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Here Comes the Style: Cultural Modernity in Chinese Indonesian Weddings

Setefanus Suprajitno

Wedding is an important rite of passage in various ethnic groups and cultures. It marks a milestone in individuals' lives. Because of its significance in life, its ceremony and rituals are very elaborate, complex, and full of meanings. Yet, cultural and social factors influence how wedding is conducted....

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Here Comes the Style: Cultural Modernity in Chinese Indonesian Weddings

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Keywords

Chinese Indonesians; weddings; identity; cultural modernity; social media

Abstract

Wedding is an important rite of passage in various ethnic groups and cultures. It marks a milestone in individuals' lives. Because of its significance in life, its

ceremony and rituals are very elaborate, complex, and full of meanings. Yet cultural and social factors influence how wedding is conducted. This makes wedding not only a passage of rite, but also a reflection of social and cultural changes in a society. One of the visible changes in wedding is the commodification of its ceremony, which is heavily propelled by social media. In this article, through an ethnographic study of Chinese Indonesians living in Surabaya, I analyze how their wedding ceremonies expose the negotiation of their ethnic, social, and cultural identities. Primary data, gathered from interviews, are analyzed using affect theory. The findings show that because of the historical trajectory in which Chinese tradition and culture were banned when the New Order regime was in power and revived after the fall of the regime, as well as the increasing popularity of social media in which consumption in weddings is pictured, their wedding ceremony and rituals are in a cultural nexus where the ceremony and rituals are still influenced by traditions, yet at the same time they undergo changes because of growing new cultures. The social media that portray ideal weddings increase the intensity of the affective elements of wedding ceremonies, which jump from one individual to another. Their wedding ceremonies are awash with elements suffused with their projected ethnic, social, and cultural identities.

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Here Comes the Style: Cultural Modernity in Chinese Indonesian Weddings

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Abstract. Wedding is an important rite of passage in various ethnic groups and cultures. It marks a milestone in individuals' lives. Because of its significance in life, its ceremony and rituals are very elaborate, complex, and full of meanings. Yet, cultural and social factors influence how wedding is conducted. This makes wedding not only a passage of rite, but also a reflection of social and cultural changes in a society. One of the visible changes in wedding is the commodification of its ceremony, which is heavily propelled by social media. In this article, through an ethnographic study of Chinese Indonesians living in Surabaya, I analyze how their wedding ceremonies expose the negotiation of their ethnic, social, and cultural identities. Primary data, gathered from interviews, are analyzed using affect theory. The findings show that because of the historical trajectory in which Chinese tradition and culture were banned when the New Order regime was in power and revived after the fall of the regime, as well as the increasing popularity of social media in which consumption in weddings is pictured, their wedding ceremony and rituals are in a cultural nexus where the ceremony and rituals are still influenced by traditions, yet at the same time they undergo changes because of growing new cultures. The social media that portray ideal weddings increase the intensity of the affective elements of wedding ceremonies, which jump from one individual to another. Their wedding ceremonies are awash with elements suffused with their projected ethnic, social, and cultural identities.

Keywords: Chinese Indonesians · weddings · identity · cultural modernity · social media

1 Introduction

Wedding is an important rite of passage. It marks a milestone in individuals' life, a transition from one situation to another, from singlehood to newly formed family. It is seen as a ritual whereby a new family, which is considered as the building block of society, is created. Because of the significance of wedding in life, wedding ceremony and rituals are very elaborate, complex, and full of meanings [1, 2]. That is why wedding is an enduring cultural ritual found in various ethnic groups and cultures.

In Indonesian cultural context, wedding is often perceived as a special occasion not only for the couple marrying and their families, but for their kin and kith as well. Because

the desire to create a festive and glamorous event that satisfies the bride, the groom, and their loved ones, people do not mind spending a lot of money for their wedding celebration. In 2018, a simple wedding celebration would cost as low as 50 million rupiahs for working class people [3]. That is about US\$3,500 (US\$ 1 is equal to Rp. 14,000). This amount may look small for a wedding celebration, but that is considered a lot for most Indonesians. Data from Statistics Indonesia, a non-departmental government agency, issued on 13 March 2018, shows that the median income of Indonesian workers is 2.65 million rupiahs, or around US\$189.29 [4]. Middle- and upper-class Indonesians would spend as low as 100 million rupiahs depending on how glamorous and festive the wedding celebration to be. Glamor and festivity have become a mantra for a good and successful wedding celebration. They have also changed the focus of wedding, from a rite of passage to a “spectacle” [5].

