

## The Roles of Event Organizers in Arranging Chinese-Indonesian Wedding Rituals

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### ABSTRACT

Nowadays, Chinese-Indonesians have already been modernized and many of them do not understand what rituals they have to undergo on their wedding day. It becomes a good opportunity for event organizers (EO) to do their businesses in arranging weddings. In this research, I am interested in finding out about the roles of event organizers in arranging Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals. This study focuses on the roles of EO in running their business and arranging Chinese wedding rituals using the theory of consumerism. In consumerism, Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals as a part of culture, can also be regarded as a product to be bought and sold. The data collected are from interviews with some EOs in Surabaya to find out the roles of EO in arranging Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals. There are three different roles of EO, which are informant, organizer, and seller. Moreover, EO has the responsibility in succeeding the client's wedding day.

**Keywords:** Commodity, Consumerism, Event Organizer, Chinese-Indonesian, Wedding Ritual.

### INTRODUCTION

Chinese-Indonesian or known as Chinese people who live in Indonesia have been largely developed in these last 2 centuries. After the Dutch took over and colonized Jakarta, there were many Chinese seeking to make their fortune by immigrating to Indonesia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hays, 2008). Chinese people who emigrated from mainland China to Indonesia made a new community, tribe, and culture, and the later generations are referred to as Chinese-Indonesian. There have been 3 to 4 generations of Chinese-Indonesians since the 19<sup>th</sup> century until now and they have been part of Indonesia's society. Furthermore, Chinese-Indonesians in Indonesia have certain customs and traditions that they preserve. Each of the traditions has its own rituals and all the rituals are very complex and it usually takes days to prepare for one ritual and some rituals are very expensive, in a sense of the preparation. It is all because rituals are really important and sacred since they mark many life events, big and small. (Vohs et al., 2013). Just like other ethnicities, Chinese people still preserve the rituals of 3 life cycles, such as births, weddings, and deaths. Each of the rituals has its own meaning and purpose.

Chinese people believe that wedding tradition is the most important tradition since it is the sign of maturity and it will change someone's life entirely. Weddings also unite two people and two families become one. According to Tillmans, wedding rituals are really important. They said that wedding rituals are really important because the rituals celebrate the person whose status is being changed (Tillman, M., & Tillman, H. 2010). That is why there are many rituals that have to be done in a Chinese wedding because each of the rituals symbolizes changes of status and the unity of two people and families.

Most young Chinese-Indonesians nowadays do not really understand and care about the rituals that they have to undergo in their weddings. They only do the rituals because they are told to do so by the elders, or they think that the rituals are interesting. Also, with the development of social media, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Google, wedding couples can

share all their wedding documentations, such as photos and videos there. Therefore, the couples who are getting married can take those documentations as references, so that they can get the idea about the rituals that they have to do on their wedding day. Even though the couples want to do the wedding rituals, they do not know anything about the rituals. Most of them also do not know the meaning and the importance behind the rituals that they have to do. There are no references and books about Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals that can guide them. However, all things become very easy nowadays, because the couples who are going to marry can hire professionals for all the wedding preparations.

The professionals are the wedding organizers or also known as event organizers (EO) that can help people who want to hold an event. The use of event organizers is really popular among the Chinese-Indonesian. They usually hire an event organizer to help them to prepare their wedding day and provide all the things they need for their wedding day. Thereto, since EOs nowadays oversee all the rituals that the couples have to undergo, the soon-to-be groom and bride leave all the wedding preparations to the EO. Event organizers have an important role in the success of the client's wedding celebration. They would prepare all the needs for the wedding preparations, including the materials of the rituals. The event organizer also provides all the things that the couples demand for their wedding day.

Aside from providing the service in Chinese-Indonesian weddings, event organizers also have to compete with each other in order to be hired by the couples who are going to get married. Therefore, according to some event organizer crews, they have to create innovations to get the customers' attention. Some of the innovations are also done for the rituals. Some rituals are simplified and modernized in a Chinese-Indonesian wedding tradition. For example, the tea ceremony is not as complicated as the old era. The tea is replaced with soda, and the bride does not have to pour the tea by herself. Also, the procession to and from the bride's place is no longer held in the bride's house, but it is usually held in a hotel.

In addition, event organizers also mix some cultures in Chinese-Indonesian wedding tradition, so it can be more interesting for the couples. For example, the tradition of making fun of the groom before he is able to meet his bride. Actually, this tradition is influenced by many cultures all around the world, but some people misunderstand it as a Chinese wedding ritual since it is really popular in a Chinese wedding. The event organizers take this opportunity as one of their services. They sell the rituals as a commodity. If there are demands from the clients, there will be sellers who will grant the demands. The EO has 3 roles in arranging the Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals.

