

Western Influence in Contemporary Chinese Indonesian Weddings

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ABSTRACT

In every culture, there is one important tradition: marriage. Marriage is important for Chinese Indonesians as it is considered to be a rite of passage. Due to globalization, many young Chinese Indonesians have little knowledge about Chinese traditions and tend to adopt Western wedding traditions as something more modern. Hence, Chinese Indonesian find new ways to convey their cultural identity as both Chinese and modern by using Chinese and Western wedding traditions. This article aims to identify the elements of Western culture that are commonly used in Chinese Indonesian weddings and the reasons they choose to use those elements. Western cultural elements commonly used in Chinese-Indonesian weddings can be seen in the wedding rituals, attire, and decorations. This article suggests that Chinese Indonesians who use Western and Chinese wedding traditions create a new cultural identity as modern Chinese Indonesian. A hybrid culture emerges to form a contemporary or modern Chinese Indonesian wedding.

Keywords: Wedding; cultural identity; Chinese Indonesian; Western cultural elements

INTRODUCTION

British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor defined culture as "a complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capability or habit acquired by human beings as members of society." (Danesi, 2004, p.35) Culture is a repetitive human behavior that needs the involvement of other people and is then shared and learned by its community. Culture is something that is shared and learned, it will not stop at one generation; it will be passed down from generation to generation. Each culture has different traditions, but there is one tradition that exists in every culture, and that is weddings. A wedding is considered important because it is where two families celebrate their union. But not only the family, but the couple also celebrates the new family that both are going to have. Other than a celebration, a wedding is also a symbol of commitment that the couple will stay loyal to each other. According to Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (2002), "weddings are one of a small number of rites of passage." (p.8) Therefore, a wedding is very important because it has a lot to say about life. People would spend much time, energy, and money celebrating weddings.

Couples who want to get married need to understand how to hold a proper wedding ceremony by using signs and symbols from aspects of their wedding culture because a wedding is an important ceremony. Chandler, D. (2017) stated that "a sign is traditionally defined as something that stands for something else" (p. 2). So basically, signs, symbols, and other aspects that will be used at weddings have meanings that are important for the families, the couple, and their community. The aspects that the couple will use at their wedding are something that has been passed down from generation to generation but can also be new aspects that they adopt.

Just like people in other cultures, the Chinese who live in Indonesia also consider weddings as important events. The Chinese Indonesian would use Chinese cultural elements in their weddings to assert their Chinese identity. According to Limantara, C., F. (2020), "Chinese people believe that wedding tradition is the most important tradition." (p. 212) There are a lot of meanings that come from the different aspects of Chinese weddings. The traditional Chinese wedding is a complex ritual, and sometimes it takes months to prepare. The couple

has to go through some rituals, wear certain attire, and use certain decorations that are full of meaning and considered important for the couple's marriage.

However, the aspect of a Chinese wedding is not the only thing that couples need to consider, especially in Indonesia. For Chinese people that live in Indonesia or what they usually call Chinese Indonesian, religion also becomes a major factor in how their weddings should be held.

Religious wedding ceremonies are important in Indonesia because "in Indonesia, a wedding celebration is a social practice, which needs to conform to the existing norms, traditions, beliefs, and cultures." (Kuntjara et al., 2018, p. 3) So, as one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia, Chinese Indonesians need to consider the religious aspects of planning their wedding. Many Chinese Indonesians are Christians. According to Hoon (2013), the history of Chinese Christianity can be traced back to "the founding of the Bond Kristen Tionghoa or BKT in 1926," (p.166) which proves that Christianity has been part of Chinese Indonesian for a long time. Therefore, Chinese Indonesian also adopt the Christian wedding tradition when they get married. Christian wedding traditions are heavily influenced by the Western wedding tradition. Cheng (2021) stated that "it is widely believed among Westerners that a marriage can be formalized in a church setting." (p.136) It means that the default wedding for Westerners is always related to church settings. For Chinese Indonesian who are Christians, it is common to adopt the Western cultural elements found in weddings. The Western influence in Chinese Indonesian weddings does not come only through religion but also through popular culture. The meaning of popular culture according to O'Brien & Szeman (2017) are "products, texts, practices, and so on that are enjoyed by lots and lots of people" (p.2). Many young Chinese Indonesian enjoy popular culture such as films, social media, magazines et cetera, and this influences their image of how a proper wedding should be held.

