Conference II:
Water and Culture & The Effluent Society

Conference Program

June 22-24, 2017
The Mershon Center, The Ohio State University
Organizers: Nicholas Breyfogle & Philip Brown (History Department, The Ohio State University)

Conference Program and Rationale

This conference is the second of two, linked international conferences focused on the provision, management, use, and cultural meanings of water and its relationship to patterns of human culture, politics, technology, and socio-economic organization across geographies and chronologies. The conference will focus on two distinct themes: “Cultures of Water” and “The Effluent Society.” The first conference will took place in mid-May 2016 and focused on the intersecting topics of Water and Power” and “Controlling Water.” Through these four themes our program spans a broad range of vital and interconnected topics posed by “water.” The conferences, held at the Mershon Center at the Ohio State University, will be run as workshops with papers distributed in advance to ensure the most productive discussions. Papers will be published either in edited volumes or special issues of environmental history journals.

“Water” constitutes a multi-faceted topic of overwhelming historical and contemporary significance. Water defines every aspect of life: from the ecological to the cultural, religious, social, economic, and political. Without the molecule H2O, life as we understand it would cease to exist. Water remains at the center of human activity: in irrigation and agriculture; waste and sanitation; drinking and disease; floods and droughts; religious beliefs and practices; fishing and aquaculture; travel and discovery; scientific study; water pollution and conservation; multi-purpose dam building; in the setting of boundaries and borders; politics and economic life; and wars and diplomacy. Water also plays an important symbolic role in works of literature, art, music, and architecture, and it serves as a source of human beauty and spiritual tranquility.

The study of water poses questions that cross boundaries: physical, political, cultural, and disciplinary. It constitutes an ideal theme for collaborative and comparative analysis over a range of methodological perspectives. The two conferences will also extend the scope of the investigation beyond human dimensions to the biosphere as a whole. By bringing together a range of ecological, geographical, chronological, and methodological perspectives, the program addresses pressing issues at the intersection of culture, environment, health, biology, and economy. “Water” recurs as a theme in news, policy, and academic discussion, carrying different meanings and values, many associated with issues of societal survival, resilience, prosperity and conflict. Sometimes it appears as a tool: a means of transportation, an irrigation source, a reservoir, the base of ecosystem services. At other times it lies at the heart of a crisis: a tsunami, a flood, a vehicle of...
pollution, a vector of disease, a source of international contention or conflict. Its meaning and value change across time and space and vary from one human community to the next.

Water resources—the need for clean and accessible water supplies for drinking, agriculture, and power production—already represents one of the most complicated dilemmas for major parts of the twenty-first century world and promises to grow in importance. The World Water Forum has reported that one in three people across the planet will not have sufficient access to safe water by 2025. As population grows, glaciers melt, and aquifers are depleted, many analysts anticipate that the world will fight more over water than any other resource in future decades. Rationing the world’s water will be a foundational ethical question of the twenty-first century.

Further, oversupply of water—floods—represent a continuing threat to populations even in the economically and technologically advanced regions of the world. The World Commission on Large Dam’s estimates that more than 50% of Japan’s population is subject to flood risk. Hurricane Katrina provided sharp reminder for Americans of their own exposure to flood risk. Both cases raise issues of the culpability of modern riparian management designed to limit flood risk.

As the world faces the challenges of water usability, supply, and more, human societies’ past experience managing water can offer a stimulus to thinking outside the limited array of perspectives that dominate debate today. Two examples are suggestive: Early Modern Japan worked out extraordinarily sophisticated approaches to managing water conflicts that have been suggestive of how to deal with similar issues today, most prominently in the work of Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom (Governing the Commons and other work). In other instances, past mechanisms of flood amelioration in Japan and elsewhere involved less ecological impact than reinforced concrete dikes and dams, and today, in Niigata Prefecture, a company has been formed to deploy other traditional techniques of water control to replace concrete structures. Equally important, past experiences can suggest complications to common solutions and approaches to water management that should be avoided or for which compensatory plans require development, especially the need to be alert to unintended environmental and social consequences of narrowly conceived solutions to specific water-related challenges (e.g., the ways in which installing new concrete dikes changes hydraulic characteristics of rivers leading to the collapse of dikes that had long withstood flood ravages in the area south of Niigata City, Japan, in 2004).

