

# The Production of Tradition and Culture in the Japanese Wedding Enterprise

Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni

Tel Aviv University, Israel

**ABSTRACT** *In this article I examine the production of culture in the contemporary commercial Japanese wedding. This is analyzed in relation to the theoretical discourse of 'the invention of tradition'. However, while this 'invention' is usually related to political motivations, I discuss the invention of tradition and of culture for economic motivations. I offer a broader perspective of tradition and culture and show how flexible these two may be as they are manufactured, played with or imagined. The contemporary wedding consists of both 'traditional-Japanese' and 'Western' inventions. These are regarded here as cultural constructs which both play a significant role in the construction of contemporary Japanese cultural identity.*

**KEYWORDS** *Japan, invention of tradition, cultural production, weddings*

**T**he wedding day of a contemporary Japanese bride begins with her being dressed in a many-layered 'traditional Japanese' outfit, complete with a heavy wig in the traditional style and the customary white, mask-like make-up. During the four or so hectic hours to follow she, and to a lesser extent her groom, will be busy in changing outfits as well as in fulfilling their carefully assigned tasks in the wedding program. These include both a 'traditional-style' Shinto ceremony and 'Western-style' ceremonies such as the cutting of a huge inedible 'Western' wedding cake topped by miniature figures of a bridal couple in Western dress. As the day comes to an end the 'traditional' bride has been transformed into a 'Western' bride, with the requisite white bridal dress and increasingly, an extravagant ball gown as well.

This paper deals with the production of the contemporary Japanese wedding. I suggest that what at first sight may seem not only bizarre but also contradictory in nature in its combination of 'traditional-Japanese' and 'Western' elements is in fact a cultural production in which both the so-called 'tradi-

tional-Japanese' and the 'Western' are cultural constructs.<sup>1</sup> This cultural production is analyzed here in relation to the theoretical discourse in history and anthropology usually called 'the invention of tradition'. However, while this 'invention' is usually related to political motivations, I wish to broaden this insight and discuss the invention of tradition and of culture for economic motivations. Nevertheless, while the Japanese wedding industry may be involved in the production of tradition and culture mainly for profit, the process of production and consumption itself should be understood against the general background of the quest for cultural identity in contemporary Japanese society.

Before going into the details of the cultural production in question let me briefly explain the main arguments made above. Weddings are usually regarded in anthropological studies as important events in the life of the individual and society (see Charsley 1991) or as rites of passage (Edwards 1989:8). Such studies are usually concerned with questions of marriage, family and gender constructions (eg., Edwards 1989; see Moore 1988:1). While the main subjects of such studies are obviously the bride and groom and their families I intentionally take the point of view of the wedding producers. The latter are regarded as actively involved in a process of cultural production. Consequently, the wedding is analyzed as an event in which cultural identity is being constructed (cf. Kendall 1994:166; Kendall 1996).

Japanese society has been intensively involved recently in a search for identity. This search has many aspects, including a general wave of nostalgia and the search for 'real Japan'. It has been manifested in several 'booms' that have spread since the late 1970s, including the *furusato bûmu* (home-village boom) which celebrates the preservation of 'old' places as emblems of 'a world we have lost' (Robertson 1987, 1991). The *matsuri bûmu* (festival boom) which pertains to the revival and reinvention of local ceremonies (Bestor 1989) is another such endeavor. Other examples of this spirit of nostalgia include growing interest in Japanese folk-craft (Moeran 1984), and a history boom (*rekishi bûmu*) which involves a media celebration of the Japanese past (Kelly 1990:69). Of course, the quest for understanding and disentangling Japanese identity has its most evident manifestation in the vast literature called *nihonjinron* (discussions of the Japanese) which is involved in an attempt to define the specificity of Japanese identity (see Dale 1986; Mouer & Sugimoto 1986).

The commercial wedding is analyzed here in the context of such a search for identity by contemporary Japanese. As such, it is not very different from other occasions such as festivals, feasts, or local performances of theater in which 'culture and tradition [become] objects to be scrutinized, identified,

revitalized, and consumed' (Handler 1988:12). Handler (1984, 1988) has emphasized the 'objectification' of tradition and culture. This has been seen as part of a larger social phenomenon, the invention of tradition and of culture (Handler & Linnekin 1984; Wagner 1975). The vast literature concerned with this theme is mainly involved with questions of invention as related to nationalism (Handler 1988; Handler & Linnekin 1984; Hanson 1989; Herzfeld 1982) or to the construction of the modern nation state (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). In this essay I offer a broader perspective of tradition and culture and show how flexible these two may be as they are manufactured, played with or imagined. These ways of handling tradition and culture are closely related to the case in hand: a prosperous industry that has the talent to package its product – a Japanese wedding – in a way that attracts its customers.

### **The Production of Weddings**

The fieldwork for this study was carried out in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time more than 80 percent of urban Japanese chose to hold their weddings in commercial institutions. Princess Palace<sup>2</sup> is a modern wedding parlor located in a large city in central Japan. It caters to about a thousand couples a year. On busy working days, mainly Sundays and holidays, the parlor produces as many as seventeen wedding ceremonies. On such busy working days the parlor is a hive of activity, a kind of assembly line processing brides and grooms dressed in traditional-Japanese and Western outfits.

