Marriage Customs in Shandong During the Ming and Qing Dynasties
from the Novel of Marriages to Awaken the World

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Abstract. Marriages to Awaken the World is a long chapter novel in late Ming and early Qing Dynasty. This book takes the marriage of two generations as the plot framework, and the author is very concerned about family marriage. This novel depicts many marriage customs, including three aspects of talking about marriage and preparing for marriage, wedding ceremony and custom after marriage. It helps us to have a comprehensive understanding of the social functions and regional culture of Shandong in Ming and Qing Dynasties by sorting out marriage customs in Marriages to Awaken the World.

Introduction

Marriages to Awaken the World is a long chapter novel written in the background of Shandong local culture. The book takes the marriage between two generations as the plot frame, which truly reflects the marriage customs and local customs in Shandong province. It provides effective data for later generations to study the literature, culture and folk customs of the Ming and Qing dynasties in Shandong province.

Premarital Customs

Talk about Marriage

Talking about marriage is arranged by the command of parents and the words of a matchmaker. The matchmaker is a middleman, representing the parents of both sides. In ancient China, marriage should take account of factors such as family status, eight characters, seniority and age. Firstly, in the book of Marriages to Awaken the World, many marriages are performed with the help of matchmakers. Traditionally, the matchmaker would let the man visit the woman at her home. In the seventy-second chapter, Zhou Longgao wanted to marry a new wife after his wife died. And a woman matchmaker introduced many girls to him but he didn’t like them. However, some visits are carried out in secret. In the eighteenth chapter, many matchmakers introduced the girls to Chao Yuan and talked about marriage, but he couldn't decide which one to choose, so he asked his family to pretend to be matchmakers and visit her. Other visits don’t have to go personally and he can delegate acquaintances or matchmakers. For example, in the seventy-fifth chapter, Di Xichen wants to get a wife in Beijing. Every time he lets Grandma Tong and two matchmakers go for half a day to visit girls.

Secondly, if both men and women have no objection to the marriage, they will enter the most important step. The man will choose a good day to give bride price for the woman. And it was called “ Xia Cha ” in Shandong during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In the seventy-fifth chapter, when Grandma Tong agreed to make Sister Ji be betrothed to Di Xichen, the matchmaker was busy with “Xia Cha” for Di Xichen. Grandma Tong advocated simplicity, and her house was too small to entertain guests, so she said, “No Xia Cha.” In the forty-fourth chapter, the old lady “decided to give bride-price in November and hold a wedding in February sixteen”[1].

Prepare for Marriage

“Shang Tou” and “Kai Lian”. Before the wedding, the family had to give “Shang Tou” and “Kai Lian” to the newly married daughter in Shandong during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The ceremony about changing the hairstyle and turn the plaits into bun called “Shang Tou”, and the ceremony about removing facial hair called “Kai Lian”. After these two ceremonies, it means to bid farewell to girlhood and become a woman. In the forty-fourth chapter of Marriages to Awaken the World, there are detailed records about sister Su hold a “Shang Tou” ceremony. When Mrs. Di gave sister Su “Shang Tou” with gifts, family Xue treated her with liquor. “She dressed herself in beautiful makeup and embroidered wedding dress, like a fairy... Mrs. Di used a cross shaped line to remove facial hair and gave her jewelry. ”[1] When married, the bridegroom and bride need to face the direction of Happy God, so as to have more joy in their lives. It can be seen that the process of “Shang Tou” and “Kai Lian” is also exquisite.

“Make the bed”. On the day before the wedding, the woman delivers the furniture and utensils that can be used in the new house to the man’s house and lays them properly, which are called “Make the bed”. SiMa Guang wrote in his book HunYi.ZhaoYi: “The woman assigned a servant to decorate the man's room before the wedding day.”[2] Marriages to Awaken the World says that Family Xue made the bed for Di Xichen and Sister Su. “All beds, desks, cupboards and cabinets should be put in order in her own homes.”[1] In modern western Shandong, women still have the custom of making beds before they get married. This is also an opportunity for the woman's relatives to inspect the house and furniture of the man.

