

An Intercultural Discussion on Li Yang's Domestic Violence

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Abstract

Domestic violence towards woman is a problem that often overlooked by society. Domestic violence is complex and conflicted. In the meantime, domestic violence has different description and understanding for the public and at home from different cultural background. First of all, the paper states the significance of discussion about domestic violence from an intercultural perspective, especially the Sino-American cultural value influence not only on bilateral social culture and family life, but also on people's different attitude towards domestic violence. And then, the author takes the case of Li Yang's domestic violence for example and tries to compare Li Yang's and Kim Lee's different opinion towards domestic violence from an intercultural perspective so as to understand different cultures can influence people's different cultural values and even family life, however, cultural difference is not problem, domestic violence is not problem in the intercultural family.

Key words: domestic violence, intercultural study, Chinese culture, American culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a worldwide problem. However, domestic violence may be under-recognized and under-reported, but is one of the worst epidemics in China today. It is manifested essentially in violence against women, which occurs across China and affects families of all ethnic backgrounds and social spheres. But its impact is not restricted to families. It extends to society as a whole. In China, nearly one-fourth of married women experience domestic abuse of some sort according to a nationwide survey released by All-China Women's Federation last month (Cheng, 2011).

In the meantime, cultural, economic and social factors such as shame and fear of retaliation from their partners are the cause of women's reluctance to denounce these acts. Like other countries, domestic violence in China is not only widespread, but also considered a private matter, which makes it very difficult for women to get proper response from police and the judiciary. Physically tortured women are more susceptible to a variety of health problems such as depression, suicide, and alcohol and drug abuse. Sexual violence against women increases the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS (through forced sexual relations or because of the difficulty in persuading men to use condoms). It may also lead to various gynecological problems (Chelala, 2010).

But, on November 25, 2011, China Daily marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and published a piece of news entitled "Wife

braves media to discuss abuse” which revealed Li Yang’s domestic violence. Especially, Kim Lee (who is American and Li Yang’s wife)’s actions set an example of how women should deal with domestic violence and her case has brought more attention to the issue “domestic violence” in China in the future.”

Therefore, the paper will discuss about the domestic violence from an intercultural perspective and attract the attention of mainstream academics or experts educators, so as to change our old cultural thought gradually strengthen the people’s respect awareness for women in families and share everything in families. Thus, there is no doubt at all that the intercultural discussion on Li Yang’s domestic violence has a very meaningful matter.

2. A CASE

Li Yang is one of the famous English educators in China, especially and the founder of Crazy English. His wife is Kim Lee who is from America.. Li Yang and Kim Lee met on the first day of her first trip to see as “yuanfen”, or fate. Then, as a teacher in Miami, she was visiting a Chinese school to learn about bilingual education. Li Yang was there to speak about his popular program, ”Crazy English” a radical approach to learning the language that involved hand gestures and slogans such as “Conquer English to Make China Stronger!” Li sold more than English lessons – he sold a life philosophy of shedding inhibitions, with a patriotism that resonated with many in today’s China. Li persuaded her to move to China to work for him. Inspired by a Chinese folktale called Journey to the West, he called himself the “Hopeless Master” and Kim his “Monkey Queen,” to the delight of colleagues. In private, he wrote to her that “ a hopeless master can’t survive without his monkey queen.”

They married in a Las Vegas Chapel in 2005, a few years after their first daughter Lily was born. But with Li away at workshops much of the time, the relationship grew strained (Wong, 2012).Life has turned upside down for Lee in the past few months since her celebrity husband Li Yang, the magnate founder of Crazy English language training centers, knocked her to the floor, slamming her in the face in front of their three-year-old daughter. Pushed over the limit, she called police and posted pictures of her swollen forehead and bruised legs on Weibo (China’s equivalent to Twitter) (Wu, 2011).

In late August,2011, Lee began going to her micro blog to post photos of what she said was her bruised forehead and her bloodied ear. She accused Li of abusing her. In the media circus that ensued, following the allegations, Lee found, as a victim, she had no more advantage than her husband. On Sept. 10th, Li confessed that he had beaten his wife and apologized for his misdeeds to the public. He also declined to divorce Lee.

Lee filed for divorce from him, and the Beijing Chaoyang District People’s Court plans to hear the case on Dec 15,2011, Lee said “ I’ll show the said result to the public,” “Maybe I am now still kind of in love with Li Yang, but divorcing him is my best and the only choice..”(Cao, Cheng, 2011)

Meanwhile, in the media circus that ensued following the allegations Lee found, as a victim, she had no more advantage than her husband. In a TV interview, Li Yang

claimed his American wife and the children from their marriage were part of an experiment conducted for his career in English teaching and cross-cultural communication. He also argued that the controversy stemmed from Lee's misunderstandings of Chinese culture, which have led some to believe that he expected his wife to accept the violence and remain silent. In her Weibo, Lee said she could not bear her husband using the media spotlight as an opportunity for self-promotion, which she said hurt her even deeper than her physical injuries (Wu, 2011). Because different social cultures affect different family lives in different countries, it's necessary for us to further discuss Li Yang's domestic violence from an intercultural perspective, in this way, we'll quite clearly know differences between Chinese and American people towards the domestic violence.

