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Reclaiming Ground: Japan's Great Convergence

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Kenneth Pomeranz's *Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* took the scholarly world by storm over ten years ago and still energizes debates in global history today.¹ Pomeranz's broad vision, clarity of analysis, careful research, and generous citations provincialized Europe on material grounds just as Dipesh Chakrabarty had provincialized Europe on intellectual grounds.² *The Great Divergence* proposed that the economic productivity of northwestern Europe and core parts of China (especially the Yangzi Delta) had been roughly equivalent as late as 1800, followed by China's swift economic decline in both relative and absolute terms. This argument weaned many adherents, though not all, from the older view of the West's long-term, deep-rooted superiority.³ In subsequent discussions however, 'China' was often read as 'Asia', leaving Japan scholars relegated to the shadows, haunting the debate like hungry ghosts with no ground to stand on. Not only intellectually but also institutionally, *The Great Divergence* unintentionally helped obscure Japan from view because it appeared in 2001 just as the juggernaut of Chinese economic dominance rose above the horizon. University administrators, history departments, and global historians writing, as most do, from that perspective of Europe seemed to have found an 'Asia' sufficient to their wants, and many desired no other. Even though Japan remained the second and then the third largest economy in the world during the first decade of the twenty-first century, its historical and theoretical importance ebbed. In considering the rise of modern prosperity, it no longer seemed essential to think about Japan. At times Japan even appeared to be written out of world history and global consciousness.

In these embattled circumstances, when Ian J. Miller organized a panel exploring Japan's Great Convergence for the March 2013 Association of Asian Studies meeting, the room was packed. The papers given that day showcased the work of the three contributors to this forum. Inquiring into Japan's development over three centuries and in three different ways, Federico Marcon, Ian J. Miller, and Robert Stolz in conversation with Brett Walker and myself laid the grounds for a new history of Japan's convergence as opposed to China's divergence. The idea was not entirely novel. For instance, Patrick K. O'Brien, analyzing Pomeranz's achievement in 2010, briefly acknowledges 'the convergence of Japan' as opposed to China, India, and Southeast Asia.⁴ Brett Walker had written of *ijin naru shūren* (the great convergence)

¹See, for instance, Manning, 'AHR Forum', and O'Brien, 'Metanarratives in Global Histories of Material Progress' and 'Ten Years of Debate on the Origins of the Great Divergence'.

²Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. See especially the preface to the second 2007 edition.

³For the argument that Western economic and political success has deep roots, see, for instance, Aldcroft and Sutcliffe, *Europe in the International Economy, 1500-2000*; Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*; Morris, *Why the West Rules*; and Thompson, *The Emergence of the Global Political Economy*.

⁴O'Brien, 'Ten Years of Debate on the Origins of the Great Divergence,' 12. Pomeranz too is careful to include references to Japan's different trajectory.

in a Japanese publication in 2013.⁵ Nevertheless, general scholarly interest in how to fit Japan's development into world history had declined with the discrediting of both modernization theory and Marxist explanations of global development, the bursting of Japan's 'economic bubble', and the mesmerizing emergence of Chinese power after the Tiananmen Square protests and collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. What our AAS panel and this special issue of *Japanese Studies* seek to do is to address once more Japan's place in global history and propose a new approach to understanding the reasons for its early convergence with northwestern Europe.

We are making two claims. First, the story of Japan is quite distinct from China's. While this point may be obvious to scholars of East Asia, it requires reiteration for global historians who tend to gloss 'East Asia' (and sometimes even all of Asia) as 'China'. Giovanni Arrighi, for instance, speaks of the current 'east Asian Renaissance' though he follows Adam Smith only to Beijing. A moment's reflection would have shown that using 'renaissance' to describe Japan's practically stagnant economy over the past quarter-century is a mockery.⁶ Critics of the idea of an Asian 'renaissance' also make the mistake of conflating China with Asia. For instance, P.H.H. Vries categorically declares,

