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Florentine Koppenborg, Freie Universität Berlin



Nuclear power in Japan after 3/11: An inconspicuous transformation

Around the world, the Fukushima nuclear accident has had a profound impact on nuclear policy. Countries such as Belgium, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Taiwan have either decided to phase out nuclear power or abandoned plans to re-introduce it. In contrast, in Japan many wonder about the lack of change in nuclear policy and the current government's insistence on making nuclear power once again a mainstay in the country's energy supply in the future. However, research so far fails to look beyond official energy policy goals and thus misses profound but largely unnoticed changes in the formal and informal institutions which constitute the nuclear policy subsystem in Japan. This paper sheds light on often neglected yet decisive fissures which have emerged between actors in nuclear policy making and regulation due to the creation of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) in 2012. This includes tensions between the government's nuclear energy goals for 2030 and the Nuclear Regulation Authority's new safety standards as well as the reluctance of large energy companies to bring all reactors up to standard and back online. As a consequence, many observers expect that the role of nuclear power within the Japanese energy mix will actually decline. This presentation aims to illuminate changes in the relationships between different actors in the nuclear policy field before and after the Fukushima accident. Applying a policy subsystem perspective, it sheds light on the structure of advocacy coalitions, veto points, the significance of regulatory capture vs. independence as well as the openness of the nuclear policy subsystem to outsiders.

Florentine Koppenborg is a PhD student in political science at the Graduate School of East Asian Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin after graduating from the M.A. Japanese Studies with Political Science as a minor subject at the same university. Her research interests are energy policy and security policy.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by S. Heinrich, P. Holdgrün and D. Kremers.
All are welcome to attend, but registration (heinrich@dijskyo.org) is appreciated.
German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ)
Jōchi Kioizaka Bldg. 2F, 7-1 Kioichō, Chiyoda-ku, Tōkyō 102-0094, Phone: 03-3222-5077
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