



SOKA UNIVERSITY OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS PRESENTS

## **Disease and Disease Control in Eras of Globalization Conference**

Friday | Sept 22 | 4:45 - 7:00 PM  
Saturday | Sept 23 | 9 AM - 1 PM  
Soka University of America Athenaeum

### **Alexander Bay: *Shit and Disease Prevention in Modern Japan: Human Waste, Toilets and Causal Agents***

#### Abstract

Japanese doctors built a Western-style public health system aimed at acute infectious diseases like cholera, dysentery and typhoid fever in the late 19th-century. While fecal-oral route diseases receive much attention in our historiography, little has been written on the most important part of disease causation. My paper examines how public health officials disciplined shit to sanitize both the masses and the environment. I use the Foucauldian notion of discipline to reveal the, although piecemeal, national project aimed at policing effluent. Doctors measured the amounts of waste produced by individuals and families to build sanitary septic tank systems. They collected samples from the afflicted and examined feces for bacteria and parasite eggs. People were made to shit for the doctor. They tested the resilience of micro-organisms in fecal matter and septic tanks. They experimented with various ways to kill them. Doctors in the metropole evaluated the skills of countryside doctors, warning that even their skills in checking poo for bacteria or parasite eggs needed policing. The masses were taught how to shit hygienically, their previous bathroom practices were censored, and they were told how to dispose of their waste properly. The government legislated human waste collection and disposal standards. Cities built processing and sewer systems to treat effluent correctly. Once safe, shit was recycled to support the rural economy. In short, doctors made shit knowable and thus controllable across the 20th-century. This is a crucial part of the larger story of sanitizing Japan that has hitherto remained unexplored.