FEMALE POLLUTION IN CHINESE SOCIETY

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By

PATRICIA FENG-YU SHIH

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AUTHOR: Patricia Feng-yu Shih, B.A.
(National Taiwan University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Richard Slobodin

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ABSTRACT

This thesis mainly concerns Chinese women's pollution in respect of menstruation and childbirth. The thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and practices towards these subjects, and the associated aspects on puberty, marriage, pregnancy and menopause, as collected from interviews of ninety-two women in northern Taiwan in 1974, are detailedly discussed. Upon placing the belief in temporary female pollution within what Mary Douglas (1966) suggests as the "broader ritual pollution complex" in which pollution is related to fundamental disorder, or things out of context, and hence dangerous and threatening to society, it is possible to accept that the sources of pollution are not solely women themselves, nor are men responsible for the dirt. Rather, they are problematic events associated with birth and death in which both women and men are implicated. Menstrual and birth fluids, the main sources of female pollution, encompass further ambiguity between life and death, and are considered particularly polluting than other bodily dirt. Furthermore, in a typical male-oriented society in which women are socially situated on the boundaries, breaking in as outsiders and strangers, females, rather than males, are often depicted as polluting.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Generalities

Women in many societies are generally considered ritually polluting and unclean in the respect that their sexual parts and the emissions are regarded as potentially infectious. The first and subsequent menstruations, as well as the parturiency, are specifically periods of female pollution of the involuntary and situational type[1]. During these periods, women are in a state considered unclean or impure, and must judiciously abstain from taking part in certain activities while other people must take precautions before coming into contact with them. Since it is believed that evil spirits are easily attached to the impurity, these women may be segregated in order to keep themselves away from harmful influences and to prevent others from contamination, and virtually become

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[1] Pollution is classified as permanent and temporary; the latter may be transformed into the former in the absence of purificatory ritual. Permanent purity or pollution is an inherent characteristic of the relationship between social groups of various categories, between man and the phenomena of nature, and between these ritual status, and fixes group ritual status, while temporary purity and pollution relates to personal ritual status of individuals within the context of endogamous and commensal groups. Both classes can be subdivided into

temporarily unapproachable and untouchable. Thus, women under pollution have to avoid all acts likely to enhance their impurity, and to further undertake certain rectification to reduce the potency of impurity upon others.

The belief in temporary female pollution, implementing women's permanent status of inferiority, must be regarded as a part of the whole ritual purity and pollution complex rather than an isolated cultural phenomenon. Taking for granted the bodily or mental purity, or both, as a prerequisite for approaching the gods in most cultures of the world, things and acts in conjunction with death and decay and with bodily wastes depart from the internal and external purity of the body, and need to be avoided. Insofar as female discharge is regarded as a bodily emission, which is impure, it is doubly powerful, hence dangerous, since it is associated with blood, the seat of life, and with the uterus, the seat of fertility. It is the source of danger to the life

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voluntary pollution (avoidable), the result of wrong behaviour, and involuntary pollution (unavoidable), the result of such natural crises as menstruation, birth, and death. In addition, pollution may be termed as external and internal, the latter being much the less easily expunged. Ritual purity or pollution distinguishes between situational and ascribed levels. An individual's ascribed level is permanent and involuntary, yet the situational level varies continuously in the life span of the individual due to voluntary or involuntary factors. (Stevenson 1954:45-65)

and prosperity of mankind, above all, of males. Moreover, the power of fertility is antagonistic to vegetation and able to thwart human activity (Leach 1949:148-9; Robinson 1908:715-6). Although not all communities, primitive or nonprimitive, share these fears[2], in all continents some communities at various levels of civilization do consider menstruating and parturient women to be dangerous and impure for ceremonial purposes.

The aspects of danger and of ritual impurity do not always coexist. In Christian Europe, menstruating women are believed to be influentially harmful. Especially in the traditional strata of central and southern Europe, the fear prevails that flowers touched by a menstruating woman will wither and that preserves she prepares will not keep. However, menstrual impurity has not been seen to impose a ritual threat on women, except that the Romans considered the menstruating and the parturient to be unclean and that the Celts in 14th century France took them to be polluting (Ploss 1895: v.2,11-2).

The concept of puerperal pollution in China can be inferred from passages taken from ancient literature and classics, and is believed to exist over two thousand

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[2] For example, the concept of female periodic uncleanliness has been known to be liberated in the Vedda of Ceylon, except where they are influenced by the Sinhalese (Seligmann 1911:139).

years. In his 'Lun Hêng' (論衡), Wang Chung (王充) of the Eastern Han (25-220 A.D.) or Latter Han lists "Four Things to be avoided" (四諱), one of which, namely the third, is a woman who has delivered a child. It was believed that she would bring ill-luck to anyone coming close to or catching unexpected sight of her within a month of the child's birth. As a rule of precaution, she had to stay away from home and in a hut on a burial ground or on the road during and shortly after the delivery. The magical power of placenta has been mentioned as well.

There exist a great variety of rules and restrictions governing a parturient woman and her chamber. The latter can be comprehensively illustrated via the chapter on "Difficult Birth" (產難篇) in the 'Ch'ien Chin Fang' (千金方) written by Sun Ssŭ-miao (孫思邈) of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.). This authority touches upon a rule that prohibits visitors from entering the chamber of parturition, especially those who are in funeral mourning. Should this happen, misfortune might befall the baby. Not even the husband could gain access to the room, which is therefore called the "dark room" (暗房).

In the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), Chu Duan-chang (朱端章) noted in the chapter "At Childbirth" (臨產) of his 'Wei Sheng Chia Pao Ch'an Yu Pei Yao'

(衛生家寶產育備要) several rules for women to observe at parturition. It was suggested that a parturient woman, although in pain, had to be helped walking around slowly or at least leaning if tired, until she approached the time of childbirth. Then she was allowed to squat while the baby was delivered. As a restriction, she should be aware of not squatting right in front of the god altar, or else she would suffer misfortune.

A huge 'materia medica', the 'Pen Tsao Kang Mu' (本草綱目), edited by Li Shih-chen (李時珍) in the Ming Dynasty (1386-1644 A.D.), is full of rules and guidance on women's menstruation and childbirth. The medical section in 'T'u Shu Chi Ch'êng' (圖書集成), the Great Encyclopedia, of the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.), collects even more methods of cure and prohibitions on females in relation to these two periods.

In addition to those medical classics mentioned above, there are other folk literature (to be discussed later) and anecdotes which instill the concept of female pollution, such as the legend in the Opium War that menstrual pads were hung in the streets of a Cantonese town in order to drive away the British army from the fort. From the beginning of this century, isolated notes on food and behaviour taboos during the periods of women pollution have been found dispersed in a few authorities.

Recent references are to be found in Wolf (1972), Ahern (1975), Diamond (1969), and Gallin (1966). Most of these take the form of fragmentary ethnology, in which inadequate data are available on menstruation since it is considered a secret in contrast to the generally happy and hopeful event of birth. However, the systematic study of thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and practices regarding menstruation and childbirth is almost nonexistent in the formal literature. Plainly enough, the main reason for this omission is that the discussion of these topics is subject to one of the most serious taboos in Chinese society. A further difficulty derives from the fact that most anthropologists are males. It is understandable that things females seldom discuss among themselves can hardly be mentioned before males. Thus, in order to investigate the female side of the purity-pollution complex, a female research team is mandatory. Taking advantage of being females, the author and a teammate were able to gain access to the data and accomplish a field study on Chinese menstrual taboos in northern Taiwan.

1.2 Material and Methods

1.2.1 Duration and Location

The study was conducted in conjunction with another research team of two members on puerperal taboos

and consisted in personal interviews of ninety-two women belonging to different age groups. These interviews were mainly carried out in the city of Taipei and its suburban areas, yet the survey had already included a great variety of informants with diverse social backgrounds since Taipei was one of the major settlement spots for immigration from Mainland China during and after the Communists Takeover. Most of them spoke Mandarin, though they still retained their original ethnic cultures and even the dialects. Hence, without loss of generality, "Chinese women" are meant in this thesis in a general sense rather than women of any specific ethnic group.

The survey spanned a period of five months from Mid-March to Mid-August of 1974. Interviews took place mostly in private homes, ranging from splendid houses and apartments of educated, well-to-do and westernized families, to the plainly constructed and low-cost settlement buildings owned by the government where poorer strata of society were usually located. Some women were also visited in places where they worked, such as schools, clinics, and factories.

1.2.2 Technique of Interview

Initial interviews were with friends, schoolmates and relatives, and were then expanded to include other women through consequent introduction and contact. Interview

with an individual had been strictly personal in order to observe the woman's attitude towards the subject and obtain her statement, which otherwise could be influenceable by someone should the interview be conducted in a heterogeneous group.

Mandarin was the common dialect employed in the interviews except in particular circumstances where Fukienese or Hakka were involved with the assistance of interpreters. The questions on menstrual taboos were deliberately deferred after those on the puerperal subjects since women were usually fond of sharing puerperal experience with others, but shy of mentioning menstruation, which for many was clearly a repugnant subject.

Although the interviews were carried out in the manner of free conversation in order to harvest unexpected data, a routine questionnaire had been prepared. Standard types of questions included age, birthplace, family background, educational and marital status, profession, religious belief, and food and behaviour avoidances during menstruation and pregnancy and after delivery. The presumed reasons for the abstention were also sought.

1.2.3 Categorization of Sample

In order to discover possible variation according

to generation, the women being interviewed are categorized into three age groups, namely, the young women up to the age of thirty, the middle-aged under fifty, and the elderly beyond that age.

For comparing regional differences on food and behaviour taboos, the women are divided into the Taiwanese and the Mainlanders who immigrated from Mainland China since 1949. By Taiwanese are meant the inhabitants of Taiwan for generations who recognize Taiwan as their place of origin though they are originally descendents of the people from the provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung. The latter are particularly known as Hakka (客家) who are considered more traditional than the former.

Immigrants from Mainland China at the time of the Communists Takeover have diversified ethnic backgrounds and mostly reside in Taipei Basin. In order to avoid undue stratification of the sample, they are classified as the southerners and the northerners, the former being separated from the latter according to their geographical origins in China defined by the boundary of the Yellow River. However, specific ethnic characterization will be differentiated whenever necessary.

Educated women, a term being applied to those with some education or academic training beyond the level of primary school, gave comparatively reliable replies at

all ages. The very young, seemingly immature women with lower education level were either too shy to speak or too inexperienced to discuss the topic. Uneducated old women proved to be the most difficult to cope with, and sometimes the interviews had to be broken off because of lack of understanding.

The poor, uneducated women residing in the government settlement units or illegally erected shanty huts are by law registered members of the first-class destitute households. They occupy the lower class of the sample. Women of the upper class include highly educated females with advanced skills, such as professors, writers, physicians and wealthy business women. Women who may not be economically independent but belong to the upper class society, such as wives and daughters of upper-class men, also fall into this category. The middle class women are mostly female teachers, office clerks and military dependents.

It should be noted that Chinese herb doctors and Western-trained physicians have been interviewed as well. The obvious reason is to learn the opinion of these two groups based on contrasting medical theories.

The data collected from the ninety-two women are believed to reflect females' thoughts, attitude and belief as seen from the women's perspective. Several males were

interviewed in the course of the study. Result of those interviewed indicated that their attitude did not differ greatly from that of female subjects. These results tend to confirm the presentations of the men's viewpoint given in the literature.

1.3 Purposes

The present work attempts to:

1. investigate the various aspects of ritual observances and belief in temporary female pollution at puberty, ordinary menstruation and birth;

2. compare the belief, attitude and degree of observance among women of different classes and age groups;

3. search for possible discrepancies between belief and practices;

4. pursue the process of transmission of belief, thoughts and rules; and

5. examine the vitality of the phenomenon of pollution so as to reveal factors of on-going change and to trace the direction into which this change is likely to occur.

In order to gather sufficient data and arrange the belief in temporary female pollution into the network of ritual purity and pollution complex, literary publications in journals and periodicals have been consulted to

supplement the lacking information on the part of parturition and other form of pollution. Valuable data along this line are scarce and can hardly be come by. Whilst not all of these difficulties have been overcome, the present study has, nevertheless, provided a basis for investigating pollution and purity which may be valuable to researchers seeking further knowledge of ritual pollution in the Chinese culture.

In compiling data for this work, the author relies on either published literature, for which citations are given, or personal observations, and either general knowledge which the writer shares with other Chinese women or specific information given me by our informants. In particular, some data are adopted from a sequence of publications by Johann Frick in the Fifties regarding women's social life, childbirth, folk medicine and magic practices among the Chinese in the province of Tsinghai (青海). Since the province is a border territory of China, the normadic influences from Tibet and Mongolia cannot be ignored. However, Frick's informants, as claimed, were from one hundred and twenty pure Chinese families in the western valley of Sining (西寧), the Capital of Tsinghai, who were descendants of the immigrants from the eastern part of China and were still bound within the Chinese cultural dominance (Frick 1950:787; 1955:338).

Frick's study was based on personal observations and interviews with the native women, midwives and Chinese medical practitioners in the course of many years' acquaintance with them. His work seems especially valuable in the sense that little systematic, direct, and first-hand information had heretofore been available. In addition, the material validates pollution belief and the associated practices far down to the Chinese of the border territories. In such respects, the author is pleased to adopt Frick's data as part of a more comprehensive study of Chinese ritual pollution.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPT OF FEMALE POLLUTION

Social ritual impurity accompanies every Chinese woman throughout her entire life. The concept of "women were not considered clean" as declared by Lao T'ai T'ai in 'A Daughter of Han' remains deep-rooted in Chinese society. Yet in what respects are Chinese women regarded unclean, and in what connections are individuals or substances similarly?

Principally, the concept of uncleanness comes from bodily effluvia associated exclusively with women, such as menstrual blood and postpartum discharge. Both menstrual and postpartum discharges are unclean and considered to be the same substance. At a woman's pregnancy, menstrual fluids accumulate at her body, until during childbirth, emerge and continue to leak less and less severely, for a period of about a month thereafter. Nevertheless, the quantities of effluvia associated with birth make that event particularly much dirtier. Indeed, any discharge from the body: menstrual blood, semen, mucus, pus, feces, or urine, is dirty. Some of our informants explained, "Any stuff that comes out of the lower part of the body (an euphemism for genitalia) cannot be clean.

And the dirt associated with birth ----menstrual fluids---- is the dirtiest of all." It is generally agreed that "a birth is like one hundred times of menstruation."

Some informants even regarded menstrual fluids as unclean because of their impairment to one's health. In contrast to the associated blood that flows through the veins and keeps one alive, the menstrual blood is the residual blood that the body rejects, and is dirty and harmful. The maleficent blood is a kind "everybody resents".

'La sam', 'ang tsang' (骯髒), or simply 'tsang' (髒), is normally used in describing these polluting substances. The term has also been commonly adopted to describe ordinary sorts of dirty things, for instance, filthy waste and unclean dresses. Alternatively, unclean substances are referred to as "not clean", 'pu ch'ing chieh' (不清潔) or 'pu gan ching' (不乾淨).

Besides the 'tsang' that relates the dirt from birth, there is also the 'tsang' which describes the dirt associated with death. Birth brings upon the 'tsang' of a happy or "red" event ('hsi shih' 喜事 or 'hung shih' 紅事), while death gathers the 'tsang' of an unhappy or "white"event ('sang shih' 喪事 or 'pai shih' 白事). Both are seen to be connected by a happy-unhappy typology. Sexual acts, following a trait that began to appear already

in the tenth century text[1], are regarded as unclean and must be hidden. However, it has to be commented that sexual intercourse, in spite of its close connection with pregnancy and birth, is not explicitly classified with the dirt of happy events.

The character 骯 ('ang') stems from the root of "bone" and "pit", and is lexicographically explained as a pit of bones, a grave, or a boneyard in general. Moreover, the character 骨葬 ('tsang') composed of "bone" and "burial" illustrates the act of burying bones, or the funeral. In these respects, a corpse is obviously the object of uncleanness. Ghosts, being miserable spirits of dead persons who have unfortunately gone astray on the way to the underworld, are said to possess 'tsang' by virtue of their association with death. The places they frequent can be cleaned by rites which propitiate them, so that they do not disperse their 'tsang' to people.

Two types of 'tsang' can be differentiated. Menstrual blood, birth fluid, semen, feces, ... ,

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[1] R. Van Gulik in his book 'Sexual Life in Ancient China' points out that the Chinese attitude towards sex changed from the time of the Manchu conquest of China (1961:335). He argues that sex was regarded as something "natural" in the early seventeenth century and became more and more repressed only from the early seventeenth century onwards. W. Eberhard, however, challenges this view by suggesting that the change might have already begun in the Sung time as a result of the diffusion of Buddhism and its concept of sin and of punishment of sin (Eberhard 1967:65).

all excrements out of the human organic system are bodily dirts, whereas dirts associated with happy and unhappy events are generally referred to as ritual 'tsang'. Both menstrual and postpartum discharges display a uniquely dual characteristic of the two types. In the ritual aspect, bodily substances like urine, feces and pus (which are unrelated to worship of gods) are tangibly or physically dirty and distinguishable from menstrual blood and postpartum discharge which are dirty (or dirtier) in a special sense. A tangibly dirty substance can be washed away with soap and water or with a chemical solvent, whereas the dirtiness of a person in contact with menstrual and birth fluids cannot be alleviated by such a means.

'Hsieh tu' (褻瀆) has been used literally to describe ritual pollution or 'tsang' related to a woman. In effect, a woman's 'tsang' has the potential of insulting gods or 'ch'ung tien ti' (沖天地), that is, insulting heaven and earth. It is interesting to note that the character 褻 ('hsieh') is written with the determinants: "cover", "put on" and "clothes", and takes the literal meaning of an "underwear". It also means "filthy" and "dirty". Since menstrual cloth (月經帶) is the "dirtiest" underwear, it has to be concealed at all cost. 瀆 ('tu') has the original connotation of "flowing water", or literally a river or a ditch. A filthy underwear

in the river definitely pollutes the water and offends the Water God (水神); hence the phrase, 褻瀆 ('hsieh tu') refers to "profanity" or "desecration". It is indeed an act of desecration if a piece of menstrual cloth is allowed to be exposed. In particular, anyone who comes into contact with menstrual blood ----male or female---- is barred from worshipping gods.

By contrast, the general dirt and the everyday uncleanness that associate with parts of a human body, in a certain aspect, cause no desecration. No ritual taboo has been found against exposing those tangible dirts of pus, urine, feces and so on. It is not rare to see such a dirt in open grounds, such as nightsoil which is, in fact, commonly exploited as a fertilizer in the fields. Basically, these tangible dirts do not prohibit one from the worship of gods. Unless on special festive occasions (such as at an engagement), one can be exempted from washing one's hands before giving offerings to the gods. Such dirt of ordinary impurity causes no insult to gods, unless it is accidentally misconducted through carelessness, such as depositing garbage in sacred places like temples, monasteries, and pagodas, or urinating or defecting towards the north (the sacred direction).

Ritual uncleanness caused by these acts is voluntary and thus avoidable, whereas a woman's 'tsang' is

ascribed pollution which is unavoidable, and maybe in some places permanent. When a woman is in a state of 'tsang', she is barred from participating in any form of worship. Moreover, she is even forbidden to get close to the house altar. It should be remarked that 'tsang' in this sense is associated with the woman only; a man cannot be 'tsang' from his own doing although he can be contaminated through certain negligence.

The word "pollution" in the sense relating to Chinese women is applicable only to describing dirty substances, like menstrual blood and postpartum discharge, that break communication between man and gods upon ritual contact. In fact, persons who are in contact with ritually dirty objects, such as those who are in mourning, those who have recently had sexual intercourse, and those who enter the maternity room within the month of birth, are similarly polluted as those who come into contact with menstrual blood; namely, they cannot worship gods. All these are in the realm of ritual pollution which will be peripherally touched upon whenever such analysis is considered necessary in linking female pollution to the entire ritual pollution complex.

Behind the concept of female pollution, the concepts of sin and shame are strong. Basically in a "shame" culture such as Japan and Burma, the Chinese did not develop the concept of sin until the spread of Buddhism

which was around the first century A.D.. Sin, according to Eberhard's definition (1967:14),is an action, behaviour, or thought that violates rules set up by supernatural powers. Thus, a woman worshipping gods during her menstruation period is considered committing a sin. Shame, noted by Eberhard (Ibid.:13), occurs only if the action is made publicly known. However, it appears not necessarily to be so in the case of a menstruating woman offering incense to gods, a necessary act of worship. It is said that "when you know you are dirty, you would not want to draw the gods' attention to your dirty state by worshipping them because it would be embarrassing" (Ahern 1975:204). Our informants furnished us with the information that they generally felt "shameful" and "embarrassed" at first menses despite in the absence of others. I am inclined to think that sin and shame in the Chinese mind cannot be absolutely separated in certain circumstances. A woman with the concept of sin for her impurity will also be preoccupied with the feeling of shame, although not vice versa.

This is so partly because Chinese supernatural rules are based upon social norms. The concept of sin and the emotion accompanying a sinful act or thought, in fact, strengthen and tighten these social norms. Moreover, the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation stresses that a person does not live with a blind fate. He is responsible for his fate, and his actions, albeit remaining unknown to

society, are known to and recorded by the deities. Punishment of committed sins will come after death if not immediately, or in the next life if not this lifetime.

Unlike the distinctive difference of crime and sin in the Western thinking, the concept of shame in the Chinese culture has the connotation of "dirty and smelly". In addition, the connotations of words for shame are the same as those for sin. (Detailed analysis on these terms can be found in Eberhard 1967:12-3) In brief, no matter whether they are for sin or shame, the two are both intimately related to illustrating "uncleanness".

The belief and attitude of women towards menstruation offer a comprehensive self-evaluation on the aspect of female pollution. It was found that the women we interviewed could be classified into three distinct categories.

The first category is composed of women who admitted that a female's body is dirtier than that of a male because of menstruation.[2] The dirtiness applies not only to a certain part but also the whole of the body, not merely during menstruation but on ordinary days as well.

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[2] In the traditional custom, clothes and shoes for the deceased are best made by girls before menarche, and hence called the "clean handmade clothes and shoes" (淨手衣,鞋), because women are considered unclean once they begin to menstruate.

One of the informants mentioned her mother's instruction that a woman was born to endure suffering in her life. The suffering includes the struggle with sin and shame that encompass her at various impure periods. For those who believe in this traditional thinking, being women is a bitter misfortune; they wish to be changed to men in the next life.[3] The frequent complaint of "our sex is so impure" has been recorded by Frick from Tsinghai women themselves, who accepted their lot and convinced themselves of it (Frick 1955:351). In respect to women's own future, many of them strongly wish to have sons not only because it is the most satisfactory way to attain higher and stable position in their husbands' families (a point to be illustrated later), but also because of the afterlife as men that they can merit in return, as explained by the religion.

In our survey, thirty-three out of a total of ninety-two informants believe in this theory. Twenty-six of them represent sixty-eight percent of the lower class women, while nearly all of them are in the old and middle

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[3] In Chapter 115 of 'The Dream of Red Chamber' (紅樓夢), a popular novel authored by Tsao Hsueh-ching (曹雪芹) of the Ching Dynasty, the nun wished, "..... as a nun who practises Buddhist rules, though not able to reach to be a Budda, she can still be better off to practise to become a man in the next life. Being born as a woman results in many grievance and sufferings that can in no way be complained of. ....."

ages over thirty. Such a high percentage of old and middle aged women in the lower class in contrast with only seven women in the upper and middle classes demonstrates that low education (which is the main distinguishing characteristic of the lower-class women in the sample), rather than old age, is a determinant underlying the concept of ritual impurity. Women with above secondary-school educational background, though in elderly ages, may vary their attitude towards menstruation and the associated self-abasement. But an illiterate woman, even though forceful and influential on domestic, economic and public levels (matriarchal types) in a way similar to "the Enterprising Women" described by Osgood (1975:v.1,290-30), may still believe that women are unclean on the aspects of menstruation and childbirth. In fact, as evidanced from the nine year compulsory education the young generation (whether or not they are from lower class families) must receive, it is the modern education that releases the bond of tradition in which women are under the shadow of uncleanness.

In the old tradition, there was ignorance in the concept of the physiological function of female generative organs. It was merely recognized that menstruation associated with the development of body in the number 'seven'. "At the age of one-time seven, she begins to

change her teeth and her hair grows longer, and the emanations of the kidneys (腎氣) become abundant. At the age of two-time seven, 'tien kuei' (天癸), namely menstruation, starts to flow[4], and she is able to become pregnant while the movement in the great thoroughfare pulse (太衝脉) is strong. Menstruation comes at regular times, thus the girl is able to give birth to a child. At the age of three-time seven, ..." (Veith 1966:98-9). 'Kuei' (癸) literally means fluid or water, while 'tien' (天) refers to heaven. Regarded as a phenomenon ordained by Heaven, menstruation is recognized to possess a rhythm which corresponds to that of the monthly cycle of spring and neap tides, also controlled by the phases of the moon (Needham 1954:v.3,484-94). In categorical terms, it is formally known as 'yüeh ching' (月經)-----monthly rule, 'yüeh shih' (月事)----- monthly affair, 'ching shui' (經水)-----regular fluid, 'yüeh ko' (月客)-----monthly guest, and numerous other flowery expressions (Van Gulik 1961:16).

