



# Disability Rights in East Asia's Democracies 2025

A GWIKS Signature Conference

Friday, April 11

9:00 am - 2:00 pm

Lindner Family Commons

Elliott School of International Affairs

6th Floor

1957 E St NW

Hybrid on Zoom

This conference will highlight cutting-edge research in the growing legal and social scientific scholarship on disabilities in East Asia's democracies. We will discuss a range of topics, including (but not limited to) the development of laws related to persons with disabilities; disparities across disability categories; the role of regulations and technology in the employment of people with disabilities; the enfranchisement of persons with intellectual disabilities; the gendered division of labor for care; and the intersection of globalized concepts of rights with local disability politics.

## Keynote Speakers

**Kawashima Satoshi**

Professor of Disability Law  
Open University of Japan



**Lee Sooyeon**

Attorney  
Network for Organizing and  
Widening Pro Bono Activities



**Chang Heng-hao**

Professor  
Dean of the College of Social Sciences  
National Taipei University



## Other Presenters

**Reiko Nishida**, Sigur Center Visiting Scholar

**Mayuko Maeda**, PhD Candidate in Political Science, George Washington University

**Celeste Arrington**, Director, GW Institute for Korean Studies; Co-Director, East Asia National Resource Center



## ◇ EVENT DESCRIPTION

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## ◇ PROGRAM

<b>April 11th (Fri)</b>	
	<b>Welcome and Introduction</b>
9:00 A.M. EDT	<b>Celeste Arrington</b> , Director of the GW Institute for Korean Studies, Co-Director of the East Asia National Resources Center, Korea Foundation Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, George Washington University
	<b>Session 1</b>
9:15 A.M. - 10:15 A.M. EDT	<p><u>Speakers</u></p> <p><b>Lee Sooyeon</b>, Lawyer, NOW “Discrimination Lawsuits and Treaty Body Activities to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Korea”</p> <p><b>Maeda Mayuko</b>, PhD Candidate, George Washington University “Achieving Suffrage for People under Guardianship in Japan: The Role of Tōjisha-Centered Activism and International Norms”</p>

	<b>Session 2</b>
10:15 A.M. - 11:15 A.M. EDT	<p><u>Speakers</u>  <b>Chang Heng-hao</b>, Professor of Sociology, National Taipei University  “Localizing Disability Rights: Taiwan’s Struggle Between Family, Community, and the UNCRPD”</p> <p><b>Nishida Reiko</b>, Law scholar, Waseda, GWU Sigur Center Visiting Scholar  “The Structure and Challenges of Japan’s Disability Employment Quota System”</p>
11:15 A.M. - 11:30 A.M. EDT	<b>Coffee Break</b>
	<b>Session 3</b>
11:30 A.M. - 12:30 P.M. EDT	<p><u>Speakers</u>  <b>Kawashima Satoshi</b>, Law, Open University in Japan, former secretary-general of the Japan Disability Law Association  “Some of the Challenges in Legal Advocacy for Disability Rights in Japan”</p> <p><b>Celeste Arrington</b>, Director of the GW Institute for Korean Studies, Co-Director of the East Asia National Resources Center, Korea Foundation Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, George Washington University  “Making Rights Real: Information Subsidies from Disabled Persons’ Organizations in Korea and Japan”</p>
12:30 P.M. - 12:45 P.M. EDT	<b>Wrap-up Discussion</b>
12:45 P.M. - 2:00 P.M. EDT	<b>Lunch</b>

◇ **WELCOMING REMARKS**



**CELESTE ARRINGTON** is Korea Foundation Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at GW. She is the Director of the GW Institute for Korea Studies and Co-Director of the East Asia National Resource Center (2024-present). She specializes in comparative public policy, law and social change, lawyers, and governance, with a regional focus on the Koreas and Japan. She is also interested in Northeast Asian security, North Korean human rights, and transnational activism. Her first book was *Accidental Activists: Victim Movements and Governmental Accountability in Japan and South Korea* (Cornell, 2016). She has published numerous articles and, with Patricia Goedde, she co-edited *Rights Claiming in South Korea* (Cambridge, 2021). Her next book, forthcoming in

Cambridge's Studies in Law and Society series, analyzes the legalistic turn in Korean and Japanese regulatory style through paired case studies related to tobacco control and disability rights. She received a PhD from UC Berkeley, an MPhil from the University of Cambridge, and an AB from Princeton University. She has been a fellow at Harvard, the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, and the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich. GW's Office of the Vice President for Research awarded her the 2021 Early Career Research Scholar Award. Her article with Claudia Kim won the 2023 Asian Law and Society Association's distinguished article award.

