

Maeda Koichi
and Hana, his
Vietnamese wife

A CULTURAL JOURNEY

Maeda Koichi, general director of Cybridge Asia, considers his time in Vietnam a cultural journey on which he discovers himself and life from daily routines

By Ban Cao

Maeda Koichi once never thought of leaving Japan where he was so accustomed to the automatic toilet. But all of a sudden, he voluntarily left home for Vietnam, and soon afterward, married a Vietnamese wife.

The path to marriage

When asked what he thought about a popular southern saying which claims that the best place to live in is a European house and the best wife to live with is a Japanese, Maeda bursts into laughing and says, “If Hana had been an American, I would have married an American. If Hana had been a Japanese, I would have married a Japanese. I married a Vietnamese because she is Hana.” Hana is the Japanese name of Maeda’s wife, whose Vietnamese name is Minh Hieu.

Recalling the path leading to his marriage, Maeda, now 32, is still deeply moved. Arriving in Vietnam in 2013 when the Japanese language is not as popular as it is now, Maeda found it hard to communicate with the Vietnamese. Even his local staff members did not completely comprehend what he meant. Then came Hana—who later entered into his life—as his interpreter. She soon became his reliable colleague who was under pressure at work as heavy as he was.

“What frustrated me, including intolerable things and business hardships, I transferred it all to Hana,” Maeda says. “She had to tolerate me. Sometimes, she cried uncontrollably because of enormous pressure.”

What will be will be. After a time working together, Maeda and Hana fell in love. To Maeda, the hardest time was to seek approval from Hana’s parents for their marriage. As a

Japanese tradition, the man has to come over the woman’s house on his own to ask for permission. He must be accepted before going back to his family to inform his own parents. Maeda wanted to do the same in Vietnam. However, one year in Vietnam and the time they knew each other was not enough for him to polish his Vietnamese. His poor command of the local language made him so nervous. He repeated time and again to learn by heart the sentence he intended to say to Hana’s parents: “Chúng con kết hôn nha!” (Please allow us to marry each other!)

But that sentence “backfired” because Hana’s parents were quite unexpected not knowing what had happened. It took Maeda quite a while to prove his worth to persuade his would-be bride’s parents.

“Now my parents even love him more than they love me,” says Hana. “They have only two daughters. My

husband is so kind and polite. He always wins old people's hearts."

Hana says when her paternal grandmother passed away, Maeda came to her house to be in mourning although they had not yet got married. When he was alone at the place, Maeda lighted incense sticks on his own. Hana's parents felt pleased with that, she says.

Vietnamese culture

Inevitably, intercultural marriage will breed differences and discontent. However, what has kept Maeda and Hana so close together until now is their straightforwardness and forgiveness.

"Maeda's major in university was literature and history," says Hana. "Sometimes, he told historical stories continuously till late at night and I was so sleepy, but he didn't stop."

Maeda talks about their quarrels. "I take care of the laundry while Hana is in charge of the dishwashing," he says. "But sometimes she keeps bickering over my untidiness. I'd say in Japan, a son cares nothing about it because his mother does it all."

In Vietnam, family members maintain close relations. But it is not the case in Japan. Maeda says several times he was caught by surprise because Hana's sister knocked at the door in a beautiful morning without prior notice. In Japan, it's privacy. Whoever—whether he or she is father, mother, sister or brother—must notify a family ahead of a visit.

Maeda recalls the time he was back home in Yokohama, his hometown. He then worked in Tokyo, a two-hour train ride from Yokohama. When Maeda told his colleagues that he visited his parents every two months, some teased at him because they would make it once in two or three years.

Therefore, Maeda was surprised when Hana visited her parents every two weeks. Previously, Maeda once in a while sent some gifts to his parents. But now, influenced by Hana, he has sent gifts and called home

more frequently, which pleases his mom and dad much.


Maeda says Japanese are meticulous in social etiquette and formalities. It's good but it comes with heavy pressure. Many Japanese dare not to speak out what they think because they are afraid they may hurt others. Things are easier in Vietnam where many people find it comfortable to express themselves, or ask for or offer help, says Maeda.

"When a Japanese says one word, you have to figure out the 10 ones he implies in that single word," he says. "You would be highly appreciated if you are able to deduce what that single word means. In many companies, leaders require their subordinates to infer what they say or read their mind. Some employees are under so heavy pressure that they commit suicide."

But it's different in Vietnam. Maeda has come to know that if he fails to make things totally clear to his Vietnamese staff, "they won't get them done right." And open communications between the boss and employees have been much better.

Asked about the things he likes in Vietnam, Maeda says it's interesting to live in a dynamic city such as HCMC because he can witness its development day by day. In Japan, this process could be seen only in the 1980s but it is much slower now.

Of course, there are ugly things in Vietnam that Maeda disapproves of. First, many Vietnamese have acquired the habit of throwing rubbish out of their cars. Plenty of Vietnamese are so easy-going that they disturb others. Sometimes, local people play music so loud that it may be deafening to the people around.

Maeda knows that some Japanese were intolerant of the local conditions and have returned to Japan. However, one of the things that have prompted him to be loyal to Vietnam is Vietnamese themselves. "My Vietnamese staff have shared my wishes," he says. "They are making great progress and altogether are taking our company to the next level. This is a great inspiration to me." 

EXPAT NEWS

HCMC COURT GRANTS MOTHER CUSTODY OF DAUGHTER

Last Wednesday, May 31, the HCMC People's Court decided to uphold a verdict by a court in France's Albi and allow it to be implemented in Vietnam, according to *Phap luat TPHCM*.

The French court has ruled that Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen, a 32-year-old Vietnamese, has the custody of her daughter who was taken away by his father, Ste'phane Azais, a French national.

According to Huyen, she met and lived with Azais without official marriage before they broke up. In 2014, Huyen gave birth to their daughter whose birth certificate was given by the French diplomatic agency in Vietnam.

However, when the baby was three months old, Azais took her to France. Huyen later went to France to conduct legal procedures for taking her daughter back. In June 2016, the French court in Albi ruled that Azais had to return the baby to Huyen.

However, after the court verdict, Azais brought her daughter back to Vietnam and ever since the mother had not met her. Huyen has sought a decision by the HCMC Court to uphold the French court's verdict.