

# Surviving Chineseness in Chinese Indonesian Wedding Celebration

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## Abstract

The long stay of the Chinese in the archipelago has resulted in the forming of hybrid cultures among the Chinese community or often called as *orang Tionghoa* in Indonesia today. The hybrid cultures have been a blend of traditional Chinese cultures and the local cultures. Apparently, in today's life we see that some Chinese tradition is still maintained even when it is gradually fading. This paper aims to describe our study on how Chinese Indonesian wedding celebration today still preserve some old Chinese traditional rituals and use several tokens which symbolize their Chineseness. The surviving Chineseness is discussed in the use of colours, the ornaments including the gifts for the celebration and in how the wedding rituals are performed. The data were collected from some real Chinese wedding celebrations and from the interviews we conducted with the brides and grooms. The study also shows that some traces of Chineseness can still be identified. They play a significant roles in how they negotiate their hybrid identity of being Chinese Indonesians.

**Keywords:** Chinese Indonesian, wedding, Chineseness, rituals, identity

## **Pengekalan Elemen Kecinaan dalam Perkahwinan Orang Tionghoa Indonesia**

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### **Abstrak**

Pertapakan orang Cina yang lama di nusantara telah menyumbang kepada kelahiran budaya kacukan dalam komuniti Cina atau yang lumrah dipanggil orang Tionghoa di Indonesia pada masa kini. Budaya kacukan ini merupakan pembauran budaya tradisional Cina dengan budaya tempatan. Nyata sekali, dalam kehidupan harian kita dapat lihat sesetengah budaya tradisional Cina masih diamalkan sungguhpun ia mendepani masalah kelunturan secara perlahan. Kertas penyelidikan ini bertujuan memerihalkan kajian kami tentang bagaimana orang Tionghoa Indonesia masa kini mengekalkan upacara tradisional Cina dan penggunaan sejumlah bahan untuk penampilan elemen-elemen kecinaan. Pengekalan elemen kecinaan ini dibincang melalui penggunaan warna, bahan hiasan yang merangkumi hadiah dalam majlis perkahwinan dan proses perjalanan upacara perkahwinan. Data-data dikutip dalam majlis perkahwinan yang sebenar dan melalui interviu-interviu dengan pasangan-pasangan pengantin. Hasil kajian menunjukkan sesetengah elemen kecinaan dapat dikenal pasti. Elemen-elemen kecinaan ini memainkan peranan yang signifikan dalam proses orang Tionghoa Indonesia merundingkan identiti kacukan mereka.

**Kata kunci:** orang Tionghoa Indonesia, perkahwinan, kecinaan, upacara, identiti

## 1 Introduction

Chinese diaspora who later on settles in Indonesia is considered to be the biggest Chinese diaspora in the world. After residing and intermingling with the local people for many centuries, Chinese people have shared and adopted the local cultures and their ways of life with the local people. Many of them have also got married with the local people. This intermarriage eventually produce offsprings who practice some hybrid language and cultures which are distinctive among the descendants of the Chinese community called as *Cina Peranakan* or *orang Tionghoa*. However, it is not very easy for Chinese community to entirely abandon their old tradition while practicing their hybrid cultures. Even, after many Chinese Indonesians feel more and more as parts of Indonesia, they still maintain some of their traditional habit and manners they inherit from their ancestors.

One of the traditional habits which people can still see nowadays is the way the Chinese Indonesians practice and celebrate their wedding. While wedding celebration is still regarded as an important event in many cultures in the world, people also see wedding as an important sacred ritual (Geller, 2001) which should be taken seriously in one's life. In Indonesia, wedding celebration is a social practice, which needs to conform to the existing norms, tradition, belief and cultures. However, as lives change and influences from other cultures are unavoidable, people have also adjusted their former habit to adapt to the contemporary life styles. This can often unintentionally sacrifice the old tradition, which is considered impractical or unimportant in order to accommodate more contemporary practice. The consumptive and commercialized commodity in the practice of wedding celebration could also lessen the sacredness of the ritual while adding to the glamour and festivities of the celebration.

The glamour of wedding celebration among Chinese Indonesian community can be seen from their consumptive expenditure they spend to celebrate their wedding. While in the US a wedding celebration may consume US\$ 31.000 to US\$ 76.000 or more in one single event with 100 to 200 invited guests (*The Huffington Post*, 13 Maret 2015), in Indonesia it could range from as low as 30 million rupiahs depending on the request of the couple on how festive they want their celebration to be.

