A DAY AT THE KOBE PRINCESS PALACE WEDDING PARLOUR

It is only a twenty-minute walk from the bustling Kobe Motomachi station, and less than a two-minute walk from Kobe Business Centre, to what the Kobe Princess Palace describes as its 'gorgeous' building. Like many other wedding parlours in Japan, the building stands out noticeably from those surrounding it. It is not uncommon for these buildings—especially those of Shōchikuden, the company which owns this parlour and which is known as the most showy (kade) of all wedding-parlour companies—to have facades that resemble European castles or Walt Disney-style palaces.

The Kobe Princess Palace facade does not reveal that the building comprises three floors. Its long white columns and the large green windows which encircle it from the bottom to the top of the building, give viewers a mixed impression of something between a stereotypical church and mosque. The broad staircase through which one enters the main lobby reminds one of the one designed in Hollywood for Scarlett O'Hara's Tara. It is sometimes used for 'romantic' poses of the bride in her Western wedding dress. It is its columns, double staircase and the extensive grounds which surround the building that inspired one of the workers to suggest that it looks like the White House in Washington, DC. As one enters the grounds of the wedding parlour, either on foot or by car, one encounters a large board listing details of every event that will take place on that day. On exceptionally busy Sundays the board lists as many as seventeen family names of couples to be married on that day.

How can any one service provide for seventeen weddings to be performed in a single day? In fact, how does the 'Comprehensive Wedding Parlour' produce these weddings? In beginning to answer these questions, and in the following description of a wedding as it takes place at the Kobe Princess Palace, it is important to note that the weddings which take place there are similar to those conducted at all wedding parlours throughout Japan.

The wedding parlour

The Kobe Princess Palace is advertised as 'A Comprehensive Wedding Parlour', that is, one which provides everything involved in producing a wedding. In addition to the wedding ceremony itself, including clothing and beauty shop services, a bride and groom can and usually do choose their engagement and wedding rings, arrange their honeymoon abroad, purchase furniture for their new home and arrange for its delivery, all under a single roof. A glance at Figures 1.1 and 1.2 will indicate the extent of the services available at the Kobe Princess Palace and their arrangement in the parlour.

Most clients and visitors enter the palace's main floor by ascending the broad double staircase at the front of the building. After entering through the main door, they find themselves facing a small information desk, where one of the parlour's employees or sales women will refer them to the appropriate area on the ground floor where most of the services are located. Also on the main floor are a Shinto shrine and a small Buddhist temple. Although most couples choose a Shinto wedding service, the parlour also offers the choice of a Buddhist ceremony. In either case a priest is called in by the wedding parlour to perform the ceremony.

The photography studio, which is used throughout the wedding for all photographs of the bride, groom and their families, is also located on the main floor. One room is set aside within the photo studio for the bride to change her attire and make-up during the wedding festivities. This floor also contains a large lobby, which is crowded with wedding guests on busy days, as well as two video screens for transmitting the Shinto ceremony while it is in process for the sake of friends and work associates who are invited only to the reception. In addition, the main floor has a small coffee shop for clients and wedding parlour workers. This shop, located at the front of the building, is the only room in the wedding parlour with windows open to the outside. Next to the large staircase leading to the first floor are two waiting rooms for the principals' families.

The first floor houses six banquet halls of various sizes and decor, as well as the kitchen which caters to all the ballrooms. While the main and first floors are usually busy on wedding days, which are mainly Sundays, Saturdays and holidays, the ground floor is...
almost always in use since most of the preparatory activities take place here. This floor, on which all employees are in uniform, houses the department which deals with reservations for weddings and wedding-related services. Next to the reservation counter is a smaller Honeymoon Counter at which the young couple can receive information about and order Honeymoon Packages. The most attractive sites for these five-to-six day excursions have been Hawaii and Guam, with Saipan and Australia recently becoming popular as well.

Wedding parlour employees and sales women also confer with clients at one of the table-and-chair arrangements which occupy a considerable area at the centre of the floor. Next to these consulting counters are a long show-case in which betrothal gifts (mimi) are displayed, and another in which wax samples of the different selections of food that may be ordered for the wedding banquet are displayed. One corner of the floor contains several show-cases with samples of items to be given as presents to the wedding guests (hikiden). Among them are such household items as kitchenware and tableware, as well as edible food, such as fish and exotic fruits. Near the hikiden display is a small jewellery corner which displays mainly engagement and wedding rings.

The bride and groom who marry at the Kobe Princess Palace – like those at most other wedding facilities throughout Japan – wear rented outfits. A considerable number of wedding guests, especially women, also rent their outfits from the wedding parlour. The costume department (ishōbu), which is managed by the beauty shop, is situated on the ground floor where it occupies two sides of that floor, the boutique for Western wedding and party dresses on one side, and a long counter with show-cases containing Japanese costumes on the other.

