

Paul Jobin, Ming-sho Ho and Hsin-huang Michael Hsiao (eds.), *Environmental Movements and Politics of the Asian Anthropocene*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2021. ISBN: 9789814951081 (pbk). xv + 374pp. US\$ 39.90.

Environmental Movements and Politics of the Asian Anthropocene, edited by Paul Jobin, Ming-sho Ho, and Hsin-huang Michael Hsiao is a welcome addition to the growing literature on environmentalism in Asia. The book attempts to build on and update a number of similar publications that came out in the late 1990s, such as Lee and So's *Asian Environmental Movements: Comparative Perspectives* (ME Sharpe, 1999). This important book is also likely to be widely used for teaching and to have a long shelf life.

Edited volumes are often treated as second-class or even third-class publications, but this is an example of an edited volume at its best. The book has a clear focus on the relationship between environmental movements and politics. This involves looking at how environmental movements have affected their countries' political system and environmental policies, as well as how changes in the political system impact on environmental movements and outcomes. Therefore the book makes an important contribution to the debate over whether democracies or authoritarian systems are better placed to deal with contemporary environmental challenges. The conclusions of the editors and chapter authors is never simplistic. For instance, though the Philippines are generally categorised as a democracy, albeit a flawed one, Francisco Magno's chapter reveals it is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be an environmental activist.

Although each chapter addresses the core questions in a slightly different way, every chapter was a joy to read. The chapters give a clear sense of both the overall evolution of environmental movements but also use more in-depth case studies, to further illustrate the relationship between activism and environmental outcomes. I will definitely encourage my colleagues who teach on Southeast Asian politics to adopt this book for their teaching.

Even though the book only has one chapter solely devoted to Taiwan, I still highly recommend it to the Taiwan studies field. Paul Jobin's chapter 'Environmental Movements in Taiwan's Anthropocene' is a masterpiece and one I will be adding to my teaching reading lists for the coming academic year. The chapter offers an overview of the environmental movement's strategies and development over the last two decades. One of the standout points of the chapter is the extensive bibliography. Not only does the chapter engage with a very diverse set of sources on environmental issues in Taiwan, it also introduces important Chinese language sources many non-Taiwan-based readers may not be familiar with. One of the convincing arguments Jobin makes in the

chapter is about the emergence and role of what he calls civic eco-nationalism in Taiwan. As with the other chapters, Jobin is able to show key trends in environmentalism, such as the shift to more radical strategies in the anti-nuclear movement, the relationship between the Indigenous population and environmental issues, as well as the growing use of legal actions in environmental disputes. The analysis is well supported by academic sources, fieldwork, and case studies. If possible I would strongly encourage readers to follow reading Jobin's chapter by watching Ko Chin-yuan's (柯金源) remarkable documentary on the history of Taiwan's environmental movement, *Age of Awakening* (前進, dir. Ko Chin-yuan, 2018). Seeing the visual representations of the movements and activists in Ko's documentary made the experience of reading Jobin's even more memorable.

Additionally there are other reasons why a Taiwan studies reader would enjoy the book. The concluding chapter attempts to bring the various strands together and challenge the argument that environmental authoritarianism is better suited to meeting environmental challenges. Instead, as the chapter title claims, democracy still matters in the Anthropocene. Since Taiwan is the only full democracy covered in the book, it is thus at the heart of the argument.

Reading the other country chapters I found myself constantly comparing the patterns with those seen in Taiwan in the past. For instance, the limited space for environmental activism in one-party Vietnam in Stephen Ortmann's chapter presented similarities to Taiwan in its late martial law shift towards softer authoritarianism prior to the formation of the first opposition party. The shift from development regardless of environmental costs towards at least lip service to environmental protection seen in many of the chapters mirrors the trend seen in Taiwan in the transition from authoritarianism to democracy in the 1990s. However, the Jobin chapter shows how compared to the other chapter countries, the environmental movement in Taiwan has been able to have a greater impact on government policy and even integrate the environment into the country's nationalism and democracy.

Although all the chapters focus on the environmental movements of individual countries, the international dimensions of the environmental crisis come through throughout the book. In the past Taiwan attempted to attract heavy polluting industries that Western countries no longer wanted, but now, partly as a result of the success of its environmental movements, Taiwan is also exporting its own polluting industries. For instance in Ortmann's chapter (and in Ko's documentary) we read about the protests in Vietnam against the polluting Formosa steel plant. A key concept in Taiwan studies is the China factor or China impact. The case studies in this book show how environmentalism in other Asian countries offers another lens through which to consider the China

factor. Many of the targets of environmental protests in the book are against polluting projects funded by Chinese companies or even the Chinese state.

As had been the case in Taiwan, we read how environmental movements have become an integral part of the pro-democracy movement in a number of the chapters such as in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Thailand. However, the trajectories of these attempted environmental-democracy alliances largely differed from the pattern seen in Taiwan. In Taiwan environmentalists contributed to both democratic transition and consolidation. In contrast, in Hong Kong and Vietnam attempts to create alliances between environmental and pro-democracy movements have not led to democratic transition or even liberalisation. Instead they have experienced authoritarian crackdowns. One of the gloomiest chapters was on the Thailand case, where the environmental movements appear to have shifted from being part of the pro-democracy alliance in the 1990s to becoming arguably tools of the state. The message is clear from the subheading of Jakkrit Sangkhamenee's chapter 'How the Thai Environmental Movement Fell Silent'.

If I have one criticism of the book it is that it did not include the more similar democratic countries in Northeast Asia, such as South Korea, Japan, and Mongolia. Apart from Taiwan, the countries examined in the other chapters can be classified as belonging to a number of different forms of authoritarian political systems. It would have been useful to assess whether the environmentalist patterns seen in the Taiwan case have also featured in its democratic neighbours.

These days I rarely have the time to write book reviews, but I am sure readers will agree this exceptional book is worth finding the time to enjoy.

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