
INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to the first volume of *International Review of Environmental History*. The volume's six articles showcase the core aims of the journal by presenting a breadth of themes and disciplinary perspectives over a range of geographical regions and environmental types. They also present bold, new interpretations that aim to push the methodological and geographical boundaries of environmental history, while at the same time speaking across disciplines. It is a healthy statement of our field, I think, that three of the six articles in this volume are by scholars who are not environmental historians—two bio-geographers, an ecologist, and an historical geographer.

Matt Chew's stimulating article leads the volume. In '**Ecologists, Environmentalists, Experts, and the Invasion of the "Second Greatest Threat"**', Chew—from Arizona State University—presents a detailed analysis of the scientific findings underlying the development of invasion biology, and concludes that the claims made for it as representing the 'second greatest threat' to biodiversity are simply wrong. In an exercise in scientific hermeneutics, Chew traces the various claims for the importance of invasion biology back to the work of Edward O. Wilson and to the papers on which he based his interpretations. Chew's analysis of the slippages and elisions which occur when both analysing and citing work is an important reminder of the significance of our scholarship to the shaping of government policy, the setting of public debate, and the establishment of sub-disciplines.

The second article of this volume remains with the theme of ecology. In '**Environmental Disturbance Triggering Infestations of Gorse, Rabbits, and Thistles in Southern New Zealand: 1850 to 1980**', University of Otago bio-geographers Peter Holland and Guil Figgins present a fascinating ecological reconstruction of the impacts of introduced rabbits and weeds in southern New Zealand. This detailed reconstruction, based on painstaking readings of farm and station diaries, allows them to examine the environmental factors which permitted rabbits to thrive in certain parts of the region but not in others. Through the application of ecological analysis to historical evidence, they identify the pathways of rabbit dispersal and the role of such factors as vegetation

clearance and infrastructure in creating conditions favourable to the spread of rabbits. Their work demonstrates, as they note, ‘that ecological theory, with its emphasis on interactions and interconnections between living things and their environments, can deepen our understanding of the spread, establishment, and dominance of these three introduced organisms after episodes of environmental disturbance, natural as well as artificial, have created opportunities for them to thrive’. Their findings have great relevance now as southern New Zealand rabbit populations recover from the impacts of rabbit calicivirus disease (RCD), introduced in the late 1990s.

The third article reflects two particularly important dimensions of China’s recent growth: the environmental costs of rapid industrialisation, and the corresponding emergence of environmental groups. Indicative of the broader growth of environmental history in China is membership of the Association for East Asian Environmental History, which has increased from 193 in 2009 to 376 by May 2014.¹ In ‘**Environmental Non-Government Organisations in China since the 1970s**’, Fei Sheng 费晟, of Sun Yat-sen University, China, surveys the rise of environmental groups in China over the last 45 years. Fei explains their rise, in part by pointing to modernisation’s growing environmental and health impacts, as well as greater levels of international co-operation and the emergence of the Internet. While political challenges remain, Fei is optimistic that among China’s rising generations, greater awareness of environmental issues and better scientific training will ensure that environmental protection is strengthened in the future.

My own article—“**Hungry dragons**”: **Expanding the Horizons of Chinese Environmental History—Cantonese gold-miners in colonial New Zealand, 1860s–1920s**—seeks to incorporate Chinese migrants into the bigger picture of settlement, development, and environmental change that occurred across the British Empire. It emphasises Chinese entrepreneurs’ use of colonial and Chinese capital to remake environments in Otago and southern China, and how this in turn created local, national, and international resource demand. A focus on Cantonese in New Zealand also underlines the important role of Pacific resource frontiers as hinterlands for the coastal province of Guangdong, in contrast to the importance of land frontiers for much of the rest of China. As well, I examine what Chinese environmental impacts in colonial New Zealand can reveal of China’s own environmental history.

The final two articles remain in New Zealand, and present revisionist accounts of, respectively, disciplinary interpretation and global resource shortages of relevance and interest to scholars world-wide. In ‘**(Re)interpreting Exotic**

¹ ‘Membership’, Association for East Asian Environmental History, www.aeah.org/membership.htm, accessed 30 May 2015.

