

INTRODUCTION: ASIAN ENVIRONMENTS

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Environmental issues have been grabbing headline space around the world in recent years. Mounting concerns over climate change have been added to an already growing list of problems—salinization, air and water pollution, biodiversity loss, and so on. These concerns are often strongly focussed on Asia, whose states' burgeoning economies and industries, increasing populations and energy needs are heightening both resource demands and anxieties about the ability of the planet to sustain its human population.²

Such anxieties, however, can mask the complex, historically contingent, ways in which the people of this region and elsewhere have interacted with, and thought about, the environment around them. Recent work, for instance, has brought to an English-speaking audience the complexity of Chinese interactions with nature.³ More controversially, Judith Shapiro has taken to task the environmental policies of the Peoples Republic

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² Note, for instance: Vaclav Smil, *China's Past, China's Future*, New York and London, 2004; Elizabeth Economy, *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future*, Ithaca, 2004; Paul G. Harris, ed., *Confronting Environmental Change in East and Southeast Asia: Eco-Politics, Foreign Policy and Sustainable Development*, London and Tokyo, 2005; Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, London, 1988; Hideo Imura and Miranda A. Schreurs, eds., *Environmental Policy in Japan*, Cheltenham and Northampton (Massachusetts), 2005.

³ Mark Elvin and Liu Ts'ui-jung, eds., *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History*, Cambridge, 1998; Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China*, New Haven and London, 2004.

of China (PRC), but not without criticism.⁴ Elsewhere in East Asia, English-language studies have brought out the complexity and shared experience of human environmental attitudes, and the early development of Japan's forestry.⁵ In South Asia, a burgeoning and fascinating literature on the region's environmental history has set the benchmark for similar studies elsewhere.⁶ Works on environmental protest, overviews of Indian ecological history or investigations of its 'green history' have provided new perspectives on human-environmental interactions.⁷

The articles in this volume similarly aim to add new perspectives to studies of Asian environments. Many of these contributions are drawn from a one-day conference held at the University of Otago on 2 September 2006, and kindly sponsored by the Asia:NZ Foundation and 'Asia-New Zealand' Research Cluster, University of Otago, and supported by the Department of History, University of Otago. Others have been elicited from invited contributors. Together, they provide some fascinating new directions in research on this region.

Each of the eight articles and seven poems investigate many of the following themes. First, they are concerned with the ways in which humans have represented and framed their relationship with nature. On Japan's Ogasawara islands, for instance, Nanyan Guo asks whether an ecological consciousness is developing among both the islands' inhabitants and the Japanese Government. In a different way and at a different time and place, Geoff Watson notes how British 'great gamers' (imperial adventurers and spies) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented the very rugged and dangerous environment of Central Asia as one that fostered and maintained a strong masculine identity. Likewise, Duncan Campbell's translation of Qian Daxin 'A Record of the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets' (henceforth, the Master of the Nets) evokes a history of the

⁴ Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*, Cambridge and New York, 2001. For a criticism of Shapiro's book, note, Peter Ho, 'Mao's War Against Nature? The Environmental Impact of the Grain-First Campaign in China', *China Journal*, 50 (July, 2003), 37-59.

⁵ Conrad Totman, *Pre-Industrial Korea and Japan in Environmental Perspective*, Leiden, 2004; C. D. Totman, *The Origins of Japan's Modern Forests: The Case of Akita*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1985.

⁶ For a soupçon, see: David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha, 'Introduction: Themes and Issues in the Environmental History of South Asia', in David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha, eds., *Nature, Culture and Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*, Delhi, reprint, 1996, 1-20; Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodaran, and Satpal Sangwan, 'Introduction', in Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodaran, and Satpal Sangwan, eds., *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*, Oxford, 1998, 1-26.

⁷ Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Berkeley, 1993; Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*, 2nd. Ed., Oxford, 2005; Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, New York, reprint, 1997.

Chinese garden culture of Suzhou written during the fading grandeur of the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799, r. 1735-1796).

Second, the articles embody very different, and often contested, representations of nature. Susan Heydon, writing on the development of Khunde Hospital in Nepal, shows the negotiations required by medical staff at the hospital to incorporate environmental factors and local needs into its healthcare. I look at the different spatial representations of ‘Chineseness’ by focussing on the development of selected Chinese gardens in New Zealand, while Cath Knight charts clashes between conservation and development-focussed approaches to the management of the Asiatic black bear.

Third, in their own way, the articles demonstrate the ways in which global knowledge about environments has been disseminated and used. Cao Yongkang et al.’s article on the model for Dunedin’s planned Chinese Garden fully exemplifies the ways in which the Master of the Nets has been transformed into an almost iconic symbol of Chinese culture, in this case forming the principle design concept behind the planned garden in Dunedin. In another way, Alex McKay’s history of European involvement with the Himalayan region of Tibet illustrates the manner in which European aesthetics and medical practices were, in a sense, transposed to a new environment.

