

The critical reporting in the press of the relationship between a royal and a commoner has illustrated the dark side of the Japanese media.

The BBC's James Williams has been discussing the case with The Kootneeti's Indo-Pacific Editor, Duncan Bartlett.

James Williams: *"I love Mako. I would like to spend my one life with the person I love."*

With those words. Kei Komuro, the new husband of princess Mako, sought to set the seal on his marriage to the niece of the Japanese emperor. It was a romantic gesture – the look on his wife's face left no doubt of that. But it followed years of controversy over the couple's relationship and an unprecedented marriage ceremony. Princess Mako spoke at a news conference after their paired-down wedding.

Mako: "I understand there are various thoughts on my marriage with Kei. I'm very sorry to the people who we have troubled. Also, I feel gratitude towards people who cared and quietly worried about me and to people who are not misled by the non-factual information and still continue to support me. Kei means everything to me. For us, this marriage was a necessary choice to live while carefully protecting our hearts".

Now the couple plans to settle in the USA.

Duncan Bartlett is editor of Asian affairs magazine and was a BBC Tokyo correspondent. Thanks very much for joining us Duncan. Why has this story caused so much controversy in Japan?

Duncan: Mako says she hopes that people won't be misled by false information and that shows that this relationship has been the focus of very intense media scrutiny since it became public about four years ago.

At one point, the couple almost broke up and their marriage plans were put on hold. Former Princess Mako is the eldest daughter of the crown prince Fumihito and she's the niece of the current emperor.

If you read the Japanese media, you might come away with the impression that her father, Prince Fumihito, is somewhat disapproving of his new

son-in-law. It's a status issue, apparently, so the media have been focusing on this apparent snobbery within the Royal Family.

When I talk to people about the characteristics of Japanese society, they often say to me they think the Japanese are very polite. They're patient people. They're respectful. All of which is true. But there is another side to them which this whole case has revealed. And that is the press, including tabloids, gossip magazines, and social media make outrageous claims about celebrities and public figures and the Royal family. The media have been absolutely feasting on stories about Mako and Kei.



Image source: BBC

James: This wedding was delayed, as I understand it, because of controversy around some payments made to the mother of Kei Komuro.

Duncan: That's correct, James. The gossip is not so much about the couple's relationship, although that generated plenty of comment. The real issue here is about Kei's mother, Kayo. That's the man's mother. Her former fiancé claims that she borrowed money from him that needs to be repaid.

Frankly, that's a personal issue. But because of this Royal connection it's been constantly discussed in the media, including on TV panel shows.

Comedians are making fun of it in quite a nasty way, and this is very hurtful to Mako. So,

she says she is now suffering from mental health problems, a form of post-traumatic stress.

At that press conference this afternoon, she said she just needs a peaceful life in a new environment. My question though, is whether moving to New York, where the husband is a lawyer, is the most peaceful environment that they could choose.

James: There's some overtones of another Royal family here, isn't there? Japan is a very conservative and traditional society. By law, married couples have to share the same surname. It's a legal requirement. There's a lot of tradition in Japan and maybe that is why this marriage has really divided society.

Duncan: Yes, there is a lot of tradition in Japan, although the role of women in society is changing a lot. There are currently laws that forbid women from ascending to the throne or becoming an empress. A big debate is going on in Japan about whether those laws should be changed.

But here we have a situation whereby a former member of the Royal family is now leaving. This has happened before. There was another Royal star in Japan called Sayako. She's the daughter of the former emperor, Akihito.

She married outside of the Royal family in 2005 and she has now become a commoner. She took up a job as an ornithologist, a birdwatcher and her specialism is kingfishers. She's had to learn how to live life on the outside. So she had to take driving lessons and she had to learn how to shop in a supermarket, a new skill for her. But she did accept a gift from the Imperial family of about a million pounds. So that presumably makes the shopping expeditions a bit easier.

This interview was broadcast on [B](#) Gavin Fischer.

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