

Folk Customs in Modern Society: 'Tradition of Zuoyuezi' in Taiwan: An Physical Anthropology Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional Chinese postpartum care *Zuoyuezi* (Doing the month) refers to a serial of rituals practiced by puerperal women and their families, sets of rules set up to prohibit certain activities. They involve taboo and dietary during the postpartum confinement/convalescence. In history, the first document relating such custom is Chapter *Pattern of the family* in the Chinese classic ethical obligations on *Classic of Rites* (禮記內則篇) which was dated about 1st century B.C. It set the regulations:

When the confinement is approaching, the wife needs to be moved to a side room from bedroom. When husband asks about her situation, the wife should avoid meeting him. Till after giving birth, if it is a boy people should hang a bow on the left side of doors, if girl, on the right.... After 3 months of childbirth, families will choice a proper day for the haircut rite for the newborn child, and till the day the wife is just allowed to meet her husband....

After thousands of years, however, such *Zuoyuezi* custom is now already not exclusively Chinese tradition, similar behavioral patterns or medical concepts are widely seen across Eastern Asia, e.g. in Vietnam, Malaya, Korea and etc.³, and the practical ritual behaviors, especially the dietary for postpartum women are differentiated in different area according to the agricultural and social changes. What specific for the Taiwan is that, despite the comparatively revolutionary economical and social changes the custom *Zuoyuezi* not only has not been abandoned, but has survived the test of time and currently is still evolving, followed by new branches of social institutions.

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³ Please refer to the studies of Laderman, C (1987), Park and Peterson (1991) and Lu, C. (2005).

PROBLEMATIC

As a long-lasting custom, *Zuoyuezi* has support from Chinese medical discourse, while western medicine takes the dominant position in modern Taiwan medical system, numerous researchers have tried to explain such custom from the Western medical perspective, mainly with public health, nutrition for postpartum women and newborn children, postpartum depression considerations. However, such modern and traditional consideration still cannot explain entirely the existence of this custom.

The study on *Zuoyuezi* custom of cultural anthropologist Wong (1994) could be a landmark for the study and provides an alternative research approach. Wong has tried to explain the custom with the concept of *the rites of passage* and examine such tradition from medicine, dirt and interpersonal networks perspectives. She argues that, the *Zuoyuezi* custom is rather a cultural setting with symbolic and practical functional meanings and is based on Chinese practical values and philosophy of harmonious equilibrium and is conducted by ritual guidelines of quarantine, dietary, no-making-up, no-working and declaration (Wong, 1994:III) .

The most significant achievement of Wong is that she has illustrated that through the *Zuoyuezi* ritual (Wong 1994:88-102) family could re-regulate the relationships between the new mother and other family members, especially her mother in law. However, due to the change of modern family structure, while nuclear family has been the main type (Chao, 2004:23), the function of the relationship inside of the family has declined. Even though the custom still exists, we might still, question the reason of such custom. This study examines the recent shape of *Zuoyuezi* custom and the connection with such postpartum adjustment / confinement and its biological, physical conditions, and try the find out the modern reasons of such traditional custom or new problematic for related research.

This research adopts the method of documental analysis. Main documents that authors have reviewed are research papers from perspectives of nutrition, nursing, sociology and anthropology. The authors have also conducted semi-structured interviews/ in-depth interviews ⁴. There are 12 female respondents who have

⁴ Interviews were conducted during Dec. 2006 and Mar. 2007, by telephone (internet phone) and face-to-face interviewing.

Zuoyuezi experience. Five of the respondents are under the age of 40 others are above 54. We might categorize respondents into 2 groups according to residency: Taipei metropolis area and Changhua, which is the Tai-he neighborhood in suburban area of Changhua City⁵. Authors have tried to build a typology study on the influence of residency on the attitudes of respondents to *Zuoyuezi* custom. Regardless the result of interviews shows no significance of residency, personal experience of *Zuoyuezi* and the relationships with family members and especially the attitudes to the custom of respondents still helped authors to verify other research documents.