One of the first things which strikes the observer of weddings at the Princess Palace is their similarity. This is not to say that every wedding in which I participated as a worker<sup>3</sup> and observed during my fieldwork between 1989 to 1991 or those similar weddings described by Edwards (1989), was identical. Of course, every ceremony did have some distinguishing, personal features. However, the fact is that, at least from the mid-seventies onwards in Japan, when weddings began to be held almost exclusively in commercial institutions, they have tended to follow a fixed pattern. I shall discuss the reasons for this later on, but shall turn first to a description of the wedding production and pattern.

My use of the term 'production' is not unintentional. Not only does it refer to the 'performative' aspect (see Edwards 1989) of a wedding, in the same way that a film or a play is a 'production', but it also suggests the process of production in the sense of manufacturing, especially of mass-production. The producers of the entire wedding event are the various departments of the 'comprehensive' wedding parlor, each department responsible for a particu-

lar aspect of the production, and all of them together accountable for the smooth manufacturing of the product known as a 'Japanese Wedding'. Moreover, the production refers also to the invention and manufacturing of cultural constructs.

Most wedding participants begin the wedding day at the parlor's beauty shop which is responsible for dressing the bride, the groom and other wedding participants – mainly women – in Japanese attire. The bride is the first to arrive, some two and a half hours before the ceremony. It takes that long for the beauticians to transform her into the perfect Japanese bride dressed in what is considered to be the most traditional-Japanese attire. The groom is advised to arrive one hour before the ceremony, when the wedding guests are also supposed to arrive. 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. Although the groom and many female guests are dressed up at the wedding parlor, their outfits are much less elaborate and usually require much less preparation than that of the bride. Exceptions are some female participants, especially those who play leading roles in the ceremony, namely the mothers of bride and groom and the wife of the symbolic *nakôdo*.<sup>4</sup> These often have their hair set at the beauty shop to conform with the wearing of the kimono in the formal Japanese style.

Once prepared in their formal Japanese attire, the bride and groom are led to two separate waiting rooms to meet their relatives. Most of the thirty or so gathered in these two rooms are close relatives. These are the people who will appear in the family photograph and who will participate in the religious ceremony to follow. This short gathering time is used for a briefing by a kimono clad female ceremonial attendant (*kaizoe*) of the participants as to what they are supposed to do during the day ahead. The wedding producers regard this introduction as very important 'nowadays when people do not know much about ceremony.'

The next station in the process of the wedding production is the photo studio. Taking professional photographs of the bride in her different costumes, of the bride and groom together, and of their families, is considered an essential part of the wedding parlor wedding. After a lengthy session of posing designed to ensure perfect representations that will be displayed in the years to come, the whole retinue is invited to proceed to the Shinto shrine, located for convenience just beside the photo studio on the premises of the parlor itself.

The central rite of the Shinto ceremony is the exchange of nuptial cups of *sake* between the bride and groom known as *san-san-ku-do*. In addition to a

few Shinto prayers and offerings, the Shinto ceremony includes also two Western practices: the exchange of rings and the recitation of wedding vows prepared in advance by the wedding producers.

The ceremony is soon followed by a reception (*hirôen*) held at one of Princess Palace's six ballrooms. The reception is considered the highlight of the wedding day. Participants include not only close relatives but also colleagues and friends who were able to watch the Shinto ceremony on video screens in the lobby. The number of participants in the reception averages fifty-five. The reception lasts exactly two hours. It is restricted not only in time but also in procedure, and follows a very strict order. These characteristics, as will be explained shortly, are closely linked to the wedding industry's calculated attempts to maximize the use of time and space.

The reception consists of dramatic entrances, speeches by the main guests and a few 'mini-dramas' or performances designed by the wedding industry, including the 'cake-cutting ceremony' and the 'candle service'. Among the dramatic scenes, 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. The first entrance is performed by the bride and groom and the *nakôdo* couple. When all four are positioned on the stage found at one hand of the room, 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 located on the second stage.

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,<sup>5</sup> 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 into another kimono,<sup>6</sup> the bride and groom may walk together under a traditional parasol or the bride may dutifully follow three steps behind the groom. While such traditional-Japanese entries may be 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 'gondola' (a sliding device in a shape of an Italian gondola or of a carriage). 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.

Once the bridal and the *nakôdo* couples have reached their seats, the M.C. – usually a wedding parlor employee – congratulates the bridal couple and their families. Then he introduces the *nakôdo*, who gives the first of the opening speeches followed by more speeches by principal guests. All the speeches are highly formal and follow a standard pattern.

After the opening speeches, the bride and groom perform several mainly Western-style performances (or mini-dramas) throughout the reception, devised 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 program 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 of her costume changes (*ironaoshi*). The toast is followed by a series of short congratulatory speeches given by company superiors, former teachers, relatives and friends. 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 from traditional-Japanese *hakama* to Western tuxedo that takes only about fifteen minutes. Nonetheless, he joins the bride in all her entrances.

