

Young Scholar Session – Uji Tea and Climate Change

by Fitrio Ashardiono

Report

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The special lecture by Dr. Fitrio Ashardiono at the Research Training graduate class of the GSIR was on the topic of the socio-political implications of climate change on Uji tea farmers. The talk was based on his anthropological research in the field and was a welcomed addition to the usually IR-centric research approaches of many students at the Graduate School of International Relations at Ritsumeikan.

His presentation focused on the socio-political implications on overall agricultural output, businesses, as well as the market value of Uji tea products. Uji tea is a rather special kind of tea which has retained traditional cultivation methods (organic fertilizers, manual harvest, and the use of shades). Given that Uji tea is harvested merely once a year, its vulnerability to the increase in the global average temperature and the rising number of weather extremes is considerable. The consequence is a decrease in the quality as well as quantity of Uji tea which, given internal oppressive market-mechanisms, leave the small tea farmers most vulnerable. This not only endangers their livelihoods, but more over the cultural and historic value of the tea brand.

In addition to the above anthropological findings, Dr. Fitrio Ashardiono moreover shared his research framework with the audience. Valuable insights were gained as he blended qualitative and quantitative research approaches and applied these to undertake analyses across the disciplines of policy studies, anthropology, as well as environmental studies. He moreover shared his insights concerning the difficulties of gaining the farmers' trust in order to collect reliable data for his research. All in all, it was a very productive and thought-provoking lecture.