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Theresa Southam

Teaching and Learning Centre, Selkirk College
tsoutham@email.fielding.edu

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“Must an anthropology of the elderly be about aging?” With this provocation, anthropologist Iza Kavedžija opens *Making Meaningful Lives*, a book in which she pursues prevailing issues in contemporary ‘aging’ Japan based on fieldwork in community salons for older adults. Her focus is on how ‘care’ is here maintained during a rapid demographic change and more specifically to “the moments when—against the odds or despite the challenges that face them—people manage to hold things in balance, and care works” (172). *Making Meaningful Lives* explores moral compasses over a large spectrum, from individuals at her ethnographic field sites—community salons—to civil society in Japan. The salons Kavedžija attends as her field sites are rooms, in storefront locations with tables and chairs, where older adults can pass the time and have a cup of tea. She pays particular attention to how the changing roles of the government, particularly in programs like these salons as well as home support for older adults, ripple down as everyday care.

In *Making Meaningful Lives*, care relates to an attitude expressed in Japanese as *ikigai*. Kavedžija says of *ikigai*, what and who one cares for is “closely related to purpose in life [and] sometimes considered the basis of *ikigai*”(3). The kind of care Kavedžija documents resonates with what is articulated in an *ethic of care*: a moral theory developed in the mid-eighties (Gilligan 1993; Noddings 1988). An *ethic of care* places emphasis on relationships, social networks, and other human interdependencies. Kavedžija’s research participants struggle to maintain the wellness of both care-receivers and caregivers. For example, newer generations in Japan can interpret *ikigai* as personal happiness, having perhaps seen their parents weight familial or work responsibilities at the expense of their own happiness. This sole focus on personal happiness might result in a loss of purpose in life, an outcome that is captured in the last of the five phases of the *ethic of care* as developed by Joan Tronto (2013). The first four may seem familiar: caring for, caring about, caregiving, and care receiving. However, the last, caring with, emphasizes the reciprocal nature of caring, where the carer must also receive some benefit. The ethnography *Making Meaningful Lives* examines how traditional interpretations of *ikigai* which include a “sense of contribution to the larger social whole”(2) can be maintained by not only caring for others but receiving, in turn, a life with purpose.

The chapters of *Making Meaningful Lives* analyze interviews with the salon’s members and organizers in relation to seven main themes: aging communities, mutual help, living well together, life stories, intimacy and interdependence, life as a path, and the good life. The first two chapters introduce readers to the field sites Kavedžija attended to in 2009—Shimoichi in old downtown Osaka and Awara in Fukui

Prefecture, Japan—and to some key concepts in Japanese cultures such as *ikigai*—the social value of a person’s life—and living “a good life,” a theme that emerged from her research. In Chapter 1, “Subjects of Care,” we learn that in the salons, care is done “through giving gifts, offering measured statements that are polite yet friendly, dropping in on each other, giving information and recommendations, taking up volunteering, and helping out”(7). These acts of caring, Kavedžija finds, are “intimately related to the idea of purpose in life, as these entwinements with others so often lie at the very heart of one’s sense of a meaningful existence” (8). Throughout the book, photos of the communities in which the salons are situated give a sense of the differences in the degree of urbanity that surround the two salons. In Chapter 2, “Aging Communities,” the author argues that salons create communities of care in a civil society that is struggling with demographic change. Kavedžija outlines how the government of Japan socialized care of older adults in response to the “perceived weakening and the limited capacities of families to care for the elderly” (26). The government introduced long-term care insurance (LTCI) in April 2000. LTCI is government funding for people over the age of 65 who need support to avoid full institutionalization or total reliance on family. The government funding is dispensed through both public and private providers. The salons are part of the distribution of this insurance as their staff organizes and pays home care providers.

