

THE WEDDING CUSTOMS

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1. The Match The parents of a boy may ask the hand of a girl for their son while both the boy and girl are still children, i.e. about twelve years of age, or they may ask the hand of a girl of marriageable age, i.e. from seventeen to twenty two. The parents may not make a direct request, but must employ a matchmaker in the person of a wise man or woman friend or relative. This person approaches the parents of the girl to request her hand in marriage, and also fixes the wedding date. A marriage may be arranged between persons who never see each other until their wedding day, or between persons who have grown up together as children, or have known each other for some shorter length of time. Near relatives may not marry, but a man may marry two sisters; however, polygamy is now illegal in Viet Nam. The boy's parents may not know the bride.
2. Wedding Preparations
 - 2.1 The Date The matchmaker chooses a propitious day for the wedding - propitious in accordance with the Vietnamese and Chinese calendar. The wedding may take place a few years or a few months after the marriage has been arranged. Weddings often take place after rice harvest because the bridegroom's parents have more money to spend on the wedding at that time.
 - 2.2 The Invitations The parents of the bridegroom, the ~~bride~~ bridegroom, and the bride, each give out invitations to their respective friends and relatives, (the bridegroom exclusively to his friends). The invitations must be printed on pink or red paper, and may be sent out ten, twenty or twenty five days before the wedding. The bridegroom's parents take out their invitations first, and then the bridegroom takes out his own. All relatives and all friends must be invited, so often hundreds of people attend the feast.
 - 2.3 The Expense As an engagement present, the bridegroom gives the bride a pair of earrings, while his parents give her parents two packets of tea and two boxes of biscuits. If the bridegroom's parents are wealthy they may spend upward of twenty thousand piastres on the wedding. The matchmaker is also expected to buy various gifts for the bridal pair. If the bridegroom's parents are poor, they may have to borrow money to pay for the wedding.
 - 2.4 Preparations in the bridegroom's home The house is thoroughly cleaned, coloured paper streamers are hung overhead and new posters of Chinese characters are

written and pasted on either side of the main entrance, within and without, and on either side and above the family altar. The bridal chamber is prepared by papering the walls with pink paper and by sticking red paper pennants over the doorway. A new bed with its furnishings is bought, and a decorative curtain is hung in the doorway of the chamber. On the day before the wedding day, men friends and relatives of the bridegroom's family help to make an enclosure for guests out at the front of the house. A pole framework is erected and covered with pieces of thatch or with straw matting to serve as walls, and a temporary roof is erected in a similar manner. At the entrance to the enclosure an archway is made of fresh green pine branches. Inside, tables and stools and benches are arranged for guests.

1.5 Preparations in the bride's home Since feasting takes place in the bride's home for three days before the wedding, similar preparations in the house and in the yard are made ~~as~~ to those at the bridegroom's house.

2.6 Preparations for the feast While there is feasting for three days at the bride's home, followed by feasting for three days at the bridegroom's home, the main feast day and wedding day proper is the first day of feasting at the bridegroom's home. Since many guests attend the feast, many helpers are needed to prepare the feast at both homes. The bridegroom's mother is in charge of the arrangements at her home, and she sends people to buy the food and supervises its preparation. While the bride's mother is responsible for the catering at her home, the bridegroom's family bear the expenses. Pork, chickens and ducks are the main delicacies. Several pigs and many fowls will be killed for a big wedding. The birds will be killed and plucked and then taken down to the river in large baskets to be drawn and cleaned. Wine is an indispensable part of a wedding feast, as the expression for "feast" (kin lẩu "drink wine") indicates. Since large quantities are needed, only a small amount of French bottled wine is bought, and large jars of rice wine are provided to fill the greater need.

3. Wedding gifts

The bride's and the bridegroom's parents' guests give gifts to the bride, whereas the bridegroom's guests give gifts to the bridegroom. Suitable gifts for the bride are gold jewelry in the form of necklace, earrings, finger ring or bracelet. Handkerchiefs, shoes, perfume and dress material are also acceptable gifts. For the bridegroom, any number of gifts may be acceptable, but the most common ones are pictures painted on glass, drinking glasses or money. The mirror pictures are a

favourite gift because of their prestige value. These are gifts that are always on show, and since the giver's name is painted on them, visitors in later years will note who was present at the wedding. While the value of a gift depends on the wealth of the giver, a reasonable amount to spend on a wedding gift is sixty or seventy piastres. It is customary to write a wedding greeting on pink or red paper to accompany the gift, which must also be wrapped in pink or red paper, but never in white or green, as these colours signify a funeral. Pink and red paper is lucky for a wedding. Gifts may be presented to the person for whom they are intended on the wedding eve. Guests may ask one another what gifts each is giving, and how much it cost. Gifts are never opened in the presence of the giver. On the wedding day, a person stands at the door of the bridegroom's home collecting money gifts and recording the amount and the donor's name. The greeting which accompanies the wedding gift must run as follows:-

"Wishing friend X a hundred years of happiness, health, peace and well-being more than I have, and I shall be very happy. Signed."

