

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Crying Marriage in the Context of the Minority, the Oppressed Female and Local Culture

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Abstract. Crying Marriage is a special ritual of the Tujia family in the west of Hunan province, China. The reason why the Crying Marriage appeared so is that Tujia women lost their rights to marriage. The emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasty abolished local governments and dispatched officials from the capital to govern local people. Then, local people in different areas of China started to adapt the traditions of Han culture (the mainstream culture in China). In this case, since Han culture advocated arranged marriage, Tujia parents also started to arrange their daughters' marriages. Tujia women lost the right to marry so they started crying during their marriages, and then this behavior developed into a ritual. Also, during the development of Crying Marriage, more and more elements appeared, such as lyrics and skills. Although it seems like the purpose of Crying Marriage is to help Tujia women gain their rights, it backfired. On the contrary, Crying Marriage diverted people's attention from women's rights to appreciate this ritual. This study developed two concepts, Active Change, and Passive Change to explain this process.

Keywords: Han Culture, Tujia Culture, Crying Marriage, Ritual Study.

1. Introduction

Tujia family is one of the 55 minority families in China. Tujia family had severe gender inequality in the past time. Women in ancient times had to obey the arrangement of their parents arrange in their lives. They had no power to refuse it. Crying Marriage is one kind of behavior that brides sing special songs with a crying tone during their weddings [1]. Tujia women use it to express their unwillingness to let loved ones go, anger, and helplessness against fate. This ritual might be the only chance for Tujia women to challenge their fate.

Researchers have studied Crying Marriage's development and formation [2-4]. Besides, almost all researchers in this area acknowledge that Crying Marriage helped (or, at least, was planning to help) Tujia women gain their marriage rights. However, this paper here provides a different point of view on the role that Crying Marriage played in Tujia culture [5].

This study developed two concepts: Active Change and Passive Change, to explain this process. Nowadays, the techniques of Crying Marriage are disappearing since people seldomly apply this ritual to their marriage. The local governments are now advocating masters of crying marriage to teach young Tujia women to protect this special ritual. Crying Marriage is not in a good position now, and few people are still familiar with this skill. This study compared Crying Marriage with Hmong "Jali" and concluded that the disappearance of minority cultures is a result of people's preference for mainstream culture and neglect of minority cultures. Of course, Ms. Yan, the national intangible cultural heritage heir of Crying Marriage, mentioned that the local government is now actively working with all of the intangible cultural heritage heirs to teach young people the unique minority culture, hoping minority culture can be inherited.

2. The formation of crying marriage

Regarding the origin of Crying Marriage, there are different theories among researchers. Prof. Gu thinks, that during the Bureaucratization of Native Officers (A political action that was implemented during Ming and Qing dynasties [6]. The empowers abolished local officials and dispatched new officials from the Capital to govern local people), and Tujia culture received enormous cultural impact. The women's social status decreased significantly, causing the appearance of Crying Marriage.

Before the Bureaucratization of Native Officers (BNO), Tujia women had the right to fall in love freely before marriage, and Tujia young people often started their relationships by singing "mountain songs" [7]. It can be said that Tujia relationships were very casual and free before the conversion. In addition, Tujia women had the freedom to divorce and remarry. If a Tujia woman was not satisfied with her spouse, she could choose to end the marriage. It is written in the "Hefeng Zhou Zhi"(Record of the state of Hefeng) that "in the old days, if a Tujia woman fled back from their husbands' families because of poor or verbal quarrels, her father and brother did not admonish her, taking her in for many years, indulging her in what she did, or even reneging on their original promise to her former husband and taking the opportunity to remarry her to another man." It can be seen that in the past, many Tujia women repented their marriages, getting support from their parents. Moreover, Tujia women were not required to have widowhood as Han Chinese women did. If her husband died, the Tujia woman could be married again. This shows that Tujia women had the right to decide on their marriage in the past.

After the BNO, Tujia marriages were gradually transformed into Han Chinese parent-arranged marriages, in which parents asked a matchmaker to choose a spouse with suitable status for their children [8]. Tujia women not only lost their right to freely choose their spouses before marriage but also had no possibility of divorce or repentance after marriage. In addition, Tujia women could not ever see their husbands before marriage. Therefore, Tujia women began to cry at their weddings to show their injustice to fate. Thus, the birth of crying marriage reflects the lowering of the social status of Tujia women.

According to Prof. Shore, "Ritualization is the human capacity to gradually stabilize our behaviors into 'rituals' through repetition" [9]. The formation of Crying Marriage follows this same pattern. In the beginning, being unable to influence their marriages, Tujia women cry at weddings to express their truest emotions without any techniques, or lyrics. Accordingly, Crying Marriage was in the beginning only an act with practical meaning. As more and more Tujia brides cried at their weddings, Crying in Marriage became a repetitive act. And it gave birth to lyrics, techniques, and other art elements. Eventually, it became symbolic (i.e., the struggle of the Tujia women against their fate) and became a mandatory ritual in all Tujia weddings.