Wedding Ceremony

“Qin Ying”

“Qin Ying” is the ceremony that the bridegroom went to the bride's house to marry the bride herself. And this is also the most solemn ceremony of Shandong and even the whole Chinese ancient and modern wedding. In the book of Marriages to Awaken the World, it clearly reflected the “Qin Ying” custom of Shandong at that time. In the forty-fourth chapter, when Di Xichen married Sister SU, “he hung red flowers on his chest and rode a horse at the front”[1]. In the twenty-eighth chapter, the writer describes Yan Liesu’s marriage ceremony. The bridegroom goes to the bride's house to marry the bride. In turn, the bride's family also prepares the banquet to entertain the bridegroom. It should be noted that bride’s brothers and sisters should send the bride to the bridegroom's home. For example, Sister Su’s brothers wear their uniform and ride their horses on their horses to send their sister. It also reflected the lively and grand scene of the wedding, and in modern marriage customs in Shandong, “Qin Ying” is also a joyous ceremony.

Open the Red Cloth Covered on the Bride's Head

Opening the red cloth on the bride's head is one of the most important ceremonies, and it originated in the Eastern Han Dynasty. According to the records of Tong Dian in Tang Dynasty, “the wife covered her head with gauze, and her husband opened the gauze”[3]. Meng Liang Lu in the Song Dynasty says, “When the bride and bridegroom marry, they invite all their friends and relatives. The bridegroom will use the scale bar to open the red cloth on the bride's head on the spot.”[4] Actually, the customs are different from place to place in which tools are used and who opens the veil over the bride’s head. In the book of Marriages to Awaken the World, the groom used chopsticks to open the red cloth on the bride's head.

“Sa Zhang”

According to folk customs, after the bride is married to the family, it is generally worship heaven and earth, drink, and then send the bride and groom into the wedding room. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Shandong, “After entering the bridal chamber, the newlyweds sit together in the wedding tent. Afterwards, the guests threw coins and dried fruits into the wedding tent. ”[5] The forty-fourth chapters of the book depicted Di Xichen and Sister Su’s “Sa Zhang” ceremony in more
detail. “The guest took a box with five grains, chestnuts, dates, lychee and longan in it. They sang as they threw things.”[1] There are nine sentences in this song and each sentence starts with "Sa Zhang East, Sa Zhang West, Sa Zhang South, Sa Zhang North ". The ceremony about “Sa Zhang” originated in the Han Dynasty, and the ceremony meant that friends and relatives wished the bride and groom a happy and harmonious life and that they would have healthy babies.

Custom after Marriage
The Mother Sends the Meal to Her Married Daughter

On the first day of the wedding, according to the folk custom, mother would send her daughter a meal. For example, after the ceremony, Di Xichen and Sister Su have to put up a banquet to entertain their relatives and friends. At this point, the Family Xue just came to deliver the meal. At noon, Mrs. Xue brought her lunch box to lunch for her daughter. At dusk, Mrs. Xue sent the wife of Xue Sanxing to feed her daughter. On the second day, Mrs. Xue also gave her daughter three meals in the morning, the middle and the late. The forty-ninth chapter of the book mentioned Chao Liang’s wedding. “After the wedding, the Family Jiang sent three meals.”[1] In the same period, the book Jin Ping Mei Ci Hua also wrote this custom. The custom of sending meals in the first few days of marriage is probably used to indicate that the bride's family has not forgotten her and still treats her as a family member. Or maybe it's because the bride doesn't dare to eat dinner when she arrives at the groom's house, so the mother gives the bride a meal to eat alone.