Even though there are different perspectives in how the Western culture and the Chinese culture give meanings to weddings, the differences can easily coexist in the Chinese Indonesian weddings. Chinese Indonesians believe that weddings are family affairs, whereas Western tradition puts the harmony between a man and a woman who are united as husband and wife as the most important event. The different perspectives can be seen in the rituals, attire and decorations used in weddings. In this contemporary setting, the Chinese Indonesians usually will adopt both the Chinese as well as the Western cultural elements in their weddings found in the wedding rituals, attire, and decorations.

I use the concept of wedding as text from Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz to analyze the Western cultural elements that are commonly used in Chinese Indonesian weddings and the reasons those elements are used. The concept of wedding as text is basically considered wedding as, "a particular type of behavior available for, and worthy of analysis, and that we acknowledge the significance of placing that text into context before beginning analysis." (p.24) meaning that weddings can be read as a text and to understand the text, it must be put in context. In a wedding, we want to show our identity that is related to our racial, ethnic, national, religious, or class background. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz defines that

[i]dentity can be basically defined as a statement of who you are, most often here in terms of racial, ethnic, national, religious, or class background. It involves a tension between public (what occurs in front of others) and private (what occurs when there is no witness), for private statements can vacillate in a way that public ones cannot (p. 28).

We use rituals as a way of telling ourselves stories about our identities (who we are), and our communities (the groups within which we find ourselves), and through the process of telling the story of identity and community, we make it real, we give it meaning. (p. 29) This

might involve the separation of the private from the public. The private will involve closest family members who share the meanings of the rituals, whereas the public is how we want to show our identity in front of the others. It is at a wedding that a story can be told, and rituals given meanings.

According to Wendy , there are at least three things that can influence how a couple should plan for their wedding:

First, the voices of tradition: parents, extended family members, and friends who have attended previous weddings and know what appropriate behavior all tell the bride and groom is. Their message is: “that is just how it is done!” expecting that every new wedding will, in all significant ways, mirror past weddings, this is where ethnic, racial, national, and family identities predominate. Second, images from popular culture convey mainstream assumptions. Having seen weddings portrayed in films, magazines, newspapers, it can be difficult for participants to not follow the expected norms. The message in these forms is: “Do what everyone else does!” This is where mainstream American influences fit. Third, there are wedding specialists with the job of planning weddings, who expect to be believed when they say “we know how to do it!” (p. 133)

The quotation above means that at every wedding there will always be involvement from parents and friends on how a proper wedding should be held. Second, mainstream culture also influences the couple's wedding because it is what people expect of how the wedding is nowadays. Third, is the influence of wedding organizers. A lot of weddings nowadays use wedding organizers to prepare and tell the bride and groom what they should do on their wedding day and according to Clarence Finley K. (2019) wedding organizers, “have to create innovations to get customers attention.” It means that wedding organizers will most likely try to innovate or change the rituals and tradition for the couple to get their attention so that they can have a fun and memorable wedding.

To collect the data, I interviewed four informants, two young Chinese Indonesian who just got married namely Denny and Indra to find if they also adopted Western cultural elements in their weddings and their reasons in adopting those elements. I also interviewed Yosua and Charles who organized Chinese-Indonesian weddings. As mentioned by Leeds-Hurwitz (2002) and Clarence Finley K. (2019) that wedding organizers have important roles in how a wedding is conducted.

ANALYSYS

The “white wedding” is the Western wedding tradition that is commonly used in Chinese Indonesian weddings. A white wedding is part of the Western cultural elements related to how they hold their weddings at church. The church decorations and the gown used by the bride are usually white thus it is called the "white wedding," as a symbol of purity and innocence. The Chinese Indonesian adopt the white wedding tradition regardless of their religions. The use of Western cultural elements found in rituals, attire and decorations are common in Chinese Indonesian weddings.