Apart from giving a gift in kind, a wedding guest must take a small money gift with him to the feast to give in return for the ceremonial cup of tea at the end of the feast.

4. Religious ceremonies. No sacrifice according to the Thô definition is made on the occasion of a wedding, but an altar ceremony (lễ bàn thờ) takes place on the wedding day in both the bride's and the bridegroom's home. A chicken must be killed, dressed and set on the altar, along with steamed glutinous rice, and rice cakes. Fruit, wine and other delicacies may also be placed on the altar as food for the ancestors. The lamp is lit and incense is burned on the altar, and the ancestors of the bridegroom are told that someone new is coming to live in the house.
5. The bridal party On the wedding day, the bridal party consists of the bride and groom accompanied by unmarried friends as helpers. The groom has two men friends, one first and the other second in importance. The bride also has two helpers - two girl friends, one first and the other second in importance. The first best man must make speeches and serve out tea and beer, while the second best man just accompanies the bridegroom. The first bride's maid must address each guest as she serves out tea, while the second maid follows her with the teapot and the tin in which to collect money. On the wedding day the bride puts on her long dress of rose pink silk over white silk trousers. The bodice of the dress may be embroidered with silver

lamé. She may also wear the traditional leather shoes with pointed, curled toes. If it is a country wedding, the bride will wear a long black dress fastened with a sash. Since many bridal gifts take the form of jewellery, the bride will be decked out with necklace, earrings, bracelets and rings. She also carries a bouquet of flowers - gladioli are the favourite flowers. The bridegroom wears a western style suit. The bridesmaids at a town wedding may wear yellow, pink or red long dresses, after the Vietnamese style, like the bride's dress.

6. The wedding day The bridegroom goes to fetch the bride and feasts at her house with her guests early in the morning. The photographer takes the photographs - no-one smiles, and the bridal party and the bride's guests leave the house to the accompaniment of fire-crackers. The bride is thus escorted to the bridegroom's home where feasting begins again. First the bridegroom's relatives and the friends of his parents feast and return home after receiving the ceremonial cup of tea and giving their money gift in return. The feasting may continue for several hours, until late in the afternoon, the bridegroom's own guests begin to feast, all seated at a long table. Until that time, the bride and her retinue have been feasting on the bed in the bridal chamber, and have only showed themselves to go in procession serving the final cup of tea to guests. Guests do not return home until they have received this cup of tea.
7. Speeches and songs There are many stereotyped speeches and songs which must be made as an essential part of wedding etiquette. Under refugee conditions this etiquette and practices connected with it are being forgotten, or *are* falling into disuse. Traditionally, friends of the bride sing as they escort her to the bridegroom's home, and the bridegroom's friends sing to the newlyweds all night during their wedding night. Before drinking the health of the bridegroom's parents, his friends sing a certain song (see Text 1). However, there are certain speeches which are still made in common with Vietnamese wedding speeches. These are as follows:-
 - a- The speech that the chief bridesmaid makes to those to whom she serves tea. (This varies according to the person addressed; see Text 2).
 - b- The speech made in reply to the bridesmaid who serves tea. (This varies according to the person addressed; see Text 3).
 - c- The speech made by each guest to the bridegroom's parents upon leaving the feast.
 - d- The speech made by each guest to the bride and groom after the Bridegroom's parents have been greeted upon the guest's departure.

- e- The speech made by the bridegroom in welcome to his friends.
- f- The various speeches, debate-like in form, that the first best man and the bridegroom's guests may make, during the course of the ceremony when all the guests must drink a full cup of beer to the health of all present. If a guest provokes a debate, the one to lose the argument must drink two, three or four cups of beer. The first best man goes round filling up each cup before each guest drinks, and ensuring that the full cup is drunk.

8. After the wedding For three days, including the wedding day, feasting takes place at the bridegroom's home, and the bridal pair go visiting in their wedding attire. For a few months, or a few years, the pair will live with the husband's parents before setting up a house of their own.