THE ‘ZUOYUEZI’ CUSTOM

The term *Zuoyuezi* in literal Chinese could be written as *Sitting for a month* (坐月子)⁶ and also *Doing the month* (做月子/作月子)⁷. After reviewing 4 Chinese dictionaries Wong believes that the term *Doing the month* (作月子) should be the proper one, because the term refers to ‘exercising’ all ritual and dietary behaviors of the custom, not only for postpartum women but her families as well (Wong, 1994:31-4). Nevertheless, according to the interview of this study, when referring to the situation of confinement and discharging from household duties that postpartum women can really ‘sit’ and rest, people would take the term ‘Sitting for a month’ to describe the status of the women, and when referring to the exercising of the custom that involves all family members, including postpartum women, the term *Doing the month* would be used to describe all related behaviors (respondent WAY, age 67, Dec. 2006). Furthermore, as the business of postpartum care organization is fulfilling the needs of postpartum women, most of the *Zuoyuezi centres* in modern Taiwan has taken the term of ‘sitting’. Therefore, for comprehensively describing the custom including perspectives from the subjective view of postpartum women and from family circumstance, the study skips the above argument and takes simply the term in Chinese phonetic pinyin *Zuoyuezi*.

⁵ Population is 235,444. Source: Changhua City Office, 2007.

⁶ For example, in the research of Chao (2004: 2-3).

⁷ Both Chinese words ‘做’ and ‘作’ mean ‘doing’, researcher eg. Shieh (2004) takes the previous character, however Wong (1994) argues that the later character should be the proper one in the case of ‘Zuoyuezi’.

Zuoyuezi postpartum confinement is exactly a course of traditional Chinese progeniture convention (birth custom). It is held, no matter after natural birth or caesarian.⁸ In ancient tradition the separation started 1 month before confinement, however such custom functioned only in rich families, in which there was no lack of labour, and related taboos were obeyed during this period as well (Shieh, 2004: 81). After giving birth the most important is feeding postpartum women immediately with small amount of food, usually fried eggs with sesame oil, this is called in Minnan phonetics *dei-bak* (墊腹/壓腹), and the period of *Zuoyuezi* confinement starts at the same time. Till the newborn child completing it's first month of life and family holding the rite of *full month* (滿月) the *Zuoyuezi* confinement would finish.

During this month, there are also several rites, for instance rites of the 3rd day, 12th day, name giving (in modern Taiwan before the 15th day) and the rite of cutting fetal hair. Such rites are mainly related to the newborn child, and rites or custom related to postpartum women are composed of three main parts: dietary, dietary taboo and behavioral taboo those are shown as bellowing table.

Table 1. Elements of 'Zuoyuezi' custom

Type	Code	Main element
Dietary	D1	Chinese prescription <i>Shenghua</i> soup (生化湯)
	D2	Kidney, heart, liver and shank of pig and <i>Duzhong</i> (杜仲 <i>Eucommia ulmoides</i>)
	D3	Sesame oil chicken (麻油雞 chicken cooked with sesame oil) or sesame oil chicken with rice wine (雞酒)
Dietary taboo	Dt1	Salt
	Dt2	Toxic foods (in Chinese medical sense) ex, duck, goose, most of sea foods and etc.
	Dt3	'Cold' foods (in Chinese medical sense)
	Dt4	Hot, spicy foods
	Dt5	Water
	Dt6	Hard and solid foods

⁸ N. Cheung, R. Mander, L. Cheng, V. Chen, X. Yang, H. Qian, J. Qian, (2006) *Zuoyuezi*' after caesarean in China: an interview survey.