Wedding Rituals

The Western wedding traditions commonly found in the Chinese Indonesian wedding rituals are the bridesmaids and the groomsmen, the wedding kiss, the bouquet throwing and the wedding toast which are done in the public sphere. It is very popular and common to have bridesmaids and groomsmen. The bridesmaids and the groomsmen’s job is to be always at the

couple's side during the wedding procession. They are usually the close friends of the bride and the groom who will accompany the bride and groom starting from the rituals in the church. First is to get the blessings from the pastor or priest at church. The couples then need to state their vows, which represent their commitment to be husband and wife for the rest of their lives. After that comes the wedding kiss, another Western wedding ritual that is common in Chinese Indonesian weddings. "Now that you mention it, I do not know where those rituals come from, maybe it can be a Western ritual like bouquet throwing and wedding kiss because I do not think we have that in the original Chinese tradition," Denny (one of the informants) stated. The wedding kiss has been part of the Chinese Indonesian wedding tradition for so long that a lot of Chinese Indonesian couples do not realize that the ritual comes from the West. In most cases, Chinese Indonesians who follow the white wedding tradition also have a bouquet throwing, because it is also part of the Western wedding tradition where they believe that whoever catches the flower is the one who will be married next. Denny unconsciously adopted the wedding kiss and bouquet throwing as a common part of his wedding rituals. Based on Leeds-Hurwitz (2002) in her book on *Wedding as Text*, the Chinese Indonesian have "seen weddings portrayed in films, magazines, newspapers, it can be difficult for participants to not follow the expected norms" (p. 133). From his answer, Denny might consider the rituals as something common and that is how a wedding should be held. In the wedding receptions, it is important to have the wedding toast. Toast is part of Western culture elements used when they want to celebrate an event. Chinese Indonesian use the wedding toast to celebrate their rites of passage by using champagne or wine. The use of a wedding toast by drinking champagne or wine in Chinese Indonesian weddings has become a mainstream wedding ritual in the Chinese Indonesian community. In contemporary Chinese Indonesian weddings, families as well as the guests would expect this ritual to be done. "I think all Chinese weddings always do the champagne toast because I think the champagne toast is neither Chinese nor Western but rather part of globalization," Indra (the other informant) stated.

Most contemporary Chinese Indonesian weddings use white wedding rituals. But as part of the Chinese community, Chinese Indonesian weddings supposedly also reflect their Chineseness because weddings are a way to communicate their cultural identity as Chinese. Even though white weddings have been part of the Chinese-Indonesian wedding tradition, it is not communicating Chinese-Indonesian cultural identity as Chinese. So, to show their cultural identity, Chinese Indonesian will perform their traditional Chinese wedding rituals as a private event. The private event that uses the Chinese aspect can be seen in the Chinese form of engagement of betrothal as a part of a wedding procession, which is sangjit. Sangjit is a ritual when the future groom brings wedding gifts to the future bride. Armandari et al. (2019) explain that, "sangjit in Indonesia means the process of submission" (p.2). Sangjit is one of the ways for Chinese Indonesians to communicate their cultural identity through the private involvement of the couple's relatives or close friends. Through this private event, the couple can communicate their cultural identity to their family and confirm that they are indeed Chinese. Another ritual that Chinese Indonesian use to vacillate their cultural identity is tea pai usually done in private, commonly conducted before the wedding receptions. Tea pai is a tribute from the two prospective bride and groom to their elderly parents and relatives to pray for the bride and groom to be a happy couple (Armandari et al., 2019, p.2). To show their cultural identity, the Chinese Indonesian will perform Chinese wedding rituals at private events. But on some occasions, Chinese Indonesian would also communicate their cultural identity as Chinese with public involvement. "Sometimes they will mix it up, like, in the middle of the wedding reception," Charles (one of the informants who work as a wedding organizer) stated. Chinese wedding rituals are being mixed with Western wedding rituals as a way for Chinese Indonesian to show their cultural identity as Chinese to the public.