Dressing in the traditional-Lapanese bridal costume and applying the special make-up considered essential for the Japanese bride is a complicated task which is carried out by beauty shop (bijōshita) professionals also on the ground floor. There are several additional rooms on this floor set aside for beauty shop workers to dress the groom and other wedding guests in their Japanese costumes.

The production of a wedding

The wedding parlour’s work cycle is generally divided into two distinct parts, the quiet week days, when mainly preparatory work is being carried out, and the busy weekends (and holidays), when most weddings are held. The difference between the levels of activity on

THE KOBE PRINCESS PALACE WEDDING PARLOUR

the quiet week days and the bustle of weekends is quite striking. On Sundays especially, the parlour is packed with clients and part-time workers preparing for as many as seventeen weddings. The first ceremony of the day is usually scheduled for 10 am to allow enough time for the bride to be dressed and made-up, as well as for other preparations, and the last ceremony is usually set at about 5 or 6 pm. This means that weddings are being prepared for and are taking place throughout the day and that the workers are constantly dealing with different stages at various weddings.

One of the first things that strikes an observer of the weddings taking place at the Princess Palace is their similarity. It is not to say that every wedding in which I participated as a worker and observer, or those similar wedding described by Edwards (1989), were identical. For every ceremony did, of course, have some distinct, personal aspects. The fact is, however, that at least from the mid-seventies on in Japan, when weddings began to be held almost exclusively in commercial institutions, they have tended to hold a fixed pattern. I shall discuss the reasons for this in Chapter Two. Here, I shall concentrate on describing the pattern of the weddings as I observed them in the Kobe Princess Palace. It is important to bear in mind that, although I describe a single wedding, there are several other weddings in different stages of preparation and performance at the same time. This is why it is so important to maintain a rigid time-table and maximum efficiency during the course of each wedding’s production.

I do not use the term ‘production’ unintentionally. Not only does it refer to the ‘performative’ aspect (see Edwards 1989) of a wedding at the Princess Palace, in the same way that a film or a play is a ‘production’, but it also suggests the process of being produced or manufactured, especially in large quantities. The ‘producers’ of the entire event are the different departments of the wedding parlour, all of which are responsible for a particular aspect of the production, and all of whom together are accountable for the smooth manufacturing of the product known as a ‘Japanese Wedding’.

Although the production of a wedding begins at least several months and usually up to almost a year before the wedding day itself, I will begin my description of the production as it takes place on the day of the wedding. Since I am interested in both the product, and its process of production, my description will pay as much attention to the work that takes place before and during the wedding in the area that might be regarded as ‘behind the scenes’ as to the formal aspect of the ceremony itself.
THE KOBE PRINCESS PALACE WEDDING PARLOUR

role in the wedding are becoming increasingly separated. While the actual matchmaking is accomplished by either a man or a woman, the wedding ceremony requires a married couple, even though the term *nakōdo* normally refers only to the husband. While in the past (and to some extent today in rural areas; see Hendry 1981:141, Bernstein 1983:45), the *nakōdo* was a respected family member (Omachi 1962:255) or a neighbour, in today's urban weddings he may be the groom's company superior (see Rohlten 1974:241-2; Kondo 1990:180). When I asked one bride how she and her fiancée chose their *nakōdo*, she replied that they chose the highest-ranking manager in the groom's company who agreed to accept the role. The symbolic importance of the *nakōdo* - as opposed to the person who actually introduced the couple - is evinced in the honourable seats (next to the bride and groom) which they occupy during the wedding ceremony and reception, as well as in the wedding portrait.

The short time spent by relatives in the waiting rooms is utilized for a briefing by a parlor employee as to what wedding participants are supposed to do, especially during the religious ceremony. The Princess Palace employs two or three middle-aged women on a part-time basis to act as attendants (kairi). While on duty these women are dressed in plain kimono. Their explanations are considered necessary by the wedding producers, who tend to think that people nowadays do not know much about ceremony.

Photographs

Upon receiving a signal from the photo studio that it is ready for the next wedding party, the attendant leads the bride and groom there. In a little while, the rest of the wedding party will be invited to join them for a 'group photograph'.

The photo studio occupies a relatively large space on the main floor. This space is divided into three areas, each one for a different type of a photograph. One area is for the bride and groom in their Japanese costumes. Next to it is an area large enough for group pictures. The third area, for bride and groom in Western dress (to be taken later, after the wedding ceremony) is at the other side of the studio. This allows studio workers to handle the different stages of more than one wedding at the same time. This is extremely important in later stages of busy wedding days when brides and grooms leave the reception to change into Western dress and cannot be expected to wait in line while the...

PACKAGED JAPANESENESS

A wedding(s) day at the Princess Palace

The formal part of a wedding at the parlor takes four hours, including the gathering of all wedding guests, the Shinto ceremony, photographic sessions and the reception (hiriten), as well as short intervals of 'waiting time', when a wedding party must wait for the previous party to vacate its destined location before it can proceed to the next stage. However, especially for the bride, the duration of the wedding day is much longer. She must arrive at the parlor two and half hours before the ceremony to be made-up and dressed by the beauty shop professionals. Grooms are advised to arrive one hour before the ceremony, the same time when the wedding guests (okyakusamis) are supposed to arrive.

