

**CHINESE POSTPARTUM PRACTICES IN
CONFINEMENT CENTRES IN IPOH, PERAK : THE
SIGNIFICANCE ON MOTHER AND NEWBORN**

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**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK**

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This graduation exercise is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Social Sciences (Hons.)

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UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

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Student's Certification

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese postpartum or known as 坐月子 (pinyin : *Zuo Yue Zi* ; Doing the month) required women to confine at home for a month for recovery after childbirth. The aim of this study is to discover the Chinese postpartum that practising in confinement centres within the area of Ipoh, Perak. Structural Functionalism Approach is used in order to explore the function of services that offer by the confinement centres. The discussion and analysis are categorises into the significances of confinement centre and postnatal taboo, the function of aids and impact of the shift of trend. Although the Chinese postpartum practices have become an alternative instead of dominant practices due to the influences of globalization and modernization. But, the practices still practices and become commercialized until present due to the value of adaptability and functionality.

ABSTRAK

Postpartum Cina atau dikenali sebagai 坐月子 (pinyin: Zuo Yue Zi; ‘Melakukan bulan’) memerlukan wanita untuk dikurung di rumah selama sebulan untuk pemulihan selepas melahirkan anak. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui postpartum Cina yang berlatih di pusat selepas bersalin di kawasan Ipoh, Perak. Pendekatan Fungsionalisme Struktur digunakan untuk meneroka fungsi perkhidmatan yang ditawarkan oleh pusat selepas bersalin . Perbincangan dan analisis adalah terkandung dalam kepentingan pusat pengasingan dan pantang larang selepas bersalin, fungsi bantuan dan kesan peralihan trend. Walaupun amalan postpartum Cina menjadi alternatif bukannya amalan dominan disebabkan oleh pengaruh globalisasi dan pemodenan. Tetapi, amalan ini masih menjadi amalan dan menjadi dikomersialkan sehingga sekarang kerana nilai kesesuaian dan fungsi.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

1.0 Introduction

Culture, describe as the continuation of the values, beliefs, attitude as well as actions incorporating with knowledge, art , customs, traditions, capabilities, identical ability as well as practices that someone achieve as a member of a society. (Altuntug, Anuk & Ege, 2018). The components that shape the individual style of living which influence by the societies values, attitudes, beliefs as well as behaviours. The notion of health and illness are part of the element of the cultural structure and deviate based on culture. (Altuntug, Anuk & Ege, 2018). Ritual of social transformation are impart in entire society as well as plays crucial roles of culture. (Huang & Mathers, 2010). Hence, it connected in the aspects of physiological as well as social of a person's life that eventually affect the shift in the life cycle as well as in social status.

Childbirth is one of the major transition in women's life. In most of the culture, the expectation of a mother that just experience of delivery on the condition of transition from a social status to another, as well as often assumed as ambiguous and abnormal position, vulnerable outside to outside dangers, and sometimes herself dangerous to other people. (Helman, 2007). The postpartum practice exist in diverse culture with different customs practice. Steinberg (1996) stated that the cultural elements of childbearing have no universal review and yet applicable, nevertheless have produced literature from diverse discipline in postnatal care. World Health Organization (2013) asserted that the postpartum period disguise a vital transient stage for women, her newborn as well as her family. However, the practices of postpartum in non-western societies indicated unquestionable commonalities.

In Chinese society, Chinese Postpartum Ritual practice also known as ‘Doing the Month’ (*Zuoyezi*). Tung (2010) stated that ‘Doing the Month’ (*Zuoyezi*) is a common term to portray various traditional health beliefs, taboos, customs, as well as restriction in connection on the women postpartum behaviour after giving birth and continuously for a month.

1.1 Background

The following section provide a platform to discuss the variables as well as the relationship between the variables that proposed in this research.

1.1.1 Culture

There are no universal term of culture and it is complicated to define. The notion of culture was developed in the periods of the cultivation of man’s capacities during the European Enlightenment. Generally, the word of *cultura* that applied by Romans with the significant relating to tilling the soil. Then, the philosopher of Cicero developed the idea of educating man into social as well as political being and in terms of philosophy is culture of the mind (*cultura animi philosophia*). (Schoenmakers, 2012). The history of the evolution of the notion of culture correspond the evolution of the conceptions of civilization. The concept of civilization mainly define the situation in which society are living as well as working which describe by the Enlightenment-philosophers.