There can be no doubt that in the nineteenth century a big economic gap existed between Asia and Europe, nor for that matter, that it still exists. To suggest that Asia has caught up, so that the problem of divergence has been reduced to 'a mere blip in what was, and is again becoming, an Asia-centered world,' is nonsense. Chinese peasants will be surprised to hear they have become as rich as their Western counterparts.⁷

What Vries appears not to realize is that Japanese salarymen have been just as rich as and sometimes richer than their Western counterparts for some time.⁸ In short, Chinese history is not Japanese history. While China *diverged* from northwest Europe and its overseas extensions in the nineteenth century, Japanese development *paralleled* the West's and ultimately *converged* with it, surpassing Europe and running a close second to the United States. This pattern of the peripheral convergence of the western and eastern outposts of the Eurasian landmass is the one we wish to explore.

Second, we argue, in different ways, that the key to the peripheral convergence of Eurasian powers is nature. Practically and conceptually, it joins questions of natural resources, population, and human health to modes of agrarian and industrial production and, finally, to social institutions, modes of consumption, forms of knowledge, and political authority.⁹ In this way, as an analytical tool linking substrate, base, and superstructure, nature prevents the disaggregation of factors that have obscured the interdependence of environment, power, and knowledge. The unfortunate disaggregation of these factors is fundamental to ideas of 'market efficiency' which eliminate environmental and human costs and also to concepts of 'cultural construction' that presuppose culture's complete divorce from natural constraints. Furthermore, nature understood in this multivalent way belies the charge of a simplistic natural determinism often leveled at approaches that incorporate nature into economic, social, and political analysis. In the

⁵Walker, 'Ijin naru shūren'.

⁶Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, 311.

⁷Vries, 'Are Coal and Colonies Really Crucial?', 410–11.

⁸See also Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not*.

⁹For a collection of essays looking at nature from this wide range of perspectives, see Daston and Vidal, *The Moral Authority of Nature*.

work of the scholars here, no single natural factor is sufficient to explain the outcome of growing population and capitalist production, increasing military might, and state management of society. Nature must be understood simultaneously as matter, as the uses of matter, and as an ideological concept. The interplay among its many registers – available resources, the object of empirical inquiry, the foundation of political economy, the ideological principle ordering societies, and the locus for critiquing modern society – must be taken into account. Once they are, we can see that nature figured in Japan much as it did in the West.

This convergence was not a matter of Japan becoming like the West through imitation once it had felt the heavy hand of imperialism. Instead, a rough equivalence was achieved before Western encroachments because Japan, like parts of Europe, was able to break with the ‘biological Old Regime’ and its Malthusian constraints toward the end of the early modern period. Japan, like northwestern Europe, harnessed peripheral lands, new energy sources, new modes of inquiry, and new understandings of society beginning in the late eighteenth century. Its dependencies (such as Ezo and Okinawa) were closer at hand and its energy sources less caloric, but its intellectual and political engagement with the material world produced striking transformations in certain domains and many dislocations in late-Tokugawa society. It could be argued that because Japan was able to reconfigure its relationship with nature and transfer these new modes to the Meiji state, it was able to better withstand the gunboats, unequal treaties, and racial disdain of Europe and the United States.¹⁰ Drawing on Tokugawa resources, Japan, as with the other Eurasian periphery, overcame its ‘biological Old Regime’, propelling itself to a global dominance from which it and northwestern Europe are only now retreating.¹¹