#### ◇ **SPEAKERS (Alphabetical Order)**



**CHANG HENG-HAO** is a Professor in the Department of Sociology and currently serves as the Dean of the College of Social Sciences at National Taipei University, Taiwan. He earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and is the founding president of the Taiwan Society for Disability Studies. His research focuses on the disability rights movement, representations of disability, and inclusive education. He serves on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Disability and Social Justice* and guest edits the special issue "Disability in East Asia." His work has

been published in *Disability & Society*, *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, *Taiwanese Sociology* and *Taiwanese Journal of Sociology*. He also co-edited a book, *Disability Studies: Theories and Policy Implication*, which introduces Disability Studies to the Chinese language.





**KAWASHIMA SATOSHI** is a professor of disability law and an advisor to the president of the Open University of Japan. He received a Doctor of Laws (LLD) degree from Niigata University in 2005. After being an Okayama University of Science professor, he moved to the Open University of Japan in 2023. He has published over 50 articles on disability law and disability studies in Japanese and is a contributor to and/or co-editor of over 30 academic books in Japan. He is a board member of the Japanese Society of Disability Law, the Japan Society for Disability Studies, the International Human Rights Law Association of Japan, and the Association on Higher Education and Disability of Japan. He is a member of several committees of governmental and semi-governmental organizations.



**LEE SOOYEUN** has been working as a public interest attorney in the field of human rights in Korea since 2019. She majored in education in college, so she is very interested in the right to education and is working to ensure the right to education for children and youth with disabilities, remedy discrimination, and amend relevant laws. As a public interest lawyer, she is mainly engaged in litigation, law reform, and international solidarity activities. She has worked on cases of discrimination against persons with disabilities and has worked to change laws related to the right to vote and education. In international solidarity activities, she participated as a member of civil society in the deliberations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2022 and the Human Rights Committee in 2023. Currently, she works for a NGO called NOW (Network for Organizing and Widening pro bono activities), which not only works in the field of disability rights, but also supports networking for public interest lawyers and promotes public interest lawyering in Korea.



**MAEDA MAYUKO** is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the George Washington University. Her research interests include disability rights movements, transnational activism, and Japanese politics. Currently, she is working on a project examining the voting rights of people with cognitive disabilities around the world. She is from Tokyo, Japan, and received her BA in Political Science and Russian from Grinnell College.



**NISHIDA REIKO** earned her Ph.D. in Law from the University of Tsukuba, Japan. Currently, she is a junior researcher at the Institute of Comparative Law at Waseda University, supported by a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) grant for FY 2023-2025. Her research focuses on comparative equality and anti-discrimination, including affirmative action to promote equal employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, women, and foreign workers. She has expertise in anti-discrimination laws in both the U.S. and Japan. She is currently a visiting scholar at the Sigur Center for Asian Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, where she continues her research.

#### ◇ ABSTRACTS (Alphabetical Order)

**Celeste Arrington**, “Making Rights Real: Information Subsidies from Disabled Persons’ Organizations in Korea and Japan”

Disability rights advocates in South Korea and Japan are contributing toward legalistic regulations regarding disability discrimination and accessibility. Whereas governance historically relied on nonbinding exhortations and closed decision-making processes, recent reforms have introduced more formal rules and participatory policymaking and enforcement in both countries. Drawing on her forthcoming book, *From Manners to Rules: Advocating for Legalism in South Korea and Japan* (Cambridge University Press, June 2025), Professor Arrington analyzes how disabled persons’ organizations and cause lawyers have provided “information subsidies” to decision-makers to use in designing and enforcing such laws and regulations. By shouldering the burden of collecting useful information and by supplying sample policy instruments and credible information, disability rights advocates facilitated the emergence of more detailed and enforceable legal frameworks, which they have also actively used to help advance the rights of people with disabilities.

**Chang Heng-hao**, “Localizing Disability Rights: Taiwan’s Struggle Between Family, Community, and the UNCRPD”

Although Taiwan is excluded from the United Nations, the Taiwanese government enacted the Act to Implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), incorporating the UNCRPD into domestic law in 2014. This talk examines the politics of disability rights in Taiwan and explores several key questions: How has the meaning of disability evolved in contemporary Taiwanese society? How have the government and civil society responded to the UNCRPD’s implementation? And how does the localization of the UNCRPD reflect tensions between the individual rights paradigm and Taiwan’s family- and community- oriented traditions?