Taboo	Behavior taboo	Bt1	Entering other's house
		Bt2	Entering temples
		Bt3	Praying to gods or ancestors
		Bt4	Going outdoor at night
		Bt5	Sexual behaviors
		Bt6	Carrying heavy objects
		Bt7	Household duties in kitchen
		Bt8	Crying, reading
		Bt9	Washing hair, taking shower or bath
		Bt10	Tough cold water

Source: **a.** Shieh, Y. 2004, A Study on the Traditional Kinmen Birth Custom. Pp. 89-97. **b.** Wong, L. 1994, *Besides of Sesame Oil Chicken* (麻油雞之外). Pp. 37-46. **c.** Yang, S. 2004, The Influence of Progeniture Convention on Middle-aged and Elderly Women's Health. Pp. 21-43. **d.** Ludman, E.K. and Newman, J.M (1989). Blood building foods in contemporary Chinese populations. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 89(8): 1122-1124

RESEARCH REVIEW

Authors of the study have reviewed traditional Chinese medical and modern anthropology theories about postpartum care and try to find out the explanation for the custom. However, the results show as the Table 2 that, several taboo of the custom are rather related to religious beliefs and have no explanation from Chinese or western modern scientific perspectives eg. Bt1, Bt2, Bt3 and etc. For such problem, authors try to find out the reason why modern postpartum women still follow the custom..

a. Chinese traditional explanation

Traditional Chinese medical discussions about *Zuoyuezi* mainly relate to concepts such as *Yin* (陰) and *Yang*(陽) (Ngai Fen Cheung 1997), which is the contrary ideas of Moon/Sun, feminine / masculine or feeble/tough, and concepts of 'cold/hot'(han 寒/re 熱), 'weak/strong'(xu 虛/shi 實, deficiency/adequacy) and etc. The balance of these characteristics assures the mind and body health. Even such ideas are involved deeply in the dietary and taboo of *Zuoyuezi* (Wong, 1994; Yang, S. 2004; Shieh, 2004) . In Chinese medicine, women are belonged to the category of *Yin* with 'weak', 'feeble'

and ‘cold’ physical characteristic. Especially after giving birth, women’s body is in the situation of extreme ‘weakness’ and ‘cold’. The deficiency of any element, or the situation of lost of balance has to be supplemented by medicine intake or by diet modification, that is the origin of the Chinese concept of ‘Bu’ (補, supplementation). Furthermore, the invasion of humidity, unclear or abnormal ‘Wind’ (feng xie/風邪 or zei feng/賊風) into the body during the convalescence period is also a serious threat for women’s health. Moreover, in Chinese myth the postpartum lochia, the same as the menstrual blood is treated as ‘dirt’ (穢), and it could affront gods and bring misfortune to other people. Such myth, even without scientific prove, forms also several basic elements of *Zuoyuezi* taboo.

b. Social anthropological explanation

Besides of Chinese traditional explanation, research of Wong (1994) on *Zuoyuezi* custom has adopted Arnold Van Gennep’s (1908-1960) concept of *the rites of passage* to examine the custom. *The rites of passage* are set of rites exercised by community members during the period, in which a member is changing its social status, and during the passage members would adjust relation and set new obligations to each other. The rites of passage are composed of three parts: *rites of separation*, *rites of transition* and *rites of incorporation*. In ancient time, according to Wong (1994: 55-65) the quarantine before giving birth was exactly *rite of separation*, and such quarantine would last till the holding of the *full month* rite, which is the rite of incorporation. The period between separation and incorporation was the period of transition. In this period dietary taboo and other taboos could be treated as *rites of transition*.