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Conference Program

Papers are distributed and read in advance to ensure maximum discussion during the meeting.

Thursday June 22, 2017

Dinner for participants, 7 pm

Day 1 (Friday, June 23, 2017)

Water & Culture

We commence the program with a look at the role of water in the realm of traditional and modern cultural activities. Bodies of water have occupied a place in the human imagination since the earliest works of art and literature. They have been revered as gods, feared as monsters, painted, celebrated in poetry and music, and understood in gendered categories. Contemporary climatic and environmental changes alter familiar bodies of ice and water and throw these traditional cultural roles into relief. We will explore comparisons, continuities, and changes in water’s role in human culture and religious belief. The conference explores a range of broadly comparative questions: in what ways has water (its qualities, quantities, and hydrology) affected the patterns of cultural practice and religious belief in human societies? In what ways have the spiritual qualities ascribed to water influenced the ways in which humans tell stories about the universe and their place in it? In what ways has water defined the artistic and architectural expressions of human communities? What are the stories we tell about water and the ways in which water is embedded and activated in our narratives and visual representations of water?

Introduction to the Workshop: 9-9:30 am

Session I: Water & Religion: 9:40-11:40 am

I-1) Albert Park

Title: The Construction of Water: Culture, Value and Power in Modern Korea

Abstract: This essay examines the cultural role and value of water in modern Korean history. In particular, it focuses on water’s place in the religious traditions of Korea, including Buddhism, Ch’ondogyo (Tonghak) and Christianity. In so doing, it examines how religious-based concepts and values of water have informed new and alternative worldviews that have inspired forms of agency and drives for social renewal in modern Korea. The essay expands understandings on water as a cultural medium for producing values that mediate and influence social exchange.
I-2) Jakobina “Bina” Arch

Title: Divine Protection from the Stormy Pacific: Shipwrecks, Storms, and Spirituality in Early Modern Japan

Abstract: From the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, a surprising number of Japanese ships drifted out into the Pacific Ocean, even as the isolationist government tried to keep sailors and fishermen close to shore. Attempts to restrict coastal movement paradoxically led to the use of large inshore-optimized cargo ships, which regularly lost steerage in winter storms. This paper looks at how records of these castaways (hyōryūki) describe their prayers and other responses to near-death experiences in the midst of shipwreck, to consider the influence of the ocean on the spirituality of sailors and others in early modern Japan.

I-3) HASHIMOTO Michinori

Title: The prohibitions on hunting and fishing in the area around Lake Biwa in the Middle Ages in Japan Rulers’ and commoners’ evolving concepts of nature

Abstract: The evolution of people’s concepts of nature is a crucial subject in the history of the relationship between humans and water. This report focuses on the Buddhist prohibitions on fishing in Lake Biwa and the surrounding areas. The prohibitions had different meanings for rulers and commoners. For rulers, they provided a means to control people whereas for commoners, fishing was their livelihood. In the unfolding process of their interactions, it is notable that Buddhists and local temples were deeply involved. The unfolding process of these interactions is described in this report.

Lunch: 11:40 am -1:00 pm

Session II: Writing Water: 1:00-3:00 pm

II-1) Jane Costlow

Title: “Fluidity, modernity and Korolenko’s Volga sketches”

Abstract: In the years he spent in Nizhnii Novgorod (1885 – 1896), Vladimir Korolenko wrote a series of sketches of life on the Volga and its tributaries that represent this iconic Russian river as a place of social fluidity and cultural, technological and environmental change. In the paper for this conference I will focus on markers of the modern in these open-ended sketches: telegraph poles, steamships, astronomical instruments, and Korolenko’s own sympathetic but skeptical perspective. The Volga of Korolenko’s day was mythically identified with “authentic” Russia, but was also increasingly a conduit for mechanized transport, middle-class tourism, and manufacture. I will supplement Korolenko’s sketches with contemporary sources that help me understand how the rivers of the region were “modernizing”; what the impacts of modernity might
have been on the rivers themselves; and how Korolenko’s perspective polemicized with cultural anti-modernists.

