

# THE DANGEROUS BRIDE: CASE STUDY OF A HAKKA COMMUNITY\*

危险的新娘——一个客家社区的个案研究

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## Abstract

In the Chinese family, daughters are regarded as temporary members. She acquires a permanent status upon marriage which offers her the transition or *rites de passage* from one social category to another. This study is based on my research of a Hakka community in a resettlement village in Sarawak. The intention is to link the marriage rituals to the theory of the rites of passage and that of the "dangerous bride". In the liminal phase or a state of "no belonging" as the bride is transferred in between fixed points of classifications of a daughter and a daughter-in-law, she is looked upon as a "floating spirit". The arriving daughter-in-law is therefore wrapped in a form of energy called *sa qi* (煞气), a superstitious belief that associates her with the possession of a potent negative force. This hidden force is believed to be capable of inflicting misfortune to the family or committing offence to the gods. The marriage rituals would thus include the performance of respect to the gods and ancestors. It is when these

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rituals are properly performed that the liminal stage of the life of the bride comes to an end and she gains acceptance into her husband's family.

### 摘要

在华人家庭中，女儿被视为是一个暂时的成员。只有借着婚姻，让她透过转变或“过渡仪式” (*rites de passage*)，以便从一个社会类别转至到另一个类别，才能获得一个永久的身分。这项研究所依据的是我在砂拉越一个客家社群村落中所作的调查。目的是将结婚仪式与过渡仪式及“危险的新娘”的理论加以联串。在处于阈限阶段 (*liminal phase*) 或“无依归”的状况中，正当新娘要从女儿与媳妇的身分定点之间转换时，她被视着是一个“浮动的灵魂”。来归的媳妇因而被笼罩在一种迷信的想法中，认为她身上带有一种强大的负面力量或被称为“煞气”的能量。这种隐藏着的力量被确信会给家庭带来不幸或冒渎神明。结婚的仪式因此也要包括向祖先及神明行使敬拜。只有这些仪式被小心翼翼的遵行，新娘生命中的阈限阶段才会告一段落，并且她也因此才会被丈夫的家庭所接纳。

### Introduction

In the traditional Chinese family, all males have permanent membership status while daughters are considered temporary members only. A permanent woman member is usually someone married into the family, which includes the mother and daughters-in-law. Although a "recruited" member of the family, the daughter-in-law plays an important role as the source that perpetuates the family lineage. In his consent to the marriage of his daughter, the father hopes that she will fulfill not only her assigned role in continuing the lineage, but also to earn a rightful place in the husband's family. As a daughter, she is not entitled to a share of her father's properties that are passed on only to her male siblings. The house where she has grown up is only a place of temporary residence. The house that actually provides a secured and permanent place for her is the one that belongs to her husband.

This paper is based on data collected from a cumulative total of 17 months of fieldwork in a Hakka community between 2005 and 2007. The community lives in a resettlement village adjacent to Kuching city, the capital of the state of Sarawak in Malaysia. To retain the anonymity of the village and the community's privacy, the name Tabidu is used instead. This paper is not an account of the marriage ritual but an analytical study of the theory of dangerous bride during the day of wedding, a day considered as auspicious or *dahao rizi* (大好日子 *tai4-ho3-tji □5-zi2*)<sup>1</sup> to her, the

groom and their families.

### **Liminality and Women in the Chinese Family**

Arnold van Gennep (1960) wrote about the concept of rites of passage and its three major sequences of separation, transition and incorporation. Turner (1981) then followed up and coined the theory of liminality to refer simultaneously to one phase of multi-step transition process effected through a rite of passage, the place within which that transition takes place, and the state of being experienced by the person making the transition.

The liminal phase is one of separation from a previous status or social state, also regarded as a period of seclusion (Turner 1981: 154). The state in which one is in during this transition stage is ambiguous, and one is neither what one was or will become. As Turner (1969) points out:

"... this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death....and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.... Their behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life."

