

Un-disciplining Mount Fuji, or Finding and Losing Japan in the Anthropocene

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This paper has two parts; the first is historical, the second makes some programmatic suggestions about the place of Mt. Fuji within the academic disciplines. Both parts use the concept of the Anthropocene as a provocation to ‘un-discipline’ Japan and to shift attention beyond the eco-nationalist memes which have so far dominated discourse on human-nature relationships in that country.

The historical argument examines changing aesthetic perceptions of Mt. Fuji. Literary critic Hiroo Mita noted that the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786 occurred within a decade of the completion of Watt’s steam engine in 1776.¹ Mita did not yet have the term ‘Anthropocene’, but the connection between industrial modernity and an interest in mountains and other Natures has been a widely noted element of Romantic thought. In her *Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory*, Marjorie Nicolson analyzed how views of mountains in European aesthetics changed dramatically from the late 18th century.² Those aesthetics were then brought to Japan: whereas most 16-18th century Europeans had completely ignored Mt. Fuji in their writings, from the moment Japan was re-opened by the steam-powered ‘Black Ships’ of the US Navy in 1854, Mt. Fuji became the subject of numerous outpourings of ‘mountain glory’.

From the late 19th century, Mt. Fuji grew into a resonant site of discourse about tradition and modernity. Even the ability to climb Fuji was re-invented by Westerners such as British consul Rutherford Alcock as a test of the hegemonic bodyscape of disciplined modernity. Fuji became a hypervisible icon of identity and was adopted as a national symbol by both Japanese and non-Japanese. National symbols are by definition controversial because they assume acquiescence and discipline to the national project, but Mt. Fuji has proven remarkably resilient as a symbol of Japan and, if anything, that role has become stronger through the process of World Heritage inscription. Recent claims by Japanese politicians that 'Mt. Fuji has been the traditional spiritual home of Japan' ignore the fact that Japanese views of Nature have changed over time. Historian Julia Thomas argues that the idea that all Japanese have a shared view of 'Japanese Nature' can be traced back to early 20th century writers such as Tetsurō Watsuji and to the nationalistic 1937 pamphlet *Kokutai no hongī*.³ Although, as noted by Thomas, this view of Nature was *modern* in that it brought Nature directly into the history of the nation-state, the concept of the Anthropocene profoundly changes the way we can perceive the relationship between Nature and the nation. Seeing Mt. Fuji as

a symbol of 'Japanese Nature' requires it to remain a discrete object 'out there'—what Tim Morton has called 'regular flavor Nature'.⁴ Such a view of Nature has been widely deconstructed within Anthropocene Studies.⁵ The un-disciplined and uncanny Nature of Fukushima is more representative of 'Japanese Nature' in the Anthropocene.

Although the Anthropocene means there is no longer any regular flavour 'Japanese Nature', the second part of this paper discusses how Fuji might still serve as a prism to explore (environmental) history in Japan. What we might call Fujinology 2.0 attempts a *difference multiplication* appropriate to the Anthropocene.⁶ In addition to *mountain history*, this would include: *urban history* (Hokusai and all those city-based artists and poets, as well as the urban Fuji-kō pilgrim associations); *coastal and marine history* (includes both geological/ecological and cultural links between Fuji and the ocean), *industrial history* (paper and textile factories in Fuji and Fujinomiya cities which use water from Mt. Fuji), *cultural history* (Fuji as a global art icon). In fact, it turns out that almost every type of (environmental) history is connected to Mt. Fuji. Of course, the same argument could be developed for many other places and anyway Mt. Fuji has never been just one place. If Fuji is the 'spiritual home of the Japanese', then that home

is a multinational chain store, more Starbucks than Heidegger's Black Forest hut. Although there are more days in the year when Fuji is hidden behind clouds than when it is visible, art historian Jin Matsushima has noted that we see *representations* of Fuji more than we see the mountain itself. Mt. Fuji is not just in Shizuoka/Yamanashi Prefectures but also in Tokugawa-period prints of Nihonbashi bridge, in Julien ('Père') Tanguy's paint shop in Paris, on the walls of former weaving houses in La Croix-Rousse, Lyon. This virus-like existence means that Fuji is a wonderfully appropriate *metaphor* for Nature in the Anthropocene.

¹ H. Mita, *Yama no shisōshi* (Iwanami, 1973), p. .

² M. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).

³ J.A. Thomas, *Reconfiguring Modernity: Concepts of Nature in Japanese Political Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁴ T. Morton, 'Here comes everything: the promise of object oriented ontology', *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 19 (2011): 163-190, p. 163.

⁵ T. Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁶ The term 'difference multiplication' is from T. Morton, 'Queer ecology', *PMLA* 125 (2010): 273-282.