The first three articles in the volume are woven together through Qian Daxin’s account of the Master of the Nets Garden. Qian’s account (1796) appeared at a time when, in contrast to the large-scale territorial expansion of earlier decades, the Chinese Kingdom was beset by growing indebtedness, rebellion and corruption. As Duncan Campbell notes in his introduction to the translation, Qian Daxin’s account charts out the changing ownership of the garden and how it came to be in the author’s hands. But more than that, Qian’s account demonstrates the close connections between the garden and its owner’s status. As Qian describes its changes of ownership, so he places himself in its esteemed lineage of owners, the literary and artistic allusions he employs also establishing the author’s own standing and status. Campbell’s introduction illustrates well Craig Clunas’ argument concerning expanding patterns of consumption during the late Ming (1368-1644 CE) period, in which ‘taste comes into play, as an essential legitimator of consumption and an ordering principle which prevents the otherwise inevitable-seeming triumph of market forces’.⁸ Qian’s literary account of his garden places him as one also possessing exquisite taste.

The ‘Chinese’ garden has not simply been confined to its region of origin. As Campbell perceptively notes in his introduction to the translation, two phases have characterised western interest in Chinese gardens. The first, he observes, took place through western engagement with China principally in the eighteenth century and in the attempts to transplant ideas of the

⁸ Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China*, Cambridge, 1991, 171.

'Chinese' garden into European soils. The second phase of this interaction, he notes, has come about in more recent years, again through efforts to establish Chinese gardens overseas, among which the Master of the Nets has been particularly representative.

Campbell's observations are borne out by the next two articles. The first, written by Chinese-based architects and landscape specialists, describes the inspiration and design principles of Dunedin's Chinese garden, which is being developed in downtown Dunedin (South Island, New Zealand). Cao Yongkang et al. demonstrate the ways in which they have incorporated many of the design features of the Master of the Nets, and other gardens from the Jiangnan region, into Dunedin's garden. In many senses, their Dunedin design, like that of Qian's but on a different site and at a different time, also derives from detailed study and reading of the gardens of the late Ming period. They explain, for instance, the manner wherein their Dunedin design exemplifies principles of the moving and the still, the straight and the winding associated with Ming period gardens of Suzhou.

My own article interweaves the interpretations by Qian Daxin and Cao Yongkang et al. of the Master of the Nets into an investigation of the spatial representations of Chinese identity in two Chinese gardens in New Zealand, those of New Plymouth (North Island) and the currently-under-development Dunedin garden (also discussed by Cao et al). I show that these gardens are more than mere symbols of sister-city friendship, but have themselves generated whole new sets of relationships connecting New Zealand and Chinese identities and landscapes. The Kunming-New Plymouth sister-city relationship, for instance, sparked explorations of New Zealand identity through the development of a New Zealand garden in Kunming. The development of such gardens also foregrounds the growing public pride of the New Zealand Chinese community in their contribution to the culture of this country as well as the way in which Chinese culture has been translated into New Zealand.

The next two articles remain in the East Asian region, but move eastwards to Japan. Both Cath Knight's study of Japanese wildlife protection in relation to the Asiatic black bear and Nanyan Guo's on the Ogasarawa islands demonstrate the local implications of international conservation ideas. Knight uses the experience of the black bear to showcase many of the inherent problems of Japan's wildlife protection laws and management practices. She argues that in Japan 'inadequate provision for habitat protection, and the major fissure between legislation and practice' contribute to the failure of many conservation programmes. She clearly demonstrates just how complex, and unwieldy are the overlapping legislation and bureaux governing wildlife management in Japan. Her article provides a salutary lesson of many of the inherent shortcomings of environmental legislation.

Nanyan Guo's study of the Ogasawara islands, lying 1400km due east of Okinawa and known as Japan's equivalent of the Galapagos islands, details many of the similar problems outlined by Knight as confronting the

mainland, but which on the Ogasawara group are made more acute by its fragile nature. Guo's article charts the emergence of a growing ecological consciousness among the region's people, one initially used to challenge the developmental ethos at the time and which, in more recent years, has spawned a successful programme of conservation and eco-tourism.

The final three papers in this volume provide a fascinating overview of European interactions with the remoter areas of Asia, in this case Central Asia and the Himalayan region. They emphasise two of the themes of this volume: the extension of global patterns of interaction and the growing knowledge of spaces and people; and, the ways in which humans have identified themselves with (or against) particular environments. Each of the three articles illustrates the variegated ways in which Europeans have depicted these areas, from sites of colonisation to sites of spirituality and medical experimentation.

