Abstract

This thesis is a study of birth rituals of the Chinese in Singapore. Birth rituals of the Chinese has an early origin in ancient China and it reflects the importance of procreation of the Chinese. It includes praying for child, taboo during pregnancy, celebration and well wishes after birth.

As birth rituals practiced by Chinese in Singapore have never been systematically investigated and thoroughly compiled, this thesis sought to compare the differences and similarities between traditional rituals in China and that in Singapore. Earliest information on ancient rites and customs is mainly from the Liji (礼记) and Zhouli (周礼). Research works from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong will also be consulted. Rituals practiced in Singapore are obtained from oral interviews and surveys.

Generally speaking, most Chinese in Singapore inherits the cultural tradition of practicing birth rituals. In a modern society like Singapore, these rituals still has a value of its own. However, most rituals in Singapore has been modified and/or simplified. The main finding of the thesis is that birth rituals closely relates to the ethical and social value of the Singapore Chinese. The new trend of development of the rituals reflects the changing value of the new generation. Therefore, proper attention should be drawn on this matter as this effort will enhance the identification of Chinese society.

Chapter 1 of this academic exercise gives an overall introduction to different types and classes of rituals. Chapter 2 discusses the importance and evolution of rites in China and explores the origin of birth rituals. Chapter 3, 4 and 5 constitutes the main body of this thesis. Birth rituals for various stages, from praying for child to pregnancy an finally birth of child, will be examined. Chapter 6 contains the statistical data of some popular birth rituals practiced in Singapore from which the trend of simplification of rituals can be seen. Chapter 7 concludes the findings and gives a general evolution of the trend of development of birth rituals in Singapore.