3. DISCUSSION

The above case devolves not only about Li Yang's domestic violence but also in an attempt to bring attention to the wide range of Li Yang's domestic violence from an intercultural perspective. As Li Yang's spouse who has different cultural backgrounds, we'll discuss the case of Li Yang's domestic violence from intercultural perspective. These researches are general patterns and are not meant to indicate that all persons in the specific culture follow the general patten. Similarly, certain cultures are not listed because of the diversity within those that identify with an ethnicity. One of the most important advancements in our understanding of domestic violence is the acknowledgment that culture affects a woman's experience with violence and her or his perception of abuse.

To some extent, culture can strengthen a family, cultural influences may also create obstacles when working with parties in a domestic violence situation, understanding a person's culture and belief systems can be helpful in successfully working with that person..

Culture and traditions provide strength of families and individuals. The culture that we grow up in affects our beliefs, values, behaviors, and how we deal with problems. Our culture, ethnic group, religion, and economic background all contribute to forming a complicated set of influences, constraints, and resources (McCue, 2008). Therefore, the elements of domestic violence are universal, a person's cultural background influences how individuals deal with domestic violence.

3.1 Li Yang's Opinion toward the Domestic Violence

Li Yang grew up in a city in the remote western Xinjiang region, where he says he was a shy child afraid to answer the phone or leave the house.

Nowadays, in a TV interview, Li claimed his American wife and the children from their management were part of an experiment conducted for his career in English teaching and cross-cultural communication. He also argued that the controversy stemmed from Lee's misunderstandings of Chinese culture, which have led some to believe that he expected his wife to accept the violence and remain silent(Kim, 2011).After Li Yang's domestic violence happened, he said on TV that he had married Lee to research American child-raising techniques, turning the relationship into a

cross-cultural experiment. He painted her as the American woman who thinks family should come before career and country, who fails to see that family business in China is private and that a Chinese man occasionally hitting his wife should be forgiven. Thus, "I still think that things that happen at home, well, a family's shame should not be aired publicly," Li said on a talk show." I thought it could cause huge damage to me and my career. So I asked her to remove these photos. She refused (Wong, 2012).

In tradition Chinese culture, men historically ruled the family, with authority over women and girls. Women were supposed to obey their fathers when young, their husbands when married and their sons when widowed, according to advice attributed to the ancient sage Confucius. Those who broke family laws could be beaten, with no questions asked, communism brought new laws that gave women the right to work alongside men, and decades of economic growth have aerated dramatic shifts in Chinese society. But inequities persist, particularly in rural areas.

It's no doubt that culture has become part of a heated dialogue about the incident. Some of the Chinese men have said that while domestic violence is wrong, it comes from the immense pressure Chinese husbands face to excel in their careers and provide for their families. Others have lamented that it took a foreign woman's indignation to cast light on what is an open secret in China. Li Yang (Cao, 2011) confessed that he had beaten his wife and apologized for his misdeeds to the public. He also declined to divorce Lee.

3.2 Kim Lee's Opinion toward the Domestic Violence

Kim Lee is the wife of Li Yang and was born and grew up in the United States. From her childhood, Kim Lee is taught and encouraged to speak out minds, to think independently and critically, and to be open and assertive in their encounters with others (Wang,2008). This is particularly so in competitive situation. On the one hand, she has the individual ethnic which urges us to "get to the point and tell it as it is," and on the other the alternative ethic that is unaccustomed to assertion or disclosure and indeed values telling it as she would wish to hear it.

Meantime, Kim Lee, likes the other American woman, seems to have more self-confidence than women from China. However, the Americans, male or female, value their own freedom and happiness most.

Therefore, Kim Lee was hurt by her husband in the home. At one time, she had responded to the violence passively. Lee began going to her micro blog to post photos of what she said was her bruised forehead and her bloodied ear. She accused Li of abusing her. Later, Li Yang confessed that he had beaten his wife and apologized for his misdeeds to the public. Since Lee began writing her posts about the alleged abuse, blog readers have forwarded them more than 8,100 times and her micro blog now has 69,513fans (Cao, 2011).