Wedding Attire

The Western attire that is common in Chinese Indonesian weddings is a white wedding gown and a tuxedo. For the bride, the Western wedding attire that is commonly used is the white gown. According to Yang (2018), the use of a white gown was first used by Queen Victoria when she married Prince Albert: "In 1840, Queen Victoria wore an elegant white robe in her wedding, which settled the status of the white wedding dress as the formal wedding suit." (p.28) until now, in the Western countries white gown is still being used as the default wedding dress for the Westerner's first marriage. A tuxedo is what the groom usually wears at the wedding. A tuxedo is considered formal clothing for Westerners to wear at a wedding, and it is part of the wedding attire for the groom. In my interview with Denny, he stated that he wore a tuxedo and his wife wore a white gown at "the church blessing, the tea pai ceremony, and at the wedding reception." This means that the use of Western costume is not limited to when the couple undergoes the Western ritual, but when they do the Chinese wedding ritual, they also wear the Western wedding attire.

Tuxedos and gowns are worn on weddings, but "cheongsam", the traditional Chinese wedding dress, is commonly worn in engagements which is a more private affair. It usually comes in red and gold. The colors represent happiness and prosperity. For Chinese Indonesian, engagement is an important part of the wedding procession and is usually done in private with close family members who attend. That is why the use of the cheongsam in Chinese engagement is important because of its symbols of good luck but also communicate their cultural identity as Chinese.

Wedding Decorations

Just like the ritual and the wedding attire, the Western wedding decoration that is commonly found in Chinese Indonesian weddings is the white wedding decoration. The traditional Western wedding decoration is white because it is related to the meaning of innocence and purity that comes with the white wedding gown. That is why the traditional Western wedding is called the white wedding because not only the white dress that the bride used, but also all the decorations in the weddings mainly use the color of white. The use of white decoration is also related with the Western wedding that is usually conducted at church. At the wedding reception, a lot of Chinese Indonesians also tend to use white wedding decorations. "Sometimes we cannot even see any Chinese symbol or color in the wedding decorations," Charles (another wedding organizer) stated. For some, it is important to show their identity as Chinese. Chinese Indonesians will put up some Chinese wedding decorations that are mixed with Western decorations. One example is the symbol of Shuang Xi used as wedding decorations. Shuang Xi is considered important in Chinese culture because it represents the meaning of double happiness for the groom and bride and usually comes in red and gold. Indra mentions that the decoration on his wedding is Western: "So there is no red color, but there are images of Shuang Xi." The image of Shuang Xi at Indra's wedding shows that he is trying to communicate his cultural identity as a Chinese to the public. By showing Shuang Xi side by side with the other Western decorations, Indra involved the public to vacillate the cultural identity that he is indeed Chinese. Different from Indra, Denny chose to show his identity as Chinese in his engagement when he used red and gold Shuang Xi but used none in his wedding decoration. Denny mentioned that "the color that I used for my background decoration is all white, and it does not have a little bit of Chineseness in it." show their cultural identity is through private events. One example of a private event is an engagement.

The reason why Western cultural elements are being used is because of the need to be contemporary. Information about Western cultural elements can be easily found in media like films, television, magazines, and social media which portray what a proper wedding should be. These media influence the view of the young generation of Chinese Indonesians about how they

should conduct their weddings. Since the Western cultural element is the dominant culture among the young generation of Chinese Indonesians, the Western cultural elements become what the young generation calls "modern."

Leeds-Hurwitz (2002) states that "images from popular culture convey mainstream assumptions. Having seen weddings portrayed in films, magazines, newspapers, it can be difficult for participants to not follow the expected norms. The message in these forms is: "Do what everyone else does!" This is where mainstream American influences fit" (p. 133). The media is largely responsible for constructing our shared identity. Popular culture conveys the meaning of modernity. Since the Western popular culture is the dominant culture in the life of the young generation of Chinese Indonesians, it has become mainstream in defining what a modern wedding looks like. That is why the Western culture is being used by the Chinese Indonesian community to give a modern Chinese identity. The use Western cultural elements in the Chinese Indonesian wedding can communicate to the public that not only they are Chinese but also modern.

