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Ideological Battles for Academic Freedom: Red Purge in the US Occupied Japan

Panel: Issues in Education

Is it still within the boundary of academic freedom to teach an ideology that will suffocate such freedom? That was the question violently discussed in occupied Japan at the emergence of the Cold War. This paper examines the challenging birth of academic freedom and university autonomy during the US Occupation of Japan (1945~1952).

Japan's conservative party aligned with the US government. Japanese academics, however, viewed the US as a dangerous reactionary that would take a peace-loving Japan back to a miserable past, and thus developed an unyielding "anti-American attitude."

Although the American GHQ did promote freedom, their subsequent behaviors to contain communism negated their earlier policies that the Japanese professors had wholeheartedly embraced.

The Red Purge of Japanese education was launched from September 1949 to March 1951, and proved to be a critical test for the survival of academic freedom. No GHQ officers or Japanese government ministers, however, wanted to take credit for the success of the Red Purge.