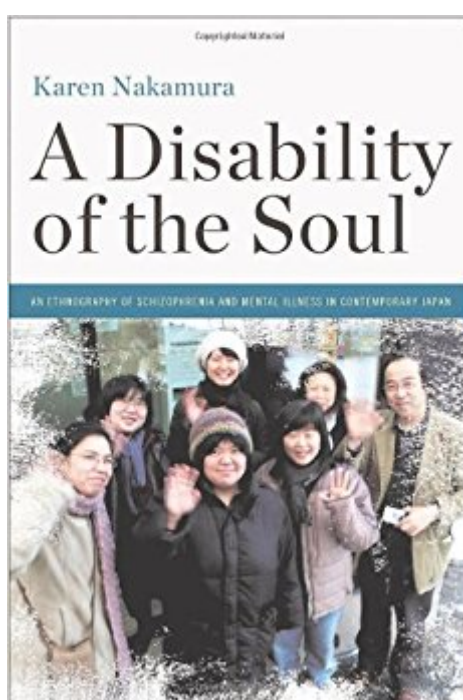


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# A Disability Of The Soul: An Ethnography Of Schizophrenia And Mental Illness In Contemporary Japan



## Synopsis

Bethel House, located in a small fishing village in northern Japan, was founded in 1984 as an intentional community for people with schizophrenia and other psychiatric disorders. Using a unique, community approach to psychosocial recovery, Bethel House focuses as much on social integration as on therapeutic work. As a centerpiece of this approach, Bethel House started its own businesses in order to create employment and socialization opportunities for its residents and to change public attitudes toward the mentally ill, but also quite unintentionally provided a significant boost to the distressed local economy. Through its work programs, communal living, and close relationship between hospital and town, Bethel has been remarkably successful in carefully reintegrating its members into Japanese society. It has become known as a model alternative to long-term institutionalization. In *A Disability of the Soul*, Karen Nakamura explores how the members of this unique community struggle with their lives, their illnesses, and the meaning of community. Told through engaging historical narrative, insightful ethnographic vignettes, and compelling life stories, her account of Bethel House depicts its achievements and setbacks, its promises and limitations. *A Disability of the Soul* is a sensitive and multidimensional portrait of what it means to live with mental illness in contemporary Japan.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In every respect, Nakamura has produced two films and a book that work against stigma and call attention to mental illness as a disability and to the humanity of those who suffer from it. These texts will be of broad interest beyond the world of Japan studies, particularly to clinicians and human

rights activists who are looking for ways to do better for the mentally ill." — Amy Borovoy, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* (Volume 41 2015) "Written in plain language and told in a narrative style, accompanied by a DVD containing two documentary videos and filled with a host of pictures, this easily accessible and deeply engaging work combines broad historical, social, and cultural context with intimate personal experiences and poignantly articulated vignettes to immerse the reader in the lives of members of Bethel House, the professional staff who work with them and the residents of the town of Urakawa located on the island of Hokkaido, Japan." — Michael Rembis, *Years Work in Critical and Cultural Theory* (Vol 23, No 1, 2015) "A Disability of the Soul is an extraordinary description of the lived experience of schizophrenics in the context of an impressive northern Japanese community program. Here we have patient stories interleaved with the history of psychiatric care for psychosis in Japan, which in turn is the context for description and analysis of a truly remarkable intentional community movement, including careful examination of its founders, sustainers, and outcomes. The book is beautifully written with great sensitivity to the tragic and ironic consequences of schizophrenia. Recovery programs such as this one are at the very cutting edge of global mental health and this is one of the first descriptions from Asia." — Arthur Kleinman, author of *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture* "This is a terrific book — moving, clear, and compassionate. It not only illustrates the way psychiatric illness is shaped by culture, but also suggests that social environments can be used to improve the course and outcome of the illness. Well worth reading." — T. M. Luhrmann, author of *Of Two Minds: An Anthropologist looks at American Psychiatry*

Hardcover and paperback editions of the book include a DVD containing two documentary films about Bethel House: *Bethel: Community and Schizophrenia in Northern Japan* and *A Japanese Funeral*. E-book and non-DVD owning readers can stream the films at the book's website, as described in the introduction.

This book is a great addition to my books and research material on how the mentally ill have to cope with the world around them. Very nicely written and learned a different way of looking at how the mentally ill perceive themselves at Bethel House. The book shares the importance of community with people who are challenged with these diseases. How insightful and I am going to take what I learned and help others use the same perspective to lighten their load. Great read and very profound.

I am taking a course on the history of disability studies and working towards a Masters in Social Work. Additionally, I have a brother and uncle with schizophrenia and have personal experience struggling with hospitals, institutions and available mental health care. This book has inspired me to find other books about Bethel and continue learning about the Self Directed Research and other models used at Bethel. If you are considering reading this book..... it is valuable to anyone interested in psychiatry and/or serious mental illness.

Japan has a wonderful record when it comes to education. Their reputation is one of absolutely no wrong, and I believe every word of it. But a classmate from graduate school, who taught English in Japan, had seen what they keep hidden; the special needs students are warehoused in the basement. I also read an article by artist Takashi Murakami, where he says that people with deformities, dermatitis, or obesity are not accepted when in Japan. My research tells me that retarded people are welcomed in the Yakuza gangs, but not much else. So what does a seemingly flawless country like Japan do about the mentally ill? Something tells me it can't be good. From the outset I was predisposed to some facts. I know that Japan is smaller than the USA, fewer people to care for, homogenous, non-religious. With their ethic of self-discipline, mental illness must be stigmatizing, and according to the book, I was right. The author says that mentally ill people are warehoused, and their families are loath to talk about it. I'm not surprised, because it was the same thing with upper-class English families until recently. Having a child who was retarded could be disguised as "eccentricity," but mental illness or epilepsy had to be hidden. The history of Japan's care for the mentally ill is bad. In the 1970s a reporter named Kazuo Okuma went undercover as an alcoholic, and found that the mental facilities were horrific-overcrowded, no time for therapy, Alzheimer's patients were locked up for days at a time, and they were used for voter fraud. As for psychiatry, the laws were lax, any MD could practice it. The Utsunomiya Hospital scandal revealed a patient beaten to death by orderlies. But there are improvements, though few. Bethel House is an outpatient commune on the island of Hokaido, and it offers a place where mentally ill adults can work together to help each other cope. Most of them were successful in their jobs until they started hearing voices, feeling paranoid, etc. One middle aged mental patient was in the same hospital for 37 years. He'd rather not leave, because he has no job skills, no friends, nowhere to go, and his family has long since given up on him. Hokaido is also the home of the Ainu, Japan's indigenous people. Among the Ainu, mentally ill people were appointed Shaman, or holy people. It was thought that they had a connection to the spirit world. But

among the Japanese, mental illness is seen as a flaw in moral character. Whatever problem Japan has in dealing with the mentally ill, it's all the result of the social norms, not economics.

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