Aside from being modern, the Western cultural elements lend simplicity to Chinese Indonesian weddings because the items for the Western wedding tradition are easier to find compared to the items that are needed for traditional Chinese weddings. As a minority in Indonesia, the people who sell traditional Chinese items are hard to find compared to the items from the Western cultural elements, which are widely used by Indonesian from all ethnicities. Not only is it easier to get, but it is also cheaper because there are many who sell Western wedding attire and decorations. It can be seen from my interview with Indra, where he stated, "I looked for a Chinese wedding dress, but they are so expensive, so I bought a tuxedo and gown instead." The statement from Indra is one of the examples of why a lot of Chinese Indonesians then choose the Western wedding attire as their choice, especially for couples who are usually on a tight budget.

The Western wedding tradition can also provide a simple solution for Chinese Indonesians who lack knowledge of their tradition. Limantara, C., F., (2020) stated that, "most young Chinese Indonesians nowadays do not understand or care about the rituals that they have to undergo in their weddings." (p.212). In addition, Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (2002) stated that, "for those with little knowledge of their tradition, a mainstream wedding provides a safe outline" (p.59). Therefore, the young generation of Chinese Indonesian who have little, or no knowledge of Chinese culture can use the mainstream Western wedding tradition. The Western wedding tradition, popularized by the media like movies and social media, can act as a safe outline for the young couple so that they can still have a memorable wedding ceremony without any difficulty. Chinese wedding tradition is complicated; by using mainstream wedding culture, such as the Western wedding tradition, young Chinese Indonesians can avoid the difficulties in learning how to perform the traditional Chinese wedding rituals because some of the rituals will be replaced by the Western wedding tradition. The young generation of Chinese Indonesians can perform the Western wedding tradition better because they learn the tradition based on what is popular in their community.

Lastly, the reason why the western cultural elements can provide a simple solution to the Chinese Indonesian wedding is because of the existence of wedding organizers. The preparation for a traditional Chinese wedding is considered complicated because there are a lot of things that need to be prepared, and it usually takes months. Nowadays, couples can rely on the wedding organizer to handle all the preparations for them. Many Chinese Indonesian

weddings nowadays will heavily rely on the wedding organizer to prepare and guide them through the Chinese wedding ritual. Wedding organizers help Chinese-Indonesian couples know how to perform the Chinese wedding tradition properly. According to Limantara (2019), he stated that most Chinese Indonesian couples use EOs "since EOs nowadays oversee all the rituals that the couples have to undergo, the soon-to-be groom and bride leave all the wedding preparations to the EO." (p. 213). By helping Chinese Indonesians perform the Western and Chinese wedding traditions, wedding organizers give simplicity to the Chinese Indonesian wedding so that they can still show their identity as Chinese who are modern.

CONCLUSION

The Western cultural elements become a common practice in Chinese Indonesian weddings because they are always being used in Chinese Indonesian weddings. Many young Chinese Indonesians do not realize that what they consider to be rituals commonly done in their weddings, the wedding attire they wear and the decorations they have, originate from the influence of the Western cultural elements used in weddings. The influence of religion, mainstream media, popular culture and through other weddings that they attend or see from the social media, video, or any other documentation, give them a picture on how a wedding should be. Chinese Indonesians unconsciously adopt aspects of the Western weddings, and because of their popularity, it becomes a natural thing to do. The Western cultural elements used can also make Chinese Indonesian weddings look more modern and simpler. Even though they adopt the Western aspects of the weddings, yet they also have the desire to show their identity as Chinese. This Chinese identity is commonly shown in the private sphere within the family members and in a more private event like engagement. It is in these private moments that they revoke the Chinese traditional wedding rituals, attire, and decorations. The uses of this both cultural Chinese and Western cultural elements construct a new cultural identity which is contemporary Chinese or modern Chinese. Chinese Indonesian wants to be recognized as Chinese but on the other hand, they also want to be recognized as modern. This mixed culture then creates a new culture, a hybrid culture.

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