II-2) Mika Perkiömäki

**Title:** Conflicts over River Amelioration in Sergey Zalygin’s “An Ecological Novel”

**Abstract:** Sergey Zalygin’s (1913–2000) autobiographical "An Ecological Novel" (1993) tells the story of a Soviet water engineer and ecologist between the Revolution and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The protagonist is repeatedly confronted with state modernization efforts, especially on issues related to harnessing major rivers. My paper examines how the conflicts between the government and the main character relate to the history of Russian environmental thinking. I argue that the protagonist’s relationship with his environment follows Lev Berg’s Schellingian concepts of geographical landscapes, while the state authorities typically represent Andrey Gri-gor’ev’s ideas, based on dialectical materialism and the Stalinist interpretation of Engels’ dialectics of nature.

II-3) Mark Bender

**Title:** Songs of Water: Water in the Poetry of Southwest China

**Coffee and snacks:** 3:00-3:30 pm

**Session III: Visualizing Water:** 3:30-5:30 pm

III-1) Hieu Phung Corsi

**Title:** “Realizing the Red River of Northern Vietnam, 1000-1850”

**Abstract:** The current lack of a reliable historical atlas for the study of Vietnamese history has posed challenges to scholars attempting to locate many riverine toponyms mentioned in historical sources. At the same time, however, we have little understanding of how a river was perceived in premodern Vietnam. This paper therefore sets out to explore how the Red River, one of the two largest rivers in Vietnam, was captured in the historical sources. In particular, an analysis that demonstrates how the conventional modern narrative of the Red River is a product of a period no earlier than the late nineteenth century will be followed by a survey of some historical names of this body of water such as the Lo River, the Big River, the Phu Luong, and the Nhi Ha. The paper finds that the Red River and its tributaries used to be understood as many interconnected local rivers. However, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was much effort to understand how these local rivers linked one to another in order to connect all the land of the
kingdom. Such a shift from a local perspective to a national one seems to suggest the territorial limit that the Red River affected the Vietnamese land.

III-2) Rod Wilson

**Title: The Renowned Waters of Edo: The Formation of an Urban Waterscape in Early Modern Japan**

**Abstract:** During the early modern period in Japan, the city of Edo (present-day Tokyo) changed from being a minor castle town to one of the largest cities in the world. This transformation necessarily depended on and included widespread changes to the city’s waters—its streams, rivers, canals, moats, bay, and even the subterranean flow of water under the city. Showing a clear understanding of the growth and transformation of the city over time, contemporary maps, gazetteers, and other writings described the resulting waterscape in terms that were very different from that of modern scholars and commentators. That is, unlike the modernist epistemological dualism that divides society and nature into separate ontological domains with society improving and degrading environments (and of course the narrative of nature not doing people’s bidding), these writers in Edo narrated the city through other conventions attended to political authority, social status, and places of renown (*meisho*).

III-3) Flora Roberts

**Title: On celebrating dams on the Syr Darya River: Speaking Soviet with an accent?**

**Abstract:** Over many centuries, the peoples of Central Asia constructed and maintained an intricate system of irrigation channels, and developed complex water allocation systems and an extensive body of lore regulating uses of water, and articulating its value to humans. The Soviet regime also invested heavily in irrigation schemes, and throughout the multilingual USSR, journalists, artists and poets were dispatched to celebrate the construction of dams – touted as touchstones of modernity and symbols of socialist progress. This paper considers the artistic and literary treatment of the Syr Darya River and its dams by Central Asians, probing whether there was anything recognizably “central Asian” in the texts and images produced. What understandings of the roles and meanings of water are reflected in the production of Central Asian artists of the mid twentieth century? For this preliminary exploration of the topic, I focus on the work of Kazakh-Uzbek painter Ural Tansykbaev, alongside Tajik-language literary production.

