

Chinese Wedding Customs, Pre-wedding Day

In Chinese culture, wedding is considered a joining of two families, thus when a couple decide to get married, both families get involved. Chinese wedding traditions are as varied and complex. During the centuries of ethnic Chinese migration throughout Asia, traditions have evolved and changed due to a myriad of regional and cultural influence.

In the ancient traditions, when a wedding is announced, the bride's family would send cakes to all their family and friends and the groom's family would present the bride's family with a pig. Whether or not you intend to follow the ancient traditions, the traditions discuss here offer a preliminary overview for couples who wish to include elements of their Chinese heritage in their wedding plans.

Selecting an auspicious date (看日子)

It is customary for a Chinese couple to consult a fortune-teller or feng shui master to select an auspicious wedding date. Using the Chinese (lunar) calendar, the date best suited for the couple is based on their birth dates and Chinese zodiac signs. It is considered good luck to marry on an even day and month of the year. Nowadays, a consultant for the auspicious date could be an elderly relative or parents as long as the couple doesn't self-analyze (that's considered bad luck!).

There are many factors that will have to be taken into consideration when choosing a wedding date. The 7th lunar month of the Chinese calendar is usually considered inauspicious. Traditionally, that is the time of the "Hungry Ghost Festival", when the gates of the underworld are opened and the lost spirits are allowed to wander the earth, making it a less desirable time for a wedding.

After selection of the wedding date, wedding details such as the types and quantities of betrothal gifts, bride's price (聘金) and the number of tables at the wedding banquet provided by the groom's parents for the bride's parents guests are agreed upon.

The Betrothal (下聘/过大礼/纳彩)

Because traditions are ever-changing, betrothal ceremonies ranged from a former proposal letter to gift exchange. Here are a few of the most practiced rituals:

Up to a month or at least 3 days before the wedding day, the groom's family would present betrothal gifts (聘礼) to the bride's family. The gifts include:

- Western and Chinese wedding cakes;
- Peanut candies for a Teochew bride and rice candies for a Hokkien bride;
- 2 bottles of brandy;
- Pig trotters (which is now replaced by tin canned ones – minimum 6 cans) or a whole roast pig for the Cantonese bride;
- Even number of tangerine or oranges;
- 2 pairs of dragon and phoenix candles (龙凤烛);
- Betrothal jewellery from the groom's parents to the bride. Cantonese will have the dragon and phoenix bangles (龙凤镯) and the Teochew four items of gold (四点金)



过大礼

Betrothal jewellery (龙凤镯/四点金)

It's a common practice for the bride's parents to request for the betrothal jewellery as a part of the betrothal gifts from the groom's parents to the bride. It is considered the mother-in-law's welcome gift to the bride.

Even without the bride's parents' request, it is expected of the gracious mother-in-law to provide the appropriate gift based on the bride's dialect group.

The bride is expected to wear the betrothal jewellery during the wedding day or at the wedding banquet so that all the relatives have opportunities to appreciate the gifts.

Bride's price (聘金)

The Bride's price, also known as the "bride's dowry", it is either pre-agreed during the wedding negotiation or the bride's parents may leave it to the groom's side to decide and usually presented in even amounts in a red packet.

The groom's side will usually prepare more than the pre-agreed amount. A portion is expected to be returned to indicate that:

- The groom's family is overly generous
- The bride's family is not greedy and
- The two families will share good fortune

Some would also include the bride's price with the betrothal gifts while others prefer to present it when the groom fetches the bride.

Return gifts (回礼)

In exchange, the bride's family will replace the 2 bottles of brandy with 2 bottles of orange syrup, even numbered portion of all other gifts and the 2 phoenix candles. The bride's family will light the 2 dragon candles and the groom's family the phoenix candles on the morning of the wedding day.

Some Hokkien families will also request for a bunch of bananas and red dates to be included in the return gifts, a red packet for the groom's parents to buy shoes is also required. The bride will also present towels to the parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and the groom's siblings.

