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**Lesson: 10**

Wedding Customs in Southern, Central, and Northern Vietnam.

In Southern Vietnam, weddings are often characterized by their lively and vibrant celebrations. The region’s customs blend local traditions with influences from other cultures, due to the area's history of trade and cultural exchanges. Southern weddings tend to focus on the joyous and festive aspects of the occasion.

The ceremony typically begins with a "Lễ Dạm Ngõ" (engagement ceremony), where the groom's family visits the bride's house to ask for her hand in marriage. During this visit, both families exchange gifts, including betel leaves, areca nuts, and tea. These items symbolize respect and the union between the two families. After the engagement, the wedding preparations intensify, often with an elaborate reception party.

The wedding itself usually involves a formal procession where the groom’s family arrives at the bride's home with gifts, including money, jewelry, and food offerings. This procession, called "Lễ Rước Dâu" (bride-fetching ceremony), is a major highlight, marked by music, dancing, and a large feast. The Southern wedding banquet often features lavish dishes, such as roasted pig, fish, and a variety of sweets.

Southern weddings emphasize a celebratory mood, with music, dancing, and long-lasting festivities. The newlyweds may also visit the groom's family afterward for a formal reception. Overall, weddings in the South are fun, lively, and full of communal enjoyment, reflecting the region's outgoing and hospitable spirit.

Central Vietnam, particularly the areas around Huế and Da Nang, has a more reserved and formal approach to weddings. The region’s customs are influenced by the aristocratic culture of Huế, the former imperial capital of Vietnam. As a result, weddings in Central Vietnam tend to emphasize elegance, respect for tradition, and the importance of family heritage.

The wedding ceremony in Central Vietnam typically starts with a formal engagement ceremony, similar to other regions, where the groom’s family visits the bride’s family to ask for her hand in marriage. However, the exchange of gifts tends to be more formalized and focused on symbolic items, such as cakes, tea, and incense, to honor ancestors and ensure a blessed marriage.

The bride and groom’s attire is one of the defining features of weddings in Central Vietnam. Brides often wear the "áo dài" (traditional Vietnamese dress) in a more refined style, with intricate designs and silk fabrics. The groom may also wear a formal suit or the traditional "áo dài" in dark colors, adding a touch of sophistication to the ceremony.

The wedding banquet is a more intimate affair compared to the Southern region, focusing on a close-knit family gathering. The food is typically less extravagant, but still reflects the region’s culinary heritage, with dishes such as "bánh bèo" (steamed rice cakes) and "bánh cuốn" (rolled rice cakes). Central Vietnamese weddings emphasize respect, family bonding, and adherence to cultural rituals, with fewer festivities but a stronger sense of tradition.

In Northern Vietnam, wedding customs are deeply rooted in Confucian traditions, and the ceremonies tend to be the most formal of all regions. Northern weddings are marked by a strong focus on ancestor worship, family honor, and maintaining social status. The wedding ceremony is seen as a sacred and highly ritualistic event.

The engagement process, or "Lễ Dạm Ngõ," is similar to those in other regions, with the groom’s family presenting gifts to the bride’s family. However, the Northern wedding places particular emphasis on the formalities of the ceremony. The wedding ceremony, called "Lễ Cưới," usually includes elaborate rituals such as incense offerings to ancestors, asking for blessings and ensuring the continuity of family lines. Both families exchange gifts of gold, jewelry, and betel leaves.

The attire in Northern weddings is also traditional and formal. The bride typically wears a more elaborate "áo dài" or a "yếm" (a traditional gown), and the groom may wear a "som" or formal suit, depending on the family’s status. The processions, including the bride-fetching ceremony, are done with strict etiquette and precision.

Northern wedding receptions are often held in venues such as family homes or banquet halls, where food is served in a formal manner, including traditional dishes such as "chả lụa" (Vietnamese pork sausage) and "bánh chưng" (square sticky rice cakes). These meals are meant to symbolize good fortune and unity. The atmosphere at Northern weddings tends to be quieter and more dignified, with an emphasis on the significance of the union rather than extravagant celebrations.