The significance of such a glamorous and festive wedding is apparent in the popular cultural landscape, propagated by media – both traditional and social media, such as Facebook and Instagram – and cultural industry. This is proven by the popularity of wedding expo, which now becomes a regular event held in many big cities in Indonesia several times a year and can attract the crowd. Bridal magazines and special issues of other women’s magazines, such as *Femina*, report the weddings of celebrities and providing tips on how to create a memorable wedding. Social media are inundated with wedding photos people share. All these contribute to the discourse that constitutes the cultural terrain of weddings. Wedding ceremony is performed not only for celebrating one’s rite of passage, but for displaying the social and cultural identities of the couples and their families.

Wedding, according to Roche and Hohmann [6], is often influenced by social and political factors. That is why, when the celebration of Chinese tradition and culture were banned during the New Order era, Chinese Indonesian weddings displayed limited Chinese traditional and customary norms. The conspicuous Chinese element was the Chinese character “double happiness” used as a wedding decoration. This resulted in the reduction of Chinese rituals and practices in many Chinese Indonesian weddings during the New Order era. The fall of the regime in 1998 became a turning point for Chinese Indonesians. The succeeding administration lifted the ban, and as a result, Chinese traditions and culture started to reappear in public. However, because of the New Order’s policy, Chinese traditions, especially those practiced by Chinese Indonesians born and bred during the New Order era, have changed. Many of them do not feel familiar with their ethnic traditions and culture. Instead, they feel closer to western or Korean pop culture, which they often see in the mass media. Nevertheless, they still feel that they are ethnically Chinese. This situation leads them to identity negotiation, which is reflected in their wedding ritual and ceremony. The identity negotiation is also spurred by changes in the meaning of wedding. Wedding now becomes cultural commodities and serves as a mode for expressing their identities and cultural orientations.

In this article, through an ethnographic study of Chinese Indonesians living in Surabaya, I analyze how Chinese Indonesians’ wedding ceremonies expose the negotiation of their ethnic, social, and cultural identities. I also want to examine how the popularity of social media also impacts the way they perform their wedding ceremony.

2 Theoretical Framework

Wedding is an extraordinary event that can be found across the globe. It is an event that many culturally diverse ethnic communities have in common. Traditionally, it is associated with an important rite of passage for two individuals who want to end their singlehood and to establish a new family, the building block of a society. No matter how different wedding rituals in ethnically and culturally diverse communities are, these rituals receive prominent position. Because of this prominent position, wedding is considered as a rite of passage that endure over time. However, its rituals are not “changeless” [7].

The nature and form of wedding rituals are not fixed. They have experienced changes because of the new needs and trends produced by social and cultural dynamics that occur in the society. Wedding rituals transform in order to represent these new needs and trends. They have to adapt and respond to the social and cultural dynamics in the society. The meanings of the rituals of contemporary wedding have moved from the realm of the sacred to the realm of the secular. Nowadays, wedding is seen as “a cultural event or performance which generates its meaning primarily through consumerism” [8]. Wedding, according to Grimes, is “the single ritual performance upon which we in the West spend the largest amounts of time, energy, and money. The imaginative, intellectual, and social resources invested in weddings are matched by no other rite of passage” [9]. What he writes shows that despite its changing nature, wedding is still so important that people do not mind sacrificing anything to make a perfect one to show their aspiration. So, contemporary wedding celebrations are more than what is being done or what is happening during the wedding day. The rituals and ceremonies in the celebrations involve several social and cultural process.

Social and cultural practices are heavily influenced by changes that occur in the society. One of the importance changes taking place in contemporary society is the conspicuousness of consumption. Consumption is pervasive in every aspect of the lives of people, including in how weddings are celebrated. Contemporary wedding celebration is characterized by consumption, as seen in the astronomical amount of money people spend for it [1]. Some other scholars, among other Adrian [10], Boden [8], and Otnes and Pleck [11], observe that business sector jumps into the wagon of wedding consumption because of the market potentials in it. The business sector with its bridal industries creates powerful cultural influence on how wedding should be like. This influence leads to what so-called “wedding industrial complex” [5].