The idiosyncratic pattern that emerged at both ends of the Eurasian continent developed out of a key set of multifaceted relationships with nature. This ‘key set’ was tripartite. First and foremost, the relationship was instrumental. A shared approach to systematically investigating and commandeering nature in the service of economic production and state power released modernity’s extraordinary energies in these Eurasian peripheries. This instrumental deployment of nature necessitated investigations into the properties of plants, animals, soil, minerals, climate, and the human body. Something that looks like what we now call ‘science’ began to emerge in both far eastern and far western Eurasia. But this instrumental approach to nature was not the only important relationship. A second approach made nature the model for society. Although modernity’s central narrative concerned humanity’s liberation from environmental constraints, confidence that nature could be completely transcended wavered. Crucially, in the discourses of modernity, our animal nature and the processes of biological and social evolution could never be fully relegated to some ‘primitive’ past, but continued to ‘explain’ domestic and international hierarchies in both Japan and the West. The justification for particular social structures and customs rested on both nature and culture. Not only that, but nature served in its ironic third iteration as the locus for a searing critique of modernity and its devastations. Forests, high mountains, and fields producing food for local consumption rather than for the market all stood against capitalism and monetization. Conceptions of society founded on a non-commercialized nature did likewise; in Japan as in the West these included leftwing ideas of natural equality as well as rightwing fascist paeans to naturalized

¹⁰See my argument in *Reconfiguring Modernity*.

¹¹The phrase ‘biological Old Regime’ comes from Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 70. See also Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, 22–32.

nationhood. This tripartite orientation to ‘nature’ as a material, social, and intellectual resource, I argue, is what explains Japan’s convergence and China’s divergence.

The new convergence story suggested in our work here and elsewhere looks something like this: Japan and Europe developed slowly on the peripheries of the economic power houses of India and particularly China, largely protected from the turmoil of invasions from the great warriors of Central Asia yet, as Victor Lieberman argues, in political disarray.¹² Gradually, the peripheral areas of northwestern Europe and *sengoku* Japan improved agricultural output aided by the beneficial climate of the sixteenth century, and their states began to consolidate. The ‘industrious revolution’, in Jan de Vries’ famous phrase, was well underway by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹³ By the eighteenth century, traders at the extreme ends of the Eurasian continent were exploiting their own peripheral areas with instrumental support from central governments: in Japan’s case, the nearby proto-colonies of the Ryukyus to the south and Ezo (which became Hokkaido) to the north, and, for northwestern Europe and especially Britain, the enormous environmental treasure houses of the Americas, Africa, and South Asia. Almost coterminously, as the nineteenth century progressed, the Eurasian peripheries began to colonize and industrialize.

Japan would not overtake northwestern European productivity until after World War II, but unlike China its economic growth paralleled Western growth rather than sinking into destitution. Then, in the first half of the twentieth century, the Eurasian peripheries, like enormous slow-moving tidal waves, came crashing down on the old Eurasian core, almost meeting near the middle. Great swathes of the former Qing, Mughal, Safavid, and Ottoman empires were engulfed by direct or semi-direct colonialism, with Britain taking India and Japan taking large chunks of China and eventually much of southeast Asia. After World War II, the colonial tide ebbed and today, increasingly, these peripheral powers inhabit a polycentric world in positions of diminished status. This tale of convergence is far from being fully flushed out and much research still needs to be done, but it is, I believe, a potentially potent narrative framework. Each of the three essays in this special issue takes up an aspect of this convergence, providing histories that are simultaneously ecological and political.

Marcon on Political Economy and Natural History

Federico Marcon highlights the importance of *honzōgaku*, the instrumental studies of nature, particularly botany, to explain the convergence between Japan and the West. The leadership of the Satsuma domain, facing problems of mounting debt and disarray similar to those in Great Britain, developed a similar concept of political economy. More than any other figure it was Satō Nobuhiro (1769–1850) who harnessed nature in the service of Satsuma. Botanical knowledge for its own sake was abandoned. Plants, particularly sugar cane, lost their intrinsic fascination and were treated as the foundation of economic wealth and power. Scholars along with their scholarship became servants of the domain’s ambitions to expand its markets and solidify its control over the peasantry. In quick order, Satsuma reversed its fortunes, emerging among the victors at the time of the Meiji restoration. Ultimately, argues Marcon, Satsuma’s paradigm of political

¹²Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, especially Vol. 2, and Lieberman, ‘What *Strange Parallels* Sought to Accomplish’.