The entrance following the bridal couple's change from Japanese to Western attire is usually followed by the candle service in which each partner enters carrying a long, unlit candle that they light from the table of their respective parents. 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. Then, the bride and groom proceed to their own table where they light the 'Memorial 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', focusing on the couple's gift of flowers to their parents as an expression of gratitude for raising them up to this day. This event not only signals the end of the reception but also provides an excellent opportunity for the participants to shed a tear or two in an emotional out-break which is considered an appropriate ending. 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 parlor.<sup>7</sup>

### The Fixed Wedding Pattern and the Japanese Wedding Industry

The extremely well organized commercial Japanese wedding production, which follows a strict 'ceremonial order' (*shiki shidai*),<sup>8</sup> has been developed with the growth of the wedding industry as a means of maximizing 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 parlors, hotels or other public facilities. The strict observance of the ceremonial order and its time limits greatly reduces the choices offered to the wedding principals, who usually follow the same wedding pattern.

The initiators of the contemporary commercial wedding style and pattern are the organizations known as *kankon sōsai gojokai* which still maintain a major interest in the wedding industry. The *gojokai* are associations in which members can accumulate money over a period of time to use for weddings or other ceremonial occasions, mainly funerals. Although wedding parlors like the 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 as mutual benefit associations, mainly by people who were previously involved in organizing funeral services in the harsh times of post-World War II Japan to provide service for the common good (see Edwards 1989:42–47), the emphasis today is more explicitly market-oriented.<sup>9</sup>

The development of the *gojokai* associations is closely linked to the shift in the location of weddings: from the privacy of the home and close community to public spaces. If weddings in Japan today are characterized by their

uniformity, formality and elaborateness, those in the pre-war period were noted for their diversity, informality and simplicity, especially among commoners and in rural areas. Such wedding ceremonies which were often held only after the birth of a child or the retirement of the groom's parents from active life, were extremely simple, and generally involving the exchange of *sake* cups between bride and groom, if at all, and were performed with the help of the local community.

The *gojokai* associations began as agents organizing weddings in places such as Shinto shrines and restaurants, until in the late 1960s and early 1970s they saw the advantages of constructing their own 'comprehensive wedding parlors'. These include everything required for the production of a 'total wedding' from engagement rings through bridal furniture to honeymoon packages. The profit motive was also a major reason for the development of the fixed wedding offered by the new wedding parlors, since the owners wanted to reap the profits from every stage of the wedding day, beginning with the preparation of the bride and ending with the reception. Moreover, in order to make optimal use of the space, they had to devise a production that left little room for divergence from a pattern whose timing could be calculated in advance. As a leading entrepreneur explained it to me: 'If you want to hold a large number of weddings on a 'good' day,<sup>10</sup> it is useful to have a program for the ceremonies. So we developed the ceremonial order to ensure that the entire operation would take no longer than two hours ... this was, and still is, better for business'.

However, devising a fixed wedding program and limiting the wedding reception to two hours has not prevented the industry from continuously introducing and inventing new ideas that fit into the fixed pattern. As I learned from the daughter of the founder of the company, the most inventive and extravagant wedding parlor group, the industry is always seeking new ideas to add to the fixed pattern, especially those for which the customer can be charged separately:

We decided that people at wedding receptions were bored by all the speeches at a reception, so we added a slide show of the bride and groom. This was back in 1968, when we were still conducting weddings in a shrine. The cake-cutting ceremony was initiated later, in 1973, when we opened our first wedding parlor in Kyoto. When one of our parlors invented the 'gondola' in 1977, it was only adopted by a few other parlors ... Now, we always have new things, like the laser effects. We encourage every parlor to invent new things and adopt them, as long as they fit into the time allotted for a complete wedding at one of our parlors.



Carefully examining this candid description of the development and elaboration of the commercial wedding ceremony given by a diligent entrepreneur, we can find more than a clue to the way various traditions are included in (or at times discarded from) the wedding event. These novelties include both so-called 'ancient' Japanese traditions like the Shinto ceremony and those elements considered to be Western traditions such as the candle service. Nevertheless, I certainly do not suggest the fictitiousness of such endeavors, as it is implied by writers like Hobsbawm (1983a:5). Instead, I suggest a more dynamic and interactive way in which tradition and culture are being constructed or 'improvised' (Jackson 1995:18).

### **Tradition as a Financial Asset**

The selective nature of tradition has been observed in other contexts (see Handler & Linnekin 1984:280; Linnekin 1983:241; Williams 1977:117). While others may have emphasized its role as related to nationalism and politics (e.g., Bendix 1992; Handler 1988; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), I emphasize cultural nationalism (see Hutchinson 1987; Yoshino 1992), or rather the construction of cultural identity. In other words, my argument is that tradition is consciously used by people in the construction of their cultural identity (Linnekin 1983). This distinction is crucial in the present case since although I will argue that the wedding industry is only one agent in this interactive endeavor in Japanese society, still it is a financial institution which is not directly involved or interested in shaping the nationalistic feelings of its clientele. In such a case, when tradition becomes a financial asset, the *selective* nature of the process of the production of tradition is intensified. Moreover, the case in hand demonstrates the reciprocal nature of the process. To use a more 'consumerist' vocabulary, I am inclined to see the wedding industry responding not so much to a 'need' of certain bodies of people in the sense that Hobsbawm (1983b:307) gives it, as to a 'demand', a 'socially regulated and generated impulse' (Appadurai 1986:32).

