

Valentine's Day and Adulthood Ceremony — Tradition and Current Custom of  
the Seventh Eve (Chi-Hsi ) in Taiwan

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Abstract

In this speech, I will first introduce the origin and development of the custom on the Seventh Eve (Chi-Hsi ) and related folk activities in modern Taiwan society, then elaborate on their significances. The origin of The Seventh Eve is associated with the love story between the Cowherd and the Girl Weaver. In ancient China, on the Seventh Eve, the females participate in “the Festival to Plead for Skills”

( Chi-Chiao-Whei ) . In the Tang and Sung Dynasties, it involves the pleading for marriage and children from the Goddess Weaver. After the Ming and Ching Dynasties, Min-nan and Taiwan start having the custom to worship “Seventh Maiden Goddess” ( Chi-Niang- Ma ) and “coming-of-sixteen” (“adulthood ceremony” in folk custom) on the Seventh Eve . In Taiwan, the Seventh Eve is developed creatively to “Chinese Valentine's Day” and “coming-of-sixteen”. “Chinese Valentine's Day” in Yilan County and “Art Festival of the Seventh Eve and coming-of-sixteen” in Tainan City are two best examples. Since these two cities promote the customs on the Seventh Eve with efforts, other cities also follow their examples. Thus, the Seventh Eve in Taiwan is exciting and interesting.

Keywords: Taiwan, Chinese Valentine's Day, the Seventh Eve, the Cowherd and the Girl Weaver, Seventh Maiden Goddess, Festival to Plead for Skills, coming-of-sixteen, Valentine's Day, adulthood ceremony, art festival

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In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people in Taiwan still celebrate the lunar holidays. These holidays and festivals are called traditional holidays or folk activities, including Chinese New Year, the Dragon Boat Festival and the Moon Festival and the Seventh Eve (Chi-Hsi ) (“Chinese Valentine's Day”) in my introduction. the Seventh Eve on lunar calendar has been called “Chi-His” or means “Chinese Valentine's Day” .”Chi” means the

seventh, “Hsi” means it is the festival at night. In the following, I will introduce the origin and development of the custom on the Seventh Eve and the related folk activities in modern Taiwan society, and then elaborate on their significances.

## 1. Origin of the custom on the Seventh Eve

Since Han Chinese migrated to Taiwan, the history and culture of the Hans in Taiwan is closely connected to ancient China. Many customs in Taiwan are based on the Chinese customs, which includes the tradition of the Seventh Eve. In the religion of ancient China, the numbers are significantly valued. The dual numbers (the same numbers in the month and on the day) refer to holidays. For instance, the first day of January is Chinese New Year, the fifth day of May is the Dragon Boat Festival, the ninth day of September is Double Ninth Festival and the seventh day of July is called “Chi-His”.

Before the Han Dynasty, there are some legends related to the Seventh Eve. For instance, Wang Ziqiao becomes the immortal or the Queen Mother of the West descends upon the world of mortals on the Seventh Eve. Among others, the story of the Cowherd and the Girl Weaver is the most famous one. In this story, there are two gods of stars in heaven: Vega and Altair. Vega is the daughter of celestial ruler and she is in charge of weaving. Altair takes care of the cattle and tills the land. Celestial ruler marries Vega to Altair. However, after marriage, the couple is so in love that they forget their jobs. Furious celestial ruler thus separates them. The Girl Weaver is on the east of the Milky Way and the Cowherd is one the west. They only meet once on the Seventh Eve every year.

The story might exist early in the Zhou Dynasty. *Minor Elegentiae of Classic of Poetry* has recorded the separation of Vega and Altair by the Milky Way. After East Han Dynasty, there is the written record. “Far Away Altair” in “The Nineteen Old Poems” describes their separation and the sorrow of the Girl Weaver. Among the folk custom related books, *Jing Chu Sui Shi Ji* written by Zong Lin in in the Liang Period of the Southern Dynasty also records this legend.

On the Seventh Eve in ancient time, the females participate in the “Festival to Plead for Skills”(Chi-Chiao-Whei). “To plead for skills”(Chi-Chiao) is a ceremony or a game. The girls gather to worship the Girl Weaver and compete threading a needle under the moonlight. The girls who thread the needle at once will “obtain the skills”. It means that they will master the needlework as the Girl Weaver. The worship for the Girl Weaver and “to plead for skills” by threading a needle have lasted until the Ming and Ching Dynasties. Only the girls join in the activities and it is regarded as the holiday and custom exclusively for the females.

## 2. Development of the custom on the Seventh Eve

After the Tang and Sung Dynasties, the customs of the Seventh Eve change. In the Tang Dynasty, with the influence of love story between Tang Ming Huang and Yang Guifei, on the Seventh Eve, some people pray for wonderful marriage from the Girl Weaver.

In the Sung Dynasty, on the Seventh Eve, a pair of mud puppets is worshiped at home. Sometimes people will buy mud puppets for the children. These puppets are called “Mo Hou Lo” and they are the mud crafted puppet for pleading for children. Thus, besides the duty of weaving and needlework, the Girl Weaver also becomes the goddess of production and marriage.