¹³De Vries, ‘The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution’.

economy became the model for all of Japan so that nature and the scientists who studied it served the purpose of capital accumulation. Nobuhiro did for Satsuma and Japan what Scottish Enlightenment figures did for the Highlands and Britain: they combined natural history and political economy to confront ‘the question of natural limits to development’.¹⁴ The research of Fredrik Albritton Jonsson on Britain, like that of Marcon on Japan, shows that ‘the economy formed a subset of the environment’ in the understanding of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.¹⁵ In this particularity, the islands at the far edges of the Eurasian continent converged.

The parallels between Satsuma and Great Britain (or more particularly Scotland) extend beyond this crucial drive to exploit nature in the service of the state. The ruling classes of both areas also developed an ideological vision of cornucopianism for human consumption.¹⁶ In Japan as in the West, nature was seen as endlessly bountiful, yet it required human intervention to ensure its fecundity. Even spiritual ideas began to converge. Contrary to Neo-Confucian principles, Nobuhiro developed the idea that some deities (the *musubi-no-kami*) had created nature and natural laws, sanctioning human dominion over nature. The gloss of divine benediction on a relentlessly utilitarian approach to bounteous nature brings Japan’s ideas into close alignment with European discourses. Interestingly, Marcon’s research also suggests flaws with older forms of convergence theory, namely the idea that lower-ranking samurai and wealthy commoners became allies to form the Japanese equivalent of a bourgeois class capable of overturning the old regime. In Marcon’s telling, *keizai* (political economy) emerges from an alliance between *high-ranking* domainal samurai and important commoners rather than the *low-ranking* samurai who bore so much weight in earlier searches for a proto-bourgeoisie capable of revolutionary energies. Had Satsuma, and ultimately Japan, not developed this instrumental understanding of nature and the political capacities to put it to use just as the rising population of the early nineteenth century was pressing up against environmental constraints, it seems unlikely that it would have weathered the international turmoil of Western imperialism.

Miller Brings Politics to Life

The emerging modernity described in Marcon’s essay celebrates the natural world’s submission to human domination: societies transcend the strictures of their immediate ecological resources; cornucopianism and arrogance reign; Japan and the West thrive; the peripheries of the Eurasian continent rise and converge. But modernity, viewed from our current vantage, was not *only* about the conquest of nature. Bruno Latour suggests that ‘modern’ designates two, contradictory sets of practices. One set was intent on purifying the distinction between culture and nature, while the other set created hybrids of the two. ‘As soon as we direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization,’ Latour insists, ‘we immediately stop being wholly modern.’¹⁷ By this understanding of modernity’s relationship with nature as inherently contradictory, Japan also converged with northwestern Europe. Ian Miller’s subtle analysis of the category of ‘animal’ (*dōbutsu*) shows that efforts in Japan to distinguish ‘the human’ from ‘the natural’ were inextricable from efforts to proliferate nature-culture hybrids in ideas such as ‘race’ and

¹⁴Albritton Jonsson, *Enlightenment’s Frontier*, 6.

¹⁵Albritton Jonsson, ‘Adam Smith in the Forest’, 53.

¹⁶Albritton Jonsson, ‘The Origins of Cornucopianism’.

¹⁷Latour, *We Have Never been Modern*, 10–11.

‘nation’. Neither ‘race’ nor ‘nation’ rested on purely cultural determinants; both claimed nature’s sanction as well. Animals might seem a sideshow in the story of Japan’s jockeying among the imperial powers, but Miller convincingly demonstrates their centrality to the convergent biopolitics of ambitious nineteenth-century states.

