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 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:**

Sept 29 (Thursday): Field trip to Kyoto National Museum: “300th Anniversary Exhibition: Yosa Buson”

Week 5 (Oct 3-7) Un/natural Representation: Meanings of Landscape Art
Readings:

Oct 6 (Thursday): Field trip to Sento Gosho (1:10 – 2:30)

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:
- Kenneth Strong, Ox Against the Storm: Tanaka Shôzô: Japan’s Conservationist Pioneer (Routledge, 1995). Chapters 8-14, epilogue (99-181);
  http://www.tandfebooks.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/isbn/9780203989470

Week 9 (Oct 31-Nov 4) FALL BREAK

Week 10 (Nov 7-11) Lake Biwa – Cultural Histories of Water
Readings:
Video Clips: *Japan’s Secret Garden* (PBS Nova, 2000) & *Japan’s Secret Watergarden* (BBC Natural World, 2006-7)

**Nov 12 (Saturday): 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**
- Eric Johnston, selected articles from *The Japan Times*, etc.

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

**Dec 1 (Thursday): Field trip or Guest Speaker TBA**

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

**Readings:**
- Norma Field and Matthew Mizenko, *Fukushima Radiation: Will you say that no crime has been committed?* (Complainants for Criminal Prosecution of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster, May 12, 2015): selections

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

Carolyn Merchant’s “Environmental History” website at UC Berkeley:  


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)  

Bill Cronen et al., “Learning Historical Research”  
[http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm](http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm)

(Harvard University,