The Japanese contemporary commercial wedding is replete with 'ancient' Japanese traditions, which appear to be crucial in supporting its role as an emblem of Japaneseness. However, an investigation into the sources of these elements shows once again that the selection of what constitutes tradition is always made in the present (Linnekin 1983:241). The Shinto ceremony considered by most Japanese as a uniquely traditional Japanese custom is an example for such kind of invention. The first such ceremony was held as late as 1900 in the wedding of the crown prince. This took place in the midst of the

Meiji period (1868–1911), an era strongly identified with Western influence or, more precisely, with the conscious attempt of the government to make Japan 'civilized' and Western. This included many innovations in the sphere of manners and ritual (Yanagida 1957). The incorporation of a religious ceremony into the Japanese wedding is interpreted in terms of such Western influence (Ema 1971:215).

The Shinto ceremony became extremely popular after World War II. The fact that this took place at the same time as the rise of the nascent wedding industry therefore makes it safe to assume that the traditional Shinto ceremony has been deliberately promoted by interested agencies such as the wedding industry – with the *gojokai* organizations as its core. Moreover, the way the ceremony is conducted by the called-in priest assisted by the two 'shrine-maidens' (*maiko*), who are actually two part-time students with no religious training, makes the 'selective' nature of tradition evident (see Smith 1995:29).

Since wedding costumes constitute a significant portion of wedding costs – or profits, from the point of view of the industry – and as multiple changes of costumes do not interrupt the course of the wedding – which continues in the absence of the bride, it is no surprise that considerable efforts have been invested in inventions in that field.<sup>11</sup> The bride, whose attire is the most expensive, begins her wedding day in an elaborate attire that consists of a heavy upper coat (*uchikake*) which is worn over a white kimono, including a special wig and white make-up; all part of the traditional-Japanese atmosphere deemed suitable for the Shinto ceremony.

When questioned as to their motivation for wearing *uchikake*, all brides stress both its Japanese (*nihon-teki*) and traditional (*dentō-teki*) aspects as reasons for deciding to include it instead of marrying in a Western dress alone. At the Princess Palace there has never been a case where a bride has chosen to wear only the Western wedding gown. Choosing traditional-Japanese attire seems to give them a feeling of continuity with their traditional Japanese past, despite the fact that their mothers and grandmothers never wore the *uchikake* or anything similar to it. Indeed, the *uchikake* did not become part of the traditional bridal attire worn by most brides until the late 1960s, when the wedding industry began its booming period. Before that, only brides who could afford to follow what had been known as part of the ceremonial court wear wore it. With the rise of the specialized wedding parlor and its fixed pattern there was no room for other outfits. Moreover, there are researchers who doubt the Japanese origin of the 'pure white' image. This image is promoted by the wedding industry as traditionally Japanese in promotional cap-

tions like: 'Wear your hair in the traditional Japanese wedding style (*Takashimada*), put on a pure white kimono (*shiro muku*), take the oath of marriage'. However, researchers of Japanese custom view it instead as a later influence based on the white wedding gown worn in the West.<sup>12</sup>

Contemporary wedding costumes are generally the productions of wedding producers. This does not mean that they are not taken from a certain 'store' of ancient materials 'accumulated in the past of any society' (Hobsbawm 1983a:6). The examples of that are manifold and include the costume of the groom, which is in fact a Meiji period (1868–1912) design for formal dress for men (Yanagida 1957:12). The case of the bride's head-coverings, which were in fact originally worn either in court or by noblewomen in temple, and not by brides (see Hendry 1981:170, 195, n. 54), exemplifies how past practices are not necessarily related to weddings.

An excellent example of the flexibility with which past customs are treated can be seen in the case of the *ironaoshi* or the practice of changing outfits (or changing color, as the name literally suggests) during the wedding. While there are some reports of the custom of changing outfits in rural weddings, the time and number of changes reported varies. Moreover, according to informants, the practice of changing costumes hardly existed at all in urban weddings before the heyday of the wedding industry in the 1970s and 1980s. A veteran bride dresser and the owner of a beauty shop said that: 'When I started the beauty shop 31 years ago [in 1957] ... there was almost no *ironaoshi* ... if the bride did change kimono it was into her own kimono'. Her last remark about the bride changing into her own kimono deserves attention since this was a crucial aspect of any *ironaoshi* in the history of weddings in Japan. In fact, as in other cases of the adoption of old traditions so in the case of the *ironaoshi*, the wedding entrepreneurs made clever use of tradition that in this case is related to the Tokugawa period.<sup>13</sup> They did so by reviving a so-called traditional practice – albeit one that had never really caught on in the past, leaving only its *form* and filling it with different materials. The flexibility of this custom can be seen in the way new fashions replaced some of the old-new traditions. For example, in the gradual replacement of the Japanese *furisode* by a Western party dress (see note 6). The introduction of *ironaoshi* among grooms is even more interesting, since it is not grounded even theoretically on any past practices, and was introduced only to complement the bride's change from Japanese-style to Western-style.

