

EAST ASIAN WEDDING TRADITION



LESSON ONE

ENGAGEMENT

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Marriage, often considered the most important event in the life of Eastern Asian people, is symbolic of the joining of two families. Thus, the parents of the perspective bride and groom get involved in the details of their children's engagement, wedding planning, ceremony, and reception from very early on.

In traditional Chinese society, engagements were arranged by parents and matchmakers, who often visited another family's home, seeking a proposal. Both families would then consult a fortune teller who analyzed the man's and the woman's birthdates, times of birth, names, and other vital information. If they are deemed compatible, a marriage arrangement is brokered.

In today's Vietnam, betrothal gifts, including food and cash are traditionally offered by the future groom's family to the bride's family. All gifts should be presented in even numbers, meaning that "good things double," according to Vietnamese culture. Once the bride's family accepts the gifts, the wedding cannot be called off lightly. After that, a wedding is planned.

Each family will make announcements to their relatives and friends by sending out "Double Happiness Cakes," baked with dragon and phoenix imprints on the styles, with fillings of lotus seed paste and red bean paste. Candles and paper-cut "Double Happiness" are often seen on an engagement day as well.

While some families may still opt for an arranged marriage or set their children up with their friends' children, most East Asian people now find their own soul mates and decide when to become engaged. In Vietnam, the man often presents the woman with a diamond ring.

While modern engagements often differ from the past, there are still many engagement traditions, including offering betrothal gifts and consultation with a fortune teller.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do the parents become involved in their children's engagement?
2. What does a Vietnamese man usually present to the woman at their engagement?
3. Why did a traditional Chinese family consult a matchmaker?
4. How did the matchmaker find a suitable spouse and make a marriage deal?
5. What is symbolic of happiness being doubled?

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