Without a clear understanding of the process of fertilization which unionizes man's sperm cells with woman's ova, the traditional Chinese considered the ova and all secretions (including general vaginal secretions) and fluids

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[4] "女子一七而腎氣動，二七而天癸至 .... ." (Liu 1968: 1-2)

of uterus and vulva as a whole to be 'yin' essence----- a lining of the womb necessary for allowing the male semen to develop into an embryo. In saying that 'ching' (經) from a man combines with 'hsüeh' (血) from a woman to creat a human, the term 'ching' which is almost used exclusively for the male sperm cells is in the sense of "semen seed", whereas 'hsüeh', exclusively employed for the ova, refers to blood, or 'yin' essence (Ibid.:45-6).

Being ignorant of physiology of the dynamic growth cycle of the human endometrium, people regard the menstrual cycle as closely linked to blood circulation in the whole human body. The concept has long been realized in the traditional medical theory (Veith 1966:99-252). Accordingly, the 'yin' blood is believed to be formed in the spleen and stomach, be taken up by the 'ch'ung' (衝) and the 'jen' (任) (circulation branches), and circulate in the veins. After dispersing into the muscles and reaching the flesh and skin, it returns to the 'hsüeh hai' (血海), the "sea of blood". Menstruation comes when the 'yin' blood descends from the spleen and stomach every month.[5]

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[5] 其血生於脾胃，攝於衝任，行於經脉，散於肌腠，達於皮毛，循環不息，回奇血海，陰盛血應月而下，即名月經 (Liu 1968: 2-3).

The idea that the blood flows through all over the body coming out in the course of menstruation underlies the concept of female uncleanness on the whole body. Indeed, Taiwanese women commonly adopt the term 'hsi wan liao' (洗完了), that is, "the purging is over", when the period is passed. According to their explanation, the blood carries the accumulated 'tsang' of the past month and it is good to have it flowed out. However, the new blood created at the same time is immediately polluted. Thus, analogous to an endless tide, female uncleanness is a continuity which ceases only at menopause. This explains also the fact that in various places all over China, as some informants experienced, all women but the old (menopausal) are restricted from entering temples.

There are many taboos derived from the attitude that women are considered unclean whether they are menstruating or not. According to the traditional practice, males and females used separate bath tubs, and their clothes were washed separately. Women's clothes should not be hung high to dry in order to avoid males walking beneath them. Females were also restricted from attending clan ceremonies. In addition, one informant told us that for curing a certain disease, a boy's urine was used instead of a girl's. Another informant mentioned that even during the war, women were not permitted to hide away from bombing

raids in wells lest they would spoil the drinking water. Women's impurity, behind all these restrictions, may very naturally be instituted to legitimate the inferior status of Chinese women in the society. But, on another aspect, the power and the dangerous potency associated with menstrual blood seem to be the satisfactory means exploitable by women to strive for their position in a patriarchal society.

Forty-eight women comprising the next category affirmed that menstrual blood is unclean just as other body excrements are, and not because of the women themselves. They represent the group of women who have at least some formal education and for the most part belong to the upper and middle classes, including all age groups. Even an eighty-year-old lady from the upper class, who had her education through tutors at home (which was the only way to be educated in those days), could differentiate the feminine dirt from the ritual dirt. In fact, some upper-class women over fifty years of age, who received post-secondary education some thirty years years ago, are presently women of success and achievement in such occupations as professors, physicians, and business managers; they knew a few, if not none, taboos on menstruation and childbirth, for, as they claimed, they spent more time in school than at home and thus away from the environment where

traditional practice was dominant. And, with such a high and modern level of education, they, apparently, would no longer accept that women are the second-class sex behind the scenes of taboos. To some women in this category, the restriction of abstaining from worshipping gods during menstruation is neglected; they do not retain any strong belief in the gods, but attend temple services as a social custom. A few of them had not even heard this taboo before, the younger generation below age twenty in particular. In my opinion, it seems that they may very well observe the taboo if their religious belief is as strong as those with lower educational backgrounds.

Despite the changing idea about menses from ritually polluted to tangible dirt, these women still consider it shameful to let menstrual blood be exposed or to talk at it. The fact that much more anxiety and secrecy surround menstruation than other kinds of tangible dirt may be partly due to the social pressure on sex separation which survived from the strict repression on sex after the Manchu conquest of China. Although the concept of "male and female cannot have a relationship of direct reciprocity" (男女授受不親) laid down by Confucius is no longer practised but left as a common joke, there remains a relationship of more rigidity between sexes than that in the Western society. Menstruation is a mark of women's sexuality which, together

with other sex symbols, should not be publicly revealed. The repression on sex is particularly compelling at a girl's puberty, e.g., a girl would be condemned as shameful should her bra be seen through her clothing. Being surrounded with shame feeling rather than sin feeling about menstruation, our informants, while complaining as a woman, may not believe the story of reincarnation as the women of the first category do, but their wish to be a male rather than a female can be similarly found in their sincere hope that menstruation will pass by swiftly.

Menstruation to most women is an unmitigated source of annoyance and discomfort; yet it is indispensible because of its intimate association with childbirth----- the bearing of a son in particular, so that the family lineage can be inherited and thereby the sacred duty to one's ancestors be fulfilled, since the well-being of the dead in the Hereafter could only be ensured by regular sacrifice made by their descendants on earth. Among our informants, all those who have delivered a son are eager to see the end of menstruation even though they may be convinced by such popular sayings as "the sooner menarche comes, the sooner menopause arrives" and "menopause will be late in coming for a healthy woman." Women who have passed or are in the state of climacteric admit without fear and the associated mental depression that "it is good to be

relieved from the burden of menstruation". The only worry they may have is the physical inequilibrium the body can then maintain, which they often resort to their unproper conduct during the childbirth period or the ordinary menstruation. However, they are generally glad to accept menopause because of their relief afterwards. Most young girls who take menstruation as a nuisance wish the absence of this process in life, and further agree that it is unfair for women to have menstruation and men should be kind to them in this respect. Many of them wish they were boys.

Menstruation may not be the sole reason behind women's negative attitude towards the female position. Somehow, in most Chinese minds, menstruation is merely a means for a woman to fulfil the "sacred duty" to her husband's family rather than, as in the Western thinking, a biological given which women use not only to express their feminity, but also to reaffirm their acceptance of the female social role (Skultaus 1970:639). This attitude towards menstruation is, to a certain extent, linked to the sex repression in the Chinese society. However, it may be worthwhile to review here Freud's psycho-analysis on menstrual taboos in which he argues: "The taboo on menstruation is derived from an 'organic repression', as a defence against a phase of development that has been

surmounted" (Freud 1930:36). By "organic repression" he means "the diminution of the olfactory stimuli" which plays a significant role in sexual attraction. Thus, whereas a woman is at her most attractive during menstruation, for some uncertain reasons, the natural process of this attraction has been stemmed, resulting in erecting rigid barriers against the possibility of experiencing consciously this original attraction, and hence the prevalence of taboos surrounding menstruating women. I cannot, on the subconscious level, confirm or deny this argument in the case of Chinese women that menstrual taboo is created as a repression on female sexual attraction and a menstruating female is most attractive, although "the diminution of the olfactory stimuli" does appear to be an element in some menstrual taboos which are to be discussed later. Freud's final comment on the significance of menstruation in women ----- a menopausal woman re-experiencing the absence of menstruation as the psychological loss she once felt in early childhood, when comparing her body to a boy's for the first time and inferring that she had been castrated ----- seems hardly applicable to Chinese women. In addition, what Skultans has proposed in his survey of South Wales women of the association of viewing the period as a nuisance and wishing the cessation of menstruation with an irregular or disturbed conjugal relationship (Skultans 1970:642) cannot be extended to the

case of our informants. It would appear that in Chinese society, the status of a post-menopausal woman is a social phenomenon rather than a biological one. When a woman has adult children she is not expected to bear children herself any longer; to have children when her daughters or daughters-in-law were bearing children would be regarded as scandalous. She is regarded, and regards herself, as past childbearing, whether or not she has reached the menopause physiologically.

The third category consists of women who consider menstruation as a natural phenomenon, corresponding to the semen from men which is not conceived as polluted. In addition, menstrual blood flowing out of the vagina cannot be much dirtier than ordinary blood that comes out of the skin, neither can it be considered as a tangible dirt like other body excrements. Belonging to this category are eleven young women around twenty years of age. In the course of the interviews, they appeared to be very relaxed at talking on these subjects, while making less complaints and mentioning fewer taboos than women in the previous categories. However, most flowery terms for menstruation together with a game[6] associated with it had been mentioned

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[6] Some pubescent school girls have invented a game system in which the arrival date of a girl's menstruation is associated with a specific meaning or an event which is likely to happen. For instance, if a girl starts menstruating

within this group. To these few women, menstruation is no longer regarded a source of misfortune in the life of a woman, nor is it considered as a bothering nuisance. In fact, it appears that menstruation for the first time, is viewed with optimism in females in addition to its association with childbirth.

On the view of the apparent relationship between linguistic and cultural behaviours, it may be useful to examine the dialectical differences among informants' various vernaculars of menstruation in order to reveal the different attitudes and beliefs of women towards the subject. N. F. Joffe in her study of the vernacular of menstruation among women of European antecedents and current usages in the United States of America mentioned that "where the fact of menstruation is concealed and thus culturally occupies a covert position, as among the Irish (and the Polish), the vocabulary is meager; where it is more overtly accepted, as in France or the present-day United States, the vocabulary is vivid and luxuriant, unless the society enforces highly formalized behaviour toward menstruation as with Orthodox Jews" (Joffe 1948:181-2). Menstruation as a hidden and

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on Thursday and on the seventh day of a month, she will meet someone who adores her very much, while if it arrives on Monday and on the twenty-forth day of a month, she may fail in a school test. The game is played among some junior high school girls, although still not openly.

conversationally forbidden matter among the Chinese, has been connected with over forty terms found from our ninety-two informants in contrast to two terms in the Irish and less than ten in the Polish, as collected by Joffe. In addition, the terms cover most of the principles classified by Joffe in her cross-culture study. Menstruation is a tabooed subject in the Chinese mind, yet the vernacular presented by our informants effloresces in variety, imagery, argot and differentiation. The fact may well be explained by the great varieties of ethnic background in the Chinese society of Taiwan.

The standard terms for menstruation take cognizance of its relationship either to the "month" or to its periodic appearance, namely, "monthly rule", "monthly affair", "regular fluid" and "monthly guest", which have been previously mentioned. Other vernaculars such as "monthly test" (月考) (which has been used among some student groups) and "M. C." (which may have been derived from the English words: "month" and "come") from which derive "Mary comes" and "Merry Christmas" follow the same trend.

Explicit or implicit reference to the colour "red" also figures prominently, e.g., "Miss Red" (紅小姐), "a reddish girl" (紅姑娘), "red tide" (紅潮), or even "the Red Sea is flooding" (紅河泛濫) as well as

"the peach flower fluid" (桃花癸水), an old-fashioned term known by a few. The "little red guard" (紅衛兵) may have been apparently coined from these within the past decade and half.

In contrast to the numerous terms referred to males in French in which menstruation is openly mentioned and discussed, male personifications are meager in the Chinese culture: "Mr. Red" (紅先生) is the only one which has been so far collected. Female anthropomorphisms, when phrased particularly as relatives coming to visit, are numerous and popularly used by Mainlanders, e.g., "Big Auntie has come" (大姨媽來了), and "relative is here" (親戚來了) or "the guest has come" (客來了). Combination with allusions to red is also known: "little red sister is here" (紅妹妹在此).

Synonyms for menstruation in terms of material culture which Joffe notes as a special feature in the American speech, have also been found in our informants' jargons. "Riding a horse" (騎馬) is an euphemism referring to catamenial state, and commonly used by northern Chinese women, while "the horse-riding belt" (騎馬帶) is that for a sanitary napkin. Taiwanese women habitually mention "a broken wok" (破鍋) (a variant for "broken and exposed", 破露) or "a rag" (破布) as an indirect way of expressing menstruation. "Water paint"

(水彩) and "mercurochrome" (紅藥水) popularly known among young women also follow this trend. Most interesting are those that adopt food references, such as "the red bean ice" (紅豆冰) and "the jam sandwich" (果醬三明治).

The nature of the expressions for menstruation tends to connotate with their concept about female pollution. Women of the first category who consider their bodies as polluted adopt terms like 'la sam' (a Taiwanese term for "dirt" or "dirty"), 'wu hui' (汚穢) and 'hui wu' (穢物) to stress on the filthy aspect of the menstrual blood, while "a rag", "broken and exposed" and "a broken wok", are used with the implication of being a refuse. Women of the second category who are surrounded with the shame rather than sin feeling about menstruation seldom relate such terms. Instead, other euphemistic expressions are employed, e.g., "routine off" (例假), a term used very often in offices and schools for people who can temporarily leave their normal duty for reason of illness, discomfort or inconvenience, or on other special occasions. In addition, as the subject itself is strongly tabooed, most pubescent girls only assert "that" (那個) in the context, e.g., "that has just come" (那個剛來了), while northern Chinese women simply say "something comes up in the body" (身上來了) referring that she is in the period.

Graphic and colourful vernaculars of menstruation like "the Red Sea is flooding", "Red Christman" (紅聖誕), "the jam sandwich" and "the little red guard" are derived from among young women of the third category, who no longer believe in the concept of female pollution and are less bound by the shame feeling from social pressure on this matter. Being more relaxed towards the subject, these women can no longer bear up with those out-of-date terms like "routine off" and "monthly guest", not mentioning 'la sam' and "a rag" which impose negative meanings to the subject of menstruation. By contrast, terms like "good friend" (好朋友) and "good affair" (好事) become popularized, and also often appear among males belonging to the same age group of around twenty.

However, it has to be stressed that the three categories do not represent a continuous change in attitudes and beliefs towards menstruation with women's ages. Although women of the first category may become fewer and fewer in time, their opinion, nevertheless, can strongly influence in any possible ways their children and grandchildren who are taught not to enter a temple when in the period or wash their "dirty clothes" by themselves. While only a scanty percentage of women (eleven out of ninety-two) are represented in the third category, the majority of young women (about two-thirds) are still bound to the pressure of

shame, if not sin, feeling about menstruation. Moreover, the overwhelming ignorance on the subject before menarche, the social segregation of sex in the teenage period and the muteness on all sex matters further reinforce such a pressure in the society.

CHAPTER THREE

CHILDHOOD AND THE GREEN YEARS

The whole life of a Chinese woman ----- her existence, her attitude, her desires, her fate, and everything relating to her, carries the seal of 'tsang' to a greater or less degree.

A girl is subordinate to 'tsang' from the immediate moment of her birth. According to the folk image, the maternity room is submerged in blood while the pure sun (天光) shines overhead. The mother is sunk in blood up to her neck for giving birth to a boy; yet the blood covers so much of her body that her hair drips with it when a girl is born ----- it even overflows out of the birth room onto the courtyard. Moreover, by custom, the mother is required to stay in childbed for a lying-in period of thirty days after the birth of a boy, but the birth of a girl restricts her to remain for an additional ten-day because a girl is so much more impure than a boy. It should also be noted that according to a few Taiwanese informants, only the mother is unclean if the child born is a boy.

For most girls, the pollution potential of their

bodies has been taught even before they first menstruate. An exemplary case has been observed by Margery Wolf (1972: 96) in rural Taiwan. A seven-year-old girl was beaten, by her grandfather's consent, for allowing her baby brother to pass between her legs while playing in innocent children's game. According to the grandmother's explanation, it was learned that the wrongdoing that provoked the grandfather's indignation did not involve any suspicious act of sexuality, rather it was simply that the female crotch was considered dirty, even in the case of an immature female, and thus dangerous to the little brother. Another instance was also reported on three girls ganging up on a younger boy. While one of them nailed him down on the ground, the others took turns to pass their legs over his head, twitting and ridiculing him that he was physically stunted, crippled, flabby, or the like. Later in their youth they learned to their sorrow that the "power" they employed on the smaller boy, represented merely a handicap on themselves rather than an asset.

If one is observant in watching children's games, one can tell that they are played differently by girls and boys. In the game of "jumping-over-horseback" (跳馬背), girls never attempt to leap over boys, nor do they ever sit on their backs. On the other hand, boys may ride on girls, In effect, girls are seldom willing to take part with boys

in such a game, and games like this are specifically known as boys' games. An ignorant girl who breaks the rule of the game may be scolded or even punished, usually by her own mother or a female guardian. The concept of 'tsang' prohibits a young girl from sharing the same life style as a boy. She is impure and remains so regardless of her age. And, by riding on a boy, she carries her curse over to him, which is dangerous and unacceptable.

In consistence with Frick's findings (Frick 1955: 342-3), an elderly woman from northern China also mentioned to us that girls were taught not to stand on a man's shoes, or even step over them. In those cold areas of northern China, people sleep on 'kang' (炕), a brick bed warmed by a fire underneath. Before sitting on the 'kang', a man usually takes off his shoes and lays them on the ground (floor) below him. A little girl who dares to stand on his shoes in order to reach high to him so that she can sit on his knees always inflicts censure and punishment. Every girl learns, at a very early age, to push men's shoes aside so that she cannot accidentally stand on or step over them. Should it be so unfortunate that a man puts on the shoes upon which she has stood or over which she has stepped, he would expose to the chance of falling down easily or hurting any part of his body. "A woman must have walked over your shoes" has been the common joke for

someone who accidentally falls down and knocks, for instance, his ankles.

In addition, there are other practices a woman must learn to avoid as early as possible. She should be conscious of not walking over the leggings of a man, which have somehow been found lying on the ground. By failing to do so, she endangers the man and hence brings much misfortune to him. Moreover, she should avoid hanging her clothes, particularly the pants, in open areas so that any man can walk beneath them. If it so happens, the man will be inflicted with the 'tsang' which will consequently ruin his future career and all his undertakings.

It is difficult to draw a partition line representing exclusively a child's departure from childhood. Although first menstruation in the life of a young female significantly demonstrates her sexual potential and fertile feminity, her physical puberty cannot be taken as a mark-off point after which she reaches her social maturity (Van Gennep 1960:68). Theoretically, the social maturity for a child is delayed to the age of sixteen[1] and, in practice,

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[1] In spite of the formal "rites of passage" at the age of sixteen to signify the state of being grown up, such as the ceremony of "passing through the door" (過門關) performed by the Foochow Chinese (Doolittle 1865: 137-8) or the worship of the Goddess of the Great Dipper (七星媽) by the Taiwanese (Diamond 1969:40), a person continues to be a boy or a girl for several more years at least.

to the time when one marries or even after having born a child. It may be worth noting here that painful initiation rites such as circumcision for boys or clitoridectomy for girls to manhood or womanhood are completely unknown in the Chinese society as compared to some other cultures. Nevertheless, the prolonged period of transition into puberty and the necessary training for becoming fully a woman which Van Gennep observes (Ibid.:65-70) as a trait in a more complex culture may start even before her menarche in the case of a Chinese girl.

The onset of menarche though not representing a girl's maturity does appear as a sign that she is at the threshold of the passage to puberty and adulthood and begins to be tested and trained for becoming fully an individual. Such fact can be well illustruated from the words givin by a mother to her pubescent daughter: "By then, being a grown-up girl, you must learn modesty and avoid messing around with boys." There are other things a girl has been prohibited from doing: she is no longer permitted to lie on her brother's bed, nor can she use his quilt. Some girls have even been warned not to sit on their fathers' chairs when their periods come. Similar to the Italian way of recognition of a pubescent girl linguistically in the phrase "she has become a woman", the Taiwanese employ the term 'chuan da ren' (轉大人), that is, "turning into an

adult", to educate a pubescent girl. As contrary to our Western informants[2] who regard the state of being "grown-ups" to be happy and cheerful, Chinese girls feel rather depressed and resentful since they are no longer treated as lively girls but solemn women, and hence cannot choose to play in whatever ways as boys do always.

Girls receive training in modesty at an early age. As children, they are taught to cover up their bodies well, in particular, conceal their genitalia from others' sight. By the age of four, a girl is expected to know the use of a toilet, where she cannot be seen exposed when urinating. From the age of about twelve onwards, she is bound with all sorts of decorum which include sitting straight with close legs and sleeping on her side with legs pressed together. Besides, she is supposed to speak softly and close her lips when smiling or cover her mouth when laughing. One also finds her dressing modestly.

In the more traditional days, boys and girls by the age of six were treated differently. A seven-year-old girl would be kept away from her brothers at the same table as the saying '七歲不同席'. While a boy, at the age of ten, had to leave the inner chambers where his sisters were

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[2] One of them told us that in Grade six she had falsely claimed to have reached menarche, in order to conceal her immaturity from her friends.

engaging in exclusively feminine training.

It is an obvious fact that boys and girls have little open social contact. They play together in mixed groups until at the age of about nine. Then, under the pressure from teasing by their parents, elder siblings or friends, they are segregated from each other and form separate play groups. In addition, the school educational system reinforces such kind of atmosphere as sex separation.

Primary schooling in Taiwan, being compulsory and co-educational, spreads over a period of six years. Although boys and girls attend classes together, they are not seated in an alternating pattern. In fact, one side of the classroom is restricted to boys while the other side is for girls. A boy is put to sit next to a girl only as a punishment. Most schools divide boys and girls into separate classes after the fourth grade. Co-educational play during recess is discouraged. Girls learn their own way in school and compete as a group with their male counterparts for better performances such as excellence in grades, neatness in appearance and obedience to orders. Boys are regarded as their ememies. Although many girls are sexually mature by the time they finish grade school, they retain their hostility towards boys as in their childhood. Some older girls and women still remember with deep resentment the way in which they were teased by boys

of their schoolmates with girl's socks or skirts dipped in red ink, yet they were so embarrassed that they dared not report to the teacher.

Since 1969, the compulsory education in Taiwan has been extended from six to nine years. However, most middle schools still maintain their old system in educating teenagers; boys and girls attend schools separately. The restrictions on opposite-sex communication within or outside schools are even more imposing and formalized than those in primary schools. It is not an unusual fact that a girl may very likely pass by her schooldays without ever being allowed to talk with any male peer at all.

Segregation between boys and girls, in the traditional era, continued through adolescence. Old ladies over sixty years of age often make comparison with women in the "old days" and argue that those in the generations before theirs were much secluded. Women of that time only looked after housework and did the cooking. They very rarely appeared before guests; especially young women of a family could not be seen in public areas, or even by hired men living with the family. The men were only responsible for buying food and doing the odds and ends, and could not wander around the house or enter the kitchen. The only women they might have contacted would be the old ones. There is a story relating to the only daughter of a family whom no one had ever seen. In the event of a flood when everybody

was running for his life, her older brother wrapped her in a blanket and carried her out of the house. Even so, she was not allowed to be seen.(Wolf 1972:96)

While this story and similar anecdotes may be exaggerated, they seem to be representative of what is told concerning "the old days". "The old days" (before the Wars), at most times, have been in the youth of the narrator's grandmother, and the tale of "women being kept hidden" does not differ much with the one related by one's mother, namely, women were not free to step over the outside doors or wander around in the house. Both married and unmarried young women, in particular, were expected not to communicate with members of the opposite sex except their relatives. An exceptional occasion was found at harvest time when men in farm families were busy in the fields and women handled household chores for the bands of labourers coming up from the south to offer help, for example, in cutting and threshing rice.

About a century ago, people's lives in Taiwan were frequently jeopardized by bandit groups, feuds between descent groups and head-hunting aborigines that existed in some native tribes, and men seldom travelled without armed escort accompanying. This, as suggested by M. Wolf (Ibid.: 97), might be one of the reasons that females should stay close to home. In contrast, women in Taiwan today can be

often seen on the streets, in marketplaces, or travelling at long distance, partly because it is now safe to do so.

Nowadays in modern Taiwan, despite the influence of Western culture, casual social contact between boys and girls in their teen years is still not approved by most parents and school authorities until well into their college ages. A girl, if seen talking to a boy personally, may be instructed by her parents not to see him again. A personal letter written by a boy to a girl, if seized by the school authority, will be publicized on the notice-board so that they are warned not to pursue their acquaintance or become further acquainted. The reasons for doing so by both parents and school cannot be easily clarified. It may be that they consider teenagers not mature enough to handle male-female relationship, or that students are expected to spend their time in schoolwork since in Taiwan the competition in entrance examination at every stage, especially the university, is very keen[3].

Unlike a pubescent North American Apache Indian girl who enjoys being the source of greatest blessing among her people and is happy to deliver her boon in a special ceremony to all who are near her, to a Chinese girl, her

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[3] In 1971, on an average, only one out of seven students were admitted into university or college.

menarche is an embarrassing and shameful event that has to be endured and concealed at all costs.