Dressing and gathering

The preparation of the bride for her first appearance in elaborate kimono, heavy make-up, wig and head covering is extremely complicated and time-consuming (see Edwards 1989:14-15; see also Chapter Five). Although the groom and many female guests don their clothing at the wedding parlor, their outfits are much less elaborate and usually require much less time than that of the bride. This is not the case for some female participants, especially those who play leading roles in the ceremony, who often have their hair set at the beauty shop so that it will suit the formal Japanese style that goes hand-in-hand with wearing kimono.

After being dressed on the ground floor, the bride is led to the main floor. From this time, she (and to a lesser extent, the groom) will be led by one or another of the wedding producers, who literally take her by the hand as her Japanese costume is confining and uncomfortable to walk in. On the main floor, the bride is led to one of the waiting rooms to meet her relatives, while the groom joins his family in an adjacent room. Most of those gathered in these two rooms - numbering around thirty - are close relatives. These are the people who will appear in the family photograph and who will participate in the religious ceremony to follow.

Included among them is a married couple who play the role of the *nakōdo*, or go-between. Though translated as a go-between or a matchmaker, this couple has not usually had anything to do with matchmaking as such (Edwards 1989:15). In fact, it seems that the roles of the actual go-between and the couple who takes this 'ceremonial'...
more time-consuming photographs of other wedding parties are being taken.

Taking professional photographs of the bride in her different costumes, of the bride and groom together, and of their families, is considered as an essential part of the wedding parlour wedding as the Shinto ceremony or the reception which follows it. In fact, even couples who choose not to have any wedding service at the parlour make certain that they are photographed in traditional wedding clothing.6

The importance accorded the wedding portraits can be seen clearly in the manner in which the photographers treat the 'objects' of their professional services. Greatest attention is paid to the picture of the bride, who is the only participant in the wedding to be photographed on her own. This solo portrait is of the bride in her first costume, which is considered to be the most 'traditional-Japanese' costume of those that she is about to wear during the day.

Posing the bride for the photograph can take at least twenty minutes as every fold in her kimono is arranged by the studio workers. The pose itself, however – like that of the groom when he joins her for the second photograph – is fixed. In both these portraits, photographers immortalize their clients in positions which suit their Japanese outfits. Thus the bride always stands in profile, with her head facing the camera. This allows the camera to capture the full beauty and elaborate kimono and its decorated long sleeves, as well as her traditional-Japanese make-up and hairdo. When the groom is 'added' to the portrait of the bride, he stands to her right, facing straight ahead, his feet placed in a stance which is wider than usual. His traditional dress includes a fan, held in his right hand and his left hand drawn into a lightly clenched fist. In this pose and costume – which he wears probably for the first and last time in his life – he is meant to resemble the Samurai.7

By the time the bride’s and couple’s portraits have been posed and photographed, the bride has been standing in a somewhat frozen position for quite a long time. This, together with the confining kimono and heavy wig, sometimes cause brides to feel faint – especially those who are pregnant. (Indeed, pregnant brides are not uncommon in the parlour. A rough estimation of about 20 per cent pregnant brides would not be an exaggeration.) The bride does occasionally complain, but not until she has obviously experienced great discomfort. It is interesting to note in this connection that I have witnessed many cases in which a bride has suddenly gone completely white without this being noticed by those around her, including the members of her family. Sometimes,

20

THE KOBE PRINCESS PALACE WEDDING PARLOUR

when the bride is so uncomfortable and/or unwell that she cannot take it any more, she will convey her 'afflicting feeling' (kuro-shi) to her dresser, who may then try to ease the kimono binding. But the general attitude is that the bride must 'endure' (ganman), which her mother repeats to her several times during the course of the wedding day. The photographers, too, consider the slightest disturbance in the photo studio as an undesired flaw in the production process, and are impatient to continue their task: producing the perfect representation of the perfect bride.

After bride and groom have been photographed, the close family is invited to come to the studio by the same female announcer who summons them to other stages of the wedding on the parlour's loud speakers.8 The relatives are generally familiar with posing for group photographs, either from other weddings in which they have participated or from photographs that they have seen.9 They take their usual positions as follows: the nakôdo and his wife sit on either side of the bride and groom in the front row; he next to the groom and she next to the bride. The groom's father is seated next to the nakôdo, with his wife beside him, and the bride's parents are similarly seated next to the nakôdo's wife. Next to the mothers of the couple, at each end of the front row, is seated another close family member usually a brother, sister or grandparent. The remaining relatives stand in the rows behind, attempting to place themselves on the bride's or groom's side of the photo with the rest of their kin. In rare cases a deceased family member may 'participate' in the wedding portrait. In a case like this which I witnessed, a framed picture of a deceased grandfather – the 'formal' type used for funerals (see Smith 1978:157–158) – was held by his widow, a further indication of the importance of representation and 'framing' that we shall see more of later on, as well as of formality.