The perception of Radcliffe-Brown in defining “culture” as the idea of socialization that describe as the platform of knowledge to live in the society. The structure of the societies determine by the society as a whole which the elements of the social structures mainly consist of human being that involved in the status of social structure. The elements that constitute the formation of social structure is social

relationships. The social relationships are identified and regulated by norms, rules or patterns. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) stated that the formation of norms based on practice with specific structure of social life is common to an institution. The main idea of the theory by Radcliffe-Brown is mainly based on the concept of the “function”. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) clarifies that the word of function in the context of culture which it is applied to the life of an organism is perceived as the functioning within its framework.

On the other hand, Clifford Geertz interpreted the definition of culture in different perspectives. Clifford Geertz (1973) describes culture in more narrow aspects which is essentially semiotic. However, the concept of symbols and meaning is used in order to understand culture to an extent. The symbols that are portrayed by Geertz as objects, an act, phenomenon, trait or connection that function as a platform for conception. In his own words, Geertz (1973) explains that :

In any case, the concept of culture to which I adhere (...) denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. (p.89).

In short, the concept of culture varies in terms of the context asserted. Hence, the context that is portrayed in this research is important. Instead of focusing only on culture, the narrower context especially Chinese postpartum practices should be emphasized in this research.

1.1.2 Chinese Postpartum Ritual

The postpartum period is a crucial period for the development and healing of the mother after giving birth and creating adaptation of confinement mother in new social responsibilities. Women that undergo labour eventually immediately become unstable in certain aspects after birth and it is crucial to receive appropriate care for self and infant.

(Liu, Maloni & Petrini, 2014). World Health Organization (2013) claim that the postpartum period possess significance that greater than common physiological circumstance which act as an indication that represent as social and personal experience. However, postpartum care exist in every culture.

The Chinese Postpartum practice or also known as the traditional ritual of “doing the month” can be traced back to the Sung dynasty (960-1270 A.D.) (Leung, Arthur & Martinson, 2005). The ritual of “Doing the month” as stated by Yeh, Winsome & Lorraine (2014) is a 30-day Chinese Postpartum ritual that including physical, taboo as well as social prescriptions. Leung, Arthur & Martinson (2005) claim that the custom portrayed new mother gratitude of their sacrifice to their family. The mother who experience childbirth eventually affect the body become vulnerable and required appropriate rest in order to back to stable health conditions. Liu et al. (2014) pointed out that the disparity between *yin* and *yang* during childbirth consider as a form of illness. The ‘female’ energy that denoted by ‘Yin’ which represented such as moon, night, weakness, darkness, softness as well as femininity, whereas the ‘male’ energy that denoted by ‘Yang’ that symbolize such as sun, day, strength as well as masculinity. (Fang, 2014). Hence, women becomes vulnerable in term of health especially after labour.

The regulation of 气 (pinyin : *qi* ; energy) is important for the mother that enter the first month of postpartum. After the delivery, the disorder of 气 will occur which cause a short-term of major organ imbalance. Hence, the initial of postpartum month is significance period for mother in order to regulate 气 to sustain back into the regular condition. (Leung, Arthur & Martinson, 2005). In order to regulate the 气 (pinyin : *qi* ; energy) during the postpartum period, the act of controlling nutrition, daily routines

as well as psychological condition is crucial. There are specific type of Chinese food that required consume by the women that undergo the postpartum period which with the aim of promote the transmission of 气 (pinyin : qi ; energy) .

1.1.3 Relationship between culture and the Chinese Postpartum Practices

In all society, health of an individual are seen as important in societies especially among Chinese community. The belief of health are among the aspect that most individual retained persistently as well as are fundamental aspects of culture. Kaewsarn, Moyle & Creedy (2003) pointed out that the attitude of health of a person are ingrained in cultural custom exchange and are commonly pass down from a generation to another.