Geoff Watson looks at the British representations of Central Asia that appeared in a variety of media, from geographical accounts to missionary tracts and photographic records from the 1830s to 1914. His article overviews the ways in which a space only slightly known to Europeans became mapped. Despite the expansion in knowledge, Watson argues that its environment and people continued to be represented as wild and dangerous. This could well have resulted because of the somewhat liminal space it occupied in British thinking—neither a part of empire nor entirely apart from it due to the important geopolitical role it was increasingly seen to play as a 'buffer zone' against Russian interests in the region, conjectures Watson. Also accounting for such attitudes, as he observes, was the British failure to gain a foothold in the region, whether as soldiers or as missionaries. Yet, as he notes, its environment and people, 'inherently hostile and unreliable', were believed to imbue the region with particular qualities, encouraging both appreciation of its 'wilder' virtues as an antidote to civilisation and the hunting of its animals. By the end of this period, Watson shows that the region had lost something of the masculine qualities associated with hunting, evidenced by diminishing wildlife and the prevalence of females in this formerly frontier zone.

The nexus between environment and health has attracted widespread interest in the west, beginning most famously, perhaps, with the Hippocratic corpus of works and stimulated most strongly by European encounters with Asia initially forged through trade and, later, through colonisation from the eighteenth century onwards.⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, a specific type of medicine (tropical medicine) had emerged to explain the patterns of disease associated with tropical areas.¹⁰ As Alex McKay and Susan Heydon show respectively, the health-environmental link carried on well into the

⁹ Mark Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India 1600-1850*, New Delhi, 1999.

¹⁰ David Arnold, ed., *Warm Climates and Western Medicine: The Emergence of Tropical Medicine, 1500-1900*, Atlanta and Amsterdam, 1996.

twentieth century and encouraged the development of another very specific kind of medicine based on the people and environment of the mountainous Himalaya region.

Alex McKay's article considers the ways in which European explorers and diplomats among others came to regard the Tibetan area of the Himalayas 'as a distinct medical environment . . . associated with particular medical conditions'. Focussing principally on the first half of the twentieth century, McKay discerns the emergence of a strong belief in the specificity, even uniqueness, of what was considered to be a particularly harsh, but pure and healthy, environment. Just as its inhabitants exhibited toughness, ingenuity and resourcefulness thanks to their environment, so Europeans thought that it demanded of them similar qualities. As well as demonstrating that its environment stimulated particular medical responses (most notably to altitude), McKay charts the development of other discourses, most notably that imbuing the region with special spiritual qualities. His article provides a fascinating intellectual overview of the changing, and complex, European ideas about this area.

Susan Heydon investigates the Himalayan experience of one of Tibet's neighbours, Nepal, and the emergence there of biomedicine through the lens of Khunde Hospital and its interaction with the peoples and landscapes of this region. Like McKay, Heydon argues that the particularly harsh qualities of such a high altitude environment—coldness, altitude sickness, etc.—and the specific conditions facing the hospital—including its medical demands from local and visiting peoples, isolation and inaccessibility, etc.—shaped the kinds of medical service established in this area. She demonstrates, for instance, the ways in which medical research on the Sherpa in Tibet helped debunk the notion that a particular kind of 'high altitude' man existed. Principally, though, she charts the growing association of Sir Edmund Hillary with this area. His initial connection to the region developed through climbing and blossomed into a life-long interest in the welfare of the Sherpa. Heydon also makes the important point that foreign climbers to the region not only create particular demands on medical services but also are themselves purveyors of biomedicine to the local population, a relationship which with the Hospital's own role sometimes requires careful negotiation.

The final two contributions to this volume, in a sense, return us to its beginning. As Duncan Campbell's beautifully translated piece demonstrated the furry boundaries and close relationships between nature and art, so the selections of poetry by Diana Bridge and Sriyalatha Kumarasinghe extend this theme in a contemporary manner. Each in their own way explores what might be termed 'landscapes of memory'—whereby nature and history evoke memories of places and people.¹¹ For Diana Bridge, in her poem 'the gap between stones', the experience of climbing up Gol Gumbaz, the seventeenth century mausoleum in Bijapur (Karnataka, India) built by Mohamed Adil Shah, evokes a very real and tactile response in which the sounds and

¹¹ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, New York, 1995.

sensations of the mausoleum ring with the present but also the past. In 'Taking Leave of a Friend', Bridge takes inspiration from the legendary Tang (618-906 CE) poet, Li Bo 李白 (701-762 CE),¹² one of whose poems' titles, as translated by Ezra Pound, Bridge also takes for hers. Sriyalatha Kumarasinghe explores memory and landscape in a different way, through the associations of place evoked by a tropical plant growing in a temperate landscape and through the development of an overseas Japanese garden.

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¹² On whom, see Arthur Waley, *The Poetry and Career of Li Po, 701-762 A.D.*, London, 1969.