**Chinese Wedding Traditions**

In China, marriage is considered to be one of the three most important things in one's whole life. Traditionally, a whole wedding consists of 6 different steps in advance and then the wedding ceremony.  
  
At all times and in all countries, the wedding ceremony is considered to be the greatest ritual of anyone's entire life. Although Chinese marriage customs are changing and developing all the time, the atmosphere created during the wedding is invariant - being ceremonious, enthusiastic, jubilant and auspicious.

The Chinese wedding ceremony first began at the end of the Prehistoric Times (1.7 million years ago – 21st century BC) perhaps with an engagement proposal with a complete deerskin in ancient times. In the Xia and Shang Dynasties (21st – 11th century BC), the 'Meeting the Bride' ritual was formalized. During the Zhou Dynasty (11th– 221 BC) the more complex and ceremonial tradition of 'six rites' was recognized: presenting gifts to the girl's family, knowing the girl's general background, engagement, presenting betrothal gifts to the bride's family, asking the fortuneteller to choose an auspicious day, and meeting the bride. This established the traditional Chinese marriage customs. Thereafter, the wedding ceremony becomes even more colorful and lively.

Because China comprises 56 ethnic groups, Chinese marriage customs are an important part of the country's folk culture. Different ethnic groups have different marriage customs: During a wedding day in Bulang communities, the bride's companions will steal the bridegroom and carry him off to the bride's home at dawn and the bridegroom's companions then carry off the bride to the bridegroom's home at dark; for the Dai people, finding a mate by selling chicken soup is done at every festival: girls will stew a pan of chicken soup to sell. If the boy is well-satisfied, she will hang her head shyly; if the boy also takes a fancy to her, they will carry the chicken soup to a quiet place to confess their feelings; during the Folk Song Fair of the Zhuang nationality, girls carry colorful embroidered balls while singing songs. A girl will throw the gaily-decorated ball to the boy she falls in love with.

**Traditional Chinese Marriage Customs**  
In feudal society marriage depended on ones parents' orders and a match-maker's selection. Men were honored more than women in the society, so the actual process of marriage was as follows:

http://www.warriortours.com/images/ico_arrow_right.gifMatch-making: if a man fell in love with a girl, the man's family would ask the matchmaker to help propose with some gifts. Originally, the gift was a live wild goose, which was the symbol of living up to the pledge between each other, because the geese were always punctual to fly to the south in autumn and move back north in spring. Then white geese (symbolizing spotless virtue), emulsion paint (jiaoqi in Chinese, symbolizing harmony and affection) and silk trees (hehuan in Chinese, symbolizing happiness) were also used.

http://www.warriortours.com/images/ico_arrow_right.gifName Knowing: inquiring about the girl's name and birthday, then asking the fortuneteller to match if the marriage would be happy.

http://www.warriortours.com/images/ico_arrow_right.gifEngagement: if the match was auspicious, the man's family would ask the matchmaker to arrange the preliminaries for the marriage with some gifts and a formal letter called the 'Appointment Book', after which the two families would exchange the girl's and the man's birthday records as the evidence of the engagement. Subsequently, the man's family would make preparation for the marriage. The girl's family would also assemble for the dowry such as bedding, chests, jewelry, clothing, silk & satin, plates, and some rich family even used house and store as the dowry.

http://www.warriortours.com/images/ico_arrow_right.gifBetrothal Gift Presenting: when everything was almost ready for the marriage, the man's family would present gift-money and various gifts to the girl's family. The variety and quantity of the gifts and gift-money were all clearly listed in a 'Gift Book' document.

http://www.warriortours.com/images/ico_arrow_right.gifAuspicious Day Choosing: the man's family would then asked the fortuneteller to choose an auspicious day according to the date of the couple's births.

A few days before the wedding, the girl's family would send the dowry to the man's family. About the same time a privileged elder woman would make the bed for the new couple, scattering all kinds of sweets and fruits on the new bed such as red dates, longans, litchi, red and green beans. No one was permitted to enter the bridal chamber or touch the new bed until the night of the wedding.

http://www.warriortours.com/images/ico_arrow_right.gifMeeting the Bride: finally the peak of the marriage came – the wedding day, when the bride would wear auspicious and festive red clothes, and the bridegroom would wear a special wedding suit accompanied by a procession to meet his bride. Before leaving her former home the bride would kowtow to her parents to acknowledge their love and care from childhood. The bridegroom would also bow out of respect. At the departure of the carriage or the bridal sedan chair, the bride's parents would scatter a bowl of water and a bowl of rice. This represented that their daughter was leaving and would never be back — like scattered water and wishing her enough food in future. Upon leaving, the bride would throw her fan out the window of the carriage or sedan chair to throw away her bad temper.

http://www.warriortours.com/images/ico_arrow_right.gifWedding: when arriving at the bridegroom's home, the bride would step over a brazier to burn out inauspicious things. Then the couple would kowtow to the bridegroom's parents, the heaven and earth, and to each other. After that the bride would be sent to the bridal chamber, and the wedding came to its peak – the feast. After the feast , came the last part of the marriage. Most relatives and friends would leave one after another, but some friends and relatives of the same generation would crowd in the bridal chamber, playing all kinds of games, giving performances and so on, to add more joy to the wedding.

However, along with the society's progress and the transformation of people's thinking, free love has become increasingly popular in China, so current Chinese marriage customs are not as complicated as the traditional ones. They primarily involve the engagement and wedding ceremony. Betrothal gifts are usually golden or diamond jewelry, with the wedding ring different from the engagement ring. The dowry has been changed into some modern electrical appliance such as a fridge or washing machine or TV set, or perhaps a sofa set or even a flat. On the wedding day the bride wears both white wedding dress and festive red clothes, while the bridegroom still wears a special suit; a bridesmaid and a groomsman attend the new couple at the wedding; the bridegroom takes a decorated car to meet his bride instead of a carriage or sedan chair; hotels have become the favorite place to hold the wedding feast, the whole wedding ceremony is often organized by a master of ceremonies in the hotel; and the new couple will also attend the feast together and propose toasts for the guests; after the wedding, some new couple will even take a honeymoon trip.