Seeing how Chinese Indonesian community celebrate their wedding, we have seen many factors which could have played some roles in the ways the couples ritualized this important event. In fact, it is getting more obvious that Chinese Indonesians are no longer attached to the Chinese wedding rituals too rigidly. Some local tradition has also been adopted in the way they conduct their wedding event. Many changes seem to have been adjusted to the current condition, which has been oriented towards their hybrid cultures. Hence, we can see that such practice can be perceived not only as mere wedding celebration, but also a revelation of Chinese Indonesian orientation and identity. It can also be regarded as a way of surviving their Chineseness, which they still want to keep and cherish as their pride of being Chinese descends.

Several scholars like Otnes and Pleck (2003) and Martin (2003) suggest that

wedding rituals, which were formerly conducted as a traditional ritual, have now been taken over by using religious rituals and ethnic identity in conducting the wedding. Chinese Indonesians who formerly followed Confucius teaching but then converted to Christianity or Islam, would change their traditional rituals to adapt to their new belief. The couple would ask their pastor or priest to bless their marriage and be confirmed in the church, while the Muslim would do wedding ritual like other Muslims do. Hence, the roles of religion may have been an important factor in the changes of the wedding styles. Therefore, in this study we want to limit the description on how their Chineseness is maintained from several Chinese Indonesian wedding celebration and ritual conducted in two different beliefs, i.e. Christian Protestant and Buddhism around Surabaya. We believe that the different religious backgrounds of the wedding couples may influence how the couple make meaning in their perceived Chineseness when celebrating the wedding and practicing the rituals.

In Indonesia, there have not been many researches done to study the wedding rituals as social practice. Several studies can be traced in some videos on wedding rituals in different tradition and religious backgrounds. Shinta (2009) studies about wedding venues. Setiawan (2013) talks about people's trend in doing pre-wedding photos. Hamsin (2014) studies about inter-religious marriage from the perspective of Islamic law. Meanwhile, there have been none we can find on the study of wedding celebration and ritual, which is related to their social orientation and cultural identity. The lives of Chinese Indonesians have been one of the main research topic for Petra University. Therefore, this study may certainly be in need since Chinese Indonesian wedding as a cultural event may still show some bits and pieces of leftover Chinese tradition.

Considering the importance of Chinese wedding ritual and the changes we see in the life styles, which may have influenced Chinese traditional rituals in wedding celebration, we want to see how far Chinese Indonesian community who practice the ritual in their wedding still maintain their Chineseness as a part of their identity for being a Chinese descent. In order to answer the research problem, we want to concentrate in the use of colours for the wedding, the ornaments and gifts they use, and the rituals in conducting the wedding celebration.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

In examining Chineseness in Chinese Indonesian wedding celebration, we learned that in cross-cultural encounters, one culture may adopt and appropriate others' cultural practices (Delanty, 2009, p. 177-199). Cultural adoptions and appropriation lead to what Bhabha (2006) calls cultural hybridity, that is, the mingling or mixing of two cultures or more. There are many aspects of social life that show cultural hybridity, and one example of these aspects is wedding. Wedding can be a good example of cultural hybridity because in its rituals and ceremonies, local traditions and cultures are mixed with other modern and "foreign" cultural practices. Leeds-Hurwitz' study (2002) explains how globalization

has changed cultural practices in wedding rituals and ceremonies. An example of these changing cultural practices is how wedding ceremonies in Asia Pacific region are heavily influenced by western tradition (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). As a community living in the environment where various cultures meet, Chinese Indonesian community is not immune to cultural adoption and appropriation, which can be seen in their wedding culture. This cultural adoption and appropriation serve as an identity marker of being Chinese.

In this paper, we use Swidler's definition of culture for analyzing the wedding ceremony performed by Chinese Indonesians. Culture, according to Swidler, "consists of such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art form, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life" (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). Depending on their background, individuals perceive certain cultural practices differently and ascribe different meanings to those practices. As a symbolic vehicle meaning, wedding produces cultural expectation and significance, which vary from one to another. Boden's study (2003), for example, shows that commercialization and consumption are pervasive in the contemporary weddings in Britain. Wedding industry and pop culture turn wedding "into a fantasy-laden cultural event that is dependent upon consumption" (2003, p. 74). Adrian's book (2003) discusses that wedding ceremonies tend to manipulate reality with the production of its cultural meanings.

