



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

### **Michael Weiner: *Leprosy and Leprosy Control in Imperial: Japan Confinement and Criminalization***

#### Abstract:

References to leprosy endemic to Japan can be found as early as the eighth century, though its prevalence remains unknown. Under the influence of Buddhism, leprosy came to be broadly understood as a form of karmic disease, though this association did not imply shared definitions or treatments. From the late 17th century, the growing importance of the family bloodline in social relations was reflected in the perception and treatment of leprosy. During the empire building decades (1870-1945) the understanding and treatment of leprosy were profoundly influenced by the encounter with Western medicine, but the historical record suggests considerable continuity between the old and the new. Beginning in the 1870s, the government drew upon multiple scientific threads, including the pseudo-science of eugenics, in the creation of a national system of public health, an explicit objective of both the modernization project and "racial" purification. Contemporary laws focused on prevention and eradication rather than rehabilitation, as reflected in policies of lifetime confinement of leprosy sufferers, widespread reliance on forced labor, and compulsory sterilization and abortions for thousands of "inmates." This paper will also investigate the extension of policies of segregation elsewhere in the empire, where the prevalence of leprosy not only confirmed the superiority of the colonizer and stigmatized the colonized as uncivilized, but the civilizing mission of modernity itself.