

Research on the Difference of Marriage Customs between Tibetan and Han Ethnicities in the Litang Area along the Sichuan-Tibet Railway

Junxi Gao, Jian Li, Junru Liu*

Sichuan Tourism University, Chengdu 610100, Sichuan Province, China

*Corresponding author: Junru Liu, allenliujr@163.com

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Abstract: Promoted by the national Belt and Road Initiative and the Western development strategy, the Sichuan-Tibet railway, as an important transportation hub connecting Sichuan and Tibet, not only greatly promotes the development of the regional economy, but also provides opportunities for sustainable development of the cultures along the route. Although the tourism industry along the line shows a booming trend with culture and tourism integration that promotes economic development, the area also faces the challenge of ethnic and cultural differences. Therefore, this study aims to promote the interaction, communication, and integration of various ethnic groups along the line by reducing the friction that causes unnecessary conflicts. This study analyzes the cultural differences between Tibetan and Han marriages in Litang along the Sichuan-Tibet railway to put forward corresponding countermeasures that eliminate conflict from the cultural differences. The study found that there are significant differences between Tibetans and Han ethnicities in the Litang area in four aspects, namely, wedding ceremony, marriage custom, marriage concept, and wedding clothing. The three targeted countermeasures are proposed according to the results, which include establishing a cultural exchange platform, developing special cultural tourism products, and strengthening cultural education and dissemination.

Keywords: Sichuan-Tibet railway; Tibetans; Han ethnicities; Marriage customs

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1. Introduction

The geographic environment along the Sichuan-Tibet railway is diverse and culturally pluralistic. The construction of the Sichuan-Tibet railway is not only a major transportation project but also an important initiative to promote cultural exchanges, interactions, mingling, and economic prosperity in the areas along the railway. Although the tourism industry along the line shows a booming trend with culture and tourism integration that promotes economic development, the area also faces the challenge of ethnic and cultural differences^[1]. The main objective of this study is to solve this problem and eliminate the conflicts caused by cultural differences to achieve the purpose of promoting regional economic development, and cultural

protection and inheritance.

By reviewing and organizing the existing literature, it is shown that there are relatively more foreign studies in the field of cultural differences. The in-depth studies on cultural differences by Max Weber, Richard Lewis, Giddens, and others, elaborate on the field of value differences, thinking differences, existence differences, and collision and intermingling between different cultures and their impacts brought about by cultural differences^[2]. The categories are roughly divided into the following three aspects. The first is to study the influence of Chinese and Western daily life, etiquette, concepts, thinking, and so on, in the international perspective on marriage culture. The second is to explore the marriage culture from the perspective of domestic region and ethnicity, as well as the reasons, specific content, and manifestations of differences. The third is to study the influence of the marriage culture on the aspects of education, politics, culture, economy, and so on. Domestic scholars have explored the wedding culture of different regions on brand building, market development, cultural inheritance, and other aspects of the problem from different perspectives. However, there are relatively few studies on the western region of China. Hence, this study investigates the differences between Tibetan and traditional Han marriage culture in the Litang area along the Sichuan-Tibet railway and the reasons for the formation of differences. The study will propose corresponding countermeasures to the conflicts caused by cultural differences to provide new perspectives and ideas for the integrated development of culture and tourism in the region.

2. Differences in marriage culture

Through the survey, it was found that the main branches of the Tibetan ethnic group include Weizang, Amdo, and Khamba, in the distinction between them is mainly based on dialect and regional culture. In addition to these three main branches, there are also several special branches of Tibetans, such as Gyaltzen, Gongbu, Huarui, and Baima. The Sichuan-Tibet railway starts from Chengdu City in Sichuan Province in the east and ends in Lhasa City in the Tibet Autonomous Region in the west. The areas along the line are inhabited by Han, Tibetan, Hui, Yi, Tujia, Naxi, and other ethnic groups. This study takes the Tibetan residents living in one of the stations, Litang Station, as the object of the study, and examines the differences between the marriage culture of the Tibetans and that of the traditional Han Chinese. The reason for selecting the Litang area is because the Tibetans account for more than 95% of the total number of inhabitants of the area, and there is a higher probability of cultural conflict after the opening of the line. The following four dimensions are analyzed in the study.