The postpartum ritual are among the aspects as well as a form of customs in every culture that portray as the recovery of the women's health after delivery. Culture in Durkheim's perspectives mentioned that is the conception web of representation, consisting of deepest values, belief as well as symbolic structure from the natural collectively. (Lincoln & Guillot, 2004). As such, the Chinese postpartum practices is the representation of Chinese culture that practice since Song dynasty among the Chinese community. The practice involve varies procedure as well as taboo that have pass down from older generation until present. Hence, Chinese postnatal custom indicated as part of the culture.

1.2 Problem Statement

There are several problem that encounter during the study of postpartum practice. In order to further discover more about the Chinese Postpartum practice, it is important to examine the past research that have done by various academician. As the trends of practising of postpartum in confinement centre still consider new in the industry. Hence, there were limited of resources on the confinement centre. The deficiency of resources affect the attribution on the idea on the past researcher on the understanding the idea on this study.

The trend of confinement centre have been become popular in overseas especially Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong. However, the trend in Malaysia only appear in the past few years and started increasing. Although the confinement centre still new in the industry, yet there were still lack of resources that mainly focus in Malaysia context. On the hand, most of the research mainly focus on the comparison of different group of confinement as well as the negative effect of confinement mainly depression but least focus on the roles of the confinement as well as positive effect on the mother and family.

1.3 Research Questions

Postpartum practices exist in every culture. Chinese community who specifically emphasizes the crucial of the custom that affect in health either in short and long term. The existences of confinement centres that maximise the benefits of services offer to confinement mothers during vulnerable period have created a new form of institution. In this ethnographic research, the main purpose of this research is to analytically explore the anthropological definition on the Chinese postpartum that practices in confinement centres in Ipoh, Perak. Thus , the trends of the postnatal practices will initially emphasized in order to explore a more in depth context.

There are few questions were elevated to further comprehend the research.

1. What is the trends of Chinese Postpartum confinement among Chinese community ?
2. What type of aid in assisting recovery of women's health during postpartum period?
3. Why confinement mother follow the taboo during the postpartum practice is important?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of the research is fundamental in order to have a clear direction in which the study proceed. To further evaluate the Chinese Postpartum at hand, the aimed of this research is to :

1. To examine the trends of Chinese Postpartum confinement among Chinese Community.
2. To determine type of aids on women's health during postpartum period.
3. To critically asses the taboo during the postpartum practice.

1.5 Why Examine the Confinement Centre of postpartum practice in Ipoh, Perak ?

The existence of confinement have been rising for this few years in Ipoh, Perak. The Chinese postpartum confinement that practice for 28 days in order for the mother able to recuperate from physical pressure of birth. The increasing of confinement centre have raise some questions in order to investigate more about the purpose of the existence of the confinement centre. In fact, such exploration allow me to perceive the collectiveness as well as the prime mover of the implementation of the confinement centre.

Nowadays, most of the parents of the child have the opportunity involve in working force in order to be able to provide a comfort lives to their family. However this cause that most of the parents apparently living in nuclear family. The existence of the nuclear family influences working parents on the choice of selecting confinement centre instead of confinement lady .

The existence of the confinement centre mainly located in urban area instead of rural area in Ipoh, that offer postpartum services to the new mother. The services provided consist of packages such as confinement meals, confinement massage etc. However, the customs of practice the confinement by mothers or mother-in-law or by hiring confinement lady have been not become a trends today's. This have raise questions on the prime mover of the changing of the trends in the urban area. Thus, the town of Ipoh, Perak has been selected as the focal point of this research on the Chinese postpartum confinement.

1.6 Research Significance

The aim in studying this research is to identify the trends of contextualise significance as well as the purpose of practising Chinese postpartum confinement among Malaysian Chinese community. There are present of evidence gap that found in the local context. The postpartum confinement have been exist during the Song Dynasty and the methods that the Chinese communities that practice in the past have been pass down until now. In the early 19th century, hundreds of thousands of Chinese people with the majority from the Fujian and Guangdong provinces in the south east coast of Mainland China arrived at Malaysia which was known as Malaya in the past, with the hopes of getting a better life. With that, they also brought along their culture as well as the Chinese postpartum confinement practice as one of the customs. As this custom originated from Mainland of China, it is interesting to study the practice of postpartum confinement in the local context which the practice have been maintaining the cultural practiced for several generations.