In formulating his theory of ritual, Turner (1969) drew on Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* (1960) of which the process is divided into three phases. Turner (1969: 94) elaborates that the first phase involves separation from social structure into a zone outside secular and profane time and space whereby "symbolic behavior - especially symbols of reversal or inversion," reinforces the detachment from normal status roles and contributes to feelings of uncertainty and fear of the unknown. In the second or liminal phase, Turner (1967: 94; 1982: 24) describes it as "a sort of social limbo," a realm of ambiguity whereby the old identity is left behind but the new is

indeterminable or not yet formed. In the final stage termed "reaggregation or incorporation", the subject is transformed, returns to and is re-integrated with community in a new social role and status (Turner 1969: 95). This takes on the nature of a "symbolic rebirth" (Turner 1974: 273). It was the second or liminal phase of Van Gennep's model which Turner developed and elaborated in his concept of liminality and which he regarded as critical to ritual's creative potential. Turner (1974: 273) used the term "anti-structure" to describe this transition phase, emphasizing that this did not imply "structural reversal".

A bride, from the moment she has left her natal home to her acceptance into the groom's family, is in a state of no belonging. She is in a liminal phase during her transfer stage as she is in between fixed points of classifications. She is going through the rites of passage, a life transition from a daughter to daughter-in-law, from a girl to some body's wife.

When she is married to her husband, she is incorporated as a new member of her husband's lineage. A marriage transforms the daughter, regarded as an immature girl when she was under patrilineal authority into a wife and potential mother within the control of her husband's kin (Freedman 1970: 180). During her wedding, both she and her husband perform an ancestor worship ceremony, a form of ritual that denotes her joining the husband's family officially and ritually. In this ceremony, the ancestors of the wife-receiving family<sup>2</sup> are ritually invited into the house and be informed about the wedding occasion. Blessings of prosperity and fertility are sought from the ancestors to be bestowed on the new couple. The wife-giving family will also inform the forefathers that a member will be married out and may blessings be bestowed upon her. Marriage offers a woman the transition from one social category to another and from one impermanent dwelling to a permanent one. It is an all encompassing first *rite de passage* that a Chinese daughter goes through.

The Chinese family looks upon the continuation of the lineage as a matter of filial duty. For this to happen, a family must have at least a son to get married and produce male offsprings. The family must therefore take in a bride, through whom bonds of affinity are created that can provide uncertain benefits. Having a new member or affine in the family is to have a potential friend or enemy. In a situation when the status and rights of a married daughter are subjected to intolerable treatment, her paternal family may voice objections or interfere in the affairs of the wife-receiving family.

The day of the wedding is filled with superstitions or taboos involving the bride. The bride, in a liminal stage, might be described as a "dangerous opportunity". Firstly, liminality is dangerous because it comprises a realm of pure

possibility (Turner 1967: 7) and "essentially unstructured" (Turner 1964: 8). In these circumstances, unpredictability and uncertainty prevail. Liminality is a realm of "fructile chaos", characterized by symbols expressive of "ambiguous ideas, monstrous images, sacred symbols, ordeals, humiliations, esoteric and paradoxical instruction" (Turner 1986: 41). This is a situation which cannot be clearly treated in terms of traditional criteria of classification, or falls between classificatory boundaries. The bride is seen as very dangerous and possesses a kind of powerful force or *qi* (气) called *sa* (煞 *saʔ5*) in the Hakka dialect. To the Hakka, there are three types of '*saʔ5*' (force), which are "dead man's force" or *si ren sha* (死人煞 *si3-ŋin2-sa□5*), "pregnant woman's force" or *da du sha* (大肚煞 *tai4-du3-sa□5*) and bride's force or *xin niang sha* (新娘煞 *tai4-du3-sa□5*). The person inflicted by such forces will fall ill or face misfortune. The victim has therefore been polluted or *ma dao* (抹到 *ma□5-do4*).

Given the consequences and potential tragedies that may befall the husband's family when receiving a bride, the transfer of the bride during her wedding day becomes very symbolic and important. In a Chinese marriage, the transfer of the bride is the last of the six rites, which completes the wedding ceremony and incorporates the bride into her new family, making her officially the daughter-in-law.

### **Ethnographic Background of the Hakka in Tabidu**

The Hakka community forms the largest Chinese dialect group in Sarawak and in Kuching city. Their population in Sarawak is around 160,000 people or about 30 per cent of the state Chinese population (Statistic Department Sarawak 2002). Tabidu village, situated about 40km from Kuching city, has a population of about 2,500 people in 2006 living in 485 households and 97 per cent are the Hakka. The community was forcibly resettled in Tabidu under Operation Hammer during the communist upsurge in the 1960s. The people are primarily engaged in agricultural production, notably in vegetable farming and animal husbandry. Poultry and chicken egg farming are also practised on a large scale. The vegetables and eggs are sold in Kuching. A new business that is gaining popularity is bird-nests processing with which about 30 households are directly involved. Many among the younger people are leaving the village for the cities or overseas. As many as 1,200 young men and women are now working overseas, particularly in Singapore, for attractive earnings.

