

German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group

Tuesday, November 29, 2016, 18:30

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Between nostalgia and utopia: Alternative lifestyles in rural Japan

The Japanese countryside has for decades seen its population shrinking and aging. But in recent years some regions have experienced an influx of new residents, urban-to-rural migrants, looking for a new life in the Japanese countryside. This so-called I-turn trend has been increasingly covered by the popular media. Magazines and websites providing information and support for people interested in moving to rural areas suggest that life in the countryside promises a meaningful job, a good work-life-balance, a life close to nature and a small, supportive community. They evoke an image of a nostalgic picturesque 'homeland' (*furusato*), where an 'old Japanese way of life' has been preserved. But what story does the individual I-turner tell?

In my paper, I explore the motivations, goals and desires of urban-to-rural migrants. Based on case studies in rural areas in the prefectures of Shimane, Oita and Fukuoka I ask: What attracts these people to move from metropolitan to rural regions? How do they construct their migration narratives and what kind of identity do they represent? What values do they mention and what role does the rural locality play? As their stories shift between their own individual self-realization, social escapism and social reformism, preliminary findings suggest that they construct their narratives between two poles: A nostalgic yearning for a romanticized, past 'Japanese way of life', and a reformist, sometimes utopian dream of changing the Japanese society for the better.

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The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by
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All are welcome to attend, but registration (kremers@diptokyo.org) is appreciated.
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