



Japan Doesn't Care about Parents?: Family Privacy, Law, and International Parental Abductions



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Sewall 309 and via Zoom

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Co-hosted by the Department of Anthropology

Parental abduction within and to Japan occurs with some frequency and has drawn growing political and media attention in recent years. These highly controversial cases involve one parent taking their own child and restricting access to the other “left-behind” parent, often for many years. These can be international abductions, involving one parent taking their child over international borders into Japan, or domestic abductions,

involving one parent removing their child from the other parent entirely within Japan. Even if the child's whereabouts are clear, Japanese police and law enforcement agents rarely punish the taking parent or assist in returning the child. In practical terms, any child brought into Japan or moved within Japan can be lost to the parent who doesn't hold de facto custody, regardless of legal agreements reached in other nations or, to large degree, even legal agreements reached within the Japanese court system itself. Concerning parental abduction, Japanese law enforcement is notably unable or unwilling to provide assistance.

Examining Japanese family law contextualized within international family law, this presentation argues that the centrality of “family” as an organizing symbol for the Japanese nation, and the ensuing legal system that privileges families as almost unimpeachably private space, which creates fundamental lacunae for people seeking assistance in family disputes. Using parental abduction cases as a starting point, I theorize the relationship between law and family within and beyond Japan, specifically engaging scholarship in anthropology, gender studies, legal studies.



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