Being a part of culture, wedding is considered as a very important cultural rite (Geller, 2001). Otnes and Pleck (2003, p. 1) write that wedding has become pervasive in our cultural landscape, because of their significance in people's lives. This occurs because wedding is located at the juncture of at least two influential social institutions, namely, family and religion. That is why people do not mind spending a lot of time, energy, and money in creating an elaborate affair that produces a perfect wedding. Thus, a wedding "becomes a carefully negotiated performance ... given meaning by the culture" (Boden, 2003, p. 70). Viewed from this context, we argue that the bride and the groom negotiate the wedding choices with each other, as well as with other relevant parties, such as parents and influential family members and relatives, to create a ceremony which is meaningful not only for them, but for family and relatives as well. In other words, they negotiate meanings in the wedding ceremony. In this negotiation, culture influences how wedding ceremony is conducted because wedding ceremony serves as "a display of social relations and cultural desires" (Ma, 2012, p. 114). Thus, in analyzing Chinese Indonesian wedding, we approach wedding as a cultural event and focus on the internal dynamics of culture in wedding rituals and ceremony (Vassos, 1996, p. 1). The dynamics of culture yields cultural hybridity as a result of the changes in wedding celebration and the ways wedding is celebrated, due to the encounters with different cultures and traditions. Tradition still plays a role in the wedding rituals and ceremony. Yet, the wedding celebrations connects the tradition with new cultural elements. This resulted in a cultural hybridity, and the cultural hybridity in wedding involve the production of new cultural forms, which is often linked to other aspects such as identity.

### 3 Methods

This research basically used qualitative approach. Several recorded wedding celebration both in videos and photos were studied as the starting point. Writings on Chinese wedding rituals in the past were also used as a comparison to the contemporary practice. Since in Indonesia a marriage is considered legal only after a religious related confirmation has been held, religious institutions like churches, temples or mosques can be used to find out any existing wedding rituals by Chinese Indonesian couples have been or will be conducted. Besides enquiring from those religious institutions, we also ask some friends if there are any wedding events they know. Indonesia acknowledges six religions whose wedding ceremonies conducted to their congregations are considered legal and therefore will be acknowledged by the government. For this study, we recorded and studied wedding celebration and rituals from two different religious backgrounds, i.e. Christian Protestant and Buddhist.

In order to decide whether the couples can be included to be our participants, we have several criterias to check: 1) both the bride and the groom should be of Chinese descents and born and have lived in Indonesia. 2) both of them come from the same religious backgrounds, but not necessarily from the same denomination. Such as the ones from Christian Protestant. 3) we prefer couples whose wedding we study are from their first marriage, since some additional ritual may be added for couples who get married for the second time with different partner. 4) the couples agree to be interviewed concerning their ways of celebrating their marriage and to be enquired concerning their knowledge about the wedding rituals in relation to their being Chinese. For this purpose, there were two couples, one Christian couple and one Buddhist couple whom we interviewed.

An in-depth interview was conducted with the couples after their wedding on their preferred time. Before the interview, we have also studied from the videos and wedding album they had, so we got some ideas on what happened and what to ask to the couples. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and later on analyzed for the report. The interviews paid attention on how several signs were meant to be included in the wedding rituals. We also focus on how the meanings have anything to do with their Chinese identity and the importance of their Chineseness is shown through the use of colours, ornaments/gifts and rituals.

### 4 Findings and Discussion

There are three things related to Chineseness we found quite conspicuous from the interviews and from our observation conducted on the wedding day of our informants. We also study the videos and pictures which they gladly shared with us. These findings were analysed and discussed into these three main points. First is the dominant colours we see being used in the venue where the wedding rituals were conducted, as well as on the outfits worn by the couple. Second, we want to discuss some Chinese ornaments and gifts used especially for the Chinese Indonesian wedding. Thirdly is the rituals, which in some ways

were still influenced by the family's knowledge about Chinese tradition. In the following discussion Christopher and Joanne (not their real names) are the Christian couple, while Leonard and Yvonne (not their real names) are the Buddhist couple.