In fact, menstruation is a taboo topic in the Chinese society, and most girls are not forewarned of it until its first occurrence. Thus, the onset of menses generates considerable fear and anxiety on the part of an ignorant girl. Our informants, young and old, agreed that first menstruation had been a frightful, shameful and embarrassing experience, particularly for those who knew nothing about the subject till menarche. Even then their mothers or kinswomen only mentioned to them some common ways of keeping themselves clean, as well as the ritual prohibitions imposed on menstruating women. The usual lesson they learned about menses had been that "it is the dirtiest of all dirtiness, and things associating with it, namely menstrual pads and 'tsang' clothes, must be kept veiled from other's sight".

A few elderly ladies also recalled that when they were juveniles in the traditional joint families, they occasionally came across their mothers and kinswomen surreptitiously washing their 'tsang' clothes. Out of curiousity, they asked them what these were. The women relunctantly answered these enquiries by saying that the girls would find out the matter when they were grown up. No further questions were tolerated. It has been the habit

of most Chinese parents to make little or no effort in answering their children's questions on most topics. Should a child keep on asking about matters that annoy his parents, he would receive nothing except a punishment.

A senior female professor who was a descendant of a large Pekinese family told us that she did not know what had happened to her when she first menstruated at the age of twelve. However, she was convinced that it had to be her "villainous" step-mother who attempted to poison her. She cried all over the house: "Step-mother wants to kill me", and made complaints to her father, her wet-nurse, the maids and the male servants, the chauffeur, and anybody she could alarm. The wet-nurse and maids immediately helped her to put on the menstrual pad and a suitable clothing, but none of them ever explained to her what had gone wrong. She henceforth hated her step-mother even more.

Out of the ninety-two informants, of whom two had lost their mothers when young, only sixteen had learned about menstruation initially from their mothers before puberty. Alternatively, a girl may obtain the information through an elder sister, a sympathetic young sister-in-law, or a wet-nurse in a more traditional well-to-do family, in whom she confides; otherwise, several months may pass after menarche before she finds the courage to discuss with her mother. Many mothers have no idea when their daughters have

begun to menstruate. We were told of a rather sad story about a girl concealing the fact of her menarche from friends and teachers in the orphanage. She secretly tore off the cotton out of her quilt one bit at a time and used as menstrual pad throughout the whole winter until being discovered by a teacher from her thin quilt.

Children have hardly any knowledge about sexual matters. On one hand, parents do not feel it necessary or expedient to discuss the subject openly, while on the other hand, they act in such a way that the children are completely unaware that they engage in sexual intercourse. Indeed, although a child continues to share the parental bedroom and the parental bed, until well into primary school, he may not have the faintest idea of what sexual intercourse between married couples is like. Many women claimed that they learned nothing about the matter until they were married. One informant further commented that she would never submitted to marriage if she had known it beforehand.

Males receive their information from outside sources; and most boys in their early teens have been exposed to the simple sex manuals that circulate clandestinely among young adults, or pornographic materials that are restricted by law.

Normally, girls are kept in the dark. They are quite ignorant concerning sexual matters even at the time

they are about to be married. This can be explained by the fact that many women feel so embarrassed and ashamed that they avoid discussing the subject with their daughters. What they instruct as premarital advice is such things as proper behaviour towards in-laws and obedience to one's husband. There is also folk advice in more traditional families. In order to gain control over one's husband, the bride should step on her groom's shoes before getting into bed on the wedding night. Moreover, provided she sleeps close to the wall, she will live a long life. With the impression derived from our informants, it seems that none of these ever mentions sex at all. As wolf (1972:140) notes, a country girl who has seen copulating pigs yet does not ever wonder about the noises she hears on sleeping with her parents; she frequently finds her wedding night a miserable ordeal. A young woman from the countryside, as Wolf was informed, had even developed an hysterical paralysis in her legs during the weeks subsequent to her marriage.

Watching animals giving birth or having intercourse is usually permitted to children at all ages. The adults are satisfied with the fact that children will not understand what is really happening among animals, and do not offer any explanation to them. It has been in the Chinese tradition that information relating birth is a

taboo subject from childhood through the teen years. Whenever a baby is about to be born, the children are shooed away from the maternity room or led by a maid or kinswoman to somewhere outside the house so that they can neither see nor hear whatever is going on in the birth-room. When they return afterwards, they are usually told to account for the baby, such as, that the mother has brought the baby from somewhere or "found" the baby elsewhere, or that it has "fallen" down from heaven above or come out of a stone that has been split open. Although some parents do mention that the mother has given birth to the baby, yet they leave no further explanation at all. It was unsurprisingly found that most informants had only a very slight knowledge about childbirth before they had borne a child.

Sex, menstruation and childbirth are restricted topics especially between people of opposite sex. Males like to joke about these subjects among themselves, but this rarely takes place in a mixed group[4]. Even though a father happens to come across evidence of his daughter's

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[4] We (all female researchers) found it very difficult to elicit any such joke from our male informants. By contrast, the women we interviewed were rather relaxed in using jargon on menstruation they talked about. However, they commented that it was so dirty and unpleasant that there could hardly be any joke at all. Some jokes about sex had also been mentioned.

menarche, he normally says nothing but lets her go for consultation with her mother or a sister. When a girl has lost her mother in early childhood, the father is placed in a dilemma. On one occasion, a girl was asked to consult the wife of a neighbour. There was also the case of a girl belonging to a high class family who was informed on the subject by her wet-nurse and an elder cousin, and further instructed by some books brought home by her father. For girls of the lower class, the chance of getting proper information is very slight. One father, instead of informing his frightened daughter of the fact of menarche, convinced her that it was simply a "stomach disease" so that she could wrap up her lower body with cloth and not attend physical classes[5] in school until recovery. Another father simply disguised the matter by telling his daughter that she should not go near the temple, lest the ghost would grab her when it saw her "pretty".

Some parents explained to us their reason for not informing their daughters about these subjects so that they could know, at an early stage, things directly influencing

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[5] There is a rule in most schools that a female student can be exempted from attending physical education class when she is in the period. This is called the "routine-off" (例假). Despite the fact that some girls occasionally take advantage of this rule, however, the overwhelming majority are simply too shy to do so, especially when their teacher is a male.

them through their entire life. "We ourselves passed this period of puberty naturally without anybody telling us what to do. The young girls certainly will learn in this way as well," said an aged mother. The younger parents excused themselves from giving their daughters any information about sex and menstruation by insisting that schools should offer proper courses on the subject, so that families would be relieved of this responsibility.

In modern Taiwan, improved nutrition and warm humid weather probably are the factors in bringing on early menarche to many girls still in grade schools. Although most schools do provide lectures on menstruation and its relationship to reproduction in the most general terms, these are not offered in hygiene classes until at the junior high level (a comparative Grade Seven in the American educational system). Thus, it is not surprising to see prepubescent girls still being ignorant about the basic facts of menstruation.

An informant in her early twenties recalled that a girl schoolmate in the fifth-grade class had menstrual bloodstain on her clothes. Her ignorant schoolmates thought that she was queer and disgusting, and did not want to be with her after that. Some girls who were unaware of menses at the first sight of it even thought that it was red ink or vomit from a sick person. There

was also a not very rare incident in which a girl became hysterical and upset at her first menstruation at school, and was convinced that she was bleeding to death. As a result, it took several female teachers to assist and calm her, while the onlooking students appeared bewildered.

Numerous girls who had attended hygiene classes at school might very well recall a version from groundless talk such as "Should a woman be born in the year of a big animal like a dragon or a tiger[6], her menstrual flow would bleed extensively." Apparently, the basic fact of the relationship between menstruation and reproduction remained a myth to them.

A young mother who was a university graduate affirmed to us that on her wedding night she had no idea of what was expected of a wife in her husband's bed, neither did the groom with whom she had been dating for six years. When she paid a formal visit to her parent's home on the third day after marriage, her mother, of age about fifty, asked her indirectly if "things" went well. From her naive reply, the mother realized that "nothing had happened". Eventually the daughter came to understand

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[6] According to the Chinese Horoscope, the year of one's birth is related to one of the twelve animals: the rat, the ox, the tiger, the rabbit, the dragon, the snake, the horse, the sheep, the monkey, the chicken, the dog and the pig.

what her mother was hinting at when her mother-in-law gave her some books to read on the subject, and she thus, to her great embarrassment. became aware of the "thing".

A number of unexpected questions were put forward to us by some pubescent girls during our interviews. Some typical queries such as "Where does menstrual flow come from?" and "Will one be pregnant if she happens to sit on a male's chair?" were not uncommon. The girls were eager to know more facts about these things relating to them directly; yet unfortunately, they, and we interviewers as well, were in a circumjacent atmosphere that prohibited one from making commentary or making critical comments. Since the girls dared not put themselves into the "abnormal group", they "never really thought of these things".

In fact, we interviewers, while carrying out the survey, had to struggle within the "atmosphere" under the pressure of being referred to as shameful and dissolute, especially in interviewing the older less-educated women. The interviews sometimes ended unpleasantly due to lack of understanding. During each interview, we explained that the purpose of the survey was to collect some old custom with the hope of releasing their tension and suspicion. Women of the lower class very often took us as government inspectors at first encounter, and hence told us a lot of their difficulties and problems in life or answered our

questions impatiently under the impression that what they said would have very little, if any, effect on improving their livelihood. Educated women, young and old, understood our motive better but still wondered why we did not choose another topic for research, which might at least sound nicer.

Moreover, the attitude and behaviour of these pubescent girls, being ten years younger than the interviewers, towards those kinds of problems had not demonstrated much perceptible difference from the ones of our time. They were normally very shy to discuss these subjects with people, nor did they ever talk among themselves, they proved to be the most difficult of all age categories to interview, not including the older less-educated ones. Upon answering our questions, they either dropped their heads shamefully or focused their eyes away elsewhere. In addition, they were very alarmed and afraid that our conversation could be heard by a passer-by or a family member (male or female) in our neighbourhood. Seldom did they express their personal opinion as adult women would. Information was obtained from them with great difficulty, by means of persistent questioning and discussion, in the face of the girls' reluctance and resentment.

In general, what girls feel about menstruation

is still derived from that same old folk-thinking dominated by a traditional society, namely that the "thing" in question is so filthy that it must be kept concealed from others' sight and not discussed in public. When menarche arrives, the girls carefully avoid males. Some girls who did seem to comprehend what intercourse was like also expressed a terrible feeling about marriage. Even their customary respectful feeling towards parents and other objects of respect could be affected, once the girls knew that these lofty beings engaged in sexual intercourse. A few of them regarded intercourse with a sense of guilt. For boys at the pubescent stage, the term of menstruation appears unfamiliar to them although they have clandestinely come across some pornographic materials.

Upon comparing youngsters with those in senior high schools and colleges, we found that the youngest ones were the most conservative, which was contrary to our hypothesis that the youngest generation would have been educated with the most modern ideas on these subjects.

When we asked the young girls how they learned these subjects in hygiene classes at school, they gave us more or less the same story. According to the informants' experience, the teachers (males or females) usually either skipped the chapters on the related topics or let the students read on their own. It also did happen that some

teachers even demanded to have those few pages torn off from the students' texts.

Today in Taiwan, information relating to sex, menstruation and birth has been liberally transmitted via the mass media. In addition to those simple sex manuals that circulate clandestinely among young adult males, there are also Japanese and American movies which are somewhat more explicit about heterosexual relationships than the Chinese films. Posters of birth control prepared by the Family Planning Institute can be found on buses or walls in public places. A few magazines explicitly for women occasionally put up some articles discussing these subjects. It is not surprising to hear a fifty-five-year-old woman exclaiming that time has been changed as compared to the time of her youth nobody ever attempted to relate any of these subjects in the mass media. This, to my knowledge, has become an excuse for parents who are still hesitant in informing their own children of the matters. Some mothers argued that the young people should know better than they did, which is not necessarily the case, as in our findings indicated.

In all, it seems that the transmission of such information is based neither on the formal lectures at school nor the parental instruction at home, but takes an informal yet natural form, that is, the information is

accumulated fragmentarily from groundless talks among neighbours, friends or schoolmates.

Moreover, our survey shows that the percentage of women in the lower class who have prior knowledge of menarche is nearly as great as that of the upper class. Environmental factors may have been one of the reasons. In contrast to women of the upper class who are provided with better opportunities of being educated in school, in family and by literary publications, the lower class women have more diversified sources of information from within the community such as marketplaces, factories, or fields where they work or visit very often, as well as from the much gossip among their kinswomen and neighbours.

On the other hand, the lower class women represent the smallest percentage group that could ever bring the topic of menarche into discussion with their female friends or family members. Almost one-third of them (being twice as much as in the upper and the middle classes) did not mention their menarche to anyone when it arrived. Thus, their attitude towards menstruation is rather conservative, perhaps because of the influence of their social environment. On the one side, the harshness of their life conditions may make it difficult for parents and children to communicate. On the other hand, all the distorted ideas about menstruation and sexual matters

that they derive from the total social environment tend to reinforce their feelings of sin and uncleanliness in relation to these things. Hence they are ashamed to speak about them.

In summary, the fear and anxiety suffered by a pubescent girl are reinforced by the atmosphere of mystery and shame imposed by the society. The segregation of communication between opposite sexes in school and in various social activities, as well as those ritual restrictions imposed on her as the result of her maturing body only confirm her feeling that she and her sisters are not the compeers of their brothers. She has no doubt that she is unclean and potentially dangerous to others and her own self.

CHPATER FOUR

MENSTRUATION

4.1 Relationship with Gods and other Supernatural Beings

Menstruation, being a polluting event, requires various precautions on behaviour by a menstruating woman and the people with whom she contacts during the course. In Chinese society, a polluting substance prevents persons who come in contact with it from associating with the gods. Thus, a woman in the period does not participate in any form of worship. A god will be offended if a menstruating woman sets foot in a temple, especially if she approaches the god's image too closely. In general, the uncleanness of a woman pollutes the holy place and desecrates the gods. The insult given to the gods as a result of a woman's impurity would anger them, perhaps to the point of causing illness or calamities to strike her or her relatives in revenge. Some temples in Taiwan, as we can attest, post signs saying "Unclean persons are not permitted into the temple", prohibiting persons in mourning, menstruating women, women within the month after childbirth, or men in close contact with them, from gaining entry.

Some Mainlanders mentioned to us that all women,

except the old ones (the menopausals), were restricted from entering temples. It was believed that even if a menstruating woman went into a temple, she should never light the incense, add the oil, ring the bell, or fold any mock money burnt for the gods, all of which are in the act of worship. The concept behind these prohibitions is not only based upon the fear from god's (or gods') punishment for the committed sin, but also the shame feeling that associates with the woman. Besides, there is no way that a prayer from a menstruating woman would get through to the gods.

Gods belong to one of the three major classes of supernatural beings perceived by the Chinese in addition to ghosts and ancestors. They are pictured as posted officials wearing robes and residing in temples guarded by divine generals. Besides their duty to punish people for crimes against society, they write reports, keep records and administer individually allocated districts. They are easily insulted but can be bribed. Obviously, gods are the supernatural counterparts of the imperial bureaucracy.

The extent of punishment a woman receives as a result of her misbehaviour during the state of uncleanness can be seen to reflect the hierarchy of various gods. Any bloodstain left near a stove by a menstruating woman brings about insult to the Tsao Shen (竈神), or the Stove God,

who also takes offense if she negligently places any article, clothes, or basket that has contained these "dirty" things, over or close to the stove. Being the lowest ranking official in the hierarchy, he is not a god of culinary arts, nor is his power confined to the stove and kitchen. However, a woman insulting him through her 'tsang' may not be given a direct and severe punishment as it may be if the insult is to the highest god, the Tien Kung (天公), or the God of Heaven.

As a stove is associated with a Stove God, so is a family with a Tsao Shen. In a traditional joint or stem family, meals are prepared on a large brick cooking stove which symbolizes the family as a corporate body (Goodrich 1964:201-4). Each family as an independent entity has its own stove which is not shared by other families. In case of dividing household, the eldest son in the family usually inherits the old stove, while his other brothers can transfer hot coals from it to their new ones, thereby inviting the Tsao Shen to associate them. Thus, family division is commonly known as 'fen-tsao'(分 竈), or "dividing the stove". It is believed that the stove somehow represents the corporate fate of a family; a family without a good stove cannot be peaceful.

The metaphors for describing Stove Gods vary from one area of China to another. In some parts of the country, Stove Gods are viewed as the spiritual remains of

foreign soldiers forcibly billeted in the houses of the region to act as spies and informers.(Fei 1939:99-102) The Taiwanese in Sanhsia (三 峽) of Taipei Basin regard them as "a kind of policemen" (Wolf 1974:133). They are everywhere looked upon as representatives of a supernatural brueaucracy.

The association of a Stove God (the lowest ranking member of the supernatural bureaucracy) and a family (the smallest corporate unit in the society) represents that of gods and human beings at the lowest level of communication. The Stove God, taking advantage of his dewelling in the house, knows everything about the family, and may report bad things to higher gods so that a lot of trouble may consequently follow. Some people think that Tsao Shen, being Tien Kung's younger brother, can report directly to Tien Kung without passing through a hierarchy of bureaucrats. He takes the role of a "plainclothes policeman". In order to forestall an unfavorable report on a family, glutinous rice cakes are offered to him at the New Year. As A. Wolf's informants told him "You have to give the god something so that he won't say things about your family, and cause you a lot of trouble". (1972:134) In addition, a woman seldom approaches the stove in the first few days of her period if she can find some kinswomen to substitute for her in the kitchen.

Menstrual blood should not be let fall onto the earth. Even a minor stain of blood left on the ground will irritate the Earth God, who, as the prototype of the many gods in the Chinese pantheon, is also known as Fu Te Cheng Shen (福德正神), or commonly as T'u Ti Kung (土地公). Being a tutelary deity and the governor of a place, he is often taken as the god of agriculture. It is thus better to regard him as a "local" god rather than an "earth" or "soil" god, who is as common in the town and city as in the village. (Goodrich 1964: 199)

T'u Ti Kung is the supernatural counterpart of a local official in Imperial China responsible for a discrete administrative district serving his community in two major ways. One of his roles is to police the 'kuei' (鬼), or the "ghost", who are the supernatural equivalents of bandits, vagabonds and other dangerous strangers, while his other role is to invigilate over the affairs of the social group in his charge, keep records of their activities and report regularly to his superiors. Playing a similar role as a Tsao Shen who is responsible for a single family, T'u Ti Kung takes care of a community and serves as a policeman in uniform. He cannot be conceived as a sovereign ruler, but a local representative of a higher authority. Any offensive insult to T'u Ti Kung through menstrual blood may not inflict direct punishment

from himself, but from a higher god, e.g. Ch'eng Huang (城隍), after his reporting. Menstruating women in Tsinghai do not usually wear any form of napkins or adopt any other method to absorb menstrual blood; hence, their workpants must fulfil the purpose. By fastening the pantlegs at the ankles, they are able to prevent menstrual blood from dropping onto the ground. Failure to take any secure measures will cause insult to the god who, in return, may become very unfriendly. (Frick 1955:344)

Ch'eng Huang, the so-called "City God", is a deity posted to govern the spirits residing in his municipality, receive reports from his local officials and judge over cases put forward to him. He is the immediate superior of T'u Ti Kung and is conceived as a scholar-official. If T'u Ti Kung is regarded as a policeman in the area, then Ch'eng Huang can be thought of as the Chief of the police station, yet his power surpasses this. However, Ch'eng Huang is merely a position like Mayor or Chief rather than a person; deceased notables in the district are generally qualified for the status. Moreover, the gods enshrined in the temples of various townships carry different names, such as Tsu Shih Kung (祖師公), Pao Sheng Ta Ti (保生大帝), Sheng Ti Kung (上帝公), and Ma Tsu (媽祖), but they treated as chief bureaucrats in many ways comparable to the Ch'eng Huang found in

administrative centres. The god is pictured as dressed in official robes and appearing on a curtained dais flanked on either side by clerks and fearsome lictors in a temple laid out on precisely the same lines as a government yamen, even to the details of red walls in the courtyards and flagstaffs at the entrance.(Goodrich 1964:195-6;Wolf 1974:139)

Three times a year he appears in public in a street procession preceded by heralds carrying his gold boards of authority and his banners to 'Kuo-ching' (國慶), that is, "tour the boundaries" and "inspect the frontiers". Being accompanied by many young men dressed up as servants, soldiers, clerks and lictors, he passes through gathered crowds in a covered sedan chair with curtains drawn so that one can hardly catch a glimpse of his face. The reason for doing this, according to informants, is to protect the god from being seen by unclean persons, such as menstruating women. Ideally, a woman in her period should not get into the route of the parade. We were told that such a procession was once interrupted because the god was offended when encountered by an unclean woman. In addition, the god would refuse to leave his dais in the temple and be seated in the sedan chair should the carrying poles have ever been used for hanging "the dirty clothes of a woman".

For purifying the defilement of gods accumulated

from accidental contacts with unclean things, firewalking ritual is held annually "to cleanse the gods and make them efficacious". The images of gods on sedan chairs are carried by young men in barefeet across a bed of hot coals two or three times. The men must abstain from sexual intercourse three days before the ceremony which has to be taken place in a "clean environment", that is, with proper carrying poles and in the absence of a menstruating woman or any other "unclean" person. The presence of a polluted woman prevents the gods' spirits from possessing the men; if they are unaware of this interference and proceed with the firewalk, their feet will be severely burnt. Similarly, it will also happen if the men themselves fail to observe the three-day sexual abstinence prior to the event. A. Wolf's informants commented on the death of such a man after being severely burnt at firewalking for "the god was angry because that man came there dirty" (Wolf 1974:162).

The head of the supernatural empire with the mightiest power one can imagine of is Yu Huang Ta Ti (玉皇大帝), or simply Yu Ti (玉帝) ----- the "Jade Emperor", who is also commonly known as Tien Kung, or the "Heavenly God". Below him are a number of gods who cannot be ranked universally in the hierarchism. Yu Ti, being the Supreme Ruler in the peasants' pantheon, is located so high and remote that cannot be reached directly by low-ranking

deities who may convey the necessary communication through a hierarchy of higher ranking gods. A woman in an unclean state, being cautious of her behaviour against the almighty god, dare not enter his temple, nor does she attempt to get close to the house altar at home where his image is honoured. In addition, because of the close relationship of the sun with the heaven, any menstruating woman sitting on a rock or on the ground outdoors to face the sun insults the Heavenly God. Thus, any dirty objects related to a woman's 'tsang', when exposed to the sun, will provoke Tien Kung or Tien Yeh (天爺), the almighty heavenly father. Menstrual pads when hung out for drying must be covered by some other clothes. As a matter of fact, women usually hide them in shady and low places such as behind the door or under the bed. In this way, the sun together with the stars and the moon will not possibly be offended. Some informants claimed that an offense against the Three Lights (沖犯三光): sunlight, moonlight and starlight, by a menstruating woman, would result in having her wishes debarred from being granted by the god or gods.

A woman must be extremely careful that her uncleanness finds no path to insult any god so as to inflict severe punishment from Tien Kung including the damnation to the horrible "hell of blood" after death. The hell of blood is commonly known as 'hsüeh p'ên' (血盆) ----- the

blood basin, or 'hsüeh k'êng' (血坑) ----- the pool of blood. As the name suggests, it is a chamber in the underworld that is overflowing with blood. As reported, only women who have insulted the gods in major ways with their ritually polluted 'tsang' will be condemned to the hell of blood. Men, being protected by eight genii, are spared the tortures of the blood hell but punished for their committed sins in some other ways.

In the folk image of the blood hell, the soul of a dead woman lies on the floor and is bound to a heavy rock either pressed underneath or welded to it so that she screams with agony. Everything surrounding her is blood, not the fresh blood of animals (which is nauseating enough) but the foul and smelly vaginal blood and amnionic fluid, which she has to swallow sourly. No friendly spirits attempt to go near or even free her, except the most horrifying devils who mock and torture her. The torture can be everlasting if all means of salvation fail. As one can imagine, the damnation to the "hell of blood" by the Supreme God, compared to the punishment granted by lowly gods due to ritual pollution, appears to be most fearsome among women. Frick (1955:358) remarks that when Tsinghai women quarrel, they utter such curses as "just wait you will end up in the hell of blood" and "you shall be buried in the hell of blood", which bring much fear to any woman.

In addition to the Stove God and the Earth God, there are some other low-ranking gods who have a very close relationship with a family, and a menstruating woman must be aware of not offending them. Women learn of not sitting on doorsteps from childhood, and must strictly observe it especially at their menstrual courses. Every door is considered "the mouth of the house" through which human beings and gods pass, and is guarded by a Men Shen (門神), or the Door God. The door to the 'kung t'ing' (公廳) or 'cheng t'ing' (前廳), the ritual and social gathering center of the house where guests are received, the ancestors of the family worshipped and the gods enshrined on the house altar, is particularly holy. The Door God at the entrance protects the family from all wandering ghosts outside the house. The door leading to the kitchen where the Stove God dwells and the gate to the houseyard where the God of Wealth resides are also important. Should a female, especially during her period, sit upon any one of the doorsteps, she would be offending the related god who will then leave his locality and seek revenge. Thus, peace will no longer be with the house, good fortune will scarcely remain in the family, and good living will depart the place and its surroundings. The woman causing this disturbance must compensate for it and await the punishment.