**Dinner for Participants: 6:15 pm**
Day 2 (Saturday, June 24, 2017)

Session IV: Materializations of Water, Real and Imagined: 9:00-11:00 am

IV-1) Jeanne Féaux de la Croix

Title: “Emerging glaciers and disappearing dams on the Naryn: materializing hopes and fears on a major highland river in Kyrgyzstan.”

Abstract: This paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork on the Naryn River, where hydropower stations have long supplied up to 90% of Kyrgyzstan’s electricity. I explore changing perceptions and uses of the river near its highland source, between dreams of greater hydropower, fears of melting glaciers and attendant floods. Investigating the political ecology of the Naryn reveals why its confluences are so highly valued, while the main river itself features as little else than a ‘drainage ditch’ (cf. Donald Worster). A contemporary history of the river as a boundary also elucidates why the Naryn is, currently, mainly feared. This project is situated in the context of trilateral research with Central Asian scholars, to trace the ‘social life’ of the Naryn and Syr Darya rivers, from its headwaters along the Chinese border, to the Aral Sea.

IV-2) KU Yawen

Title: The production of flood as a disaster: the increase of flooding vulnerability in colonial Taiwan

Abstract: This study avoids treating flood as an act of God, aims to re-examine the relationship between flooding disasters and Japanese ruling policies in colonial Taiwan. First, I will discuss how the riparian society developed adaptation measures to cope with frequent flooding in pre-colonial period. Then I will investigate how the colonial policies under the Japanese rule excluded those local knowledge and conventions, and explain how the technical intervention revised the environment and finally increased the riparian people’s vulnerability to flood. The paper will conclude that the so-called natural disaster was mostly caused by non-natural factors.

IV-3) Adriaan M.J. de Kraker

Title: “Changing waters enhance cultural change on both a spatial and temporal scales: Six centuries of dealing with waters in Meuse and Scheldt Delta.”

Abstract: This contribution looks into the area of the Northern Flanders (Belgium), the Dutch province of Zealand with two adjacent provinces. This is the Delta of rivers Meuse and Scheldt in which from medieval times onwards islands were formed and a process of embanking started.
The Delta kept being dominated by the Western and Eastern Scheldt estuaries and some smaller ones. In the course of this process of embankment larger island with towns and many smaller settlements on it emerged. Exchange of goods, ideas and people took place by ship. The major estuaries and smaller tidal channels and creeks became the veins making life in all its aspects possible. It also became the onset of separate island cultures, between which the differences and similarities became most visible during the 19th century, in terms of dialects spoken, traditional costume, eating culture, religion, etc.

 Quite another aspect of the existing many islands is the effort aiming at protecting them from the wild waters during storm surges. Generally dikes were built for protection. However, the juridical system gave people who had reclaimed land, but could not hold this, the opportunity to simply abandon their land. Therefore on 16th and 17th century maps large areas are mapped out as flooded areas. At that point in time there was some flooded land near most settlements on nearly every major island. This perception of giving up land changed over de next centuries in a strong conviction of never having to abandon land again. The idea of progress (Enlightenment) very much promoted the idea of man subduing nature. In this new way of thinking there was no place for land abandonment. Under the influence of building nature, this enlightenment idea is changing again, but not so fast among landowners.

Finally dealing with water also has a strategic aspect. This implies using water to flood land during wartime. The obvious aim is to prevent enemy armies to invade areas or start besieging towns. And again overlooking six centuries there is a change noticeable in this strategy. Initially polders were flooded at random, often with sea (salt) water. During the 18th century special inundation zones were designated and special sluices were built to make a flooding happening. Later still, also fresh water flooding occurred even as recent as the Second World War by both the Nazi’s as the allied forces.