As with bride and groom, posing those in the group photograph is a serious business, especially in the case of the nakôdo and close relatives in the front row. Their positions, in particular those of women wearing kimono, are arranged by the female assistant who positions their arms and legs, and makes certain that every fold of the kimono is in place – in short, does whatever necessary to create the 'perfect' portrait. This assistant may also be the one to make one final check of the bride in the group portrait, although this is usually done by a dresser. In fact, two or three experienced dressers are at hand throughout the picture-taking to powder the bride's nose or adjust her head cover while the studio assistant is responsible for spreading her over-garment (uchikake) on the floor.10 After everything has been arranged to perfection and the
photographer has done everything possible to engage the attention of the young children in the photo — including clapping his hand and pressing on a plastic duck to make it quack — the portrait is finally ready to be shot. At this point all smiles, if there were any to begin with, are erased; in Japan, formality requires seriousness.

The glossy hard-backed portraits that are the result of this exercise are considered an essential part of any wedding, and will be displayed throughout the years to come. But these professional portraits are by no means the only records made of a wedding. Most wedding guests bring their own cameras, and take photographs throughout the day, especially during the periods between different stages of the formalities. Some of these snapshots have already become part of the family wedding album, which always includes a picture of the bride and groom in front of the board bearing their family names that is taken on the way from their individual waiting rooms to the photo studio. Other snapshots are taken by wedding guests during the reception, especially of memorable moments such as the cutting of the wedding cake. Indeed, 'memorial moment' snapshots are encouraged by the wedding producers, who pose those concerned for the picture to create the frozen moments (or 'frames') which will become part of the permanent wedding memorabilia.

'Packing' the bride and preparing for the Shinto ceremony

After the group portrait, the relatives depart for the lobby, leaving the bride and groom, and sometimes the nakōdo and his wife, in the photo studio. For the next stage of the wedding agenda — the Shinto ceremony — the bride's flowing overgarment, which is united for the photographs, must be re-tied. This binding, or 'packing' (karage), usually accomplished by two dressers, is necessary so the bride can walk. However, packing is also significant in regard to the whole process of 'packing' the bride. As the bride is being bound, a dresser tells the groom — who is waiting for instructions — to stand to the right of the bride. Then she arranges the bride's palm lightly over the groom's hand. Holding the bride's other hand, the dresser then leads the couple to the lobby.

In the lobby, bride and groom and the nakōdo and his wife are positioned in front of the two rows of their families who have already been arranged by an attendant in front of the shrine. However, on busy days, when one party after another enters the shrine, the wedding party must wait for the preceding party to depart. In such cases, the bride is

seated on a sofa designated for this purpose (she uses a different sofa, also in the lobby, in between the Shinto ceremony and the reception) with her relatives and girl friends who are not participating in the Shinto ceremony gathered around her, admiring her appearance and taking pictures.

When the shrine is finally ready for the party, the attendant knocks on its wooden entry doors, which are opened by two shrine maidens (miko), usually young students dressed in white and orange formal religious costumes, who are hired on a part-time basis (arubaito) and have no religious training. As the whole retinue slowly marches into the shrine, the attendant bows to them and leaves, closing the doors behind her before preparing the next wedding party for this portion of the wedding.

The Shinto ceremony

Although the Shinto ceremony is considered by the wedding parlor's customers as part and parcel of the traditional-Japanese wedding, it did not become a standard part of the wedding until after World War II (Yanagawa 1972:126). In fact, the first Shinto ceremony was held in 1900 at the wedding of the crown prince (Una 1971:169; Eirksne 1925:8).

The shrine in all the parlours run by this company comprises one room of standard design. It is carpeted in red and all its structure and furniture, including the altar, are of wood. The altar is designed to create the atmosphere of an actual Shinto shrine. The 'ancient' (tape-recorded) music played in the background adds another traditional flavour.

The shrine maidens guide the bridal couple to seats in the centre of the room, with the nakōdo couple seated behind them. Other wedding participants take seats in order of entrance, following the parents of bride and groom, the groom's relatives on the right side and the bride's on the left. In front of each relative is a small tray containing a cup of sake and tiny pieces of dried cuttlefish (surume) and seaweed wrapped in paper (konbu).

The ceremony itself is conducted by a Shinto priest dressed in traditional costume. He is not a regular employee of the wedding parlor and is paid by the Princess Palace for each ceremony. The priest greets the participants and then he proceeds to carry out the purification rite done by waving a long stick with strips of white paper attached to its top (tani-gushi). The ceremony continues with a prayer (norito)
and offering – practices which are part of other Shinto rituals. The san-san-ku-do ceremony, in which bride and groom exchange nuptial cups of sake is considered another essential component of the ritual, as is the exchange of rings.12

While the ceremony conducted in the shrine is strictly for close relatives, other relatives and friends are invited for the reception which follows. However, many of these guests arrive before the reception and watch the Shinto ceremony on videos. Once the ceremony has been conducted, the announcer instructs all wedding guests to gather at the bottom of the stairs leading to the first floor, and from there they are directed by a wedding parlour employee to the hall where the reception will take place.

