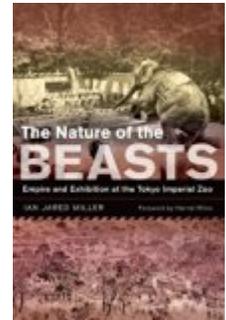


Ian Jared Miller. *The Nature of the Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. xxvii + 322 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-520-27186-9.



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The archetypal zoo is a place occupied by creatures of fleshy and phantom realms. Nonhuman creatures enclosed in captive spaces interact with humans in substantive ways, yet the images cast on the walls of their enclosures are never stable; they represent changing understandings of the human place in the biosphere and illustrate shifting paradigms according to which the world is given meaning. Ian Jared Miller's *The Nature of the Beasts* builds significantly on the insights which have preceded it, engaging most substantially with the interactions between Japanese identity and attitudes toward the nonhuman world, reflecting changing notions of civilization and savagery, sacrifice and sentiment.

Miller's focus on the Ueno Park Imperial Zoo, Tokyo—the oldest zoo in Japan, the first in East Asia, and the first not to have been fashioned by a Western imperial power—approaches these issues in broadly chronological fashion. The work is split into three distinct but interlinked parts, each representing a significant contribution to both our understandings of human-animal relationships in

modernity, and changing senses of identity in Japan. The zoo itself was founded in 1882, when Japanese relationships with the rest of the natural world (grounded in a sense of ontological separation) were increasingly influenced by those hallmarks of modernity: industry, mechanized warfare, and imperial ideology. These are symptoms of what Miller calls “Ecological Modernity,” an epoch defined by a particularly exploitative attitude to the world's resources and characterized as much by change as by stability (this recognition is in itself a valuable one). This notion forms the conceptual spine of this work. Unraveling this model and its manifestations between the founding of the zoo and the later twentieth century permits us a window into shifting and interlocking ecological dynamics, social practices, and politics. This, in itself, lays bare the messiness of captive spaces and the array of factors which shape not just Japanese, but human, ideas concerning, and interactions with, the rest of the natural world.

In the three core sections that constitute this work, Miller convincingly unpacks the complex

interplays between Japanese identity and ecological ideas within the microcosm of the Ueno Zoo. Part 1, "The Nature of Civilization," reveals how the zoo emerged from the very threshold of modernity, in large part as a consequence of Japanese aspirations to become "civilized." In the chapter's journey from the first "museum" (Yamashita) and menagerie through to the founding of a zoo inspired by those in the Europe and the United States, it illustrates a sense of what it meant to the Japanese to be civilized in modernity. Rejecting the antitheses of civilization such as the dancing bears of earlier animal entertainments, the zoo, in emulation of Western zoos, imported a didactic style of exhibition which privileged learning and observation, reflecting the sense that mass education could be a potent driver of social evolution, "civilizing" Japanese society (p. 58). As Harriet Ritvo notes in the foreword to this work, Miller's examination of the ways in which Ueno Zoo aspired to the heights of "civilization" embodied in practices at Western zoos is decidedly valuable. It not only reveals culturally specific understandings of savagery and civilization, but it also illuminates a world of diverse influences in human relationships with nonhumans in a global context.

The equivalence of "civilization" with imperialism is plain in the history of Ueno Zoo. While Miller's examination of the links between Ueno and imperialism (be it imperial ideologies, or the manifestations of imperialism in zoo architecture) is reminiscent of much that came before it, the specificity of these links in relation to this particular zoo are significant.[1] The war trophy exhibit, for instance, which displayed, among others things, wild boar captured by soldiers in North Korea, is one that is not replicated elsewhere. Furthermore, Miller's examination of the associations between the peaceful relations between children and animals and the prospective management of Japan's imperial enterprise is illuminating. Likewise, the distinctively colored nature of nationalistic prejudices that is evident in the zoo is fasci-

nating. The 1902 edition of *Boys World*, for instance, depicted a particular species drenched in nationalistic prejudice. "Foreign sources," the publication proclaimed, "say that camels are quite depraved, and this is certainly true. If camels were people, they'd be just like the Chinese." [2]

The idiosyncratic flavor of human-animal relationships at Japan's principal zoo is vividly, and sometimes disturbingly, illustrated in part 2, "The Culture of Total War." Miller's examination discloses manifestations of human-animal relationships which are quite distinctive. Memorials for the nonhuman war dead are extremely unusual in zoos, yet a cenotaph was constructed for lost animals in 1931 at Ueno, and by 1945 there were similar constructions in most of the empire's larger zoos. Furthermore, the imagery of valiant conflict was explicit at the zoo: retired warhorses were paraded, while uniformed children saluted animal soldiers. It is in the context of total war that Miller examines the slaughter of dangerous and expensive creatures. This analysis of the "sacrifice" of animals--which were starved, strangled, poisoned, bludgeoned, as the Japanese empire collapsed--adds significantly to historiography regarding Japan in an all-consuming state of total war by contextualizing it within the wider frame of Japanese identity over a significant period of time.[3] As Miller remarks, "we cannot ... understand the 'dark valley' of Japan's imperial nadir, without accounting for the powerful emotions of the time, and the story of Ueno's 'animal martyrs' offers us a connection with that world" (p. 160).

