

A Foreign Perspective on Education in Japan – William Griffis and Japanese Educational Reforms in the 1870s

Abstract:

The Meiji Restoration was accompanied by sweeping changes to Japan's institutions and its society. The new government instituted numerous reforms to modernize Japan in order to be acknowledged as an equal member in the comity of nations, then dominated by the Western powers, and to abolish the Unequal Treaties. As part of its attempts at modernization, the government hired numerous foreign experts, known as *oyatoi gaikokujin*, to introduce modern technology, practices and knowledge to Japan. One of the most prominent foreigners to serve in Japan during the 1870s was the US-American educator William Griffis, who worked in Japan from 1870 until 1874. However, Griffis did not only help to introduce Western knowledge to Japan, but he also disseminated knowledge of Japan in the West. This presentation will look at a series of articles on the subject of "Education in Japan" published by Griffis in the Japan Weekly Mail, an English-language newspaper published in Yokohama, from late 1873 until early 1874. It will examine how Griffis portrayed the educational reforms and Japan's progress in general. It will further look upon the role of Western experts and newspapers as mediators of knowledge and how reports such as Griffis' contributed to the formation of an image of a "New Japan" in the West in the 1870s.

Keywords: Meiji Restoration – Education Reform – William Griffis – New Japan – Treaty Port Press – Japan Weekly Mail