


# Precarious Japan

*By Anne Allison*

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**Precarious Japan** By Anne Allison

In an era of irregular labor, nagging recession, nuclear contamination, and a shrinking population, Japan is facing precarious times. How the Japanese experience insecurity in their daily and social lives is the subject of *Precarious Japan*. Tacking between the structural conditions of socioeconomic life and the ways people are making do, or not, Anne Allison chronicles the loss of home affecting many Japanese, not only in the literal sense but also in the figurative sense of not belonging. Until the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in 1991, lifelong employment and a secure income were within reach of most Japanese men, enabling them to maintain their families in a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. Now, as fewer and fewer people are able to find full-time work, hope turns to hopelessness and security gives way to a pervasive unease. Yet some Japanese are getting by, partly by reconceiving notions of home, family, and togetherness.

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**Precarious Japan By Anne Allison Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

Review

"Anne Allison's moving and perceptive account of precarious existence in contemporary Japan cuts through the sheen of a society's self-image to reveal an everyday weighted down by scarcity and a temporality dedicated to the daily struggle to stay alive. Where there was supposed to be permanent abundance and the well-being of all, is now a ruined landscape, vacated by hope, a constituency compromising globalization's version of the 'wretched of the earth,' who have appeared in Japan and everywhere the new global order has established its austere regime of insecurity and desperation. Allison's stunningly thoughtful elucidation of the growing numbers of the homeless, hungry and the socially withdrawn will take its place with all those ethnographies that have courageously sought to capture the precarity of broken lives within our midst to make us see what continues to defy our capacity to confront, which is the mirror of our collective future."
(Harry Harootunian, coauthor of *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*)

"*Precarious Japan* is a harrowing read. Mummified corpses, the homeless housed in stacks of coffin-sized boxes, rivers of radioactive mud, and other horrific scenes capture the contraction of existence in contemporary Japan as the history of the *sarariman* (salaryman) gives way to a stagnant neoliberal future. While Anne Allison seeks to tell the story of a nation for whom hope looks backwards, readers will wonder whether they are also seeing the blueprint for a global condition emerging at the edge of the rising sun."
(Elizabeth A. Povinelli, author of *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*)

"*Precarious Japan* is a model of new modes of conceptualizing sociocultural theory. Here the theory is sober, mature, aspirational, hopeful, gracious. It pushes up against the limits of thinking categorically, of thinking that lived phenomena simply, magically, derive their force from the categorical—from identities, borders, inclusions and exclusions, ideals writ large. It will be important to scholars trying to get a better handle on what is going on in the historical present."
(Kathleen Stewart, author of *Ordinary Affects*)

"*Precarious Japan* is a forward-thinking commentary on the current state of Japan, detailing a progressive history from the economic collapse in 1991 to how the country functions today in a modern, post-earthquake society. . . . For those wondering just how precarious Japan's future really is, this book is a good place to start."
(Jordan Sievers *Japan Times*)

"The only reason that I didn't burst into tears while reading this book is because of extreme self-control."
(Eustacia Tan *With Love from Japan blog*)

"Allison's book is an impressive tour through important public discourses in Japan today, rooted in extensive discussion of contemporary popular literature and media."

(Kathryn E. Goldfarb *Somatosphere* 2014-05-29)

“[A]n important, thoughtful, and moving ethnography that deserves the attention of a wide audience.”
(Carla Nappi *New Books in East Asian Studies*)

" . . . Allison's work reminds us of why ethnographic work is important. She skillfully weaves recent theories of the 'precarious' between personal accounts, interviews, statistics and textual analyses, making *Precarious Japan* as much an exemplar of the ethnographic methodology as an account of the vicissitudes of life in post-bubble, post-crisis and post-Fukushima Japan."
(Jamie Coates *Social Anthropology*)

“*Precarious Japan* is a compelling collection of examples and theories that connect overwhelming or shocking social problems in contemporary Japan with the realm of labor. . . . Although many of the examples are emotionally difficult to read, I am sure they will be very hard to forget.”
(Allison Alexy *Anthropological Quarterly*)

“Allison’s book announces a paradigm change. . . . The book is a valuable provocation. . . . *Precarious Japan* is a valuable incitement to imagine new narratives for Japan’s present and future—and to locate Japan’s experience in the context of global precarity. . . .”
(Amy Borovoy *American Ethnologist*)

"Allison’s ethnography of contemporary Japan, framed in terms of instability, poverty, hope, mud and the desire for belonging, is a compelling and timely work."
(Laura Dales *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*)

“*Precarious Japan* has implications far beyond Japan not only because similar problems exist in other market-dominated countries but also because she draws on the relevant theoretical literature to analyze Japan from a broader perspective. The breadth and depth of Allison’s scholarship—and her insight into Japanese culture—are impressive. … I highly recommend *Precarious Japan* for those interested in contemporary societies, especially Japan. It is also a good textbook for social sciences and humanities courses, inspiring students and generating fruitful discussions.”
(Yohko Tsuji *American Anthropologist*)

“[A]n impressive ethnographic study of exclusion, precariousness and struggle that will leave no reader untouched. . . . Allison’s new book will surely be highly impressive for many readers and a good resource for discussions in courses on contemporary Japan.”
(David Chiavacci *Pacific Affairs*)

About the Author

Anne Allison is Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University. She is the author of *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*; *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan*; and *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* and a coeditor of the journal *Cultural Anthropology*.

## Users Review

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