## Marriage Rites of the Chinese Marriage

Marriage in the Chinese sense is a contract of two families, one that is giving the daughter (wife giving) and the other receiving the bride (wife receiving). A process of rites called the "Six Rites" of marriage in the canonical *Li Chi, The Record of Rites* takes place to make the marriage a socially accepted one plus, of course, a black and white document to register the marriage in the eyes of the law (Malaysia Legal Act 1982). A very important thing for the Chinese is that a marriage is not socially accepted by the families or the community until the "Six Rites" has taken place. Maurice Freedman (1970: 182) wrote that "The sequence of events laid down in the "Six Rites" is essentially the structure of all Chinese marriage in its preferential form, however modified and embellished by custom". Although they are some differences and modifications in the "Six Rites" in different Chinese communities, the sequence of the rites still serves as the core structure of Chinese marriages.

In Tabidu village, a couple will normally consider marriage after they have known each other for at least a year. If it is held less than a year into their courtship, the marriage is considered too rush. Parents of both sides will also come to know about the background of both families either through their children or through relatives or neighbours. There may be a few rounds of unofficial visits or invitations to dinner to each others' houses.

When the couple decide to get married, the man will convey his intention to his parents, normally his mother. The first rite in the marriage process is seek the service of a go-between or matchmaker *mei ren* (媒人 *moi2-nin2*), a role traditionally played by a female, to relate the matter to the girl's parents. If the latter agrees to the union, the second rite is performed by the matchmaker who in her second visit to the girl's house will match the horoscope data known as the *ba zi*<sup>3</sup> (八字 *ba 5-zi2*) of the future couple through the help of a fortune teller. This is to ensure that the horoscopes of the couple do not "clash" (冲 *cun4*) or bring harm to each other. Normally the forecast based on the horoscopes will not pose any problem as the fortune teller will suggest alternative dates for the wedding day to suit the horoscopes of the couple.

Incompatible horoscopes will lead to conflicts (相冲 *sioŋ2-cun4*) in the lives of the couple. However, there are always "counter measures" to minimize or eliminate any incompatibility. On one occasion, a couple whose horoscopes were incompatible was told that there was one particular day in that entire year that was ideal for their marriage. If they chose to marry on that day, the "clash" would be

avoided.

After the horoscope has been consulted and the date of marriage chosen, the future bridegroom's family will undertake another formal visit to the bride's house to fulfill the third rite. The future son-in-law would arrive with his parents and the matchmaker to fix the best time for various necessary arrangements prior to the wedding day. These would include the dates to send the "brideprice" or a form of "dowry" from the bridegroom's family, wedding biscuits and other gifts, and a date to set up the bridal bed. Mutual agreement would have been reached concerning such issues as the amount of the "brideprice" and gifts as well as the wedding day programme.

It is essential that appropriate dates for various events are chosen to prevent anything untoward would befall the couple and their families. The failure to avoid latent "clashes" might inflict one or the other party with bad health or ill luck. The choice of proper timing is to minimize the likely negative force of the bride so as not to give offence (犯 *fan1*) to the God of Heaven (天公 *tian1-gon2*).

On the visit to perform the fourth rite, the man and the matchmaker will present the "brideprice" and auspicious gifts. About a week before the actual wedding day, a married man of standing who has led a good and prosperous life is invited to perform the fifth rite known as the bed-fixing ceremony (安床 *an1-coŋ4*). The bridal bed symbolizes a fruitful and harmonious life of the new couple.

The last and sixth rite is the wedding itself. It is the culmination of the long process which will witness the bride's "transfer" to her new home. It signifies that the bride's body, fertility, domestic service and loyalty are handed over by one family to another (Freedman 1970: 185). The natal family of the bride loses a family member and the resources that she embodies to a potential foe. For its part, the man's family, while acquiring major rights in the girl and potential economic and other benefits conceded by the opposite family, is conscious that the bride could become a source of disruption within its own ranks. As the bride does not completely sever ties with her own kin, the union could open an avenue for domestic intervention by their new affines (Freedman 1970).