This talk argues that while Taiwan has shifted from a medical to a human rights model of disability, charity-based and family-centered discourses still dominate public narratives. The implementation of the UNCRPD has prompted new disabled people's organizations to adopt innovative advocacy strategies. However, parents' organizations often challenge the individual rights approach, leading to alternative community-living models such as "aging family group homes" and "institutions in the community," which follow distinct deinstitutionalization trajectories. Finally, this talk discusses the broader impact and ongoing challenges of implementing the UNCRPD in Taiwan.

**Kawashima Satoshi, "Some of the Challenges in Legal Advocacy for Disability Rights in Japan"**

Although Japanese disability law has undergone significant development in the process of ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2014, there are still many serious challenges in legal advocacy for disability rights in Japan. The CRPD Committee's concluding observations on the initial report of Japan (2022) articulated a number of concerns regarding Japanese disability law and policy. These concerns include the following: (a) legal provisions that deny the right of persons with disabilities to equal recognition before the law; (b) legislation that allows the involuntary committal to psychiatric hospitals and the involuntary treatment of persons with disabilities; (c) the perpetuation of institutionalization of persons with disabilities; (d) the perpetuation of segregated special education of children with disabilities; (e) the segregation of persons with disabilities in sheltered workshops; (f) the limited accessibility of voting procedures taking into account the diversity of persons with disabilities; and (g) negative stereotypes and prejudices towards persons with disabilities.

It is important to recognize the multifaceted factors that give rise to the aforementioned concerns. These factors include ableism, which excludes persons with disabilities from society; limited involvement of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes; individual choice, which lies at the heart of human rights yet can sometimes result in the denial of social inclusion; protection of the best interests of persons with disabilities, which has been required in practices of advocacy but denies personal autonomy of them; and affirmative action, which can contribute to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society but can also lead to stigma and social backlash, undermining positive attitudes towards them. In this regard, legal advocacy for disability rights in Japan faces at least three tensions between individual choice and social inclusion, between best interests and personal autonomy, and between affirmative action and positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities.

**Lee Sooyeon, "Discrimination remedy lawsuits and treaty body activities to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Korea"**

In this talk, I would like to share my legal work and treaty body activities as a member of the Korean civil society. The first example is a case involving the right to vote for persons with intellectual disabilities. Since 2014, persons with intellectual disabilities in Korea have been campaigning for changes in laws and policies to ensure their right to vote. However, the Korean government and the

National Assembly have not taken any substantial measures to ensure the rights of people with intellectual disabilities. In January 2022, persons with intellectual disabilities filed a discrimination remedy lawsuit against Korea in relation to their right to vote. In August 2022, Korean civil society also raised issues at the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' deliberations on Korea.

The second issue is related to the right to freedom of assembly. The Korean government has repressed rallies for the rights of persons with disabilities. Organizations of persons with disabilities raised this issue during the UN Human Rights Committee's review of Korea in September 2023.

Finally, I would like to introduce recent issues related to the rights of children with disabilities in Korea, especially the right to education. There are various issues, particularly with regard to inclusive education, individualized education, and accommodations. In this regard, organizations of persons with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities have filed complaints with the National Human Rights Commission.

**Maeda Mayuko**, “Achieving Suffrage for People under Guardianship in Japan: The Role of Tōjisha-Centered Activism and International Norms”

In 2013, Japan revised its election law to repeal a provision that disenfranchised people under adult guardianship. This expansion of suffrage was the result of successful legal mobilization and lobbying efforts by Japanese activists. The activists' suffrage campaign was particularly effective in two ways: (1) it “centered” the individuals (i.e., the “shōgai tōjisha”) who were directly affected by the voting restriction, thereby highlighting their agency as rights-bearing citizens; and (2) it framed the suffrage issue as a universal human rights concern by frequently referencing international disability rights norms and global trends regarding the political rights of people with cognitive disabilities.

**Nishida Reiko**, “The Structure and Challenges of Japan's Disability Employment Quota”

This presentation will introduce Japan's disability employment quota system, focusing on its legal structure and recent challenges. With the statutory rate increasing in recent years, businesses must hire individuals with more severe disabilities, including those requiring 24-hour personal assistance and individuals with severe mental health conditions e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression. However, the average employment duration for workers with mental health conditions is shorter than that of individuals with other disabilities, posing retention challenges. Private sector employers have called for reforms to the quota system, including expanding the scope of covered disabilities, adjusting working hour requirements, and introducing double counting for workers with mental health conditions. However, these proposals raise concerns about reducing the actual number of employees with currently covered disabilities hired. By analyzing these legal and policy challenges, this presentation highlights the complexities of Japan's disability employment system and the balance between compliance and meaningful workforce participation.

*This event is on the record and open to the public.*