In addition, the relationship of confinement meals on the implications on the mother's health is also one of the purpose in conducting this research. The confinement meals plays a crucial roles in the recovery of mothers health. As the confinement meal is significance in regulating the imbalance energy (or qi) after giving birth. The confinement meals in the local context may be varies based on certain aspects as well as the changes may cause by the influences of the local context. Apart from that, , there were varies taboo that required mother to follow during the postpartum period. As there were lack of solid evidence that providing scientific in supporting the taboo during that period.

1.7 Scope of Study

There are several approach in conducting this study with diverse perspectives. One of the approach mainly focus on the choice of the family in choosing confinement centre instead of confinement lady as well as the increasingly of the existence of the confinement centre that mainly in the urban area than rural area. This able to fit into the questions on “what cause the trends of confinement change?”. On the other hand, the following procedure will be focus on the confinement’s meals on women’s health. In order to determine the implications of confinement meals on health as well as the function of each meals in the recovery. As the study mainly concentrated on the Chinese communities that located in Ipoh, Perak. However, it is also crucial to not overlook the taboo during the postpartum period. The taboo that mother follow also as important as the confinement in the recovery of health.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The following chapter began with the historical background of the Chinese postpartum practices as well as provide the general of Chinese postpartum practices in different region. The discussion of the postpartum practices from different context in the Chinese perspectives from various geographical region could lead to fundamental understanding on the bigger pictures of postpartum practices before analyse deeply into a local context of postpartum practices. Next, it is also crucial to consider various concepts in order able to construct a platform for further discussion. Finally, the conception framework that supported by the functionalism theory act as a guideline in this research.

2.1 General Discussion on Chinese Postpartum Practice

The culture of postpartum practices are vary across region around the world that determine by the influences of the local as well as the social context. The postpartum period are the crucial period for mother in every culture especially Chinese tradition as it indicate mother transitional new roles as well as a stages of rehabilitation. In contrast, the western culture or known as “modern” cultures mainly concentrate on the antepartum as well as intrapartum care while neglected the care after the postpartum after the childbirth. This can be explain by Dennis et al. (2007) stated that the utilization of technological involvement in the Western postpartum that mainly concentrated on the physical health of the confinement mother as well as new born. However, western “technocentric” cultures in postpartum meanwhile opposite to the “ethnokinship”

cultures mainly located in the South Asia, East Asia as well as the Middle East that mainly emphasizes the important of postpartum practices.

The practices of postpartum not only practice in Malaysia but other region such as China, Taiwan, Singapore and more. Although, these region might practices similar traditional postpartum ritual that pass down from the older generation but there might slightly deviate due the diverse local context that influences by the social, culture, politics as well as economy of certain region.

The first month after the childbirth, the mother as well as the new born are vulnerable to infection and probably exposure to high risk of death in accordance to the traditional Chinese customs. There are various traditional taboo as well as dietary practices that have pass down for several generation in order to reduce the risk of exposure to future illness as well as death during the confinement period. Hence, as Poh et al (2005) stated that women that practices the customs are consider as confinement or known as 坐月子 (pinyin : *Zuo Yue Zi* ; Doing the month).

In the belief of Chinese tradition, 坐月子 (pinyin : *Zuo Yue Zi* ; Doing the month) required women to confine at home for a month for recovery after childbirth. (Pillsbury, 1978). The aim of practising the confinement is to regulate the instability of 气(pinyin : qi ; energy). In the context of Chinese belief, the 气 (pinyin : qi ; energy) consist of Yin and Yang where women that undergo childbirth, the body eventually becomes Yin or cold. Hence, the confinement women required to confined to adjust the imbalance of energy by following restricted prescriptions as well as proscriptions mutually. Although, the practices of postpartum are non-scientific. As Callister (2006) proposed that Chinese societies especially women are presume that by practising this ritual is indicated acceptable either physiologically as well as psychologically, and with the