

Fujihara Tatsushi, ed.

Handbook of Environmental History in Japan

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023. 304 pages. Hardback, €198.00. ISBN 9789048559893.

Environmental history is among the fastest-growing fields of history, according to the American Historical Association (Townsend 2015). Universities and colleges are creating new environmental history courses and degree programs in droves, and academic publications in the field are keeping pace. JSTOR reports that over the last half century the number of documents published annually about environmental history has grown tenfold (Constellate n.d.). Western historians of Japan have joined the movement and to date have generated a strong body of anglophone scholarship on the topic. Unfortunately, to date little of the research being conducted at Japanese universities has been made available to anglophone audiences.

Fujihara Tatsushi's edited volume *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan* is the first ambitious attempt to rectify this problem. Broad international exposure to Japanese work in this field is important, Fujihara asserts, for it "is full of clues to solve . . . current global environmental problems" (xv). "Handbook" in the book's title suggests an approach to the topic that privileges breadth and accessibility, and Fujihara affirms that he tasked each contributing author with conveying "both a general story that is easy for readers to learn and detailed content [from] their own research" (xiii). Many of the volume's sixteen short chapters prioritize the first task, which is more easily accomplished in ten to fifteen pages than the second. Designed to serve as both a sourcebook and a textbook, *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan* assumes no prior knowledge of Japan or environmental history. Given its dual objectives of providing broad, interdisciplinary coverage and introducing anglophone readers to Japanese research in the field, this review shall assess the book's effectiveness in both of those areas.

The volume offers considerable thematic and disciplinary breadth. In part 1, titled "Topology of Environmental History," three contributors examine the historical significance of the nation's natural landmass. Their respective studies include cultural landscapes formed by human-nature interactions; colonialism's environmental impact, particularly greening projects and cherry trees in Sakhalin, Taiwan, and Korea; and early twentieth-century national parks, including conflicts between land use, land protections, and war-related pressures. Part 2, "Pollution Incidents," focuses on well-known environmental pollution events in Japan. Its four chapters cover the Ashio Copper Mine incident, modern Japan's first case of widespread pollution; Minamata disease in Kumamoto and Niigata; the aftermath of the atomic bombings, including discrimination against "black rain" victims; and the lesser-known issue of noise pollution from the Tokaido Shinkansen. Part 3, "Between Nature and Human," explores the interactions between the human body and the natural environment. Its three chapters consider smallpox epidemics and countermeasures in early modern Japan, the use of human waste as fertilizer, and the development of modern Japanese agricultural technology. Part 4, "Seas, Lakes and Shores," focuses on water resources. Its chapters construct a regional environmental history of Lake Biwa, summarize environmental changes in Tokyo Bay, and discuss US thermonuclear tests in the Marshall Islands and their impacts on

Japan's tuna industry. Part 5, the final section, contains three chapters on forestry. They examine the development of swidden farming, imperial Japan's afforestation projects, and postwar Japanese forestry development in Southeast Asia.

This lineup covers the topics one would expect, as well as some unexpected areas. Its two chapters on nuclear issues, typically absent from environmental histories, are especially welcome inclusions. Nakao Maika's "Black Rain, Lawsuits, and Compensation" covers a historically taboo issue: how scientists and government authorities have responded to nuclear radiation's damage to human populations. Yuka Tsuchiya Moriguchi's "Tuna Fisheries and Thermonuclear Tests" extends that discussion by considering the relationship between the anti-nuclear movement and tuna fishermen. Two transnational studies, chapter 2 on colonial environments and chapter 16 on Japanese resource extraction in Southeast Asia, both long-standing sources of international consternation, also stand out as unexpected but important inclusions.

Fujihara admits certain lacunae in the volume's coverage, attention to wildlife and religion specifically. These omissions are important and regrettable given broad interest in Japanese religions and general awareness of Japan's commercial whaling, exotic pet trade, and other wildlife-related controversies. Readers may also be surprised to find a dearth of coverage on the archipelago's native environment—that is, analysis of its biodiversity, habitats, natural forests, and ecosystems in their wild state. In fact, they will soon discover that many of the book's chapters adhere to human-focused perspectives that differ from most anglophone historiography. The four chapters in part 2, for instance, focus specifically on human impacts of environmental pollution incidents, including human rights, lawsuits, discrimination, and victim compensation. Other sections likewise focus more on select human industries than on the status of the natural resources themselves.