### **Ancestor Worship**

The Chinese practise ancestor worship as a way to appease the souls of the departed. It is a religious practice based on the belief that deceased family members have a continued existence, take an interest in the affairs of the descendants, and plays a role in determining their fortune. The goal of ancestor worship is to ensure

the ancestors' continued well-being and positive disposition towards the descendants. The social function of such worship is nonetheless to enhance family values such as filial piety or *xiao* (孝 *hau4*), family loyalty and the continuity of the family lineage. Filial piety is the most fundamental and important quality of moral duties of the Chinese. Just as parents have raised and nurtured their children until they become independent, the children "repay" their parents with an unselfish adherence to their filial piety duties, whether they are living or in their afterlife. The children are reminded that the role of the father is as high as a mountain and the virtue of the mother is as deep as the sea (父恩比山高、母德比海深 or *fu en bi shangao, mu de bi haishen* in Pinyin).

However, ancestor worship can only be carried out if there are descendants to perform the rites, such as calling of the souls, offering food, joss sticks and paper money. Contacts with the ancestors take the forms of ritual communications and greetings. Without any descendants, the souls of the departed will be forgotten. They will only be remembered during certain time such as the hungry ghost festival. Ancestors have their "rights" to be served on their death dates and provided with agnatic descendants. It is believed that, if their descendants are negligent of their filial duties, their angry ancestors might cause sickness or other discomforts to the living (Freedman 1970). It is therefore mandatory that a dutiful son, and his wife, bear male descendants so that their duties to the ancestors be continued without interruption.

### **The Transfer of the Bride**

A day before the actual wedding day, an ancestor worship ceremony is conducted at the bride's house. There are many restrictions on the bride on the wedding day, one of them is that ancestors should not be worshipped, hence the ceremony at the bride's house the day before. Turner (1969: 109) calls this the "the powers of the weak" whereby there are many restrictions on what can and cannot be done despite what appears to be an auspicious occasion in welcoming the bride. All these are done upon the assumption that the bride can safely arrive in the groom's house.

At the bride's house, a table is set outside the main door of the house. On the table three shallow sand-filled jars for placing joss sticks and generous portions of cooked pork, steamed whole chicken, roasted whole duck together with some rice cakes are served. Three rice wine glasses and three cups are also placed on the table.



The medium begins the ceremony by lighting up three pairs of red candles and a bundle of joss sticks and starts chanting to invite the ancestors of the lineage to the ceremony. He seeks help from the God of Earth to lead the ancestors in their journey. They are invited to attend the auspicious occasion of the family and be informed that a daughter of a member of the lineage will be marrying. The bride will be standing beside all the rest of the family in front of the ancestor worship table. Blessings are asked from the ancestors for the outgoing daughter that she may have a good and fruitful marriage life. Blessings are also asked to protect the lineage so that all its members are in good health, achieve prosperity and acquire wealth. Meat, rice cakes and alcohol are served to appease the spirits of the ancestors. Towards the end of the ceremony, paper money and incense are burnt to mark the end of the ceremony. The bride is not to leave the house until her wedding the following day.

In the early morning of the wedding day, it is the turn of the groom's family to perform the same ceremony. On a table in the living room are auspicious offerings of food and paraphernalia. The main difference is that the table is placed inside the house instead of outside.

A medium invites the ancestors to the house to be informed of the happy occasion. The ceremonial procedure is similar to that in the bride's house the day before. The arrival of the ancestors, guided by the God of Earth, is indicated by the medium who tosses a cup (杯 *buil*) made up of two silver clam-like ornaments which are tied together with a red string. If both sides of the cup end up in the same positions, it indicates that the ancestors have not arrived. It is only when one side of the cup faces up and the other faces down that all ancestors would have arrived. The medium will then start chanting and to invite the ancestors to feast themselves with the food and drinks served on the table.

In the meantime, the groom departs for the bride's house in a decorated wedding car and accompanied by a female relative. He has to arrive at the appointed time that is deemed the most auspicious for the bride leave her natal house in a ceremony known as *chu men* (出门 *cu □5-mun2*). Similarly there is also an auspicious time for the bride to enter the bridegroom's house. Based on the horoscopic data of the couple, the fortune teller would suggest a two-hour period before noon. According to Turner (1969), transitions are characteristically scheduled for a propitious time carefully selected by a geomancer. This requirement holds for almost any kind of change in status or place such as the transfer of a corpse to the graveyard, disinterment of bones, groundbreaking for buildings, or shifting into a new house. When the bride finally enters her husband's house, she takes great care to cross over the threshold during the pre-selected two-hour interval.

