

[Japan Society-New York: Documents Project. (1800-1890, Daily Life)]

**Document 26: “It is possible that they will run away together.” Village headman’s draft report on a scandalous affair in Saitama, 1855.**

*Draft Copy (with the headman’s strikeouts maintained as they were in his original document)*

Kizaemon’s son Kisaji has been having an affair with Kanroku’s widow’s daughter Sono for quite a long time, and recently there has been an incident. Kizaemon appealed to the village officials to disinherit his son, and village officials (*yakunin*) appointed mediators to negotiate a settlement. The contents of the private settlement follow:

On the fifth of this month, Kizaemon submitted a request to the village office. Relatives and members of the five-family group (*goningumi*) have expressed their disapproval of the relationship, but Kisaji refused to listen to them. Since he was exceedingly stubborn, there was no choice but to petition to remove him from the family register.

On the sixth of this month, Kanroku’s widow submitted a petition. Her daughter Sono had been having an affair with Kisaji, and ~~she became pregnant~~ there were certain circumstances. Kanroku’s widow appealed to intermediaries. ~~The two lovers were supposed to return the personal effects that they had exchanged during their relationship, but Kisaji had refused. As a result,~~ negotiations for a private settlement did not go smoothly, and she asked the authorities to intervene.

As stated above, requests were submitted by both parties. Village officials called the mediators Hidekichi and Ryūsaburō to the village office, and told them to help settle the issue. ~~On the evening of the tenth of this month, Sono gave birth. There were no complications, and~~

~~both mother and child are healthy.~~ The intermediaries discussed the matter with both parties several times, and finally they were able to negotiate a settlement, the details of which follow. Kisaji was called to the village office, where officials and the intermediaries strongly expressed their disapproval. Kisaji agreed that he had been in the wrong, and he ~~(submitted a statement agreeing to end his relationship with Sono and to have no further contact with her. But he also said that they had been involved for seven years, and after all that time, it would be difficult to simply abandon her. She should stay with her mother until she had recovered from the birth~~ submitted a statement agreeing to end his relationship with Sono, but the village officials find it difficult to overlook recent events; it was decided to send her to Kisaji's relatives. After that, she should be married into another family. ~~When Kanroku's widow was informed of this plan, she objected to the idea of sending Sono to Kisaji's relatives. Instead, she would prefer to leave Sono in the custody of the intermediaries.~~ After negotiating again with both parties, it was decided that ~~Sono should remain with her mother until she has recovered from childbirth (as she is ill right now) and then~~ Kisaji's relative Sennosuke of Arako village and three intermediaries will be appointed as her guardians. The matter should be settled according to Sono's wishes. Furthermore, all parties need to guard against the possibility that the two will form further attachments, but relationships between men and women are complicated, and it is possible that they will run away together. In this case, they should be apprehended and separated.

Yabuta village, 1855, submitted to officials' office

*Kisaji's Letter of Apology, submitted to Hidekichi and Ryūsaburō*

I became intimate with Kanroku's widow's daughter Sono, and when both our parents heard about it, they submitted a request to the village office asking that the two of us break off



our relationship. Mediators facilitated the negotiations and told us to stop seeing each other. We have consented, and from this day forward we will not meet anymore. We will return all the keepsakes we have exchanged. I have lost the hair ornament she gave me, so I request permission to return the monetary value of the ornament in its place. Even if I find it later, I will not ask for the money back.

**Source:** Hayashi-ke monjo #3487, Saitama-ken Archives. Translation by Amy Beth Stanley.

### **Context.**

Ideals and realities differed as often in Japan's dynamic, premodern villages as they did in the world of the governing samurai. One thing that set villages apart, however, was the social impact of "improper" behavior, because the small populations and intense daily interactions of rural life meant that actions rarely could be kept anonymous. What happened in one family had an impact on everyone. For this reason, most villages had well developed mechanisms for dealing with disputes and disruptive behavior. Indeed, the mediation procedures described in this 19<sup>th</sup>-century document may be more significant than the actual disputes.

### **Questions.**

1. Describe the village's process for resolving conflicts: both the kinds of steps that were taken and the goals of the process.
2. What made Kisaji's behavior upsetting enough to bring village officials into the conflict?
3. Analyze the materials that the headman who drafted this statement decided to strike out before preparing his final manuscript. Why do you think he decided not to use some of his original material?



**Terms.**

*Saitama*. The region (today, a prefecture) that lies north and west of present-day Tokyo.

*Goningumi* (five-family group). One way that Tokugawa-era officials organized and controlled rural regions was to divide villages into groups of five families each, with members of a group mutually responsible for each other's social and material needs, as well as for their behavior.

*Family register*. The household registers, or *koseki*, were the official, public records in which the biographical details of all Japanese were recorded. To be removed from the *koseki* was to be banished from the family.