

The “Crisis” of Sociality: Caring for the Dead Otherwise

Anne Allison

Responding to the record low birthrate and population decline of the year before, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida declared Japan “on the brink of not being able to maintain social functions” in 2023. Seeing this as a crisis of social reproduction, he announced policies to incentivize young people into having and raising children—to reembrace the family as the center of life/livelihood. For youth themselves, however, this is a model declining in both viability and appeal. This talk addresses a different contingency; as sociality continues to downsize in Japan—to single households, solo lifestyles, childless futures—what are the effects on the elderly who once counted on “the family” to both care for and bury them? This is another dimension to the “crisis” in sociality today: the post-(re)productive who increasingly find themselves “without anyone else to depend upon” (*miyori ga nai*) in what some call Japan’s “era of family-less dead” (*ienaki jidai no shisha*). Facing all-aloneness as they age and enter the grave, seniors—and Japan itself—must confront a model of (reproductive) sociality that is not only being rejected by youth but sentencing the elderly to a wastebin of neglect. Looking at moves that are arising to both avoid and anticipate such an end, the talk considers what any of these new “ending” trends portend for a post-familial future as mapped by caring otherwise for the dead.

Anne Allison is Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University. Her research, on contemporary issues in Japan, spans the nightlife, popular culture, Pokémon, sexuality, gender, precarity, and death. She is the author of *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*; *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*; and *Precarious Japan*. Her most recent book, *Being Dead Otherwise*, has been awarded the John Whitney Hall Prize for 2025.

This talk is organized by David Slater (Professor of Anthropology, Sophia University).



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No registration required