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Richard Ronald and Allison Alexy (Eds.) Home and Family in Japan. Continuity and Transformation. New York: Routledge, 2011.

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The essays in this collection are composed by a range of contributors who combine their anthropological and sociological expertise to explore various aspects of Japanese home and family life. They address such issues as the threat to the support of the elderly; an alarming increase in childless couples and unmarried adults; changes in the provision of housing as a result of an unfavorable economic climate and neoliberal policies; the gender imbalance in qualifying for benefits; and alternative living arrangements, among other issues. The essays demonstrate how the Japanese family structure is being transformed, contested, and reimagined while continuing to reflect the traditional *ie* norms¹, although those are being transformed as well.

Chapter One foreshadows the remainder of the essays by providing background information. Richard Ronald and Allison Alexy discuss the “Japanese concept,” which denotes a wide range of issues, including not only actual houses and the families that inhabit them but also conceptual notions such as loyalty to one’s place of employment and to the nation at-large. The authors discuss the fact that the Meiji Code (1898) and the Family Registry System (1871) established uniformity and the adoption of particular practices. Specifically, the Family Registry System required all family members to be registered in order to benefit from any legal rights. These two regulatory systems established the system of taxation and land ownership and indirectly continued promulgating patriarchal authority in law. The authors underscore socio-political pressures on the state as “a provider of welfare and care” (12). Despite the current increase of nuclear families that deviate radically from *ie* norms, the authors predict that “normative family relationships will persist, albeit in terms of far greater diversity and in forms we may not yet recognize” (18).

Brice White, in “Reassembling Familial Intimacy,” writes that the Japanese bureaucracy has always had a tendency to manage familial relationships by blaming them for a wide range of society’s ills, including youth delinquency, problems with the treatment of the elderly, and the inadequate number of newborns as potential contributors to the society’s welfare, etc. According to White, there is a “mismatch between the state construction of Family and the realities of families” (26). He discusses four alternative visions of the Japanese family. White’s four examples aim to “illustrate the lack or loss of familial intimacy and simultaneously propose solutions for its reassembly” (41). By and large, these examples illustrate, whether intentionally or not, certain nostalgia for things lost, though creatively reimagined and projected into the future.

In “Reforming Families in Japan,” Takeda Hiroko addresses the structural reform of the Koizumi and post-Koizumi governments in relation to contemporary family life. Hiroko provides a critique of neoliberal policies that ignore the actual structure of the modern families and impose normative expectations. Karl Jacob Krogness in “The Ideal, the Deficient, and The Illogical Family,” focuses on *koseki seido*, the Japanese administrative household registration system, which often defines family units differently than these units perceive themselves with respect to their actual living arrangements. Krogness employs various examples to depict the

¹ The *ie* is a Japanese term which translates directly to “household.” It can mean either a physical home or refer to a family’s lineage. It is popularly used to refer to the “traditional” family structure. The symbolic definition of *ie* includes the cultural notion of the physical processes of kinship, such as those relating to mating and procreation.

complexity of 'koseki,' which in turn mirrors the complexity of Japanese social structure. Krogness concludes by stating that "the koseki system most likely cuts through [people's] lives a swathe that is even wider than the one described here" (88). Despite its structural usefulness, it seems safe to assume that the koseki system might be prone to perpetuating negative stereotypes, achieved through the means of exclusion. This will become particularly apparent not only in the subsequent discussion of Japanese homelessness but also in relation to unwed mothers.

Ekaterina Hertog, in "I Did Not Know How to Tell my Parents, So I Thought I Would Have an Abortion," addresses the difficulty of being a single mother in Japan. She notes that because of limited welfare provisions, these mothers must often depend on the assistance of their parents. Receiving this assistance, however, can be problematic given the negative views of some of these parents on out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Hertog argues that given the economic constraints, accompanied by the changing generational attitudinal approaches to single motherhood, "The continuous [and] strong association of marriage with childbearing in Japan is striking" (109). The current state of Japanese economy makes any significant change unlikely. Here, in the case of single motherhood, we notice a commitment to traditional norms despite contemporary transformations.

Tomoko Hidaka, in "Masculinity and the Family System," focuses on the post-war Japanese conception of the *salarīman* or "salaryman"² as a representative of "the hegemonic form of masculinity" (112). The changes in the economy in the 1990s, which destabilized the corporate assurance of life long employment and its associated benefits, affected the image of salaryman, though men continue to be defined as the primary financial providers. Hidaka notes that the construction of masculinity is inseparable from the gender role in general and the marital bonds in particular. Hidaka notes, as do others in this selection, the significance of the Koseki Family Register as a means for preservation of certain values and approaches, even in cases of their inherent obsolescence.

Whereas Hidaka's attention was placed on men, Lynne Nakano, in "Working for an 'Appropriate Person'," focuses on single women ranging in age from 25 to 45 and living in Tokyo, which is considered "the center of singles culture in Japan" (131). Nakano addresses women's resistance to dominant forms of marriage, gender expectations, and the pressure to marry "on schedule" (132). In Nakano's articulation, these single women's experiences "transcend conventional understanding of women as rooted in home and family" (132). The idealized vision of the Japanese family and the means of support it attains does not match the Japanese reality, especially when a family does not fit the conventional model. The choices that single women make problematize the family model since they are aiming "to find meaning that transcends the current family and gender model" (148).

