

ANP 370

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Week4: The New Born

There's no doubt that the Enlightenment movement has completely changed the way human society functioned, especially regarding to the development of science and biomedicine, which we have been discussed and analyzed for the past two weeks. We've already looked into how differently the process of healing varies between the Western (scientific) and Eastern (traditional) medical systems, while this week's material gives us another aspect on this topic that how dramatically this evolutionary development of biomedicine has influenced the child-birth traditions around the globe.

To be honest, I had never thought about the role of childbirth or midwifery in this "science vs. traditions" debate, and it occurred to me quite oddly when I learned from this week's lecture that Americans also had their old traditional childbirth techniques - it seems like I've taken the fact that the U.S. has become such "modernized", "technological", and people counting on biomedicine for granted. While according to this week's lecture, the practice of midwifery and other childbirth traditions was still quite prominent in the 19th century America, while the development of science and especially, biomedicine, has become the most dominant "ways of healing" after the Flexner Report issued in 1910 (Lecture 4.1). Not only for the Americans, the developments of biomedicine also led revolutionary changes in other countries, including India, that their childbirth systems were also become highly medicalized. According to Van Hollen, the biomedicalization process has impacted Indian traditional ways of pregnancy and birth since the post-colonial state, that a series of biomedicines have been used to reduce the labor pain. However, Van Hollen adds that this acceptance of biomedicalization in India was essentially pretty much cultural and closely bonded with local traditions, political agendas, and the social class systems, including the understanding of vali and its connection with both pain and strength, and the traditional homemade medicines for labor help called kasayams (Van Hollen, 2002: 57-63).

While one of the significant factors that differs medicalized childbirth from the "regular" or "traditional" ways of childbirth is the absence of the idea of "community" during the medicalized childbirth process, that it seemed to isolate the new born from his/her mother and family, and that's part of the reasons why many groups like Inuit people and Australian Aboriginals have refused this medicalized process. Those traditional childbirth techniques often associated with various rituals and the child's fate was often tightly connected to the whole community the time he was born. According to the lecture, the mother was helped by the traditional Inuit midwives during the delivery, the new born would have his/her first baptism by the shaman and other rituals, and eventually assigned his names with the belief that he/she is the sort of reincarnation of the spirit of one recently deceased relative (Lecture 4.2). From the video about Australian Aboriginals' childbirth, one could also spots the significance of midwifery during the process - they were pretty skilled and had their own ways of inducing labors, while the child will received a baptism by local shamans with series

of rituals, and most importantly the infant is expected to be born in Aboriginals' own community instead of urban hospitals, otherwise he won't be accepted by as a part of the community (On country birthing. Aboriginal Australian). The childbirth traditions in Hmong culture are also associated with various rituals. According to Anne Fadiman, Hmong woman should carefully pay attentions to their diets during pregnant, the father was expected to bury the placenta after the child's birth to help his soul reuniting with his ancestors after his death, and the shaman would help to cure infertility with various rituals like animal sacrifices (Fadiman, 1997: 12-14). There's an article about Chinese childbirth traditions I found quite interesting, especially as a Chinese myself. According to the author, there are many customs the mother need to pay attention to when she's pregnant, like don't put sharp objects on the bed and don't criticize someone (if she do her baby would look and act like that criticized person); during the labor and delivery, the pregnant woman's mother is expected to be present and the woman should remain quiet during labor (of course, the whole process was conducted by traditional Chinese midwives); after the child's born, a necklace would be placed around his/her neck before the umbilical cord (while in my hometown a jade or silver bracelet would be placed around the new born' wrist); and the mother should have a month's rest called *zuo yuezi* (sitting month), with many other customs need to be aware of (Raitisoja: 2017, 1).

In conclusion, the development of biomedicine was indeed revolutionary and would eventually lead to the biomedicalization process of childbirth globally. Despite its high efficiency and a more guaranteed safety for the mother and infant, medicalized ways of childbirth often isolate the new born from his/her mother and community, which is one essential characteristic traditional ways of childbirth value a lot, and those traditions often associated with various rituals, in order to emphasize the child's connections with the whole community.

Citation

Raitisoja, Geni, 2017. "Traditional Chinese beliefs about pregnancy and childbirth", published September 11th, 2017 by gbtimes.com
<https://gbtimes.com/traditional-chinese-beliefs-about-pregnancy-and-childbirth>