

Panel Proposal: Introduction of Science and Christianity in Meiji Japan

Panelist 1:

Science, Protestant Christianity and Darwinism in Meiji Japan

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This paper will argue that some elite Japanese, especially the former samurai, considered a package of Westernization that included not only the introduction of Western science but also Western values through Christianity which was seen as part of the 'intellectual Westernization' of Japan. Study in the US was, for some, the first step. The introduction of Darwinism into Japan and the popularity of Herbert Spencer's writings provided an obstacle to the spread of Christianity. The rise of nationalism and justification of the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) in terms of the divinity of the Emperor meant that Christians were seen as having divided loyalties. From that point, the notion of Westernization and Christianity as a package that had some currency in the 1870s and 1880s declined. There were inherent tensions and contradictions in the relationship between science and Christianity that became obvious to the Japanese, and the Rescript introduced another element of potential conflict.

Panelist 2:

With and Without Christianity: Differences in introducing evolutionary biology by Edward Sylvester Morse and John Thomas Gulick

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To this day, the controversy over teaching evolutionary biology, and compatibility between evolutionary biology and Christianity bring heated discussions in the US. Is it indeed true that Christianity and evolutionary biology could not co-exist? The first introduction of evolutionary biology to Japan was in two different ways between Tokyo and Kyoto. Two American naturalists, Edward Sylvester Morse and John Thomas Gulick, who had diversely different views, introduced the theory to Japanese people in the early Meiji independently to these two major cities in Japan.

My paper will examine how views of these two enlightenment thinkers were different and how Japanese reacted to their teaching on evolutionary biology. I will further discuss why the views on evolution differ significantly between Japan and the US in present time. The differences may deeply rooted in the initial introduction of the theory.