



Tübingen Korean Studies Lecture Series

## Frontlines of Social Science Research on Korea

### *Legal Mobilization and Changing Governance: Disability Rights and Accessibility in South Korea.*

Celeste Arrington (George Washington University)

Wednesday November 9, 2022, 18:00 c.t.,

Wilhelmstraße 133, Room 30



#### Abstract

Recent policies related to disabled people exemplify a more legalistic approach to governance in South Korea. In the past two decades, reforms have codified new rights, made rules more detailed and formal, added fines for rule-breaking, and proceduralized dispute resolution mechanisms. What accounts for this legalistic turn, which expands the role of law and courts in policy processes? Most explanations are top-down, emphasizing politicians' strategies to cope with electoral turnover, judges' activism, or the state's treaty commitments. While not wrong, such explanations overlook the role of civil society actors. Through qualitative analysis of Korean movement records, policy deliberations, court cases, interviews, and news coverage related to accessible public transportation and anti-discrimination policy, I trace how activists and lawyers are contributing to the legalistic turn in governance by demanding and using more formalized regulations and participatory policy processes. In so doing, civil society actors are prying open the structure of legal opportunities. This research contributes to broader scholarship on varieties of legalism, policy diffusion, the judicialization of politics, and political participation.

#### Bio

Celeste Arrington (PhD, UC Berkeley) is Korea Foundation Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the George Washington University. Her research interests include law and social change, comparative policy processes, and transnational advocacy. Her first book was *Accidental Activists: Victim Movements and Government Accountability in Japan and South Korea* (Cornell, 2016). She has published articles in *Comparative Political Studies*, *Law & Society Review*, *Journal of East Asian Studies*, *Law & Policy*, *Asian Survey*, and elsewhere. With Patricia Goedde, she co-edited *Rights Claiming in South Korea* (Cambridge, 2021). Her current book project analyzes the legalistic turn in Korean and Japanese governance through paired case studies related to tobacco control and disability rights. In 2022-23, she is on sabbatical at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München with a research fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.



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