

Influence of Western Culture on Views of Chinese College Students on Marriage and Childbearing

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Abstract: In today's rapidly developing economic globalization, the exchange of views on marriage and childbearing between Eastern and Western cultures is gradually becoming more frequent. The concept of marriage and childbearing in Western culture has changed the thinking of Chinese college students, making their mindset more open, but it also has some adverse effects. This article explores the changes in the views of Chinese university students on marriage and childbearing through the study of Western perspectives, while also connecting them to traditional Chinese culture. A systematic overview of contemporary students' attitudes towards marriage and childbearing is provided, examining both favorable and unfavorable effects. It is conducive to predicting the future trend of marriage and childbirth in China, exploring its underlying reasons, and providing a basis for the formulation of relevant policies.

Keywords: Western culture; Chinese college students; Influence; Views on marriage; Views on childbearing

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1. Introduction

Students are easily receptive to new things and have a more open-minded mindset. The same is true for contemporary Chinese college students. While exhibiting a blend of traditional Chinese values, they have been somewhat influenced by Western culture in their views on marriage and childbearing.

They value love, freedom, and equality. To achieve self-worth and happiness, some opt to delay marriage and parenthood, while others hastily marry and divorce. "Students are a highly representative group", Li Xinfang pointed out in the paper, that students' views on marriage and childbearing can reflect their commitment and sense of responsibility to their families and society, and to a certain extent, predict the future trends of marriage and family in China ^[1]. Therefore, analyzing their perspectives is critical for anticipating the future development of Chinese society.

2. Traditional views on marriage and childbearing in Chinese society

In traditional Chinese culture, marriage is viewed as the union of two families. People advocate for the concept of “matching families and equal status.” And the wishes of both the man and woman are a secondary consideration. Some conservative Chinese still hesitate when discussing divorce. They believe that divorce is a highly undesirable behavior, especially for women. Many individuals endure unhappiness in marriage, including domestic violence, in order to maintain a complete family for their children.

In terms of fertility, the traditional view is that giving birth is to pass on the family line. There is an ancient Chinese saying that goes, “There are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the worst is to have no descendants” (不孝有三, 无后为大) (Mencius) ^[2]. This indicates the traditional Confucian concept of filial piety regarding marriage and childbirth.

In traditional Chinese views on marriage and childbirth, there are many positive aspects. Chinese people attach great importance to marriage. They believe that this is a lifelong commitment and should be carefully considered. There were also many love stories in ancient China, such as Liang Zhu (The Butterfly Lovers), Niulang and Zhinu (The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid), and the Legend of the White Snake, all of which reflect the Chinese people’s longing for love. Chinese people value heritage and place great emphasis on the upbringing and education of their children, which is beneficial for their healthy development.

3. Views on marriage and childbearing in modern Western society

In Western society, marriage and childbearing are individuals’ free choices that are not influenced by external factors. Westerners worship Christianity, which values people-centeredness and the pursuit of freedom.

Their view on marriage is based on love, emphasizing the compatibility of both parties in terms of soul and personality, regardless of social status, age, gender, and other factors. Within marriage, spouses are expected to respect each other, communicate effectively, maintain equality, and share rights and responsibilities.

Meanwhile, divorce is a very common thing in Western society. People believe that divorce is also a form of freedom. Once a marriage loses love, or an unsuitable marriage lowers one’s standard of living, divorce is inevitable.

In terms of fertility, Westerners view children as the product of love, rather than solely as heirs. Due to the continuous improvement of pension systems, people do not rely on children to ensure their later years of life. Rather, they are more willing to follow their own wishes.

In addition, the phenomenon of DINK (Double Income, No Kids) is also common, where individuals often choose to have children based on their own desires rather than being influenced by family or other factors. These people often do not like children or have no desire to have children for various reasons. In their view, there are many things that are more important than having children, and spending a lot of time on children is not worth it. So, they do not consider giving birth as a mission in life. They are more inclined to enjoy their own lives.

4. The influence of Western marriage and childbearing views on Chinese students

4.1. Positive influence of Western marriage and childbearing views on Chinese students

To some extent, the Western views on marriage and childbearing have positively influenced Chinese students, inspiring them to seek freedom, equality, and love bravely.