The reception: dramatic entrances

Among the dramatic scenes which constitute the wedding reception (hirien), the entrances of bride and groom deserve special attention, for the bride leaves the room at least two and sometimes three times to change her outfit (and have a photo taken before she returns). Each of these entrances – for which the groom joins the bride – is highlighted by special effects.

Wedding guests are formally greeted outside the entrance of the reception hall by bride, groom, nakôdo couples and parents who stand in a row and bow to each guest in turn. Both bridal and nakôdo couples remain outside while the guests are seated in accordance to a seating chart prepared in advance.

Until quite recently, the bride entered the reception hall in the white outfit she wore in the Shinto ceremony. However, in the last few years, the fashion has become for brides to change into a colourful overgarment (uchikake), preferably red. This relatively quick costume change, unlike the others which follow, is handled by two dressers on the spot, at the entrance to the reception hall. Another even more recent fashion is to add a ‘traditional-like’ artificial plait to the already heavy wig. All these fashions are designed to highlight the bride’s entrance into the reception hall as well as to add to the wedding parlour’s profit.

While at other wedding facilities bride and groom enter directly into the hall (see Edwards 1989:19–20), all Shôchikudan-owned parlours have a curtained stage on which the bridal and nakôdo couples are presented. When all four are positioned on the stage, the curtain is opened and they appear enveloped in a cloud of white smoke created by water and dry ice. Then, as the lights in the main hall dim, the stage lighting, on cue, turns rose-pink, intensifying the astonished hush from the assembled guests. After they have posed for pictures, the four descend from the stage and proceed slowly to their table which is also elevated above the others. The two stages on either side of the reception hall are trademarks of Shôchikuden and add to its distinctly ‘showy’ image.

The procession down the long aisle, from one side of the room to the other, can take a variety of forms. In the most popular one, described by Edwards (1989:20), the two couples slowly follow the wedding director, usually to the music of Mendelssohn’s ‘Wedding March’. Other options may add to the drama. For example, in the cases that have recently become quite rare in which the bride changes to another kimono, the bride and groom may walk together under a traditional parasol or the bride may duifully follow three steps behind the groom.13 While traditional-Japanese entries are used when the couple is dressed in traditional-Japanese attire, Western-style entrances are employed when they change into Western clothing later on. The flashiest Western style entrance has the couple lowered into the hall in a device called a ‘gonola’.14 The dramatic effect of this entry is usually intensified by accompanying audio-visual aids and is considered particularly appropriate before the Candle Service (see below). All these entrances are carefully documented by wedding guests, many of whom bring cameras, as well as by a video expert, hired for the occasion. The professional studio photographers only take pictures in the photo studio.

The reception: the ceremonial order

After the bride and groom, and the nakôdo and his wife have taken their seats, the master of ceremonies – usually a wedding parlour employee,15 congratulates the bridal couple and their families. Then he introduces the nakôdo, who gives the first of the opening speeches. This speech is followed by two speeches, one by a principal guest (shûhin) of each side, usually company superiors or former teachers (see Edwards 1989:19–35). All these speeches like that of the nakôdo are highly formal and follow a standard pattern.

All the succeeding proceedings also follow a strict ‘ceremonial order’ (shiki shidan) as the wedding programme is termed by its producers.16 The idea of ceremonial order has been developed with the growth of the wedding industry in an attempt to maximize the use of time and space. This practice is the main reason for the great similarity
between all weddings held at commercial facilities, whether wedding parlours, hotels or other public facilities.

To ensure that the proceedings run according to plan, a director is assigned for each wedding, a parlour employee who is directly in charge of all cuing, prompting, setting the stage and the bridal entrances (see Edwards 1989:19-35, passim). Other parlour workers such as waiters and waitresses are in charge of tasks like dimming the lights at the appropriate time, or giving cues to the participants. One or two waitresses stand behind the bride and groom and physically seat them (especially the bride). In other words, there is always an ‘anonymous hand’ available to help prevent mishaps.

The reception: ‘mini-dramas’

After the opening speeches, the bride and groom perform several performances (or mini-dramas) throughout the reception, designed to create climaxes of memorable moments, which are ‘framed’ in valuable photographs. In the first of these acts, the ‘cake-cutting ceremony’, the bridal couple inserts a knife into an elaborately decorated cake made of wax, under the close guidance of the director. The well-staged event is accompanied by romantic music, a spotlight beaming on the couple, and yet another white cloud enveloping them.

The next set part of the programme is the toast (kanpai), which, as on many such occasions gives guests the cue to relax and begin eating and drinking. This is usually when the bride leaves the room for the first time of her costume change (ironaoeshi).

