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TECHNO-MEDIATED SAFETY: SOCIAL ATOMIZATION AND THE GROWTH OF RESIDENTIAL SECURITY IN RECESSIONARY JAPAN

In contemporary Japan, the once proverbial truth “*mizu to anzen ha tada*” (water and safety are free) is, more often than not, either heard in the negative, or relegated to a position of skepticism. While lauded internationally as a preeminently “safe society” by OECD and Global Peace Index rankings, the designation no longer accurately reflects the national mood, despite downward crime trends. Instead, pervasive social changes have led to a weakening of traditional forms of safety and with them confidence in the public sector. Consequently, the phrase now suggests a yearning for a long-gone Japan, real or imagined, its utopian vision of free-flowing safety standing in contrast to the contemporary “*jidai*” (age)—an age where you must protect yourself.

This dissertation examines this dynamic of perceived worsening social conditions and the subsequent growth of a technologically mediated form of safety—residential security. Drawn from 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Tokyo, Japan, it examines Japan’s emergent culture of securitization through the very products now enlisted by families to keep safe. Going beyond securitization as a technological shift, through locks, sensors, intercoms and access control systems, it shows how techno-mediated safety encompasses a changing worldview tied to the reimagination of the Japanese family and community.