In a rural village, a menstruating woman is not allowed to enter the stalls to feed the animals or to lead them out to drink for fear that the Cattle or Horse God will be enraged or insulted so that the lives of the animals will be endangered. However, the woman may take care of the animals outside the stables while someone else has to untie and lead them out. Provided that the well or the brook is not very far away, the animals are normally led to the water. In fact, in some places, it is a woman's work to carry water to the house. But a menstruating woman cannot carry water because her impurity will insult the Lung Wang Yeh (龍王爺), or the Dragon King, who is the sacred god of all wells and brooks. In order not to endanger the invaluable help from the friendly Dragon King in daily life, the chore will be performed by a man or a neighbouring woman instead.

While it is true that all gods in the supernatural bureaucracy, ranging from the highest Tien Kung to the lowest Tsao Shen, have to be carefully protected from contaminating women, most of our informants stated that ancestor worship at home or at ancestral hall did permit menstruating women to participate. Their explanation, being rather interesting, was either that "the position of ancestors is lower than that of the gods" or that "ancestors used to have wives". It appears, then, that ancestor

worship is staged at a different level than god worship. Ancestor worship in the Chinese culture is an act of obeisance, and is obligatory because "one has to pay back what he owes from them as an heir or descendant". Although the offerings made to gods also express obeisance, they arise from an entirely different motive in that "one hopes to gain their sympathy and good will from the worship". A person may not be punished for failing to worship a god, just as he is not punished for failing to offer gifts to an official. The Chinese proverb which says, "if one does not burn incense to the gods on ordinary occasions, he will have to implore the Buddha on his knees when an emergency arises" (平時不燒香,臨急抱佛脚), only shows the uselessness of an untimely plea but not necessarily implying any inflicted punishment due to his negligence. The truth can be more plainly seen from what a shaman often tells his patient about the cause of illness which is attributed to the neglect of the dead, such as the lack of placing a tablet on the altar or choosing a proper geomacy (風水) at the burial site for the dead, but not to the neglect of deity worship. It must be also noted that petitioning for the help of a god takes the form of an offering to assure favour to respond to the plea. Usually small gifts and respect are offered in promise of larger gifts to come after the desired outcome has been

obtained, as in the case of negotiating with officials and bureaucrats. As A. Wolf (1974:168) argues, the relationship between gods and man is political in nature, whereas that between ancestors and man is a kinship relationship which is ascribed and permanent, involving an assumption of a common welfare and mutual dependence. Thus, there is no need to make an offering when appealing to one's ancestors, since as senior kinsmen they are obliged to heed the request of their juniors who, in return, provide comfort and support for them.

When describing the petition for favour from a supernatural bureaucrat, people use the term 'pai' (拜) which literally means "to worship". Thus,the person making the offering must show deep respect and honour to the god. Besides, he has to be ritually clean before he can safely approach the god's image. As a means of cleansing oneself, local people take a bath infused with a special plant called 'bua-a-chau' (麻仔草) which has been grown in seclusion so that its purity is preserved. The protected plant is cultivated by "clean" personnel and sheltered from the pollution of birth and death. Should it be cultivated in a family occasionally in mourning, a mourning bracelet would be tied around it to keep away from the pollution. Thus, the plant is considerably valuable for particular use in removing contamination which results from contact

with ritually defiling substances like menstrual blood. Furthermore,especially before a major offering or festival, worshippers are expected to avoid engaging in sexual intercourse. It is also interesting to learn that most worshippers from out of town normally put up for the night in a temple chamber while they abstain any sexual acts.

The personal lives of the gods and their human counterparts are so alike that even the temples of the gods provide dwelling quarters for their families in addition to the sacred hall of worship. Some of our informants, when arguing the permissible ancestor worship and the impermissible worship of gods by a menstruating woman for ancestors have wives but gods have not, are probably ignorant of the scene behind the main hall of a temple (e.g. the Ch'eng Hung Miao, 城隍廟) that there is often a room provided for the god's parents and an apartment reserved for his wife and children. In the temple of a lowly T'u Ti Kung, not even is there a chamber for his wife, but also an extra room for the concubine if he has one. Apart from the discrepancy in the belief and the actual behaviour, people generally feel much closer to their ancestors than to the gods. This is particularly true when people have to seek help from a mediator, such as a priest or a shaman, in order to communicate effectively

with the lesser gods who, in turn, also function as intermediaries between common people and the higher god. By contrast, no such hierarchy is found with ancestor worship. Most of the women seemed rather surprised when being asked if they thought their ancestors would be enraged for being worshipped by a woman during her period. They returned with the interrogation of why the woman should be punished for such a thing since her ancestors were her own parents and grandparents. Thus it seems that women's impurity associated with menstrual blood only disturbs the sensitive gods but can be tolerated by one's ancestors.

According to Doolittle's observation in Foochow (Doolittle 1865:v.2,401-2), the Chinese there believe that each living person possesses three distinct souls which separate at his death. One resides in the ancestral tablet erected in the family shrine, and another stays with the corpse in coffin or the grave, while the third goes to the infernal underworld for his merited punishment. Thus, he plays the role of a moral kinsman enshrined in the family altar, as well as a citizen of the supernatural empire (the underworld) which, in the Buddhist imagination, is a multi-layered yamen staffed with supernatural bureaucrats. The soul associated with the corpse, while representing the social role of a stranger, becomes the source of an

amoral and impersonal power.

'Kuei' (鬼), the generic name for "ghosts", "demons' or "devils", includes all those amoral and impersonal souls of people who perish as members of a special group called "strangers". Not all of them are malicious, and in fact, most have living kinsmen or descendants to attend to;[1] yet they, being strangers or outsiders, are all potentially dangerous and harmful. Only those discontented souls being submitted to circumstance to pry on the living are malicious; they include those who died without kinsmen or descendants, and those who died away from home and were forgotten, and also those hateful souls who are zealous to seek revenge, namely, the murder victims, the suicides and the unjustly executed. As mentioned by A. Wolf (1974:170), "some are angry because they are hungry and homeless, and some are hungry and homeless because they are angry." The more powerful souls loiter about mountains and countrysides like many bandits waiting for prey, while the less capable of these unhappy beings crowd outside temples begging for a living like the derelicts of this world.

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[1] A. Wolf (1974:173) emphasizes the relative categorization of "ghosts" by pointing out that "your ancestor are my ghosts, and my ancestors are your ghosts, just as your relatives are strangers to me, and my relatives strangers to you".

Gods and ancestors offer man protection and help when appealed to, whereas ghosts at encounter bring nothing but human misery of any kind such as accidents, barrenness, death, and all varieties of illness, as well as other forms of mishaps: crop failures, business downfall, gambling losses, frustration, disappointments and the wasteful and disruptive habits of individuals. Despite a massive offering made in the seventh lunar month[2] and several smaller offerings on irregular occasions annually in the hope of propitiating the wandering ghosts, people still worry that any misfortune may be caused by these malevolent creatures laying terrible curses. Whenever the misfortune from such a supernatural agency has been sorted out, a religious man (such as a Buddhist or Taoist priest, or a 'tang-ki', a shaman) is invited to exorcize the evil spirit. Menstrual blood is considered best to fulfil this purpose since the blood, as believed, possesses potential danger and tremendous power which will be shortly discussed.

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[2] It is customarily believed that on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, ghosts will come out of the hell to be fed for their hunger. Besides making offerings to these wandering ghosts on this day, people try not to walk outside after dark.

4.2 The Double-sided Power of Menstrual Blood

Menstrual and birth fluids, being conceived as "abnormal", residual bloods, possess potential power and danger. In particular, menstrual blood has the direct power in procreation of life. During pregnancy, a woman's menstrual blood goes to the development of a baby's body while the excess blood discharges at childbirth as the residue of the creation process. Both the father's semen and the mother's blood are needed to produce the baby. Taiwanese women, showing some gleam recognition of the function of sperm, agree that the semen with 'ch'ung' (蟲) in it is the source of the life-giving process while menstrual blood initiates the growth process by turning it into the body of a child, into its bones and flesh. By contrast, Tsinghai women considered the semen from the father develops the bones of the fetus whereas the menstrual blood from the mother builds the flesh on the bone structure (Frick 1955:669). In spite of the discrepancy in the blood function, woman's role in procreation is seen very substantial and the blood is considered very powerful. On the other hand, the blood bearing the secret power of life is no less dangerous when misused than efficacious when properly employed. This is true of women in monthly courses who are the sources of potential peril and potency as antithetical to various natural processes.

In northern China, women pickle vegetables in the autumn season, preserving them for the winter. A menstruating woman is not expected to be in the pickling area for fear that the odour of her menstrual blood will spoil the vegetables. Nor should she enter a silk-worm raising room, the silk worms, which are thought to be very particular about cleanness, would stop producing good silk any more. Connotatively, the room is believed to be guarded by Ts'an Hua (蠶花) and Ma Ming (馬鳴), the silk-worm patron and goddess. The deities will be insulted by an unclean woman's presence and disaster will follow.

A menstruating woman is also prohibited against visiting a family which has a new born baby. If she disregards the rule and enters the maternity room, she will "clamp off the milk" (踩了奶) of the occupant and the mother will have no more milk for the baby. One mother claimed her experience of having accidentally encountered a menstruating woman in her childbirth room; soon after the incident, her milk stopped flowing until it was recovered by taking in a number of herbal medicines. Some other informants explained that this was due to "two bloods in contradiction" (兩血相沖), which means that the menstrual blood conflicts with the mother's blood thereby causing milk stoppage. This association of lactation and menstruation may be derived from the principle of traditional Chinese

medical treatment which regards the mother's milk as being transformed from the 'yin' blood that forms in the spleen and the stomach. The blood descends as menstrual blood before a child is conceived, but stays in place to nourish the fetus after conception. Soon after the child is born, the scarlet blood fades to white colour and ascends the body as milk (Li 1596:c.52, 96-7). But the 'tsang' carried by a menstruating woman spoils the milk so that it cannot flow out any more. In addition, the milk may be spoiled when menstruation returns after childbirth and becomes no good for feeding; if it so happens, other kinswoman's or neighbour's milk may be the substitute or other food may replace it.

Neither is it right for a menstruating woman to visit a family in which there is a child who is having measles or smallpox. In the Chinese mind, a child is not recognized as a fully grown individual until he reaches the age of sixteen. Before that epoch, he has to pass many crises (關煞) at which evil spirits attempt to get his soul. Measles and smallpox are two of the typical crises that must be passed. Both are commonly regarded as "hot poison" that has to come out of the body as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. A person with measles is supposedly undergoing a transition from a relatively sickly to a much more healthy state. However, measles,

being natural and inevitable, is necessary yet dangerous. Similarly, smallpox, with its high mortality rate before the Wars, is also an extremely horrifying crisis. Special treatments are required to prevent the pustules resulting from these diseases from retreating or remaining in the body permanently. In addition to dietary observances[3], the child cannot be approached by an "unclean" person or animal, such as a menstruating woman, a person in mourning, a pregnant woman, or a dog or cat (pregnant animals in particular). As a precaution against accidental encounters amulets made out of grass or pomelo leaves are worn by the child, who may also be cleansed by wet pomelo leaves if affected.(Topley 1970:427-37) One of our more outspoken informants affirmed also her witness of a child going blind after being accidentally encountered by a menstruating woman. In such respects, even the menstruating mother must avoid nursing her child at this time. On some occasions, the child is sent to live with his grandmother, or a live-in grandmother takes care of him; alternatively, for those who reside in countrysides or villages, other kinswomen or neighbours will most likely offer a hand. If there is a 'ru-mu' (乳母), a breast-feeding mother, in

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[3] The measles victim has to avoid taking "hot" and "poisonous" food, and a full vegetarian diet (齋) must be observed. Very often, the whole family in which there is such a patient follows the same rules.

the family, she must also observe all the dietary and other proscriptions applying to the child taking the breast[4]. Further proscription includes the avoidance of engaging in sexual intercourse for married couples, especially the parents, in the house.

Long before the facility of smallpox vaccination, people normally turned to a supernatural goddness known as Smallpox Controller (痘疹娘娘) who would be enshrined and worshipped in a "clean room" (淨室) the moment the child started having smallpox until all the pustules cleared out. With the blessing from the goddness and through the observance of all necessary taboos, the child could be rid of the dangerous disease quickly and safely. In Chapter 21 of the novel 'The Dream of Red Chamber', the necessity of such a preparation has been vividly delineated through the careful arrangement by Feng-chieh (鳳姐) when her daughter was suffering from smallpox. Should any unproper words or "unclean" persons or things offend the deity, the life of the child as well as of the intruder would be endangered.

The potentially dangerous power of menstrual

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[4] In his 'Autobiography', the popular novelist Ba Chin (巴金) notes that the wet-nurse of his little sister who was having measles was punished because she had taken the cucumber (a restricted substance).

blood restricts the contact between a man and a woman in her period. Men's attitude towards menstrual blood and menstruating woman is commonly one of deep-seated fear and abhorrence. Being regarded as unclean, women at the time of their monthly period prevent men from getting close to them. In Tsinghai province, according to Frick (1951a:965-7), should a man disregard the rule and allow a woman's blood to come in contact with his body, his "gold lamps"[5] a symbol of fortune, would extinguish, and his luck would leave him. Consequently, he will suffer from lingering illness and all his endeavour will vanish; moreover, misfortune will not leave him alone wherever he goes and whatever he does.

Prohibition of sexual intercourse during a woman's period is a prominent taboo agreed upon by all our married informants. When this restriction is violated, the couple's health will be impaired; the woman may incur longer menstruating period or bleed so extensively that her life

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[5] "It is the common belief here that every man ---- and only the man ---- has nine gold lamps: one on his head, one in each ear, one in each eye, one on each shoulder, and one on each hip. These gold lamps were asked for in an earlier existence and merited by good conduct. When fortune frowns on a man, he consults a lama or some other adviser, and is told that his gold lamps have gone out. To light them again a lama must recite over him a prayer for peace. Then the man takes some small yellow slips of paper marked with the sign of the deer, climbs to the top of a mountain and lets these flutter away in the wind. He burns incense while making 'kowtow' to the mountain spirit, ---- and his lamps burn once again." (Frick 1951a: 966-7)

may be endangered, while the man gathers bad luck all along his lifespan. Among members of the lower class, it is believed that one's genitalia will turn rotten and be ridden by eight-legged bugs called "feverfew insects" (白菊蟲) in case of breaching the taboo. Traditional Chinese medical theory supports the taboo basically from a male's point of view. Accordingly, sexual intercourse is believed to aim at strengthening the man's vitality by enabling him to absorb the woman's 'yin' essence besides achieving her conceiving. During the intercourse with a menstruating woman, the man's 'yang' will, on the contrary, be injured by the unclean blood, thereby causing him with disease.

The taboo certainly limits the sexual life of people in ancient times as well as ours. However, since the males of the ruling class in more traditional ages used to have a large number of female partners to nourish and perpetuate their 'chi' (breath, 氣) through the "sacred union" in coition to maximize their 'tê' (virtue, 德)[6], the taboo against the menstruating partners made

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[6] "The ruling class believed itself to possess a great amount of 'tê' (a magical power), inherited from their ancestors and passed on to their own offspring. This 'tê' formed the link between the ancestors and their descendants, it connected the dead with the living." (Van Gulik 1961:13) Such power will continue through ancestor worship by descendants, and, in a sense, be strengthened through intercourse with women who were credited with a particularly strong 'tê'.

no considerable effect on their sexual life. We were told by an upper-class elderly lady that beginning in the Han Dynasty, every wife of the emperor should wear a ring to show that she was in her period, and in this way, would not be chosen as the emperor's sexual partner. According to this informant, this was the first time rings were ever used. Later, rings became popularly used as ornaments and began to lose their original application. However, the ring story had been known to exist long before the Han Dynasty. In Early Chou Dynasty, according to Van Gulik (1961:18), a special court lady called 'nü-shih' (女史), whose duty was to regulate and supervise the sexual relation of the emperior and his wives as well as to keep him informed about their states of health and periods of menstruation, put on the right hand of the emperor's bedmate a silver ring before she was conducted to the royal chamber. At the consumation of the "sacred union", the silver ring was transferred to her left hand, and until she proved to have conceived, then was replaced by a gold ring to wear. Regardless of whatever the original function of rings is intended to be, it may still be interesting to note that the literal meaning of a ring, 'chieh-chih' (戒指), is that which must not be touched.

The restriction of having sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman is particularly applied on the wedding

night. There is a saying that "to have a red horse (i.e., a menstruating woman) in bed will break up the family and its members will die" (紅馬上床家破人亡). Thus, people are very cautious to choose the "good day" after consulting a fortune teller and the almanac. After a date is fixed, the groom's family sends it to the bride's family who, in return, will send an answer of consent if approved. This is the so-called "exchange of papers" (換帖) between the two families. In some areas, the groom's family only proposes the month while the bride's family arranges the date. Should the wedding day do fall within the menstrual period by chance, rituals of rectification would be necessary. For instance, a Pekinese will throw a candle wrapped in red paper into the water with the hope of getting rid of the menstrual period sooner. On the other side, a Taiwanese mother will put some peanut leaves (the symbol for having first born sons) around her daughter's wedding sedan to keep away bad luck. At night, the bride will throw a red threaded ring to her groom to indicate that she is menstruating. Some Taiwanese women believe in the reliability of the 'ba-tzŭ' (八字)[7], a system of

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[7] 'Ba-tzŭ' is a general term for the Celestial Stems and the Terrestrial Branches (干支), denoting the time, date, month and year of a person's birth. It is now used mostly by fortuneteller as a reference to see if betrothed persons are well-matched.

numerology, to choose the wedding day so that it will not fall within the menstruating period. But they still refrain from eating their own engagement cake for fear that it may still happen.

Menstrual blood, though thought to be potentially harmful, can be deliberately exploited in various aspects. Just as the blood of a newly menstruating girl (a virgin) was used in Germany to give the temper to the metal forged into a sword, the Chinese Taoist priest alchemically refined it into elixir for special usage in healing disease and magic practice. The blood in these cases is euphemically known as 'hóng-chian' (紅鉛). Such belief that menstrual blood possesses healing properties as well as magic power is not uncommon. And when the blood is employed on a sick person, it is often impossible to define precisely between its magical and medical uses, since the very nature of illness is believed to be the artifice of evil spirits.

The product from the first menstruation of young girls is most desirable for use either as a magic charm or as a curative agent and can be purchased in an apothecary's shop under the name of 'kao t'ang ts'ao' (高堂草) for its being the most efficacious. The blood is bright red in colour but deteriorates to a darker hue on older menstruating women. Buyers are well aware of the fact that the product in an apothecary's shop is often not

genuine, and since there is no way of testing it, they normally accept any form of menstrual blood for use, unless they know of any particular young girl in an immediate family or among close friends who can provide the genuine article. In Tsinghai province, peddlers are very eager to collect pads soaked with the menstrual blood of girls and sell them to an apothecary at a profit (Frick 1951a: 965).

Menstrual blood has been used in various forms as a medical cure for a great variety of diseases and wounds. In Tsinghai, patients with female problems (especially when their monthly period is missed), 'sha-cheng' (痧症)[8], 'yin-cheng' (阴症)[9] and tuberculosis are treated with the blood. By boiling menstrual pads in water, the fluid can be wrung out and the extract be drunk like tea, usually with an additive of black or white sugar to conceal the

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[8] "'Sha-cheng' is a collective term for about thirty different diseases or symptom complexes. A shaman or quack will call a disease by this name to cover up his ignorance when he is unable to make a more accurate diagnosis. To this class belong appendicitis , syphilitic, hysterical manifestations of grief, in short, any severe and unexplainable pain connected with few outward signs of illness." (Frick 1951a:974-5)

[9] "'Yin-cheng' is not a specific disease, but is a collective term for any disease that runs its course rather rapidly and is attended with fever. Sicknesses that begin with ague, and are characterized by goose flesh and cold sweat are all counted in this category." (Frick 1951a:974)

nauseating taste. For curing cholera, short breath and muffled voice, or recurrence of a hot disease due to fatigue, a piece of cloth after mixing in menstrual blood is roasted to ash, and the powdered product is drunk in wine or boiled water. The ground ash may also be made into a paste with sesame oil and applied to the sores on the penis due to sexual intercourse violating the menstrual taboo. It is further prescribed that one can keep his wife from being jealous by wrapping a toad in the cloth she uses to absorb her menses and burying it in front of the privy. By drinking menstrual blood and excremental fluid, one can be relieved of arrow poisoning; this is thought to be efficacious in "poison driving out poison" (以毒攻毒). Moreover, the blood also cures certain animal diseases, in particular, stomach cramps in horses. This is accomplished simply by feeding the animal with the washing water of a woman's menstrual cloth.

Menstrual blood, despite its effective use as a healing agent, has the power of affecting one's mind. A patient being treated with the blood shows a decline in his mental ability and is less alert than before. This is evidenced whether he knows or not that he has been treated with menstrual blood during his illness. (Frick 1951a:974)

The use of menstrual blood in treating disorders, cannot be proficient in a scientific sense, except that the

proteases in fresh human menstrual blood may be capable of dissolving clots of peripheral blood (Cooper and Sivin 1973:239-40; Eastman 1950:101-2). However, the possible ritual and magical origin for these treatments cannot be ignored. The idea of sympathy that "blood is used to guide blood" probably supplements the therapy with menstrual blood in those cases involving blood and bleeding. The disorder of a man's sore on his penis which is accounted for explicitly by violating the menstrual taboo and the ritual operation upon menstrual cloth to bind a woman's emotion are obviously magical in nature.

The magical uses of menstrual blood have been well reported by Frick on the native people of Tsinghai (1951a:966-7). As it is a relatively poor border territory of China, the residents there deal with adversity in their life mostly via magic. To the people's apprehension, noxious spirits stir up thunder and lightning, and thus are responsible for storms and dangerous hail in this mountainous area that wipe out whatever they grow, causing famine and misery. Menstrual blood, when mixed with the blood of a white dog and a white hare, is capable of breaking the power of these spirits, for they fear nothing so much as the bloods. A sentinel is specially appointed to discharge small pellets of the blood mixure upwards toward the clouds from a rifle or by hand, in the hope of

dispersing the clouds, thereby evading the calamity.

The magical power of the menstrual blood can be seen even more prominently in the case of a shaman who puts himself into a state of trance so that a spirit can take possession of him. In this way and as part of his professional duty, he is able to answer questions put forward to him by people, yet becomes physically exhausted and sickly as frequent trance is demanded. By drinking the blood of a woman with that of a white dog, the shaman can be rid of any spirit possessing him against his will. However, he may eventually lose his efficient power whenever he wishes to pass into a trance if he resorts to this too often.

Menstrual blood is also very effectual in breaking spells. In the secret societies of the "invulnerables", as Frick (1951a:969) observes, members are given the blood of women and of white dogs before going for a battle or fight, or their leaders scribble some sort of signs with the blood on yellow papers ('piao', 表) which they swallow, so that they are made invulnerable and their faith in the spell is unshakable. To invalidate this effect, the enemies cleverly dip their bullets in the blood of a woman or of a white dog and a white cat, which is believed to possess the countervailing power.

The use of the blood in exorcizing evil spirits has been known throughout the folk literature. 濟公傳

'The Story of Ji-Kung' or 'The Drunken Buddha' relates the main character Ji-Kung (濟公), a Buddhist priest who earns his name "the Benevolent Mad Monk" (濟顛僧) by helping people with his great capacity in healing diseases and exorcizing spirits while he usually dresses up in shabby clothes like a beggar, eats meat and gets drunk very often. By performing the black art of 'ji-tong' (激筒法術) which employs the blood of a black dog, the urine of a white horse and the menstrual blood of a woman, he is able to break witchcrafts. "Once the evil spirits were hit upon with the 'dirty water' all over their bodies, their spell could not be effective any more."[10] The dirty blood from women is hard to find but believed to be the most efficacious in breaking witchcraft.

Due to the difficulty in obtaining menstrual blood, other substances which are invested with similar powers are also used. A specific example is the blood flowing from bodies, of animals and of human beings. The blood of a slaughtered animal, a pig or a chicken, has the potential power for both good and evil. A man who falls sick at the exact moment of the slaughter can be cured by drinking the water in which a charm written on red paper

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10. "衆妖道……被髒水打在身上，念咒也不靈了。"（濟公傳 第二百零一回）

and pasted on the handle of the butcher's knife is soaked. In fact, the collected blood spurting out from the animal's jugular vein and a wad of ritual paper money thrust into the blood stream are the two items presented to the gods in an offering as embodying the strength and life force of the slaughtered animal (Ahern 1975:197-8). Fresh human blood also possesses great healing power. According to an eyewitness' information given to Frick (1951a:966) the gathered crowd at a public execution in Tsinghai in 1948 rushed forward to dip their prepared bread in the welling blood of the criminal as soon as the head fell down under the executioner's sword. The fresh blood (not the blood from a natural wound), is beneficent for ailing people in need of treatment. The blood-soaked bread can be dried out in the sun or near a fireplace, and stored away for later uses. When in need, it is dissolved in hot water and given to the patient like medicine. Such usage of the bloody bread (血饅頭) also appears in the modern literature of 'Medicine' (藥) by Lǔ Hsün (魯迅).

