

Chinese Wedding Ceremony in Pematangsiantar

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Abstract: The major goal of this article is to present the Chinese wedding ceremony in Pematangsiantar, Indonesia. Every wedding ceremony has its own process and characteristics. In Indonesia, there are a lot of wedding ceremonies since Indonesia has lots of ethnic, such as Batakese, Javanese, Sundanese, Chinese, etc. In Pematangsiantar, one city of North Sumatera of Indonesia, Chinese had become one of the largest communities since the independence day of Indonesia in 1945. The wedding ceremony of Chinese people in Pematangsiantar has a very unique tradition. This wedding ceremony can represent the Chinese culture, custom and shows the ways of thinking and belief. It consists of *khua jit ci* (selection of days), *sang jit-thau* or *sang le/sang pheng* (betrothal/pre-wedding custom), *pai tu* (stacking wardrobe), *phang te* (tea ceremony), etc. This article is hoped to be useful for readers (especially younger generations of Chinese people in Pematangsiantar, Indonesia) to know more about wedding ceremony and also for other researcher as references in conducting other research related to the other wedding ceremony tradition.

Keywords: wedding ceremony, selection of days, betrothal, stacking wardrobe, tea ceremony

Different people will be different culture, including to the wedding ceremony. Every country has its own wedding ceremony. In Indonesia, there are lots of wedding ceremonies because of the diversity of the society (people). There are Batakese, Javanese, Chinese, etc. Pematangsiantar, one city in Indonesia located in North Sumatera, is one of the largest communities which have special wedding ceremonies. There are some similarities and differences between ceremonies held by the people. There are lots of ethnic in Chinese such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, etc. In this occasion, the writer will deal with the wedding ceremonies of Chinese who live in Pematangsiantar, Indonesia especially for Hokkien tradition. The writer himself is a Hokkien people who live there. The Chinese wedding ceremony there consists of *khua jit ci* (selection of days), *sang-jit* or *sang le/sang pheng* (betrothal), *pai tu* (stacking wardrobe), *phang te* (tea ceremony) and wedding reception

Selection of Days (*khua jit ci*)

Based on https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_pre-wedding_customs, 21st July 2015; 04.30 PM, selection of days is also known as the selection of auspicious dates (看日子) for the Chinese wedding. This selection of days is very important in Chinese wedding because they believe that the date can bring luck for the couple in the future. The parents from groom family usually invite a monk or fortune teller from temple to find the dates. A monk or fortune teller uses Chinese calendar to find the character for year, month, day, hour of birth of a man and a woman in order to predict the future of that couple-to-be.

Betrothal (*sang jit-thau/sàng-jit*)

Based on https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_pre-wedding_customs, 22nd July 2015; 10.26 AM, the betrothal (Chinese: 過大禮; pinyin: *guo dàlǐ*, also known as 納彩 or *nàcǎi*) is an important part of the Chinese wedding tradition. During this exchange, the groom's family presents the bride's family with betrothal gifts (called 聘礼 or *pìnlǐ*) to symbolize prosperity and good luck. Moreover, the bride's family receives the bride price (Chinese: 聘金; pinyin: *pīng jīn*; literally: "abundant gold) in red envelopes. The bride's family also returns (回禮, *huílǐ*) a set of gifts to the groom's side. Additionally, the bride's parents bestow a dowry (嫁妝, *jiàzhuāng*, *kè-chng*) to the bride.

This betrothal is also known as *mahar* (Javanese custom) and *sinamot* (Batakese custom). But, in this betrothal custom, there will be no bargaining like what the other betrothal of other wedding ceremony does. In <http://chcp.org/virtual-museum-library/chinese-wedding-traditions/>, 22nd July 2015; 10.32 A.M, it is written that there will be extensive bargaining for the amount of money and goods that would make up the gift to the girl's family. But, the writer did not find any bargaining between both families (boy and girl) in Chinese wedding ceremony in Pematangsiantar, Indonesia. In one wedding ceremony, the writer found that the amount of money given to the girl's family (known as *kè-chng*) was not bargained, but it was the willingness from the boy's

family to give to the girl's family. The boy's family's gifts acknowledged the parents' efforts in raising the girl and by accepting the gifts, the girl's family pledged her to the boy's (quoted from <http://chcp.org/virtual-museum-library/chinese-wedding-traditions/>, 22nd July 2015; 11.09 A.M)

The selection of betrothal gifts will run after the *kè-chng*. The gifts are often include food such as dried longans and lotus seeds, dried noodles (means long life), eggs, along with other sweets, sealed with red paper, as part of the dowry. All of them will be placed in red basket. The groom family will bring and give to the girl/bride family to be accepted. The girl family will only take some of the gifts and the rest of the gifts will be returned to the boy's family. After being accepted, the girl family will treat the groom family to a small feast through various foods.

