

Hybrid Guest Lecture
Osaka University

Oceanic Frontiers as an Environmental Framework for the History of Modern Japan

Japan holds a unique position in world history as a Pacific archipelago turned continental empire. Its ambiguous position between the island Pacific and the continental rims is reflected in the changing paradigms of the empire's maritime historiography. If the myth of national seclusion had created an appearance of resource-poor insularity in the past, the repeated discoveries of Japan's maritime dimensions in different contexts has invited debates over the emergence of shipping capitalism, the spiritual meaning of the sea, or the very origin of the "Japanese race." The globalization of Japanese studies has opened the debate to interregional issues and ecological dimensions of oceanic history. This contribution discusses the specific implications of concepts such as frontiers, resource bases, or "Oceania" itself, as applied to terraqueous Japan. The shift of historiographical focus towards the oceans as catalysts of human history reveals the allegedly resource-poor archipelago in the front row seats of the Pacific's colonial theater – and as anything but the allegedly resource-poor insular existence it long seemed to pass.

(167 w.)

Jonas Rüegg
jonas.ruegg@hist.uzh.ch
www.jonasruegg.com