



## Asia Research Briefs

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The York Centre for Asian Research (YCAR) is one of Canada's largest and most active communities of scholars working on East, South and Southeast Asia as well as Asian migrant communities around the world.

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compliance with the powerful, normalizing ideology of "good wife, wise mother" that Meiji government officials, intellectuals and social reformers promoted in full force. They also encourage us to re-examine their husbands' ability to uphold this ideology.

### Matsuda Kama: A Temporary Spouse

Given the delicate and elusive nature of the practices relating to temporary marriage, wife sale and wife brokerage, I draw on accounts culled from a wide range of sources and archives in the Japanese and English languages. Among a number of primary source materials that I have examined, I found an unusual personal notice in *Nippu Jiji*, the largest Japanese newspaper in Honolulu at the time. On 13 October 1937, Matsuda Kama, a sixty-year-old issei woman from Okinawa, at this time a Honolulu resident, announced in this newspaper her departure for a visit to Japan on the same day. She acknowledged her gratitude to Shimabukuro Kiyoshi, the owner of a Japanese immigrant hotel, for having obtained a permit from the US federal government for her re-entry into the country on her return from the imminent trip to Japan.

Matsuda stated that she had arrived in Hawai'i in 1908 under the pretense of being the spouse of an unnamed Japanese man who travelled with her from Japan. She was then thirty-one years old. She openly admitted that she travelled across the Pacific with a pseudo-husband posing as a married couple and together performing temporary marriage. Like Matsuda and her fellow traveller, an unknown but significant number of issei women and men from Japan crossed the Pacific Ocean under similar arrangements only to end the marriage upon landing in Hawai'i. While Matsuda was silent on the reasons for putting the notice in the newspaper, it illuminates the malleable and practical nature of marriage among issei women and men at the turn of the century. This reveals the powerful culture of ordinary Japanese immigrants. Moreover, it suggests a world apart from the one based on the Meiji-era ideal of womanhood that Japanese and American officials promoted and sought to impose. Through my research I seek to shed further light on the malleability of marriage practices among issei women and men in Hawai'i and the power and limitation of the Japanese state, in collaboration with the American state, to impose its gender ideals.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 7.

*One of several papers produced on this topic is "Recrafting Marriage in Meiji Hawai'i, 1885–1913," published in Gender & History (Volume 31, Issue 3) in 2019. This article received the 2020 Canadian Committee on Migration, Ethnicity and Transnationalism Article Prize, awarded by the Canadian Historical Association.*