

Pradyumna P. Karan, Unryu Suganuma, eds. *Local Environmental Movements: A Comparative Study of the United States and Japan*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008. xii + 303 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-2488-9.



Reviewed by Colin Tyner

Published on H-Environment (January, 2011)

Commissioned by Dolly Jørgensen (University of Stavanger)

In her history of contemporary environmental protest in Japan from 1981, *Environmental Protest and Citizen Politics in Japan*, Margaret A. McKean drew attention to the role that environmental campaigns have played in creating a new political dynamic at the local level in Japan. Coming out of a conference held at the University of Kentucky in 2003, which examined the dynamics of environmental groups' influence over policy-making in Japan and the United States, Pradyumna P. Karan and Unryu Suganuma's *Local Environmental Movements in the United States and Japan* suggests that an examination of environmental movements, which often work outside governmental and nongovernmental organizations, while converging on the same discursive and material space, provides social scientists with the opportunity to analyze "politics in the raw" (p. 5). Because "there is no one, single environmental movement and ... the differences between the many environmental movements far outweigh their similarities" (p. 4), Karan and Suganuma argue further that an examination of these po-

litical performances, which implicate multiple stakeholders within any given locality, requires a flexible methodological tool kit and attention to complex assemblages of the actors, goals, values, and the mode of action in each of the case studies presented in the book.

This is, indeed, a very complex book, covering seventeen case studies of local environmental movements active, or once active, in the United States and Japan from the 1960s to 2008. The chapters are assembled loosely in five thematic sections. The first section includes an introductory chapter and comparative histories of environmental movements in the United States and Japan. In their essay, Richard Forrest, Miranda Schreurs, and Rachel Penrod attempt to situate the particularity of local movements into a national framework by nationalizing local ecologies and movements under a tidal wave of historical context. As a cautionary tale, they highlight the importance of reflecting on the complexity of situations rather than pushing for cross-national similarities or relying on facile generalizations. The

final two chapters of this section examine the ways in which certain movements have attempted to work their political goals in conversation with the language of international environmentalism. Stanely D. Brunn explores the role that *National Geographic* has played in bringing environmental problems into popular consciousness through its textual, broadcast, and online media. Kim Reimann offers a methodologically savvy essay exploring how environmental groups in Japan have begun to use what she calls “postmaterialist protest frames,” such as the language of “biodiversity” or cultural artifacts, to protect threatened wetlands near the city of Nagoya (p. 45). Instead of focusing on human costs of polluting the environment, which characterized the environmental movement in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s, Reimann argues that environmental groups have used these discursive frames to engage conversations with national and international nongovernmental organizations with similar conservationist and preservationist goals.

The second section covers frictions produced in communities that host the facilities of national nuclear and chemical weapons programs. The first two chapters (chapters 5 and 6) examine how communities hosting nuclear facilities in both countries came to terms with the effects of nuclear radiation. David Zurick’s essay investigates the political movement opposed to the proposed construction of a biological weapons incinerator at the Blue Grass Army Depot in central Kentucky. John Metz’s well-researched and well-written chapter examines the community relations of the U.S. Department of Energy through nine “site-specific advisory boards” (p. 77). If there is a common thread that runs through all of the chapters in this section, it is that the community-based movements that developed in opposition to these national facilities were made possible because of the community members’ unwillingness to put up with the environmental and financial costs of hosting them.

The third section deals with both successful and unsuccessful environmental movements to protect fragile terrestrial and littoral landscapes. The chapters help to illustrate how movements to preserve built environments are often produced by the coming together of a number of social worlds, many of which would not come into contact otherwise. Don Carey and Karan’s case study shows how groups of conservative and progressive actors in the Bluegrass region of Kentucky worked together to hold back the colonization of the rolling landscape by developers. Kenji Yamazaki and Tomoko Yamazaki show that the activist successes preserving what is left of the Sanbaze tidelands in Tokyo Bay depended on them framing their preservationist arguments in a way that “can be understood by the general public,” thereby achieving some kind of “consensus among interested parties” (p. 203). All of the case studies in this section illustrate how environmental movements often have trouble functioning within overly complex institutional structures of local, regional, and national governments. Masao Tao, for example, describes how the fractured policymaking process in municipal politics in Kyoto has worked to undermine efforts of preservationists to preserve much of the urban environment.

The fourth and largest section of the book examines the ways in which environmental movements evolved in the context of mega-projects, such as the building of hydroelectric dams, airports, and reclamation projects. Two standout chapters are Akiko Ikeguchi and Kohei Okamoto’s discussion of the movement to preserve the tidal flats near the port of Nagoya, and Sukanuma’s investigation of the local and international movement to protect the Shiraho Sea from the proposed construction of an airport on Ishigaki Island. Ikeguchi and Okamoto bring up the salient point that one of the reasons that political movements to preserve ecological spaces like the Fuji-mae Tidal Flats developed is because they are valued not only by activists for cultural or biological reasons but also by industrialists who view the

tidal flats as easily reclaimable land. Both chapters demonstrate well that much of the success of environmental movements in Japan and elsewhere relies on the ability of the members of the movement to enlist members from multiple and dynamic interests of the social worlds directly engaged or implicated in the preservation, or destruction, of the local environment.

The final section, which is ostensibly on movements that developed in militarized island environments, examines human conflict with human and nonhuman invasive species that have established themselves on the islands of Okinawa and Hawai'i. Jonathan Taylor reviews how Okinawan movements to protect the environment and remove the bases from the prefecture are intertwined, while Christopher Jaspardo's chapter on alien-species control in Hawai'i shows how civilian and military personnel have worked together to protect biodiversity within the Nu'upi Wildlife Management Area, which is partially on U.S. military land. The essays are housed under the section heading "Protesting the Effect of Military Activity," although, really, Taylor's chapter on Okinawa is the only one that deals explicitly with protest against military activity. In contrast, Jaspardo's chapter deals less with protest against the military than it does with how the military partially enabled the removal of invasive species from the Nu'upi Wildlife Management Area, providing significant amounts of scientific expertise (including Jaspardo's), volunteers, and funding.

The lack of continuity in this collection of case studies might dissuade some reviewers from assigning *Local Environmental Movements in the United States and Japan* to undergraduates. However, the chapters read alone demonstrate what can be gained from examining the history of environmental movements locally. Most contributors ask critical questions that are attentive to the historical contingencies through which the social movements have developed in complex socio-natural ecologies that are particular to each case

study. The different ways in which these movements have unfolded cannot be simply attributed to variations in preexisting cultural ideas about nature. Rather, the chapters show that ideas about nature and grassroots politics are shaped as much by relationships between actors as they are by grand historical narratives, culturalist premonitions, or crude stereotypes. For this reason alone, this collection of essays is well worth the read.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-environment>

Citation: Colin Tyner. Review of Karan, Pradyumna P.; Suganuma, Unryu, eds. *Local Environmental Movements: A Comparative Study of the United States and Japan*. H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. January, 2011.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=31284>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.