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presents

Young Women in Tokyo and the Changing Definition of Work: Morality, Marriage and Flexible Capitalism

by

Dr. Vincent Mirza

East Asian Studies
McGill University

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Leacock 738

McGill University

Abstract:

My presentation focuses on the significance of work for young women in Tokyo during of period of intense social change. From the early 1990s, an increasing number of young women between the ages of 25 and 35 began to challenge the prescribed moral order by refusing or postponing marriage. In addition, despite poor job security, women remain longer within the workforce. This is because companies require a cheap, flexible labour, and unmarried women remain a prime source. As a consequent, the actual situation of women's work and marriage differs greatly from that prescribed in conservative views of business and political leaders. I will discuss the complex relations between morality, work, and gender in an attempt to provide a better understanding of transformations in the family and work in contemporary Japan. Drawing partly on fieldwork in Tokyo and on current research, I will on the one hand discuss women's 'marriage refusal' (however indirect), and on the other hand women's efforts to appropriate the professional world to establish a sense of autonomy. I discuss how new representations and practices accompany the exploitation of institutional interstices and female forms of resistance. These tend to define work not only as a social and moral responsibility but also as an individual choice.