

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group



Wednesday, June 5th, 2019, 18:30h

Farmers, Local Agency, and the Development of Peri-Urban Spaces

Aaron Kingsbury, PhD, Maine Maritime Academy

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the postwar history of the Atago Mountain area as a mirror to reflect and interpret broader changes affecting peri-urban spaces in Japan. The Atago Mountain area is located on the outskirts of Kofu City, the capital of Yamanashi Prefecture. As with many other similarly-sized communities across Japan, the area changed from a rural into a peri-urban community over the postwar period. Once known for timber production, farmers have transitioned through a number of agricultural crops including mulberry, peaches, kiwi, table grapes, and grapes for wine. Agricultural land was also sold, and replaced with higher-end housing, now often unoccupied. A children's museum was built. Grape tourism establishments and wineries went out of business. Solar panels, abandoned fields, and prefabricated apartments have split up the remaining farmland, which continues to form the foundation for the livelihoods of a shrinking number of local farm households.

To some extent, this transition has occurred as a byproduct of the well-documented top-down developmental policies that have shaped Japan's peripheries. However, based on fieldwork including the collection of over 40 oral histories of local residents, the analysis seeks to tease out the effects of the agency of local actors such as farmers and their cooperatives in this transition. Indeed, broader changes brought about by rural development programs and shifting social-economical dynamics were found to have been mitigated by the entrepreneurial aspirations, localized agency, and personal relationships of local actors. Through a focused and intensive exploration of this small, yet distinct place, this presentation argues for a reengagement with peripheralization and rurality in contemporary Japan, and broader practical and theoretical notions of and strategies for rural (re-) development.

Aaron Kingsbury is an Assistant Professor at the Maine Maritime Academy and a research advisor for the Agriculture and Forestry Research & Development Center for Mountainous Regions in Vietnam. He received his PhD in geography from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, with a long-term study on the history and the contemporary challenges of the grape and wine industries in Yamanashi Prefecture.

About:

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for scholars conducting research on contemporary Japan. Meetings are held once a month and are open to speakers from all disciplines of the social sciences. The event is open to all. Registration is not necessary but appreciated, online at www.dijtokyo.org.

Venue:

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)
Jochi Kioizaka Bldg. 2F, 7-1 Kioicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo
102-0094
Phone: 03-3222-5077

For directions visit dijtokyo.org/access