The gifts from the groom's family acknowledged the bride's parents' effort in raising the girl. By accepting these gifts, the bride's family pledged her to the groom's family.

After the betrothal, the Chinese wedding invitations are distributed.

The Bride's Dowry (送嫁妆)

The bride's parents may send the bride's dowry with the return gifts on the day of betrothal or deliver the dowry a few days before the wedding. The Chinese dowry typically includes:

- Beddings such as pillows, bolsters, comforter set, blankets, bed sheets, etc., all tied with red ribbons;
- New clothes in a suitcase for the bride (in the past, wardrobes or wooden wedding chests are used);
- Tea set for the wedding tea ceremony;
- Baby bathtub, potty, face washbasin, tumblers, toothpaste and toothbrushes, mirror, comb;
- 2 pairs of red wooden clogs, wedding slippers or bedroom slippers;
- Sewing basket with even numbered rolls of colorful thread, needles, pincushion, scissors and sewing wax with auspicious words written on it;
- Jewellery given by the bride's parents



搬嫁妆

Installing the bridal bed (按床)

In the past, as a part of the pre-wedding preparations, couples were expected to acquire a new bed to sleep in as a married couple. Today, most couples simply prepare a bed with new linens, often red to symbolize good luck.

A good fortune woman will install the bridal bed in the couple's room up to 12 days before the wedding day on an auspicious date. New red or pink bed sheets are used and a plate of dried longans, lotus seeds, red dates, persimmons, sprig of pomegranate leaves together with 2 red packets are placed on the bed. A pair of bedside lamps is lit to symbolize adding sons to the family.



Read more in [Bridal Bed Taboos...](#)

Hair combing ceremony (梳头)

This ceremony is one of the traditional Chinese wedding rituals which are still widely performed today. It is a lovely and simple ritual to perform and practice differs for this simple ceremony.

Some believe that both the bride and groom must carry out the hair combing ceremony for it to be meaningful while others believe it does not matter. Some believe that if the parents did not carry out the ceremony at their wedding, then the children should not do so.

The bride and groom should check with both set of parents on the details and come to an agreement to avoid any unhappiness.

The night before the Chinese wedding, the bride and groom at their respective homes will bathe or shower with water infused with some pomelo or pomegranate leaves. The Chinese believe that these leaves will ward off evil.

Each will then put on a set of new clothing and shoes. Pajamas and bedroom slippers are acceptable. Each family will find a good fortune woman to conduct the ceremony. A good fortune woman is one who is married with surviving husband, children and grandchildren. Mum of bride and groom may carry out the ceremony if they are good fortune women. Otherwise find relatives or friends who are.

The bride and groom will then take a seat within sight of moonlight or in front of a mirror. Candles and incense may be lit for those who are ancestor worshiper or Taoist.

Some practice combing the hair three times and some four. The good fortune woman will bless aloud as she combs the hair. The 4 blessings are:

一梳梳到尾: the first combing symbolizes "from beginning to the end"

二梳百年好合: the second combing symbolizes harmony in your marriage

三梳子孙满堂: the third combing is a blessing with many children and grand children

四梳白发齐眉: the fourth combing offers hope for wealth and a marriage that lasts a lifetime



A sweet soup containing pink and white rice ball will be served to the bride and groom after the hair combing ceremony. The round rice balls symbolize a complete and sweet marriage.

At the end of this ceremony, the bride's mum will give her a treasure box filled with some jewellery and token red packets. This is a farewell gift to a treasured daughter who is leaving her childhood home. The Chinese believe that a person only becomes an adult after marriage.

Chinese wedding decorations (大喜装饰)

Double happiness (双喜) stickers will be placed on all wedding items such as the betrothal gifts, dowry, the couple's toiletries and cosmetics. The bridal room furniture, especially the mirror and cupboards will all be decorated with double happiness or other wedding paper cutouts such as pairs of mandarin ducks, dragons and phoenixes etc. Such red wedding paper cutouts will also be placed on the main door, bridal room door and generally around the house.

A red banner (红彩帘) will be hung across the fronts doors of the two households to announce the joyous event.