

Centre for the Humanities and Medicine
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Convergence and Collisions: Disease, Religion, and Healing in Asia

Sanitizing Menstruation in Modern Japan
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The physiological phenomenon known as menstruation has long been embedded with interpretations of difference and power, projected as sacred, polluted, or taboo, to name a few. As such, anthropological studies have identified multiple communities around the world observing menstrual taboos, using segregation huts, or viewing menstruating shamans as all-powerful. Scholars generally view such practices to be representative of primitive societies, disappearing or eliminated upon contact with a more powerful and modern knowledge system. The banning of menstrual segregation in Japan in the late nineteenth century appeared to follow this trend, yet the perception of menstruation as something polluted continued to prevail, embalmed in a more sophisticated vocabulary of modern science and medicine. What were the purposes of the newly revamped interpretations on menstruation, which maintained elements of the past?