“Return Door”: the Return of a Bride to Her Mother's Home

On the third day after marriage, the bride returns to her mother's home. The groom usually goes to see his parents-in-law and all his relatives and friends. That is called “return door”. At this time, the bride's family will be very hospitable to the bridegroom, and the two sides will give each other presents. In the forty-fourth chapter, the author wrote that Sister Su had been married for third days, and the mother's family came to pick her up. Then the mother's family prepared a banquet and invited the son-in-law. Generally speaking, the bride will return to the bridegroom home on the same day. The bridegroom and his family will also give a banquet to the guests who are sending the bride, and ask the honorable people to accompany them.

“To The Moon”

After a month's wedding, the bride will return to her mother for a month, then return to her husband's home, and that is called “To The Moon”. In the forty-ninth chapter of Marriages to Awaken the World, the word “To The Moon” has been mentioned many times. Such as “I wait your wife To The Moon”, “maybe after To The Moon” and so on. “To The Moon” means that the month when the bride's wedding returned to her mother's house a month later. Chao Liang and Miss Jiang married in April 15th. “In May 15th, Miss Jiang returned to her mother's home, but only three or four days later she came back.”[1] And Miss Jiang's going home this time means “To The Moon”. In many parts of modern Shandong, there is still a custom of “To The Moon”. When the bride returns to her home for “To The Moon”, the bride's family will greet her with gifts. This behavior is called “Call To The Moon”. When the bride returns to her husband's home after a full month at her mother's house, the relatives of the mother's family will send the bride back specially. This behavior is called “Deliver To The Moon”. At this point, the whole wedding is over.

Vent the Anger

The end of the wedding does not mean the end of the marriage custom. In the long-term marriage life of a woman, the marriage custom also continues. Another marriage custom with Shandong's regional characteristics in Marriages to Awaken the World is venting the anger for the abused bride. If a woman is subjected to inhuman torture at her mother-in-law's home, causing serious physical and mental harm, the family members of the woman will be greatly humiliated. Therefore, they organized a group of family members to go to the groom's home to carry out theoretical and do sabotage. Chao Yuan, the protagonist in Marriages to Awaken the World, was very indifferent to his
wife, Miss Ji. She often beat and scolded his wife and ignored her life, which made Miss Ji's life very embarrassing. “Several servant girls and several foster mothers take care of Miss Ji. Apart from that, she is lonely and alone. By the time of the lunar New Year, Miss Ji could not receive a gift. Even a steamed bread was hard to get.”[1] Miss Ji's father and brother saw that her life was very miserable, and her husband framed her, so they wanted to vent the anger for her. But later they thought that Miss Ji was not desperate, and they were afraid of Chao Yuan's family power, so they gave up revenge. As her father and elder brother did not fight for her, Miss Ji finally hanged herself.

If a woman is unfairly treated at her husband's house, beaten to death or committed suicide, the family members of the woman will immediately come to the man's house to discuss the case. That is often done in several steps in *Marriages to Awaken the World*. The first is the negotiation stage. The women's family members first went to the men's consultations to deal with their affairs, and talked with the men. The two is the stage of putting a corpse in a coffin. When the man replied to the woman's family members, the family members of the woman were waiting for the funeral. If the man does not agree to the terms of the woman's family, the woman's family will condemn the man and force them to agree to the terms. The three is the stage of smashing. After the funeral, the women's family began to give vent the anger. The male family members usually do not interfere too much when they know their own faults. Finally, the man will appoint a middleman to reconcile. In most cases, the women's family members will stop and forgive them. That is the general survey of the custom of “vent the anger” in wedding customs.

**Conclusion**

The marriage custom of Shandong in Ming and Qing Dynasties is clearly recorded and inherited in the book of *Marriages to Awaken the World*. The description of marriage custom in the book is true and exaggerated, with strong satire. The author attaches great importance to character and talent, and affirms the advanced view of marriage. At the same time, the author also shows his opposition to parents' arranged marriage. And he also used the description of marriage custom to show the author's concept of marriage. These descriptions of marriage customs can make us understand the social nature of that era. Therefore, the novel *Marriages to Awaken the World* is also very important for the study of the overall culture of Shandong and Ming and Qing Dynasties.

**Reference**