Following the idea of Wong, because the status change happens in the ‘transition’ period, which lasts almost as long as the whole ‘passage’, it might be said that the ‘transition’ is the most important period in the ‘passage’. According to Wong, there are two significant concepts in this period: ‘role exchange’ and the ‘dirt’. During *Zuoyuezi* the roles exchange of the postpartum woman and her mother in law brings the experience of changing from secular status to sacred and then returning to secular for the woman. In everyday life woman should serve her mother in law, but during *Zueyuezi* period the situation reverses. Such experience not only helps in maintaining

the balance of relationship in the family but also helps members to cognize the fact of status change. Such change usually results in disorder situation for the community and causes members anxiety. From such perspective the anxiety of the ‘dirt’ in postpartum woman is exactly the reflection of the anxiety of disorder and the separation from the ‘dirt’ could be the method to protect existing order (Wong, 1994: 14) .

c. Physical anthropological explanation

The 30-days period of *Zuoyuezi* is almost equal to 4-6 weeks postpartum period. Postpartum is a medical term referring to the time when women’s body recovers after childbirth. Uterus, in the last period of pregnancy reaching weight of 1000g is now involuting until it recedes to the prepregnancy weight of 50-100 g. The perineal tissues are swollen, stretched or even traumatized and it takes 10-20 days to heal up (Wong, 1994: 74). Due to long lasting labor, loss of large amount of blood and changes in hormone levels, woman is exhausted, weak and unable to work or sometimes even walk. During this period she requires the support from other family members.

To justify postpartum woman right to rest is another function of *Zuoyuezi*. In the tradition, during the period of *Zuoyuezi* woman is not allowed to work. In this case ‘work’ refers not only to discharging her professional duties, but also to many others activities, like household duties, taking care of newborn child, or even carrying it. Postpartum woman is also excluded from social and religion life and its duties. What do not match to common understanding of ‘work’, are activities like reading books and watching television, which are prohibited, too.

As Wong reports, nowadays the length and quality of postpartum rest strongly depends on family’s economical situation. In prehistoric and medieval agricultural populations in China, or even in modern times, in indigent areas, human muscles are main source of labor in the farms. Women participate in and work hard in the farm as a man, while they still have to hold the house. Only pregnancy and childbirth put them into a special, privileged situation. In household economy, the lack of labor brings often stress to postpartum women, requiring them resuming her duties as soon as possible. Under such circumstances, the authority of tradition is an argument for a

woman to stay at home for few days more.

Table 2. Chinese traditional and modern biological explanations for *Zuoyuezi* custom

Type	Code of element	Traditional Chinese explanation	Modern biological explanation	
Dietary	D1	For helping excreting lochia and hematopoiesis.	unknown	
	D2	Preventing from backache, helping hematopoiesis and lactation.	Vitamine A and iron supplement	
	D3	For helping hematopoiesis and lactation.	High nutritional value, contains proteins and iron	
Taboo	Dietary taboo	Dt1	Because salt could cause <i>feng</i> (風/月內風) and is unfavorable for excreting lochia.	Water retention, urinary system disorders, hypertension
		Dt2	Harmful for health especially for weak postpartum women.	There is no idea, of <i>feng</i> , however some foods belonging to this group may cause allergy
		Dt3	Because postpartum women are in the physical status of 'cold' and 'weak/ deficiency, 寒/虛).	unknown
		Dt4	Hot spicy foods would deepen the 'weak/deficiency' physical situation.	May cause hemorrhage
		Dt5	The same reason as 'cold' food taboo.	unknown
		Dt6	Disturbing digestion	unknown
	Behavioral taboo	Bt1	It will bring misfortune to others.	Reducing the risk of infection, quarantine
		Bt2	It will affront gods and cause misfortune.	Reducing the risk of infection
		Bt3	The same reason as above.	Unknown
		Bt4	Because postpartum women are 'unclean', the behavior will attract evil spirits.	Unknown
		Bt5	It brings bad lucks for husband.	Resuming sexual activity may be resumed when puerperal traumas are healed

	Bt6	Disturbing uterine involution.	The risk of hysteroptosia
	Bt7	It brings bad luck.	Unknown
	Bt8	It is harmful for eyesight.	Unknown
	Bt9	It causes <i>feng</i> , which will cause headache, backache, rheumatism and etc.	Hot baths in first two weeks of postpartum may cause serious hemorrhage
	Bt10	Similar reason as above.	Avoiding heat loss

