

Locality and the Development of Geosciences in Meiji Japan

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Since historians and philosophers of science have paid more attention to physics and biology than geosciences, the characteristics of the latter are still waiting to be elucidated. As a geologist Akiho Miyashiro points out, geosciences often investigate the only Earth, which makes it difficult to discover universal laws as physics presents. Instead, according to Miyashiro, local features also matter for earth scientists. In the historical context, geoscientific investigations during the Meiji period deserve to be noticed as they can shed light on the role that locality has played in the development of sciences in Japan. On the one hand, the under-surveyed field around Japan provided scientists with new opportunities for research, which lead European scientists such as John Milne to establish the first seismological society in the world. On the other hand, geophysical observations and experimentations nurtured the first generation of Japanese physicists such as Aikitsu Tanakadate and Hantaro Nagaoka. Therefore, it could be said that the geophysical investigations during the Meiji period mediated both local and global interests, circumstances, and activities. In this presentation, I will discuss how Japanese geosciences have developed within this historical situation.