

The Gate to Marriage: Benefits and Detriments of Arranged Marriage

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In the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, intelligent Elizabeth has determined that “only the deepest love will induce [her] into matrimony”. Luckily, she then finds her Mr. Darcy and lives happily ever after. However, the writer, Jane Austen, who has the same determination as Elizabeth, failed to marry in her lifetime. The relationship between marriage and happiness seems to be a perpetual topic for people, especially for women. They cannot help but ask which process of mate selection will lead to happy lives. For instance, Firoozeh Dumas, an Iranian- American, shows her good hope of the American-style romantic love in the article “The Wedding”. Romantic love is attractive, whereas the existence of the tight family relationship in Eastern culture makes the arranged marriage more reliable and rational; therefore China’s partially arranged marriage stands in a good middle ground.

The processes of choosing a lifetime partner dramatically differ between Western and Eastern cultures. In Western cultures, mates select one another directly based on interpersonal attraction. Since marriage is not the primary task of starting a relationship, family members are not likely to get involved when a person is starting a relationship. In the Eastern cultures, however, marriage is regarded as the primary pre-requisite for a relationship and it is often arranged by family members. According to Bhopal (1999), “arranged marriages are seen as an agreement between two families rather than two individuals, and are based on a contract where both sides have to fulfill their obligations” (Madathil). Thus, arranged marriage is not only a combination of husband and wife; but also a union of two families in Eastern cultures.

Dumas shows changes of attitude and good hope of her family, an immigrant family from Iran, towards her romantic love with a Frenchman in “The Wedding”. Dumas’s family is deeply affected by the traditional Eastern Culture. Dating, as described in the article, is “like the rodeo circuit or trout farming, is a completely foreign concept to [Dumas’s] parents” (Dumas 75). However, although Dumas’s parents and almost all their siblings’ marriages have been arranged by family members, it does not take long for them to accept Francois, the man Dumas wants to marry. After dining out and having a delighted conversation with Francois, Dumas’s parents soon accept that Francois is the best husband for their daughter. As described by Dumas, “at that very moment, my mother threw aside everything she and her generation knew about marriage and entered a new world where daughters select their own husband” (Dumas 77). Dumas’s parents believe romantic love may give their daughter a chance to choose a really kind person whom their daughter really loves and lead to a happier marriage.

Unlike the wide acceptance of romantic love, arranged marriage is often regarded by Westerners as an oppressive way to build lifetime relationships. Serena Nanda criticizes arranged marriage in an agitated tone at the beginning of her article, “Arranging a Marriage in India”.

How could any intelligent custom of arrangement young person agree to such a marriage without great reluctance? It was contrary to everything I believed about the importance of romantic love as the only basis of a happy marriage. It also clashed with my strongly held notions that the choice of such an intimate and permanent relationship could be made only by the individuals involved. Had

anyone tried to arrange my marriage, I would have been defiant and rebellious! (Nanda 195).

As a young American woman in India for the first time, Nanda finds the arranged marriage is opposed to her belief that individuals should choose their lifetime partner by themselves. In the general view of those who believe in individualism, the personal practice of one's goals and desires is highly commended, while the interference of external power, such as society and family, is firmly opposed. The idea of arranged marriage which is against her American view of individualism and romanticism really fuel her anger.

Nevertheless, Nanda soon cannot deny that the positive aspects of arranged marriage appear to her to outweigh the negatives. First, an arranged marriage is more reliable and rational, which may reduce the rate of divorce and lead to a happy marriage. In Easterners' point of view, marriage is an once-in-a-lifetime event, while divorce might be regarded as a scandal. Therefore, the decision to marry would be made after rational and careful consideration. For instance, in arranged marriages in India, matches would be arranged "only within the same caste and general social class" (Nanda 197); thus, wives are less likely to be humiliated in the way such as being sent back to their parents or even abandoned by the husbands' families, since the husbands' families and the wives' families are coming from the same social classes, husbands' families are unlikely to look down upon brides and their families. Also, marriages would be arranged by parents after acquainting all about the boys'/girls' family background in arranged marriage in India, which makes the marriage more reliable. Unlike a variety of material bases in an arranged marriage, the only basis of romantic love is interpersonal attraction; however, interpersonal attraction may fade over time and it makes marriages less stable and may lead to unavoidable divorce. Since parents are always trying to find their children the best people to marry, it is better to have parents' guidance in choosing lifetime partners than to have inexperienced children arranged marriage by themselves.

