

The Politics of Social Classification: Youth (青年) Categories in South Korea



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9 February 2026 MON.

JST 11:00-12:30

[HYBRID]

@ Conference Room 1 | ZOOM

3th Floor, Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia,
the University of Tokyo

This lecture explores the cultural politics of socially constructed classificatory systems by using youth categories in South Korea as an analytical lens. It focuses on three interrelated issues. First, it examines the historical context in which the category of "youth (青年)," largely absent from public discourse since the 1980s, was reactivated from the early 2000s through the mid-2010s, acquiring new meanings as a demographic category, a political group, and a target of social welfare intervention. Second, it analyzes the sociocultural significance of mobilizing the signifiers of "youth" and "generation" in contemporary East Asian societies. Third, the lecture situates recent youth policies in South Korea within broader frameworks of state governmentality, with particular attention to policies addressing socially withdrawn youth (孤立隠遁青年), a Korean policy term used in a sense highly similar to the Japanese concept of hikikomori (ひきこもり).

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