Wedding industrial complex does not have legal basis for dictating how wedding is conducted. Yet it has a hegemonic power to influence people’s belief on wedding celebration and its significance. It operates through “a very powerful meaning-making apparatus ... that work[s] as an ensemble in creating many taken-for-granted beliefs, values, and assumptions within social texts and practices about weddings” [5]. It creates an ideology that produces images and message, through which it guides people on what a wedding should be like and how it should be celebrated. Wedding turns to be a site of cultural production whereby the bride and the groom make a unique scripted performance that represent them, by for example.

... the space in which the wedding takes place must be transformed. The modern blockbuster wedding rests on alchemizing a once plain sanctuary, room, backyard, field,

or beach front, into a magical landscape. This usually involves a cadre of professionals; in upscale weddings, the team is headed by a single coordinator who makes it all happens [1].

Thus, wedding becomes an arena in which social and cultural expectations are accomplished. The efforts to pursue a perfect accomplishment led to the reification of consumption. Today's weddings have evolved into a ritual of consumption.

Nowadays, the "global cultural flow" reconfigures patterns of social structure [12]. Social reconfiguration as a result of globalization may change practices that exist in the society. One of the changing practices that is easily observed is wedding practice. Several scholars, Leeds-Hurwitz [2], Adrian [10], Otnes and Pleck [11], Ingraham [5], Fairchild [13], and Mbunyuza-Memani [14], notes that people's global movement results in changing wedding practices in Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. Western cultural influences change how wedding rituals and ceremonies are held. Yet, at the same time, wedding in the West, especially in the U.S., are also influenced by Asian wedding practices, as observed by Leeds-Hurwitz [2], Adrian [10], Otnes and Pleck [11]. "Wedding rituals involve the mix of local and western style" [15]. Weddings have become a site of the interplay between the global (western) and local cultural traditions and practices.

In the interplay between the global and the local, consumers are no longer viewed as passive. Instead, they are seen as the ones that have agency. Their agency is proven by the fact that they do not blindly follow the global cultural influences. They select some global cultural practices and modify the functions and meanings in order that those practices fit with the local cultural context. The selection and modification of global cultures highlight local consumers' creativity in making those global cultures compatible with local social factors. The consumers' creativity results in the hybridity, that is, "the fusion of two hitherto relatively distinct forms, styles, or identities, [as a result of] cross-cultural contact, which often occurs across national borders as well as across cultural boundaries" [16]. Wedding as an act of consumption also reflect hybridity in its rituals, ceremony, and practices.

Wedding consumption is also heavily influenced by social media, which become a game-changer in how people plan their weddings. Evans [17] writes that social media have the power to influence people's choices and behavior. In relation to wedding, social media enable people to search for inspiration on how they plan their wedding. "With the new power of social media, weddings are becoming shaped by Facebook statuses, Instagram snaps and Twitter updates. From the proposal to the wedding day – brides are using digital media to help them with their announcements and planning" [18]. More and more people turn to social media to find information for their wedding arrangement and finding vendors for organizing their wedding. This occurs because of the trends that people share and post the stories of the pictures of their wedding or the wedding parties they attended in their social media account. The glamor reflected in wedding pictures triggers the affect among the viewers.

Affect, according to Morris, is an "emotional response to stimuli or thoughts" [19]. While emotion is relatively connected to individuals, and hence intrasubjective, affect is intersubjective, that is, it circulates among individuals, and moves from one person to another [20]. It is "practiced between individuals rather than experiences borne by sole individuals" [21]. In the case of wedding and social media, affect delineates how wedding

pictures posted in social media platforms transfer emotion imbued in the pictures to their viewers, and informs the way people plan their wedding.

These theoretical frameworks, namely, that rituals can change over time, that contemporary wedding is a ritualized consumption, that globalization could produce cultural hybridity, and that social media produce affect that can influence people, provide me a basis for analyzing Chinese Indonesian wedding.

3 Methodology

In this study, I used an ethnographic approach. Data are collected primarily through in-depth interviews with couples who were willing to be my informants. Besides couples, I also conducted interviews with their parents and wedding organizers. The informants for this study were those who claim to be Chinese Indonesians, except wedding organizers who can be any ethnic groups. All of them live in East Java province, that is, Surabaya and the cities nearby. I had five couples, aged late twenties though mid-thirties, and the parents of two couples. I was able to get two owners of a wedding company to be my informants. Pseudonyms were used to protect their privacy. Besides in-depth interviews, I also used material analysis of my informants' wedding photography and videography. This material analysis is used for the basis of designing questions for interviews. Questions in interviews covered the informants' experiences in wedding rituals and ceremonies, such as their opinions about those rituals and ceremonies, the reasons why they choose such rituals and ceremonies, and factors influencing their choices. The questions were semi-structured, conducted in Indonesian. The interviews lasted 30–60 min. Results of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed within the conceptual framework of wedding as social practice, ritualized consumption, and hybridity, as well as the framework of affect that social media produce. The informants' choices of wedding rituals and ceremonies may emerge out of the negotiation of their ethnic, social, and cultural identities.