Yosuke Hirayama, in "Home Ownership, Family Change and Generation Difference," once again turns the reader's attention to the increase of unmarried adults and the close links between home ownership and family formation affected by this increase. The focus is placed on generational differences in relation to housing opportunities. Hirayama writes, "The housing ladder system of facilitating home ownership has provided many households with routes into mainstream society, which has been a key catalyst for enhancing social integration" (170). However, this expected social integration has not fully materialized because of social class inequalities, largely based on home ownership. Because being a homeowner is a mark of one's

² Following World War II, becoming a "salaryman" was viewed as a gateway to a stable, middle-class lifestyle. In modern use, the term carries associations of working long hours for little recognition, of being a cog in the corporate hierarchy. The term salaryman refers exclusively to men.

economic solvency, parents' inability to support their children marks these children as insolvent and affects their socio-economic status. This has a spiral effect since the decline in housing opportunity becomes translated into a decline in the fertility rate as more younger people decide to postpone having children or not to have any children at all. This decline is further accompanied by a decrease in the workforce. The connection between housing, fertility rates, and workforce indicates that "housing provision is a significant policy issue ... not only in terms of shelter but also in regard to social processes and transformation at large" (171).

Thus far, the essays in this collection have focused on the inhabitants of family homes along with the habits and tribulations of those inhabitants. Richard Ronald, in "Homes and Houses, Senses and Spaces," directs the reader's attention to these homes' architectural and aesthetic value as something culturally fundamental. He notes that one's physical home is a mark of "social interactions and cultural values" and highlights the significance of the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 in regard to Japanese architectural production, especially because of the "joint meaning of *ie* as both material homes and family units" (174). The development of nuclear family advanced a "considerable atomization" that affected the physical form of Japanese homes, transformed to better suit new societal patterns. The spatial organization of homes took the mediating function between social relationships and social system. This transformation sheds light not only on cultural meaning and societal values but also on how they are negotiated and regulated, e.g., the concept of inside as purity and the outside as impurity. This chapter demonstrates literal and figurative transformations of dwellings to account for societal changes. Ronald predicts that "future changes in urban environments are likely to be driven by the intensified fragmentation of households that began in the 1980s" (196). Here again, we note the persistent link to the past despite contemporary transformations.

The essays discussed thus far have only tangentially referred to homelessness and the formation of the underclass in Japan. Akihiko Nishizawa, in "The Changing Face of Homeless in Tokyo in the Modern Era," turns full attention to this issue. Here again, the *Koseki* system is invoked as having a direct impact not only on how every individual is "defined as a member of the *ie* family" (200) but also on how some individuals become effectively excluded from the nation-state and society. The *Koseki* system provided the criteria for being labeled a "bad" citizen. This criterion was based on the absence of a permanent address, family, or permanent work. To account for any Meiji period migrants, a temporary category, "Temporary Residence System," was created to note any homeless individual's original birth place and family household. Those who did not have any home to return to and any other working poor who had no means to build an economically sustainable life were labeled "uncivilized" or "wild creatures." The introduction of the concept of a welfare state after WWII did not drastically change the conditions of the urban underclass but rather introduced an additional normativity that included some discriminative measures. Rather than deal with these problems, homeless individuals were concealed through dispersion and segregation. The concealment mechanism further increased "[a] system of division" (207). The neoliberal policies of 1990s further increased the number of poor.

Sachiko Horiguchi, in "Coping with *Hikikomori*," focuses on a group of people characterized by the tendency for withdrawal. Sounding eerily similar to American youth often described as being antisocial or even sociopaths, *hikikomori* exhibit violence directed toward their parents and a tendency to contemplate or commit suicide. Horiguchi states that regardless of the underlying cause, *hikikomori* are viewed as "the ills of today," particularly in relation to contemporary Japanese families. Despite *hikikomori* not being formally diagnosed with mental

disorders, many parents acknowledge that their children at some point have been admitted to mental hospitals or diagnosed with mental disorders such as schizophrenia or manic depression. Horiguchi does not, however, provide any analysis of this problem and leaves the discussion to be primarily of a descriptive nature.

Allison Alexy, in “The Door my Wife Closed,” turns our attention to divorce in contemporary Japan and notes that “houses play a fundamental role in and explanation for divorce.” Alexy underscores the fact that houses play both a literal role (by providing spatial arrangements) and a figurative role (by representing normative expectations). Just as the household system plays a figurative role in the imagining of physical houses, physical houses can also play an integral role in resolving marital problems. Houses, Alexy argues, are “much more than mere repositories of capital,” and traditional *ie* norms continue impacting lives of contemporary Japanese families even when they are faced with marital problems.

The book concludes with the essay by Anemone Platz, entitled “Living apart Together,” which focuses on how older Japanese people “negotiate their housing arrangements, lifestyle questions, and social contracts within and beyond their families” (254). Platz’s analysis shows the centrality of parent-children relationships to any decision-making. Platz brings this collection of essays full circle by stating that “children or other family members remain the chief reference point when anticipating housing for old age” (267). Despite many transformations discussed in this selection of essays, the fact that family relations continue to be central and the role of the “house,” in its many manifestations, has not lost its saliency. In the words of Joy Hendry, this selection is “a gem for those who wish to understand more about the way life operates in Japan” (xviii). Her words capture the value of this collection quite accurately.

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