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Huebner, S., Heé, N., Miller, I.J., & Tsutsui, W.M. (Eds.) (2025). *Oceanic Japan: The archipelago in Pacific and global history*. University of Hawai'i Press.

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Oceanic Japan offers a comprehensive and thought-provoking exploration of the complex relationship between the Japanese archipelago and its surrounding aquatic space. Framed particularly within the fields of Japanese studies (historical and modern-day) and environmental humanities, the volume examines how Japan's geographic position as an archipelagic nation has shaped its cultural, political and environmental narratives. With contributions from both Japanese and non-Japanese scholars, the book investigates the interplay between oceanic and terraqueous spaces and political spheres, especially in the context of Japan's large population and its vulnerability to natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis and typhoons. By emphasising the ocean as a dynamic space – one that influences identity, history and ecological consciousness – the book challenges land-centred perspectives and highlights the significance of maritime environments in understanding Japan's past and present relationship with the sea. The chapter contributions offer multi- and inter-disciplinary insights into how the ocean is not just a backdrop to culture, but an active participant in the making of the archipelagic nation in local, Pacific and global history.

The book's thematic focus is articulated through the six principal parts of the edited collection: Terraqueous Connections; Technology; Social Status; Governance; Danger; and The Materiality of Water. Each part is introduced by a framing essay that contextualises the subject matter for the chapters that follow. The book is well structured, signposted and indexed, with a small number of illustrations adding to its visual appeal.

In the book's introductory essay, Stefan Huebner sets out the scope of the volume, outlining the various parameters of immediate interest and the historical development of a changing discourse. Huebner offers the metaphor of "sushi geographies" to stress "the emergence of long-distance oceanic connections" (p. 28), commenting that historical studies have seldom studied these. The volume puts forward a study of "terraqueous and oceanic perspectives as tools to move beyond terracentric understandings of Japan's past and present" (p. 6) and situated "between Japanese studies and oceanic history" (p. 3). As a nation with more than 6800 islands, "Oceanic connections are ubiquitous in Japan's history and physical geography" (p. 6), and, with anthropogenic influence, the contributors expand on the idea of an archipelago – also offering the suffixes or resource, disaster, pollution, and legal – and consider the "temporal, spatial, and material aspects of marine regions" (p. 11).

In an oceanic part of the world that has several island and territorial disputes, a collection of essays on Oceanic Japan places history and culture into discourse around the nation's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Japan's territorial borders have changed over time, from the border islands mentioned in the 7th century chronicle of myths, *Kojiki*, to the northern and southwestern expansionism from the 19th century (including the annexation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom) and the age of the Japanese Empire in the 20th century with its spread southwards to the South Seas (Nan'yō). After Japan's defeat at the end of the Second World War its borders decreased much, but its terraqueous and oceanic dimensions have been sustained as key to Japanese identity.

The first part of the book, 'Terraqueous Connections,' is introduced by Bathsheba Demuth's framing essay, 'How the Sea Comes Ashore.' Noting the influence of the Kuroshio Current and that slight changes to the ocean can impact much elsewhere in Japan, the author asserts that land and sea connections should be viewed as "as mutually implicated processes" (p. 40). In this opening part, Martin Dusinberre's chapter, 'From Black Ships to Black Smoke,' looks at the histories of steamships in connection with Japan's subterranean encounters. With a focus on the Karatsu coal mines in the north of the island of Kyushu, the discussion highlights the transformative role of steamships in allowing Japan to have long-distance engagements, as well as the fact that to have such modes of transport, coal was needed, which linked the ships with the ground. While the author comments that "the material history of oceans is also a story of the ground" (p. 53), it would have been helpful for the book to consider some of Japan's former island coalfields, some of which tunnelled beyond their respective islands under the ocean floor.

The historical focus of the sea continues with Hannah Shepherd's essay on the urbanising ocean, which in this case focuses on constructions of the Tsushima Strait, 1876–1945. From the late 19th century to the end of the Second World War, the Tsushima Strait emerged as a significant maritime space. Positioned between Japan and Korea (under Japanese rule from 1910 until 1945), the Strait functioned as an important maritime corridor that helped shape imperial strategies, expansion and urban growth along the respective coasts of Korea and Japan. Such was the strategic importance of the Straight that Korea unsuccessfully claimed the island of Tsushima, and Japan even cut several canals through the island to help facilitate naval travel from its bases on the island of Kyushu.

