Doing Environmental History in Japan (provisional syllabus)

Time/Place: Mon / Thurs 1:10 – 2:40
Tel/Email: lpincus@umich.edu

Description
In this course, we explore concepts of nature and histories of the environment in Japan through a series of questions: What does “nature” signify in Japan and how have concepts of the natural world changed over time? How have people living on the Japanese archipelago interacted with the land, seas, and biota from the time of the Tokugawa shoguns to the Fukushima meltdown? What do these interactions tell us about Japanese understandings of the non-human living world, and how have these understandings changed under the pressures of “modernity”? Finally, how does the environment become a site of conflict and controversy in Japan?

This course will address these questions through specific explorations of concepts, places, episodes and agents from 1600 to the present. We begin with historical practices of representing and imagining the natural world in the visual arts, literature, and philosophy. The focus then shifts to more practical dealings with the land and the living world as manifested in agriculture and forestry during the Tokugawa era. As Japan moves into modernity, we trace the complex effects of industrialization and social modernization on the natural environment, both in imagination and in the physical world. In a series of case studies, from the Ashio copper mines pollution case at the turn of the 19th century and the Minamata mercury poisoning disaster in the postwar era to the earthquake/tsunami/nuclear disaster of 2011, we will consider how Japanese governments and citizens have created and responded to the change, degradation, and destruction of the natural world.

Expectations
This seminar-style course is a collaborative enterprise in exploring questions and issues emerging from the course materials. The task of presenting texts and facilitating discussion will be divided among members of the class, with students sharing areas of interest and background. Each week, 2 students will facilitate the class session, creating discussion questions in collaboration with the instructor to be posted online in advance of class. Everyone will be asked to read and respond to the postings, with assignments varying week to week. Needless to say, the success of this collaboration depends on the level of engagement each of you brings to the table; your presence, preparation, and participation are basic requirements. You will all be asked to undertake two writing projects for the course: 1) a brief “concept” essay, due _____; and 2) an exploratory essay on a place or an event where you will have an opportunity to do environmental history yourself, drawing both on course material and outside sources, due _____.

Required Texts
Other readings available electronically on CTools either as a PDF or as a URL reference.

Grading

- presence 15
- preparation/engagement (forum/discussion) 35
- first essay 20
- second essay 30

Weekly Schedule

SECTION I: Resources and Concepts

Week 1 (Sept 5-9): Foundations: Environmental History, Nature, Japan
Readings:

SECTION II: Tokugawa “Nature”: Precedents and Legacies (1600-1867)

Week 2 (Sept 12-16) Tokugawa Forests and Farms: Changing Ecologies
Readings:

Week 3 (Sept 19-23)
Monday (9/19) – National Holiday
Thursday (9/22) – National Holiday

Week 4 (Sept 26-30): Nature as Knowledge
Readings:
- Federico Marcon, The Knowledge of Nature and *Nature as Knowledge in Early Modern Japan* (University of Chicago, 2015), Introduction (3-27), Ch. 7 “Inventorying Nature” (140-152)

Week 5 (Oct 3-7) Un/natural Representation: Meanings of Landscape Art
Readings:
SECTION III: Modern Ecologies—Transformation & Crisis

Week 6 (Oct 10-14) Ezo / Hokkaido: Changes in the Land

Oct 10 – National Holiday

Readings:

Week 7 (Oct 17-21) Engineering Environmental Disaster in Meiji Japan

Readings:

Week 8 (Oct 24-28) Environmental Movements and Visions in Early Industrial Japan

Readings:

Week 9 (Oct 31-Nov 4) FALL BREAK

Week 10 (Nov 7-11) Lake Biwa – Dilemmas of Water Control

Readings:
Readings to be arranged
Video Clips: *Japan’s Secret Garden* (PBS Nova, 2000) & *Japan’s Secret Watergarden* (BBC Natural World, 2006-7)

Nov 10 (Thursday): Field trip to Lake Biwa

SECTION IV: THE LONG POSTWAR: DEVELOPMENTALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Week 11 (Nov 14-18) Heavy Industries and Delicate Ecologies

Readings
Frank Upham, “Unplaced Persons and the Movement for Place” in *Postwar Japan as History* (Univ. of California Press, 1993). Focus on pp. 337-344


**Week 12 (Nov 21-25) Local Landscapes and Imposing Sites**


David Aldrich, *Site Fights: Divisive Facilities and Civil Society in Japan and the West* (Cornell University Press, 2008). Read Ch. 3 “Occasional Turbulence: Airport Siting in Japan And France” (70-94)

**Week 13 (Nov 28 – Dec 2) Fukushima: Dilemmas and Disasters**


**Video Clips:** *Nuclear Meltdown Disaster* (Nova, July 29, 2015, on PBS)

**Dec 1 (Thursday): Field trip TBA**

**Week 14 (Dec 5 – 9 ) Fukushima: Dilemmas and Disasters (continued)**

**Readings:**

David Lochbaum et al, *Fukushima: The Story of a Nuclear Disaster* (part 2)


Recap and Review

**Video:** *Little Voices From Fukushima*, dir. Kamanaka Hitomi

**ELECTRONIC RESOURCES:**


American Society for Environmental History (includes bibliographies and syllabi) [http://www.aseh.net/](http://www.aseh.net/)

Environmental History on the Internet: (an electronic bibliography of resources and readings) [http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/departments/espm/env-hist/eh-internet.html](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/departments/espm/env-hist/eh-internet.html)
Bill Cronen et al., “Learning Historical Research”
http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm

(Harvard University,