**Coffee and Snacks: 11:00-11:30 am**

**The “Effluent Society”**

*Perhaps the greatest public health achievements of the modern world, the provision of clean drinking water and efficient waste disposal have dramatically raised life expectancies in the developed world. At the same time, many other nations face inadequate infrastructure, deteriorating supplies, and limited disposal options in the face of rapid urbanization. While more than a billion people lack access to clean drinking water or a working toilet, most Westerners live in a “flush and forget” society with little stomach to engage issues of human waste that are displaced to remote locations. This part of the program brings together scholars of this transformation in infrastructure, public health, and policies. It explores water-provision and sewage policies, public health, and infrastructure and technological development. As infrastructure ages and floods and droughts appear more frequently, there will be significant financial, ethical, technological, and hydrological obstacles to the long-term viability of public-water and sewage regimes that*
historical studies can illuminate. In sum, we examine both past and present issues of availability, access, and inequality in water supply and waste disposal.

**Session V: Science & Policy in the U.S.S.R.  11:30 am–1:30 pm**

V-1) Christopher Burton

**Title:** “A Soviet Science of Effluent: Risk, Precaution, and Stalinist Industrialism.”

**Abstract:** From the 1940s onward, in the context of rapid industrialization, Soviet scientists developed a sophisticated framework for understanding, regulating, and treating economic and household effluent. Their science both resembled, and differed from, efforts elsewhere, but there were also deep differences between the scientists themselves. These differences operated on several levels with personal animosity playing a role. There was also a divergence between scientific “center” and “periphery” as scientists in Moscow were more accommodating of Stalinist and post-Stalinist industrialism than some of those in “the regions.” Most abstractly, their disputes over the quality of water can be interpreted using the contemporary concepts of “risk” and “the precautionary principle.”

V-2) Elena Kochetkova [via skype]

**Title:** "Struggling for pure water: biological water treatment in the USSR, 1950s-1970s"

**Abstract:** My paper examines how Soviet engineers developed biological water treatment in the context of discussions around the construction of large pulp-making plants near Lake Baikal in the 1950s-1970s. In the 1950s, scientists and engineers in the USSR paid more attention to the problem of water contamination by industrial enterprises in the USSR. The construction on Baikal even spurred these debates. Stimulated by the state, engineers in Leningrad experimented with new methods in the 1950s-1970s, but the new facilities, finally installed on the Baikal’s plant and other enterprises through the USSR, did not work properly. My paper states that the problem of this failure hid in the drawbacks of Soviet technological system.

V-3) Simo Laakkonen

**Title:** A Case Study of Water Pollution and Protection in the Soviet Union

**Abstract:** Water protection can be claimed to have been the oldest, largest and in some cases, most effective sector of environmental protection. Its environmental history is, however, surprisingly poorly studied and known. Most studies have focused on individual cities while the national and international level has been neglected. This has been the case also concerning studies of the environmental history of Soviet Union. And additional methodological limitation is that studies have tended to focus on policy issues or political rhetoric. But what was the reality behind grandiose speeches? Was Soviet water protection an abject failure as many scholars and
people seem to think? The aim of our study was to try to avoid the most glaring shortcomings of previous studies and explore these issues by means of using new approach and materials. The first theme we wanted to examine was the development of Soviet style administration concerning water pollution and protection. The environment is a public good and no public policy cannot be effective without proper administrative organization, powers and skills. But when and what types of institutions did the Soviet Union possibly establish in order to manage water protection issues in the new Soviet Republics? Another focus of our research was the history of environmental science. Was anything at all known about water pollution in Lithuanian SSR? How did scientific research about the condition of water courses possibly begin and develop? The study’s third, and perhaps most important focus, was on the history of environmental technology. With the aid of research of the history of wastewater treatment, we can empirically examine what particular measures, if any, were specifically taken in order to reduce the discharges of urban or industrial wastewaters. In our research, we were able, for the first time, to describe, using qualitative and quantitative methods, the history of water course pollution and protection in one Soviet republic throughout the whole period of the Cold War.