### **EO AS AN INFORMANT OF THE NECESSITY OF THE RITUALS**

The first role of event organizer is as an informant about the Chinese wedding rituals, which is part of the Chinese wedding tradition. According to Astricia, Regina, and Nelson, my informants who work in EOs, EO also becomes a wedding-rituals informant, so that the wedding couples will not be clueless about what they are going to do on their wedding day. Most Chinese-Indonesian wedding couples nowadays do not really understand about the meanings and values of wedding rituals. They said that most of the soon-to-be groom and bride usually only care about the wedding celebration and do not really pay attention to the Chinese wedding rituals. They have been modernized by the times and abandon the Chinese rituals, which they consider as old-fashioned.

Furthermore, the informants also said that even though the wedding couples are Chinese-Indonesians, they do not really understand the wedding rituals that they have to

undergo. They do not know what rituals that they have to do on their wedding day. They also think that the rituals are not important and necessary. However, they still have to do the rituals since they are Chinese-Indonesians. According to one of the informants, Regina, actually wedding is a family event; it is not only about the groom and bride, but also about their families. If the parents are the ones who pay for most of the wedding needs, the parents also have the rights to meddle in the wedding preparations. Regina, my informant who works in Ultimo Project EO, said that it is usually the parents who really think that it is a must to have the wedding rituals. They want their children to do all the wedding rituals and stick to the tradition, because the elders usually value the tradition more than the youngsters. Because of the demand from the family elders, the couples usually still do the rituals, but they need an informant to inform them about all the rituals and to guide them, without having to bother their family elders.

Moreover, Regina also said that in preparing a wedding, EO also has an important role as a conflict mediator. Since the wedding couples have no idea about all the rituals, they will think that the rituals are not really meaningful and it is not necessary to do the rituals, so they want to omit the rituals. Meanwhile, the elders or specifically the parents think that the rituals are very important, so they think that their children have to do the rituals. In the end, there will be a conflict between the wedding couples and their parents, since they have different perspectives toward the traditions and rituals. Therefore, it becomes EO's job, as the one who has the responsibility to ensure the success of the wedding of their clients, to be the mediator and informant to solve the problem. They will patiently educate and give explanations about the wedding rituals to the soon-to-be grooms and brides, so that they can understand the reasons why their parents want them to do the rituals and also tell them the importance of doing the rituals on their wedding day. After the couples understand the information according to the rituals from the EO, usually they will understand and follow what their parents said, so they will not have conflicts with their parents anymore.

Therefore, it is also important for EO crews to understand all the wedding rituals because it has become EO's job to explain all about the rituals to the wedding couples. In consequence, the EO crews have to undergo training, so they can understand their "products" well and can present it well to the clients. It is important for a seller to have product knowledge. According to Riis, Hansen, and Hvam, it is important to take notice of the product knowledge, otherwise the product often ends up unstructured or unsuited for their purposes (Riis et al., 2003). This also can be applied for EO, the EO crews have to have product knowledge of the wedding rituals, so they can do and explain the rituals to the clients, so the clients can also understand the purposes of the rituals. The EO has to look convincing when they offer their products since most of the Chinese-Indonesian wedding couples nowadays do not really understand the meaning and value of the wedding rituals, so they will only depend on the EO.

### **EO as the Organizer of the Rituals**

Just like the name, "Event Organizer", EO's role is not only as the informant for a wedding, but also as the organizer of a wedding. EO's job is to help the clients, or the wedding couples to plan their wedding day. Not only organizing for the wedding venue and banquet, but EO also helps the couples to plan all the traditions and rituals. Therefore, EO's main duty is to organize all the preparations of the clients' wedding day, including the preparations for the traditions and the wedding rituals. EO must prepare all the rituals that the couples have to undergo on their wedding day, such as preparing *Misua* (Chinese traditional white noodle) and *Angcho* tea (tea with red date fruit from China which symbolizes joy) for the morning rituals, also preparing for the tea *pai* ritual, a ritual which is intended as a tribute for the elders, before the party started.

According to the informants, the wedding rituals which are included in the wedding packages are usually only the standard or prescribed rituals for a Chinese-Indonesian wedding tradition. The EO will help the clients to organize the rituals and prepare all the ritual needs. If there are some requested rituals from the clients, EO will try to fulfill the requests. The informants said that the main duty of event organizer is to help the clients or the grooms and brides to organize their wedding day, including the rituals. No matter what the request is, the EO will try to fulfill all the requests. Even though they have never done it before, they will look for information about the ritual first and then help the couples to organize the ritual as requested. They will help the couples to prepare all the ritual needs, such as the “double happiness” stickers, the lucky bamboo, and the food for the wedding rituals.

