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## Book Review

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*Being Dead Otherwise* is about what else is going on in Japan around death and dying beyond well-known traditional mortuary practices. Japan's families, *ie*, grieve their dead members. Buddhism has long been Japan's mortuary cult, through which rituals a family gradually transforms its dangerous recently dead into its revered and supportive ancestors, giving their *ie* immortality. Anthropologist Anne Allison suggests that "considering the implications of this rearticulation of deathcare away from familial others and onto or by the self – for Japan/ese but also beyond – is one of the major contributions of this book" (19).

Japanese discourse now understands its traditional handling of the dead to be facing a serious crisis on two fronts. "The dead in an era without family (亙亡き時代の死者) (*ie naki jidai no shisha*)" (18), are very largely the elderly found long after they have died lonely deaths unclaimed and uncared for by any family member, but also increasing numbers of foresightful singletons who know they can expect no support at the end of life from family members. And from the other direction, parish temples often can no longer find anyone to care for family graves, which is supposed to be the responsibility of the family, not of the parish priest. *Being Dead Otherwise* searches out the many and varied ways death and the dead are being unmade and remade in Japan today.

Allison discusses the rearticulation of deathcare under the complex paradoxical rubric "*necro-animism*," that means, in short, "the ordering and ritualizing of preparations for the dead in an age of shrinking sociality" (55), or, more specifically denotes "activities of endingness in which mortuary arrangements are being carried out by a range of actors and means, blurring the orders of self and other, human and nonhuman, person and thing" (19). *Being Dead Otherwise* develops three related themes in six paired chapters, contrasting past practices in the first with recent innovations in the second of the pair. Throughout these chapters, the author tries to answer the following questions: what happens to those people who die disconnected from family (Chapters 1 and 2); how are death and its prospect handled where there is no expectation of family to make these arrangements (Chapter 3 and 4); and how is ritual – the one constant requirement for the eternality of a life within or without a family – refashioned against the backdrop of these socio-demographic changes (Chapter 5 and 6). A final stand-alone Chapter 7 takes a more speculative tone by looking at how mechanization of care in urban society might replace the local parish temple and family attention.

The methods of the book are a lively combination of anthro-journalistic techniques for tracing out leads (here, through and with Japanese friends and acquaintances, fellow anthropologists and Japanese academics), visits to and interviews at telling sites, and the detailed exploration of current writings on

all sorts on death – formerly, at present and speculative – in Japan and elsewhere. Not in the least technical, this book is easily accessible to anyone interested in how contemporary Japan is preparing – or not – for this part of its aging future.

Along with a full discussion of typical Japanese ways of handling death, this book offers a wide selection of novel Japanese responses to death. The cultural-wide foundation which creates demand for all these infinite possibilities that can be imagined and marketed in a huge, wealthy, aging, technology-oriented urban society, is the continuing conviction of the imperishable human soul.

The author is “particularly interested in the contours of ambiguity” (27) in the unmaking of death, “a topography ambiguous still.” With such a touchstone, a reader might initially anticipate an examination with equivalent depth and precision of the always-said-to-be-vanishing *ie*, an ambiguous organization if there ever was one. Is this cultural conundrum, sometimes called family, sometimes household, sometimes simultaneously both the physical and metonymic house, a domestic arrangement rooted in economic behavior, or an economic enterprise with a core of function of reproduction as well? The argument has been made that household and local corporate group are preferable to family and descent group because “these corporate groups are not kin groups, and though they involve kinship elements, economic factors and local political power-relations are more important” (Nakane 1967, vii).

Concern increases in Japan on how the earthly and spiritual remains of “the dead of the family-less era” should be handled. To understand this “family-less era” as well as the “family-less” dead, we must have a clear understanding of what has been subtracted. Unfortunately, Allison does not provide her reader with such a clear and correct understanding of *ie*. Throughout the book, the *ie* is said to be patrilineal. It is not and has never been. Japanese kinship does not distinguish agnatic kin in any way (Maeda 2010, 78). Both Japanese and English kinship terminology, called Eskimo and usual with bilateral descent, make the same distinctions among kin apart from sibling birth order. The Japanese *ie* is a household-centered, corporate stem-family with bilateral descent. It has three necessary features: perpetuity, only one married couple per generation, and an estate, material and spiritual.

An *ie* is not simply a group of related co-residents or a collection of scattered relatives who trace their descent from a common ancestor, it is “a corporate entity whose continuity supersedes the lives of its individual member-caretakers” (Robertson 2018, 66). As Jane Bachnik’s study of *ie* recruitment strategies concludes: “although ‘parents’ and ‘children’ do exist in the *ie*, its organization is not based on such relationships, nor is their existence necessary for its continuity. Kinship ... is merely one recruitment option for the group-defined continuity of the *ie*” (Bachnik 1983, 178). The form of residence characteristic of patrilineal societies keeps all married sons’ families together under their father’s roof and authority. This pattern is never found in Japan, among so many other interesting patterns.

Why say the *ie* is patrilineal if it is not? If not, why say anything? Does it matter if the *ie* is patrilineal or not? This flawed characterization of *ie* is reproduced in the analysis of death and mourning practices. On page 10, for example, Allison considers the concerns of a childless couple of which the husband “is a second son (thus not eligible to enter the family grave due to the rule of primogeniture).” But his ineligibility is in fact due to the exclusion of second sons from *ie* before or with the marriage of the successor (*atotsugi*); not because of primogeniture but because there can be only one married couple in a stem family in each generation. As Harumi Befu (1971, 45) observes, “Since the traditional family system required junior sons to move out of the family of orientation and set up their own stem families, it was inevitable for these newly established stem families to be nuclear in form.”

The exclusion of second sons from the stem family is as important to its continuity as is the location and marriage of a successor. Second sons, with their own marriage, begin a new *ie*. When they die before their wives, their wives continue that new *ie* and must either find a successor or see their *ie* end, leaving themselves, and their late husbands, bereft of mourners. Two women in this dire situation are discussed on pages 10 and 11. Connubial families – families which begin with a marriage and end with a divorce or death – do not have successors. *Ie* are not gone from Japan, they are not patrilineages, and they are the only kind of family Japan has, however diminished they seem compared to the imagined families of a century ago.

Allison aims to include a very wide range of cultural practices that can be associated with death and dying in Japan, from dolls sent to comfort soldiers facing death in WWII, to the emergence of radioactive Godzilla from Tokyo Bay, to mechanized parking garages for the souls and ashes of the dead to an annual ENDEX convention of businesses catering the end of life where the catchword is “*jibunrashii*” (‘do it your own way’) (54). Today’s ‘do it yourself’ marketing approach strongly evokes the anti-*ie* discourse of the inchoate postwar atmosphere which offered Japan’s small households the opportunity to “choose a suitable family life” (*kōtsugō na kazoku no arikata o erabitoru koto*) (Kumahara 1998, 37). Yet those families, too, were and remained *ie*, and what *ie* are makes all the difference for the treatment of the dead in Japan.

It may be that so much of this tenuous connection between the living and the dead revealed to us in such detail in *Being Dead Otherwise* has its origin in the always tenuous nature of the *ie*, a slender reed that requires a close fit with its surrounding community and the deep loyalty of its members. Where that community thins, individuals at the edge of and outside an *ie* may find themselves with vanishingly few resources to rely on, living, or dead otherwise.

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