4 Weddings in Chinese Indonesian Society

In the past, marriage was seen as an entrance into adulthood. Parents would be worried if their Children who were at marriageable age were still single. They tried hard to find a suitable match their children, either through their social network or by hiring professional matchmaker, known as *méirén* (媒人) in Chinese. Most parents would feel that they failed as parents if their adult children were not married yet. Nowadays, people are getting married later in life, and wedding does not carry its old significance that marks people's transition from adolescence to adulthood. Yet, wedding is still perceived as "the most significant ritual in contemporary culture" [11], including in Chinese Indonesian culture, whereby typical wedding ceremony consists of three events. In Indonesian those events are *lamaran*, *tunangan*, and *pernikahan*. These events are not so complicated as they used to be. They have been simplified to cater for the changing demand in the society.

The first event, *lamaran* or *dìngqīn* (定亲) in Chinese, refers to betrothal in English. This event is an official meeting between the bride's and the groom's family. The groom's

family visits the bride's family and brings gift, such as, fruits and delicacies. This official meeting was the beginning of the formal relationship of the two families. In this meeting, the two families discuss a date for *tunangan* and wedding ceremony. Traditionally, they usually choose an auspicious date, calculated based on the Chinese zodiac of the couples, and sometimes the couple's parents as well to make sure that the date chosen will bring luck. This event culminates when the groom's mother put a gold necklace around the bride's neck as a symbol of betrothal.

The second event, *tunangan* or *dìnghūn* (订婚) in Chinese, refers to engagement. Both betrothal and engagement refer to the same event. But in Indonesian and Chinese both events are different. In this event, which is usually held one month to one week before the wedding, both the bride and the groom exchange rings. That is why, this event is also known as *tukar cincin* in Indonesian (*tukar* means to exchange, and *cincin* means ring). This event is held by the bride's family. The groom and his family visit the bride's house to bring trays filled with the bride's necessities, fruit, alcoholic beverage, and delicacies. The bride's family will return half of the gift received. If the bride and her family live in different cities, it often happens that they hold a party for their friends and relatives, because usually, the wedding party is held in the city where the groom's family live. In this scenario, the bride's family will pay for the engagement party, and the groom's family will pay for the wedding party and give the bride family a certain number of invitations for their relatives. Sometimes, the bride and the groom finance their own party. So, to make their wedding affordable, they skip the engagement.

The third event is the actual wedding, known as *pernikahan* or *jiéhūn* (结婚). This actual wedding consists of two sections, the rituals and the banquet. The wedding rituals begin when the groom and his entourage arrive at the bride's house to ask for her. A bowl of thin vermicelli with a boiled egg is served for everyone. After that, the tea ceremony is held. In the tea ceremony, both the bride and the groom pay their respect to the bride's parents and relatives by serving them tea. After that, at a time deemed auspicious they leave for the groom's house and do the tea ceremony. The tea ceremony signifies the acceptance of the bride and the groom into their respective families. To save time, many couples choose to stay in a hotel on the wedding day, and the wedding rituals are conducted in the hotel. In this alternative, the bride and her family will wait for the groom and his entourage in a room reserved for the ceremony. Then, the bride and the groom go to the room where the groom's family and relatives are waiting. After the tea ceremony for both sides are over, the bride, the groom and their families are going to church or other places of worship to solemnize the marriage. The wedding banquet will follow in the evening. Three days after the wedding, the newly married couple visit the bride's family. This is known as *huí niángjiā* (回娘家), which marks the end of the wedding festivity.

All my informants follow the steps in these three events. Yet, the ways they practice the rituals and holding the party highlight the negotiation of their ethnic, social, and cultural identities. Informed by Ma that wedding rituals and ceremony are "a display of social relations and cultural desires" [22], in the following section, I discuss that my informants' choices of their wedding rituals and ceremonies are influenced by the affect social media produce, and the wedding rituals and ceremonies reflect their changing ethnic, social, and cultural identity.