Furthermore, according to the all informants, most of the wedding couples do not seem really care about the wedding rituals. They do not care whether the rituals are necessary or not. They only do the rituals because their parents told them to do so. Most of them personally do not like those kinds of rituals. They prefer to have a simple wedding, which they can enjoy with their friends. However, the informants also said that they still have to do the wedding rituals in order to respect the elders in their family. That is why, now, there are many innovations from the EO for the Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals to make the rituals more fun and enjoyable, so that the couples can still fulfill their parents’ demands and can still have fun with their friends, or their bridesmaids and bestmen. The EO will just follow all the instructions from the couples and try their best to fulfill the demands from the couples, so that they will be satisfied with EO’s service.

From this phenomenon, it can be concluded that EO is also playing a role as the organizer of the wedding rituals. The EO will help the couples in arranging all the rituals. The EO will help the clients to organize all the compulsory and prescribed or requested rituals. It does not matter if it will change the value of the ritual or not, or even if the ritual will not be suitable with the meanings anymore. As long as the couples ask the EO for arranging it, the EO will organize it. The EO will just follow whatever the clients’ request and organize it for the clients.

### **EO as the Seller of the Rituals**

The third role of the EO is as a seller. Since there are demands from the clients, or the wedding couples, EO as the seller will provide or fulfill all the demands from the clients, including the rituals. It is supported by Philip Kotler’s concept of marketing, which he stated in his book, *Marketing Management* (2000), “The social marketing concept holds that the organization’s task is to determine the needs, wants, and interests of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than the competitors” (Kotler, 2000) From this quotation, we can say that in this system, whatever the customers or the couples demand there would always be, EO, as the seller who will fulfill the demands. It means that everything can be sold as a commodity, including the rituals, depending on the customers’ needs, wants, and interests.

According to the all informants, each EO has its own wedding service packages, each of the packages has different offers and rates, and wedding rituals are already included in the wedding service packages. Therefore, once the wedding rituals are included in the packages, the wedding rituals have already become one of the EO’s services and become their products, or commodities. However, the rituals in the wedding service packages can still be innovated and can be changed, according to the client’s request. According to all of the informants, the wedding rituals are really flexible, the EO can change the rituals based on the requests from the groom and bride. So, as long as there are demands from the clients to change the rituals, the EO will fulfill the demands and it makes the rituals become a common commodity, not as

something sacred. Astricia said in the interview, “The rituals can be flexible and the wedding couples can modify all the rituals, so they do not have to follow what the EO has prepared for the rituals. The EO will follow what the groom and bride want.” In this case, the EO will not be pegged on the ritual itself. As has been explained before, EO will focus more on the clients’ needs and demands. If the groom and bride want the wedding rituals to be modified to something more exciting, the EO will fulfill the demand and organize it for them because in the end EO is only a seller. The EO will do everything to make the clients or the couple satisfied.

According to the informants, there are many requests for the “first meeting” ritual to be modified to a more exciting and less serious ritual. Originally in the old era, in the “first meeting” ritual, the groom and bride will stand back to back first, then they will turn around and the groom will unveil the bride’s veil. However, the informants said that sometimes it has been changed now. The groom prefers to walk directly to the bride and read a love letter, which he has written before, first before unveiling the bride’s veil. The original ritual is actually serious and has certain meanings, but since there was demand from the groom and bride, the sanctity of the ritual can be erased and changed to a more exciting ritual. The EO will just help them to organize and prepare the ritual, even though the ritual will lose its meaning. As long as the clients are satisfied and happy with the service of the EO, the EO will follow everything the groom and bride want, because the most important thing in the marketing concept is the customers’ satisfaction. According to Buskirk and Rothe (1970, as cited in Kaufmann, 2014) “Consumerism can be related to what has been popularly accepted as the marketing concept for the past 20 years, which suggests that purpose of a business is to provide customer satisfaction” (Buskirk & Rothe, 1970 as cited in Kaufmann 2014, p. 335). If the EO wants to succeed in running their business, they have to put the couple’s satisfaction on top of everything.

