

THE EMERGING COMMODITY OF CHINESE BRIDE CHAPERONE (DAI KAM JIE) IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT: *Bride chaperone (Dai Kam Jie) traditionally dominated by women plays a prominent role in Chinese marriage rites and is meticulously chosen based on the fame and expertise to assist the wedding couple throughout the ceremony. This study explores the transformation of the bride chaperone from her traditional to an economic role. The objectives of this study were to identify the significance and economic role of bride chaperone, to determine the innovations and their sustenance to assess its economic growth in 21st century. Purposive sampling research method was used where the bride chaperones were interviewed using a qualitative open-ended questionnaire. It was found that despite great influence of Westernised weddings Chinese traditional practice is very important and interestingly its sustenance is linked to a lucrative business. Its innovations include male chaperones, online promotions with storyboards (extensive use of social media), photographers/video makers, musicians, beauticians and initiation of business awards. These innovations are self-sustained as e-business is becoming a norm of the society.*

Keywords: Bride chaperone, Chinese, marriage, Malaysia, Dai Kam Jie, Dai Kam Gor

1. INTRODUCTION

In Chinese society, the traditional marriage is expected to comprise a set of complex procedures because the chronicle of Chinese traditional culture documented that “from the beginning of Zhou Dynasty in 2000 BCE, marriage is highly regulated institution” [1]. From this context, the complicated Chinese marital ritual and custom is usually referred to as Six Rites or Liù Lǐ which includes marriage proposal or matchmaking (nà cǎi), asking the woman’s birth date (nián gēng bā zì) and name by the man’s family (wèn míng), matching the couple’s birth dates to predict the compatibility in the future (nà jǐ), betrothal gifts ceremony (nà zhēng), choosing an auspicious day for the wedding (qǐng qī) and lastly, welcoming the bride into the groom’s house (qīn yíng) [2]. Hence, there is an essential need for a mediator to carry out these detailed responsibilities in conducting these traditional and demanding marriage rites. It is feared that without the aid of the mediator, the overall process of marriage may not run smoothly or relatively become incomplete. The mediator in question is the bride chaperone or in canonical Dai Kam Jie or Da Jin. Broadly speaking, the term Dai Kam Jie originally has its own definite meaning which represents the eldest uncle’s wife who particularly comes from the bride’s family and given the honourable status in performing the rite of passage in the conventional marriage [3;4]. In the past, she was invited to be a bride chaperone in the traditional wedding practice because they believed that she personally possessed the luck and fortune and would pass be passed down to the bride [5]. Thereby, she was assigned with a specialized name called Xī Niǎng or Xī Pó which she was often referred to as the “auspicious lady”, who was endowed with happiness and prosperity [4]. Thus the role of Dai Kam Jie was to assist in the traditional wedding ritual as accustomed to her considerable expertise in carrying out the demands of the high value placed on marital customs [5]. In this regard, she was typically designated with innumerable responsibilities and duties in different phase along with the marriage process that strictly ascribes to the Chinese culture and practice [6]. Prior to the couple stepping into the official Chinese marriage ceremony, it was a must for them to adopt the traditional rules and regulations of the marriage (Travel China Guide, 1998). So Dai Kam Jie was to guide the newlyweds with the dos and the don’ts in conjunction with the preparation of their wedding to make

sure that the whole process of the marriage runs smoothly [6]. She was also in charge of the betrothal ceremony whereby the gift exchange between two families took place by preparing all the wedding groceries like red candles, golden coconut, wedding biscuits, Chinese tea, red cloths, wedding paper cutting, hair combing set, red rope, sesame, pork’s hand, sǎn shēng which consists of chicken, goose, pork’s spleen, wine, crystal sugar and areca all by herself [7]. Apart from that, the role of Dai Kam Jie in practicing brides wealth system was one of the most common characteristic of the wedding practice because both families would normally agree upon the exact bride price after receiving the consultation from the bride chaperone [4]. Before the wedding ceremony, it is a must for Dai Kam Jie to assist the groom in installing a brand new bridal bed, mattress, pillows, bed linen and blanket in his house, determining the position of the bed, scattering candy and fresh petals on the bed, and placing a pair of red candles and red body pillow [9]. On the day of the wedding, Dai Kam Jie is responsible to be beside the bride and assisted the bride in the preparation of the bridal’s hair-dressing ritual [8]. Then, she would need to escort the bride until the bride reached the groom’s house safe and sound [9]. Not only that Dai Kam Jie was also obligated to maintain a good social interaction with the elderly in both families especially during tea ceremony [4]. Throughout the ceremony, she would speak auspicious words and blessings when the newlyweds are preparing to serve the tea to their parents and elderly relatives [6]. Besides that, entertaining the guests of the wedding was also considered as one of the important tasks carried by Dai Kam Jie [4]. Thus, there used to be a great underlying significance in their existence for those who wished to get married.

2. Problem statement

Recently, the presence of Dai Kam Jie as a marriage mediator awakens the nostalgia of substantial transition among the contemporary Chinese society. Accelerated with the force of the globalization and modernization, most of the Chinese people, being more or less susceptible to the Western cultural value have changed their attitude and behaviour towards the significance of wedlock [10]. This has motivated the Chinese family to practice their marriage with the simplified mode of tradition [11]. They intend not to make themselves troublesome and in turn, only showed little care on their wedding preparation [12]. Due to their