Plantation Forestry in 1920s New Zealand, Michael Roche of Massey University revisits historical debates about the rise of exotic timber plantations in New Zealand in order to assess why timber plantations came to constitute such a large percentage of New Zealand's twentieth-century timber production. Roche's paper is part of a wider debate about the role of plantations forest policy more generally throughout the British world, and now, the developing world. His article also provides a fascinating discussion of how disciplinary differences—in this case, among historical geographers and environmental historians—and differences in periodisation can affect interpretations of continuity and discontinuity in the transition from nineteenth- to twentieth-century forest policy.

Paul Star's article, **'Thomas Potts and the Forest Question: Conservation and Development in New Zealand in the 1860s'**, reinterprets the first call for forest conservation in New Zealand. This revisionist article seeks to explain the origins of forest conservation in New Zealand, a subject that has received attention from several prominent scholars, including Graeme Wynn, Michael Williams, and Michael Roche. Star warns against viewing Potts' call for forest conservation and tree-planting as proto-environmentalism because, he says, different factors were at play, most notably, he argues, the doctrine of waste, which applied also to other comparable colonial societies such as the United States.

Together, the contributions uphold the journal's goal to be read across disciplines and to encourage scholars to 'think big' and to tackle the challenges of writing environmental histories across different methodologies, nations, and time-scales. The contributors to this volume embrace interdisciplinary, comparative, and transnational methods, while still recognising the importance of locality in understanding these global processes.

Journal Aims

Before closing, I will summarise the journal's aims, and look ahead to the next volume. While the journal publishes on all thematic and geographic topics pertaining to environmental history, the journal developed to strengthen environmental history in the southern hemisphere and the 'Global South'. The simple reason was that no specific journal actively catered to Australia, New Zealand, India, Africa and South and Central America, as well as East and South East Asia. The expertise of the editorial board reflects the focus of the journal on these areas as well as broader global environmental issues.

A second key aim of the journal is to break down the barriers dividing wealthy and poor scholars, students, and readers. The journal eschews subscription fees and is freely available as an open-access publication. (For traditionalists, there is also a print-on-demand option.) This upholds some of the fundamental ideals of the Academy, regarding the dissemination, encouragement, and free exchange of ideas. It is also backed by research which has revealed that the high access costs to academic journals unfairly disadvantages scholars and students working in places like South America, South East Asia, and Africa, many of whose universities often cannot afford to subscribe to expensive journals.²

A third motivation is to provide a forum for highly original—even contentious—scholarship that promises to reshape the field or which offers bold overviews of particular sub-fields of help to teachers or students approaching a topic for the first time. A particular advantage of an online journal such as this is that it enables publication of scholarly articles that may be longer than most journals accept, or which may contain a large number of high-quality images.

The Next Volume

Preparation for the next volume of *International Review of Environmental History* is already well underway and I have received six submissions. Two have been referred and accepted for publication: Ts'ui-jung Liu and I-chun Fan, 'The Colonist Land System in Xinjiang during the Qing Dynasty: An Environmental History Perspective'; and Joanna Bishop, 'New Perspectives on Methodology in Garden History'.

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² Much of this scholarship is summarised in: Right to Research Coalition, 'Why Open Access?' www.righttoresearch.org/learn/whyOA/index.shtml#Developing_Countries, accessed May 2015.

editor. Brett M. Bennett, Associate Editor, has taken a lead in soliciting papers and in reading and commenting on material, and I am especially grateful to him, and my supportive and active Editorial Board, for permitting me to test ideas and share material with them. Further support for the journal has also come through the Historical Research Unit, University of Waikato. Finally, I am thankful for the copy editing skills of Ina Mae Barton and Austin Gee, and for the permission from Wynston Cooper for use of one of his photographs for the cover of the journal. I also thank ANU Press Editor Emily Tinker and her staff for their support and professionalism.

James Beattie, Editor
Hamilton, June 2015

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