The toast is followed by a series of short congratulatory speeches given by company superiors, former teachers, relatives and friends. As in the opening speeches, the congratulatory speakers elaborate on the couple’s new role and responsibilities in society. The flow of these speeches does not seem to be hampered by the absence of the bride, who keeps leaving the room for costume changes, each of which takes about twenty-five to thirty minutes. The groom usually has only one costume change which takes only about fifteen minutes, nonetheless, he joins the bride in all her entrances. While Edwards (1989) regards the theme of the speeches as a direct reflection of the ideals and values of Japanese society, and places high importance on their content (pp.20-24, 28-30, 114-127), I view them more sceptically, as having a role very similar to that of the inedible wedding cake, that is, of decoration. For in both cases the form is no less important than the content.

The couple’s entrances to the reception hall are always dramatic. The

one when they return in Western attire, is followed by the ‘candle service’ in which each partner enters carrying a long, unlit candle that they light from their respective parents’ table. Then, again led by the director, they circle the room together and light the candles placed on their guests’ tables. Each candle lighting is greeted by cheers and applause, which is encouraged by the master of ceremonies. When they reach the tables of the groom’s friends, their attempts to light the candles are thwarted as the friends have wet the wick to tease the groom. The couple’s unsuccessful attempts are accompanied by much cheerful urging and laughter. This apparently ‘spontaneous’ event (Edwards 1989:31) actually occurs in every wedding, and is apparently encouraged by the wedding producers to slightly alleviate the formality.

After this comic interlude, bride and groom proceed to their own table where they light the Memorial Candle. This central candle, that is heart-shaped, or is a straight long shape with a list of numbers to signify the years the couple has spent in the homes of their parents as well as those they will spend with each other, is said to represent the ‘flame of love’. Of course, this scene, too, is documented as the guests at each table snap photos as the couple lights their candle.

At this point the two hours allotted to every reception are almost over. The remaining fifteen or so minutes are filled with light speeches or songs and dances usually performed by friends.

The reception ends with a short ‘flower presentation ceremony’ in which the bride and groom present bouquets to their partner’s parents. Introduced by the master of ceremonies as an expression of the couple’s gratitude to their parents for having raised them until their wedding day, the ceremony is usually accompanied by music and some form of narration (see Edwards 1989:33). Shiokikaden adds yet another sentimental element by providing an accompanying ‘Happiness’ slide show. The slides (photographs are provided in advance by the couple themselves) follow the bride and groom from childhood through their dating period. This event not only signals the end of the reception but also provides an excellent opportunity to bring the participants to shed a tear or two in an emotional outburst which is considered an appropriate ending. The bride, relieved that her tasks have been completed and no longer worried about spoiling her make-up, sometimes continues sobbing as she parts from the guests.

After the slide presentation, the bridal couple and parents line up in front of their guests as the master of ceremonies announces that the reception is about to end. He then introduces the two final speakers: the groom’s father, who briefly thanks the guests on behalf of the couple’s
parents, and the groom, who gives an even shorter speech on behalf of himself and his bride.

The master of ceremonies now announces that the reception is over. Then, for the last time, the director leads the bride and groom down the aisle towards the entrance to the room amidst applause and congratulations. At the entrance they are joined by their parents and nakodo and wife. This is a signal to the guests to pack up the untouched food as well as their gifts (hikaidemono) in large paper bags printed with the company emblem. The final mini-ceremony of the reception is the mutual bows they exchange with the lined-up hosts as they leave the room. Although this ceremony is quite similar to the one at the beginning of the reception, it is much less formal – mainly due to the alcohol drunk – and includes handshakes and sometimes words of thanks.

The reception has now ended, and another wedding party is usually anxiously waiting to enter the reception hall. Thus, additional informal farewells and snapshots with the bride take place in the lobby. Then the bride and groom, and many of the female guests go down to the ground-floor changing rooms to remove their formal attire before leaving the Princess Palace.

While many guests return home directly from the wedding parlour, others, mainly friends and young co-workers of the couple are invited to another party called Ni-ji-kai or Second Party. This festivity is usually held at a restaurant or bar and is much more informal than the wedding. It includes friends who were not invited to the wedding parlour. The expenses of this party are sometimes shared by the guests.

In this regard, it is interesting that the Princess Palace has recently begun offering rooms for these Second Parties in an attempt to produce the ‘total wedding’ – and also to increase its profits. However, it is still not clear whether customers will ‘buy’ this extra service or will stick with the relative freedom of the less formal restaurant party.