Under the influence of Western culture, Chinese students now pursue their own freedom and happiness more

in marriage. In marital relationships, both spouses have a more equal status and share the same responsibilities ^[3]. At the same time, students are no longer confined to traditional marriage models, but are starting to explore forms of marriage that better suit their own preferences.

Today's young people in China tend to constantly examine the rationality of gender roles within families and pursue gender equality in marriage. In dealing with family affairs, both spouses communicate with each other and make joint decisions.

Cohabitation before marriage has also been gradually accepted, which young lovers believe would allow them to detect the other person's habits in advance, and then the two can work together to see if further development is possible.

The attitude of Chinese students towards divorce has also undergone significant changes nowadays. They believe that if the marriage is not happy, then divorce is necessary. They do not need to maintain an unhappy marriage because of other people's strange looks. And there is no need to compromise for the sake of the children's physical and mental health.

In terms of childbearing, influenced by Western culture, Chinese college students are more inclined to follow their inner desires. They repeatedly weigh the benefits and costs of childbirth, pondering whether it is necessary to have children.

"Highly educated young people are influenced by modern fertility culture and have more independence and autonomy in fertility issues. They consider various factors comprehensively and take a longer-term perspective on reproduction", to quote Hong Xiumin and Zhu Wenting ^[4]. That is to say, college students will not conceive children out of a momentary impulse. They will carefully consider their own wishes and financial situation to decide whether or not to have children and when. This is a positive trend that encourages young people to take responsibility.

4.2. Negative influence of Western marriage and childbearing views on Chinese students

The Western concept of marriage and childbearing has also had a negative impact on Chinese university students, leading to a lack of responsibility and a lack of serious attitudes towards marriage. It has also led to a continuous decline in China's fertility rate, resulting in some social problems ^[5]. The negative impact of Western culture on the marriage views of Chinese university students has also led to some moral issues and corrupted the social values.

In Western culture, marriage is all about emotions, and divorce is not an unforgivable thing. Influenced by Western beliefs, to some extent, some young people may impulsively get married or divorced without serious consideration. They establish a marital relationship without a certain amount of interaction. And once they discover that the husband or the wife is different from what they expected, they immediately seek divorce. Out of emotional control, a momentary impulse can lead to flash marriages and divorces. Such a phenomenon goes against the traditional Chinese culture, where marriage is a very important thing that needs to be carefully considered.

In the West, the pursuit of love may become an excuse for infidelity within marriage. However, in China, infidelity is a very shameful thing, and both spouses have an obligation to be faithful. Everyone has the right to pursue true love, but this must be based on not violating marital obligations. Maintaining mental or physical contact with a third person in a marital relationship should be condemned. "Marriage is a social relationship, a gender relationship with a contractual spirit. Both parties in marriage should follow the moral principles in marriage." ^[6]. However, affected by Western culture, some young people may blur the boundaries between pursuing true love and infidelity, leading to confusion in male-female relationships.

Chaotic relationships between men and women are not conducive to physical health and can lead to the spread of infectious diseases. From a societal perspective, this can lead to the deterioration of social morality.

Similar to the low fertility rate in the West, China's fertility rate has also been decreasing year by year. Chinese students are influenced by Western culture, resulting in lower fertility desires.

They believe that the arrival of children will increase the burden on the family, lower their own living standards, and the effort will outweigh the reward. "The soaring cost of population reproduction has dampened the enthusiasm of the vast majority of families to have children", as is quoted in the article called "The 'Fear of Childbirth' Mentality and Reproductive Views of Contemporary Youth"^[7]. If it were not for their love of children, they would see no need to have them.

5. Conclusion

The authors encourage students to pursue freedom and love. But Rights and obligations are relative. As members of society, when people enjoy the convenience provided by the country and society, people also have an obligation to fulfill their social responsibilities. It is everyone's duty to have children and maintain the sustainable development of society. Similarly, as husbands or wives, they also have an obligation to fulfill their duty of loyalty. In a word, college students should distinguish right from wrong and resist the negative aspects of Western marital views.

In addition, the school should provide moral and ethical education to students, enhancing their sense of morality and responsibility. The government needs to encourage young people to have children through measures such as providing childbirth subsidies, promoting gender equality, and improving the parenting environment.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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