

MARRIAGE IN CHANGING JAPAN

Community and Society

Joy Hendry

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JOY HENDRY

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INTRODUCTION

A favourite topic of conversation in Japan is the question of what factors go towards creating a good marriage. The subject seems to hold great fascination for young and old alike, whether discussed from the standpoint of theoretical preferences or the practical details of a specific match. Nor is the interest merely academic. The sums of money associated with weddings and the establishment of a marriage are enormous, often representing the savings of years, and they seem to exceed by far the outlay expected for other ceremonial occasions. Over the centuries, various government attempts to limit such extravagance have met with little success. It was this apparently extraordinary interest in marriage which provided the inspiration for this book and I hope that the book in turn goes at least part of the way to explaining it.

The Japanese laws which concern family and marriage were changed completely after the Second World War and discussion about marriage often centres around the advantages or otherwise of the Western influence which helped to bring this about. An extremely modern couple may see their marriage as differing in no way from a Western one, but many marriages are still arranged largely by families through a go-between, which was the practice in pre-war Japan. Writings on the topic suggest that though modifications have been made to behaviour in response to the legal changes and imported ideology, many of the previous customs and attitudes persist. People getting married in Japan today usually have been brought up entirely in the post-war period and, even for old people, as much time has passed since the war as they lived through before and during it. It is the aim of this book to examine just how far marriage has changed during the lifetime of these older people, and, in areas where there has been little change, to attempt to explain why this should be so.

The basic method employed was the intensive field work of social anthropology which most successfully approaches institutions such as family and marriage in their total social context. As the investigation proceeded it became clear that this method was well suited even to an industrial and technologically highly-developed country such as Japan. The result is a book in which the greater part is devoted to a detailed and descriptive analysis of the social organisation of one community and the place of marriage in that community. I feel that this provides