Source: 1. Research papers: **a.** Shieh, Y. (2004: 89-97). **b.** Wong, L. (1994: 37-46). **c.** Yang, S. (2004: 21-43). **d.** Ladipo O. A., Nutrition in pregnancy: mineral and vitamin supplements in *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Vol. 72, No. 1, Pp. 280-90, July 2000.
2. Interviews: respondents WAY (Dec. 2006), KTY (Feb. 2007), LFR (Mar. 2007).

DISCUSSION

a. General view on biological aspect of *Zuoyuezi*

There is no doubt that in Middle Ages, or even a hundred years ago *Zuoyuezi* was a highly adaptative behavioral pattern. As it was mentioned above, the reason for developing *Zuoyuezi* custom may be seen in agricultural origin of Chinese society. However, it may be analyzed from a broader view as the method to increase the mother's and neonate's chances for survive.

b. Dietary aspect of the pregnancy and postpartum period.

Human is a placental mammal. The young homo sapiens is growing in mother's womb for 9 months. After birth, it is comparatively not well developed, incapable for independent life and totally dependent on others' care. For first few months it's only food is milk, produced in it's mother mammary glands. For over a year, energy costs of a child development and growth need to be supported my mother. This is why the biological condition of women's organism is crucial for the pregnancy outcome and child's further nutrient situation. It is a bottleneck of human ontogenesis. The body fat content and BMI index effects even on women's fertility. After childbirth, the sufficient dietary intake guarantees proper lactation capacity and infant's normal development. WHO recommends an additional 500 kcal per day to meet the cost of

lactation⁹. The food shortages in dietary intake may reduce milk production. However, even under the conditions of severe reduction of energy intake the milk production will be maintained.

During pregnancy women's dietary requirements change. Women's nutrition is an important element for the development of fetus. Her daily food intake needs to fulfill her organism's needs and needs of developing child. Therefore, some groups of nutrients must be supplemented. Since the beginning of gestation, the energy intake is growing as well as demand for certain minerals and trace elements.

Table 3. Dietary allowances for selected nutrients in pregnant women and the results of its deficiency.

Nutrient	Pregnant woman daily allowance increase comparing to non-pregnant woman (in %)	Deficiency results
Energy	14	Malnutrition
Fatty acids (unsaturated)	30 (10)	Hormonal disorders, fetus congenial brain and retina abnormalities.
Protein	60	Intrauterine growth retardation,
Calcium	140-150	Hyperhensive disorders,
Iron	182-454 ¹⁰	Anaemia, increased maternal mortality, increased risk of infection
Zinc	43	Fetus congenital abnormalities, abortions, intrauterine growth retardation, premature birth, preeclampsia, reduction of T-cells development
Iodine	33	Fetal loss, stillbirth, cretinism, mental retardation of newborn
Selenium	26	Keshan disease
Vitamin A	20	Night blindness, increased maternal mortality, premature birth, intrauterine growth retardation, low birth weight, antepartum hemorrhage, immune system disorders

⁹ According to WHO report, the energy cost of lactation is estimated to be about 700kcal, but the recommendation assumes, that an average woman would initiate lactation with additional 2-4 kg body mass, accumulated during pregnancy period.

¹⁰ Different values for different bioavailability, WHO.

Vitamin D	300	Neonatal tetany, fetal rickets, abnormal teeth development
Vitamin C	67	Abruptio placentae
Folate	118-176	Megaloblastic anaemia, low birth weight, potential fetal anomaly
Vitamin B-12	40	Megaloblastic anaemia, intrauterine death, adverse infant neurobehavioral development, immune system disorders

Source: **a.** Ropacka M., 2000. Żywnienie kobiet ciężarnych. W: Żywnienie człowieka zdrowego i chorego. Red. J. Hasik, J. Gawęcki. PWN Warszawa, 48-85. **b.** Human Vitamin and Mineral Requirements, Report of a joint FAO/WHO expert consultation, Food and Nutrition Division FAO Rome, 2001.

