

How to write the history of geoscience -right and wrong of Whig interpretation of history-

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When we write the history of geoscience, it is important to consider what kind of interpretation of history we have. For example, as Brush(1995) argues that it is difficult to completely eliminate Whig interpretation, his history of planetary science (1996) picks up such topics as the studies on planetary formation, earth's inner structure, and age of the earth - which are selected from our present concerns. Thus, at least our questions on history are decided relative to our present concerns. On the other hand, anachronism or Whiggism of the excessive types - as we read our present knowledge or methodology in the past scientists, or praises Hutton's uniformitarianism above his contemporary fame - cannot be called objective description of history. So, the content of description should be coherent with the contemporary knowledge and background.

However, things get complicated when we dig into the detail. For example, Oldroyd(1985) rightly points out that such criticism of Whig interpretation is itself founded on Whiggism. As we sum up the oral history of living geoscientists (Aoki 2013), even "facts" might be influenced by Whig interpretation. Is it possible / desirable to eliminate such influence? Another problem is, the choice between various types of interpretation depends on the context (purpose), and the written works are often transcontextual (Iseda 2013). Historians of science aim to attain objective description. On the other hand, in case of the history of science for the general public or science education, one might argue that some simplification or idealization (i.e. Whig interpretation) - even "fictions" - may be better to serve the purpose. Also, the contemporary history has the aspect that it is written by scientists while reflecting on the past.

Thus, construction of the contemporary history of geoscience raises the question whether we could reconcile various positions. In this presentation such problems concerning Whig interpretation will be discussed.

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