5 Findings and Discussion

Results of the in-depth interviews and materials analysis wedding photography and videography highlighted the theme related to the participants' wedding rituals and ceremonies, that is, cultural modernity. They influenced the participants' visualization of their weddings.

As a social practice, wedding is affected by the culture that exists in the society. It functions as a force that influences people's belief on how a wedding is like. Informed by the opinion that culture is composed by "symbolic vehicles of meaning," such as traditions, belief, practices, conventions, and stories [23], I argue that my informants use the symbolic vehicles of meaning for creating an ideal wedding that fits with their needs and expectation. The symbolic vehicle of meaning is employed because wedding is a carefully planned event and has important meanings for the rest of the couple's life.

One conspicuous element that I observe in my informants' weddings is the Chinese symbol "double happiness", read as *shuāngxǐ* (双喜). This symbol consists of a Chinese character *xǐ* (喜), which means happiness, written twice, side by side. This symbol is solely used in Chinese weddings. The symbol of double happiness is a visual marker of good luck and happiness. It is usually printed in red or golden color and found in various forms at the wedding, as a decoration at the wedding venue, or wedding invitation (Fig. 1).

Some informants said that they used the Chinese symbol of double happiness in their wedding celebration because of the tradition. They referred to tradition when asked why double happiness could be found conspicuously in their wedding ceremonies.

Joshua: We are Chinese, so we follow the tradition. ... Erh, actually, my wife and I are not very particular about traditional practices. However, in our wedding, we followed some that were not too troublesome to do, one of them was double happiness symbol. So, we used it in our ceremony. After all, this symbol has a good meaning.

Donna: It is a customary practice to put double happiness sign in a Chinese wedding, I guess. Nobody forces us to do so, but it is the way we are supposed to do in our wedding.



Fig. 1. Double happiness symbol as the center of the backdrop of an engagement party.

Michael: The wedding organizer we hired told Angeline [Michael's wife] and me that *shuāngxǐ* was a conventional element in Chinese wedding, but it was entirely up to us to make decision. So, when I googled Chinese wedding and found that it seemed to be a must, we took the suggestion.

As my informants mentioned above, they admitted that they just followed the tradition in their wedding arrangement. Some elements, in this case, double happiness signs, are expected to be used or present in their wedding because of what they think as a tradition. Other informants also mentioned that "double happiness" symbol was always expected to be present in a Chinese wedding. It was how a Chinese wedding should be.

James (a wedding organizer): *Shuāngxǐ* is always present in a Chinese wedding because, erh, that is how a Chinese wedding should be. A Chinese wedding is supposed to be decorated with this symbol. I have encountered a number of Chinese customers who wanted to have wedding that did not look Chinese. Nevertheless, they still used *shuāngxǐ* in his wedding invitations, engagement, and wedding banquet.

Andrew: It is said that the meaning of *shuāngxǐ* is double happiness. It is a Chinese symbol of wishing the couple happiness for the rest of their lives. Every Chinese would use it in their wedding. So, yeah, why not using it as a decoration in our betrothal and wedding.

Nancy (Andrew's wife): We are Chinese, and I think a Chinese wedding should be like that (referring to the use of double happiness).

Henry: Actually, I want to have a unique wedding celebration because it is once-a-life-time event. But, there is always a certain thing that you cannot neglect, no matter how you want your wedding to be unique. There is always double happiness symbol in all Chinese weddings that I saw in magazine, Facebook, and Instagram are like that.

James', Andrew's, Nancy's, and Henry's statements implies that people have a certain knowledge about Chinese wedding. People's knowledge includes a repertoire of things, such as the use of double happiness, and the context for making sense of those things. This repertoire serves as the reasons why those things are included in their wedding, and it gives an assumption that people would understand those reasons even without further elaboration.

Besides double happiness symbol, another thing that is included in the repertoire is the color red. In Chinese culture, color is divided into two. The first one is the color associated with happiness and joy, such as red, gold, yellow, orange, purple, and green. In this category, red is most dominant. That is why, traditionally the term "red affairs" (*hóngshì*, 红事) is used for describing happy events, such as weddings, in Chinese culture. The second one, the color white, blue, and black are the color of death and unpleasant events [24]. Thus, it is obvious that the color red would dominate a Chinese wedding.

