

Discovering Cultures - Planning a Wedding Japanese Style Michael Emmerich, 2004 Graduate Research Fellow

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The biggest news, and the fastest education that took place in the past months was my marriage. Or rather our wedding. My former fiancé, now my wife, Shimazaki Satoko and I got married on May 13th. In order to do this, we had, of course, to plan the wedding. (Not having a wedding would have been an option, I suppose, but we figured it would be important for our families and possibly for us, sometime later on in our lives, that we have one.) The planning process took an incredible amount of time and was an enormous hassle. Since we had lots of people coming from the US, everything had to be done bilingually. This meant that nothing involving words could be left to the wedding planner (it is impossible to have a restaurant wedding, as we did, without a wedding planner): I made the invitations myself, Satoko wrote the script for the *shikaisha* [MC] (two of her bilingual friends, including one former Fulbrighter, were kind enough to take on this role, but in order to keep them from being too harried and make it possible for them to eat the very good food, Satoko and I ended up doing about half the talking ourselves), I made a little booklet of photographs and the welcome board, etc. etc. etc. All this in addition to doing the usual things: meeting with florists; spending several days looking at dresses and tuxedos; selecting *hikidemono* [wedding favors]; selecting non-breakable *hikidemono* for people coming from the US; choosing *hikigashi* [special wedding sweets] from Tokyo, New York, and Kyoto; meeting the makeup and hair person; talking with the wedding planner; selecting music; choosing a place to have the wedding (the order of this list is somewhat mixed up), then choosing a second venue in addition to the restaurant we had decided on when we realized that the restaurant, not being a hotel, had no waiting room, and that Satoko's relatives might not like having a wedding with no waiting room; choosing the food; asking the chef if he could use some of the truly delicious *kabu* [turnips] Satoko's grandfather, a farmer, grows, then making sure to have them delivered at the right time on the right day (the *kabu* were served with foie gras); etc. etc. etc. We spent hours and hours

writing e-mails in which we politely turned down dreadful ideas that the wedding planner had, trying to keep everything simple and personal, trying to make sure the wedding wouldn't be offensive or seem cheap (which it certainly wasn't!) or strange to guests coming from either the US or Japan, even though the two groups would have completely different expectations and read different meanings into the ceremony. All in all, it was an exhausting, frustrating, instructive, and fascinating process. We learned more about certain general and specific aspects of culture during these past few months than we could have from reading any number of books.

At the same time we were doing all this, we were also arranging travel plans for my family (now "our American family"). We took them to Kanazawa, Kyoto, and Naoshima (to see the Chichu Museum, Benesse House, and the House Projects). Looking up places to stay and eat (naturally we wanted them to try everything) and getting the reservations (especially at Naoshima, where you have to have a reservation just to go experience some of the artworks) took almost as much time and energy as planning the wedding. Well, maybe not that much.

In short, I've been doing research, as always, but the research hasn't been as eye-opening as the wedding was. Perhaps the biggest discovery has been that it's possible for a human to keep going even in times as busy as this one has been for me.