### The Manufacturing of New Japanese Traditions

The ongoing process of invention involves not only the re-invention of Japanese traditions, but the production of new traditions as well. This production involves a wide variety of manufacturers of traditional wedding artifacts. These vary from special bridal make-up, to special traditional wigs and other traditional decorations, which operate in a highly competitive market.

I have chosen to illustrate the production of traditions by the case of a company specializing in the production and development of a unique lease system for bridal wigs. A close look at the way in which the company promotes its product sheds light on the *production* of traditions. While the company presents itself as a 'rational' (*gôri-teki*) wig service whose wigs are produced in a modern factory, they by no means neglect the traditional aspect of their product. This modern image is important *vis-à-vis* the more traditional image of small workshops which produce old-style wigs, which are heavier and are not made to order. Thus, while the company's catalog is, on the one hand, full of illustrations of the company's modern facilities, on the other hand, it is titled 'The Time When Tradition (*dentô*) Shines Beautifully'. Like others involved in the marketing of traditional artifacts, this company, a subsidiary of one of the largest oil companies in Japan, not only imitates and improves on tradition, it also produces new traditions to order.

Even more striking is the fact that this process seems to be conscious (or rational – to use the company's own language). An excellent example of this can be given in the company's new idea of introducing wigs to another ceremonial occasion in which comprehensive wedding parlors and their beauty shops are involved. This was the Coming-of-Age ceremony (*seijin shiki*) celebrated on January 15th for young men and women who have reached legal majority at the age of twenty. While the Coming-of-Age day has come to be strongly connected with kimono wearing and other traditional appurtenances for girls (see Goldstein-Gidoni 1999), by 1991, when this idea was considered, it certainly did not include wigs. This fact did not prevent the promoters of the 'light' wig from investing efforts in originating the idea of wigs for the *seijin shiki*. However, as it was put by one of the promoters in a meeting with the beauty shop personnel responsible for preparing brides as well as Coming of Age girls: 'Our company must think of the future. That is why we have begun to think about new uses for our wigs'.

Although this idea was almost hypothetical at that time and there were no signs that wigs had become popular in the Coming-of-Age ceremony, its implication is intriguing. One can only wonder what will happen if Japanese

girls begin wearing wigs for the Coming-of-Age day. I have no doubt that, after a few years, 'a wig for twenty-year-old girl' would be considered just as traditional as 'a wig for a bride' is today.

### 'Playing' with Tradition

While the new, 'rational' wedding wig represents a case in which the wedding industry 'modernized' an already existing traditional artifact, there is an even more daring kind of invention which I call 'playing with tradition'. These kinds of ventures are usually entered into by the wedding parlors themselves and generally require only a relatively small out-of-pocket investment. They involve the invention of a custom – usually connected with clothing – which was originally related to a very specific group or occasion.

Such a case was the introduction of a special traditional wedding attire called *junihitoe* (literally, twelve layers), as a set for bride and groom in imitation of the full court dress (*sokutai*) worn by Princess Kiko and Prince Akishino at the royal wedding in June 1990. Not long after the imperial wedding, advertisements for *junihitoe* began to be seen everywhere, and the company that owns the Princess Palace jumped on the 'twelve-layer' bandwagon by devising a particularly expensive set which they rented out for picture-taking (only) at a price of 250,000 Yen (about \$2,500). However, although the details of the imperial wedding were the focus of a great deal of attention on the part of the Japanese public, the attire was not as popular as 'Princess Diana' wedding dresses were in England after the Diana-Charles wedding.<sup>14</sup> For example, in Princess Palace only one couple chose this attire. The parlor manager attributed this lack of success to the expenses involved and the fact that it was very uncomfortable to wear. He also admitted that they might have been wrong to think that the set would be popular, since apparently young Japanese, who have recently been the main target of new ideas, did not 'long for' (*akogare*) the imperial costumes.<sup>15</sup>

What becomes clear here, however, is that the wedding industry is endlessly occupied in producing new ideas. In this process the producers do not hesitate to utilize any kind of playful idea which may have a chance of appealing to their customers. The fact that the company found it necessary to promote the *junihitoe* because other wedding facilities were doing so, only emphasizes the propensity for commercialization of such new-born traditions.

### **Orientalism Japanese-style**

'I am only trying to make my customers happy', the manager of the Princess Palace responded to my question regarding yet another invention which he introduced to potential customers at a bridal fair:<sup>16</sup> an optional bridal change into the costume of a young geisha. This innovation reveals the multitude of still untapped possibilities of manipulation by 'playing' with tradition. For the bride who was to wear the young geisha's outfit was certainly not to be identified with an actual geisha. As Dalby (1983:xiii) has clearly put it: 'geisha are different from wives. They are categorically different ... and the categories are mutually exclusive'. The choice of a geisha image, then, had nothing to do with marriage. I would argue that it was related to the tendency of the Japanese to regard the geisha as 'more Japanese' than almost any other definable group' (Dalby 1983:xiii). Moreover, the image of the geisha was being used as a beautiful *form*. In this case, too, the producer of this new tradition was aware of his invention, even using the Japanese word *asobi* (play) when he described it to me. 'It may seem a little strange from the traditional point of view', he said, 'but today's young people are not interested in difficult things. They prefer light things, light things to look at'. What he was really saying was that young Japanese do not care about historical truth but are interested instead in the 'forms' – indeed forms of culture – which bolster their own sense of cultural identity.

