

BOOK REVIEW

Modern Asia and Environmental Issues: Diversity and Dynamism

Edited by Tomoyo TOYOTA, Yasuhiro HAMADA, Yuji FUKUHARA,
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Satoshi SODA**

Globalization is progressing for better or worse. Increasing opportunities have arisen for businessmen and engineers to carry out projects not only in Japan but also overseas, especially in Asia. Although we might not be aware of it, such projects are involved in international environmental issues of many different kinds. Many books describing environmental issues in Asia have been published, but most of them have dealt mainly with East Asia and Southeast Asia. Very few have specifically examined South Asia and West Asia. The book introduced herein, "Modern Asia and Environmental Issues," is aimed at investigating almost the entirety of Asia, with a discussion of the diversity and dynamism of each region's particular environmental issues. Most of the eighteen authors of this book are area researchers rather than environmental researchers. Therefore, the political, social, and cultural characteristics of Asia's respective regions are well described throughout the book's more than 330 pages. Moreover, readers might imagine the possibilities and limitations posed by science and technology for resolving the diverse environmental difficulties presented therein. Indeed, the successes and failures of efforts to address environmental issues in Asian countries, which are developing rapidly in the wake of progress by Western countries, are expected to affect the futures of Latin America and Africa.

The book contents are presented below.

Introductory chapter: Environmental issues in Asia: Perspectives of regional comparisons

Part I. Modern Northeast Asia and Environmental Issues

Chapter 1: Possibility of deliberative democracy – Consensus building on Japan's selection of final disposal sites for high-level radioactive wastes

Chapter 2: Crises everywhere – Environmental issues in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Chapter 3: China's air pollution problems and its countermeasures

Chapter 4: Taiwan's environmental policy and Shaman Lapogan Literature

Part II. Modern Southeast Asia and Environmental Issues

Chapter 5: Over the environmental issues in Vietnam

Chapter 6: Utilization of forest and fishery resources in Southeast Asian islands and environmental issues – Focusing on the northern part of Borneo

* 豊田知世, 濱田泰弘, 福原裕二, 吉村慎太郎 編著. 現代アジアと環境問題 多様性とダイナミズム. 花伝社, 2020. ISBN 9784763409324

** Professor, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, College of Science and Engineering, Ritsumeikan University
Email: soda@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp
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Chapter 7: Proposals for environmental issues after Indonesia's independence and environmental protection measures

Part III. Modern South Asia and Environmental Issues

Chapter 8: Bangladesh's environmental issues – Challenging global tasks

Chapter 9: Air pollution in Delhi, India – Current situation and countermeasures

Chapter 10: Overview of Pakistan's environmental issues intertwined in multiple layers

Part IV. Modern West Asia and Environmental Issues

Chapter 11: Modern Iran after the revolution/war and environmental issues – Examples of air pollution, water resources insufficiency, waste disposal issues

Chapter 12: Rich seas driven by development and conflict – Environmental issues in the Persian Gulf

Chapter 13: Turkey's environmental issues – Focusing on water resource issues

Data collection of environmental problems in Asia

Among these Asian countries and regions, one of the most familiar to Japanese readers is Vietnam, whose issues are elucidated in Chapter 5. In this chapter, past topics are reviewed, such as the pollution that has persisted since the Vietnam War, environmental conservation under socialism, rapid development after the Doi Moi policy, and the Communist Party's responses to environmental issues. Then, recent topics in the 21st century are also discussed, such as the cancellation of the construction of nuclear power plants to be built with Russia and Japan, pollution from bauxite mining with tensions between Vietnamese political power and Chinese companies, and ocean pollution caused by the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation under the environmental protection law.

These cases of countries and regions for which accurate information is difficult to find in Japanese, such as discussions of North Korea in Chapter 2, Pakistan in Chapter 10, Iran in Chapter 11, and Persia Gulf in Chapter 12, remind us that border conflicts, nuclear weapons, revolutions, and wars can lead to unsustainable, indeed the worst, environmental outcomes. According to the World Happiness Report of 2021, the international happiness ranking evaluated based on real GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption are as follows: 24th Taiwan, 56th Japan, 79th Vietnam, 81st Malaysia, 84th China, 89th Indonesia, 101st Bangladesh, 104th Turkey, 105th Pakistan, 111th Iraq, and 140th India.

In addition, 16 articles are inserted between the chapters. The article "COVID-19 Crisis and environmental issues" states that the sky has become sufficiently clear to see the Himalayas with the naked eye for the first time in decades because of the lockdown in northern India, where air pollution has become increasingly severe. Some concern persists about the balance between post-COVID-19 economic recovery measures and environmental protection. The article "Islamic world's view of nature and environmental issues" introduces us to Islam's values for environmental issues, where its ethics are explained based on an interpretation of passages from the Holy Quran. The "Ecofeminism" article introduces two examples: the Chipco (*to hug* in Hindi), which originated from local women's initiatives in India to protect trees by hugging them in the early 1970s, and a lawsuit brought by women in Indonesia in opposition to cement factory construction.

Globalization led by economically developed countries might define environmental issues in a monistic way. However, the following words in this book impressed me: "Regional knowledge is indispensable for understanding various discussions of environmental issues because it brings diversity or multiplicity to the monistic frame", and "Environmental issues provide challenges that should be addressed in unison with countries and regions having different ideologies, ethnicities, denominations, and political systems".

Although not addressed in this book, the government of Afghanistan in South Asia fell as Taliban forces entered Kabul in 2021, and the Russian military in North Asia attacked Ukraine in 2022. Indeed, decades of exchanges with Western countries do not always lead to solutions for peace and environmental issues in Asia. In light of these recent world-influencing events, this introductory book can illuminate the diversity and dynamism in the world from the perspective of environmental issues.