Arranged marriages may raise the rate of marriage, too. Women may have some restrictions when choosing their husbands in traditional culture due to personal and social preconceptions of marriage. It is widely recognized that women should choose those men who are older and more intelligent than themselves as husbands, while men are encouraged to choose women who are younger and less intelligent than themselves as wives. However, the number of intelligent people is definitely less than the number of unintelligent people; thus, intelligent women may have less of a chance to find themselves husbands in romantic love than either less intelligent women or men. As a result of the increasing number of highly educated women, more and more women find themselves unable to find husbands. Arranged marriage, on the other hand, may raise the rate of marriage and make the distribution of marriage even; since marriages are arranged within the same social class and the proportion of gender in a social class is relatively equal.

Second, arranged marriage contributes to the self-confidence and natural charm of young women. In United States, where romantic love is believed to be the only basis of a happy marriage, "girls are spending more time worrying about whether they will meet a man and get married" (Nanda 195) than those girls from Eastern cultures where children's marriages are arranged by their parents do. The competition of standing out from other girls is competitive; what is worse, "the endless worrying about the rules that governed [their] behavior and about [their] popularity rating sapped both [their] self-esteem and [their] enjoyment of adolescence" (Nanda 196). These girls are losing both their self-confidence in the competition with other girls and themselves in the anxiety of getting married; and they may unable to enjoy their lives as those girls whose marriages are arranged by their parents do. In Eastern cultures, since parents in arranged marriages may carefully choose lifetime partners for their children, children may do not have to worry about their marriages; therefore, young people, especially girls may have chance to do what they are really interested in, such as reading, painting and photographing. In this way, girls are able to develop

their natural charm.

Furthermore, arranged marriage helps to build a peaceful family relationship, especially in Eastern cultures. In Eastern cultures, marriage is not only a combination of husband and wife; but also a union of two families. After marriage is arranged, the united families may share important resources, such as social networks and work opportunities. Therefore, the internal relationship is far more important in such a family. To be specific, the relationship between wife and mother-in-law is a big issue in many families in Eastern cultures, since young couples may have to live with the husband's family. The relationship between wife and their mother-in-law usually runs awkward in romantic love, while the relationship runs better in an arranged marriage; since the mother has taken part in choosing the bride, and she is less likely to exclude the wife from her family.

Despite the difference between Eastern culture and Western culture in the matter of marriage, arranged marriages are varying in different regions within Eastern culture. India, where more than 90% of the marriages are arranged (Gautam 2002), is among the regions where arranged marriages are strictly performed, as described by Nanda. China, however, stands in a good middle ground of "tradition of arranged marriage and the irresistible rise of consumer choice, even in the area of personal relationships" (Gu 36). Instead of asking friends or relatives to help finding lifetime partners for their children, parents may come to a park as a venue "to exchange pictures and brief biographies of their children of marriageable age in the hope of finding the perfect partner for each, with the right qualifications, income and, almost as important, a compatible animal sign" (Gu 36). Definition of arranged marriage is generalized in the form of interview by parents. Young adults may able to date the one chosen by their parents, which is a kind of improvement, since it gives children a chance to see if they are satisfied with the partners chosen by their parents, which may make the arranged marriage work better.

Arranged marriage is often regarded as a remnant of feudalism and a disadvantage form of marriage; however, since the decision of marriage has been rationally made in an arranged marriage, the marriage can often withstand the test of time. In an arranged marriage, husband and wife are most likely to come from the same background; they may share the same memories of childhood, and have various topics to talk about which may help build a strong relationship and deep love. Also, since the bride was chosen with careful consideration in an arranged marriage, mother-in-law is more likely to regard the bride as "the best thing that ever happened to [her] son" (Dumas 83), which may lead to a peaceful family. Furthermore, China's partially arranged marriage stands in a good middle ground; it gives young people a chance to date with those who chosen by their parents, and helps arranged marriage works better.

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