Conclusion: reflections on a day at the wedding parlour

I have chosen to use the term ‘production’ to describe a day at the Kobe Princess Palace in order to emphasize its theatrical aspects, as well as the extremely efficient manner in which weddings are in fact ‘produced’ there. During my fieldwork, when I first observed these activities on days with many weddings, I had the feeling that I was witnessing a magnificently organized, well-lubricated machine designed for the production of weddings. Watching brides as they run hastily from one ‘station’ to another, constantly urged by the producers to stick to the

**THE KOBE PRINCESS PALACE WEDDING PARLOUR**

strict time-table, brought home to me an image of an assembly line. It reminded me of an insider’s account (Kamata 1982:25-26) of a factory floor work in one of Japan’s biggest industries:

The term ‘conveyor belt’ suggests automation, but actually the work is done by human hands. Only the parts are transferred by automatic power. The first worker, standing at the beginning of the assembly line, feeds the conveyor with parts. The next person assembles the parts, and the man next to him adds still more parts. All this is done in accordance with the line speed. The people working on the line are nothing more than power consumed in the process of assembly. What is achieved at the end of the line is the result of [their] combined energy.

The wedding parlour’s work sometimes seems little different from Kamata’s description of a car-assembly line. As in that production line, every station at the parlour is responsible for a specific function, and all together are responsible for producing the final result: a series of smoothly flowing weddings. The fact that this entire ‘process’ takes place in a windowless space only underscores this image.

Indeed, this metaphor of an assembly line is not to be taken lightly. The dressers and bride-makers do indeed love their work, and some of them regard it as a high art. However, they also view the need to maintain a strict time-table and the wedding parlour’s efficiency rules as an enemy to their work – one which consciously or unconsciously drives their work to become increasingly standardized and mechanical.

However, the bride-makers and all other producers in the parlour, do not solely manufacture brides and grooms dressed in the perfect manner, but rather are involved in a much broader process of cultural production. Indeed, in any culture, a public ritual such as a wedding reproduces its subjects as symbols and by that objectifies them. However, while other wedding studies (like that of Edwards 1989) are more interested in the production of marital or gender symbols, my main concern here is in other modes of production. I am primarily interested in the production of a ‘Japanese’ bride and a ‘Japanese’ wedding, and in fact in the production of Japaneseness.

While Edwards (1989:8) chooses to regard the Japanese commercial wedding as a rite-of-passage that ‘everywhere mark[s] the transition of an individual or a group from one social status to another’, I have decided to adopt another perspective. In his typology of public events, Handelman (1989) distinguishes between events that model the lived-in world and those which present the lived-in world. Unlike events that
model, which are purposive and ‘embedded in a means-to-end context’, ‘events-that-present’ have a ‘modular’ organization in that scenes can be added and subtracted without necessarily altering the story lines of the event. Thus, the incorporation of the three ‘new elements’ into the Japanese wedding: the cake ceremony, the candle service and the flower presentation (Edwards 1987:61) seems to place the commercial Japanese wedding more in the event-that-presents than the event-that-models category.

The wedding described herein, which presents the lived-in world, is the kind of event that embodies the logic of a ‘mirror, the reflecting surface that displays how things are, but that in itself, and through itself, acts directly on nothing’ (Handelman 1989:41). It is in this context that the windowlessness of the wedding parlour becomes significant. Like department stores, it is a ‘closed system’, a space in which people try on various appearances and assess themselves in the mirror of the system. In the department store this means donning and viewing oneself in unobtainable clothing, and at the wedding parlour it consists of allowing oneself to be dressed and re-dressed and immortalized in the mirror of the wedding portrait in traditional Japanese and Western costumes. However, in both of these spaces, the object of all this attention leaves the closed system in the same style clothing in which he or she entered. According to Creighton (1992), Japanese department stores offer their customers the opportunity to ‘buy themselves’. The mirror offered by both the wedding parlour and the department store is a reflection of the dialectic between Japanese and Western which is part of the Japanese cultural identity.

Another duality which is of interest in relation to the commercial Japanese wedding is that of form and content. Whereas other scholars feel that weddings as rites of passage ‘contain ideal images about the status to be entered . . . regardless of [their] form’ (Edwards 1988:8), in my view, the form cannot be divorced from the content. Simmel (cited in Tenbruck 1959:72) commented on the two as long ago as 1959:

In every given social situation, content and societal form constitute a unified reality. A social form can no more attain existence detached from all content than a spatial form can exist without a material of which it is the form. Rather, these are in reality inseparable elements in every social situation and occurrence.

The complex and reciprocal relationship between form and content can be linked to Hobsbawm’s interesting distinction between ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’ (and the invention thereof): “Custom” is what judges do; “tradition” (in this instance invented tradition) is the wig, robe and other formal paraphernalia and ritualized practices surrounding their substantial action’ (1983b:2-3). Since the present study focuses on tradition or ‘traditionalism’ (Bestor 1989), it is as concerned with the formal paraphernalia as it is interested in the content of the substantial action. Thus, while for Hobsbawm invented tradition is the wig and the robe, here it is the packaging in which weddings and brides are enveloped.

The individual reality and therefore the equal importance of content and form can be observed in several aspects of the wedding reception described above, for example, in the speeches which go on regardless of whether the couple are present to hear them. This and the fact that no one at the reception really listens to them as all ideas projected are well known (Edwards 1989:20-24) suggests that they are given as a matter of form, in other words, that the ‘medium is part of the message’ (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:6).