3. Analysis of the content of crying marriage

3.1 Lyrics

The lyrics of Crying Marriage show the contents that Tujia women cry for marriage. The lyrics of the Crying Marriage contain three main elements: crying for parents, crying for brothers and sisters-in-law, and scolding the matchmaker [10]. In these three different elements, we can see the different emotions that Tujia women want to express.

3.2 Crying for parents

The following lyrics are a Crying Marriage song about crying for parents.

Three bananas are as tall as each other, you are worried, I am worried too, you are worried about money and rice, I am worried about life. Being worried about money and rice in the first thirty years, and being worried about children for the next thirty years, contributed a lot to children but little rewards from children. If I had been born with a good life, I would have served my parents for the rest of my life, but now I have to leave my parents with another surname.

The line "If I had been born with a good life" shows that Tujia brides cherish their parents' upbringing and are grateful for their contribution and want to repay them. At the same time, the song also expresses the sadness of the Tujia brides for leaving their parents and the helplessness of their fate. The line " I have to leave parents with another surname " expresses the fate of the Tujia bride. She didn't have any decision rights and had to obey the arrangements. The song and the bride and her family are powerless to change their fate.

3.3 Crying for brothers and sisters-in-law

The following lyrics are a Crying Marriage song for brother and sister-in-law".

Weeping brother and calling sister-in-law, it's hard to separate flesh and blood. My brother and sister-in-law love me so well, they gave me so much love and consideration. I still haven't a chance to repay them but now ask them to take care parents

In this song, the Tujia bride first expresses her reluctance to part from her brother and sister-in-law and her gratitude to them. At the same time, in the line of ". I still haven't a chance to repay them but now ask them to take care parents ", the Tujia bride feels guilty that she not only has no opportunity to repay her brother and sister-in-law but also needs their help now.

3.4 Scolding the matchmaker

The following lyrics are a Crying Marriage song for "scolding the matchmaker".

You can say fancy words and make both families smile. You can also say that there are several houses and ten thousand hectares of land. You have convinced my parents and taken your lies to heart, and they all believe in each other, leaving me in the fireplace. The matchmaker lied, and the woman in the world is pitiful. If the matchmaker lied and was not faithful, his second generation will turn into a cow and plow the field.

As can be seen from the above lyrics, the 'crying matchmaker' section expresses one of the most specific emotions of the bride: hatred. After the BNO, "parents' arrangement and the words of the matchmaker replaced the choice of free marriage" [11]. Of course, in addition to hating the matchmaker for losing the right to freely choose marriage, Tujia brides also hate the matchmaker for another reason: the matchmaker's deception. As mentioned in the above lyrics, the Tujia bride scolds the matchmaker for " You have convinced my parents and taken your lies to heart ". It can be seen that matchmakers go out of their way to deceive the woman's family in some cases to promote a couple. It is only when the woman is finally married that she realizes she has been deceived, but by this time it is too late to regret it.

3.5 Skills of Crying Marriage

The lyrics of Crying Marriage songs are often seven words in each sentence. The advantage of this phrase type is that it "read strongly, clearly, and straightly" [9]. Tujia brides have different ways to express their emotions for different content. For example, for sentimental content, the bride will prolong her voice when she cries. For scolding the matchmaker and emotional parts, the bride will speed up her speech and make the tone more intense. As there are many different elements to the Crying Marriage songs, their techniques are also variable. The author of this paper has not studied the techniques of Crying Marriage songs in depth, so he will not discuss them in greater depth here.

4. Discussions

When the formation and skills of the Crying Marriage songs are combined, a very shocking phenomenon can be found: Crying Marriage did not help Tujia women achieve a higher social status. On the contrary, in addition to historically reflecting the low status of Tujia women, Crying Marriage has further made the social status of Tujia women even direr.

It is easy to see that the Crying Marriage song has become a very well-developed and complex ritual. At the same time, in the process of forming the ritual, it has been given another meaning: the evaluation of women, which is the reason that Crying Marriage has lowered the social status of women. According to Wang, "In the old days, Tujia girls had to learn how to 'cry for marriage' at the age of twelve or thirteen. Whether they cried sadly or emotionally, was often a judgment of the girl's natural wisdom" [12].

