

An Interpretation of Flora Botton Beja's *Trends in Contemporary Chinese Marriage*

Ting Zhang

(College of Foreign languages/University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, China)

Abstract: Chinese scholars have been continuously working on the inheritance of Chinese culture and promoting its dissemination, bringing China's excellent traditional culture to the world, including history, philosophical thought, intangible cultural heritage, and folk customs, among others. As a result, Chinese culture has attracted the attention of many foreign scholars. In recent years, the study of China overseas has gained momentum, with an increasing number of Sinologists researching Chinese history and culture to facilitate cultural exchanges and mutual learning between China and other countries and to promote the spread of culture. Taking Mexico in Latin America as an example, this paper selects the Mexican Sinologist Flora Botton Beja as the subject of narration. By examining her work "Trends in Contemporary Chinese Marriage," this paper interprets how Flora Botton Beja understands Chinese marriage. She differentiates between traditional and modern marriage models and compares the two.

Keywords: China, Flora Botton Beja, Mexico, Sinology

I. INTRODUCTION

Most Sinology studies are discussed in developed countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. There aren't many studies in developing countries (Wang, Xie, [1]). I want to introduce the sinology studies in Mexico. Flora Botton Beja is a famous Mexican Sinologist. She works at the Asian and African Studies Research Center at the Mexico. She has done a lot to build a strong base for Sinology research in Mexico. In 1978, she first went to China with a Mexican group. That was her first time really getting to know Chinese society. She is very interested in Chinese families and marriages, and the values behind them. Her research focuses on traditional and modern Chinese families. After conducting extensive surveys and studies on Chinese women and marriage, she wrote the book *Under One Roof: Traditional Chinese Families and Their Crises* (Wang, [2]). Additionally, Flora Botton Beja is deeply interested in Chinese philosophical culture. She systematically studied Chinese philosophy and promoted its dissemination in Mexico, thereby facilitating cultural exchanges between China and Mexico. Of course, studying Chinese philosophy is no easy task, and accurately narrating Confucian

thought and culture is particularly challenging. Flora Botton Beja is also highly interested in Chinese history. She authored the book *China: History and Culture Before 1800*, which is the first comprehensive history of China written by a female scholar in Spanish (Beja F B, [3]). The Asian and African Studies Research Center at the Colegio de México focuses its research on the relationship between China and Mexico, with particular attention to China's foreign policy (Wang, [4]). The center is dedicated to promoting cultural exchanges and mutual learning between China and Mexico.

Flora Botton Beja also cares about aging in China. She thinks that Chinese people really value the parent-child relationship. Filial piety is the most important part of the family. It's not just something people should do, but also a good quality to have. Behind filial piety, there is deeper love and respect. In the past, men were supposed to be in charge of filial piety. This also shows that it is important to keep the family going. In ancient China, the father was the boss of the family, and wives and children had to listen to him. As the saying goes, "The eldest brother is like a father," and naturally, filial piety towards the father extends to all elders. These are all the influences of Confucian thought on the Chinese people. Therefore, fathers in ancient times had a strong sense of authority and could exercise absolute power over their wives and children, even deciding on their children's marriages. Confucian thought emphasizes "filial piety", requiring children to respect and care for the elderly and to ensure a good end for them. However, today, the aging population is gradually changing family structures and has attracted high attention from the government. Faced with economic pressures, many elderly people are being neglected and have even lost the support of their children.

In Confucian thought, "filial piety" has become the criterion for evaluating the quality of a marriage. If children are unwilling to live under the same roof as their parents or to provide for their parents in old age, they are considered unfilial and may be ostracized by society. This Confucian idea occupies a dominant position in the entire family ethics and morality.

II. TRADITIONAL CHINESE MARRIAGE

Flora Botton Beja really understands Confucian thought and uses it to explain Chinese marriage. She quotes from the Book of Rites: "Marriage is when two families come together and two people connect emotionally." This means marriage isn't just about two people; it's also about joining families and even bigger groups. A stable marriage is seen as a good thing. If a husband and wife get along well, it helps keep the family and society stable. Confucianism says that a good marriage is the key to keep a stable society. If a marriage is bad, it can mess up social customs and cause problems. So, Confucianism always says that having a good family and taking marriage seriously are really important for keeping society in order. Confucianism always emphasizes the seriousness of marriage.

Under this ethical framework, Confucianism emphasizes the distinction between husband and wife in marriage. The Book of Rites mentions: "The husband manages external affairs, while the wife manages internal affairs." Confucianism clearly defines the roles of men and women and assigns tasks accordingly: men are primarily responsible for economic activities outside the home, while women are expected to take care of

household chores and raise children. Confucianism also places great importance on the continuity of marriage, seeing it as an important means of continuing the family lineage.

In traditional Chinese marriage, most marriages were arranged by parents. Flora Botton Beja aims to study the current trends in Chinese marriage, where women's marriages are often associated with economic exchange and the consolidation of status. According to tradition, Chinese marriages required a matchmaker and could not be arranged by the individuals themselves. When getting married, the groom's family was required to give a dowry to the bride's family, which made the bride seem like the property of the groom's family.