Three iterations – scientific, political, and popular – reveal the power of animals. First, in the 1822 *Botany Sutra* (*Botanika kyō*), Udagawa Yōan developed the vocabulary, including the word ‘*dōbutsu*’ itself, that distinguished animals from human beings and arrayed the ranks of creatures and plants according to a system of scientific classification.¹⁸ Second, with the hot breath of imperialism down their necks, Japanese leaders quickly realized that the taxonomic distinction between humanity and animality was often synonymous with that between colonizer and colonized so that ‘*dōbutsu*’ was necessarily a political term as well as a scientific one. As Miller puts it, the “‘savagery’ associated with “brute” animals and “lesser” human beings was the inverse of “civilization” in the bipolar worldview of the nineteenth century’. But as Miller also underscores with equal emphasis, this neat binary was always being undermined. The civilized man internalized animal passions; civilized society continued to function through the savage workings of the ‘struggle for survival’ (*seizon kyōsō*). Transcending the animal was impossible. Finally, ‘*dōbutsu*’ with all its complexity became part of the national vernacular after the Meiji Restoration. Georges Bigot’s cartoon, where a Japanese couple simultaneously recognize and fail to recognize themselves in a mirror where they are figured as monkeys, attests to the popularity as well as the ambiguity of nature–culture hybrids. In all three iterations, there was no simple separation between humans and other animals, between the civilized and the savage, between value-laden political ideas and objective scientific investigation. Japanese and Western ideological constructs and institutions such as zoos converged around an anxious effort to elevate the human animal over other animals, and both ended up by proliferating hybrids. The purported triumph over nature was never complete. The lingering connections with nature remained and, as Miller shows, turn out to be an essential structural feature of modernity in the Farthest East as well as the Farthest West through developments that were ‘neither entirely autochthonous nor fully foreign’.

Stolz and the Convergence of Critique

If Miller’s essay reveals the convergent ways ‘we have never been modern’ (in Latour’s view), Robert Stolz reveals a convergent anti-modernity, if ‘modernity’ is narrowly defined as industrial capitalism. But if modernity is divorced from that definition, another equally modern and equally scientific social and political organization might be possible, one which is ecologically sound. Just as both ends of Eurasia developed industrial capitalism and plundered the earth’s resources, they also produced a critical intelligentsia aware of the damage done to both workers and nature by the monetization of more and more life forms. For these critics of industrial modernity, nature was a key term for an alternative modernity. To demonstrate the convergence of this alternative modernity revolving around ecologically and politically sensitive ideas, Stolz’s analysis brings together the critiques of anarchists Edward Carpenter (1844–1929) in England, the Reclus brothers Paul (1847–1914) and Elisée (1830–1905) in France, and Ishikawa Sanshirō (1876–1956) in Japan. All

¹⁸Udagawa Yōan, *Botanika kyō* [Botany sutra]. Edo: Udagawajuku, 1822.

these anarchists centered their hopes on the individual's sensual complexity fostered by connection with the natural world. Ishikawa traveled to Europe, spending time with Carpenter and the Reclus brothers, before returning to Japan to fight the horrors of industrial pollution, rightwing militarism, and urban poverty. As his base, he turned not to the proletariat in the cities but to the countryside. There in the rice paddies he rejected cornucopianism's flawed belief in infinite bounty and embraced instead a view of non-hierarchical dynamism within environmental constraints. The convergence of these leftwing critiques did not emerge merely because a few rootless cosmopolitan eccentrics shared friendship and the pleasures of North Africa. Ishikawa, Carpenter, and the Reclus brothers did not hit upon the same problematic at random. Instead, their shared resistance to industrial capitalism arose from the structural convergence of modes of production in Japan, Britain, and France. The similarities among these critics of capitalism represent the flipside of the similarities among its proponents.

Contrary to Satō Nobuhiro, who sought to bend the laws of nature to the will of the state, Ishikawa sought forms of community that would accord with nature's finitude. This community was a democratic community, expressed in the phrase *domin kurashi*, an idiosyncratic homonym for 'democracy' written with kanji 土民生活 meaning 'people attached to the earth'. Importantly, this attachment to the earth was a choice, a decision liberating people from national imperatives rather than a prescribed connection due to ethnicity or nationalism. Although Ishikawa skated dangerously close to the rightwing simply by highlighting nature, what saved him was his belief in the individual's inherent diversity of interests and the natural ability of human beings to choose. Unlike rightwing ideologues, Ishikawa's nature was neither reductive nor national nor socially deterministic. Ishikawa even rejected the idea that organisms would necessarily evolve in optimal harmony with their natural surroundings; instead he argued that under capitalism a dangerous separation had developed between human beings and nature. Trying to overcome that division became his life's work. The fascists also attempted to overcome this separation by submerging the individual within a unity of nation, race, and nature.¹⁹ Ishikawa attempted to overcome it by localizing both people and production, and elevating the individual.

