

# **Women Study on the Existence of Zhai Ji and Female Temple in Vihara Buddhi Bandung Within Chinese Patriarchal Culture**

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**Abstract.** The results of the patriarchal culture in Chinese people which violated women are foot binding, mui cai, family system and marriage. Various acts of rejection towards patriarchal culture took place, women refused to accept the practice of foot bindings and marriages. They formed an organized community. The women's community lived in a place called Zhai Tang which means "vegetarian hall" which is the origin of the Kelenteng Perempuan (Female Temple). The women occupying Zhai Tang are called Zhai Ji. They are practicing celibacy, adhere to Sanjiao teachings and worships Guan Yin. This research aims to reveal the relationship between the existence of the Kelenteng Perempuan and Zhai Ji in Vihara Buddhi Bandung within the scope of the patriarchal culture of the Chinese nation as its historical background. The research uses historical methods and purposive sampling techniques. The conclusion in this study is the Existence of Female Temple and Zhai Ji is a representation of some of the values of emancipation of Chinese women towards injustice caused by patriarchal culture.

**Keywords:** *women's studies, China, Female Temple, patriarchy, Zhai Ji*

## **Introduction**

Chinese women in their traditional culture do not have an important role in the social system. This fact is due to the lineage culture of the traditional Chinese community that adheres to the Patrilineal system. The existence of women in the life of Chinese society is always associated with relationships with men in their families, such as fathers, brothers, and husbands. In this regard Chinese women do not have autonomous rights over themselves (Lim Sing Meij, 2009). One form of frightening patriarchal cultural violence that is practiced against Chinese women and survived for thousands of years is the practice of foot binding.

Vento Marie in Lim Sing Meij explained that Foot binding is a Chinese tradition. It is to bind women's feet since they were seven years old (Lim Sing Meij, 2009). Foot binding was originally a symbol and status for royal women. This tradition then becomes a status for women from rich families, because girls from rich families do not need to work, therefore foot binding will not hinder their activities. The beginning of this cruel practice is not known. Some sources believe that this practice began in the Han dynasty, but documented references say that foot binding began from the Tang dynasty (920 A.D) until the last dynasty in 1911 when the Chinese government banned the practice. Gondomono explains that foot binding (lotus feet) is a practice in the culture of the Chinese community originating from the "Great Han Culture". Both women's legs had been bandaged since they were very small with very long and tight bandages to look beautiful because both legs remain small (although it makes it very painful and smelly) (Godomono, 2013).

Lim Sing Meij mentioned the causal relationship between eastern philosophy and the practice of foot binding by stating that eastern philosophy helped shape women's identity (Lim Sing Meij, 2009). The mechanism of male control over female sexuality is done by tying women's legs early on. Yang explains that the practice of foot binding is a way to limit women's space so that they are attached to their homes (Yang Wei An, 2014). Foot binding becomes the prestige of culture and civilization. Levy in Lim Sing Meij states that in China, foot binding lasts for almost 1000

years (Lim Sing Meij, 2009). However, there are a number of women's groups in China that are free from their lifelong foot binding practices, they are a Hakka tribal women's group and a women's group living in the Suntek district, Foshian city, Guangdong province.

Other forms of Chinese patriarchal culture are found in social systems such as family and marriage systems. Lim Sing Meij specifically explained the interrelationship between the teachings of Confucius that deserves to be evaluated, especially teachings relating to the existence of women (Lim Sing Meij, 2009). The teachings of Confucius establish men as the main actors in carrying out relations between social members, therefore a father has full power over his wife and children. Forms of violence against women in family and marriage are mentioned by Lim Sing Meij and Yang one of which is in the form of Mui Cai / Mui Tsai (妹仔) culture. Lim Sing Meij mentioned the relationship between the authority of a father in Chinese culture to trade his daughter (Lim Sing Meij, 2009). Yang explains in detail, that Mui Tsai is a term derived from the Cantonese which means a little girl or young woman who is sold by her parents to another family (Yang Wei An, 2014). The fate of the Mui Cai is no different from slaves, they are sold to be employed as servants in their employers' homes without getting paid. Mui Cai is very isolated and often gets physical violence from her employer. During the British colonial period in Singapore, British government officials were not aware of this practice of slavery. Yang notes that the practice of Mui Cai was often veiled and considered adoption, until it was first recognized by the British government during the torture of a 12-year-old girl by her employer to death (August 22, 1929) (Yang Wei An, 2014).