**Lunch: 1:30-2:30 pm**

**Session VI: Hydrology and Conservancy: Imperial China: 2:30-4:30 pm**

VI-1) CHE Qun

**Title: Seesaw Effects between Water and Soil: Water Conservancy Construction as an Indicator in Environmental History of Middle Yangtze River**

**Abstract:** The Jingjiang River is a reach of the Yangtze River from Zhicheng to Chenglingji on the north of Dongting Lake, located in the border area where the Yangtze River gets out of mountains and deep valleys into a plain. The river widens, soil is carried down and settles. Hence in history, the sandbars emerged and continuously changed which led to the channel shaped frequently. Before the Tang Dynasty, there were no settled river channels in this region. The Yangtze River used to rush directly into a marsh called Yunmeng, and meanwhile, the Dongting Lake was no more than a seasonal small lake regulating and storing very few flood from Yangtze River because, at that time, the north side had lower elevation compared with the south. Afterward, with the rapid development of the Jianghan Plain, people moved here, cultivated marsh into land and built up dikes to guard their land against the flood. With overwhelming dikes’ construction on the north side in the Song, Yuan, Ming Dynasty (960-1644), a steady river channel formed. The deposition of sediment made the riverbed aggrade, the Jingjiang River, therefore, became higher and higher, even exceeded the elevation of the Dongting Lake Region, river water tended towards the south, and the lake body expanded day by day.

The process of Jingjiang and Dongting Lake transformation has been discussed by plenty of previous studies in a large-scale. However, the details both in temporal and spatial context have not been demonstrated yet. When we know the environmental changes mean the transformation of the
entire ecosystem, then there are more than merely “the transformation” mentioned above, including animals, plants, cultivars, agriculture, as well as human physical well-beings offer a profoundly way to understand local environments.

This thesis sheds lights on the procedure in detail based on the systematic Qing’s Memorials and Local Gazetteers to clarify the flood water level of Jingjiang River and the water conservancy constructions in Dongting Lake Region across different regions and time periods. And in so doing, to trace the flooding and deposition process of the lake to understand how the lake has been shaped from the past to today. At the same time, the perceptions of health and disease are introduced into the framework. Schistosomiasis, one of the natural focal diseases caused by Schistosoma, will be brought into as a core environmental parameter. Just like what Timothy Mitchell questioned, “Can the mosquito speak?” Mosquito maybe not, the environment and society do.

VI-2) GU Weifang

Title: Water conservancy projects and schistosomiasis in the upper reaches of Xin'anjiang River

Abstract: The activities of water conservancy construction in the upper reaches of Xin'anjiang River have changed the water environment which caused the prevalence of schistosomiasis in this area. This changes began in the Song Dynasty when Yuliang Dam was constructed which created steady river channels in the upstream of Xin’anjiang River and became the most serious until to the early Qing Dynasty when the dam was washed away again. With the destruction of Yuliang Dam, sediment deposition caused by frequent floods made the dam lose the original function of discharging flood and sand. This change has been an important issue in the study of water history. While, the disease hidden in the water environment changes has been neglected. This thesis means to reveal the process of changes and the formation of optimal growth environment of snail which led to close water residents infected with schistosomiasis and finally formed a large-scale epidemic in the early twentieth century.

VI-3) LI Yuchang

Title: Storm Surge, Water Speed and Schistosomiasis in Huangpu River Basin

Abstract: The history of mankind is often an accident. In 1582, the storm surge happened in Jiangsu and Zhejiang coastal which is not serious in the history of China’s tide, washed away the original dikes at Lijiahong and Laohuanzui to defend the tide of Yangtze River. While, this “little accident” brought Huangpu River about two hundred years of salty tide, sediment and torrent, also caused lots of inconvenience and affliction to the residents. However, the strong tide inhibited the prevalence of schistosomiasis. Until 1850, due to the river blockage, some areas gradually out of the tide area, schistosomiasis began a large-scale prevalence and reached its peak in the first half of the 20th century when the history of mankind has entered a new stage. Therefore, from the perspective of schistosomiasis history, this basin is the most fortunate area in the Jiangnan region.
Coffee and snacks:  4:30-5:00 pm

Session VII:  General Discussion of Cross-cutting themes:  5:00-6:15 pm

Wrap up and Concluding Remarks.  What have we learned and where do we go from here?

Dinner for participants: 7:00 pm.

Participants

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