Ishikawa stood against capitalism, against nationalism, against fascism, and against militarism, urging a non-exploitative relationship with nature. Yet Stolz argues that Ishikawa ultimately failed because he treated human nature as ahistorical, untouched by the vicissitudes, even, of new modes of production. Ishikawa wanted Life and the unity of humanity beyond race, ethnicity, and nationhood to function as an obdurate Other to the historical forces of capitalism. But as Stolz points out, if this were the case, if human nature really could remain unsullied by history, it would not need protection. Ishikawa's political critique of industrial capitalism in the service of the rightwing Japanese state during the 1920s and 1930s could not succeed because it did not recognize that historical experience transforms human actors as well as the natural world around them. The art of politics, including the politics of nature, must be alert to the specific vicissitudes of particular times and places.

¹⁹For a clear articulation of nature's centrality to fascist ideology, see Neocleous, *Fascism*. I have written on the role of nature in Japanese and German critiques of fascism, comparing Maruyama Masao with Horkheimer and Adorno, in 'The Cage of Nature'.

The Thesis of Peripheral Convergence

On Angus Maddison's graph comparing GDP per capita in Japan and the UK from 1500 to 2000, the two lines snake upwards in rough parallel.²⁰ Except for a brief plunge after World War II, the line representing Japanese wealth gradually grows closer and closer until it overtakes the UK line around 1970. On the next page, Maddison has another graph. The two lines on it, representing China and the UK, creep further and further apart. Not until after 1950 does China's line change course, and begin to march doggedly upward although never reaching the UK line. Japanese per capita GDP almost parallels the rise in British wealth and eventually overtakes it; Chinese per capita GDP sinks lower and lower over the centuries, recovering slightly only after the communist victory. Japan converges; China diverges. The rough synchronicity of the Eurasian peripheries between 1500 and 2000, with languishing China between them, is conspicuous.

Why haven't we properly attended to this phenomenon? Reasons abound: the pattern of peripheral convergence was obscured by problematic terminologies, inadequate data, the foundational assumptions of the social sciences, Western hubris backed by the West's greater overall wealth, and, no doubt, Japan's defeat in World War II. Various models of global history – Marxist, modernization school, Wallersteinian – presupposed a deep-rooted Eurocentric system spreading outward to absorb other societies. By the lights of those models, to the extent that Japan succeeded, it was merely following certain inevitable stages of development or imitating the West. For instance, eighteenth-century Japanese interest in *rangaku* (Dutch or Western learning) was taken not as an interesting indication of a convergent empiricism, but as the natural admiration of a less-advanced people for the West's superior learning. Where Tokugawa scholars were found to have adapted knowledge or practices (such as dissection) from European texts, they were congratulated as inevitable acolytes. Where they preceded Western experimenters, such as the first known operation using an anesthesia created by mixing potent herbs in 1804, little note is taken.²¹ Moreover, if Japanese scholars broke out of the textual confines of Neo-Confucian bookishness to probe actual bodies, dead or alive, in their quest to understand the human organism, why did the Chinese who had greater access to Western texts not do likewise? As early as 1751, physician Kosugi Genteki (1730–91) declared that Chinese anatomical depictions were entirely mistaken. Sugita Genpaku (1733–1817), in a famous 1771 dissection, compared the innards of an executed criminal with Dutch texts and found the Dutch texts more accurate.²² Again, what explains Japan's convergence and China's divergence? The answer suggested here is a particular orientation toward 'nature' as a material, social, and ideological resource.