Furthermore, wedding rituals can also become a branding tool for an event organizer. The informants have said in the interviews that Chinese-Indonesian couples do not want to have a serious wedding ritual and only want to have fun on their wedding day, so it becomes an opportunity for EOs to make innovation for their products, the rituals, to be more exciting and appealing. This also becomes one of EO’s strategies to promote their products and their services. They have to come up with brilliant and fresh ideas every time, such as making fun of the groom before the morning rituals or the innovations of *tea pai* ritual. They have to do innovations so that they will not be outdated, and they can gain more customers, also they will be able to compete with other EOs; because just like Gbadamosi stated in his book, *Exploring the Dynamics of Consumerism in Developing Nations* (2018), “customers are viewed as the dominant force since their purchase determines market success for competing firms” (Gbadamosi, 2018, p. 341).

Other than that, EO can use wedding rituals for a promotion strategy in their social media. It is known that almost all people nowadays have social media, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Based on a research, in 2018, there were estimated 2,65 billion people using social media worldwide (Clement, 2019). Based on this fact, social media becomes a promising field to do a promotion. It is also done by many event organizers in Indonesia, especially in Surabaya. They will post everything about their wedding services in their social media, including the wedding rituals, so that they can attract attention from the couples who are seeking an event organizer. The EOs show all of the rituals that they provide in their wedding services, so that the clients will know what they will get once they hire an EO. Moreover, from this, we can conclude that EOs assume Chinese wedding rituals as a commodity, so they have to make a promotion about their products, in this case the products are Chinese wedding rituals.

## CONCLUSION

In arranging a Chinese-Indonesian wedding, EO not only becomes the organizer, but EO is also playing the roles of an informant and a seller of the wedding rituals. As an informant, EO must understand anything about the wedding rituals, from the technical problems to the meaning behind each ritual. Therefore, the soon-to-be EO crews must undergo a training before they are officially become one of the EO crews. They have to do the training so that they can understand anything about planning a Chinese-Indonesian wedding, including the wedding rituals. The EO crews have to look convincing in explaining the wedding rituals, so that the clients will trust the EO crews and believe that the rituals are important. Thus, the EO crews will succeed in making the couples maintaining the rituals. Meanwhile, as an organizer, EO's job is to help the clients, or the wedding couples to plan their wedding day. Not only organizing for the wedding venue and banquet, but EO also helps the couple to plan all the traditions and rituals. The EO will follow all the demands from the clients and help them to organize the wedding as they requested. Even though, sometimes, the demand from the couple is kind of unusual, the EO will just fulfill the demand because they want to make their clients satisfy with their service. Indeed, actually it is leading to the third role of EO, which is as a seller. As a seller, EOs will regard wedding rituals as common commodities as long as there are demands from the clients. EOs as a seller will provide all the needs of their clients and will try their best to make them satisfied with their services, including innovate the wedding rituals as requested by the clients. Because of this phenomenon, Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals are not portrayed as something sacred anymore. Therefore, EOs also have to come up with fresh and new innovations for their services every time, including in arranging the wedding rituals, in order to compete with other EOs and to attract customers' attention. Thereupon, according to these roles of an EO, I have found a finding.

From the analysis, I found out that, in planning a Chinese-Indonesian wedding, the event organizer or the EO inadvertently and unconsciously becomes the preserver of the Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals. The EO crews seem to really understand everything about the Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals. They know what exactly the soon-to-be groom and bride have to do on their wedding day. Most of the EO crews also know the meanings behind the Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals and can even give explanations to the wedding couples about the rituals. They will provide all the needs of the rituals and guide the couples to do the rituals. However, if the couple decides that they do not want to do the rituals, the EO will still try to ask them not to omit the rituals. The EO will give some explanations about the importance of the rituals and why they have to do those wedding rituals. They will try their best to make the couples keep maintaining those wedding rituals. Therefore, it seems like the EOs eventually become the preserver of the wedding rituals. They are considered as the preserver because they help the wedding couples to maintain the Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals and organize the rituals on their wedding day. In addition, because of this, it also seems like the EOs play an important role in the sustainability of Chinese-Indonesian culture and tradition, especially Chinese-Indonesian wedding culture. The EOs help the Chinese-Indonesian culture and tradition to stay alive and keep preserved by the Chinese-Indonesians. EOs also seem to have concern about the understanding of the wedding couples about the wedding rituals. They do not want the wedding couples to do the rituals without knowing the meaning behind each ritual. If that happens, the couples will still do the rituals, but they will not appreciate those rituals. From this also, the EO unconsciously becomes the preserver of Chinese-Indonesian wedding rituals by helping the Chinese-Indonesian couples understand about all the Chinese wedding rituals that they have to do on their wedding day, which are also led by the EO.

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