Like Lim Sing Meij, Yang believed that the Confucian doctrine rooted in the Chinese nation was the main cause of the practice of injustice towards women (Yang Wei An, 2014). Confucius regulates women's ethics in aspects of their behavior in relation to men in their families in a rule called "three obedience and four wisdom" (三从四德). Three obedience means a woman when she is young must obey her father, when she is married she must obey her husband, when she is old he must obey his son. Four wisdom means that a woman must behave well in the behavior, words, attitudes and duties of the household (Lim Sing Meij, 2009).

Various forms of violence against women caused by the patriarchal culture of the Chinese people caused reactions from various communities consisting of women. Topley notes that in the 19th century in Suntek district, Guangdong province, there was organized protests to reject the marriage by women who called themselves "women who did not go to their families" (不落家) (Topley, 2011). Gondomono explained about the Hakka sub-ethnic women who refused to accept the practice of foot binding because they felt it was not in line with their role in the community (Godomono, 2013). Various acts of rejection of forms of violence against women and patriarchal culture had a major influence on the emergence of Zhai Ji and the Female Temple. Historical facts about the reaction of various Chinese women to oppose violence against women in patriarchal culture that occurred in the 19th century is important to study, given that the values of gender equality and feminism discourse are identical to the 20th century in the West. This study aims to analyze the existence of Zhai Ji and the Female Temple which emerged in the midst of the patriarchal culture of the Chinese nation, from the perspective of women's studies.

## **Method**

This study aims to reveal the relationship between the existence of the Female Temple and Zhai Ji in Vihara Buddhi Bandung in the sphere of Chinese patriarchal culture as a historical background. The object of research is limited to Zhai Ji and the Female Temple. For this type of

research qualitative and interactional method is needed between the subject and object of research so that the research process itself guides the researcher to take all paths that are believed to enable the researcher to reach understanding (Flick, 2017).

### ***Analysis Method***

#### *Descriptive Method*

Descriptive method is used to analyze data about artifacts in the Female Temple. Usman and Akbar state that this method is about describing things (Usman & Akbar, 2009). Describing in this case can be in the true sense (literally), in the form of pictures, photographs obtained from field data or researchers explain the results of the study with pictures and can also mean to explain in words.

#### *Historical Method*

The historical method will analyze data on the historical background of the Female Temple and Zhai Jie as one of the results of a typical Hakka culture. Fraenkel and Wallen in Riyanto, in Zuriyah explained that the historical method is a method that exclusively focuses on the past, while Donald Ary, et al in Riyanto, in Zuriyah explained that the historical method is a method for applying facts and reaching conclusions regarding the things of the past (Zuriyah, 2005).

#### *Purposive Sampling*

- Participant Observation

According to Arukinto in Kudiya, observation through the activity of focusing on an object using all of our sensing devices (Kudiya, 2017). Nasution argues that observation is the basis of all science. Scientists can only work based on data, namely facts about the world of reality obtained through observation (Nasution, 2003). The data is collected by various tools, including very sophisticated tools, so that objects can be observed as small or as far as possible in the universe. Direct observations will be made by visiting Kelenteng Perempuan Vihara Buddhi, especially during ongoing rituals that involve the role of Zhai Ji to obtain valid data. Specific field investigations were also carried out relating to the existence of Zhai Ji and the Female Temple.

- Documentation and Collection of Archives

Moleong divides this technique into two types: (1) personal documents, consisting of diaries, personal letters and autobiographies; (2) official documents, divided into internal documents (memos, announcements, instructions, rules of a particular community institution used by the community itself) and external documents (magazines, bulletins, statements and news broadcast by the mass media) (Moleong, 2010).

- Data Compilation

Compilation of complete data (Rohidi in Kudiya) about the artistic and cultural values of the existence of Zhai Ji from a gender perspective related to authentic Chinese culture, the social function of the Female Temple, legend of the Gods, the underlying cosmology and the type of representation in the works of art and symbolic functions (Kudiya, 2017). Furthermore, the preparation of data will produce a compilation of data for analysis and conclusion writing.

## ***Theoretical Basis***

### *Women's Studies*

Sadli in Ihromi explained that the women's study was rooted in a movement known as the suffrage, a movement to advance women both regarding their living conditions and their status and role. The basis for the development of women's studies is to be able to accept opinions that state the experiences and views of various women about the problems they face are different, and differences in views and experiences can enrich data about women (Ihromi, 1995).

Women's studies develop on the belief that science is generally androcentric. The purpose of the Women's Study is to make the experience of women part of science which until now still prioritizes the experience and research data originating from men, so scientific data tends to describe the human condition which is a generalization of data whose sample consists mostly of men. male, or the data generated is synthesis from a male perspective. This situation then determines the research topic that is considered important for research. This condition is used to explain why experiences that are unique to women (such as appreciation of daily life, biological conditions, etc.) escape the attention of men or are considered not important to be used as research material.

