

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
Community Analysis Section
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ENGAGEMENT AND MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN A RELOCATION CENTER¹

Before Evacuation:

Prior to evacuation the engagement and marriage customs in Japanese communities on the Northwest Coast largely followed the traditional Japanese patterns. Marriages among Japanese were usually arranged by go-betweens (baishakunin). The go-between's function was to make all the necessary arrangements concerning the wedding. He also assumed responsibility for the happiness of the couple after the marriage. Sometimes these 'baishakunin' acted as go-betweens in name only, that is, an individual allowed his name to be used although the families or individuals concerned made all their arrangements themselves. Using the name of two individuals as 'baishakunin', however, satisfied the traditional patterns. There were usually two 'baishakunin' for a marriage, one representing the bride's family and the other representing the bridegroom's family.

Even before evacuation most Nisei were choosing their own mates, although for the sake of form the traditional customs were observed and 'baishakunin' chosen. There were, however, a small number of arranged marriages in which the bride and groom scarcely knew each other. These usually took place between quiet individuals or in families where the parental control was very strong and Japanese customs strictly observed. Conflict would occasionally arise in such families where a son or daughter would insist on their own choice. Parents were usually aware of their sons' or daughters' attachments although at times they were not. Sometimes the individuals themselves informed the parents of their choice, although frequently relatives or close friends did so. In such cases these individuals would then act as go-betweens for later arrangements.

At the time of the engagement announcement, a betrothal present known as 'yuino' was presented by the bridegroom to the bride. The amount of the 'yuino' was sometimes determined by the go-between, although in most cases it depended largely upon the economic status of the party involved; it ranged from \$100 to \$500. The bride customarily

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returned part of this amount (usually one-half) to the bridegroom's family several days after the receipt of the gift. It was not considered good form for the bride to keep the entire amount.

Quite often the young people themselves arranged for the engagement party to which close friends and relatives were invited. These parties were usually held in the home of the bride's family. Refreshments are served and speeches in English and Japanese given. The more elaborate engagement parties before evacuation were held at a Chinese style restaurant (usually owned by Japanese) where the 'yuino' was presented with ceremony. The bride's family paid for the expenses of this engagement party.

Following this engagement party the go-betweens arranged the details of the wedding which could follow immediately or as much as a year later. The marriage ceremony usually was held in a Christian or Buddhist church, although occasionally marriages were performed at the bride's home. Most Nisei brides wore the traditional western style veil and wedding gown. However, they usually changed into a Japanese kimono for the wedding reception. Ice cream, cake, sandwiches, and punch were occasionally served at the church. A reception was generally held either at the bride's home or in a big restaurant (usually Chinese style), where an elaborate dinner was provided. As many as 200 guests might be invited to such a dinner reception. The guests were expected to bring gifts to this reception and a 'receiver' was at the entrance and carefully recorded the name of the giver in order to have their names and addresses so that a letter of thanks could be sent. These gifts were usually presents of money, ranging from \$2.00 to \$10.00. Sometimes a couple would receive enough gift money to cover all the reception expenses.

Within the relocation centers:

With the exception of the physical differences, most of the engagement and marriage customs carried out within the relocation center are much like the patterns followed before evacuation. Marriages within the center are arranged in three ways: by go-betweens, by parents, and by the couple themselves.¹ While some of the Nisei get married in a very quiet fashion with only a few friends and relatives in the wedding party, there are just as many families who give 'Yuino Kin', and have an elaborate wedding and a large reception in the dining halls. The Issei believe that marriage is a sacred ritual and therefore should follow the

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In at least one of the relocation centers a matrimonial service bureau has been formed which offers 'go-between service, checking of family records, and marriage advice.

traditional pattern. The Nisei, even though they make their own choice of a mate, accede to their parents' wishes in following these traditional patterns. Thus, most marriages within the center are still arranged by the 'baishakunin', although this may be in name only. The couple usually go to a neighboring town to be married if they are Christian, but many of the marriages are performed in the center. Even though the marriage may take place in the nearby town, the bridal couple return to the center the same day to be present at a reception which generally is held that evening in the block dining hall. If the party is small, it may be held in an apartment. Liquor is sometimes served at these small parties but not very often at the larger receptions. Refreshments consist of several kinds of sandwiches, fried chicken, potato salad, jelly, makisushi, barasushi, tempura, cakes, etc. (Makisushi is rice flavored with vinegar; barasushi is rice mixed with vegetables, like carrots, gobo, eggs, etc.; and tempura is food fried in salad oil or other vegetable oil.) In addition to these formal receptions, Nisei girl friends of the bride usually have 'shower' parties before the wedding.

Relocation has brought about a few new problems with respect to marriage. Boys in the army or on indefinite or group leave may meet a girl outside and get married without the knowledge or consent of their parents. Girls on the outside usually get their parents' consent, although not always. Such marriages are usually criticized by the Issei. There are several reasons why such marriages are not approved. The older Japanese are very conscious of status and family position, and many Issei are afraid that their sons or daughters will marry into the despised Eta¹ group which would disgrace the entire family. The family genealogy of the prospective bride or groom is always carefully checked by the families for this reason and for signs of certain diseases which are regarded with horror. There are three maladies, tuberculosis, insanity, and leprosy, which are feared by the older Japanese and which are considered a disgrace. The Issei distrust the marriages which take place outside without these precautionary measures. They feel that the Nisei are too young to make a proper investigation of the family background. Marriages between boys from the relocation centers and girls outside about whose families nothing is known are extremely hard for Issei to accept. In some instances where this has happened, the parents in the center have created quite a fuss.

Evacuation and relocation have accelerated greatly the assimilation of Nisei with regard to marriage customs. The physical setup of the relocation center prohibits many of the old traditional customs, and consequently, some of them are gradually disappearing.

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The Eta were the outcast group of Japan.