### **(1) Chinese colours**

In Chinese culture, wedding is often called as “red affairs” or hongshi (红事) in Chinese (Scott, 2007, p. 186). People use this term to refer to wedding because red is associated with happy and joyous occasions. That is why red is the dominant colour in a traditional Chinese wedding ritual and ceremony. In the past, red was not only found in the decoration of the wedding venue, but also used in other things, such as wedding invitation. However, in its development, Western wedding culture, especially the American wedding form, that is, white wedding, permeates the cultural practices of Chinese Indonesian community. A white wedding is “a spectacle featuring a bride in a formal white wedding gown, combined with some combination of attendants and witnesses, religious ceremony, wedding reception, and honeymoon” (Ingraham, 2005, p. 3). Consequently, white become the predominant colour displayed in the wedding ceremonies (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002, p. 59). This cultural form influences Chinese Indonesian wedding cultural practices. The most visible impact of this influence is that the domination of red diminishes in their contemporary weddings. Nevertheless, for Chinese Indonesians, wedding is located at a cultural nexus, where tradition still plays a significant role in the rituals and ceremony on one hand, and new cultural practices as a result of the influence of modernity change those rituals and ceremony on the other hand. This produces a hybrid of wedding cultural practice, that is, a new form of wedding culture, as reflected in the colours used in wedding ceremony. The engagement and the wedding of a couple, Christopher and Joanne, who are our informants showed this hybrid culture.

When we talked about the pictures of their engagement, which was dominated by the red colour, Joanne told us that they chose this colour intentionally. She said, *‘Inisiatif kita sendiri. “Wes, merah aja seperti biasa.” Soale mungkin kan Chinese pake warna merah umumnya. Tapi sekarang yang modern udah engga sih.’* [Well, as usual, we decided to use red. The Chinese generally use red. But now, those who are modern do not use it anymore ..... [The dominant colour in the engagement party] is not necessarily red, but we followed the tradition.”] She therefore followed what was suggested.

Because in Chinese culture happy and joyous events, such as weddings and engagements, are always linked to red, they decided to choose that colour as the theme colour of their engagement. Christopher wore red shirt, and Joanne wore a dress with the same colour. The curtain in the restaurant where the engagement was held was red. Red was also the dominant colour in the engagement gifts – Chinese traditional snacks were in red boxes, and baskets of fruits were decorated with red. These gifts were put on the table covered with red tablecloth. Red paper bearing Chinese character “double happiness” were pasted on those gifts. Christopher said that the restaurant arranged everything, including the engagement gifts because his family did not want to be bothered with preparing everything, which, in his mind was quite a hassle. Besides that, he admitted

that because of their limited knowledge on Chinese engagement practices, the professional photographer he hired for documenting their engagement, who was knowledgeable on Chinese engagement and wedding practices, advised him on the ceremony.

Christopher- Joanne's engagement looked very Chinese, but that was not the case with their wedding. In their wedding ceremony, Christopher wore a white shirt and black suit and Joanne wore a traditional western white bridal gown. The only red colour was found in the bowl and chopsticks used for consuming thin noodle and egg, the box of the betrothal jewelry, the cover of the bridal bed. No Chinese cultural influences were seen in the solemnization of their wedding vow in the church. The decoration looked western. No red colour was seen. After the religious ceremony was over, they went out of the church and released pigeons and balloons to the air. When we commented that it was western tradition, laughingly Joanne said yes and agreed that they followed the wedding trends in Indonesia. Christopher and Joanne intentionally chose the western style because prior to their wedding party, they went to several wedding exhibitions to get some ideas for what their wedding should look like. And the result was a wedding, which in Christopher's mind, was based on the trend at that time.

Because of following the trend, in their wedding banquet, white was the dominant colour. According to Joanne, she preferred white. The atmosphere in the banquet was quite western. The only Chinese cultural element was a glass structure of Chinese character "double happiness," an icon of Chinese wedding, which was filled with red wine later on. Red color was conspicuously absent, except the Chinese character double happiness and the tablecloth for the dining table for guests. However, the arrangement of the dining table for the couple and their family members looked western. (See figure 1 below)







Christopher and Joanne were of Chinese descents, but they neither know Chinese cultural practices and traditions, nor speak Chinese. However, by telling us that they followed the tradition, implicitly Joanne and Christopher wanted their betrothal and wedding ceremonies to look Chinese. The Chinese practices in their betrothal ceremony, which was a private affairs because only family members and close relatives attended it, were symbolic. Describing what they did in their betrothal, they admitted that the event organizer and vendor they hired had prepared everything, including the betrothal gifts. They just followed the script prepared, so what they did was like a symbol of their Chinese identity.