Chapter 3, “Mutual Help,” explains how Kavedžija’s field sites benefited from the LTCI while maintaining volunteer programs. In doing so the organizations weighed the benefits of volunteering where rich social relations can be developed against the potentially excessive demands that result from thick social networks. Both volunteers and users are charged a membership fee with the assumption that someone who at first gives volunteer support might in turn become a recipient. For example, a young mother might help an older adult and later receive some babysitting support. This mutual aid is organized with a voucher system. Kavedžija argues that such a formalized exchange of services could help to restore the balance between social interdependence and autonomy. This seems unlike community care that is less organized. Still, in larger urban centres, more formalized solutions to care, like those Kavedžija describes in Japan, may indeed be a solution to the systematic unravelling of social networks that can be a casualty of neoliberal agendas.

In Chapter 4, “Living Well Together,” the balance between autonomy and dependence is further explored through the “personal but not intimate” (65) relationships that Kavedžija witnesses. There is an interesting discussion about how much *tatemae* persona—external and rule-bound—and how much *honne* persona—expression of one’s true self—occurs in the salons as well as how both personae can be cultivated throughout the lifecourse. Kavedžija explains that even when salon goers seem “all right” they might have difficulties of which their fellow salon goers are unaware. Outbursts from salon goers, although rare, are interpreted as possible expressions of one’s *honne* persona. Another communication form discussed is ‘talking practice,’ an integral part of coming together for tea in the salon. In the salons, dialogue on topics such as food, local geographies, politics, self-development, appearance, aging and health, death, family, and leisure can be *okeiko*. *Okeiko* indicates a kind of self-development that happens if the salon goers are self-reflective and making meaning of their lives through these exchanges.

In Chapter 5, “A Life in a Story,” model stories endemic to Japan, such as the ‘salary man’ and the ‘housewife’ are set against the life stories of some of Kavedžija’s research participants. Like Arthur W. Frank (2010), Kavedžija believes that our expectations are moderated by our life stories which “can only exist in relation to the others available in one’s culture or which circulate in society” (85). The meaning of our lives, Kavedžija posits, depends heavily on whether we adopt or resist model stories. Among her participants are older adults who followed and those who resisted model life stories. Both can be impactful in harmful and beneficial ways. The research participant Kawasaki-san resisted the model story of staying with one’s career throughout the lifespan by leaving teaching. Kavedžija narrates:

Kawasaki-san felt that his work in school was utterly ordinary and unchallenging, and he felt he couldn't bear to think that he would spend the rest of his time in such a way. He is a human being who needs stimuli: "That is my *ikigai*." It seems that Kawasaki-san sees himself as a person who likes a challenge and dislikes routine, who replaced the security of this mild employment with the challenging and often dangerous environment of his insurance company work. (97)

Chapter 6, "Intimacy and Independence," adds further evidence to recent findings about the importance of *intragenerational* communication. Whereas in the past most of the emphasis has been placed on the importance of *intergenerational* relations for older adults, she finds that her participants are building up networks *within* their friend groups, especially where family ties have weakened, and that these relationships can be as beneficial as those with family. A salon goer who did not appear as expected one day was sought out by other salon goers before her family thought to investigate. Her fellow salon goers found she was ill and helped with groceries and friendship. In the seventh and final chapter Kavedžija summarizes her findings. She reflects on whether her participants are rational actors in their self-development or if the choices that lead to the 'good life' are more a case of judicial opportunism.

In the end, Kavedžija responds to her own opening provocation: *Making Meaningful Lives* is not necessarily about aging, but about living well throughout the lifespan. In this book we learn about lives finding meaning and lives losing meaning. It is an intermixing of rich life stories, observations of the salons, and artful critiques of life story approaches and narrative identity. The participants' voices are directly quoted and remade as narratives by the author. *Making Meaningful Lives* will cause readers to reflect on how a society and country might respond to demographic changes with care. Similar increases in the percentage of the aging population are occurring worldwide and culturally specific caring responses are needed urgently. There are a few stunning gems in the text like "gratitude is not irrelevant" (159) which powerfully link to everyday care practices. Kavedžija herself says that "care in its multiple incarnations within efforts to live well offers a different perspective, one deeply embedded in everyday life" (172). Although participant voices are Japanese, an international public will benefit from the universality of the findings of the book such as the importance of mutual aid and care. If anything, the importance of these topics has been heightened during the pandemic.

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