

Young urban migrants in the Japanese countryside between hope and precarity:

Post-growth forms of living and working, creative depopulation and living for the moment

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This multi-sited ethnographic project explores the trajectories of urbanites in their 20s and 30s who choose to relocate to remote rural areas across Japan for lifestyle reasons. Drawing on my fieldwork in Shimane, Tokushima, Niigata, Miyagi and Iwate Prefectures, I argue that the concerns of these young urban migrants embody key issues relating to modes of living and working and the need for change that post-growth Japan is faced with. Whereas the majority seem content with their lives after relocation, many tread precarious paths and struggle to implement their ideal lifestyles. Emerging entrepreneurship and moves from work as structured obligation (Gratton 2011) towards self-determined work are uneasily intertwined with the reproduction of postwar societal values. Drawing on Duncan, Cohen and Thulemark's definition of lifestyle mobility as a 'fluid and dynamic process' (2013) in an urban-rural continuum (Gkartzios 2013), I propose that individuals tend to live in the moment to grapple strategically with insecurity, liminality and risk and explore the ongoing shift in the representation of rural areas from lost causes to grounds of opportunity.

Dr. Susanne Klien is Associate Professor on the Modern Japanese Studies Program, Hokkaido University. Her research interests include immaterial forms of cultural heritage and their transmission, youth subculture, regional revitalization and alternative lifestyles in rural Japan and beyond. Before joining Hokkaido University she worked as senior research fellow at the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) Tokyo.