"Modern Youth” and Colonial Nationalisms in the Japanese Empire

Dr. Sayaka Chatani

CHAIRMAN
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Abstract

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the metaphor of generations—young and old; immature and mature—was widely used to explain the domination of imperial powers over colonial societies. East Asian intellectuals also used the metaphor of a human lifespan to explain Japan’s imperial power and the subjugated status of China, Korea, and Taiwan. But unlike in the European empires, they linked “youthfulness” to Japan’s rising power and attributed the weakness of colonized societies to their “old” characteristics. In this talk, I will present such generation-centered understanding of the modern world by colonial intellectuals of Okinawa, Taiwan, and Korea that developed around the 1910s and 1920s. Students from these colonized societies, while studying in Tokyo, envisioned “youth” as the protagonists of their own nation-building. Their emphasis on youthfulness not only alters our previous focus on imagined “traditional roots” as a basis of nationalism. It also shows how a variety of ideas and ideologies, not just those coming from Japan, shaped the worldview of colonial intellectual youth.

About the Speaker

Sayaka Chatani is a FASS postdoctoral fellow in the Department of History, NUS, for 2015-7. She completed her Ph.D. at Columbia University in New York in 2014. Before coming to NUS, she was in Florence, Italy, as a Max Weber Postdoctoral Fellow at the European University Institute. Her larger academic interests evolve around the intersection of the military, the nation, and society—mass mobilization in the twentieth century in particular. Her current topic is the global rise of youth in relation to modern imperialism and colonialism, and her regional focus is the Japanese empire. She is working on a book manuscript, which is a transnational social history of youth mobilization by the Japanese empire through the “seinendan” (village youth associations) in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. Her work challenges the binary of the powerful state and people subjected to its power by emphasizing multilayered social dynamics surrounding both the state and mobilized rural youth.

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