Flora Botton Beja really cares about how women are treated in marriage. She thinks that the old idea of "liking boys more than girls" is still very strong in both men's and women's minds. This idea makes it hard for women to choose who they want to marry and limits their chances to get an education. Because of this, women often don't have much power in marriage. In a marriage, both men and women have to follow certain rules. After getting married, men usually have a higher position than women. Men go out to work and make money for the family, while women stay at home to do all the housework.

This traditional pattern also affects their children. Sons are allowed to receive a good education, while daughters are often deemed unnecessary to educate. The lack of emphasis on female education leads to a series of consequences. Men working outside may complain that women do not work and cannot help ease the family's financial burden. However, this is precisely because women have not received a good education, which limits their job opportunities. This forced marriage is not only seen among the younger generation but also among children who oppose their parents' remarriage. In China, old prejudices among urban and rural residents often hinder intermarriage. In traditional Chinese concepts, there is a preference for male children, which stems from the unequal status of men and women, with women being in a subordinate position. Traditionally, women in China marry men from outside their village. In the past, divorce was very difficult; couples needed permission from their workplace, which was often denied and discouraged. Society had a very low tolerance for divorce. Even if the couple's feelings were broken, they were expected to maintain the marital relationship.

Flora Botton Beja starts from traditional Chinese marriage, tracing the functions of marriage under the traditional model. She emphasizes that marriage is not only the union of two individuals, two families, or even two clans, but also the combination of the emotions of two people. By employing historical comparative analysis, she examines the marital patterns and conditions. She observes the evolution of China's marriage system and laws through a historical timeline. Flora Botton Beja adopts a critical perspective to explore the Chinese marriage system and place the discussion of marriage within the framework of legal institutions. Her approach is clear and cover women, men, parents, families, and society as a whole. She also compares the marriage systems in rural and urban areas, highlighting both similarities and differences between them (Botton Beja F, [5]).

Flora Botton Beja takes the evolution of marriage laws as one of the narrative threads. She first introduces the Marriage Law of 1950, which was the first marriage law enacted after the founding of New China and had profound historical significance. At that time, the marriage system had many problems, such as polygamy and arranged marriages by parents. These feudal customs severely suppressed women's rights, confined their

thinking, and hindered their progress. After the founding of New China, the government decided to abolish the traditional marriage system in order to protect women's rights. This included prohibiting arranged marriages and marriage by purchase. The principle of monogamy was established, stipulating that no one could maintain marital relationships with two people at the same time. This provision abolished the unequal relationship between husband and wife, prohibited forced arranged marriages by parents, and banned the purchase of marriage through money. Marriage had to be based on the free will of both parties and could not be forced. This marriage law promoted social progress, and women's rights gradually received protection, laying the foundation for social stability. The law safeguarded the rights and interests of women and children, granting women autonomy in marriage, including the right to divorce. It also regulated women's property rights in marriage and ensured that they received appropriate compensation after divorce, as well as protected the legitimate rights and interests of children.

Subsequently, Flora Botton Beja introduces the 1980 Marriage Law Amendment, which adjusted and revised the 1950 Marriage Law. It protected the legal rights and interests of the elderly, stipulating that couples had the obligation to support the elderly. With the increasing divorce rate in recent years, domestic violence was identified as a major cause. Therefore, the amendment prohibited "domestic violence," laying a solid foundation for subsequent marriage laws.

The 2001 revision of the Marriage Law explicitly prohibited consanguineous marriages, taking into account the safety of future generations. These revisions to the laws are all manifestations of the continuous progress of society.

III. MODERN CHINESE MARRIAGE

After 1950, the way people got married started to change a lot. Kids could pick who they wanted to marry based on what they wanted. In 1950, China made a new Marriage Law. It said that marriage is just between two people and nobody else should mess with it. The law got rid of old customs like arranged marriages, child marriages, and having more than one wife. Either the husband or the wife could ask for a divorce, and the law helped protect women and kids. This made things better for women who used to be treated unfairly. The law also said that men had to be 22 years old to get married and women had to be 20. This helped make marriages more stable, but it didn't really talk about things like money and who gets the kids if the couple divorces. Over time, people's ideas about marriage kept changing. More and more couples started to focus on love and compatibility when choosing a partner. Education also became more important for both men and women, giving women more opportunities to improve their lives. With better education, women gained more independence and were able to make decisions for themselves. This led to more equal relationships between husbands and wives. Today, marriage in China is much more about the freedom and happiness of the couple, rather than just following old traditions.

In 2001, the Marriage Law was changed. It said that kids should respect their parents' right to get married again. It is wrong for children to stop that. Nowadays in China, people are very picky when choosing a partner. They think about age, education, family background, money, and even politics. Even though women are getting more education, they still have a hard time in the job market. Companies worry that women might get pregnant and miss work. Because of this, women still don't get treated equally at work. Although people have

more freedom to choose who they want to marry today, parents still have a big discourse in it. Many married women also live with their husband's parents.

