The Horizon of Democracy: Fukushima and Okinawa as Method

Speaker: Dr Hiro Saito, Singapore Management University

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Abstract

Although rarely featured in the contemporary debate on the crisis of democracy, Japanese politics illuminates two of the most serious tensions in democracy—between popular sovereignty and expert guidance and between national sovereignty and international relations. This talk examines how Japanese democracy has prioritized expert guidance and international relations in light of ongoing political struggles over the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster and the US military bases in Okinawa. Specifically, the talk shows that the primacy of expert guidance and international relations has been coterminous with the consolidation of the developmental state and the US-Japan security alliance in postwar Japan. The talk then explores how this particular institutional configuration of Japanese democracy can be further traced back to Meiji Japan as a late modernizer, wherein the state epistemically dominated the civil society as well as normalized international power asymmetry as the sine qua non of national security.

About the Speaker

Hiro Saito is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Singapore Management University. Broadly interested in intersections between power and knowledge, he studies how interactions between government, experts, and citizens shape public policy. He is the author of The History Problem: The Politics of War Commemoration in East Asia and currently working on The Horizon of Democracy: Fukushima and Okinawa as Method.