Anthropocentric approaches to environmental history remind us that environmental history is human history, but for many readers they will also evoke long-standing controversies over "Japanese" and "Western" perceptions of nature and the environment. Japanese have long asserted their comparatively eco-friendly cultural heritage by citing the nondualistic nature of Japanese religion and the nation's history of semi-vegetarianism. The Western side, in contrast, has been widely critical of Japan's allegedly non-ecologicistic perceptions of nature. Japan's purported "love of nature," it maintains, is a misunderstanding stemming in part from early Meiji translators' choice to translate the English term "nature" as "*shizen*" instead of the more accurate term "*temnen*." As a result, *shizen*, literally "things as they are," started to be applied to human matters, acquiring a meaning closer to "as the human world goes." As Taichi Sakaiya asserts, echoing this well-established argument, the Japanese appreciation is not directed toward untamed, original nature but rather toward that which has been perfected by human hands (Sakaiya 1993, 183).

Regardless of one's position, the debate does raise important questions over environmental history and historiography. It also invites discussion of language and its role in shaping historical discourse, for *shizen* is not the only term dividing Japanese and anglophone perceptions of the environment. The standard Japanese translation of pollution is "*kōgai*" (literally, "public harm"), a utilitarian term that understands pollution as a predominantly humanistic and legal issue rather than an ecological one. A multitude of chapters in *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan* indeed adhere to a view of environmental problems as "public harm" in the sense that they foreground

the degradation of the human living environment. While English speakers may not view smallpox, the topic of Kozai Toyoko's chapter, as an environmental issue, for example, for early modern Japanese it most certainly was a source of "public harm" (pollution) that entered the body from one's environment.

The term "environment" is itself a source of cross-cultural disagreement. Yuzawa's chapter on night soil defines the Japanese term ("*kankyō*") as "the relationship that exists between humans and their natural surroundings" (132). This definition certainly reflects this book's perspective, though Western readers might dispute the need to include humans as a frame of reference, just as many would likely dispute the need to foreground humans as the central objects of attention in a volume on environmental history.

Language and translation matters evoke important questions about how to define the field itself, the type of questions well-suited to an undergraduate course in Japanese environmental history. *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan's* chapters are easily adapted to such a course. While some merely summarize well-known cases of "public harm," others are rife with rich, provocative fodder for classroom discussion. Hashimoto's chapter on Lake Biwa approaches its topic as a regional environmental history to, as Amino Yoshihiko put it, "shed light from a variety of angles on the infinite depth of the natural world" (168). Takemoto's chapter on tree planting likewise seeks to advance the field by shifting interest away from "forestry history" toward "forest history" (i.e., forest conservation). Although Hashimoto's and Takemoto's studies remain rooted in relationships "between humans and their natural surroundings," they nonetheless seem to call for more holistic and naturalistic reappraisals of Japanese environmental history. If this is the case, then this book represents a credible starting point for such.

As already noted, the book also offers points of historiographical comparison with anglophone scholarship. It stands in interesting contrast, for example, to *Japan at Nature's Edge: The Environmental Context of a Global Power* (Miller, Thomas, and Walker 2013), whose fifteen chapters were authored almost exclusively by American scholars. Though the two works cover considerable common ground, their approaches and analyses differ notably. Chapters in *Japan at Nature's Edge* are generally more historical, theoretical, and ecological; those in Fujihara's tend to be more utilitarian and data-driven. The juxtaposition reminds us of the self-evident yet often forgotten truism that history and the environment are cultural constructs. Whether as a stand-alone text or as a pedagogical foil for other scholarship, *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan* will be a valuable resource for researchers and teachers seeking to incorporate Japanese historiography into their work.

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