In the years following the collapse of the empire, Japanese identity reconfigured once more. Part 3, "After Empire," explores this reconfiguration in relation to further transformations in human-animal relationships at the zoo as it became a locus of innocence, reflecting a rising desire to expunge the war guilt of the Japanese people. It is the figure of the panda that Miller best deploys as a symbol of a Japanese nation remade at the climax of ecological modernity. The interest of the

Japanese in the giant panda was intense when the first pair arrived in 1972, while Miller's illustration of "panda diplomacy" serves to effectively illustrate the central contradictions which so complicate our conceptualizations of nonhumans in the most recent decades of the Anthropocene.

The insights which Miller offers are of substantial significance in their contribution to a number of historiographies. In addition to enriching those concerning Japanese identities in modernity, previous Japanese environmental histories have tended to be declensionist in attitude, thrusting a finger towards the historical roots of irreparable environmental deprivations. Yet, this work does not fall into this schematic. Instead, while fully recognizing the contribution of zoos to the diminution of the biosphere, Miller depicts a complex place of diverse human relationships with the rest of the natural world. The story that is uncovered is one dripping with complexity and which challenges the apparent simplicity of such wholly declensionist narratives. Moreover, each zoo is distinctively tinted, and this is a fact that has often been buried beneath far-reaching homogenizations in existing historiography.[4] Each captive space is a unique configuration of humans and nonhumans within their own physical and ideological parameters, and Miller's examination of the Ueno Zoo reveals a distinctive formation. This illustration of specificity is a significant contribution to environmental and animal histories. Indeed, it is critical if we are to fully appreciate human relationships with animals in historical contexts, large and small.

Yet, there are matters here which, rather than impacting on the validity of Miller's insights, reflect some of the broader challenges facing the field of environmental and animal histories. Throughout this work, the beasts with which Miller is concerned tend to be those obscured beneath their representations. While he lays down his intention to give voice to animals which, he acknowledges, are hardly passive, even in captive

context, he also warns that historical sources to assist this endeavor are limited. Indeed, he argues that to ventriloquize in the absence of source material would be an act of dominance in itself, further obscuring the "real" animal. Consequently, when he alludes to the "agency" of the nonhuman in various contexts (pp. 144, 196), the concept remains underdeveloped. While giving voice to the animals, especially those who whisper from the depths of the past, is intensely problematic, I do not adhere to the view that it is impossible to access and illustrate animal influence in the past. There remains significant scope to integrate animal action into zoo histories, to convincingly give form to the flesh and bones.

Further, in Harriet Ritvo's foreword, she notes that for most people the term "animal" continues to denote the apes and cats and bears and dogs of the world (p. xvi). This book perpetuates this preconception of animal life. Yet, this is no fault of Miller's; alas, this is the nature of the historical record. In keeping with a general sense of "the animal" as four-legged furry-thing, most archives relating to zoos reflect an enduring pre-eminence of mammals in our estimation. Finally, the perennial problem of visitor reception is in evidence here. Miller acknowledges this methodological limitation, though he points to tantalizing glimpses throughout.

Raising important questions for historians of human-animal relationships in the past, engagingly written, comprehensively researched within a transparent methodological framework, and referenced in relation to an impressive source base, this book ought to become seminal reading to those interested in human understandings of the more-than-human natural world in a global, rather than exclusively Western, context, as well as scholars concerned by the cultural manifestations of Japanese identity in a period defined by cataclysmic turbulence.

Notes

[1]. See, for instance, Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Robert W. Jones, "The Sight of Creatures Strange to our Clime: London Zoo and the Consumption of the Exotic," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2, no. 1 (1997): 1-26.

[2]. "Ueno Dobotsuen," *Shonen Sekai* 8, no. 4 (1902): 116-17, quoted on 82-83.

[3]. A comprehensive analysis of the Japanese animal slaughter was undertaken by Mayumi Itoh, but this work lacked the larger context within which Miller situates his analysis: Mayumi Itoh, *Japanese Wartime Zoo Policy: The Silent Victims of World War II* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[4]. See, for instance, Eric Baratay and Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier, *Zoo: A History of Zoological Gardens in the West*, trans. by Oliver Welsh (London: Reaktion, 2002).

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Starved, strangled, poisoned, bludgeoned,

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