In the actual practice of magic, animal blood, especially from white cats, white dogs and white roosters[11],

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[11] In the Chinese mind, white is an emblem of evil or sorrow while dogs and cats are sensitive to spirits and occasionally take the form of demons. A chicken is used in exorcizing spirits because of its good omen and the association of its crowing at dawn with the dispersing of ghosts.

is used more often than human blood[12]. But at a time of scarcity, any animal blood obtainable regardless of its origin is permissible despite its lesser potency. In a story related by Ahern (1975:197), a Taoist priest employed the blood of a black dog and a brass needle in performing esoteric rituals to ward off a vengeful soul. Not only did he successfully keep the soul away but also its power had been disposed of. The blood of several animals may be also mixed together to increase the efficacy of the charm. Human blood, such as the resulting blood of a 'tang-ki' (童乩, a shaman) who mutilates himself when being possessed with the spirit of a god, is powerful for expelling evil spirits when daubed on charms. Such charms are worn around the necks of many children and even adults as amulets (Diamond 1969:103).

Menstrual blood and all the other kinds of blood mentioned so far share a common point of being the escape and flow of blood. The linkage of menstrual blood and the

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[12] In Tsinghai, a white rooster is often beheaded soon after a woman's delivery. The animal blood must drip at the side of the 'kang' where the birth is to take place. Symbolically, the slaughtered rooster protects the newborn from being disturbed by evil spirits, exchanging its life with that of the child. This is justifiable from the woman's cry: "Exchange the rooster! Exchange the rooster!" while she is slaughtering the animal (Frick 1950:792-3). Similar ritual is also held when a child is seriously ill; the idea is that the rooster has given up its life so that the child can live (Frick 1951b: 185).

blood shed by a 'tang-ki' is evident from the fact that the presence of a menstruating woman in the vicinity of a possessed 'tang-ki' endangers both of their lives, and the 'tang-ki' may have great difficulty in stopping the flow of blood from the cut he made in the performance. Any blood that escapes unnaturally from a living body is associated with power. On the good side, it has the life force to produce a child, to please the gods with a potent offering, or to protect a person from an evil spirit. On the other hand, the destructive force in the power brings on danger and death, as in the cases of a man's 'yang' and 'chi', the vulnerable spirits, the bleeding 'tang-ki', the worms in the silk room and the child with measles or smallpox.

Blood, being associated with both beneficial and ruinous power, has an immediate involvement in both life and death. As the life-preserving blood it circulates normally inside the body, whereas as the extraordinary escape of blood it greatly endangers life. The development of a new life requires blood, yet the menstrual blood ejected by an unpregnant woman is symbolicly a dead fetus. Besides, great danger generally accompanies childbirth in that life or lives may be jeopardized depending on how excessive is the amount of blood flowing out. In another respect, the association of death with the powerful blood has been clearly demonstrated at the scene of a slaughter

or execution when the life-preserving blood leaves an animal or human body, the spurting fluid being useful as a life-strengthening medicine. In all, any flowing blood is invested with ambivalent power in relating the momentous events of birth and death. Thus, the amount of postpartum discharge which is closely associated with both life and death at childbirth arouses greater anxiety before and after the event than that incurred by the hundrum monthly periods, as will be seen in the following chapter.

CHPATER FIVE

CHILDBIRTH

5.1 As a Potential Power of Women

Sources commenting on Chinese women's social status share a common viewpoint: the most important and desirable power of a woman in her husband's family is her ability to produce offspring, chiefly sons, so that the family lineage can be continued and the ancestor worship be ensured. In the public belief, one's soul after death, unless being cared for by descendants, may become a hungry, wandering ghost which is considered unclean because of its irrelevant or anomalous status. Thus, as heads of the family, the parents are responsible to see to their future inheritance. Their son's wedding ceremony, in the traditional aspects, represents not merely an act of matrimonial union between a man and a woman but an announcement to the ancestors and the public that the new couple accept the obligation of taking the first step to extend the family to a new generation. Even in the modern society of Taiwan, a number of our senior informants still insist that the potential function of a daughter-in-law is to provide descendants to insure continuity of incense burning for

their ancestors (傳遞香煙). Failure to do so on the part of the woman must incur severe blame of unfiliality.

To some advanced males in the modern days, burning incense for ancestors is merely an expression of personal respect while they themselves seldom care the welfare of their own souls after death; yet their desire for sons remains strong. For them, sons display the sign of wealth and prestige, a symbol of stability and respectability. A young man earnestly anticipates the arrival of his first child so that he as a father is legitimately a full adult in the community where he remains as a child to his parents. Grandparents are doubtlessly overjoyed with the child because they can witness the continuance and prosperity of their generation in addition to their personal pleasure which they can gain from loving and even spoiling the child with impunity[1].

In the traditional times, despite the immense expense and trouble of replacing a daughter-in-law in the family, there was the threat of returning her to her natal family due to her failure in bearing a child, a legitimate

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[1] Grandparents rarely exploit their authority to punish grandchildren and are not particular at badly raised grandsons. In fact, they, not risking their discomfort in old age, enjoy them affectionately more than they did their own children.

reason for dismissing a wife[2]. The woman could claim no rights and perhaps suffer ill fate in her conjugal home for remaining childless or being nonproductive. Margery Wolf, in her analysis of the domestic relationship in a rural community in Taiwan, puts it clear by indicating that "until a young woman becomes the mother of one of the family's sons, she feels very insecure ..... and unless she bears a child for her husband's family, she will have no right there" (Wolf 1972:149). Evidently, she has to justify her existence in the family by producing a son.

A woman's fertility, besides being a great asset in associating the lineage of her husband's family, provides an alternative means for her to gain access to authority via her immediate affectionate bonds with her dear children. Wolf, in the publication already cited, argues convincingly on the isolation of the "uterine family". Accordingly, a Chinese woman, in contrast to her male counterpart who perceives the family in terms of generation prosperity and with emphasis on lineage continuance and duty to his ancestors, seldom completely agrees to, or feels part of, the "family" in which she is either a daughter or a wife.

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[2] Traditionally, there are seven offenses ('chi-chu', 七出) which constitute the legitimate grounds for dismissing a wife: sterility, loudness, disrepect to parents-in-law, loquacity, stealing, jealousy, and repulsive disease.(Liu 1959: 88)

Rather, she feels closest to her uterine family centred around her own mother and together with her brothers and sisters comprising a domestic unit. The father is excluded because of conflicting loyalties, both to his own mother's uterine family and to his father's household. As a daughter is married out, she leaves the original uterine family and begins to form a new one of her own by bearing children.

Indeed, the interests of a woman's uterine family are often in conflict with the demands of her husband's male-dominated household. Before a married woman becomes firmly attached to her husband's family, she, as an outsider and intruder, is expected to make her own way to power even at the risk of undermining her husband's authority. In fact, at the wedding night, a Taiwanese bride, as we were informed, would not even miss her chance of gaining domination over her groom by stepping on his shoes before getting into bed and sleeping close to the wall[3]. She might also purposely add her saliva to the bowl of oily rice ----- a special food for the occasion, prepared for her groom so as to assure his submission. In some cases, a woman may further resort to sorcery to achieve the similar result. Ahern (1975:199-200) reports an incident wherein

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[3] A Taiwanese bride believes that by sleeping close to the wall at the wedding night, she is able to cross over her groom's bed site when getting up, thereby gaining dominance over him thereafter.

a woman gained dominance over her husband by tricking him into ingesting (swallowing) an effective charm procured for the purpose.

Besides the power a woman wields directly over her husband, her indirect influence on men's behaviour is also significant through what M. Wolf calls the "women's community". This constitutes, to some extent, a threat to men. This "community" exists in most villages and is composed of neighbourhood groups of women who meet very often, mind each other's children, wash clothes and do chores together. As a result of their frequent, if not daily, social gathering, much information or news will be exchanged. In fact, gossip in the Chinese society is such a powerful and deadly weapon that no one, even a male, can find a way of protecting himself. It is inevitably dreadful because, in the Chinese tenets, a person being talked about is losing face and "may bring shame to the family of his ancestors and descendants" (Wolf 1972:40) if it persists. Whenever the women of a community disapprove of a man's behaviour or consider it wrong, they chatter about him, making it known among not only themselves but also their sons, husbands and relatives. Indeed, such a group within the community is like an informal jury, exercises a considerable amount of social control and thus provides a major avenue of protecting individual women from

excessively abusive husbands or mothers-in-law.

Apart from all of this, the most essential means for a woman to claim a lasting security in the alien environment of her married family is to bear children and form close affectionate bonds with them. A Chinese woman normally learns from painful experience that she cannot rely confidently on her husband for support in case of trouble with her in-laws in spite of her tremendous effort to manipulate him with every available technique. She realizes that in the long run, her sons are the only available persons upon whom she can depend. As Wolf (ibid.: 163) notes, "in times of crises it is well known that sons are more dependable than husbands". In order to gain control over her sons, a Chinese mother uses guilt to influence them. Thereupon, she, out of desperation and need, consciously and unconsciously builds upon herself a strong filial relation with her sons who are constantly gratified with warmth and comfort, affection and blessings. Moreover, by separating her uterine family from her in-laws, she is able to remove much of her mother-in-law's domination while strengthening her influence among her own children.

A woman's reproductive power, then, not only means a great potential advantage to her husband's family, but is also potentially threatening. According to

Wolf's remark, which is basically derived from Freedman (1958), "the emotional strains within the family, including the tensions that arise from the existence of uterine families, are the heavy contributors to family divison" (Wolf 1972:164-5). Thus, by wielding her power to build a uterine family and manipulate her husband behind the scenes, a woman alters the family form while posing the danger of subverting and disrupting what Chinese (essentially males) consider the ideal family in which sons, their wives and children for generations live in harmony under the guidance of the male head of household, the manager of the lineage.

In response to this, Ahern (1975:200-2) draws up the parallels between the power and danger of menstrual blood and a married woman's social power and danger. A woman clearly demonstrates her power in varying the form of a family by bearing sons to it, separating it into uterine families and interfering with the male authority, as well as the danger she poses in ruining men's dream of an ideal family. A young woman's beneficial power or ability to bear sons, thus continuing her husband's line of descent, is parallel to the power of menstrual blood. On the other hand, the threat she poses to a man's ideal family carries the same extent as that threat by menstrual blood on the wellbeing of persons against whom it is used

by sorcery. Thus, a woman's reproductive power before menopause and the kind of power inherent in menstrual blood are analogous in their two-sided potential for both great good and harm. Or equivalently, the two-sided power of menstrual blood symbolically represents the actual social power of a married woman.

To most Chinese women (at least our informants), menstruation indeed functions as a crucial symbol of fertility while reproduction is the strong expectation of their husband's family as well as their own desire. However, the perception of women as a sort of underground subversive force in a male-dominated kinship system through their establishment of "uterine families" and "women's communities" cannot be generally applicable. Myron Cohen (1976), on a recent field trip to Yen-liao, a rural Hakka community in southern Taiwan, comes up with a view on women's role in family dynamics differing from that put forth by Wolf. Unlike Wolf, who attributes family breakup to the domestic discord among women and to the daughter-in-law's desire to creat a solidary "uterine family" consisting of herself and her children but not her husband, Cohen instead sees an ultimate husband-wife solidarity in the conjugal unit, 'fang' (房), created by division of the larger joint family, 'chia' (家), of which they are a part.

In the modern society today, a woman with some

education and a well-paid job usually enjoys much of her own way under the roof of her parents-in-law. Notwithstanding many of our informants live in nuclear families, there are still some others who do reside with stem families, yet the authority of the senior generation seldom prevails. Moreover, the increasing amount of education down the age scale definitely gives a woman advantages over her mother-in-law. In this reverse situation, elderly women who were brought up in "the old days" become somewhat overridden by their younger counterparts. An exemplary case has been found with an elderly woman being half teased and half threatened by her daughter-in-law who told her that "in 'modern' countries like America, old women live alone and are not cared for by their sons" (Diamond 1969:62).

In the modern domestic life of a married couple, the husband often consults with his wife beforehand partly because of their shared concern with things facing them both and partly because of his confidence in her rather than other relatives or friends who may turn an affair into gossip and ridicule. In addition, as her wellbeing lies firmly with that of her husband, particularly in a nuclear family, she is not likely without any justifiable reason to commit any disloyalty which may threaten her own wellbeing. Ahern's theory on linking a woman's social power with her

destructive menstrual power is then expected to encounter difficulty in explaining the domestic situation in which the need to establish a uterine family on the sacrifice of her husband's dominance in order to gain access to authority is not a woman's most concern. In fact, in the modern society, through economic independence from a salaried job, a woman is no longer quite as worthless as she once was in her father's family; and she no longer merely functions as a supplier of her husband's family descendants, although the responsibility still remains inescapable.

5.2 As a Polluting and Dangerous Event

Despite the extraordinary hunger for descendants among the Chinese, the event of childbirth is generally perceived as unclean and dangerous to both the mother and the child as well as those who come into contact with it. According to the ancient custom, the impure scene of childbirth, as described earlier, would prohibit a Chinese mother-to-be from having her child born at home. As a rule, she had to be removed to a hut away from home during and shortly after the delivery. However, such restriction, according to our informants, has already been abandoned. As a Cantonese woman told us, a hut of the kind in her home town Hâo-shan (鶴山) was only used for training girls at puberty and not for birth segregation purposes. In fact, people with more traditional mind believe that a child is best born in its parents' paternal home. Nowadays, childbirth in hospitals becomes commonplace in towns and cities where medical facilities are readily accessible. Nonetheless, to some country folk, hospitalization is extravagant and may not serve the best interest of newborn children. Even certain country people who can afford the cost of staying in hospitals cannot believe that the best start of a child's life is to be had there. Moreover, at home, both the mother and the child can be provided with home remedy and treatment for discomfort, which may not be

otherwise permissible in a hospital (Hsu 1967:201; Gallin 1966:190-1; Diamond 1969:30-1; Wolf 1972:53).

Basically, someone else's home, such as the home of a friend or a relative, or even the woman's natal home, is considered as an unproper site for childbirth. But in case of labour when it is inconvenient for the pregnant woman to return home, a small sum of money is normally offered to the host of the house as a symbolic rental payment so that the birth resembles the one delivered at home. In the vicinal areas of Loyang (洛陽), an east capital in ancient China, a woman cannot bear her child in any house except the one where she was conceived as a bride. It may happen that she has already moved out of the place at the time of delivery. Then she is sent to a temple or a 'yang-shêng-t'ang' (養生堂), an orphanage, until the child is born. And until a full month after the event can she go back to her residence (Kuo 1971:98-9). Moreover, childbirth at the mother-to-be's natal home is particularly restricted. As Frick reveals in his studies in Tsinghai, a woman who stayed with her parents while her husband was on military service had to leave home during labour and seek accomodation among relatives. Should she not be able to accomodate herself, she had to stay in a hut during the forty-day prescribed childbed period until she was again welcome back. Even the wife of a democratic

district president, namely a prestigious educated man among villagers, was no exception. (Frick 1955:348)

A pregnant woman is not welcome to stay in someone else's home because of the traditional belief that an outsider who has given birth in a family is eligible to enjoy the privileges of the family and hence to reduce its fortune; in addition, such a birth may cause possible damage to the childbearing prospects of the women in that house. This is obviously reflected in a Chinese proverb which says: "It is better to loan your house for a death than for a birth". Moreover, birth in the expectant mother's natal home is believed to bring severe threat to her brother's wives and must be avoided in any possible way. As Gallin (1966:191) notes of a Hsin Hsing woman who resided with her parents because of her trouble with the parents-in-law, at the time of her labour, she had to go to a hospital to have the baby, an unusual event among villagers.

For the Chinese, "home" symbolizes the kinship association of ancestors and descendants, and every event, be it a worship, a birth, a wedding or a death, should be carried out by the descendants in the same "home" as the ancestors did before them. The high cost of hospitalization is an added reason, although not the principal reason, why a father may insist that his child, hopefully a son, be born in the home of his ancestors. In fact, M. Wolf (1972:

54) came across a well-educated son bringing his wife "home" for their first child's delivery by a village midwife in a farmhouse according to the traditional wishes.

Childbirth, being potentially polluting, must take place in a room without a house altar and usually in the prospective mother's regular bedroom. If no suitable room is available, the pictures or idols of gods need to be removed during the occupancy so that they may not be insulted. The room, usually being dimly illuminated with a small electric or a kerosene lamp, is filled with taboos. Windows are expected to be covered with red felt blankets to shade the sun and to prevent any draughts from getting into the room, which may cause puerperal fever to the occupant. The place is indeed a "dark room" in that the disgusting blood during birth must be avoided to be "seen" by the sun, a symbol of the Heavenly God. Males, even the father-to-be, are usually not allowed to be present at childbirth. In fact in Tsinghai, young girls are also restricted from a birthplace for fear of the blood and the amnionic fluid that may spurt into their eyes and cause eye diseases, or more seriously, even blindness. There is also the threat of premature loss of hair. (Frick 1955:349) People in Hangchow seldom let others know the time of labour for they believe that the presence of an additional person in the maternity room will delay the time of parturition

(Tsay 1918:533).

By contrast, more persons may attend a Taiwanese birth, particularly if it is the woman's first pregnancy. Besides the presence of the mother-in-law, the married sisters-in-law and some neighbouring women who are available for assistance, her mother is normally sent for when labour sets in. The husband may also be present to support his wife during labour. She is expected to dress in a black skirt, one of her dowry which is intended for use at the event. When the moment of great pain and stress is imminent, the woman is allowed to kneel or be seated on a low stool, facing the proper direction as almanac instructs so that no spirit can be obstruded. Any agony cries at labour overheard by other people would be embarassing and must be avoided. The floor of the maternity room is spread traditionally with grass and rice husks, and recently with newspapers, to soak up the unclean blood which may otherwise pollute the earth. After the event, the midwife must take away the dirty papers and dispose them in a free-running stream. Since people consider postpartum blood to be very strong and powerful, these waste papers must be dropped softly in the water, or the newborn child will continuously vomit. Should there be no free-running stream, they could be buried but never burnt lest the baby would burn up itself or be infected with red spots on skin. It must be carefully

observed that no bloodstain ever remains on the floor or elsewhere on earth, otherwise it has to be cleaned up or the soil in that place needs to be dup up. Every careless spill of the water used during the childbirth outside the house offends the wandering spirits and must be avoided.

The umbilical cord and the afterbirth are also considered polluting and are buried cautiously, not only because their exposure would offend the Three Lights (sun, moon and stars) but also because of the high cost if they are taken away by others. As people believe the magical curing power of placenta[4], the apothecary's shop then makes good profit out of it, which is offered for sale under the name of 'tzŭ-ho-ch'ê' (紫河車) but is very precious. Particularly precious is the placenta from the birth of a first born son for it is conceived as one of the most effective tonics and medicines as is the powerful menstrual blood from a girl's menarche. However, should a newborn child's placenta be stolen and employed for such a purpose, its life would be greatly endangered. People in Hangchow customarily keep it in a jar with lime from the first birth

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[4] The belief and use of placenta as a tonic appear commonly in popular traditional Chinese novels. For example, in Chapter 41 of 'Chin P'ing Mei' (金瓶梅), Nun Wang (王姑子) advised Wu Yüeh-niang (吳月娘), "to drink the wine dipped in with a charm and the ashes of a first-born child's placenta" in order to be conceived.

of a child to the last and then bury away with the assurance of good health to all members in the family. Only if there is a death among the children, the placenta is thrown away and a new jar is reserved for the placenta of the next child being born (Tsay 1918:535). With a slight variance, Tsinghai folk regard the placenta as the infant's companion that cannot be removed from home lest the child will become seriously ill within the next few years. Moreover, everything emerged from the uterus at birth (postpartum blood, amnionic fluid etc.) including the placenta must be either burnt in a 'kang' close to the birthplace or buried in the family courtyard (Frick 1957:189).

In spite of the different customs in the disposal of things related to childbirth, beliefs on the potential power and danger of the blood emerged during the event in various localities of China are basically invariant. They are related to people's beliefs on the behaviour of a supernatural deity called Thai Shen (胎神), the Placenta God who is also regarded as an infant's soul. As soon as a child is conceived[5] in its mother's womb, a Thai Shen

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[5] In Chapter 38 of the 'Heroism of Sons and Daughters' (兒女英雄傳) by Wen Kang (文康), Madam Chang (張太太) commented on the childlessness of Chang Chin-feng (張金鳳) and Ho Yu-feng (何玉鳳) after two or three years of marriage by saying that a woman's conception is a matter of "whether the spirit is present in her or not". The spirit she referred to implies the Thai Shen. Should the spirit be absent, sexual intercourse would not bring pregnancy to a woman.

begins to reside with it until four months after its birth, just as a soul is with every human being. It is believed that the god is not firmly bound to the fetus and can be anywhere close to its mother inside the maternity room. Particular precautions and care must be taken to prevent disturbing the spirit and hurting the infant (the fetus). According to one of M. Wolf's Taiwanese informants, even the Japanese[6] feared the powerful,vindictive god: "the Japanese colonial administration held regular house inspections to ensure a minimum standard of cleanliness, but made exceptions for the room of a pregnant woman out of consideration for Thai Shen" (Wolf 1972:153). After birth, the spirit becomes gradually attached to the child's body, but fear still exists in carelessly disposing the birth fluids and the afterbirth in which the Thai Shen may be present. Thus, as the power of the blood derives its relation to the Thai Shen, any maltreatment to it may undoubtedly jeopardize the child's well-being.

In addition to those dangerously polluted things associated with childbirth, the new mother is totally contaminated. Consequently, she may not be seated with all members of the family at the dining table within the

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[6] The Japanese had ruled over Taiwan for fifty years after the Sino-Japanese War in 1895.

period of her confinement. Any family that can afford to hire a special servant to cook and care for her and the baby during the postpartum period may free itself from further polluting influences. Apparently, the postpartum discharge is the source of the "dirt", and, although it seldom lasts for a full month, the standard period of one month for ritual uncleanness generally applies. Within this period, the new mother, besides keeping away from people, must avoid stepping outside the house to be "seen" by the Heavenly God, Tien Kung, who regards her as "a puddle of dirty blood" (一灘髒血).

The birth room is also considered polluted for a full month and actually dangerous to the visitors. Usually, male guests are not allowed to enter the room unless they are close relatives of the new family. One can only gain entrance to the room without being contaminated when the confinement has been lifted[7]. Anyone who has recently entered such a room within the period is barred from engaging in all activities related to the gods, such

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[7] The occasion is clearly demonstrated in Chapter 39 of the 'Heroism of Sons and Daughters' in which Teng Chiu-kung (鄧九公) addressed his friend who visited on the Full Moon Day (滿月) of his children: "Today is the celebration of my twin sons' full month after birth... . The inner chamber is no longer a 'dark room', ... , and you are invited to see the room (and the baby)."

as praying in a temple and practising firewalk, as well as attending any wedding, for fear that bad luck may be brought to the bride. Some Taiwanese argue that if a male child is born, the mother alone is polluted and visitors to her room are not necessarily submitted to the same restrictions as when the child born is a girl. To deny this, others refer the pollution period as covering twenty-nine days for a girl born but extending to thirty days when the baby is a boy. They believe that boys live a "more expensive fate" and thus are more troublesome (Wolf 1972: 57). The same is true according to the Pekinese custom. However, Tsinghai folk affirm forty days for baby girls and thirty days for baby boys because they consider girls to be more impure and requiring longer time for purification. In spite of all these variations in the length of the postpartum period, the terms: 'tso-yüeh-tzŭ' (坐月子) and 'tso-yüeh-nei' (做月內) which literally mean "sitting in for one month" and "committing to a month of seclusion" respectively are commonly adopted to describe this birth pollution period.

Postpartum discharge, in its resemblance to menstrual blood, is laden with taboos similar to those indicated in the previous chapter. As a rule, a new mother within her childbed period is closely kept to the house. She is expected to stay entirely within the birth

room for the first few days after childbirth, and only until a full week[8] has passed may she begin to step out of the room. Nevertheless, she still has to refrain from entering the kitchen, the seat of the Stove God, and the main hall, the seat of many higher gods and ancestors. For a relatively poor family (such as a farm family), the new mother has to return to her work within a few days after the birth. But she still dares not approach the house altar or walk through the door of the main hall. In fact, in western Yunnan, a woman during her confinement period has to put on a hat whenever she attempts to go by the main portal of the house lest her "unclean" body may offend the gods guarding it (Hsu 1967:204).