During pregnancy demands for some nutrients increases significantly. In the situation of general, pre-pregnancy malnutrition, gestation may intensify the deficiency. The most common deficiency in pregnant and lactating woman is iron, calcium and foliate deficiency. In tropical countries more than half of woman population displays anemia, according to WHO standards (Leke, L., Kremp, D., 1989).

Many of dietary guidelines, following the traditional medicine concept of *Yin* and *Yang* are surprisingly reasonable in the aspect of western dietary postpartum care. First of all, most of foods in *yang* category have high energetic value and is rich in nutrients. Eggs and meat, rich in proteins helps to build up and regenerate tissues. Ginger vinegar soup helps to restore calcium and iron reserves.¹¹ The meat, pigs liver contain large amounts of iron and lipid-soluble vitamins, especially vitamin A, the deficiency of which often prevails during gestation and postpartum period.^{12 13}

c. The wisdom of the tradition- some biological aspects of ‘Zuoyuezi’

¹¹ Chan SM, et. al. 2000, ‘Special postpartum dietary practices of HongKong Chinese woman, *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2000) 54, pp. 797-802.

¹² Christian, P., West, K. P., Khatry, S. K., Katz, J., LeClerq, S. C., Kimbrough-Pradhan, E., Dali, S. M., & Shrestha, S., Vitamin A or b-Carotene Supplementation Reduces Symptoms of Illness in Pregnant and Lactating Nepali Women *The Journal of Nutrition*, (2000).130: 2675-2682

¹³ Lisa M. Bodnar, Mary E. Cogswell, Thad McDonald, Have we forgotten the significance of postpartum iron deficiency? *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* (2005) 193, 36 – 44

Not only the diet recommended for *Zuoyuezi* period is surprisingly adaptative. Other elements of the ritual evolved into commonly known shape after centuries of natural selection influence:

The taboo of water

In contrary to common belief, the woman exercising the *Zuoyuezi* requirements is allowed to wash herself. She is said to use a sponge or a wipe soaked in hot herbal infusion. According to Chinese medicine, small amount of hot water, additionally ‘strengthen’ by herbs, is acceptable. This belief appeared few hundred years ago, when the concept of microbes and pathogens was unknown. Now, it appears obvious, that using unboiled, dirty water can cause the injured tissue’s inflammation. It is also natural for modern people that boiling the water is one of easiest and the most convenient methods to get rid of most of pathogens in it. What was the element of magic and now appears to be a simple, scientific fact.

Confinement

During the period of *Zuoyuezi*, woman is supposed to stay at home all the time and reduce to minimum any social interactions. Traditional explanation engages the idea of ‘dirt’ and ‘misfortune’. What interesting is that, the ‘vector’ of the dirt is the woman herself. Following such idea, bring with bad luck and affront to gods have become the reason of taboo.

In the historical populations, which did not know antibiotics and inoculations, even a small infection might have lethal results. Reducing the number of possible carriers of air-borne diseases which puerperal woman was meeting with, was and still is a very successful strategy. In biology, one-month of confinement can be understood as a simple, yet effective form of quarantine. Therefore we may understand that in ancient time, as temples and markets were only public places that woman could frequently visit and were always crowded, the taboo of entering temple and releasing from household duties exactly eliminated the possibility of exposing to infection for postpartum woman. The case of the taboo of visiting is the same.