Processes of self-definition tend to intensify the sense of self by dramatizing the difference and opposition to the Other (Said 1991:55; Carrier 1995:3). In the Japanese case they have at times ended in self-exoticism, which can be observed in promoting Japaneseness through products of 'nostalgia' (Ivy 1988) or by way of women divers (*ama*) sold as prototypes of 'real Japan' (Martinez 1990). This treatment of things Japanese by Japanese themselves in almost the same vein of the West's 'orientalizing impulse' (Robertson 1995:974) evident in literature from Lafcadio Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894) to Roland Barthes' *Empire of Signs* (1982), often ends up with what can be termed 'reverse Orientalization' (see Miller 1982:209–211).

This peculiar Orientalism (Said 1991) which is closely connected with the on-going process of constructing cultural identity, has two channels. While the Japanese are involved in orientalizing or exoticizing themselves to enhance the 'Japanese' character as unique, this reverse Orientalism also pertains to the 'monolithic' way (Mouer & Sugimoto 1986:32) in which they perceive the West. As has been suggested by Moeran (1990:9), this mirrors the same 'large collective terms' and 'abstract ideas' with which the West used to view Japan.<sup>17</sup>

### The Abstract West

The abstract way in which the Japanese tend to view the West is well observed in the commercial Japanese wedding, with its extravagant inedible wedding cake and its 'uniquely' Western candle service. In such Western mini-dramas there is no attempt to imitate any 'real' Western wedding of any sort. This attitude is very similar to the invention of the traditional-Japanese. In both cases, the 'reality' or the particular past may have never existed. However, just like American historical sites, they are conceived as authentic by the consumers (see Bruner 1994). Thus, when the mother of a future bride, who came to check the Princess Palace at one of the bridal fairs, asked me if the candle service is part of the wedding reception in my country and I told her that I had never seen it, she was surprised because she was certain it was performed in the West and probably concluded that I was not a reliable source.<sup>18</sup>

The West imitated in the candle service and the cake-cutting ceremony is a concept of the West imagined by the wedding producers and willingly accepted (and paid for) by the consumer. This kind of West and the spirit of cosmopolitanism it conveys is typical of another kind of Western-style weddings, overseas weddings, promoted in bridal as well as travel magazines. 'Become the heroine of a story in a Walt Disney Wedding', one such magazine advertisement promises. Another magazine contains an offer for a 'pumpkin horse-carriage tour' from Disney Hotel (Rosenberger 1993). The appeal of these overseas weddings, just like that of the candle service ceremony, lies in their international, fantasy-inspiring qualities (Rosenberger 1993).

It is obvious that Western clothing and above all the classic white Western wedding gown are among the main prototypes of the West in the commercial Japanese wedding. The wedding dress, like its traditional-Japanese counterpart, the *uchikake*, was introduced by the wedding industry in the 1970s together with other Western elements of the program. It was not long before it was joined by the colored party dress in the early 1980s to round out the Western aspect of these weddings.

The party dresses that have become very popular bear the tendency to envisage the Western as a whole 'package', one that is conceived quite abstractly. Their elaborate design, elegant materials and colors – as well as the layers of crinoline to puff out the skirts – ape the gowns of the nineteenth-century European bourgeoisie, as portrayed in films and on television. And since the process of invention and elaboration is endless, we may expect to see still more new items added to emphasize the Western picture. Such an innovation was a new fashion of tucking a bustle under the skirts to add to the puff of the crinoline.

An anecdote from my fieldwork illustrates the general attitude towards these Western dresses. While working with a middle-aged clothing department employee, I was asked if 'over there' (*mukô*, a quite typical way of referring to the West) we still wear these bustles when we dress for parties. And this middle-aged woman's image of the West is not very different from that of others with whom I worked at the Princess Palace.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have described the manifold ways in which an interested industry is involved in the production, packaging and commercialization of cultural products I have referred to as traditional-Japanese and Western. Yet I argue that these cultural products are not fictitious, or 'spurious', to use an even more provocative term (see Handler & Linnekin 1984; Jackson 1995; Sapir 1924). Indeed, it has already become evident that the question of 'culture, genuine or spurious' is irrelevant in the same way that the distinction between 'invented' and 'genuine' tradition (Hobsbawm 1983a) has been proven futile (Giddens 1994:93; Linnekin 1983:241). Instead, culture and tradition should be regarded in a much more dynamic and interactive manner.