As a precaution against inflicting any form of catastrophe, a childbed woman may also detour the small mound in the courtyard in front of the main house, where the Earth God is honoured. In case she ever goes near a well, the Water God may seek revenge by growing worms in the water. She should not step under the roof of a stall, otherwise the protective spirit would be insulted and the animals become ill. In addition, a childbed woman must also refrain from entering someone else's house. Our Taiwanese informants, in observing the rule, bear in mind

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[8] For Taiwanese women, the restricted stay-in period is twelve days.

of the warning that they would be obliged to come back after death to wash the threshold of the house should they break it.

It is imperative that the sun not be offended. If a postnatal woman cannot confine herself totally in a "dark" room, she must observe the rule not to expose herself to the sunlight in any way. Should she fail, she could bring about an eclipse or possible punishment to become in the next life a lowly animal such as an ass instead of a human being. In Tsinghai, new mothers in their childbed periods generally keep well within shady areas whenever they go out of their house. If they need to go to the public convenience which is simply enclosed by bamboo walls but seldom roofed, they merely go at night or when the sky is cloudy or dim. (Frick 1955:350) Taiwanese women in their pollution confinement prefer carrying umbrellas or wearing large hats to shelter themselves from Tien Kung, the highest god, if they must go out. All utensils which have been used during a birth must also be removed and buried in a place where the sun does not shine, or at least when they are brought away for burial, the sunlight is shaded. To Tsinghai folk, a horse stable, especially the place directly above which horses usually stand, is preferred because animal ungulae are believed to be capable of trampling down dangerous demons and withholding

any pollutants. (Frick 1955:351)

At the conclusion of the confinement event, those clothes worn by the woman within the month, menstrual cloth in particular, have to be washed by herself and not by the ordinary washing 'amah'[9] employed in a Chinese household. However, a special maid hired for looking after the new mother and the child may do the work for a usual double pay. Washing of these "dirty" clothes cannot be done in the usual washstand for fear that other people's garments or clothes will be contaminated and the wearers be inflicted with all sorts of misfortune. The clothes may be cleaned in a dog trough, or more often, by pouring water over and pounding them on a stone. Regardless of how she manages her washing, she must observe not to do under the sun, but either at night or in a shade at daytime. The clothes may not be dried in open sunshine but hung in a dark corner or an enclosed chamber, or according to the northerners' practice, powdered to dry with ashes from the 'kang'.

Like its mother, the contaminated baby is also confined to the house soon after birth for a whole month from being seen by the Tien Kung. Apparently the "dirt" it carries is derived from the polluting fluids at birth.

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[9]An 'amah' is not expected to wash the mistresses' undergarments which have been stained with menstrual blood.

As a further belief, every child is born with a clot of blood in its mouth, which must be released at birth by the midwife as the blood is regarded "poisonous" and detrimental to its health. Moreover, the contamination from the womb probably lasts well past the child's infancy, as evidenced by those "poisonous" pustules that erupt at measles[10]. Hence, within the "month", the baby must be cleansed of the "dirt" by any possible means. An infant cannot take lactation until three days after birth, only the boiled water soaked with licorice or the water boiled with 'Coptis japonica' (黃連) is fed. A Taiwanese baby is usually treated with "sugar water" (namely, honey and brown sugar in boiled water) and sweetened herbal tea. Honey and brown sugar are classified as "clean" substances that serve to rid stomach of any possible "dirty" blood swallowed by the infant during birth. Licorice, 'Coptis japonica' and herbal tea all serve the same purpose because they are "clean and cool"[11].

Ritual purification of an infant generally takes place before the house altar on the third day after its

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[10] The contamination is originated from the womb and passed onto the child: "It is unclean because of its origin" (Topley 1970:426).

[11] Foodstuffs and herbs are often categorized according to their nature as cool, clean, hot or poison. Those "clean" substances are considered to be capable of removing any unwanted poison or dirt from the body.

birth. The ceremony is known as 'san-chao' (三朝) or 'hsi-san' (洗三), which literally means "the washing on the third day". It is customarily performed by the midwife who can then collect her fee, and possibly some presents. Boiled water dipped with pomelo leaves[12] is used to bathe the baby. But before the washing, offerings are made to Ch'ung Wu (牀母), the Bed Mother[13], with request that her protection and help be given in rearing the child and other children to follow. In a more formalized ritual which takes place one month after birth, the child is bathed in water boiled with various kinds of "clean" herbs after its hair has been shaved. This ritual cleansing is believed to aim at ridding the child of the dirt associated with death which may, in case, be brought from someone in mourning who comes into contact with the child. The cut hair is usually wrapped and saved by the family, who may keep it beside the baby's pillow to protect it from any frightful spirits. It is this day commonly known as 'man-yüeh' (滿月) or 'mi-yüeh' (彌月), that is, "a full month", that marks the conclusion of both the child's and the new mother's polluting confinement. Again, offerings

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[12] Pomelo is categorized as "cool" fruit.

[13] Ch'ung Wu is not a goddess of fertility but a child's tutelary deity who must be worshipped among a collection of gods and ancestors in the house altar on the first day and the middle of each lunar month as long as there is a child in the family.

of thanks are made to gods (especially the Bed Mother) and ancestors for preserving the infant and its mother. A feast is normally held for relatives and friends who come to give good wishes and presents to the child, or gifts in the forms of delicate food are sent to them symbolizing a feast. It is from this day on that the mother resumes her normal activities while the child may be taken out for visiting relatives and friends.

In some Chinese communities, the dirt associated with birth requires more extensive cleaning. In K'un Shen, a small southwestern village in Taiwan, an infant receives its first haircut twelve days after birth, and then an additional bath in a tub with two eggs and a stone placed in the water to wish the baby a pretty face as an eggshell and a hard (wise) head as a stone (Diamond 1969:31). Also in Peihotien, a village in northern Taiwan, a one-month old child is shaved on the head as well as eyebrows for being polluted with the dirt it contacts when born through "the dirty part of a woman" (Wolf 1972:57).

Contrary to all the ritual efforts made to cleanse the baby of any contamination, there is practically no ritual custom to rid the mother of the dirt. Indeed, she is expected to purify herself gradually. In case she unfortunately dies during labour or in the childbed period, the tragic event, by combining the pollution from both birth

and death, is extraordinarily impure and dangerous. The woman who brings upon such a climatic pollution is expected to be punished with all the tortures in the Hell of Blood as described in an earlier chapter. The mortality rate of mother and child during and after childbirth was very high before adequate medical care was introduced in the Chinese society. It is usually said that during labour "one foot is in the coffin and the other outside" (Tsay 1918:536). Also, the common belief that at delivery the woman is separated from the Devil King of Hell by only a thin piece of paper emphasizes the extreme danger of the event. In fact, in Tsinghai, any discomfort during childbirth is customarily referred to as a 'liang-chia-ping' (兩家病), or a "double illness" (Frick 1955:352), implying that the birth itself is an illness which is often fatal.

A woman who cannot survive childbirth is considered to die an unnatural death, or rather, a violent death (橫死). In the Chinese mind, anyone who suffers in life and passes away discontentedly without any accomplishment or success, or else, dies young from an undeserved cause is likely to become a dissatisfied and malevolent ghost. In this respect, a woman who dies in childbed, with an understandable grievance, is believed to turn into a dangerous, horrible demon who will seek vengenance

among the living. Such a deceased woman is generally regarded as fearsome and disgusting rather than pitiable and lovable. Contrary to those who die in a natural cause and are given the highest honour and the best funeral possible, she receives no death rites and must be buried in the cheapest coffin, with the ordinary clothes[14] and a repellent attire. The alloted spot in the family burial place which she deserves according to her relationship to the family cannot be used for the purpose. She has to be buried in any unclaimed land or public graveyard, or in the area set aside for those deceased members of the family who are undersirable on the proper site, such as the cripples, the suicides, infants, unmarried daughters and women in childbed. (Hsu 1967:154-5; Frick 1955:353-4)

The great pollution of a woman deceased during childbirth even prohibits her coffin from being carried out via the front door of the house as it should be in a proper funeral. This is to prevent the God of Wealth (who often resides at the door) and all fortune from leaving the family with her. In Tsinghai, a "new gate" is usually erected under the existing gate by binding together branches with straw and arranging them in such a fashion that fire

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[14] Wedding clothes are put on the body of a young woman who dies naturally.

can be set on it when the coffin is taken away as swiftly as possible without offending the god. The pallbearers will scream when running through the kindling gate, believing that the fire can effectively destroy the malevolent spirit. In addition, the dead woman is not carried to the grave as in a normal funeral, but transported in a wagon to the burial site. The head of the corpse must be buried much deeper than the feet while not facing in any possible way that may insult the sun. (Frick 1955:354-5)

Besides the necessary means of suppressing the greatly polluting danger of a deceased childbed woman, any death which takes place in the house occupied by a woman in childbed must be also treated similarly. The deceased person, being contaminated by the birth event, is deemed to go to the blood hell and suffer the tortures in it. But as the privilege of a man, his fate can be relieved by undergoing certain rites at the funeral to free his soul from damnation. He can still be buried with all honours and retain his rightful spot in the family burial ground. The burial is normal except that a red felt mat must be hung over the window of the birth room so that childbed pollution can find no way of endangering the dead man. In view of the misfortune birth may bring upon the deceased, people try every means to avoid the two conflicting events from occurring together in the same house if there is such

a possibility. In the modern novel 'Family' (家) by Ba Chin (巴金) (ca. 1931), the expectant mother Rueyjyue (瑞珏) was forced to give birth in an out-of-town hut for fear that the childbirth might pollute her recently deceased father-in-law whose body was laid out at home awaiting burial; she finally died during hard labour for lack of proper care.

Treatments to deceased childbed woman who has already born a son may be mitigated. Since her principal function and responsibility in her husband's family has been fulfilled, she deserves better clothing at burial, though not the best funeral attire. She has also the chance of being saved from the hell of blood through ritual prayers of atonement[15] by her survivors. In fact, women commonly pray for the atonement of blood hell when they are alive so that they may be alleviated of the damnation. The duration of the tortures in blood hell is believed to depend upon whether the woman has been giving birth to a boy or a girl. To Tsinghai people, the birth of a girl is

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[15] The Taoist Scriptures (道藏) record the texts: 血湖真經 and 血湖寶懺 for praying the atonement of bloodhell. Popular novels also mention a similar prayer, such as in 'Chin P'ing Mei' (金瓶梅) (Chapter 63), Li P'ing-er (李瓶兒), while dying, asked Nun Wang (王姑子) to recite the "Blood-basin Prayer" (血盆經懺) for her after her death. Other methods of atonement include striking the temple bell and burning paper houses, men and devils, forts surrounded by water as well, to symbolize the soul being freed by breaking the bloodpit.(Kuo 1971:115-6)

so impure that it requires longer period of damnation, whereas in the case of a boy, the mother may possibly suffer in hell for only three years. (Ibid.:360)

Most unmerciful is the treatment towards a woman who dies during childbirth without leaving behind any descendant. In Tsinghai, before the burial of such a woman, every possible means is taken to suppress the dangerous power of her soul. A magic charm with red paint on it is usually placed over the heart of her corpse to restrain her. Salt may be added in addition to an ass-hoof (which is not vital) in order to put further pressure on the heart. Besides the use of an inverted black earthern vessel, a piece of husk and a wooden piece from the cattleyoke are respectively bound to each forearm and ankle with a piece of sheepwool since they are believed to be the effective repellents. Two or three handfuls of husk are also thrown over the corpse in the casket with the wish that the soul be suppressed eternally (Ibid.:353-4).

Female ghosts, especially the souls of unwed women, are most malevolent and dangerous according to the Chinese conception of the supernatural world. They haunt the living to demand a marriage and thus a proper place on a house altar. A deceased married woman, though having acquired a secure place on her husband's family altar, is generally fearsome for she may seek revenge for the

accumulated resentment and frustruation she has suffered from her mother-in-law, husband, or any member of the family during her married life. For a woman who departs miserably in childbed, added resentment from hard labour and merciless tortures in bloodhell prompt her to be deeply hateful and evil, and hence revengeful and harmful. Similar accounts exist also in the case of a deceased little daughter-in-law (童養媳), a girl adopted by a family as a wife of their son (a practice which was widely spread in China before the Wars). As Arthur Wolf (1974:152) learns from various cases in Sanhsia, a town in Taipei Basin, a little daughter-in-law who dies either as an infant or a young adult is not even tied to the conjugal relationship, yet is considered married into her future husband's family and thus qualified for a seat on her foster father's (father-in-law's) altar. In general, her soul is cared for by her intended husband who promises not to marry without obtaining her approval. The request, taking the form of a written agreement signed by her foster father, the husband and his expectant wife, and submitted to her by burning before her altar, includes the promise that one of their future sons would worship her as mother, lest she could be irritated and come back to cause trouble.

Obviously, such a promise may very well be indispensable to a deceased wife leaving no descendant.

In fact, any serious misfortune, as Wolf notes, is more likely attributed to a deceased married woman than an unwed daughter of the line, because the former enjoys better rights (Ibid.:152). Her soul is thus bound to be dangerous and malicious, not only for the grievance she has suffered in childbed and bloodhell, but also for her jealousy at the second wife's existence in her husband's family. In addition to the worship she deserves on the family altar by the children of the second wife, she must be respected as an elder sister by her successor, who also treats her living parents with all the obligation and respect of a daughter, including paying them a formal visit soon after her arrival in the household as well as on some festive occasions (Ibid.: 152-3). Otherwise, calamities may be inevitable. Indeed, any illness suffered by someone immediately after a woman has deceased in childbed in the family is naturally believed to be the deed of her demon. Even a shaman called in to exorcize the spirit would, as if in the presence of a menstruating woman, fail to put himself into a trance and become powerless, since her soul is particularly fearful (Frick 1955:338).

In the book 'Lǐ-cheng' (里乘) written by Hsu Shu-ping (許淑平) of the Ching Dynasty, there is a story relating the ghost of a woman who died in childbed and wished to find replacement for life:

One night, Pi You (畢酉), a man noted for his wit and courage, came across a girl walking alone on his hurried way home from out of town before his wife was going to deliver. Out of curiosity and suspicion that she seemed not breathing at all, he asked her which clan she belonged to and why she walked alone at midnight.

The girl replied, "I am not a human being but a ghost of childbed (產鬼). It is merely because of the birth in the Pi family awaiting in the next village that I am travelling there to replace her."

Although astonished, Pi You sought a way of overcoming the ghost's endeavour and asked, "How long have you been a ghost?"

"It has been thirteen years since," the ghost answered.

"Why is the replacement delayed so long?"

"The officials in Hades judge the length of time according to one's virtue and vice in life. Replacement is granted only if the soul has gone through all the necessary punishment for sins committed. This thus causes my late replacement."

"Is there any technique for replacement?"

"Yes, there is," admitted the ghost. "Around my neck is a red string called the 'blood bait' (血餌). If it falls into a pregnant woman's abdomen, it will tie around the placenta preventing it from being delivered. And the woman, no matter how strong she is, would not survive from the great pain in her heart should the string be pulled three or four times."

You laughed falsely and said, "This is really a delicate trick. But is there any means of subduing it?"

The ghost just grinned but kept silent. It was not until You swore to keep the secret, then the ghost disclosed the method.

"A ghost of childbed is most afraid of an umbrella. Should it be hung behind the door of a maternity room, the ghost would dare not enter the room."

It was further revealed that the ghost, even though shut outside the house, could climb up the roof and drop the "blood bait" into the woman's mouth. But if another umbrella was opened at the top of the bed, the bait could not descend and the ghost not have any other wicked means, ...

(translated from 'Lǐ-cheng', Chapter 5, 清同治十三年)

In addition to the use of umbrellas, Doolittle (1865:116-7) mentions a ceremony performed in Foochow to propitiate the the will of two such female demons which attempted to destroy a woman's life at the time of childbirth for replacement. Besides the ordinary items usually appeared in a ritual ceremony such as food, incense, candles, flowers and mock-money, the appropriate classics of propitiation were recited by a priest, and pieces of a kind of grass chopped at an inch length and crab models cut out of paper were burned in a censer in the open street. Paper crab were used because the name for "crab" (蟹) in the dialect of the place is phonetic with the name of one of the demons (謝). Similarly, I assume that the word for "grass" (草) sounds like another demon's name (曹). All ritual ceremonies of propriation are aimed at frightening and driving away evil spirits.

A baby who survives after its mother's death in childbed may face the danger of the deceased mother's spirit coming to get it for the cause of her death even though it has been two or more years. In fact, as mentioned earlier, a child's life, before the time of measles or smallpox, is believed to be threatened by evil spirits. In Peking, an infant, when seriously ill, could be "stripped

and placed on the floor just inside the outer door of the room. The parents leave it there and watch what takes place. If the child survives this treatment, it is recognized as a true child of their own flesh and blood; but if it dies, then it never was their child, but an evil spirit seeking to gain entrance to their family in order to bring trouble on them." (Cormack 1935:243-4) This treatment may not be necessary for a child whose birth results in its mother's death. In Tsinghai, even though an infant does survive in lieu of its mother, it is subject to great suspicion and contempt. Indeed, it is not considered as a precious gift at a high cost, but a mark of anxiety and misfortune in the family. What it has brought upon the family may remain as a curse to them. Very often, such a child is given away. (Frick 1955:357) If the child dies soon after delivery, it is regarded as an evil spirit or someone from a previous life dunning for a debt. For fear that its soul may return to life, according to some customs in northern China, black dots are usually marked on the face of a dead child, as applicable to a woman deceased in childbed. Such a child is never buried in the family graveyard, for it means adoption of an evil spirit into the family, the "height of folly" (Cormack 1935:244). In addition, an elaborate funeral cannot be given as in the case of elderly people. And according to the custom of

Ping Shen in the New Territories of Hong Kong, a makeshift coffin is generally used for the perfunctory burial (Potter 1974:210). In Shantung Peninsula, the infant's body is not placed in a coffin but in a shallow grave which is merely covered up with sufficient soil to conceal it from sight so that, as noted by Coltman (1891:77), dogs can dig up and devour the body. The idea is plain: "An evil spirit inhabited the child's body, otherwise it would not have died so young. If the dogs eat it, the bad spirit enters the dog and cannot again enter another child who may be born to the same parents." A "demon child" who causes the death of a woman may also endanger others if not being eliminated completely by any means. The treatment is not very surprising, for similar customs are also practised in Tsinghai (Frick 1950:788).

Members of a family are not responsible for propitiating the souls of small children or of unmarried women. This is applicable to an unwed woman not only because her soul is ugly and hateful, but also because a woman is meant to be married out and belong to her husband's family instead of her father's (Ahern 1973:127; Jordan 1972: 140-2; Wolf 1974:149; Li 1974:178-82). But for a deceased child, it is simply because the ancestor worship is an act of obeisance and respect paid by a junior to his senior, but not vice versa (Wolf 1974:147; Hsu 1967:159). Consequently,

children who die young are regarded as strangers and their souls become homeless, hungry ghosts. Such a ghost, being a social anomaly and full of sibling jealousy like an unwed daughter, is particularly dangerous and fearsome. One of the ghosts encountered at a seance Potter attended in Ping Shan, Hong Kong, was the soul of a little girl who accused her parents of causing her death by not calling in a doctor soon enough. In addition, the vengeful spirit complained through the medium that she could not rest in peace because her parents were careless and hired someone who buried her body shallowly and inadequately with earth to be uncovered by dogs. (Potter 1974:210)

The souls of deceased infants and women who died in childbed, particularly leaving behind no children, as aforementioned, are potentially dangerous but at the same time powerful. In fact, bones of anyone who had died an unnatural death, such as a person who has committed suicide, been executed or murdered, or died by any violent means, as well as those unknown bones plowed up in fields, if enshrined and given offerings, are beneficial to those who treat them with respect by protecting and helping these persons by means of their unusual, potentially dangerous power. In Taiwan, according to Wang (1974:190) and Harrell (1974:195), there are many shrines built by devotees to house these spirits. They are given dignified titles such

as 'Chu Tuo Kung' (竹頭公) ----- "Sir Bamboo" for a drowned man found in a bamboo grove, 'Chen Ku Niang' (陳姑娘) ----- "Lady Chen" for a girl surnamed Chen who hanged herself, and 'Yu Ying Kung' (有應公) ----- for a collection of bones unearthed during plowing, gravedigging or construction, as well as remains of anyone nobody cares to worship. These shrines resemble the temples of the supernatural bureaucrats, except that they have no 'miao-mien' (廟面), "temple face", with a double-leaf door guarded by two divine generals whose images are inscribed on it. Besides, they are usually much smaller and less elaborately furnished, and, in essence, a simple structure with 'san-mien-pi' (三面壁), "three-face-walls". These powerful spirits generally lack legitimate authority and respond to anyone, good or evil, who makes offerings to them. They are the supernatural beings which persons of low status, such as gamblers and prostitutes, commonly worship and rely upon for help.

Although these two sources of information do not explicitly mention a similar temple erected for a woman deceased during childbirth, worship of her soul for protection, according to Kuo (1971:114), has been practised since the Han Dynasty, and in contrast to the terrible fate of the souls of women who died in childbirth as described earlier, such a spirit is dignified as a goddess of descendants instead of a horrible demon. Indeed, the

ambiguity in status of a deceased childbed woman's soul as being both dangerously harmful and beneficially helpful also applies to the souls of certain other deceased persons. As Harrell remarks, some spirits in the Chinese concept of the supernatural world carry an intermediate status: "Though originally 'kuei' (ghost), in some circumstances they take on characteristics of 'shen' (god), often achieving a status that contains both 'kuei' and 'shen' elements, and occasionally even change their nature entirely and becoming full-fledged gods" (Harrell 1974:195).

The status of these supernatural beings is dubious and easily mutable because of their unknown or socially marginal position and their beneficialness to anyone who worship them on shrines: "Once a shrine is built, the spirit has acquired an individual identity. Offerings are made, stories are told, and consensus begins to form" (Ibid.:205). This obviously holds true for the souls of unwed women in 'Ku-niang-miao' (姑娘廟), or "Maiden's temple", and infants and other unknown souls which have nobody to care about them and end up in a socially anomalous status. Many who have died violent deaths either in battles or as a result of illicit activities, according to Harrell, used to be characters of ambiguity when alive and situated on the verge of the social order. Included in this type might be the gangsters, the so-called 'liu-mang' (流氓), who

are simultaneously despised and respected, yet establish no definite status in the legitimate social order. Being dangerous on one hand, they are chivalrous on the other and particularly beneficial to certain sector of people in the society who approach them. In the supernatural world, they retain this equivocal quality and thus possess an alterable status. It is only through experience and consensus from their effective response that one can classify them as supernatural benefactors.

Curiously enough, the soul of a deceased childbed woman who has already earned a legitimate place in her husband's family altar through marriage is still posted as a spirit of flexible status and possesses an ambiguous double-sided power comparable to that of those just mentioned! In order to apprehend such a powerful spirit, one has to associate it with the conflict and crises encountered by someone under similar circumstances. As Harrell puts it, "Civil struggles, resistance to occupying armies, aborigine raids, floods that uncover buried bones or wash them ashore, all are occasions of great uncertainty and concern to the average Taiwanese. It is especially at times when rational calculations and actions are insufficient to understand or cope with the situation that people are likely to turn to the supernatural, both as an explanation for otherwise inexplicable events and as a source of help.

And since the Taiwanese supernatural order is to a great extent a reflection of the earthly social order (as elsewhere in China), it appears likely that uncertainty about natural events lead to uncertainty about supernatural events as well. Not only are people likely to be more concerned with the supernatural in times of conflict and crises; they are also more likely to have doubts about it" (Harrell 1974:206).

During childbirth, a woman is facing considerable danger and uncertainty of life and death. The event is desirable as a baby is to be born, yet also undesirably polluting. Should she die on such an ambivalent occasion, her soul, unsurprisingly, would be compounded with similar ambiguities to cope with conflict and crises. Thus, as mentioned earlier, such a powerful spirit is normally worshipped as the goddess of descendants by pregnant women who, in the state of great anxiety and uncertainty, beseech for safe delivery and less pain during labour.

CHAPTER SIX

POPULAR BELIEF AND PRACTICE FOR THE MENSTRUAL AND POSTNATAL ADJUSTMENTS

The pollution power of a woman associated with menstrual and postpartum discharges, be they alive or dead, has been explored in the foregoing chapters. During these impure states, a woman is, nevertheless, considered vulnerable. In fact, if a new mother in childbed is accidentally encountered by a restricted person such as a pregnant or menstrual woman, a person in mourning or merely a stranger, her milk will suffer the danger of being disturbed. A remedy for this, according to the people of Ting Hsien (定縣) is to exchange immediately the intruder's waist belt for that of the mother (Gamble 1954:378).

Relatively speaking, since menstruation is a repetitive physical event, the vulnerability of a menstrual woman is expected to be less severe than that of a parturient mother who, together with her newborn baby, is undergoing both social and biological adjustments. However, in both cases, there are necessarily many tabooed behaviour and dietary rules which are similar because of their comparable bodily conditions. Of the proscriptions involved in both

menstrual and postpartum periods, to protect the body from "cold" and keep it "warm" (驅寒保溫) is exemplary. In order to discourse further on these prohibitions, a cursory explanation of the Chinese popular concept about health and illness is necessary.