The bride leaves her natal house accompanied by the groom and a woman known as the auspicious or "good-life" lady (好命婆 *ho3-miaŋ4-po2*) who is invariably a female relative of the groom's paternal side. She must be married, has successfully bore a few healthy children and has generally lived a good life. The bridal car (新娘车 *sin1-nioŋ2-ca1*).

A red umbrella is held over the head of the bride by the good-live relative when the bride exits her house and walks to the bridal car. When the 新娘车 reaches the groom's house, he will alight from the car to open the door for the bride. Before he does so, he knocks on the door with a Chinese fan or *san* (扇 *san4*) three times. This is a symbolic action as *san* has the same sound as the word "to ward off" or *san* (闪 *san4*) *vis-a-vis* the bride's "force".

Upon reaching the entrance of the husband's house, the bride performs certain rituals before she enters. A pot filled with talisman or *fu* (符 *fu2*) and a type of leaves or *mo cao* (抹草 *ma□5-cho3 Anisomeles indica*) are placed at the doorstep.<sup>4</sup> As the bride enters the house, the pot is lit by an elderly female relative and the bride is to step over the pot or *huo lu* (火炉 *fo3-lu2*) and not to avoid the flame by side stepping it. From the arrival of the bride to the groom's house to the stepping over of the fire pot, the bride has yet to be greeted by the groom's family members. In fact, when the bridal car arrives, members of the groom's family retreat into rooms and other locations to avoid face-to-face meetings with the bride.

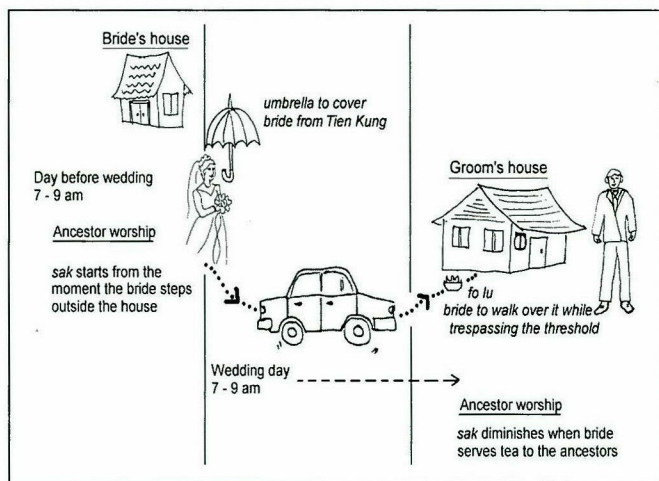
After walking over the fire pot, the bride is led by the groom and the "good life lady" to the bridal room where the couple stays in until invited out by a medium to pay their respect to the ancestors. Standing in front of the table for ancestor worship, and acting on the instructions of the medium, the newly-weds to make three bows: first to the heaven and earth; second to the ancestors; and third to each other. On a tray carried by the groom, three empty glasses are filled with tea for the bride to offer to the ancestors. The medium instructs her to utter words of greetings and respect to the ancestors. In return, the bride receives a red packet or *hong pao* (红包 *fuŋ2-bau1*) with gifts of money to symbolize their blessings. The bride serves the tea three times and receives three red packets in return. The couple returns to their room to prepare for the next rite.

The groom helps the bride to remove her headgear or *tou sha* (头纱 *teu2-sa1*). They then exit their room to the living room to perform the next rituals. Each with three joss sticks, they bow three times: first to the heaven and earth; second to the ancestors; and the third to the God of Earth. The joss sticks are planted onto the jar placed on the table. The medium then sends off of the ancestors and give thanks to the God of Earth for guiding the ancestors to the living world. The siblings of the

groom burned some paper money for the God of Earth. Meanwhile, the table is cleared and food, drinks and wine glasses are returned to the kitchen.