Noticeably, in the Ming and Ching Dynasties, there is the belief in “Seventh Maiden Goddess” (Chi-Niang-Ma) in Min-nan. In other words, the Girl Weaver is called “Seventh Maiden Goddess” and the custom on The Seventh Eve includes the worship for Seventh Maiden Goddess.

Who is “Seventh Maiden Goddess”? There are two explanations: She is the “Seven Star Empress” and the wife of Major Star God (the Big Dipper); some say that she is “Seventh Maiden Goddess” (the Girl Weaver) since she is the seventh one of seven fairy maidens. People are more familiar with the second explanation.

The Girl Weaver is called “Seventh Maiden Goddess”. After she marries the Cowherd, she has children and becomes the mother. She is devoted to her children and after her ascension; she turns into the goddess who protects the children. The mission of “Seventh Maiden Goddess” is to bless and protect the children.

Thus, after the Ming and Ching Dynasties, on The Seventh Eve, people in Min-nan and Taiwan worship “Seventh Maiden Goddess” and they will prepare some items such as perfume, powder and flowers. Since she is a goddess, she will certainly enjoy dressing up. The items also include needles and threads and scissors which imply her duty of needlework. The sixteen-year-old children can participate in “coming-of-sixteen” adulthood ceremony at home or in the temples.

Besides the items for worshipping Seventh Maiden Goddess, the items for “coming-of-sixteen” likely further include three domestic animals, wine, seven bowls of vegetables, noodles, candy, pastry, etc.. Besides, people should prepare a “pavilion of Seventh Maiden Goddess” made of cotton paper and bamboo. There are three, five and seven levels. The pavilion is full of colorful decoration and it represents the residence of Seventh Maiden Goddess. After worship, the sixteen-year-old children should pass under “pavilion of Seventh Maiden Goddess”. The ceremony is called “out of the room of sisters”. “Sisters” are the sisters of the Girl Weaver and they also

protect the children. “Out of the room of sisters” means to leave instead of being protected by these goddesses. In other words, they are grown-up.

In ancient China, children are considered the adults when they are twenty years old. The adulthood ceremony is called capping ceremony. However, in Taiwan, sixteen-year-old children are regarded as adults. Thus, “coming-of-sixteen” is a kind of adulthood ceremony. Since capping ceremony is the adulthood ceremony for boys, some people suggest that “coming-of-sixteen” is mainly for boys. However, in recent years, boys and girls can both join in “coming-of-sixteen” ceremony.

### 3. “Chinese Valentine’s Day” in Taiwan

The custom to worship Seventh Maiden Goddess and “coming-of-sixteen” ceremony on the Seventh Eve is passed to Taiwan with the Min-nan immigrants in the Ming and Ching Dynasties. However in the 70s, the Seventh Eve is call “Chinese Valentine’s Day” in Taiwan and there are some romantic activities.

The activity “Folk Fair of Chinese Valentine’s Day” is held by Kuo Hua Company on August 26, 1978 (lunar the Seventh Eve) . It aims to promote the products with the packing of folk culture. The theme is that the lovers in the world can finally be the family as the Cowherd and the Girl Weaver.

The activity is very successful. According to the report, there are over 35,000 participants on the day and the TV watch rate is 15.8% (over 674,000 families watch this program of “Chinese Valentine’s Day”). It is significantly influential. Although it is a business activity, it creates new style of celebration.

Thus, in Taiwan “Chinese Valentine’s Day” becomes the key activity for the merchants who focus on the love story between the Cowherd and the Girl Weaver to promote the presents and dinner on Valentine’s Day and encourage the lovers to give the presents or enjoy romantic candle dinner.

Treating the Seventh Eve as “Chinese Valentine’s Day” is based on one of the customs on the Seventh Eve in the Tang Dynasty. As mentioned above, because of the love story between Tang Ming Huang and Yang Guifei, the customs on the Seventh Eve also involves love. People can pray for wonderful marriage from the Girl Weaver. After the promotion of commercial activities, the Seventh Eve is named “Chinese Valentine’s Day” in Taiwan and the idea is accepted by most of the people. Thus, after 1978, many Taiwanese treat the Seventh Eve as “Chinese Valentine’s Day”. Besides giving flowers and presents and dinner of Valentine’s Day, there are also some cultural activities, such as the speech of the love experts or the activities for unmarried men and women. In the romantic air on this day, these people can have meals, go out, play games, introduce themselves and meet more people to find the mates for dating or

even marriage.

When the idea that the Seventh Eve is “Chinese Valentine’s Day” becomes popular, most of the activities are held privately. However, since 1997, Yilan County Government has been promoting “Chi-His Valentine’s Day in Yilan” and it creates romance and happiness by holding the concerts, performance and ceremony to “walk on the bridge of magpies”. For instance, on Chi-His Valentine’s Day in 2007, the government holds the activity in Yilan Riverside Park and constructs the spot across Yilan River. It also establishes a bridge called “colorful bridge of magpies” which is 75 m in length and 10 m in width. The bridge can bear 300 people walking in two directions; it is decorated with beautiful lights to result in the romantic vision.

