Urban Migrants in Rural Japan
Between Agency and Anomie in a Post-growth Society

A virtual u:japan lecture by Susanne Klien

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Lunch Lecture 12:30~14:00

https://japanologie.univie.ac.at/ujapanlectures
Rural areas have generally been associated with stagnation, depopulation and lack of perspectives. In my book, published by SUNY Press in 2020, I aim to radically rethink the stereotype image of countryside in Japan and beyond. Drawing on nine years of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork across the country, I argue that the Lehman Shock in 2008, the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 and increasingly harsh conditions of the job market have set the path for a new role of rural areas as experimental grounds for innovative projects. I will focus on three themes that feature in the book. I will introduce selected narratives by urban newcomers to show the paradox between aspiration to a better work-life-balance and the reality of persistent overwork and (self-)exploitation. Second, I will discuss changes in the way rural Japan has recently been presented in various media. Third, I will examine entrepreneurial projects and discuss how budding entrepreneurs negotiate their daily lives between self-determination and structural constraints. Last, I will reflect on fieldwork in rural Japan during the pandemic and the insights I have obtained through follow-up interviews with my interlocutors in 2021.