The worship table is removed to provide space for the all-important tea ceremony to commence. A younger brother of the bride arrives with the bridal gifts or *jia chuang* (嫁妆 *ga1-zoŋ1*) from her natal family, and usually contained in a square shaped traveling suitcase. If the younger brother or *xiao jiu* (舅仔 *kiu1-zai3*) arrives before the ancestor worship is over, he will be asked to wait outside the house for the signal to enter. At about the same time, the groom's relatives will arrive for the tea serving ceremony. The ceremony follows a strict protocol of serving tea first to the groom's oldest relative, usually the paternal grandparents followed by the maternal grandparents. This is followed by the groom's parents, the paternal uncles and aunties together with their spouses, and those from the maternal side. The tea ceremony serves an essential function to introduce the bride to the groom's family members and relatives and the proper way to address each and everyone according to strict kinship terms. In return, they offer their blessings to the newly-weds by presenting red packets, jewelery or gold accessories such as necklaces or bracelets. The younger relatives, however, pay their respect by offering tea to the bride and groom and receive their red packets in return.

### Interpretation of the Transfer of the Bride



The transfer of the bride from her natal house to her husband's house.

The rites of passage of the bride may be studied in the context of the theories put forward by van Gennep and Turner. The passage is one of separation of an individual from her family (van Gennep 1960). The rites begin a day before the marriage in the form of ancestor worship the bride's house. By offering tea to the ancestors in a symbolic gesture of farewell, the female member is formally "separated" from her natal family. She is to depart from her temporary domain to move to her permanent one.

That the ancestor worship is outside the bride's house is not without meaning. This is because female members are not part of the family lineage, a function that is only reserved for male members. The males have to perpetuate family surname and they perform the ancestor worship ceremony inside the house.

In the second stage of the rites of passage when the bride is in the transition phase, she is a social "non-entity", being neither the daughter of her natal family nor the daughter-in-law of the groom's family. While "forced" of her old identity, she has yet to be accepted into a new one. This transition period begins from the moment she symbolically leaves her natal home through the initiation of rites in ancestor worship, and physically moves to the groom's house to complete another round of ancestor worship in the groom's house.

The time for the bride to leave her natal house or *chumen* (出門) is determined with studied precision, though in practical terms it has little significance. It is the belief of the presence of a certain force associated with the bride that is imbued with practical connotations. The bride on her wedding day is believed to possess a potent force that can inflict harm or ill-luck on others. On the power and danger of the bride, Turner (1969) warned that "the bride should always keep her eyes averted, because if she should look at someone, he might be struck blind." This is so because persons who do not fit into well-structured positions, even temporarily, are regarded as "dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with proscriptions, and conditions" (Turner 1969: 109). Persons who are polluted by the bride's potent force may pass on the pollution to those in the family. Additionally, the appointed time to begin the bride's transition is to ensure that the bride's force will not offend the God of Heaven.

When the bride steps out into the open, an umbrella is used to shield off her potent. A red umbrella is deliberately chosen for the purpose as red signifies an auspicious occasion.<sup>5</sup> As the bride is blessed with a "status" only next to that of the God of Heaven on her wedding day, the potent force that is associated with her is not a direct source that "pollution". It is the almighty God of Heaven, if offended during his brief visit, who metes of punishment.

The journey to the bride's new family follows a direct route and avoids unnecessary bends or turnings along the way. This is to signify that the path to her new family will be smooth. Mapping the best route is the chore of the driver of the bridal car. Bumpy and tortuous routes are avoided to ensure that the life of the bride will be without similar uncertainties. Hence the privilege of acting as the driver is usually accorded to the groom's best friend. The car too is a spacious and expensive one as a pointer to future wealth.

The arrival of the bridal car is treated with "caution" by family members of the groom who will avoid eye contact with the bride. Tradition has it that one will be "polluted" if one looks straight at the bride when she enters the house. The groom himself is also vulnerable and he deflects his wife's powerful force by knocking on the door of the bridal car with a Chinese fan before she steps out.

The groom possesses three symbolic "fires" on his wedding day - on his head and on his shoulders. Such fires are bestowed upon males of elevated status such as the bridegroom or scholars who, as in ancient China, had passed the imperial examination. Such males are likened to transient gods and their imaginary fires are feared by spirits and ghosts. In the binary world of Chinese society, men are the *yang* (阳) element and women the opposite *yin* (阴) element. Hence only men possess the fires. On the other hand, the bride on her wedding day is infused with a special aura that elevates her status that can deter ghosts and spirits.