Similar pattern can also be seen in the betrothal of Yvonne and Leonard, who practice Chinese Buddhism. Talking about betrothal ceremony, they explained that the ceremony was simple and relax, because both families knew one another. Leonard and Yvonne have known each other for quite a long time, although Leonard started courting her one year before the betrothal. In Yvonne's words, the betrothal "was just a formality." Nevertheless, in the ceremony, when Leonard and his mother (Leonard's father already passed away) went to Yvonne's house to ask for her hand, they also brought customary gifts in red boxes and trays, decorated with Chinese characters "double happiness" in gold. They did this because, in Leonard's opinion, it was their culture, and they wanted to preserve it. That is, why, Leonard wore red shirt and Yvonne wore red qipao, a tight-fitting Chinese gown.

In their wedding ceremony, Yvonne wore traditional white wedding gown, a traditional “white wedding” style. She said that because she wore a western style wedding gown, she chose a minimalist theme as the decoration in her wedding banquet, where friends and relatives were invited. She did not choose red as the colour theme of the banquet. In her opinion, red did not fit with the ambience. However, the colour red and other Chinese wedding ornaments were very visible in the bridal chamber and the place where wedding rituals, such as the groom meeting the bride, kowtowing their parents, paying respects to their elders, and eating noodle and egg. “Happiness banner” (a banner made of red cloth symbolizing marriage) were hanged on the frame top of the door. Chinese character “double happiness,” in red and gold decorated the walls.

The betrothal and wedding ceremonies of the couples above illustrate the changes in Chinese Indonesian wedding practices. Amidst the global flows of cultures, as seen through the case studies of Chinese Indonesians Christian and Buddhist couples, still maintain their cultural practices, yet at the same time, to a certain extent, they break with them. The use of the red colour points out this idea. By saying that they used red colour in their engagement and wedding ceremonies because they were Chinese, implicitly they paid homage to their Chinese cultural roots. The red colour serves as a “symbolic vehicle of meanings” for their Chinese cultural heritage (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). As Chinese, they ascribe joy, good luck, and happiness to the red colour, in line with Chinese tradition. However, the red colour is quite problematic in the context of “white wedding,” a cultural wedding form that Chinese Indonesians nowadays adopt. In the white wedding, the white colour is the predominant colour in the ceremonies because of its western cultural association to purity and innocence. Whereas, in Chinese culture, white is the colour of funerals (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002, p. 78). Being at this juncture, they feel the need to negotiate their wedding ceremonies. This negotiation resulted in a hybrid wedding culture. They want to follow the trend so as not to be considered as old-fashioned. This can be seen in the western style of white weddings they adopt. Yet at the same time, they also want to preserve their cultural heritage, that is, performing their Chineseness in their wedding ceremonies. This produces the practices of employing red colour in their ceremonies because red is associated with Chinese.

To sum up, the cross-cultural encounters that Chinese Indonesians face, namely, the encounter between their ethnic culture and that of the West, create a sort of cultural hybridity in Chinese Indonesian culture. On one hand, they adopt and appropriate western cultural influence, and on the other hand, they want to practice their ethnic culture. This hybridity occurs as a result of their cultural negotiation between these two cultures. A good example of this hybridity is Chinese wedding culture. Since they cannot avoid the influence of western culture, they modify their wedding culture so that it is in line with the advancements of the society. Thus, basically their wedding culture is heavily influenced by the notion of “white wedding.” However, they want to connect themselves with their ethnic tradition, by traditionalizing their wedding culture. One way of doing it is employing red colour, which is culturally Chinese because in Chinese culture red is the wedding colour. In so doing, through the use of red colour, they perform their Chineseness.

## (2) Chinese ornaments and gifts

One Chinese ornament, which can be seen in almost all Chinese wedding ceremonies is the Chinese character *shuangxi*, which is often written in red or golden colour and pasted on the wall, the wedding invitation card, gift envelopes and any other decorations in the wedding.



This character is never been used in a spoken nor written Chinese words, but many Chinese Indonesians would usually refer to it as in hanzi: 双喜; and in pinyin: Shuāngxǐ. The character means double joy or double happiness. People believe this character is suitable in describing the event celebrated by the couple on the wedding day.