In his essay, Toshihiro Higuchi examines Japan's first nuclear-propelled ship, the *Mutsu*, and its contested ecological legacy in its homeport of Mutsu Bay at the northern tip of Honshu. Central to the discussion is the tension between the use of atomic-powered ships, with the *Mutsu* suffering a radiation leak, and the local aquaculture industry whose livelihoods depend on the fragile marine environment of the bay. Higuchi's account reminds us that the ocean is a three-dimensional space, a layered environment in which the *Mutsu* floats above an underwater farmland. This vertical dimension evokes the spatial disjunction between state-sponsored technological advancement and the lived realities of marine-dependent communities. Higuchi's essay gains resonance in light of the more recent Fukushima nuclear disaster and its location on a coastal region. As the author observes, the *Mutsu*'s story reveals the deep entanglements between technological enterprise, ecological vulnerability and the communities caught between them. Continuing the theme of sustenance, Takehiro Watanabe's chapter explores the interconnected food webs along rivers in terms of land–water relationships, focusing on forests and salmon in eastern Hokkaido. The author shows how forests and salmon provide nourishment to the ecological environment and points out

the problems when ecosystems are deprived of nutrients. Other issues of concern are the damaging effects of dairy farming and the impacts of this industry on oceans and forests.

The second part of the book concerns technology. As outlined in Sujit Sivasundaram's framing essay concerning ships, "the history of ships and ports is about waves, winds, and tides as much as it is about the material dynamics of technology and engineering" (p. 100). Ther first of these chapters, by Jakobina Arch, offers an historical account of a type of ship known as *bezaisen*. The discussion focuses on how a thriving coastal trade grew and relied on ships that were the most efficient for longer trade routes. As such, *bezaisen* were modified, particularly getting bigger, designed for local seas. As the author asserts, "changes in *bezaisen* use and design as they grew larger show ongoing adaptations to the local maritime space of Japan and a dynamic relationship to the ocean" (p. 112).

The theme of technology, ships and the ocean is explored in the context of the Second World War in the chapter by Brett Walker. The author's detailed historical insight into naval conflict and the influence of technology, framed around the destroyer *Yukikaze*, helps in comprehending a further sphere of terraqueous connections. As the author notes, "the Imperial Navy depended on a complex array of maritime technologies to render the South Seas legible and thereby defend the fluid boundaries of its pelagic empire" (p. 128). Stefan Huebner's chapter further challenges the "terrestrial mindset" (p. 136) by looking at "technological adaptation to unstable aquatic spaces" (p.136). These include offshore oilfields and other types of floating and elevated platforms. The author looks historically at these emerging technologies and then locates the study in 21st century architectural practices. An underpinning aim of the chapter is to draw attention away from technophobia by moving towards an oceanic perspective and design within a variety of aquatic spaces.

In the next part of the book, Social Status, Marcia Yonemoto's framing essay points out Tokugawa Japan's relationship with its oceans, noting the “Large Eastern Sea” and the “Small Eastern Sea”, or the Pacific Ocean situated close to the US and Japan respectively. It is with such ambivalence that the chapters in this part explore links between "land and seas, early modern and modern, space and time" (p. 158).

David Howell's chapter tells the story of castaways, including one of a princess. Underpinning the discussion is an interpretation of Japan's relationship with the Pacific, which in the early 19th century was increasingly encroached upon by the wider world. Continuing the social theme, Katherine Matsuura's chapter looks at the village of Kosaka in connection with "the centrality of the sea and [how] the ability to access its resources produced a complex social system that ultimately erupted in violence as a new era dawned in Japan" (p. 173). In the last of the social chapters, Alexis Dudden offers an historical account of the Ogasawara (Bonin) Islands (about 1000 km south of Tokyo), which were uninhabited until the arrival of American and British whaling ships. In the 1820s, "a renegade group of two Americans, an Englishman, a Portuguese, and a Dane (or Croatian depending on the account) declared sovereignty over the islands and ran them as their own country" (p. 186). In the present era, the islands form part of a Japanese imaginary where the islands' natural environment, including the surrounding ocean, is juxtaposed with the Fukushima disaster.

Dividing the different parts of the book is a "Centerpiece" chapter by Kären Wigen, who looks at the design of Japanese maps, place names and pictorial embellishments in the period 1600–1900, noting that because of the Tokugawa's regime of restricting maritime exchange and no cartographic standardisation, Japanese maps of its place in the world took divergent

approaches to representation. An array of colour inserts of various maps accompanies the chapter.

Carmel Finley's subsequent framing essay explores the challenge of governance on ocean fishing, particularly in the context of the Pacific Ocean, which covers about one third of the planet's surface. Finley sets the scene for the following three chapters, noting how fishing rights and "ocean regime changes will continue to challenge those who make their living from the sea" (p. 221). Paul Kreitman draws on Philip Hayward's notion of the aquapelago and Epeli Hauʻofa's "sea of islands" (although no reference is given) "to think historically about the various factors that at some times have helped knit Japan's islands into oceanic space and at other times cleaved them from it" (p. 225). This discussion offers cases from wartime to contemporary environmental concerns to "remind us of that aquapelagos are at the same time ecological, economic, technological, and political assemblages—terraqueous stages on which to perform contesting activities, claims, and visions of the future" (p. 235).