The shifting, disputed nature of culture has been observed in the Japanese case (Smith 1995), as well as in other contexts (cf. Comaroff 1991; Dominguez 1977; Keesing 1992). Others have criticized the concept of culture in its static, essentialistic forms and proposed viewing culture itself as an on-going human creation (Clifford 1988; Fischer 1986; Handler 1984; Jackson 1995; Rosaldo 1989; Wagner 1975).

In her intriguing article on the politics of Indianness, Jean Jackson (1995:18) suggests viewing culture as a jazz musician's repertoire. Just as the jazz musician while creating music and improvising has to take into account considerations such as the acoustic properties of the hall, the qualities of instruments and the inclinations of the audience, so culture is created in a dynamic process.

Jackson rightly argues that we cannot speak of people as 'possessing' or 'having' culture in the same way that a jazz musician cannot be described as 'having' jazz. However, the case in hand, which describes the production of culture mainly for economic motivation, may at first be regarded as suggesting the opposite. An extreme example of this is the case of a passport-like short leaflet titled: 'A Life Care Passport' which was given to each of the parlor's customers for some time. The 'passport' included various details of manners related to weddings, funerals and various other Japanese as well as Western



manners. The equation made between 'good citizenship' and the appropriation of right manners, packaged by the wedding industry as the Expert, portrays the 'objectification' of culture (Handler 1984, 1988).

The way culture is packaged and then offered as a thing to be possessed is indeed typical not only of commercial Japanese endeavors but also of more political areas as well (see Handler 1988). In such cases, as in the attempts of certain groups 'to defend the culture', culture is regarded as 'a commodity, subject to all the processes to which any commodity is subject, a familiar notion in our late-capitalist society' (Jackson 1995:16).

But, how are we to solve this apparent contradiction between a dynamic view of culture on the one hand, and culture viewed, or in this case sold, as an object, on the other? I would argue that the answer lies in understanding the reciprocal relationship between the producers of tradition and culture on the one hand and the consumers of their products on the other. While it is true that the wedding industry is responsible for most of the inventions of tradition and culture analyzed in this paper, and profits from this endeavor, this does not make it in any way a 'villain' engaged in a conspiracy against its innocent customers. I have not attempted to prove the 'falsity' of the invention in the hegemonic Marxist sense implied for example by Hobsbawm (1983a, 1983b).

What I have suggested, instead, is to broaden our view of tradition and culture by accepting that tradition is not only 'invented', but 'produced' as well. I have intentionally been using the term production, and have insisted on referring to those who are usually regarded as the wedding principals as consumers. The idea that culture, as much as tradition, can be commoditized is not new. It has been suggested in relation to tourism, selling 'culture by the pound' (Greenwood 1977). Others have related to the nostalgic nature of handcrafted commodities. These may be antiques, pottery or even chocolates (see Loeb 1977; Moeran 1984; Terrio 1996). My intention is then to add a more dynamic and complex view to this kind of understanding of cultural traditions and their authenticity (see Hanson 1991:450).

Writers like Douglas and Isherwood (1978:57) and Baudrillard (1975) have emphasized the importance of the arena of consumption to the production of culture in late capitalist society. Others have emphasized the relationship between consumption and the production of identity (see Friedman 1994). The relationship between wedding producers and their customers was indeed regarded here in terms of consumption. However, while treating the wedding and its side-products – the traditional-Japanese and the Western as

consumer products, I have been very careful not to neglect the crucial point concerning the importance of reciprocity added by Appadurai (1986) to this discourse of consumption. As was clearly articulated by him, 'consumption (and the demand that makes it possible) [should be regarded] as a focus not only for sending social messages (as Douglas has proposed), but for receiving them as well' (Appadurai 1986:31).

The social and cultural 'messages' sent and received in the production of the contemporary Japanese wedding must be interpreted in a much larger social context. The way Japanese cultural identity is constructed in the commercial wedding cannot but be interpreted in the general context of contemporary Japanese society. Since the 1970s Japan has been swept by a nostalgic wave concentrating on revealing the 'real Japan' (cf. Bestor 1989; Ivy 1988; Kelly 1990; Moeran 1984; Robertson 1991). The same attempt to define, understand – and at the same time construct – this 'unique' identity has been manifested in the *Nihonjinron* (discussions of the Japanese), the publishing boom of national studies in Japan that has engaged academic scholarship and the mass media for the last forty years (see Dale 1986).

The bridal couple who choose to buy the whole wedding package including the traditional-Japanese appearance as one of the highlights of their wedding day, are involved in the construction of this contemporary Japanese cultural identity no less than those who choose to revitalize or invent 'old' places or 'ancient' Japanese festivals (cf. Bestor 1989; Robertson 1987, 1991).

Finally, let us not forget that all such kinds of inventions, whether for political or financial motivation, should not be viewed by the anthropologist who investigates the invention of tradition with an authoritarian eye (Briggs 1996). In the case of the newly invented twelve-layer imperial set, just as in the case of touristic historical sites, the particular pasts imagined may have never existed (Bruner 1994). However, this does not make the experience of the social actors themselves – the visitors to the sites as much as the brides who don the 'traditional' wedding costume – less authentic.