2.1. Differences in wedding ceremonies

The Han wedding follows the tradition of the thousand-year-old ceremony that pays attention to “three knocks and nine worshippers.” Weddings attach importance to the process of marrying with the groom going to the bride’s home to pick up the bride mostly in the form of a sedan chair, wedding car, and other symbols of festivity. After the bride is taken home by the groom, the solemn ceremony of worship follows. First to pay homage to heaven and earth, then to the elders of the high hall, the couple pays homage to each other, and finally the bride is sent to the bridal chamber. The completion of this series of three ceremonies symbolizes the blessing and approval of heaven and earth, ancestors, and parents before the two are officially married^[3]. Red is an auspicious wedding color representation present throughout the entire wedding decoration, from the wedding invitation to the newlyweds’ clothing, all reflect the pursuit of happiness and longing. In addition, the cave and tea ceremony is also an indispensable part of the Han Chinese wedding, which symbolizes the good wishes of the couple and the integration of the two families. Tibetan weddings, on the other hand, are deeply influenced

by Tibetan Buddhism, focusing on the concept of the unity of mankind and heaven, showing strong religious and ethnic characteristics. Tibetan weddings are often accompanied by the fluttering of streamers and the sound of dharma horns, reflecting the Tibetan people's reverence for heaven and earth. Unlike Han weddings, Tibetan wedding ceremonies are usually presided over by lamas, who seek the blessings of the gods through prayers and chanting. The newlyweds exchange khadas and barley wine to express each other's respect and blessings in the presence of friends and relatives. Tibetan wedding has a hat-grabbing custom, where the groom and his friends will grab the hats of the bride's family members, while song and dance will be performed to start this joyful race, reflecting the unrestrained behavior on the mountains.

2.2. Differences in marriage customs

Traditional Han Chinese marriage often emphasizes the perfect match through the matchmaker to propose marriage. Both families will negotiate on the bride price, dowry, and other material conditions ^[4]. The Tibetan marriage proposal process pays more attention to the emotional aspect of the two sides and the harmony between the families. Han weddings pay attention to the "three books and six rites" process involving *Nacai* (marriage discussion), *Wenming* (wedding divination), *Naji* (wedding confirmation), *Nazheng* (sending betrothal gifts), date selection, and finally receiving the bride, each step has relatively strict norms. In contrast, Tibetan weddings are more minimalist with religious characteristics and are usually performed in temples to pray for marital happiness and good fortune.

Tibetan and traditional Han wedding feasts are also different. Han wedding feasts pay attention to the color, taste, smell, and shape, and there are certain rules for seating and toasting etiquette. During the Han wedding reception, the couple will often have a toast to thank the guests for coming, and the couple will also receive blessings from the guests. Tibetan wedding feasts are mostly based on beef, mutton, and barley wine, relatively simple and rich in regional characteristics, and the guests sit around to share the food in a warm atmosphere.

As for the post-marriage residence, Han Chinese couples generally live independently or live with their in-laws, while Tibetan newlyweds tend to live with the woman's parents first, and then separate into their own household when family conditions permit.

2.3. Differences in marriage concepts

The traditional Han concept of marriage is deeply influenced by Confucianism, which emphasizes the importance of family unions. Driven by this concept, marriage is not only the union of two individuals but also the alliance of two families and even two social groups ^[5]. In addition, Han marriage customs have clear gender role divisions and expectations, such as the traditional "three obediences and four virtues," which set a subordinate position for women in marriage. Although modern attitudes are gradually changing this pattern, some families are still influenced by traditions.