The history notes how the character was first invented. However, the Christian couple (Christopher and Joanne) we interviewed never heard about the story. The character was used to decorate the wedding venue was more a matter of habit. For them, it is enough to know that this is a Chinese character and it symbolized the happiness they share together in the marriage. Thus it can be found only in Chinese Indonesian weddings, not the weddings of other ethnic groups in Indonesia. However, the Buddhist couple (Leonard and Yvonne) we interviewed could tell us some meaning they said they got it from their mother. Hence, the Buddhist couple were more aware of their Chinese identity and were eager to find out the meaning of the Chinese ornament they used. What our informants said about the Chinese character “double happiness” shows that they used it in their weddings because that was what Chinese Indonesians usually did. However, behind the habitual use of this character, which serves as a wish for the happiness for the couple, it also serves as “a marker of Chinese Identity” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002, p. 162). The Buddhist couple also mentioned the use of Chinese paper lanterns and red candles to decorate the room. However, they admitted that the last two ornaments were not so often used anymore due to some practical reason. Perhaps lanterns and candles might look quite oldish and are usually used only in Chinese temples while calligraphy is more commonly seen in some Chinese houses.

Besides the character *Shuāngxǐ*, which is basically very Chinese, other things which we found to contain meanings for the Chinese are the gifts the groom family usually gives to the bride-to-be. In the Chinese custom, this is usually done in the betrothal event. Very often this is conducted six months to one year before the wedding. However, some others may do it just a few weeks before the wedding day. On this betrothal event, the groom brings some gifts to the bride. Each of the gifts symbolizes some deep meaning concerning their hope for the prosperous and happy future of the couple married life. Since they contain good meanings, the couples we interviewed admitted that even though they

did not really know a lot about the Chinese tradition, it was necessary for them to follow the Chinese symbols of this gift giving because they are for their happiness.

There have been at least five gifts commonly used in the Chinese way of gift giving given by the groom-to-be family to the bride-to-be. They are: a sum of money, jewelry, fruits, sweets, and tea. Others also mention noodles and eggs. Both Chinese couples we interviewed admitted that the custom is not very strict nowadays, they just followed whatever their parents suggested or they chose from the list offered by the event organizer. Basically they chose the gifts by considering the budget they allocated for the gifts instead of the deep meanings contained in the gifts. For the gift of money for instance, both couples did not choose. 'It is too complicated,' one pair of the Christian couple said. One source (See, 2015) noted that the money the groom gives for the betrothal is called *lishi* money or lucky money. In Indonesian, some people call it *uang susu* [milk money]. This money should be given in an amount that contains the number 9 for good fortune according to Chinese belief. According to Christopher, it was too complicated to prepare a sum of money which contained the number. He was probably right since Indonesian money which ends in 9 or 99 or 999 was almost impossible to be provided in the exact amount.

What both couples still did was the gift of jewelry and fruits. Christopher said that he did it for a matter of habit and proprietary. He chose a necklace with a pendant in the form of *Shuāngxǐ*. The Buddhist couple, Leonard and Yvonne, always maintained that they would find out the meanings of the tradition first. The gold necklace is usually put it on the bride by the mother of the groom. It symbolizes the commitment of the groom family in taking her to be his bride. There is also a sense of pride for the groom who can give something precious for the betrothal. Meanwhile, fruits and sweets are gifts which are most often presented in any betrothal ceremony. The Buddhist couple explained that yellow oranges symbolize prosperity. Apples usually produce different tastes like sweet and sour. The kinds of taste people find in real life like happiness and sadness. Meanwhile the ginger candies give a hot taste symbolizes the problems the couple will encounter in life. All these gifts have been important to remind them on the various kinds of life experiences they will have in their marriage life. The Buddhist couple said that they felt sorry that many young Chinese couples nowadays did not even try to find out the deep meaning of their tradition. They said that it is important for them to find out about the meanings of the things they give and receive.

### (3) Chinese rituals

For the Chinese-Indonesian, weddings are complicated affairs. It is a shared knowledge that before the wedding, there are at least two other events that the to be bride and groom need to go through. The Chinese words for the three events are *dìngqīn* (定亲) the betrothal, then the engagement *dìnghūn* (订婚) and *jiéhūn* (结婚) meaning to marry, but commonly used by the Chinese-Indonesian to refer to the wedding event. In English, the two words betrothal and engagement are synonymous, but in Chinese, they refer to two separate events. In Indonesian, the betrothal or *tingjing* (Indonesian version of the *pin yin*) is *lamaran*, an event when the two families meet to decide on a date for the wedding.

The groom's family will bring fruits and delicacies to be given to the bride's family, and the climax is when the groom's mother put a gold necklace around the bride's neck to formalize the betrothal.

