



Millennials' Senses of Inequality Class, Gender, and Legitimation of Differences in Tokyo

A virtual *u:japan* lunch lecture by Yuki Asahina

Thursday
2022-06-23
12:30~14:00



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Today's young adults face a labor market where precarity is the norm rather than the exception. They also confront the widening crevasse between the rich and the rest and persistent gender disparities. Scholars argue that this generation's shared experience of hardship shaped acute sensitivity to injustice, making them a 'new political generation.' In Japan, however, despite two decades of economic stagnation and a widening gap between the haves and have-nots, various surveys report that young citizens are surprisingly content with their situation; a sociologist called them 'the happy youth of a desperate country.' This talk examines how Japanese young adults experience inequality as something 'natural' with a particular

focus on their experience of work. Drawing on longitudinal interview data and through a lens of comparison with the case of Seoul, South Korea, where young citizens maintain a strong sense of injustice, I show the persistent tendency among Japanese millennials to interpret inequality as a matter of individual efforts and talents. Then, I will examine differences in the ideas that various groups of young adults use to justify the inequalities they observe. Finally, I will ask when and how inequality and insecurity are experienced as 'unjust' to the extent that young adults can no longer tolerate them by focusing on the experience of precariously employed young men and women.



Yuki Asahina is Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of International and Area Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea, where he teaches about Japanese society, inequality, and qualitative research methods. He received his PhD in sociology from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and was previously a postdoctoral fellow at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies and an affiliate of the Weatherhead Research Cluster on Comparative Inequality and Inclusion at Harvard University. His research has appeared or is forthcoming in *Sociology*, *Politics & Society*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, and *Contemporary Japan*, among other journals.

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