The Tibetan concept of marriage has distinct ethnic and regional characteristics ^[6]. Religious belief occupies an important place in Tibetan concepts of marriage. The concepts of karma and reincarnation advocated by Buddhist culture have led Tibetans to hold a fatalistic attitude toward marriage. Under such a cultural background, many marriage customs have a strong religious theme, such as divining the wedding date through lamas and the prevalence of complicated religious ceremonies in weddings.

2.4. Differences in wedding clothing

Traditional Han Chinese wedding clothing tends to be ornate and delicate, with red as the main color, symbolizing happiness and auspiciousness. The traditional bridal wedding clothes, such as the dragon and phoenix coats, are embroidered and intricately detailed, reflecting the Han's extreme importance and good

wishes for marriage. The groom, on the other hand, wears a long robe and coat, with a color scheme of dark red, black, or dark blue, showing solemnity and steadiness.

Tibetan wedding costumes reveal strong ethnic characteristics and local style. The bride usually wears brightly colored Tibetan robes with exquisite headdresses and jewelry, such as coral, turquoise, and silver, which not only play a beautifying role but also have the significance of praying for blessings. The costumes of Tibetan grooms are also unique, as they will wear robes embroidered with various patterns and felt or leather hats, showing the roughness and bravery of Tibetan men.

From the choice of materials to the use of colors to the matching of decorations, the wedding costumes of Tibetans and Han reveal their unique aesthetic and cultural connotations in their differences. The delicacy and complexity of Han Chinese costumes convey the desire for a happy marriage life, while the roughness and primitiveness of Tibetan costumes express the reverence and obedience to the power of nature.

3. Analysis of the reasons for the differences in marriage culture

3.1. Influence of geographic environment and mode of production

Marriage culture is deeply influenced by the respective geographic environments and modes of production. The Tibetans are mainly distributed in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, with steep terrain and cold climate, and have long formed a production mode based on animal husbandry and supplemented by agriculture. Such production activities emphasize self-sufficiency and a high degree of dependence on the natural environment, which in turn affects the living habits and cultural traditions of the Tibetan people. In contrast, the Han people have a much wider distribution area and a diverse geographical environment, ranging from the plains of the north to the hills of the south, and from the interior to the coast. The Han people's mode of production is diversified, with a wide range of economic activities, such as agriculture, commerce, and industry. As a result, Han wedding culture shows richer contents and forms. Taking weddings as an example, Han wedding customs in different regions also differ in terms of dress, food ceremonies, and so on. These differences not only reflect the influence of geography but also map out the different levels of economic development and cultural exchanges in different places.

3.2. Level of socio-economic development

Differences in the level of socio-economic development lead to differences in infrastructure, education, and openness to the outside world that directly affect the wedding culture. In more economically developed regions, traditional wedding customs may be gradually replaced by simplified ceremonies under the impact of modernization and globalization, while in regions with relatively closed and conservative economies, traditional wedding customs are preserved more completely.

The Han and Tibetans have lived in different geographical environments for a long time, forming their unique social structures and lifestyles. The Han, as the main ethnic group in China, has a wider influence on the cultural direction of the country, including the concept of marriage and the form of marriage customs. On the other hand, the Tibetans have more limited communication with the outside world due to their living in the plateau area, which has resulted in the Tibetan marriage culture maintaining more traditional characteristics and independence.

3.3. Influence of religion and belief

Traditional Han wedding customs are influenced by Confucianism, Taoist philosophy, and Buddhist culture, emphasizing the continuation of the family line and the order of social ethics. Han people tend to choose

