

# From 'Sacred Cow' to 'Kobe Beef'

## Japan's Bovine Revolution

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**403 Kent Hall**  
**Columbia University**



For centuries prior to the Meiji Restoration, it was taboo in Japan to kill cows and eat beef. Yet, almost as soon as the new “treaty port” of Kobe was opened to Western settlement in 1868, it began to develop a reputation for its meat. This lecture will explain how this was possible and consider the impact of the “birth of Kobe beef” on the human population of the city at the dawn of the modern era. Particular attention will be given to the involvement of “outcaste” (= “untouchable”) communities in the new industry. By raising the question of “sacred cows” and “untouchability” in an unfamiliar context, the lecture will also try to highlight the need for more creative analysis of the comparative histories of non-Western societies and the ways in which they have been represented in the modern world.