Manako Ogawa offers an historical study of mid-20th century Japanese fishing fleets in Hawaiian waters, noting the sea as a three-dimensional seascape where humans, nature and technology meet. For the study, the author draws on organisational records, both official and private, revealing conflicting positions between Japanese and US perspectives on fishing in Hawaiian waters. Pointing out "terraqueous racism encoded in US ocean and fisheries policy" (p. 261), Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu closes this part of the book by looking at Japan's oceanic history as reflected in the Pacific geopolitics of the 20th century and a rapidly growing and exploratory Japanese fishing fleet.

In his framing essay, Gregory Clancey introduces the topic of danger as concerning Japan and its relationship with the sea. Japan is prone to earthquakes, typhoons and tsunamis, and much of the nation's history and mythology has references to natural or supernatural danger. As a nation, "Japanese never gazed as comfortably or curiously sea-ward as Polynesian colonizers" (p. 267). The author questions why more wasn't made of the sea in Japanese myth, noting that Amaterasu was originally a sea goddess, not a sun goddess, although her brother, Susanoo, a sea god, is portrayed in myth as a frightening character. Nevertheless, there are more positive myths connecting to the ocean, such as treasure ships and fish. Bringing the discussion to the present day, Clancey notes the extreme measures that Japan has made concerning coastal defences, an intervention practice that inherently concerns the ocean and Japan's confrontational relationship with it.

Julia Mariko Jacoby's chapter looks critically at tsunami research and preparedness in the 20th century, offering comparisons between Japan and Hawaiʻi. Key to the chapter, which explores human interaction with the ocean, is a study of tsunami prevention warnings and the ignorance and uncertainty that have been key factors in tsunami management. About 30% of Japan's coastline is bordered by massive concrete tetrapods, which have been strategically positioned to help with coastal defences against erosion and tsunamis. In this context, Gerald Figal looks at Japan's eco-ontologies in connection with this massive infrastructural feature, one that also embraces breakwaters and seawalls. Figal explores the multiple human interactions that connect these concrete structures to human life and the broader environment, noting complex interactions and a challenging relationship with "a material and cultural life of their own" (p. 291). Satsuki Takahashi's chapter concerns building a future in Fukushima in the years following the nuclear meltdown. Once a site of fisheries and a floating wind farm, the author considers issues pertaining to the ocean environment and public concerns around the use of technology in everyday life. The ocean

in this setting is considered a site of interaction, but one where fisheries seek to build a sustainable future in the context of a ruined ocean.

Ryan Tucker Jones' framing essay opens the final part of the book, which concerns the materiality of water. Jones notes the lack of English-language scholarship on the human histories of the Pacific Ocean, and outlines Japan's engagement with the materiality of the ocean as a way of understanding the nation's oceanic relationship to human history.

The idea of Japan as an archipelagic empire is considered by Jonas Rüegg. Focusing on the oceanic flows of the Kuroshio Current, which runs south to north from Okinawa to mainland Japan, Japan's archipelagic history is mapped out through its oceanic connections. From the nation's South Seas interests to mainland colonisation, the author points out that "Japan has never been an island limited to a confined terrestrial world" (p. 329). Nadin Heé's chapter concerns migration and tuna frontiers in the Indo-Pacific, referring to Japan's Imperial fisheries. The author argues that "Japanese transpacific fisheries labor migration in the first half of the 20th century was driven by environ-mental transformation – in particular the depletion of fish stocks – in addition to economic or ideological factors" (p. 341). As noted earlier in the book, oceans are often thought of in terms of their surface features, that which is visible to the eye, but, as the perspective throughout the book notes, the ocean is a multidimensional space with the environment at its core. The chapter offers a study of tuna in connection with fishing migrants, enhanced technology and expanding tuna frontiers. The final chapter, by Kjell Ericson, concerns water-based trace-making technology. It is about a system called Kai-Lingual (*kai*: shellfish), which monitors ocean change through the response of oysters. That is, "Kai-Lingual purports to enable new forms of undersea communication between human aquaculturists and submerged shellfish" (p. 355).

Closing the book, David Armitage's Afterword summarises the essays with three views of oceanic Japan. The author argues 1929 was a pivotal year. In one map of that year, Japan was completely omitted, implying that oceanic Japan had not made its mark on oceanic history at that time. However, another view, from 1929, uses Koga Harue's artwork, *Umi* (*The Sea*), to portray Japan's deeper engagement with the ocean by that time. The final view concerns sea changes and questions when Japan became oceanic, summarising the book and Japan's terraqueous history as "wave making" (p. 378).

As a whole, *Oceanic Japan* provides a substantial reflection of Japan's historical and modern-day engagement with the sea from terraqueous and oceanic perspectives. The contributions cover a range of disciplines and approaches, providing succinct cases that offer insight into terraqueous history. While more could have been made of understanding such a connection from an anthropological perspective, providing insight into such spheres as belief systems, perceptions of the environment and cultural practices, the contributions do help in comprehending the making of Japan through its oceanic history. Lastly, more engagement with the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of island studies would have enriched the volume by locating the chapters within broader theoretical and comparative frameworks.