When I asked about their engagement party, which was dominated by the color red, Michael and Angeline said that it was their own initiative. They chose the color red because firstly they were Chinese.

Angeline: For the Chinese red is associated with joyous occasion. So, by choosing red, we wanted to show our happiness.

Michael [laughingly]: Remember angpao [*hóngbāo*, 红包 in Chinese]? Red symbolizes luck. We hope that our engagement would bring luck to our life.

Secondly, they chose red for their engagement because it was trendy.

Angeline: I saw this kind of engagement picture in the social media. It was the trend, so yeah, we just followed it.

Other informants mentioned similar reasons (Fig. 2).

Henry: Actually, I am not so particular about fashion and style, as long as what I am wearing is appropriate. When Jolanda [the wedding organizer he engaged] asked me what to wear in my engagement, I told her that I just wore normal full dress, white shirt, tie, and black suit, since it was a formal function. Elaine [Henry's wife] could wear a gown in any color. Women usually have more choices. But then, knowing that Elaine would wear a beige *qibao* (Chinese style gown), embroidered with a white crane and red flowers, typical Chinese motifs. Jolanda advised me to wear a shirt with similar color and matching tie. She said that it would fit with the environment, which was dominated by the color red. I thought, why not.

Lilian [explaining the picture of her engagement with Edward]: The trend has been like this since a few years ago. In their engagement, the couple choose a Chinese-inspired theme. The couple wear Chinese style dress and shirt, and the engagement venue has Chinese atmosphere, which was dominated by the color red.

Lilian's and Edward's engagement party looked impressive. She wore a red *qibao*-style gown embroidered with golden thread. Edward wore a burgundy Chinese-style shirt. A big double-happiness symbol in red was pasted on the wall, and smaller ones made of red paper were pasted on the engagement gifts. The gifts which were wrapped

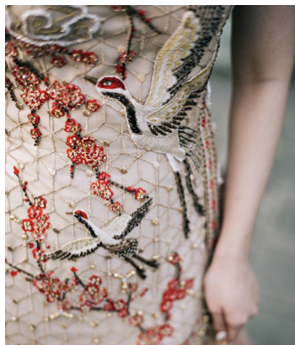


Fig. 2. Elaine in her engagement dress.

in red or put insides red boxes had gold double-happiness signs pasted on the boxes. The table where the gifts were placed was decorated with red flowers. Edward told me that everything, including the engagement gifts, was prepared by the wedding organizer they hired. He said that all they did was hiring a vendor, who would do everything, based on the budget they had. Since none of the elders in their families knew Chinese engagement and wedding customs, the vendor also helped them prepare and make sure that their engagement and wedding follow Chinese customary practices.

Based on what my informants stated above, I contend that they have a certain assumption about Chinese wedding practices. A wedding is considered as a Chinese wedding if it observes Chinese traditions. However, because of the complicated nature of Chinese weddings and their lack of knowledge on that subject, they just follow the convention and customary practices they know, or the ones that others who are considered knowledgeable in this subject tell them. They assume that the core elements of Chinese weddings that are easily recognized are double-happiness sign and the color red. These elements seem to be taken for granted as the elements that are found in Chinese wedding ceremony.

However, the development of the use of color for expressing meanings shows that in Chinese Indonesian weddings, red and white do not always carry the traditional association like what Scott [24] writes. Contemporary Chinese Indonesian weddings, as reflected by my informants' weddings, are weddings known as white weddings. 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" [5]. Consequently, the color white becomes the predominant color displayed in the wedding ceremonies [2]. The adoption of white weddings occurs because of the shifting meaning of the color white.

When I looked at my informants' wedding pictures, all brides wore white wedding gowns. They said that white wedding gown was the traditional gown for the wedding in their community. The use of the color white, which symbolizes the purity of the brides, in a wedding ceremony is in fact a western tradition. However, they appropriate this tradition as theirs. This idea is perpetuated by wedding industry, which depicts Chinese Indonesian brides wearing white bridal gowns, as seen in the Fig. 3.

Michael: Angeline and I were busy with our work, so we entrusted the wedding organizer to take care of things related to our wedding, the engagement ceremony, the wedding rituals, the banquet, everything. We told the wedding organizer we hired about our budget. He and his team arranged everything. They have been in this business for years, so surely they know how a Chinese wedding is like. We just followed their suggestion.

Michael's mother: None of our family and relatives knows about Chinese wedding tradition.

