

Omiai

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Omiai is a traditional method to find a spouse in Japan. It is an arranged meeting between two people looking for someone to marry. As many traditions are declining in Japan, fewer people rely on Omiai. According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, less than 10% of Japanese couples were married through Omiai in 1998 (cited in “Tying the Knot”). Omiai has a unique procedure based on its historical background and has both disadvantages and advantages in the present society.

Omiai started in Japan during the 12th century (“Omiai”). During this period, marriage was an agreement between two families, and children had no right to choose their own spouse. This system remained at least until 100 years ago. After World War II, many old Japanese systems were abolished, and arranged marriages became less common. Although Omiai still remains in Japan, there have been many changes. For instance, the modern Omiai shows more respect for the individuals’ feelings than for the family’s expectations, and there is little pressure to commit to the relationship.

In the modern Omiai, a mediator arranges the meeting based on the individuals’ interests and their parents’ suggestion. It is usually held at nice hotels or restaurants, and it is common for parents to attend. The mediator hosts the meeting and is responsible for helping to develop the relationship until the couple either break up or get married.

The disadvantages of Omiai usually arise from its limitations. It is no longer a marriage arrangement, but it is still not a free procedure for marriage between two individuals. Parents prefer to voice their opinion, and the mediator encourages them to make a decision about marriage in a short time. In fact, people usually make their decision regarding whether they want to marry within three to six months after Omiai (“Miaigo no”). Moreover, the focus is more on outward appearance than the real personality due to the lack of insufficient time and/or contacts. For example, it is common for a man with a good career to be considered a good husband. Therefore, Omiai is not suitable for a person who is not sure about a potential marriage or desires complete freedom in his or her marriage affairs.

Although Omiai is becoming less common because of its disadvantages, there are still some advantages. In Omiai, personal information such as name, address, education, occupation, family background, and even income is shown on a special leaflet with the individual’s picture. People can decide whether they want to meet the person based on such information. Furthermore, Omiai is different from regular dating, and it is convenient to end the relationship by telling the mediator that one is no longer interested. Therefore, emotional suffering is minimal, and it is easy to meet many people before making a decision. Thus, Omiai would be useful for individuals who desire marriage but do not have many chances to meet the opposite sex.

In brief, Omiai has changed to serve the current society. Compared with the traditional version, the modern Omiai has more flexibility to suit an individual. Clearly, there are both advantages and disadvantages, but the important thing is whether it suits the person who chooses to use it. Omiai might be a good way to find a serious relationship for someone who is too busy working or does not have many friends.

However, as the belief that marriage should happen after the establishment of good relationship gains popularity, Omiiai is diminishing in Japan.

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