



**David Fedman.** *Seeds of Control: Japan's Empire of Forestry in Colonial Korea.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020. xvii + 292 pp. \$40.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-295-74745-3.

**Reviewed by** Timothy Yang (University of Georgia)

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The salutary act of planting a tree was often far more political than it seemed. David Fedman makes this case for colonial Korea (and more) in his new book, *Seeds of Control*. Since Richard Grove's pathbreaking *Green Imperialism* (1944), environmental historians have demonstrated the intimate connections between sustainability, conservation, and state power.[1] The focus, with few exceptions, has been on Western empires and their encounters with the exotic flora and fauna of far-flung lands. *Seeds of Control* makes a crucial intervention into this scholarship by asking what happens when an island nation on the periphery—one that was nearly colonized itself and has had, as Conrad Totman's *Green Archipelago* (1989) has shown, a deep history of dealing with the consequences of denuded forests—forges a green empire of its own. Fedman shows—to give a taste of his lucid prose—how “forestry in general and silviculture in particular functioned as a vital dimension of state power in colonial Korea” (p. 7). The scientists, bureaucrats, and timber industrialists (among others) refashioned “deep-rooted Japanese ideas about deforestation, statecraft, and silviculture” and “globally circulating theories of scientific forestry and natural resource conservation” to create an empire of forestry (p. 13). And in doing so, they “etch[ed] into the social as well as physical landscape patterns of consumption, sys-

tems of regulation, and ideas of rationalization that outlived the Japanese Empire” and structured the developmental logic of postcolonial forestry regimes in North and South Korea and beyond (pp. 7-8).

*Seeds of Control* demonstrates David Fedman's creativity and skill as a historian. The research—based on a critical reading of colonial forestry bureau archives tempered with popular voices that provide alternative perspectives—is extensive and thorough. From this rich source material (notably in both Japanese and Korean), Fedman weaves together an intricate, multilayered narrative that operates at different registers through thematically organized chapters along a loose chronology. The first section examines the ideological and administrative roots of forestry conservation as state control during the Meiji era. Chapter 1, dubbed the “Imperialization of Forestry,” examines how forestry bureaucrats, scientific experts, and commercial lumbering interests co-produced a centralized and professional forestry regime “whereby Japan's forests were freighted with new meaning as building blocks of capitalism, sites of emperor worship, and symbols of national prestige” (p. 25). Chapter 2 addresses the creation of fallacious narratives of environmental decline in Korea, and how these narratives of deforestation as proof of Korean debasement le-

gited Japan's forestry regime that would bring "civilization and sylvan enlightenment" (p. 65). The book's second section concerns the implementation of forestry policy at multiple levels. It opens with arguably the key chapter of the book, chapter 3, on woodland-tenure reform. Here, Fedman meticulously describes the creation of an administrative legal apparatus that helped dispossess land from Korean communities and laid the groundwork for reconstituting land for colonial interests. The rationality of law amounted to an "instrument of colonial violence" (p. 96). Chapter 4 explores a network of colonial forestry scientists whose research agenda and *raison d'être* involved border-crossing negotiations between local and global epistemologies. Chapter 5 provides a fine-grained analysis of the development of the timber industry in the Yalu River basin, which was often characterized as a "limitless treasure house" of resources (p. 119). The subject of chapter 6 is the promotion (and pushback) of civic forestry campaigns as interventions into everyday life. The third and final section discusses colonial forestry during the wartime years (1947-45). Chapter 7 explores the promotion of a spiritual campaign of "forest love" due to concerns of Koreans "supposedly lacking in *regenerative* instincts" (italics original, p. 179). The mobilization of forestry products in a command economy is the subject of the eighth and final chapter.

Together, these chapters paint a picture of a colonial regime of forestry that was far from all-knowing and all-seeing; it was "less a monolithic entity than a collection of like-minded technocrats, less an almighty actor than a jumble of competing interests" (p. 12). The foibles of the colonial regime's personnel, along with the fallibility of their projects, is an important underlying theme. And so we are treated to a congeries of imperfect, career-oriented policymakers caught in the crosswinds of corruption scandals and the factionalism of party politics as well as forestry scientists willfully ignorant of native Korean forestry management practices. These imperfect bureaucrats re-

vised and reformulated their plans after facing resistance. What they created was an imperfect state whose policies bore the imprint of global (read Western) forestry science and conservation, the legitimizing strength of Japanese forestry traditions, not to mention pragmatic adaptations to local conditions and customs on the Korean peninsula. To quote a subtitle in the introduction, "seedling like a state" was part and parcel of the problems and schemes of seeing like a state. (This book, for better or worse, is brimming with puns.)

Overall, David Fedman has written an excellent book that is a must-read for scholars of Japanese and Korean history (particularly of Japan's empire and aftermath) as well as for environmental historians worldwide. It was a pleasure to read.

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