In the Chinese mind, the human body is a microcosm of the universe. While 'yin' and 'yang' govern the universe, blood and 'chi' are similarly related to the body. Man as an individual ----- to be distinguishable from a "social being", is viewed as a psycho-physical entity in which both blood and 'chi' flow continuously between various vital organs and through numerous bodily vessels. These two forces have a mutual affinity and antagonism to each other. Health requires a harmony between the two forces, while illness is often derived from an imbalance in the blood-'chi' relationship. The imbalance manifests itself in humours which are of "hot" and "cold" origins, literally in fevers and colds, or referable to spiritual or metaphysical heat and coldness. An excess of "heat" in a human body is thought to produce sore throat, flushed skin, fever, cough, sore muscles, and various kinds of sores and pains, while weakness, chills, inability to maintain effort, misery, sadness, depression and helplessness result from excessive "cold". Yet the proper apportionment of both "hot" and "cold" qualities a body needs to keep its balance is conditionally and individually determined. In the winter,

"hot" diets are preferable to "cold" ones, whereas the converse is true in the summer. Moreover, the kind of dietary depends on the physical condition of the individual; some people can tolerate more "hot" foods than others. In addition, a young person can probably digest various kinds foods without falling sick easily, whereas elderly people must judiciously choose the proper dietary in order to maintain a balanced health.

In contrast to men who, being 'yang' (hot) oriented, are prone to excessive "heat", women, possessing mostly 'yin' principles, suffer more frequently from "cold" diseases. Particularly during menstruation and childbirth, women are prone to "cold" and "not enough blood". Indeed, the physical condition of a woman cycles every month, fluctuating about the dynamic equilibrium of 'yin' and 'yang'. Early in the month, the "cold" quality is gradually replaced by the "hot" essence which is reached at mid-month before retreating to the "cold" again when blood is passed out of the body as menstrual fluid. At the time of parturition, a woman generally feels extremely "cold and weak" after losing more blood at delivery than during ordinary menstrual flow. It is believed (and subject to traditional doctors' affirmation) that at childbirth, a woman's bodily joints are all disclosed and thus vulnerable to "wind" (風). Metaphysically, this is referred to as

an obstruction that the blood and 'chi' cannot circulate freely throughout the whole body as they normally should.

To take precaution against further imbalance of the body in blood and 'chi', even in a hot summer, women are advised to put on warm clothes and avoid fans to protect from draughts during menstrual periods, and above all, be secluded in the house and away from people at the time of postpartum confinement. In fact, menstrual pain and puerperal fever are often attributed to the exposure of the body to "cold" and "wind". It occurred recently in Taipei that the plan to install air-conditioning facilities in the delivery wards of a public hospital was rejected by a number of parturient patients and their families simply from such a fear.

Any symptom such as arthritis, rheumatism, headache or backache is generally attributed to the "cold" and "wind" which women inflict upon themselves by breaking taboos during their menstrual or postnatal periods. In fact, it is not recommendable to take baths and wash hair within the month after childbirth. Some elderly informants do think that these activities must be withheld in menstrual periods as well. Bathing is indeed strongly disapproved by some because the "poison" associated with menstrual fluid is believed to leak out in the course of bathing and cause skin disease. Furthermore, there is the fear that the clean

blood in the body would also be washed out. However, most women still agree to bathe or at least partly clean their bodies in menstrual periods, but avoid using cold water for fear of getting blood clot. In childbed periods, the taboo is even more seriously observed. Some women do hold the opinion that washing, bathing or even cleaning with moisture can be done twenty days after childbirth, and only boiled water can be used. The water is usually boiled with moxa and ginger skin to help the body getting rid of "cold" and "wind". Pomelo leaves, a special ritual cleansing agent, may be added to the water to remove the "dirt". Swimming is generally prohibited not only because of the danger that may be risked from "wind" intrusion and skin disease, but also due to the possible infection by germs. There is a further comment that the water would be polluted should a menstruating or postnatal woman attempt to swim in it, and such behaviour is considered immoral.

In addition to the above behavioural restrictions, certain foods that are categorized as "cold" must also be avoided during menstrual and parturient periods, and only certain "hot-strengthening" foods can be consumed. Some foods have "hot" qualities in the body quite unalike to their actual temperature in the environment, while some others possess qualities that effectively cool the body. "Hot" foods are usually fatty, sticky, and especially

"nutritious", which include sesame oil, fried foods, glutinous rice and meats. They are vital to 'chi' and blood, but may cause fever and fever associated disease. While certain "hot" foods do strengthen 'chi' with minimal risk of disease, there are others which have the converse effect. "Cold" foods are generally soupy and watery, but considered less nutritious than those made of animal matters. These are mostly vegetable matters such as golden needle soup, herbal teas of various sorts and honey-water, and are effective in suppressing elevated temperatures and helping to cure "hot-related" disease as well as bringing rest and relief. However, they may have the adverse effect of bringing weakness and chill to the body, and even to the point of causing death. Some "cold" foods are meat to remove or disperse harmful substances so as to bring comfort and relief, while others lead to bodily weakness and dizziness with less relieving powers.

The dyadic classification of foods into "hot" and "cold", being widespread in civilizations of the Old World[1] (Hart 1968; Wilson 1970), has long been known in China from the earliest time when things were recorded.

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[1] A similar, but with differences, concept of "hot-cold" dichotomy also existed, and still exists, in Western folk medicine. According to Andersons (1975:145-6), it may have been borrowed from the Old World.

Such a widely known system of dietetics becomes elaborate and, very naturally, assimilated into the 'yin-yang' dichotomy with "hot" corresponding to 'yang' and 'cold' to 'yin'. Yet despite its universality, it is not fundamentally possible to classify every food as either "hot" or "cold", whether it is the "hottest" or the "coldest", or even most harmful to the body. A partial listing of both "hot" and "cold" food items collected by Andersons from two Chinese communities in the South-east Asia (Andersons 1975:146-8) may serve as a valuable reference on the dietary habits for a menstruating or a parturient woman to observe, and also on the possible treatments to a woman's problem during such a period. By comparison, the dietary rules during menstrual and childbed periods in conformity with northern Chinese habits we have gathered from our informants are somewhat different from those of Andersons.

All the cold foods in a literal sense must be avoided. Chinese traditional doctors particularly advise women during their menstrual and postpartum periods not to consume anything recently taken out of a refrigerator. Foods served cold or uncooked are strongly unrecommendable. Moreover, in contrast to Indian women who refrain from non-vegetarian foods during these periods in order to keep away from being further polluted with unclean animal meats (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1973:169-70),Chinese women avoid taking

most bland,low-caloried vegetables such as turnips, cabbages, watercresses, seaweeds, bitter gourds, green beans, wintermelons, carrots, celery and bamboo shoots, because they are "cold". Most fruits also fall into the "cold" category and are thus prohibitive; they are grapefruits, watermelons, sugarcane and oranges, to name a few. Cantonese women particularly disapprove cantaloupe (muskmelon) for its "extremely cold" nature, which is regarded as the "Devil King's meal ticket" (閻羅王的飯票). Breaching the taboo by eating any cold or cold-natured foods during the period of menstruation causes menstrual cramp so that the menstrual flow may become clotted or even stop. In the case of a parturient woman, the danger may be extended to the baby whose stomach will be upset after being fed with the mother's milk. However, strict abolition of cold food, which is mostly fruits or vegetables in the childbed period, almost totally bans the the available sources of vitamin C and is strongly discouraged by Western-trained physicians. A reasonable compromise, as adopted by those women who are mindful of good nutrition and, at the same time, comply with all of the restrictions imposed in the confinement period, is to supplement diet with vitamin-C tablets.

Similar to the dietary observation in the Indian culture, foods categorized as "stimulating" like ginger,

garlic, pepper, hot pepper, vinegar and things with sour taste are seldom taken by Chinese women during their menstrual periods. While Indian women avoid these foods because they are "passion-inducers" (Ibid.: 171), the Chinese merely fear that their stimulating nature would cause increased bleeding or longer menstruating periods. However, vinegar which is particularly renowned in this respect is often taken by a postnatal woman in order to get rid of the postpartum discharge from the body efficiently.

Meats categorized as "hot" are generally favoured by both menstrual and postnatal women. Yet some may still avoid such "offensive" meats as lamb, beef, crab and fish which give an unpleasant smell with the blood discharge, besides those plants as onion, scallion and leek with pungent odour. Some elderly informants gave up eating beef also because the animal, namely the bull, was regarded as an agricultural helper instead of an edible bovine. Crabs and most seafood are forbidden because of their "cold" nature. Ducks are also shunned because they are "poisonous" and will contaminate the mother's milk and vitiate her vagina and womb if the dietary is not restrictively observed.

Besides the food avoidance during the vulnerable periods of menstruation and childbed, a woman must not, as mentioned before, have sexual intercourse with her husband as it will cause severe harm to his 'yang'. Moreover,

according to the common belief, a menstrual woman's genitalia will be ridden with bugs while a parturient woman will be inflicted with "strange" diseases (怪病) in the lungs, which are collectively called 'gan-hsüeh-lao' (乾血癆), 'pai-jih-lao' (百日癆), or 'nü-erh-lao' (女兒癆)[2]. Indeed, as M. Wolf notes (1972:158), during the first few weeks after childbirth, the woman's mother-in-law often sleep with her and assists her at night, thus ensuring that the young couple cannot resume sexual relations too soon after the event. We gathered the impression that our informants, especially the low-class women, firmly believe in the strange diseases mentioned above, with their horrible consequences. Evidence has been collected by several married women who pointed out likely taboo-overridden cases related to their neighbours, friends and relatives.

While many foods are tabooed during the seclusion period, others are specially recommended to help the new mother back to a normal balance. As a common belief, it is possible to ingest the appropriate substance, "hot" or "cold", to overcome the lack of that substance in the body or to counteract the surfeit of one substance with another of its opposite kind. Thus, Taiwanese women customarily

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[2] 'Lao' (癆) is the collective disease in the lungs. Women inflicted with any of these "strange" diseases will die from blood exhaustion; while with 'pai-jih-lao' (百日癆), she is expected to pass away within a hundred days.

consume 'ma-yu-chi' (麻油鷄), a soup made up of hot ingredients, namely, chicken, wine, and sesame oil, as a nourishment after childbirth or as a treatment for menstrual problems. Usually, some hot strengthening herbs such as 'Ssu-bu-la' (四不辣) and 'han-gua-wa' (寒瓜挖) are also stewed with the soup. According to northern Chinese practice, a new mother is only given boiled eggs, "millet congee" (小米粥) with brown sugar and sesame within twelve days after childbirth. After the twelfth day, she is nourished with pork hock stew, fresh gold carp soup, chicken and stuffed dumpling. The former two items are supposed to encourage milk production and help the mother to regain her strength. In a childbed woman's diet, chicken is seldom deleted perhaps because the word is phonetic with that of "luck" (吉) permitting the fowl to be used in most ritual ceremonies. Stuffed dumpling is a northern styled food and has a symbolic meaning of "pinching crevices in bones" (捏骨縫).

Females in northern China usually drink hot soup with brown sugar and ginger. The latter is considered superb in ridding the body of coldness while the former dissolves blood clots, the main cause for menstrual pains. Indeed, ginger is often added to vegetable cooking, and particularly to dishes of very "cold" nature. An elderly lower-class woman from Shantung, a province in northern

China, revealed to us that in her hometown, menstruating women used to tie around their waist a bag of heated salt or a wrapped piece of hot clay to relieve menstrual pains. There are other informants who believed that the discomfort could be treated by acupuncture and moxibustion.

Childbed women commonly imbible wine in order to "dry up the wind" in their bones. Generally, people believe that wine is good for releasing menstrual cramps, since it is "hot-natured" and promotes the flow of blood. So quite a few women, particularly those from southern China, ingest fermented rice, fried eggs in wine, or just drink some wine to relieve menstrual pain. Taiwanese women prefer taking cuttlefish soaked in wine for treating the menstrual discomfort. There are also some prescriptions which have only been mentioned by a few persons. One informant told us that once after imbibing wine in which the penis of a male deer (availavle as a drug in dry form known as 'lu-pien', 鹿鞭) had been soaked, her menstrual cramps and other disorders disappeared, and she soon became pregnant. Other remedies mentioned are: boiling the calamus leaves with brown sugar, drinking the juice from the old grape tree stem, and having hawthorn powder with water.

All remedies for menstrual disorders can also be used as a general tonic, or literally, "patching" medicine, during the period. Liver, lingusticum, old moxa, a

medicinal seasoning wine, as well as other drugs, for instance, 'tzu-su' (紫蘇), 'yi-mu-kao' (益母膏) are also good for the body. Some women do feel that they need patching after every menstruation because of the loss of blood and physical weakness. But the principle of using a tonic is that the woman must take the proper tonic only at the very end or after her period. This is so because people believe that a woman's body becomes weak during menstruation and such a "hot" food may "burn" her body. It is also believed that the nutritive value of a tonic will flow away from her body with the menstrual blood and be wasted.

However, the special concern is after parturition. As a popular belief, should a woman pass her childbed period with sufficient and necessary tonics while not violating any taboo at all, she would live long and with good health. Otherwise, miserable pain and ache will be inevitable. Such a belief is rather strong in most women. In fact, a new mother prefers taking "good and rich" tonics brought from home to the hospital instead of the normal, "plain" meal prepared for her there. A physician even confirmed us that he could hardly pass by the maternity ward at meal times without detecting the scent of chicken in sesame oil. Many women who had been treated with such a nourishment exclusive of any other food during their childbed periods

claimed that they had consequently gained over twenty pounds and the "good and rich" food was not as tasteful and desirable as it was at the beginning of the treatment. Often, a young girl or an inexperienced woman would be astonished when learning these facts and all the restrictions on washing, bathing and ritual behaviours. Nevertheless, our puzzle remains: why did most of our informants who have borne a child still prefer these special treatments in confinement when they were considered as impure and polluting?

It has been mentioned earlier that the most expedient means for a Chinese woman to establish a respectful position in her husband's family is to bear descendants. As socially approved, a woman who has already fulfilled her duty after childbirth must deserve a good rest and better-than-average food during her childbed period. A new Taiwanese mother, for instance, is expected to be given at a bare minimum two chickens (hens for the birth of a boy, otherwise roosters) cooked in sesame oil and wine, in addition to the temporary exemption of household chores that are used to be her routine work. As often the case may be, the older woman who regards her daughter-in-law "a sting in the eyes" is willing to make concession and prepare a bowl of chicken soup for her whether it is for the good of the mother's health or her grandson's nutritive

lactation. There are diversified Taiwanese stories ranging from the chicken prepared for a new mother was shared by "greedy" visitors to those tearful ones in poor families where the new mother's chicken was obtained with borrowed money. Also, we heard complaints from some informants with current aches and pains caused by their mothers-in-law who cruelly denied them their chickens after childbirth. However, the impression as gathered from our informants, both young and old, is that a mother-in-law seldom dares to act too harshly towards her young counterpart lest she may risk the possible criticism from others. In all, what a new baby has brought into the family is not merely happiness, but most importantly, a rather relaxed and peaceful atmosphere between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, temporarily at least.

With the provision of good food and the exemption from household task during the postnatal period, a married woman who has suffered anxiety and frustruation in her husband's family can be somewhat pacified. If the birth brings the first grandson to the family, she can expect security and better-than-ever treatment from her husband's family, both of which are desperately needed by a lonely daughter-in-law. From the viewpoint of a functionalist, the compensation, in both material and spiritual aspects, for a young woman during her childbed period seems to be

indispensable to her anxious life as a subordinate daughter-in-law with a stem family in the Chinese society.

Nowadays in the modern society of Taiwan, although nuclear families are prevalent and health care knowledge is commonplace, many women are still unwilling to give up their childbed prescriptions. An informant who had completed college education claimed that the backache she suffered after her first childbirth was due to her negligence of practising any childbed taboo. Hence at her second childbirth, she confined herself at home for a full month and "patched" with "good and rich" tonics, and then recovered. Curiously enough, a young Cantonese woman residing in Ottawa revealed to me recently that she, after the birth of her first child, returned home for seclusion and sent for her mother from the west coast to help her with all the possible treatment in confinement. Furthermore, several women living in this country made complaints upon their situation, stating that they could not fully recover after childbirth as they possibly could if they were back home in Taiwan or Hong Kong.

Perhaps it is just a feature of basic human nature that whenever it comes to an unpredictable and uncontrollable situation which affects one's own health, one simply cannot fully ignore the taboos. The point is also evident in the case of menstrual taboos on "cold" and

"cold-natured" foods best represented by the subtle relationship between women's belief and practice.

In our survey, the informants were divided into four groups depending on the correlation of their experience with menstrual pains and their compliance with menstrual taboos on "cold" things. The first group of women, though experiencing pains, still preferred "cold" things. They amounted to a minority of seven percent in the survey, all were the middle and the upper-class women under thirty years of age ----- the strongest disbelievers on the taboo. Women in the second group experienced little or no pain, but still complied with the taboo. They comprised mostly of the middle and the lower class women of middle ages and over, and accounted to fourteen percent of those surveyed. They believed the taboo deeply and observed it strictly. Another group of women had pain and determined not to take any "cold" food. This was the majority group totalling forty-nine percent in the survey and comprising women of all ages and status. Women in the last group claimed no experience in pain and would not mind eating "cold" things. They made up the rest, thirty percent, and were the second largest group with women of all ages and status. Upon putting forward to them the question: "If you had pain would you still eat 'cold' thing?" Most replied by saying "No". This shows that they are not the "disbelievers",

not because they comply with the taboo, but because it does not affect their own lives. However, they do feel that while it does not affect their lives, it may affect others.

To sum up, only a few educated young women disbelieve in the taboo entirely; even if they do experience pain, they continue to take "cold" food. A few middle-aged women of the middle and the lower classes believe in the taboo absolutely; even if they never have pain before, they do not dare to choose the "cold" things. The remaining eighty percent practise the taboo under the rule that once they encounter mentrual pain, they will not eat "cold" food. Thus it can be seen that a woman's behaviour regarding menstrual taboos is directly related to her individual physiological condition, and also to her sub-cultural heritage.

CHAPTER SEVEN

POWER AND VULNERABILITY

The relations of dangerous power and vulnerability associated with menstrual and childbed women can be similarly found with certain other persons who transit either temporarily or permanently from a clear and unambiguous status to another of anomalous and ambiguous nature. Categorized in this class of marginal, anomalous or transitional people are pregnant women, widows, brides, grooms, mourners and infants. Some of them may not be called 'tsang', or "dirty", in a sense comparable to menstrual and postpartum women. But, pregnant women and brides, probably because of their connection with birth and sex, may, in some places, form a barricade in their relationship with gods as polluting objects do.

A pregnant woman is a source of happiness in the family, and in her own right, of relief if it is to be her first child. But to others in the community, she can be a menace. Pekinese pictorize a pregnant woman as a "double-being" (双身子) and prohibit her from entering temples. In Taiwan and elsewhere in China, such a woman is commonly known as a "four-eyed person" ----- with two eyes in the head (for her) and two others in her belly

(for the fetus). Either of these terms refers to the strangeness a pregnant woman represents. Topley's Cantonese informants in Hong Kong describe the state of pregnancy more exactly as 'kei kwai' (奇怪), that is, "strange and queer", because the woman's body resembles a poisonous entity with 'yin' and 'yang' forces pulling in opposite directions inside her body. She herself is "cold-polarized" as a result of losing blood to the fetus which becomes "hot" (Topley 1974:237). According to the native custom in Peking and its vicinal places, a pregnant woman being accumulated with unclean blood in her womb is expected to stay away from all places of worship. Taiwanese women during pregnancy seldom attend firewalking ceremonies because their presence can cause serious injury to the performers when they carry the gods across the hot beds of coal.

Dangerous is the moment when a pregnant woman encounters another polarized entity such as a bride (who is socially "hot"), a corpse (which is socially "cold") or another pregnant woman. Our Taiwanese informants mentioned that if two pregnant women share a common bed, their children will be "exchanged". The same is also considered true if they sit together on a common bench. Also, whenever a bride first steps in her new home, pregnant women must be kept out of sight on the spot since the

simultaneous presence of two persons in auspicious states[1] is dangerous and harmful to each other. In fact, any pregnant woman of the family is even prevented from entering the new room particularly prepared for the bride. Needless to say, she cannot be the person who accompanies the bride to her bridal vehicle or receives her when she descends from it in the marriage rites. Moreover, in the dowry preparation, she must not offer her help in making wedding dresses and sewing quilts for the new couple, lest both parties will be endangered. In Foochow, according to Doolittle (1865: v.1,73-4), to prevent the danger a pregnant woman may pose on a bride, a ceremony known as "Sifting Four Eyes" is normally performed before the bride's dowry is delivered to the groom's place. Accordingly, all items included in the dowry are laid one by one, or in convenient quantities, on a large round sieve-like utensil made out of bamboo splints, and passed over a coal-burning brass vessel to sift out any pernicious influences from pregnant women. During the performance, various sentiments of propitiation are uttered, such as "a thousand eyes, ten thousand eyes we sift out; gold and silver, wealth and precious things, we sift in." Indeed, such ritual can be

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[1] Both persons are considered queer, one being "four-eyed" and another having "double happiness".

seen as an omen of good, possessing a cleansing or purifying effect. As Doolittle notes, once the articles have been sifted, care must be taken to insure no contact by any pernicious hands, such as of pregnant women or persons in mourning, on the way of sending off the bridal outfits. He further mentions a similar ceremony known as "Expelling the Filth", which is performed by the groom's family prior to the wedding day and aimed at warding off any evil and unpropitious influences in regard to his wedding suit and personal apparel (Ibid.:74-5). Correspondingly, in I-ch'ang, Hupeh, a bronze mirror, about the size of a telephone dial, is hung on the groom's breast to protect him from the evil influence of pregnant women and widows, who are, in fact, not welcome to attend the marriage ceremony (Feng and Shryock 1950:393).

Children are notably vulnerable. If a Taiwanese pregnant woman attempts to fondle a child, she will make it 'kui-khi' (貴氣), that is, "expensive" or "difficult to raise", and the child will become irritable, troublesome, quarrelsome, disobedient and hard to be taught. The woman's own child is also expected to be inflicted 'kui-khi' because of her unavoidable contact with it. A serious illness may result in the child she has contacted if her fetus is particularly "fierce". In Peihotien, if a pregnant woman has accidentally frightened a child, or if

a child falls ill after contact with a pregnant woman, she must give its parents a length of her hair ribbon to tie around the child's wrist as an amulet. Sometimes, the woman also put on her child a little bracelet for protective purposes.(Wolf 1972:154-5)

At the same time, pregnant women are considered vulnerable. There are many restrictions imposed on a pregnant woman, yet most of them are particularly designed for the protection of the fetus rather than the mother. Besides her diet not being supplemented to inflate the fetus in her body, she is not encouraged to be physically inactive, although unusually strenous work can be exempted. Despite the fact that village women may be too modest to make use of prenatal care in public health clinics, and midwives are seldom consulted with to take precautions against hard birth (Diamond 1969:30; Gallin 1965:190), most families do focus their attention upon behaviour and rules for guarding against disturbing the wandering fetal soul, Thai Shen. The spirit is expected to move about outside the mother's body until four months after birth, thereby causing many difficulties and inconvenience during pregnancy and childbirth. As a rule, traditional people normally consult an almanac which tells the particular room of the house or the specific part of the yard Thai Shen is in on any given day, before they do anything in a home

where there is a pregnant woman. It is believed that the soul often hangs around the mother's bedroom. Should someone sew there, Thai Shen might be stabbed in the eye. If someone cuts carelessly, the child will be born with a cleft palate. By breaking a stick at the wrong time, one of the child's limbs may be damaged. The child may be aborted or born prematurely if someone drives a nail in the wall or digs a hole on the floor. If one fills in a hole in the ground, the child's anus will also be filled. Anyone who pours boiling water into a long-unused basin may scale the child's skin consequently. Any accidental breach of taboo will be reflected in the physical conditions of the child. M. Wolf (1972:153) reports such a wound on a Sanhsia child with a sadly deformed hand caused by her mother's crocheting fish nets (a cottage industry).