Michael, his mother, and some other informants said that they knew a little about Chinese wedding tradition, and because of this reason, they follow the suggestions from their wedding vendors on how their wedding ceremonies were performed. All wedding vendors suggest white wedding as the "traditional" Chinese wedding. In order to give a more modern twist, some modify the color theme of the wedding by adding other soft color. Yet, it still conjures an image of white wedding. Traditional red Chinese dress is seen as old-fashioned, and too traditional. Monica, a wedding organizer, told



Fig. 3. Michael and Angeline's wedding.

me that up till now, white wedding was the traditional trend in a Chinese Indonesian wedding. This trend is perpetuated by wedding images across social media platforms, where people look for some ideas for their weddings. Evans [17] writes that social media have the power to influence people's consumption. Their power comes from their search function, namely, the function that enable people to search for pictures and reviews of events, products, and services before they plan or purchase. In the case of weddings, my participants stated that they looked for ideas or inspirations on the internet for planning their weddings. They also searched people's review on potential wedding vendors, which vendors could plan a fabulous wedding, which ones could offer a good price, and so on. Wedding vendors told me that they usually turned to the Internet to get ideas or inspirations on designing weddings their customers wanted.

James (a wedding organizer): Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, enable people to see tons of wedding pictures that they may not otherwise see. These pictures give inspirations and ideas on things related to wedding: the dress, the floral arrangement, the wedding cakes, you name it.

Monica (James' partner): I haven't met any customers who did not check the Internet to look for inspiration for their wedding. ... The Internet helps them create a look and feel for their wedding. ... It is definitely a great help for us to prepare for a proposal for them.

James' and Monica's statement attest the growing influence of social media in changing people's cultural practices. One visible cultural practice is seen in the case of Chinese Indonesian weddings.

To sum up, since western wedding culture permeates the wedding practices of Chinese Indonesians, white wedding is now appropriated as their "traditional" wedding culture. Nevertheless, due to greater acceptance toward Chinese culture, things Chinese gain more and more popularity. The popularity of Chinese culture also influences their wedding practices. So, 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 practices, as seen using Chinese decoration and color. The negotiation between two practices can be seen in how they arrange their wedding ceremonies. White wedding is used for public performance, namely, the wedding banquet, where friends and guests are invited. And Chinese ceremonies are used for private performance, that is, the engagement, where kin and kith are invited.

6 Conclusion

The betrothal and wedding ceremonies of the couples above illustrate the changes in Chinese Indonesian wedding practices. Amidst the global flows of cultures, the participants in this study still maintain their cultural practices, yet at the same time, to a certain extent, they break with them. The use of the red color points out this idea. By saying that they used the color red in their engagement and wedding ceremonies because they were Chinese, implicitly they paid homage to their Chinese cultural roots. The color red serves as a “symbolic vehicle of meanings” for their Chinese cultural heritage [23]. As Chinese, they ascribe joy, good luck, and happiness to the color red, in line with Chinese tradition. However, the red color is quite problematic in the context of “white wedding,” a cultural wedding form that Chinese Indonesians nowadays adopt. In the white wedding, the color white is the predominant color in the ceremonies because of its western cultural association to purity and innocence. Whereas, in Chinese culture, white is the color of funerals [2]. 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 betrothal ceremonies. This produces the practices of employing the color red in their ceremonies because red is associated with Chinese.

In other words, for Chinese Indonesians, as exemplified by the case study of my informants, wedding is not only an important rite of passage, but also an expression of ethnic, social, and cultural identities. The expression of ethnic, social, and cultural identities are the result of the changes in their cultural values, social needs as well as expectations of their ethnic community. Thus, for them, Chinese Indonesian wedding functions as a site where they perform their ethnicity as well as their aspiration to be modern amidst the cultural flow that takes place in Indonesia. Their wedding ceremony and rituals are still influenced by traditions. Yet, because of growing new cultures, their wedding ceremony and rituals undergo some changes. Social media popularize new cultures to the extent that the new cultures produce affect that inspire people in designing their wedding. As a result, their wedding ceremony and rituals reflect their changing ethnic, social, and cultural identity. Wedding is not only a public display of the union of a man and a woman, but also an avenue for them to show their social and cultural orientation. This can be seen the way they modify their wedding decorations and traditions. Their effort to do so can be seen as their way to perform their Chineseness and cultural modernity.

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