved from: <https://www.jiawuzi.com/minglijiehuo/921/> [access: 28.02.2021.].
- Picture 4. A representation of 'a hidden marriage'. Retrieved from: <http://sh.sina.com.cn/news/s/2011-04-12/1431179180.html> [access: 28.02.2021.].
- Picture 5. A representation of 'a naked marriage'. Retrieved from: <http://roll.sohu.com/20110715/n313481190.shtml> [access: 06.03.2021.].

Picture 6. A representation of *jihūnzú* 急婚族 — ‘a group of people who rushes to get married’. Retrieved from: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/急婚族/7002238> [access: 12.06.2021.].

Picture 7. A representation of *bihūnzú* 毕婚族 — ‘a group of people who gets married shortly after graduating’. Retrieved from: <http://www.chinanews.com/edu/xyztc/news/2007/07-30/990337.shtml> [access: 13.06.2021.].