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Marriage and the Australia-Japan relationship

One comment heard after the Australia-Japan Millennium Conference held in April 2001 was that the Australia-Japan relationship was like a middle-aged marriage – comfortable and stable, but not exciting. It is an interesting metaphor within which to view the relationship between the two countries, and provides a framework for a discussion of Australian-Japanese marriages.

There have been many types of marriage between Japanese and Australians over the past one hundred or so years. Although the Japanese war brides who came to Australia in the 1950s are a prominent group, it is little known that a number of Australian women married Japanese men in the prewar years. Most people believe that the “natural” balance in such marriages is that the husband is Australian and the wife Japanese. In my talk I will discuss the reasons for this general view, and attempt to explain it from the point of view of fluctuating ways of conceptualising the Other in the context of Australia-Japan relations. I will also explore the special contribution which such unions have made to relations between Australia and Japan.