The engagement, commonly referred to as *tunangan* in Indonesian is done around one month to a week before the wedding. There are various interpretations on what engagement means to the Chinese-Indonesian. Some interpret engagement as *sangjit* (Tionghoa.Info) when the groom's family bring beautifully decorated trays filled with the bride's daily needs, fruits, alcoholic drinks and delicacies, and the bride's family will give back half of the content of the trays and fill them with the groom's daily needs. Other interprets engagement as *tunangan* or *tukar cincin*, an event held by the bride's family, might be because the bride's and the groom's families live in different cities or the bride's family is of prominent background and wants to hold a lavish party for their friends and relatives. It is understood that it is the bride's family pays for the engagement and the groom's family pays for the wedding, thus the bride's family will receive a limited "quota" of the invitations to the weddings. In other cases, when the bride and the groom pay for their own wedding, they would choose to have the wedding only. Many couples do their weddings without the engagement to make things simple and affordable.

The two Chinese couples that we have interviewed Christopher and Joanne, and Yvonne and Leonard went through the betrothal and the wedding without the engagement. As these two young couples paid for their own weddings, they had simple weddings in regard of most Chinese-Indonesian weddings, because they needed to consider the budget that they spent. Even though their weddings were kept simple, they deem it important to go through the complicated affairs of the wedding rituals.

Christopher acknowledged that he did not understand the meanings behind the rituals because his family is *qiao sheng* a term referring to Chinese-Indonesians who adopt the Indonesian culture and do not practice the Chinese tradition. He referred to Joanne's family as *totok*, Chinese-Indonesians who practice the Chinese traditions. It is interesting to note that Christopher offered the facts that he and Joanne had different backgrounds to explain his ignorance of the Chinese tradition and he also did not show any interest to understand the meanings of the rituals. On the other hand, Joanne who was positioned as *totok* felt obligated to find the meanings of the rituals by browsing the internet. She was the one who mentioned that *tingjing* was *lamaran*, a betrothal, not an engagement, the term used by Christopher to refer to the event. During the interview, he consistently used the term engagement although Joanne had pointed out the difference. Despite their different backgrounds and interest in the meanings of the Chinese wedding rituals, they opted to do the wedding rituals. Christopher mentioned that they skipped several rituals for practical reason and Joanne felt that she was willing to do the rituals because most people did the same things "*Tapi rasanya semuanya gitu ya. Makanya ini dipake ya. Kebanyakan orang gitu soalnya.*" If Christopher chose practicality, then Joanne sought conformity. Bell (2009) mentions that rituals can be a form of social control as symbols that promote social solidarity. Joanne's answer can be interpreted as her acknowledgement that she is Chinese

Indonesian, therefore she has to participate in the Chinese wedding rituals.

Yet this identification as a Chinese seems to be negated when they were asked why they used English instead of Chinese language for their invitation, Christopher again mentioned practicality and Joanne mentioned that they were modern people, therefore they used English for their invitation. Her reference of being modern might be related to the fact that she and Christopher are Christians. Hoon mentions that “Christianity was commonly associated with modernity in post-colonial Indonesia due to its legacy of being a “Dutch” religion, which represented ties with the modern, global world” (Hoon, 2013, p. 167). As she is a Christian, thus modern, therefore the use of English for the invitation is the logical choice. Implied in her answer is how she regarded using the Chinese or Indonesian as not modern, or old fashioned or traditional. We found that Christopher and Joanne expressed their own meanings of Chineseness, meanings that were created out of the hybrid culture of modern and traditional, the West and the East.

Yvonne and Leonard who are Buddhist did the Chinese wedding rituals to the best of their knowledge because they believed that the meanings of each ritual was important for the success of their marriage life. If Christopher several time mentioned how he skipped most of the rituals that he thought too complicated or took too much time, Leonard mentioned that he abode all the rituals that he knew of and never tried to skip any of them. He explained the meanings of each ritual and he heartily believed that he and Yvonne needed to do the rituals to guarantee them a good marriage. Before the wedding, they sought the advice of their elders, the blessings of their ancestors and the approval of the Javanese guardian spirits so that the day of their wedding would be sunny and everything went well. Their belief in involving the elders, the ancestors and the guardian spirits, made their wedding rituals very complicated, but they paid no heed to it.