I fully realize that the thesis of peripheral convergence, to be fully persuasive, must arm itself with more evidence, careful comparative statistical data, and greater theoretical precision regarding the concept of nature. Once fully developed, this thesis may help us to write an inclusive global history of modernity with nature as its theoretical core. Nature as analytic rubric could coordinate environmental, economic, political, and ideological factors so that development is not portrayed as the result of a single determinant within a society, but occurs as a multifaceted, interrelated phenomenon in relation to resources. Such complexity also allows for substitutions among practices when societies are

²⁰Maddison, *Contours of the World Economy*, 157, Figure 3.3.

²¹The first such operation in the West was in America, at the Massachusetts General Hospital in 1846. Geddes, 'Banishing Consciousness', 76.

²²For a rich, insightful account of medicine and other sciences in Japan, see Bartholomew, *The Formation of Science in Japan*.

compared, rather than using one standard such as ‘inanimate energy’ consumption as proposed by modernization theorist and sociologist Marion Levy.²³ Thus one society may control an aspect of nature through advanced pumping technologies providing fresh water, while another does it through daily habits like making tea.²⁴ One society may develop sewage treatment systems while another creates successful markets in human excrement to keep its cities disease-free.²⁵ Nature also permits the necessary inclusion in economic analyses of gender and the wider social context in which production takes place. Instead of being blinkered by an exclusive focus on capital, labor, and technology, historian Susan Hanley, for instance, points to ‘the family system, the material culture, and the level of physical well-being’ in late Tokugawa and Meiji Japan, arguing that they were ‘the “secret” of Japan’s successful industrialization’.²⁶ Likewise, Kimoto Kimiko²⁷ and Anne Allison²⁸ speak compellingly of the ‘family-corporate system’ as the foundation of postwar Japanese capitalism. A developed feminist biopolitics will provide insights into substitutions and compensatory practices as societies pursued modernity’s goal of controlling nature to produce wealth. In terms of theories of economic development, efforts are being made to reread classic statements of political economy, particularly the works of Adam Smith and Karl Marx, for their environmental engagements so that economic theory itself is no longer denatured.²⁹ With nature in these multiple forms, our historical landscape will change.

While the contributors to this forum are not singing in unison, our shared objective is to demonstrate how a focus on nature in its multiple registers challenges the framework of contemporary debates on global history and reveals why Japan cannot be ignored (or subsumed under ‘Asia’) if one wishes to understand modernity in all its complexity. It is a matter of jaw-dropping wonder that environmental, economic, political, and intellectual developments in the string of islands on the far eastern edge of the Eurasian continent resembled so closely those of the islands and protuberances on the other Eurasian edge. Far east Eurasia and far west Eurasia converged in realms as diverse as political economy, human-animal hierarchies, and rural anarchism. They became power houses that colonized and dominated the great landmass between them. Now they are declining in relative power and productivity together. This is not a story of East versus West, but a tale of Peripheral Convergence.

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²³Levy, *Modernization*. I am indebted to Ian J. Miller for his allowing me to read ‘Tokyo’s Electric Modernity: Japan in the Age of Global Energy’ where he provides an insightful analysis of energy’s relationship with concepts of modernity.

²⁴Alan Macfarlane compares England and Japan with the health-giving properties of tea in mind. Macfarlane, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, especially Chapter III, 105–80.

²⁵Howell, ‘Fecal Matters’, and Perez, ‘Kuso Happens’.

²⁶Hanley, *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan*, 197. Drixler, *Mabiki*, reveals how early modern Japanese kept their human population in line with the available resources.

²⁷Kimoto, ‘Kazoku, jendā, kaisō’.

²⁸Allison, *Prekarious Japan*.

²⁹For Marx, one of the most systematic and emphatic efforts is Foster, *Marx’s Ecology*. Also of interest is Ted Benton, *The Greening of Marxism*. For John Walker, Adam Smith and others, see Albritton Jonsson’s *Enlightenment’s Frontier* and ‘Rival Ecologies of Global Commerce’.

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