However, why postpartum women were treated as the medium of ‘dirt’, and were

not treated as a delicate, weak and protected person? In Wong's opinion that the anxious of 'dirt' would result in the isolation for the woman, and the purpose of such isolation is to protect existing social relations or provide a period of time to reorganize it. If with social biological consideration, is it possible to explain it that, such myth of 'dirt' or 'misfortune' could form a social stress to postpartum woman from community, and the function of this stress is to ensure that the woman will not leave her house and have a secure convalescence conditions.

d. 'Zuoyuezi' custom in modern Taiwan society

Contemporarily in Taiwan, *Zuoyuezi* not only did not undergo atrophy, affected by westernization. It is still popular and very vivid, however its modern form differs from the one recorded in the literature.

The changes or modifications of such custom in modern society are unavoidable. The culture changes simultaneously with physical characteristic of population. Modern Taiwan population's dietary problem is not a malnutrition anymore¹⁴. It is rather obesity or mental – based eating disorders like anorexia or bulimia.¹⁵ It is hard for modern woman to obey *Zuoyuezi* strict regulations while her social and physical conditions are not the same as it might be a hundred years ago.

However, according to the research of Chao (2004: 18-20), traditional dietary and dietary taboo are still exercised and obeyed in modern Taiwan. Noticeable changes are mainly in behavioral taboo, for instance, with the help of modern sanitary facilities and air conditioning, shower, bath and washing hair are not necessarily forbidden. A respondent of interviews says: '*I started to take shower after 1 week of giving birth, but very fast. I think it should be ok cos now we have modern sanitary equipments, it's already not like in the ancient time...*' (respondent CHM, age 36, Mar. 2007). Another example is '*Thanks to the modern technique, during my Zuoyuezi I bought small*

¹⁴ In 1993-1996 the Nutritional and Health Survey in Taiwan had been conducted for general population.

¹⁵ Wong Y., Huang Y., Obesity Concerns, Weight Satisfaction and Characteristics of Female Dieters: A Study on Female, Taiwanese College Students, *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 194-200 (1999)

packs of some chemical powder; I used that to clean my hair without water. It smell good after using it, and I felt very comfortable.' (respondent KTY, age 54, Feb 2007)

Constant popularity of *Zuoyuezi* has caused the rise of new branch of economy-maternity care centers known as 'Zuoyuezi centers' since about 1990. These medical care organizations engage the scientific and traditional methods to provide postpartum women the fine conditions to carry out *Zuoyuezi*.¹⁶ The *Zuoyuezi* centers originate from historical institutions of so-called *tsou ko nian* (Wong, 1994: 42), evolved as response for the needs of numerous immigrants in Taiwan.

As the immigrants had no family support taking care of them during puerperal period, the modern women appear to be afflicted with similar problem. The nuclear family structure and the prevalence of informal relationships determine the lack of family background for *Zuoyuezi* needs. It helps to explain the popularity of *Zuoyuezi* centers. However, this choice for *Zuoyuezi* differs from the traditional one in many dimensions¹⁷. the cost of 30 days stay in such clinic may reach up to 150 000 NTD in Taipei. Only the women with good economical status can afford this cost. For these women, who prefer to stay at home but are not able to cope with cooking, *Zuoyuezi* centers usually offers a catering service.

Chao (2004: 27) has concluded following reasons for the popularity of *Zuoyuezi* centers in Taiwan: 1. Traditional idea of *Zuoyuezi*. 2. Changes of family structure. 3. Economic development. 4. The rise of feminist consciousness. 5. The conflict between puerperal woman health needs and the filial piety (*xiaoshun*) idea. 6. The will to carry out *Zuoyuezi* and without stress from elder families. 7. The complexity of *Zuoyuezi* procedures. 8. Postpartum women's incapacity to look after herself. 9. Yearly decreasing birth rate. 10. Increasing age of lying-in woman. 11. Changes in the health care system. Those opinions could be confirmed in the interviews of this study.

¹⁶ Han, Wen-hui (1992) , *A Research on Factors of Care for Postpartum Women in Taipei City*, Master thesis, Graduate

Institute and School of Public Health, National Defense Medical Center, Taipei.