The wedding rituals done by Christopher and Joanne, and Yvonne and Leonard were very similar, yet they gave different meanings to the rituals. The two couples did rituals that Bell defines as symbolic action and as symbols they can be “interpreted . . . in very dissimilar ways” (Bell, 2009, p. 183). This different attitudes might be caused by their different beliefs. Christopher and Joanne believed that the sanctity of their marriage lay in the blessing of the church. They considered the rituals just as a custom that most Chinese-Indonesians did for their weddings. Skipping some of the rituals, at a first glance, can be regarded as practical for Christopher, but this action also says that he does not consider the rituals to be important to guarantee a successful marriage life. It is the blessing of the church that is considered to be the most determinant aspect. Frederiks as quoted in Hoon (2013, p. 171) states that “many non-Western Christians adopt a “survival strategy by living in two worlds at the same time: The Western world of the church, the school etc. and the world of their own culture at home.” This statement explains how Christopher and Joanne separate the rituals from the church. The rituals have to be done as an acknowledgement that they are of Chinese descent, but when they received the blessing of the church, the traces of Chineseness are replaced with the “modern” Western rituals. One example of the ritual is the tea ceremony for the parents of the bride and groom which was done at home

(in the hotel in this case) outside the church.

Whereas for Yvonne and Leonard, the tea ceremony was done in the temple as a part of the rituals of the blessing. Their Chineseness is more pronounced by the temple that practice and preserve the Chinese traditional rituals, including the decorations and the dominant colours of red and gold. The home and the temple are integrated as one unit that defines their Chineseness. In a sense, it is the temple that has a big role in preserving the Chinese tradition and might be the party that reminds the couple the necessity of doing certain traditional Chinese rituals in their wedding day. Yvonne and Leonard defined themselves as Buddhist *tridarma*. *Tridarma* is an Indonesian term for

“*san jiao*” “(Three Teachings) [that] encompass Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism . . . has no clearly demarcated doctrinal boundary or membership restriction . . . as multiple deities can be worshipped in one temple . . . traditional rituals and cultural symbols are essential to the definition of Chineseness. As an organized religion with clear institutional structure, doctrines and membership requirements, Christianity not only differs from Chinese belief in form, but also in substance (Hoon, 2013, p. 162-163).

Because of their religion, this couple actually had no choice but to embrace the rituals, as it is a part of who they are. Even though Yvonne and Leonard’s wedding rituals were heavily laden with Chinese symbols, yet, they also inculturated their religion with the Indonesian culture and created a hybrid culture. They decided on the wedding date based on their birth dates according to the Javanese calendar, the Chinese calendar and the Chinese zodiac. The success of the mixture of the Indonesian and Chinese practice was proven when their wedding day was sunny despite it was on October, a rainy season in Indonesia. Another form of hybridity is obvious when they consulted the Javanese guardian spirits alongside praying to their ancestors for blessings. The difference in the beliefs or religions of the two couples explains the different meanings they put in their wedding rituals. Regardless whether or not they understood the meanings behind the rituals. It is interesting to observe that they felt to be “most Chinese” when they were going through a transition from one phase of life to another, from being single to being married. The rituals have become the rite of passage that marks their life transition.

## 5 Conclusion

In the weddings rituals of these two couples, one Christian and one Buddhist, we can witness a byplay of the traces of Chineseness as defined by their religions. The relation of religion and culture is explained by Hoon that “[t]he course of deculturation, acculturation, or inculturation that occurs when religion meets culture is not an end in itself but reflects an ongoing process of negotiation” (Hoon, p. 160). Weddings can become an arena where the Indonesian, the Javanese, the Chinese and the Western aspects and values are being negotiated to suit the beliefs of the doers. The doers can pick up and discard their identity as Chinese when and where they need it and it is in weddings that the identity as a Chinese is reaffirmed. They might feel un-Chinese in the course of their daily life and

activities, but in their weddings, they are forced to face and display their Chineseness.

The display of the Chineseness is represented in the use of colours, ornaments, gifts and rituals in weddings. Each aspect is given meanings or interpreted in different ways by the two couples related to their beliefs. Colours, ornaments, gifts and rituals are used as a display to inform themselves and others of their identity as Chinese, but at the same time the colours, ornaments and rituals are used as separators to mark that they are Chinese Indonesian. The meetings of Indonesian culture, Chinese culture and religion is made more intricately when the Western culture brought by the church and education. When all of these aspects exist alongside, a hybrid culture is inevitable - the culture of the Chinese Indonesian that would permeate all aspects of life. A Chinese Indonesian wedding is a place rich with the practice of the hybrid cultures.

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