Besides the supernatural threat of Thai Shen, a pregnant woman must avoid encountering a child with measles, who, as noted earlier, is undergoing a transition from a relatively sickly to a much more healthy state. Any contact between them jeopardizes not only the safety of the child but also the woman who may consequently fail to give birth. Topley's informants commented on the case that "the child was like a god at this time" and "vegetarian food (the prescribed diet) was appropriate to someone like this" (Topley 1970:427). Indeed, before a

Taoist priest performs any religious ceremony in which he is acting, as assumed, the role of a god or 'bodhissatva' he must practise vegetarianism. During the ceremony, it is dangerous for both the performer and the individual who comes into physical contact with the acting god. The presence of a pregnant woman in such a ritual ceremony is particularly hazardous. In Peihotien, pregnant women in the neighbourhood of the house where a Taoist ceremony is to be performed are warned to close their doors and stay away from the site (Wolf 1972:153-4). Extremely dangerous is the ritualized act of coffining at funeral. Should any inadequate precautions[2] be taken, the corpse, being in an intermediate state between a living person and a buried ancestor, would turn into a dangerous monster and harm anyone it comes across. Pregnant women are usually vociferously warned to take refuge when nails are about to be hammered into the coffin, lest something unfortunate will happen. If a pregnant woman is obliged to attend the mortuary rite by reason of her close relation with the deceased person, such as being a daughter or a daughter-in-law, she must stand astride the threshold of the house,

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[2] Since ghosts are permitted to come out of Hell on certain days of the year as holidays, the time of coffining must be carefully chosen so as to protect the deceased from being disturbed by dangerous monsters hanging around in the neighbourhood.

holding a piece of white cloth over her stomach or putting on a particular piece of mourning cloth (made of hempen fabrics) around her abdomen to protect the unborn infant. Other pregnant women are expected to stay far away so that the pounding noise of coffining is hardly audible to them.

In addition to the abstention on behaviour intrusive to supernatural beings, many rules are also prescribed for the expectant mother on diets, hygiene and behaviour designed to ensure an uncomplicated pregnancy and a healthy baby. All of these are included in a custom known as "cultivation of the fetus" (胎教). Preferential foods taken by a pregnant woman vary by region; but generally speaking, the prospective mother receives no special and excessive food as she deserves from postnatal nourishment, for fear that the baby will become too big and make delivery difficult and dangerous. Usually, special herbal teas are taken as tonics in the early stage of pregnancy to "strengthen the womb" within the first eight months, yet overuse of the drugs must be avoided. Cantonese, who are noted for being particular about their diets, set more rules on the diet of a pregnant woman. She, being a "poisonous" entity, must avoid further poisonous foods lest she may lose her child due to premature labour. Foods that are definitely either "cold" or "hot" cannot be included in her daily meals for they will further polarize

the two opposite entities (the "cold" mother and the "hot" fetus) and generate excessive "wind" and "poison". No vegetables, a modicum of meat along with pork, and perfectly balanced (neither "hot" or "cold") foods are ideally desirable (Topley 1974:237). Pregnant women in general avoid strong drinks such as alcohol and coffee because of their "hot, stimulating" nature, and ice-cream and ice water because they are too "cold". Some other foods are also avoided depending on the recognition of their associated ideas:

> Dog and rabbit meats, for they will cause the baby to be born mute and with a harelip;
>
> Crabs and other crustaceans which creep laterally, lest the fetus will be in a transverse presentation at delivery;
>
> Turtle flesh, or the child will be born with too short a neck or limb;
>
> Chicken and carp, which will encourage pustules on the infant's body;
>
> Glutinous rice, that will bring about intestinal parasites to the child;
>
> Sparrow and pigeon with alcohol, which will give the child a tendency to abnormal, carnal desire when grown up;
>
> Sparrow and pigeon with beans, or the child will

have black spots on skin;

Duck, not only because it is poisonous but also for fear that the child will be as ugly as a duck;

"Unclean food" like beef, pork and meats of mouse, rat and snake, lest the child will be an imbecile;

Mule and horse meats, for they will cause hard labour and delay the birth;

Lamb and its liver, which will cause epilepsy (the association of which is derived from the similarity of the words for lamb, 羊 , and epilepsy, 羊癲風); and

Cold fluids, which lead to miscarriage.

The above list is by no means definitive and exhaustive, and not every woman is well aware of all these prohibitions. However, most women are able to identify the most common taboos with their possible explanations. In addition, ritually contaminated foods from wedding or funeral feasts which many pregnant women are reluctant to consume because of the danger caused to the fetus have not been exclusively mentioned. There are also certain doubts on the permissible use of routine medicines including aspirin for fear of harming the fetus.

Proper moral behaviour during pregnancy is

exceedingly important for a prospective mother because it will be reflected in the mind of the child she is carrying. In fact, parents are believed to take complete responsibility for their children's character, which is strongly influenced by their proper or improper conduct before birth. Thus, a pregnant woman is expected to abstain from practising anything likely to create a bad or misleading impression on the fetus. She may not, for instance, look at sickening, pathetic, repulsive, vulgar or obscene display, scenes or objects. The sight of dead animals or persons must be avoided if possible. In particular, public executions and punishments must not be attended. Movies, plays and shows which are upsetting are definitely tabooed.

There is the fear of the child being born "boneless" if the mother has watched a puppet show during pregnancy. Nor must she look at an eclipsed sun or moon, or sleep at the time of such an event, lest the child will be born with a deformed body (Hsu 1967:201). Also feared is the birth of a child, known as "changed fetus" (換胎), resembling a defected person or an unpopular figure the mother has glimpsed when pregnant. Certain images in the temple, such as those of cow-faced or horse-faced gods, are especially offensive to a pregnant woman who fears that her child be born with a cow-like or horse-like face. Disgusting pictures and images must not be displayed in the

maternity room because they sting the eyes of the mother.

A living creature of any kind must not be annihilated in the presence of a pregnant woman or by her own self. If she happens to catch a rat in her place, she has to release it for good, because there is a danger of killing her own fetus. Whenever she holds something, she must grasp it steadily; by breaking it carelessly, she ruins her child's life.

Badly behaved or dishonest persons must be kept far away from sight because their examples greatly endanger the well-being of a child. Moreover, obscene or vulger words or stories, as well as unsavory or upsetting tales are strongly discouraged. A pregnant woman also avoids the company of women who have abortion. Most important is that she must not lie, steal, or be guilty of any mischief.

On the positive aspects, the expectant mother must be often shown beautiful and pleasing scenes or pictures, particularly related to happy and harmonious families with healthey and cheerful children. In fact, it is very recommendable to decorate the maternity room with bright-coloured, lively and joyful pictures so that the mother will give birth to a chubby baby of sound body and mind. I was recently told by a new mother in Hamilton that she posted a picture of "the Wonder Woman" in her

bedroom during pregnancy with the hope of bearing a healthy, pretty girl baby. Generous alms to the poor and wise consideration of people must be practised by a pregnant woman who is also expected to maintain a pleasant, smiling and serene countenance at all times while avoiding anger, fits of jealousy, complaining, brooding and any emotional upsets. Those around her in the family must be sincere, gay and helpful. Even in a complex household where the relationship between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law or other family member is noticeably tense, a woman's pregnancy and her subsequent childbed period are happy and unusually peaceful.

It must be added here that conception must be at the proper time and place and ritually permissible (Kuo 1971:68), otherwise the child born will be retarded, deformed and ugly, and suffer a miserable life with illness and disaster if not die at an early age. By the third month after conception when the fetus begins to attain a complete human form, further sexual intercourse between the couple must be halted. This must be observed both on medical and moral grounds for the good of the fetus as well as the couple. On the woman's part, serious womb poisoning is otherwise expected, including such symptoms as colic and hemorrhages, while the fetus faces the danger of being born exceedingly "unclean" or even losing its life from

miscarriage. Violation of this taboo is also likely to penalize the father with dyspepsia and various ailments and occasional or seasonal discomfort. Regarding these dangers, the propective mother usually, as mentioned before, calls upon her mother-in-law for assistance in keeping away her husband, or alternatively, stays away with her own parents until the time of delivery.

Besides a pregnant woman (who is polarized towards "cold") can be a menace to a socially "hot" bride, the latter is also a potential threat to the woman and her fetus. Their unfortunate encounter is generally described as 'hsi-chung-hsi' (喜沖喜), or "two happiness in contradiction". The idea that a bride is powerful and dangerous is commonly indicated by the term 'sin-niang-ta' (新娘大). Indeed, despite her later submission to her husband's family, she, at least on such an occasion, is like a childbed woman and gratified with many privileges which basically take two forms: besides being served upon as an honoured person, she also gains access to temporary power over those who later control her. Such special power and treatment, to a Taiwanese girl, also apply at her betrothal rites during which, for instance, the girl is seated on a comfortable chair with a footrest supporting her feet while her prospective mother-in-law attempts to place a wedding ring on her finger. She can, as a

privilege, crook her finger so that the ring cannot be slided and pass the second knucle, an act symbolizing that she will not be dominated by her mother-in-law who, at this moment, as Ahern (1974:283) observes, grantes her resistance by simply sliding the ring up to the second joint and desists without forcing it on all the way. When she enters her new home as a bride, for three days subsequent to her settlement, she enjoys all the possible privileged treatments and favours from the members of her husband's family. Even her mother-in-law is expected to serve her dutifully to her preference and satisfaction. Moreover, she is specially served by a senior woman dear to the family at the wedding feast, and on the following day, waited upon with pans of hot water and clean towels at door for her private washing. All these material comforts provided for a bride can be explained by her liminal role between a daughter and a daughter-in-law. She, as a person who cannot be admitted into a well-structured position, is regarded as "dangerous and anarchical, and has to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions" (Turner 1969:109).

Certain proscriptions in the marriage rites indicate the "power of the weak" in relation to a Chinese bride. For instance, the mirror of a dresser sent along with the dowry to the bride's new home must be thoroughly

covered (usually with soft red corduroy and some decorations) so as to protect a pregnant woman, a widow or someone in mourning from glancing into it and inflicting serious misfortune (Wolf 1972:134). Besides, these women are usually told to hide away in the bride's presence. There are other restrictions (to be discussed shortly) as to what kind of visitors may safely meet the bride. On the other side, the bride herself must avoid gazing at someone who may then be struck blind (Ahern 1974:284).

Besides being dangerously powerful, a bride is also potentially vulnerable. In a Taiwanese wedding, no matter whether a taxi, a pedicab or a sedan is used to transport the bride to her new home, the rear of the vehicle is always decorated with a sieve onto which is woven the octagonal symbol of 'yin-yang' (陰陽八卦) to ward off evil spirits on the way. Among the marchers in the bridal procession is a man who carries a long pole with a piece of meat tied at its tip for feeding mythical hungry tigers which may otherwise threaten to devour the bride (Gallin 1966:210; Wolf 1972:136). In Ting Hsien, a northern Chinese rural community near Peking, a bride is expected to carry with her a tiny mirror (a Taoist amulet) for frightening away evil spirits. On arriving the groom's place, she would disperse the black beans carried in her robes on the guests around her to

insure her safety against the God of the Star of Misfortune (Gamble 1954:381). Moreover, in a typical Chinese wedding procession, a noisy musical band is hired to accompany and strings of fire-crackers are exploded; both means were designed originally to keep wandering ghosts away from the bridal sedan rather than to creat a hilarious atmosphere on the occasion as they are nowadays expected to provide.

It is rather interesting to learn the similar protection (noisy music and fire-cracking) of a deceased person when his coffin is being carried to the graveyard. Instead of employing meat and other food to propitiate evil spirits on the way of a bridal procession, mock-money is scattered along the road in a funeral procession to bribe disturbing spirits into letting the coffin to pass without molestation. The ritual is known as "money to buy the use of road" (Gamble 1954:390), "cash which buys the road" (買路錢) or "cash which opens the road" (開路錢) (Doolittle 1865:v.1,203).

A "double happiness" is usually feared in a Taiwanese wedding procession, whether it takes place between a bride and a pregnant woman or between two brides. In the latter case, the brides must exchange flowers for their own protection. On arrival at the groom's place, the bride is guided by an elderly woman to the inner house, with the route being cleared of all relatives, particularly

the mother-in-law who is so frightful to her. She then takes refuge in the "new-persons' chamber" (新人房), a room particularly prepared for the newlyweds, where visitors are strictly discouraged. The mother-in-law does not enter the room on that day but sends her personal maid or a girl to see to her needs. Threatening to the bride and her fertility are females born in the year of the Tiger because they are "white tiger stars" (白虎星) or jinxes who are known to devour women and children. These women must not be present in the family for that entire day. (Wolf 1972:137)

The dangerous power and vulnerability associated with a bride or a pregnant woman are similar to those of a potential polluter such as a corpse, a menstrual or postpartum woman. While a pregnant woman is barred from entering temples, a bride, like other persons who are undergoing important social changes (a childbed woman is a new mother, and a deceased person is a corpse), is often prevented from "seeing heaven" (見天) and/or "touching earth" (着地), according to the marriage rites in many places of China.

It has been indicated that a Taiwanese parturient woman cannot go outside the house without being sheltered by an umbrella. Correspondingly, a deceased person's eldest son or grandson who puts the burial clothes on the

corpse as part of the funeral rites has to do so under an open black umbrella and over a stepping stool. An umbrella is also necessary for shielding the paper tablet representing the deceased on its way to the grave during the transition of the dead from a corpse to a resident of the tablet. As the bones are transferred to an urn after disinterment, the corpse loses its malevolent power of being transformed into a dangerous monster. This transitional stage also necessitates the use of an umbrella to cover the bones in the urn (Ahern 1974:284-5).

Furthermore, a woman, by contrast to her exemption from such a protective requirement while walking outside at her betrothal, must have a cover over her head to avoid the sun on her wedding day. The sieve painted with a 'yin-yang' diagram and placed at the back of the wedding cab for protection along the road is expected to be transferred and held over the bride's head when she descends the vehicle and makes her way into the new home. Correspondingly, a Sanhsia bride, as Wolf (1972:135) reports, is carried to the wedding cab while being sheltered by an umbrella on the way, displaying the observance of "not touching the earth" and "not seeing the heaven". Similar rules are also found in Chén-hsi, Hunan (湖南, 辰谿); besides the necessities of an umbrella and a kinsman to transport the bride to her sedan chair, a black piece of

gauze is hung over the bride's face to prevent her from even catching sight of sunlight. While Taiwanese explain such a ritual as because a bride is a "new person" ('sin-jên', 新人) who cannot view the sky, the people of Chén-hsi believe that the bride is sinful and hence must avoid seeing heaven and insulting the Heavenly God.

In Foochow, the house floor extending from the "new room" to the place where the bridal sedan is expected to halt is covered with a kind of red carpeting so that the "new woman" can walk on her feet while not touching the ground directly (Doolittle 1865:v.1,83). Pekinese, for a similar reason, lay on the floor before the bride red felt rugs over which she steps on the way to her room (Kuo 1971: 53). In some other provinces, hempen rice bags are used to pave the bride's way instead. Additionally, the ritual of "delivering bags" ('chuan-tai', 傳袋), is phonetic with "carrying on to the next generation" ('chuan-tai', 傳代), and hence has the auspicious meaning of wishing the bride fertility, that is, "bringing forth descendants" or "continuing the family line by producing a male heir" (傳宗接代).

A fortune-teller must be consulted to determine the proper time a bride in crucial transition can safely enter the groom's house. Her entry is typically marked out by letting off a long string of fire-crackers amid the

noisy music the band play upon to frighten away evil spirits. In some places, elaborate efforts are put into protecting the bride at this moment. In Foochow, for example, a lad is supposed to hold up a mirror facing the sedan chair when the bride is invited to descend (Doolittle 1865:v.1,84). The mirror is effective in warding off "all deadly or pernicious influences which may emanate from the sedan". In addition, a sieve like the one used in the ceremony of "Sifiting Four Eyes" and initially placed over the sedan door is held over the bride's head while she is being ushered to the inner house on carpeted passageway. In a Sanhsia wedding (Wolf 1972:137), handfuls of unhusked rice were thrown on the bridal company at their arrival in front of the groom's house. It is thought that any evil that may possibly be carried into the house with someone inadvertantly breaking a taboo can then be counteracted.

The threshold of a house, a symbolic representation of the domestic head, is often bound with taboos to safeguard its purity and welfare. In Taiwan, it is pasted with red papers to remind the new couple and their party not to step on it as they enter the wedding hall (Wolf 1972:137). But in many southern and northern wedding ceremonies, the ritual of "Striding over a Brazier"(過火盆) is practised. The bride is required to step over a small barricade of fireplace with heated charcoal set up deliberately on the

threshold. Since fire is most efficient in purification, any evil and uncleanness a bride may carry can be removed. In fact, there are folk tales in classical literature relating to an evil weasel, who takes the form of a bride and thus attempts to slip into a family and cause trouble. In regard to the village wedding I attended (1973) in a rural community of Shi-luo (西螺) in Central Taiwan, the bride, being dressed up in a Western white gown, had to step over a broom which takes up the role of a fire and serves to sweep off any dirt, misfortune or evil that may find its way through at such a crucial moment.

Certain marriage rituals do seek good omens and wishes. A bride in Taitou (Yang 1945:111) or Ting Hsien (Gamble 1954:382) is expected to encounter a saddle blocking her way into the inner house. The saddle represents an evil spirit which endeavours to prevent her from joining the groom and must be passed over if she is to overcome all the obstacles in life and to assure a successful marriage. Also, since the words for "saddle" (鞍) and "peace" (安) are phonetic, the bride is believed to bring peace to her husband's family. During her marriage days before she can be fully recognized as a member of her husband's family and end her transitional period with a ceremonial visit to her natal home, a bride, being regarded as myteriously powerful, is waited upon by the new family,

does little housework, scarcely ventures to leave her room, and is indeed treated in a manner similar to those contexts associated with a childbed woman in the pollution period.

Regardless of how similarly brides, grooms, pregnant women, widows, mourners, children, or potential polluters are treated in their respect of being both vulnerable and dangerously powerful, one case links them all together: the safety of a child with measles, who must be confined at home so as not likely to be endangered. Should he happen to catch a glimpse of a funeral, a wedding, a new mother, or chickens mating, he would become cross-eyed (Diamond 1969:101-2). Besides, as mentioned earlier, the child's parents must not engage in sexual intercourse during the child's illness. A menstruating or pregnant woman, a dog or a cat (pregnant ones in particular), or any person in mourning is also restricted from ever contacting the sick child.

While such a child with measles is suffering from a critical and ambiguous condition which is regarded as a transitional process "leading to the establishment of a new equilibrium based on a changed situation" (Topley 1970:429), persons or things involving childbirth, funeral, or wedding, are, in a sense, undergoing a socially transitional process which is often treated ritually.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: FEMALE POLLUTION AS IN THE RITUAL POLLUTION COMPLEX

The problem arising in female pollution studies has been that anthropologists focus more of their attention on women as polluting agents than on substances or events that, in certain contexts, can be polluting. This methodology is deemed to leave those polluting substances or events systematically unidentified as to what they are or where they come from. Besides, in this approach, women are generally depicted as weak, unclean and inferior to men who are strong, naturally pure but potentially victimized by women's pollution. The mainstream of such a trend is Young and Bacdayan's "sociogenic" theory (1965:225-40) on menstrual taboos being institutionalized by males in society to discriminate against females, and which has been proved oversimplified (Bock 1967:213-7). With the neglect of females' multiple roles in society, their importance in daily and ritual life, and their participation in political and economic affairs, it is not possible to explain satisfactorily the relationship between women and pollution.

In regard to the characteristic of a polluting substance in Chinese society being defined as one which

prevents those who come into contact with it from communicating with gods, the data compiled in this thesis indicate that women are not the only polluters, nor are men the only victims of pollution. Even for an event closely associated with women, pollution seems not to come from the woman in question but the event itself. Sexual intercourse is avoided before worshipping, not just because of men's contact with women's polluting bodies but because the very act of sexual intercourse is considered polluting. At childbirth, pollution emerges from the event and surrounds the place where it occurs, rather than just because of the new mother herself. When she leaves the delivery room in the hospital, she leaves behind the contagion while she herself is no longer polluting. Her husband is automatically considered affected by the polluting event within the month in much the same way as she and must wait to be clean again. Any person, male or female, infant or adult, having approached a childbed woman in her confinement month or having entered her room, is equally contaminating and must observe the same prohibitive rules so as not to offend gods. In such respects, although women are polluting more often than men because of their frequent sexually fertile periods in life, the very real danger posed by men cannot be ignored.

Various forms of pollution do exist, not

necessarily in events associated with women. Besides the pollution of birth, gods are equally offended by those who have been exposed to the dirt of death. In case of such an event, gods' statues along with ancestral tablets must be either removed or covered by baskets or mats while scrolls with gods' images are hung face to the wall in the room where the corpse is stationed to await burial (Gallin 1966:220). Moreover, during the funeral procession, the doors of any temple enroute are closed until its passing; and gods will be offended if someone observing the heavy mourning period of forty-nine days ("seven-seven", 七七) (Ibid.: 229) dares to offer incense to them. Other cautions are also observed at a firewalk to cleanse a god of all forms of pollution. Those carriers of the god's image are required to be free of any contamination, such as the pollution of death from persons in mourning or even putting on hempen clothes as used in funerals, besides their abstinence from sexual intercourse for a prescribed period before the event. It is also essential for them to step over an incense burner in an ablution held prior to the walk (Ahern 1975:205).

At this point, it seems clear that the sources of pollution are not solely women themselves, nor are men responsible for the dirt. Rather, they are problematic events, such as those associated with birth and death, or

happy and unhappy occasions, in which both men and women are implicated. Events like menstruation and childbirth associate women more closely than men, who become polluted independently at such time as when one of their relatives dies. Thus, for an accurate, although complex analysis of female pollution, the system of pollution as a whole must be considered with emphasis on the nature of various pollution beliefs adopted in a broader sense.

Most analyses on pollution-purity, following Durkheimian sociology, have been consistently structural-functional. In this respect, the social system in its diverse structures and relationships can be recognized from pollution beliefs in any culture. Van Gennep (1960) in his 'Rites of Passage' notes that since change disturbs both an individual and the society, in order for society to deal with these disruptive effects, the process of change must be ritualized so as to minimize the danger inherent in all transitions. To elaborate on his view, Mary Douglas (1966:1-6) suggests that animate or inanimate things often regarded in symbols and rituals as unclean and powerful to pollute are considered ambiguous because they cannot be easily categorized in culture; indeed, anything lacking clear classification in terms of traditional criteria, or falling between classificatory boundaries, is very likely to be polluting and dangerous. While Van Gennep (1960: 12)

uses the "sacred" state to explain the transitional process which may sometimes acquire a certain autonomy (Ibid.:191-2), Douglas's view incorporates the rites of transition with artificial boundaries, each of which defines two separate regions of social space-time that are "normal", "time-bound", "distinct", "central" and "secular", and an overlapping region with "abnormal", "timeless", "ambiguous", "marginal", "sacred" and "tabooed" nature (Leach 1976:35). Since the body is the most readily applicable model for the social system, life processes such as birth, death, sex, eating and eliminating, which blur the clarity of either social or bodily boundaries, logically become recurrent matters of cultural concern, and focuses of taboo. By keeping boundaries clean with our separating, tidying and purifying, we organize the enviroment, make unity of experience and preserve confidence in our category system.

In the analysis of Chinese society, if the pollution concept generalized by Douglas as related to fundamental disorder, or things out of context and hence dangerous and threatening to society, were adopted, questions might arise concerning the relationship between sets of behavioural taboos and the fundamental nature of society as a symbolic entity. Typically, taboos relating to the practice of sorcery, and to death and death ritual, are associated with harnessing danger and keeping things in proper context, while marking the boundaries between

life and death[1].

The materials collected in this thesis support the Chinese beliefs that polluting and unclean things are closely associated with birth and death, and with the entrance and departure of people from social groups. Menstrual and birth fluids, the main sources of female pollution, encompass further ambiguity between life and death as previously mentioned, and are considered particularly polluting than other substances that escape across body boundaries. With respect to the Chinese kinship system which is focussed on male lines of descent, women are socially situated on the boundaries, breaking in as outsiders and strangers. The transition from one social status to another is necessarily hedged about with rituals. It is, then, no accident in a male-oriented society that women rather than men are often depicted as polluting. As Ahern puts it,

> "Things the Chinese consider unclean threaten the order of or are a result of disorder in the family or in the human body. Disorder here has two specific meanings: anything that pierces the boundaries of these two entities is unclean, whether it is something that enters or something that leaves; anything that tends to undermine the tenets of order, any external threat to orderly entities, is unclean." (1975:207)

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[1] For example, the Taiwanese death ritual of "the cutting" ('kuaq-tng' 割斷), the last rite before the actual transfer of the corpse to the coffin, is to eradicate the dead person from all living relatives (Ahern 1973:171-2).

However, one aspect has been found adding more nebulosity to the above abstract formulation: there is no general agreement on the matter of whether a bride or a pregnant woman is subject to pollution taboos or not. According to Ahern, "..... a class of anomalous, marginal, or transitional people ----- pregnant women, widows, brides, grooms, mourners, children ----- who are both vulnerable and dangerous to others ..... ; people in this category are not called 'dirty' ..... , and, though danger lurks, it does not threaten the relationship between human beings and gods"(Ibid:212). However, I have found that bridal and pregnant women in some communities are indeed considered as polluters as delineated in the previous chapter. They are apparently closely associated with the events of entrance of family members. Besides, the body order of a bride or a pregnant woman is also disturbed because of the crossing of body boundaries in the same way as a male's entrance into a female during sexual intercourse or the entrance of a fetal soul into a woman's body at the moment of conception. The discrepancy existing in different Chinese communities would make it premature to even attempt a description of the beliefs about pollution in the Chinese society as a whole.

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