Upon the promotion of Yilan County Government, other cities and counties start holding the activities on “Chinese Valentine’s Day”, such as firework, romantic concerts or the games to express love for the lovers (cards of Valentine’s Day or shouting “love” through microphone”. The idea that the seventh day of July is “Valentine’s Day” is common nowadays. On Chinese Valentine’s Day, people will thus have romantic expectation.

#### 4. Coming-of-sixteen art festival on the Seventh Eve in Taiwan

Comparing with the rise of “Chinese Valentine’s Day”, the custom of “coming-of-sixteen” gradually declines in Taiwan society since ancient custom tends to be forgotten in modern society. However, Tainan City Government has a better idea. It treats the Seventh Eve as the important annual folk activity and enhances “coming-of-sixteen”. With art festival and summer camp, the activities on the Seventh Eve become creative.

Since 1999, Cultural Department of Tainan City Government has been in charge of the planning of “the Seventh Eve in Tainan”. Since 2002, the activity has been upgraded as international art festival. After 2006, it is called “coming-of-sixteen art festival on the Seventh Eve in Tainan” to enhance the significance of “coming-of-sixteen”. “Coming-of-sixteen” is the main activity. Thus, in local temples such as Kai Long Temple, God of War Temple and Matsu Temple, the people worship Seventh Maiden Goddess or hold “coming-of-sixteen” ceremony. Besides, there are varied art performances to attract the visitors by lively air.

Among the customs on the Seventh Eve, Tainan City focuses on “coming-of-sixteen”. However, the tradition is presented by two models: (1) Tradition: the government emphasizes that “coming-of-sixteen” is the unique folk culture in Tainan and thus the people are encouraged to participate in “coming-of-sixteen” at home or in the temples. Thus, everyone can recognize the meaning of “adulthood

ceremony”. (2) Innovation: it involves the idea of summer camp and holds “16-year-old Teens Youth Camp”. By varied competitions and learning, 16-year-old teenagers can learn team work and show their creativity and energy. The theme of these two kinds of “coming-of-sixteen” is “gratitude, independence and responsibility” which highlights the significance of “adulthood”.

Using 2007 as an example, I have visited Tainan on site (August 11, 2007) and my learning is as follows:

(1) Innovation in coming-of-sixteen art festival the Seventh Eve

As many ancient festivals, some customs of The Seventh Eve have been forgotten. However, “coming-of-sixteen” has been lasting and becomes more interesting. It meets the needs of modern society and thus the sixteen-year-old boys and girls and their parents are willing to participate in. The change is successful.

(2) Exposition in folk culture museum of the Seventh Eve

The area around Confucius Temple is the base of the activity. Folk culture museum of The Seventh Eve is located in this place and it exhibits the historical relics related to “coming-of-sixteen”, including the display of “coming-of-sixteen” altar in Quanzhou, Fukien and local altar in Tainan to show the cultural difference between Min-nan and Taiwan.

(3) “Coming-of-sixteen” and related activities in the temples

There are many ancient temples in Tainan City and during this time, some temples host “coming-of-sixteen” ceremony.

For instance, I visit Kai Long Temple which is constructed in the Tenth Year of Emperor Yong Zheng, Ching Dynasty. The temple worships Seven Star Empress and is well-known by “coming-of-sixteen” ceremony. The manager and the boy’s mother raise “pavilion of Seventh Maiden Goddess” made of paper and the boy passes through the underneath (three times on the left and three times on the right). Subsequently, they burn “pavilion of Seventh Maiden Goddess”, some paper money and “the clothes of Seventh Maiden Goddess” in the golden altar of the yard. After all the items are burned, the ceremony is thus finished. In this year, the boy is 15 years old in real age which is 16 in nominal age. He just finishes the entrance examination. Since the result meets his expectation, he worships Seventh Maiden Goddess and follows “coming-of-sixteen” to show his gratitude.

(4) Exposition of Japanese-style the Seventh Eve in the department store

The custom of the Seventh Eve is also spread to Japan. In Tokyo and Sendai in Japan, there is grand celebrations of the Seventh Eve even until recently. Thus, Cultural Department of Tainan City invites the representatives from Tokyo and Sendai in Japan to visit Taiwan and hosts cultural exhibition of the Seventh Eve. The

activity is held on certain floor in Shin Kong Mitsukoshi department store by the display of pictures, real items and models to show “pleading for skills” in Tokyo and the customs of the Seventh Eve in Sendai. A plastic tree is made as the bamboo and thus the visitors can write down their wishes on the cards and hang them on the branches to pray for blessings.

## 5. Conclusions

Folk culture in Taiwan is rich. Besides the customs, folk religion, folk literature, folk craft and performance art all include traditional meanings. There are creative styles involved to meet the change of times and it turns into the characteristics of folk culture in Taiwan which can be experienced, observed and studied by those who are interested in folk custom.