Sadli in Ihromi explained that in the West, the women's study in the scientific environment is still considered a relatively new scientific study. According to Sadli, there are three characteristics in women's studies that distinguish them from other scientific studies (Ihromi, 1995):

- 1) Studies are centered on women, meaning that women's studies provide opportunities for women to learn about themselves in the university environment and apply scientific methods.
- 2) The approach is interdisciplinary. The point is that women's studies require approaches that go beyond the specific limits of a particular scientific discipline. One problem is reviewed from various scientific disciplines because women's problems and appreciation are not enough to be understood based on just one discipline.
- 3) The orientation leads to concrete activities (action oriented). Research in women's studies does not only aim to gather scientific data about women's experiences. Insights gained through academic activities on women's experiences are needed to carry out problem identification in order to effectively develop strategies and programs for women. The results of women's studies on certain problems can provide scientific knowledge and provide perspectives on how to make links between women's needs in their daily lives based on empirical data obtained. The purpose of women's studies is as a solution to the concrete problems faced by women. To achieve these objectives, it is necessary to formulate questions that come from women's perspectives, meaning that researchers do not limit themselves to the choice of assumptions or hypotheses that are considered important by men, but compile questions and hypotheses from the perspective of women and women scientists.

Similar to Sadli, Mohanty in Lim Sing Meij criticized women's studies with a too "objective" and "frozen" approach, and ruled out important things in the world of women such as the meaning of women's lives from liquid and very dynamic day to day. Mohanty stressed the importance of looking at the daily history of women in women's studies (Lim Sing Meij, 2009).

## *Analysis*

This section contains historical analysis of some forms of resistance to violence against women caused by the patriarchal culture of the Chinese nation which had an influence on the existence of Zhai Ji and the Female Temple.

### *Hakka Women Refuse Foot Binding*

The term Hakka (客家) means "guest" or "stranger". This term is used to refer to the name of an ethnic group whose ancestors came from Han. Constable explains that this sub-ethnic group is believed to have originated in northern China (Constable, 1996). According to Gondomono the term Hakka was first given by the Yue people in Guandong, this means that they came later in an area compared to others (Godomono, 2013). According to Davis, the understanding of the term above is related to the lifestyle of the nomadic Hakka tribe (Davis, 2005). Gondomono explains the theory of the Hakka tribe that is popularly known as the five wave theory (Godomono, 2013). This theory explains the stages of the Hakka diaspora which were divided into five stages over 10 centuries from North to South China.

Hakka women are the women who are free from foot binding practice, according to Gondomono they reject the practice because they feel that the practice is not in line with their role in society (Godomono, 2013). Hakka women can and usually work in the fields and do other hard work side by side with men. Other sources suspect that Hakka women's rejection of the practice of foot binding is due to poverty. Hakka women have to help men work to make a living. Because they used to work in the fields Hakka women were considered to be village women who were "ugly and big-legged" by elite groups from other tribes.

Constable argues that the phenomenon of Hakka women who are free from foot binding is not solely due to factors derived from conditions related to their welfare, but because they are indeed permitted to have more freedom than other Chinese women. On a more serious level, the behavior of Hakka women is seen as a major threat to the patriarchal hegemony of Han culture (Constable, 1996). Eberhard in Constable asserts that Hakka women work hard not because they are exploited, poor and often abandoned by their husbands. The character of a hard-working Hakka woman and an ideal woman who is able to bear the domestic profession as a wife and mother, and as a professional is proof that the Hakka tribe has the same vision as the vision in modernity related to women's emancipation. History records that there were active Hakka women who were prominent leaders and members of the military in the Taiping rebellion (Constable, 1996).

### *Suntek Women Refuse Marriage*

Suntek is a district in the province of Guandong. In the early 19th and early 20th centuries, a large number of women refused to get married. Some of the Suntek women were married, but later refused to live with her husband's family. Topley notes that this rejection was due to the patriarchal culture of the Chinese people who denied women's rights, the injustice was strengthened in their traditional laws such as, if an unmarried woman gets money or compensation from her work, then the money belongs to her father. If the woman is married, then the money he obtained belongs to his father-in-law. Married women are under the authority of their mother-in-law for all domestic matters and are often treated inappropriately / harshly (Topley, 2011).

Suntek women who refused to get married support themselves by working in the silk industry. They formed a sisterhood and were able to organize themselves independently. Some of these fraternities were able to buy property and then changed it to a temporary house for women who

do not yet have a place to live, this property is known as Zhai T'ang (vegetarian house). The term vegetarian is based on a celibate lifestyle and does not eat meat like Buddhist priests. The vegetarian house is a female Temple, and the women of the Temple are called Zhai Ji. Topley explained that the original purpose of the establishment of the Chinese Temple was to accommodate elder Zhai Ji (Topley, 2011).

