



GWEN MURAKA / Rafu Shimpō

From left: Valerie J. Matsumoto, Tritia Toyota and Yasuko Takezawa discuss the migration of Japanese women to the United States at a program at the West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple on March 3.

Toyota: Women Lead Recent Wave of Japanese Migration to U.S.

WLA Buddhist Temple hosts discussion of "Intimate Strangers."

By GWEN MURAKA
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A bustling Japanese Institute of Sawtelle is an example of the ways the Japanese American community has evolved with the migration of Japanese women seeking more opportunities since 1980.

A capacity crowd at West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple was on hand for a discussion of the findings of Tritia Toyota, who has written about the phenomenon in her new book, "Intimate Strangers: Shin Issei Women and Contemporary Japanese American Community, 1980-2020."

The event was sponsored by Japanese Institute of Sawtelle, Sawtelle Japantown Association, West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple, West Los Angeles United Methodist Church, UCLA Asian American Studies Center, UCLA Asian American Studies Department and UCLA Nikkei Student Union.

Toyota, a research scholar at the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, used data to counter the often-heard observation that the Japanese American population is shrinking; it's just not the same as the traditional



Toyota speaks with Marlene Sakamoto (right) at signing for her new book, "Intimate Strangers."

model that has defined the community since before World War II.

Toyota was joined on the panel by Valerie J. Matsumoto, a professor in the Department of History and the Department of Asian American Studies, and Yasuko Takezawa is a visiting professor serving as the Terasaki Chair in U.S.-Japan Relations with UCLA Terasaki Center for Japanese Studies.

The typical migrants in this new generation are young women from highly urbanized areas such as Osaka

and Tokyo who came to the U.S. alone seeking more economic opportunities. Toyota shared some stories from the women she interviewed.

"I was the oldest employee, so my boss fired me. Other women were younger and were making less money," said Mariko, a woman interviewed for the book.

Most are not highly educated and come from middle class or working class families. When they arrived in the U.S., they found work in sales

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and service jobs in places like Little Tokyo or Sawtelle due to their limited skills. The influx of Japanese migrants can be found in the U.S. Census.

According to the U.S. Census, in 1980 there were 336,000 households where Japanese was spoken. In 2000, the number grew to 477,000, a 42 percent increase. Toyota attributed this to Japanese mothers speaking to their multiracial children.

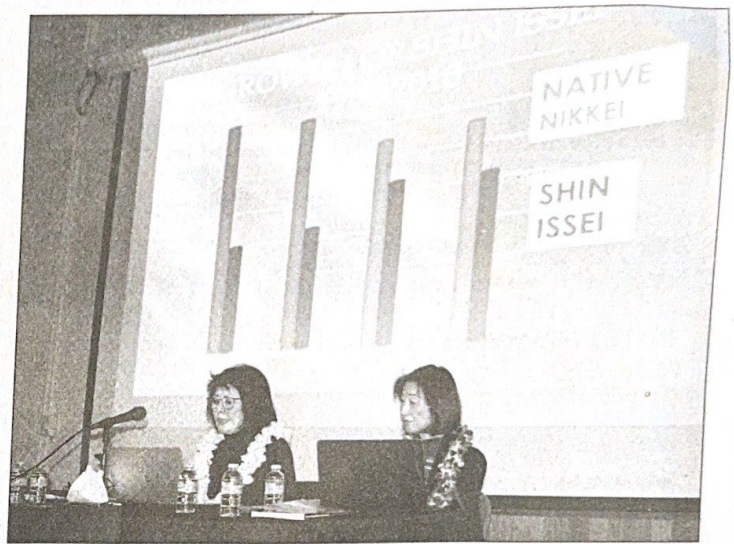
These families are evident at the Japanese Institute of Sawtelle, where Toyota described a trip for the students to Manzanar in 2012. Institutions like JIS have become vital gathering places for a new Nikkei community. A 2017 LTSC needs assessment found a need for more programs aimed at families with

Japanese-speaking parents.

An important place of connection between the established Japanese American community and the new Shin Issei community can be found in JA history. Toyota explained in 2012 the JIS board decided to sponsor a trip to Manzanar. Shin Issei moms served as chaperones for the kids and were surprised by what they learned. Japanese American history is still largely unknown in Japan. Although, Takezawa said that programs such as the Japanese American Leadership Delegation have made some strides in addressing the knowledge gap.

For the parents who went to Manzanar, the experience was profound, as Toyota shared.

One parent said, "The Shin Nisei have to know the history of the camps and about Japanese Americans during the war and how difficult (it was). Yes, it was very racist. Racism still exists, I think so."



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Tiritia Toyota and Yasuko Takezawa speak about the growing Shin Issei population in the United States.