The pot of fire over which the bride walks through is to ward off the potent force associated with her as a free floating spirit in an liminal phase. Wandering spirits are likely to follow a floating one. Such wandering spirits are lonely and hungry for food as no one offers them food or care for their souls. They therefore wander about looking for food and companions. By stepping over the fire pot containing talisman and the evil-expelling grass, wandering ghosts that happen to follow the bride are driven away. The wandering ghosts or any other inauspicious events are euphemistically referred to as "dirty things" or *laji dongxi* (垃圾东西 *la1-sab5- duŋ1-si1*). In the event of a clash of events such as the beginning of a funeral process from the house opposite that of the groom's house, the tea ceremony for family members will be deferred until the procession was over. The bride would remain in her bridal room with the door closed. The bride herself would not be infected by the "dead man's force" as the bride's force is more powerful than that of the dead. Looked at from another perspective, all the "dirty things" around the house would be drawn away by the funeral procession. All the wandering spirits in the vicinity would be enticed to follow the procession and move away from the groom's house.

The female relative who lights up the fire pot is similarly protected by a talisman. She acquires the talisman in a temple a few days prior to the wedding day. In one occasion when a female relative assigned to perform the task was in a dilemma when she did not obtain such a talisman and was not provided one by the groom's mother. As she dare not face the bride without a talisman, she asked to be excused. Such was the belief in the power of the bride's force. The matter was only settled when the medium who was conducting the ancestor worship wrote a talisman on the spot. With the special ink to prepare the talisman on a piece of rectangular yellow paper, the medium resorted to using a lit joss stick to write on a piece of paper money. Reassured, the female relative did her part that was assigned to her. On another, the younger sister of the groom came out of a room and came to face with the bride she was entering the house. She subsequently fell sick, suffered from diarrhea and vomited for a few days. It was commonly understood that she was a victim of the bride's potent force. The prescribed "cure" for driving away this infection was for her to drink a glass of water into which is tipped a piece of burnt talisman.

When tea has been offered to the ancestors in the groom's house, the bride's potent force would have deserted her. Only then does the bride reach the final phase of the rites of passage, the incorporation. She is now accepted as a new member of the husband's family and forms part of the lineage. During the tea ceremony, the bride addresses the ancestors the same way as her husband addresses them. If the ancestors are not pleased or happy with the new member, signs of objection will surface. The candles may become dim or the tea is spilt the bride offers it. However, there are always remedies for such happenings by uttering auspicious words. Should a glass drops and breaks, it is known as sprouting flowers on the ground or *luodi kaihua* (落地开花 *lo□5-di3-koi1-fa1*). When the candles dimmed, it is blamed on strong winds instead of the rain as it is considered auspicious.

The timing of the arrival of the bride's younger brother bearing the bride's gifts is also strictly observed. If he arrives when the ancestors are still around, the family fortune will be carried away by him. While female relatives and friends of the bride may accompany the bride to the groom's house, adult male relatives may not do so. In their absence, blessings of the groom's ancestors will not veer away from the groom's lineage members. The presence of non-lineage members would drain away some of these blessings and the family fortune.

Upon leaving the natal home, the bride finds herself quite literally without a family (Wolf 1972). She enters the household of her husband as an outsider and an outsider is always an object of deep suspicion. Her husband and her father-in-law do

not see her as a member of their family (Wolf 1972) but she arrives with an essential mission to bear the new generation for their family. Her mother-in-law may harbour some resentment over the hard bargaining at the preliminary negotiations, but she is nonetheless eager to see a new generation added to her uterine family. On the one hand, the dangerous force the bride is to be avoided and, on the other, they will do everything appropriate to ensure the couple enjoys a proper head-start.

From another perspective, women are deemed dangerous because they are associated with bodily forms of pollutions, such as menstruation. In many societies, menstruating women are believed to cause men to fall sick or unable to perform skills such as hunting or trapping animals. In this village, menstruating women are must observe restrictions such as not to worship the gods. The belief is that the joss stick is made by a Chinese hero (Zhang San Feng / 张三丰). A woman considered "polluted" and holding the joss stick is considered a sign of disrespect to the hero.

The link between women and pollution has been the topic of study in many ethnographic works. It is also no exception in the Chinese society. Some scholars argue that society set rules to keep unclean women controlled for their sexuality. In this case, it is not only the men who are imposing the observed taboo to the brides, but women themselves are much more sensitive and aware of it. For instance, mother-in-laws and older women present were tactful about the force of the bride the moment the bridal car arrives. They will advise against looking at the bride by seeking refuge in the rooms or elsewhere in the house until such time when it is "safe" to re-emerge. Much of this taboo concerns the ability of women to procreate and the main focus is on menstruation and pollution.