Another, more obvious, example of the complex relationship between content and form is the wedding cake ceremony. The ceremony in which the huge, elaborately decorated – as well as hollow and inedible – cake is cut may be regarded as an example which illustrates that form should not be disregarded. Edwards, however, would not agree with this, as he suggests that the symbolic significance of the cake-cutting ceremony, like that of other ceremonies in the commercial Japanese wedding, may be looked for only in ‘values appropriate to the context’ (Edwards 1989:37). To his view, in the case of the cake-cutting ceremony, such ‘conceptual associations which are already present in Japanese culture’ (p.109) are images of insemination and fertility. However, Charsley (1992) is not certain that such a clear symbolic significance of the wedding cake does exist. In his study of the history of the wedding cake in various parts of the world, Charsley cites some informants as a hotel manager with a strong wedding trade as describing the cake as symbolic, but without any thought as to what it symbolizes (p.18). He therefore concludes that, although different symbolic meanings have been attached to the cake by a number of those involved, including anthropologists ‘looking for pattern and meaning’ (p.122), what really influenced the process of the acceptance of the cake in places like Scotland was ‘what people would buy’ (p.130).

Changes in wedding practices throughout the years support Charsley’s – and my – ‘market’ explanation. This is the case with the
custom of throwing rice at the bride. Edwards (1982:707) says that it has not been adopted in Japan because there is “a tendency for those elements that “make sense” in terms of the symbolic code to be chosen over those that do not”. However, I have witnessed many instances during my fieldwork in which rice was thrown in ‘Christian’ hotel weddings. This raises the question of whether the custom has become popular because it suddenly made sense in terms of a symbolic code or followed the logic of a market in which the growing popularity of Western ‘chapel weddings’ has given rise to the adoption of new Western attributes.

The producers’ emphasis on form leads to the theatrical aspect of commercial weddings. According to Edwards (1989:137), the ‘memorable occasions’ manufactured for these weddings have their origin in traditional theatre. While I agree with his depiction of the wedding as a ‘series of poses’, the stylized gestures and exaggerated poses of the bride and groom – as programmed by wedding producers – would seem to suggest more of a similarity to Bunraku puppets than to Kabuki actors. While, like Edwards, I use the term ‘frame’ to describe the individual segments and mini-dramas which liken the commercial wedding to the framing scenes of a film (see Moeran 1989a), I disagree with Edwards’ interpretation of the term. Edwards grasps the ‘frame’ in a similar way to writers of literature known as nichyosakai (discussions of the Japanese). He uses Nakane’s ‘organizational frame’ to sustain his argument that the concept of self in Japan emanates largely from the social context (Roden 1991:237). In other words, the ‘framed’ structure of the Japanese wedding is portrayed as yet another supportive argument for what is seen as the uniquely Japanese ‘group model’ (Moser and Sugimoto 1986:54–63) enhanced by writers like Nakane (1984) (see also Abbeglen 1958; Rothien 1974; Clark 1979). I, on the other hand, do not see the use of frames in the wedding production as natural (being uniquely Japanese). Rather, I view the way in which the wedding industry utilizes framing (and form) as enhancing the ‘group model’.

Handelman (1990:8) writes that the ‘event that presents . . . may be likened to a mirror held up to reflect versions of the organization of society that are intended by the makers of the occasion’ (my emphasis). Indeed, it is the makers of the occasion who create the wedding as a mirror, offered to the Japanese customers as a representation of a peculiar thing called Japaneseess. What is of particular interest, then, is this invented form of Japaneseess as a form of cultural identity, and especially its links to commercialization.

FROM HOME WEDDINGS TO WEDDING PARLOUR PRODUCTIONS

The extremely well-organized commercial Japanese wedding production, with its elaborate entries, theatrical mini-dramas and frequent changes of attire, has spread from urban centres to most of rural Japan. But the development of this type of wedding is quite recent and is closely linked with the rise of the Japanese wedding industry.

The expansion of the wedding pattern and the growth of the wedding industry both originated when home weddings began to be moved to public spaces, a change which was promoted by agents like the mutual benefit associations known as gojokai, which still maintain a major interest in the wedding industry. Although such commercial institutions such as hotels, public centres (mainly municipal) and shrines entered the wedding business in the mid-seventies, the majority of comprehensive wedding parlours are still owned by these associations.

The gojokai are associations in which members can accumulate money over a period of time to use for weddings or other ceremonial occasions. Although wedding parlours like the Kobe Princess Palace operate in accordance with a similar scheme, these associations have undergone a shift in ideology with the growth of the wedding industry. Thus, while they were originally set up to provide service for the common good, the emphasis today is more explicitly market-oriented.

In what follows I shall describe and discuss the history and development of the gojokai and their evolution into companies like Shōchikuden and Cobella, which owns the Kobe Princess Palace. As a preliminary it is of interest to look briefly at wedding practices in Japan prior to the introduction of commercialized weddings.