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## Notes

1. The quotation marks around 'traditional-Japanese' and 'Western' are meant to indicate precisely this point of their being cultural concepts rather than objective referents. I will generally not use quotation marks around these words (and similar words, such as 'Japanese') in the rest of the text, now that this point has been made.
2. All names are pseudonyms.
3. During my two and a half years of fieldwork at the wedding parlor (1989–1991), I worked as a part-timer at the beauty shop responsible for dressing wedding participants. My work as a 'dresser' included preparing brides and female wedding guests for their formal appearance. For a full ethnographic account see Goldstein-Gidoni (1997).
4. Although frequently translated as a go-between or a matchmaker, the couple have not usually had anything to do with matchmaking as such. In fact, it seems that the roles of the actual go-between and the couple taking this 'ceremonial' role in the wedding are becoming increasingly separated. While the actual match-making is accomplished by either a man or a woman, the wedding ceremony requires a married couple even though the term *nakôdo* normally refers only to the husband. This couple is supposed to provide an example of a stable marriage. While in the past (and to some extent today in rural areas; see Hendry 1981:141, Bernstein 1983:45), the *nakôdo* was a respected family member (Omachi 1962:255) or a neighbor, in today's urban weddings he is frequently the groom's company superior (see Rohlen 1974:241–2; Kondo 1990:180).
5. To ensure that the proceedings run according to plan, a director is assigned for each wedding, a parlor employee who is directly in charge of all cueing, prompting, setting the stage and the bridal entrances. Other parlor workers such as waiters and waitresses are in charge of tasks such as 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.
6. Whereas until the late eighties it was popular for brides to change from the *uchikake*, the elaborate kimono in which they had the wedding ceremony to another kind of lighter 'swinging-sleeve' formal kimono (*furisode*) (see Hendry 1981:170, Edwards 1989:28), nowadays, most brides tend to forsake this change in favor of the more 'modern' version of having a white wedding dress followed by a colored party dress.
7. While many guests return home directly from the wedding parlor, 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 and includes friends who were not invited to the wedding parlor. The expenses of this party are sometimes shared by the guests. However, 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 clients will 'buy' this extra service or will stick with the relative freedom of the less formal restaurant party.

8. This is the term used by the wedding producers to describe the wedding program. Every wedding produced is programmed in advance, beginning with a detailed form giving the names of every speaker and every scheduled activity, including such particulars as the number and the type of costume changes and the names of guests who will offer songs or dances. There is a time limit for each activity, for example, three minutes for each congratulatory speech.
9. In 1991, the Japanese 'ceremonial occasions' (*kankon sôrai*) industry had annual sales of about 10 trillion Yen, which led to a further growth in the industry.
10. There is limited number of days, which Japanese consider to be 'good' for weddings. These include Sundays and holidays, spring and autumn weddings, as well as days considered especially auspicious according to an astrological calendar borrowed from China.
11. The cost of rented wedding costumes usually reaches as much as 40 percent of all wedding expenses, which come to about two million Yen (about \$20,000). Bridal attire cost accounts for as much as 75 percent of costs for all clothing.
12. See Ema 1971 and *Kindai Nihon Fukuso-shi* (History of Dress in Modern Japan) (1971) for the variety of wedding fashions and how they have changed since the Meiji period (1868–1911), and for the origins of the white color of the *uchikake*.
13. It has been suggested by Ema (1971:154, 208) that changing clothing on this day began during the Tokugawa period (1600–1867), when the bride changed from a more formal kimono to a kimono from her own trousseau between the formal ceremony and the banquet. Some Japanese scholars (e.g., Nakayama 1928:828) argue that this was an abbreviation of an even older practice in which the bride would wear white for the first and second days of her wedding and change into a colored garment for the third.
14. One of the reasons for court dress failing to catch on may be related to the attitude of Japanese young people towards the imperial family. Unlike other countries like England, where young women imitated any new fashion introduced by Princess Diana, in Japan the imperial family is more detached from the people and therefore more likely to be venerated than imitated. This attitude can be understood in light of the modern myth, designed by bureaucrats in the late Meiji period who created a state of orthodoxy around the figure of the Japanese emperor and then imposed it on the people. (Gluck 1985:5).
15. The word *akogare* (longing) is frequently used in the wedding industry as well as in the kimono industry. Its use generally refers to the so-called 'natural' inclination Japanese women should have for wearing what is considered traditional-Japanese outfits.
16. Princess Palace, like all other wedding facilities in Japan, holds bridal fairs regularly, usually at weekends. These grand events include the display of wedding attire, bridal furniture and any other items related to the wedding, as well as a show of the wedding's highlights, such as the cake-cutting ceremony and the candle service.
17. Robertson (1995) also suggests that there is a distinct kind of Orientalism in Japan. This has been deployed by influential Japanese historians and ideologues in two apparently contradictory ways. While one channel is the claim for uniqueness – mainly *vis-à-vis* the West – the other is the claim for superiority mainly over Asian countries.

18. Kendall (1994:171) observed exactly the same attitude among Koreans towards what they defined as the 'new style' wedding. As Kendall puts it, many of her interviewees assumed that the new wedding was identical to the American custom.

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