¹⁷ Tseng Y.F., Chen, C.H., Wang, H.J., Tsai, C.Y. (1994) 'Postpartum Adjustment of Women who were Home During the "Traditional Chinese one Month Postpartum Period of Confinement" and Those who were in Maternity Care Centers', *The Kaohsiung Journal of Medical Sciences*, vol:10(8), 458-468

An elder lady suffering backache, which in her opinion is due to the careless during *Zuoyuezi* says:

'Zuoyuezi is really a very serious affair that we need to exercise it well. If not, for example just look at my case...and if you don't want to bother your parents or your family are not available for help, the Zuoyuezi Center will be a nice choice that I strongly recommend'. (respondent KTY)

Another younger mother from Taipei City, for example, says that:

'I stayed in Zuoyuezi center for the beginning 3 weeks. It was more convenience for all family members and I could ensure a proper care in that place. After 3 week, my mother in law from a countryside which is far away from here came to my house to help me for 1 week'. (respondent CHM)

The phenomenon of rising popularity of new *Zuoyuezi* institutions shows that *Zuoyuezi* is still an influential custom. However its traditional function of dietary supplementation and improving relationships in family has been weakened by modern medicine institutions and the change of family structure, and has lost its significance. What is left is maybe the awe of taboo. Besides of that, Taiwanese believe that there are two chances for women to improve their physical situation. The first opportunity is the period of menarche, and the other chances are the occasions of *Zuoyuezi*, and such idea is also seen in the interviews of this study. This is to say, regardless of medicine sense, besides of the awe of taboo, *Zuoyuezi* custom brings women benefits, these could ensure the exercising of the custom.

The studies on *Zuoyuezi* give a great opportunity to observe a ritual development. It can be observed when it is arising to reach out the biological needs of historical populations, then slowly immersing in the society structures, obtaining the superphysical meaning. And finally, it distinguishes as independent entity. However, it is causing research problems, because the observed custom is a continuously evolving process.

SUMMARY

The analysis of *Zuoyuezi* custom results following conclusions:

1. The idea of *Zuoyuezi* is in some part compatible with Western medicine patterns for

postpartum care. In both cases, the postpartum period is considered as a time of regaining pre-pregnancy physical shape, and postpartum care is a set of procedures that facilitate it.

In certain points, however, these two outlooks are fundamentally different.

- a. The aim of *Zuoyuezi* custom in terms of biology is a postpartum woman and her health situation. It treats gestation and childbirth in category of health disorder, after which recuperative steps have to be undertaken. The supplementation begins too late to influence in any way the child's intrauterine development.
- b. In contrary to western medicine health care guidelines, taking care of postpartum woman is not only goal of *Zuoyuezi*. As foregoing analysis shows, the dietary aspect of *Zuoyuezi* is still preserved, and follows the evolution of dietary requirements for women in modern society. Nevertheless, social, psychological and ritual aspects of *Zuoyuezi* play the leading role, now even more than in the past.

2. Modern form of *Zuoyuezi* obviously differs from its traditional form. It is rather derived from cross-generational, traditional Chinese family context. In its current shape it rather resembles the propositions of western culture. Its concern is not only postpartum women's recovery but also an infant's health. Expecting mother does not treat the pregnancy as disease anymore. Just like western women, she takes diet supplements and regularly goes for medical checkup during pregnancy. The modern *Zuoyuezi*, derived from its biological significance may be treated as a form of legitimization for one-month maternity leave in the society where a woman-worker is forced to renounce her family life. It is obviously the measure of economical status, concerning the women choosing *Zuoyuezi* centers. Finally, *Zuoyuezi* custom may still be popular only because its parallel to widely practiced western medicine procedures. The custom of *Zuoyuezi* as a ritual is a way to experience the *sacrum*. By referring to the folklore and Chinese history it helps to construct national and social identity of Taiwanese women.

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