The formation of the Tujia Crying Marriage Song is itself a reflection of the declining status of Tujia women in society. The standard of the form reflects the further decline in the social status of Tujia women. As the Crying Marriage ceremony developed, in addition to the original general criteria,

such as singing ability and strength of performance, more subtle criteria were developed for Crying Marriage ceremony. For example, in addition to testing the bride's singing ability, the Crying Marriage songs also test if the bride has free expression in it [13]. Such multiple judgments diverted people's attention from sympathizing with women to judging the bride's performance. Such kind of change had already been the original purpose of Crying Marriage. As the skill of Crying for Marriage became one standard to judge Tujia women, people began to train Tujia brides how to cry for marriage in a more mean-spirited manner. Growing up, Tujia women would be subjected to more pressure as a result. For example, from an early age, Tujia women were expected to learn the skills of Crying Marriage and were ridiculed by others if they would not perform well. More importantly, the purpose of the Crying Marriage ceremony began to be forgotten, and it was seen as a routine event and standard by which Tujia women were evaluated. Worst of all, even the Tujia women themselves began to lose sight of the meaning of the Crying Marriage ceremony. In their eyes, crying for marriage is just a task for their elders, an examination and a tool to help them reap praise, rather than a way to help them cry out against injustice. If we relate this to modern times, we can consider the Crying Wedding as the SAT. While the original purpose of the SAT was to give students the ability to better understand texts, most test takers do not consider this and instead pursue many of the techniques used to do the questions simply for the sake of a higher score.

Why did the Crying Marriage change its initial intentions during its development? Two reasons are proposed here: Active Change and Passive Change.

Firstly, Active Change means that the purpose of the Crying Marriage ceremony was changed by human initiative. For example, to rule people better and remove factors that would lead to social instability, the rulers of feudal dynasties might ask officials from all over the country to artificially change the purpose of those local rituals. One purpose is that to reduce female rebellion in society, government officials would join forces with the more influential and less radical women of the Tujia family and work together to establish various rules for the Crying Marriage songs, such as the content of the Crying Marriage songs, the rhythm, etc. In this way, the attention can be diverted from helping women to gain their right to enjoy the songs, thus maintaining social stability.

Passive Change, on the other hand, means the purposes of Crying Marriage changed naturally without any artificial interference. For example, the Tujia women naturally developed different singing styles and content, causing attention diversion

Although the results of both types of change are the same, the influences on human society were different. If it is an Active Change, then the change of the meaning of the Crying Marriage ritual can only be described as a special event, for in different societies the rulers would not necessarily interfere with the rituals. However, if it is a Passive Change, then the change in the meaning of the Crying Marriage would be a general order in human societies: it would suggest that humans perhaps, unlike animals, change the initial purpose of rituals as they were developing. Not only just in the Tujia family, but also all peoples, all groups and all races in the world proceeded in such a process. This is perhaps what makes human rituals different from animal rituals. The above statement is only a hypothesis, and there needs more evidence. In the future researchers can prove (or disprove) this hypothesis by studying more ritualistic processes.

5. Current situation of crying marriage

Nowadays, the Crying Marriage has almost disappeared from Tujia weddings, and there are only a few people who still master the technique. Most scholars believe that the reason for the disappearance of the Crying Marriage is that after the founding of New China, Tujia women gained the right to be married independently and with freedom, causing the Crying Marriage ceremony meaningless.

However, It is believed that the real reason for the disappearance of Crying Marriage is that the Tujia people no longer value their minority culture but prefer to integrate into the mainstream culture-Han culture. Based on my hypothesis of Passive Change above, Crying Marriage no longer serves

the function of giving a voice to Tujia women. Therefore, Crying Marriage has lost its connection to the marital autonomy of Tujia women. The gain or loss of marital autonomy also, cannot affect the existence of Crying Marriage. Therefore, we can conclude that the real reason for the disappearance of Crying Marriage is the overall decline of Tujia culture. Here, we can draw an analogy with the "Jali" culture of the Hmong people. The Hmong "Jali" culture is like a code of social governance, covering all aspects of people's lives. But nowadays, "Jali" is also in a crisis of transmission [2]. Has "Jali" also lost its meaning? The answer is no. The "Jali" is still a well-established system of social governance, and there are no external factors influencing the "Jali". Then why does "Jali" still fall into the succession crisis? I believe that the reason for the disappearance of Jali is the same as that for the disappearance of Crying Marriage: people tend to integrate into the mainstream culture and therefore start to disregard minority cultures. Since the inheritance crisis occurred both with external factors (Tujia women were given the right to marry) and without external factors (Jali was not disturbed by any external factors), I believe that the minority culture is fading because of people's desire for the mainstream culture and disregard toward minority cultures.

According to Xie and Chen, the current situation of the Crying Marriage faces three main crises: the crisis of the inheritors, the crisis of the cultural field, and the lack of overall planning and coordination [4, 8, 14]. In my interview with Ms. Yan Shuihua, the heir to the national intangible cultural heritage of the Crying Marriage, Mrs. Yan also mentioned the difficulty of passing down the song. According to Mrs. Yan, although she holds Crying Marriage classes in various places in western Hunan every year, very few people are willing to learn this skill. Of course, the government is now actively working with intangible cultural heirs like Mrs. Yan to organize more activities, hoping to inspire people's love for traditional cultures.

6. Conclusion

The Crying Marriage song has become a very well-developed and complex ritual. Although the Crying Marriage may have lost its meaning now, it is a record of Tujia culture. People may not have to learn such cultures as mathematics and physics, but they should respect and pay attention to minority cultures. By helping to preserve minority cultures, such studies are also helping the preservation the diversity of human cultures.

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