### Zhai Ji

Zhai Ji (齋姐) which means vegetarian sister is a group of female prayers from the Hakka sub-ethnic group. They are influenced by Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. This group of priestesses lives in a monastery called Zhai Am (齋庵) or Zhai Tang (齋堂) which means Vegetarian House / hall. Zhai (齋) means vegetarian, referring to a lifestyle influenced by Buddhism. Topley presents the results of scientific analysis of the historical background of the existence of Zhai Ji and Zhai Tang. In the analysis, Topley mentions a group of women workers who came from southern China, especially in Kwangtung and Fukien who had never received foot binding practices in their lives, they protested strongly against the marriage system in Chinese culture which did not benefit women. These women refused to get married and preferred to live independently (Topley, 2011).



**Figure 1.** Zhai Ji performing a ritual (Tjutju Widjaja, 2016)

The women who decide to live celibate must rely on themselves to survive, most of them decide to migrate to Malaya to work as servants, workers on rubber plantations or tin mines. The existence of Zhai Tang as a place and organization, was motivated by the arrival of the female immigrants. Zhai Tang provides a safe place for local women and immigrants who are determined not to marry. Topley [4] explains that the women who live in this place even though they live like a Buddhist are not the same as Bikhuni (Buddhist priestess).

The principle of celibacy of the Zhai Ji, then becomes a principle held firmly by its members. Topley in Chun-Fang Yu explained that members of Zhai Ji vowed not to marry for the rest of their lives. The declaration of the oath was carried out through a ritual witnessed by witnesses from among themselves, in the presence of the Goddess whom they exalted, Guan Yin (Chun-Fang Yu, 2001). In some Female Temples in Indonesia, the regeneration of Zhai Ji is carried out

by the Female Temple by adopting abandoned baby girls or from disadvantaged families. But now this practice no longer continues due to the complexity of the adoption regulations imposed by the state. Female Temple Vihara Buddhi has a school that teaches the teachings of "character".

Community contribution in the form of financial donations is one of the sources of livelihood that is quite important for the existence of the Women Temple and Zhai Ji. The Female Temple manages their domestic activities independently with a system that adheres to the principles of kinship with Zhai Ji as the sole decision maker, this is different from the General Temple which is managed by a committee that is formed internally by the people and jointly regulates various necessities of the general Temple.

### *Female Temple (Kelenteng Perempuan)*

The term "Kelenteng" (Temple) is a special Indonesian term specifically refers to places of worship used by Chinese people in Indonesia. According to Kustedja, the term Kelenteng only exists in Indonesia, not found in China alone or in the Chinese vocabulary (Kustedja, 2017). According to some linguists, the term temple comes from the sound of "teng-teng", which is heard from inside the building at the time of the prayer ceremony. Kwa Tong Hay explained that this sound came from the bells that were played at the recitation of the chant or at the peak of the ceremony (Kwa Tong Hay, 2013).

The political situation in Indonesia is very influential on the existence of Chinese temples as places of worship for Chinese people. During the first Indonesian president, Sukarno, the government recognized Confucianism as a religion in addition to other recognized religions in Indonesia, namely, Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. At the time the government was run by President Suharto, initially Confucianism was still recognized, but in the era of the 70s, the government revoked its recognition of Confucianism as a recognized religion in Indonesia. This government decision was the impact of the G30S / PKI incident. As a result, many temples are threatened with being forced to close. The practical solution to this problem is to provide a place to respect Buddha in the Temple, thus a place of worship permit can be issued under the name Vihara, this is generally the case in West Java Province. Whereas in some provinces of East Java and Central Java, the name of the Temple changed to Tridharma Place of Worship / Tempat Ibadah Tri Dharma (TITD)

One Kelenteng that uses the name of Vihara, is Vihara Buddhi, located on Jl. Cibadak No. 281 Bandung City, West Java Province. Vihara Buddhi is a unique temple, because it has another name known as the "Female Temple". This term is embedded because in this temple there are Zhai Ji.

### **Conclusion**

Chinese women experience various forms of violence caused by the patriarchal culture adopted by their community. Forms of violence against women, for example, are the practice of foot binding and Mui Cai. The patriarchal culture of the Chinese nation stems from several teachings on social rights and obligations taught in Confucianism. The suppression of women's rights resulted in resistance from some women in the Suntek region and from the Hakka sub-ethnic women. The reaction in the form of resistance accumulates in the creation of communities of celibate women who live together in a place, they organize themselves independently. The existence of the Female Temple and Zhai Ji is a representation of some values of the Chinese women's emancipation towards injustice caused by patriarchal culture.

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