

**German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)**

**DIJ Social Science Study Group**

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## **Journalism and Disaster from a Cultural Perspective**

### **A comparative reflection of German and Japanese media reporting on 'Fukushima'**

Japanese and international media coverage of March 11, 2011 differed significantly in many ways. Some of the most remarkable examples of this gap can be drawn from comparing Japanese and German news reporting. For instance, media outlets in Japan initially paid most attention to the earthquake and tsunami disasters, while their German counterparts focused on the crippled nuclear power plant in Fukushima. Japanese coverage relied to a high degree on official sources, whereas German media reports also involved many non-official sources such as NGOs. Moreover, news in Japan were shaped by calls to avoid panic and so-called "harmful rumors". On the opposite, German media were often denounced for cases of sensationalism.

This presentation argues that the fact that Japan was directly involved into the disaster while Germany was not, does not sufficiently explain this gap. This study reconstructs the circumstances of disaster reporting as well as the journalistic cultures in each country. Based on the understanding that "western" theories of journalism do not do the Japanese case justice, the study employs an inductive approach that is sensitive to the different cultural conditions of the work of journalists in both countries. It draws on a series of expert interviews with scholars of Japanese studies and journalism studies as well as narrative interviews with journalists from both countries who covered the disaster. The comparative analysis indicates that not only the routines of disaster reporting differ substantially between German and Japanese media, but also the journalists' societal role as well as their professional socialization.

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The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by Steffen Heinrich, Phoebe Holdgrün and Daniel Kremers.  
All are welcome to attend, but registration ([holdgruen@diجتokyo.org](mailto:holdgruen@diجتokyo.org)) is appreciated.  
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