auspicious days and emphasize the bridal betrothal gift. These customs not only reflect the pursuit of good luck but also show trust in the fate of heavenly arrangements. The “six rites” of traditional Han weddings reflect respect for filial piety and etiquette, while elements such as Hejin Wine and the word “double happiness” imply prayers for harmony between husband and wife and family prosperity. Tibetan marriage customs, on the other hand, are deeply guided by the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, which regards spiritual elevation as an important part of life. Marriage in Tibet is not only a family union, but also an experience on the path of personal cultivation. For this reason, Tibetan weddings are blessed with the participation of monks, as well as the integration of Buddhist scriptures into the wedding ceremony, to add sacred sanctuary to the couple’s married life. The transcendental attitude towards material reincarnation can be glimpsed in the Tibetan sky burial ceremony. This concept is also reflected in the wedding ceremony, which is not only a union of two people but also a part of the purification of the soul and cultivation. In addition, the special status of the living Buddha reincarnation system in Tibetan society has also influenced to some extent the Tibetans’ views and choices about marriage. Although the influence of traditional religious beliefs has fluctuated in the process of modernization, these deep-rooted cultural beliefs continue to shape, to varying degrees, the views on marriage and related practices of the two ethnic groups.

4. Conclusion and countermeasures

Through documentation and comparison, this study analyzed the differences between Tibetan and traditional Han marriage culture in the Litang area along the Sichuan-Tibet railway. From the four aspects of the wedding ceremony, marriage customs, marriage concepts, and wedding clothing, the results show that there is a big difference between the wedding culture of Tibetan residents in the Litang area and the traditional Han wedding culture. The reasons for the difference are mainly geographic environment and production methods, level of socioeconomic development, and religion and beliefs. According to John H. Haynie, “Cultural differences should not cause a gap, but should be a bridge for us to learn and grow with each other.” In this regard, this paper proposes the following three countermeasures to dissolve the friction caused by cultural differences.

4.1. Establishment of cultural exchange platforms

It is necessary to build effective cultural exchange platforms from multiple dimensions to reduce the friction caused by cultural differences. One way is to make use of the existing festivals, such as the horse racing festival in Litang, to create thematic festivals by inviting scholars and people from both Tibetans and Han Chinese to participate in them and experience the marriage traditions and modern changes of both sides. This not only can enhance the understanding of the respective cultures, but also stimulate cross-community dialogues and innovative thinking. Secondly, online cultural exchange spaces can be created with the help of modern technological tools, such as social media and online streaming. The third is to establish societies or NGOs that focus on the preservation and exchange of ethnic cultures. Regularly organizing cultural workshops, seminars, and interactive experience activities not only provides residents with learning and exchange opportunities but also attracts more foreign tourists to learn more about local culture.

4.2. Developing specialized cultural tourism products

The cultural elements of Tibetan and traditional Han wedding customs can be integrated to design unique tourism products. Travel routes that contain wedding experiences, ethnic customs displays, and interactive sessions can be created. Tourists can experience a traditional wedding re-enactment and participate in certain ceremonies, such as wearing traditional wedding clothes, learning ancient blessing songs, or participating in

the production of handicrafts that symbolize auspicious meanings. This sense of participation can enhance visitors' understanding and identification with the culture. Additionally, with the help of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology in the cultural experience hall, visitors can immerse themselves in an all-around, multi-sensory wedding culture scene. Through VR technology, a realistic virtual world is constructed, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the unique charm of wedding culture.

4.3. Strengthening cultural education and dissemination

School education can incorporate curriculum content on ethnic and cultural differences through a combination of classroom teaching and practical activities, allowing students to experience and understand the similarities and differences between different cultures. For example, students are organized to participate in project research on the theme of ethnic cultures. Students can be encouraged to visit areas inhabited by different ethnic groups, interview local residents, and collect and compile information on traditional customs. Through interactive learning methods, students' cultural sensitivity and awareness of respect for multiculturalism are enhanced. Targeted cultural dissemination activities can also be performed. For example, competitions such as shooting documentaries or short videos on ethnic traditions can be organized to drive people's understanding and dissemination of the ethnic culture. Through the above countermeasures, an all-round, multi-level cultural exchange network is gradually constructed, helping the cultural and tourism integration along the route to flourish.

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Author contributions

Study idea conceptualization: Junru Liu

Data collection and organization: Jian Li

Data analysis: Junxi Gao

Study writing: Junxi Gao

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