Wardrobe Wedding Room (*pai-tu/pai ke ceng*)

Pai-tu is also known as *pai ke ceng* (摆嫁妆). In Chinese culture, *pai-tu* means decorating the wedding room/bridal chamber. *Pai ke ceng* is from *ke ceng* (嫁妆) means a set of things. The things are brought by the bride-to-be when she is going to get marry. These things are given by the bride parents as a provision/stock to have a new household. In Hokkien wedding ceremony in Pematangsiantar, *pai ke ceng* is usually done four days before the wedding day.

Tea Ceremony (*phang te*)

Tea ceremony (in Hokkien language known as *phang teh*) is also known as *cha dao* (茶道) or the way of tea. Tea is the symbol of purity, stability and fertile. The purity of tea represents the love is pure and noble; the stability of tea stands for faithful love; the fertile of tea represents the family will have many children (quoted from <http://www.teasenz.com/chinese-tea/chinese-wedding-tea-ceremony.html>, 30th July 2015; 09:54 A.M). Tea ceremony is one of the most important events in Chinese wedding. It is done in order to introduce the bride and groom and also to show respect to their family (both bride and groom family). The tea ceremony is usually done for the groom family in the morning and then for the bride family, the ceremony is always done in the afternoon).

During a Chinese wedding tea ceremony, the groom should stand on the right and the bride should be on the left side. Their parents should sit on chairs and wait for the new couples' kneel and tea serving. The order of serving tea is very important. It shows how the couple respects their seniority. The parents will be served first, then the grandparents, grand uncles and aunts, uncles and aunts, and then elder siblings. The ceremony is done to all family members

After the drinking of the tea, gifts for the bride and groom will be presented. Gifts are usually in forms of red envelopes with money or jewelry. And the couple should use the jewelry immediately. To the younger siblings and cousins who help them serve tea will be blessed with a happy marriage or abundant wealth. These helpers also receive lucky red envelopes filled with money, called "lai see" which means "lucky", from the bride and groom. In Pematangsiantar, Chinese usually invite a host (master ceremony) to explain the significance/meaning of every event in wedding ceremony, including the tea ceremony.

Wedding Reception

The last of all events from the wedding ceremony is wedding reception. In Pematangsiantar, there are 4 sections in Chinese wedding culture, especially Hokkien, they are gifts, sign-in, banquet procedure, and food. The reception in Pematangsiantar by Chinese is always done in a restaurant. The gift often given is cash/money. The cash/money should be put into a red envelope with the name of the giver/sender.

There will be two people (one from bride's family and one from groom's) at the sign-in table to help the guests to register and receive the red envelope. The red envelopes are usually placed in a special box which is sealed with red paper. After all the guests come, the wedding reception is started by introducing the groom family walking to the banquet table and then the bride family. The host (master ceremony) started the reception. There will be cake cutting, toasts, and feast which is designed by singing and dancing.

The wedding reception is always done in a restaurant. Chinese wedding reception in Pematangsiantar typically has eight various foods. The types of foods depend on the groom family who make an order to the restaurant. Every dish has its own meaning related to the wedding ceremony. Based on https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wedding_reception#Chinese_culture, 8th September 2015; 09.39 P.M., the dishes can be shark fin, abalone, lobster, jumbo shrimp, squab, sea bass, or sea cucumber are common on a wedding banquet menu. A whole fish, chicken, or pig means luck and completeness in Chinese wedding culture. And usually, when the reception comes to the fifth dish, the bride changes the wedding dress into a traditional Chinese red wedding dress ((鳳褂, or *qípáo*) at that time and the groom together with bride will make a toast to the guest, including their friends to each table.

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