The danger that the bride poses during her wedding day becomes minimal if she menstruates on that day itself. Ironically, such a bride is known as one who is riding a white horse. The "good life lady", who accompanies the bride to the groom's house, will announce this after the bride enters the house. The groom is the unlucky person as he will be jeered on as having to just ride the horse for the night and restrain from consummating the marriage just yet.

The bride completes the rites of passage of her wedding when she is finally assimilated into her new family. In this third phase termed incorporation, the bride is now reclassified as a daughter-in-law. She now begins a new chapter of her life in her husband's family, and a more important and significant one than that in her natal home.

## Notes

- 1 The Chinese characters are first spelt out according the Pinyin (Mandarin) system followed by the Hakka pronunciation in bracket and according to Hashimoto's (1972) 《客家語基礎語彙集》 (*Hakka Language Basic Vocabulary*). The pronunciation is based on the Hakka dialect of Meixian prefecture of Guangdong province and matches that of the Hakka dialect in Tabidu.
- 2 In anthropological term, a family that receives a bride is called wife-receiving family while a family that gives out a bride is known as wife-giving family.
- 3 *Ba zi* (八字) is the celestial stem (*tiangan*) and earthly branch (*dizhi*) associated with the year, month, day and time of birth (Murphy 2001: 216).
- 4 The name of *mat cho* in Malay language is *Penyapu Cina* or Chinese Broom. This shrub is commonly planted in the compounds of temples around Kuching and Kota Samarahan and in many Chinese houses. It is believed that the plant dispels ghosts and spirits. The Iban community in Sarawak uses "Selukai" to serve the same purpose in getting rid of evil spirits.
- 5 The colour of the umbrella is important for different occasions. The bridal umbrella is always red in colour as red symbolizes good luck, celebration and happiness. For funeral processions, only black umbrellas are allowed. Black and white are mourning colours.

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## Appendix 1

Simplified Character	Pronunciation (in Hakka)	Translation
煞	<i>sa</i> □ 5	Force
死人煞	<i>si3-ŋin2- sa</i> □ 5	Dead man's force
大肚煞	<i>tai4-du3-sa</i> □ 5	Pregnant lady's force
新娘煞	<i>sin1-nioŋ2- sa</i> □ 5	Bride's force
抹到	<i>ma</i> □ 5- <i>do4</i>	Polluted
大好日子	<i>tai4-ho3-ŋi</i> □ 5- <i>zi2</i>	Auspicious day
媒人	<i>moi2-ŋin2</i>	Matchmaker or go-Between
八字	<i>ba</i> □ 5- <i>zi2</i>	Horoscopic data or Eight Character
冲	<i>cuŋ4</i>	Clash or contradict
相冲	<i>sioŋ2- cuŋ4</i>	Clash or contradict each other
犯	<i>fan1</i>	To offend
天公	<i>tian1-goŋ2</i>	God of Sky or Heaven
安床	<i>an1-coŋ4</i>	Bed fixing
孝	<i>hau4</i>	Filial piety
伯公	<i>ba</i> □ 5- <i>goŋ1</i>	God of Earth
杯	<i>bui1</i>	Silver pieces for divination purpose
出门	<i>cu</i> □ 5- <i>mun2</i>	Leaving the house
好命婆	<i>ho3-miaŋ4-po2</i>	Good life lady
新娘车	<i>sin1-nioŋ2-ca1</i>	Bride's car
好命	<i>ho3-miaŋ4</i>	Good life / auspicious life
扇	<i>san4</i>	Chinese fan
闪	<i>san4</i>	Avoid
符	<i>fu2</i>	Talisman
抹草	<i>ma</i> □ 5- <i>cho3</i>	<i>Anisomeles indica</i>
火炉	<i>fo3-lu2</i>	Fire pot
红包	<i>fuŋ2-bau1</i>	Red packet filled with money
头纱	<i>teu2-sa1</i>	Headgear for bride
嫁妆	<i>ga1-zoŋ1</i>	Bride gift
舅仔	<i>kiu1-zai3</i>	Younger brother
阿嫂	<i>a1-sou1</i>	Sister-in-law
垃圾东西	<i>la1-sab5- duŋ1-si1</i>	Dirty things or wandering spirits
吃完完	<i>si</i> □ 6- <i>ciu1-ciu1</i>	'Eaten' or taken all away