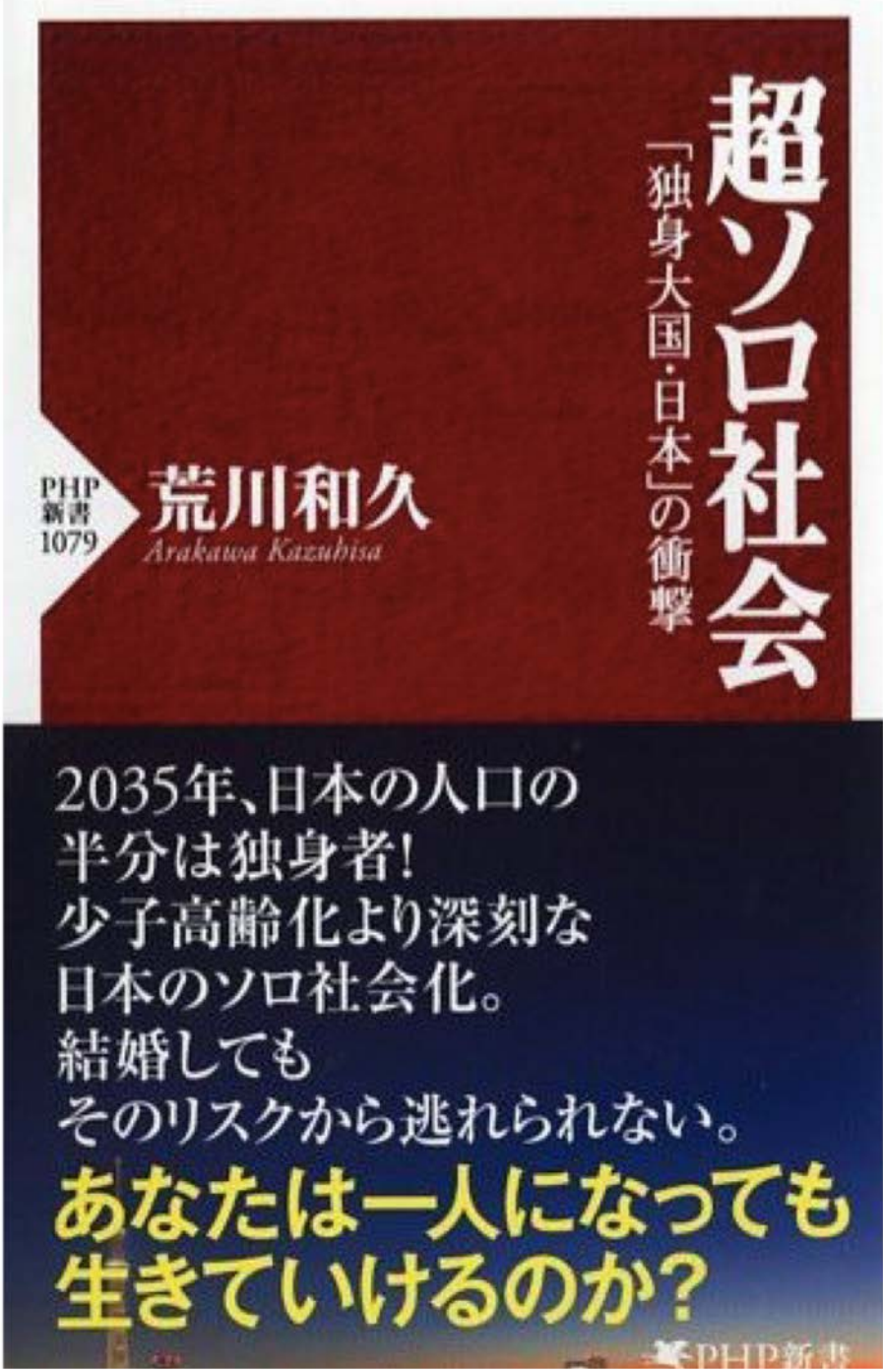




# (Re)Locating Intimacy: Spatial Perspectives on Personal Relationships in Contemporary Japan

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As in all post-industrial societies, the structure of personal relationships in Japan has undergone fundamental changes: increasing numbers of young people are marrying later in life or not at all; more people of all age groups are (permanently or temporarily) living alone. Studies in the Japanese context have begun to speak of an “era of permanent singles” (Nagata 2017) or the development of a “Hyper-Solo-Society” (Arakawa 2017).

However, the relationship-worlds of people who are single, divorced, or live alone have received almost no discrete attention. As a result of several contextual specifics—gender segregated spaces, job-related multi-locality, high demands for mobility, adults staying in their family home or a general spatial density—the category of “space” is of particular importance for further investigating various *practices of intimacy* of individuals.

## Research Questions

- Which spaces are available for living diverse *practices of intimacy*? What significance do various (non-)places have?
- What influence do mobility and multi-locality have on individuals' *doing relationships*? What significance do physical and virtual co-presence as well as geographical and emotional proximity have?
- Are “new” spaces being created (for example due to the emergence of “new” forms of solidary or romantic relationships)? How are they (possibly) used on a daily and biographical basis?



Couple in Toyko

## Theory, Data and Methods

- Sociology of space (Löw 2000; Massey 2005; Weidenhaus 2015)
- Subject oriented family sociology (*practices of intimacy* (Jamieson 2011), *doing family* (Jurczyk et al. 2014), *arata na sei no kiban* (Muta 2009))
- Mixed-methods approach: Qualitative data (expert interviews, partly standardized individual interviews, participant observation), a descriptive survey, evaluation of existing (international) datasets

## Preliminary Findings

- Polarization of individuals’ relationship-worlds (between diversity and relationship~~less~~ness)
- Changing notion of (physical) “proximity” and “intimacy”
- Importance of dwelling spaces (a room of one’s own/shared housing), virtual spaces or (non-)places/public spaces (restaurants, bars, sightseeing spots, love hotels ...) for different practices of intimacy
- Emergence of “new” *spaces of intimacy*



Female friends (private), advertisement (Let’s ENJOY TOYKO)

## Conclusion/Research Goals

- The project intends to provide nuanced and systematic insights into the individual relationship worlds (also: relationship~~less~~ness) of people who are single, divorced, or live alone.
- It further aims at examining to what extent *spaces of intimacy* in the sense of “new bases for existence” (Muta 2009) can and, perhaps, must take over the functions of the classical nuclear family against the backdrop of contemporary social upheavals and the subsequent sociopolitical challenges.
- Lastly, it strives to identify and analyze complex correlations and possible reciprocal relationships between “intimacy” and “space” while addressing questions surrounding the issues of belonging, solidarity, and social transformation in contemporary Japan and beyond.

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