Nowadays, people really believe in having freedom in marriage and treating men and women equally. Marriage isn't just about money or things anymore. It's more about how well two people get along and how good they are as people. Society cares more about what each person wants. Husbands and wives are equal and both help with the family. It's not just women's job to take care of the family anymore. Men have the responsibility for it and are encouraged to help out too. This has changed the old idea of "men work outside, women stay inside." Now, both spouses share family responsibilities. Women also have more discourse in marriage and want to be more independent. They want to get better education and jobs to support themselves and feel good about who they are. In the past, women didn't have money and had to depend on men, which made them less important. Now, women can be leaders in their relationships and don't have to hide their feelings. They can talk to their husbands openly. Both parents are also responsible for raising their children now, not just the mom. The old idea of liking boys more than girls is also getting weaker.

In today's society, a term has emerged called "leftover women," which refers to women who have surpassed the socially accepted age for marriage but remain unmarried. These women often have higher standards for their partners and are unwilling to settle for less. They typically possess higher education levels, are economically independent, and have the right to make their own choices.

As society becomes more open, many young people now see marriage as something that holds them back instead of something they want. So, one trend in China now is "delayed marriage" or "staying single." Flora Botton Beja talked about Taoist philosophy, which says we should "go with the flow" and not rush things. It teaches us to respect how things naturally develop and not force anything. For example, in nature, plants grow in their own way, and it's not smart to try to change that. We all know the story of "The Farmer Who Pulled Up His Seedlings to Help Them Grow," which shows that rushing can be bad. This idea can also be used for marriage today. Marriage is now more about finding someone you really connect with and like, not just joining families. So, some people choose to wait and not rush into marriage. They believe it's better to take your time than to be with someone you don't truly like.

Flora Botton Beja pointed out China's one - child policy and the "4 - 2 - 1" family pattern, which consists of the parents of both husband and wife, the couple themselves, and their one child. This family pattern is very common in China. However, it has some drawbacks. The economic burden on the couple is too heavy, and the family pressure is overwhelming. At the same time, it also leads to the pressure of supporting the elderly, which makes the only child face the pressure of supporting the elderly. The ways of finding partners have become more diverse. Some companies have established databases to help men and women find suitable partners, commonly known as "online dating sites." Although many concepts of marriage in contemporary China have changed and parents no longer interfere strongly in their children's marriages, they still play the role of matchmakers before marriage. Chinese parents hold "marriage corners" in public places such as parks, where posters display their children's educational background, family economic situation, and appearance, introducing

their children's basic information to others at the "marriage corners" to consider suitable partners for their children. Compared to other countries, China's divorce rate is not high, but it is on the rise. The 2001 Marriage Law provided greater freedom for couples to divorce. When the two parties do not agree, the court will make a ruling. Since 1949, women have entered the paid labor market and have been encouraged to participate equally with men in socialist construction, as Mao Zedong said, "Women hold up half the sky."

IV. CONCUSION

Flora Botton Beja's in-depth interpretation of Chinese marriage, from the perspectives of sociology and anthropology, dissects the Chinese marriage system and observes its development and changes from traditional to modern times. Although the contemporary Chinese marriage system has achieved greater freedom and equality, some traditional concepts still influence subsequent generations. For example, traditional customs such as the wedding procession, bowing in the hall, and serving tea to parents in traditional marriage patterns are still preserved to this day, reflecting the characteristics of the combination of traditional and modern marriage patterns.

Flora Botton Beja interprets traditional and contemporary Chinese marriage through a cross - cultural lens and her insights into Chinese culture. She pays attention to gender equality and the status of men and women, as well as the evolution of legal systems. She also values the development of individuals within family and marital contexts. With her cultural perspectives and works, Flora Botton Beja has built a bridge for cultural exchange between China and Mexico, promoting the development and cooperation of the two countries' cultures. Her in - depth studies of China, especially her research on Chinese philosophical thought and its application in her writings, not only provide more authentic interpretations of Chinese culture but also disseminate Confucian ideas to Mexico and the rest of the world, contributing to the spread of Chinese culture.

REFERENCES

- [1] A.Y. Wang and W.Z. Xie, A Review of Chinese Studies in Mexico, *Studies in Contemporary Chinese History*, (01), 2026, 114-120.
- [2] L.Q. Wang, Building Bridges for Sino-Mexican Cultural Exchange: An Interview with the Mother of Mexican Sinology, Béatrice M. Bartlett, *Han feng*, (00), 2023, 140-147.
- [3] F.B. Beja, China: su historia y cultura hasta 1800 (Ciudad de Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico AC, 2008).
- [4] X.Y. Wang, Chinese Studies at the Colegio de México, *International Sinology*, (1), 2022, 2.
- [5] F. Botton Beja, Tendencias actuales en el matrimonio en China, *Estudios de Asia y África*, 52(3), 2017, 535-566.