

Eugenic thought and reproductive politics in modern Japan

Alison J. Darby

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18:00 – 19:30

Room 301, 3F, Building 10, Sophia University

In March 2018 the first court case over compensation for victims of Japan's historical eugenic legislation began. Approximately 16,500 people were forcibly sterilised under the 1948 Eugenic Protection Law (優生保護法) before it was overturned in 1996. How did this law come to pass? This presentation will trace the intellectual origins of the Eugenic Protection Law to its wartime predecessor the 1940 National Eugenic Law (国民優生法) and to earlier eugenic activism. While in the popular imagination state eugenic policies have tended to be viewed as top-down phenomenon, this presentation will emphasise the role of civil society groups. Varying civil society groups, inspired by successful eugenic campaigns abroad, lobbied the Japanese state to regulate reproduction as a way to ensure family wellbeing and improve the Japanese 'race'. These groups, including the Japanese Association of Race Hygiene (日本民族衛生協会), further sought to influence individuals' reproductive decisions through marriage counselling centres which disseminated eugenic ideas. Through their campaigns to popularise eugenics these civil society actors had a marked impact on the reproductive politics of modern Japan.

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This talk is organized by Professor Sven Saaler (FLA) / Lecture in English / No RSVP required

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