



Comparative Asian Research Network
Monthly Lecture Series on Issues and Research in the Asian Region
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Male Studies of Female Bodies: Gender, Menstruation, and Science in Early Twentieth-century Japan

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Time: 12:30 -13:30

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Language: English

In the formation of the modern Japanese state, women were often blamed for the poor Japanese physique and the resulting weakness of the nation. These critiques of Japanese women were understood in medical terms that were imbued with social Darwinian discourses on “civilizational” hierarchy. Using new social science methods of quantification and surveys, late Meiji and early Taisho male scholars and doctors, within and outside state ranks, analyzed and compared women’s physical development with their European and Asian counterparts to determine Japan’s “civilizational” status in the new international order. These male experts established not just height and weight as the defining physical markers of “civilization,” but, above all, menstruation. Discussions of menstruation continued to shape socio-medical interpretations of women long after the social Darwinian perspective had waned. As increasing numbers of women publicly engaged in physical and intellectual labor in the early twentieth century, menstruation was continually used to gauge the (ab)normality of their physical development, and hence, their suitability for such work. These male-dominated discourses in the early twentieth century formed the core theoretical foundations for a Japanese woman’s normative body experience.

No registration necessary.

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