Later, in her Weibo, Lee said she could not bear her husband using the media spotlight as an opportunity for self-promoting, which she said hurt her even deeper than her physical injuries. "I'm American and Yang is Chinese that is not the problem, the problem is violence," Lee said, "If I can help to change the concepts that domestic violence is common, acceptable, should not be disclosed, the fault of the wife, and

part of Chinese culture, then I feel both honored and obligated to do so.” Lee said in an email to the Beijing Fan Bao Culture Development Co. Ltd, a anti – domestic violence organization in Beijing.” Domestic violence is not culture. Domestic violence is a crime.” (Lee, 2011)

Lee’s action set an example of how women should deal with domestic violence. Lee hopes the public will let her settle her private affairs in peace.. “I’ll show the said result to the public.” She said, “Maybe I am now still kind of in love with Li Yang, but divorcing him is my best and the only choice.”

3.3 Typical Cultural Conflicts from Different Cultures between China and America

In Chinese culture, family lines are based on patriarchal family structures, and men are therefore endowed with a strong sense of importance and entitlement (Lee & Au, 1998). Because Chinese cultural values support male supremacy and dominance over woman, male violence against women in the form of physical abuses are often justified based on culturally acceptable reasons. Because family name and honor is paramount and because the individual well-being is held to be subordinate to family well-being, it is extremely difficult for many Chinese women or families to disclose the existence of abuse. Such cultural factors exacerbate the problems involved with intimate partner violence, creating a tenuous process in attempting to change such violence (Hanser,2001).

In China, domestic violence is traditionally regarded as a private family matter. ”Domestic violence is worldwide problem. Now, more than 80 countries have a separate law on this issue, but China is one of the few nations in Asia that does not have such a law” (Chen, 2011)

China has no yet implemented laws and regulations aimed at curbing violence inside the home. Although legislators are drafting a new policy in response to immense social demand, they have yet to reveal any specific date for implementation. In face of a legal vacuum,, victims of domestic violence can publicize their sufferings on Weibo, call relevant hotlines and turn to those they trust for help.” said Feng Yuan, Chairperson of the Board of Directors from Beijing Fan Bao Culture Development Co. Ltd.

“In the face of this dominant cultural norm, Kim Lee chose to break the silence. Kim’s courage to speak out a on this issue has set a positive example for many other domestic violence survivors who may be reluctant to disclose how they are suffering,” Julie Broussard, Country program Manager of UN Women China.

From the above comparative discussion of Li Yang’s domestic violence from an intercultural perspective, people can see different cultures can affect different peoples’ opinions about domestic violence. Maybe, in Chinese culture, domestic violence has been an accepted fact of life. Only in recent years has it begun to be viewed as a criminal problem, and in different societies, it is still culturally acceptable. The case of Li Yang’s domestic violence allows us to compare and contrast the ways in which domestic abuse is viewed and handled by different representative social and cultural background from China and America. We should think critically to determine which cultures have been the most successful in dealing with domestic abuse and which

prevailing techniques have been shared around the world to try to examine this very serious problem.

It is no doubt that domestic violence happens everywhere regardless of whether it's a intercultural marriage. Through intercultural examination of Li Yang's domestic violence, it will encourage us to recognize the problem as a global one, providing greater intercultural insight into the ways in which we can address it and find solutions to prevent it worldwide not only in China or in the United States of America.

4. CONCLUSION

Because domestic violence is a world wide issue. The United Nations recognizes the problem of domestic abuse to be primarily a problem where the woman is victim. The UN has officially condemned violence against women. The agency considers the fact that many countries in the world consider domestic violence to be a private matter a barrier to change. From the case of Li Yang's domestic violence, it's easy to know that some things still exist in Chinese culture and it is difficult to understand Lee's action to open her family violence for the public. In reality, all cultures including Chinese and American one, have no ways of giving people permission to be violent. In fact, there are very high rates of perpetration of violence by men against women in American culture, maybe less rates in Chinese culture. Furthermore, in all cultures there are values, practices and traditions that facilitate male dominance and oppression of women as well as values that are protective and support men's recognition of women's self – determination. Effective practice for batterer intervention programs involves understanding and using these culture elements to help men change (Mederos, 2012).

In addition, all cultures have elements – values and traditions – which are protective against the use of violence and which offenders can use to shape a non – abusive identity. Above all, culture is a source of healing and strength for people.

Therefore, domestic violence is not a family problem, but a illegal violent action. More work has to be done to control the epidemic of domestic violence. Government and community leaders' should spearhead a move to create a culture of openness and support to eliminate the stigma associated with domestic violence. And, it is necessary not only to enact, but also to enforce legislation to make all forms of violence against women, including marital rape, a crime. Laws should be followed up with plans for specific national cooperative action. In this way, the domestic violence will decrease day by day both in China and American, even if other countries.

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