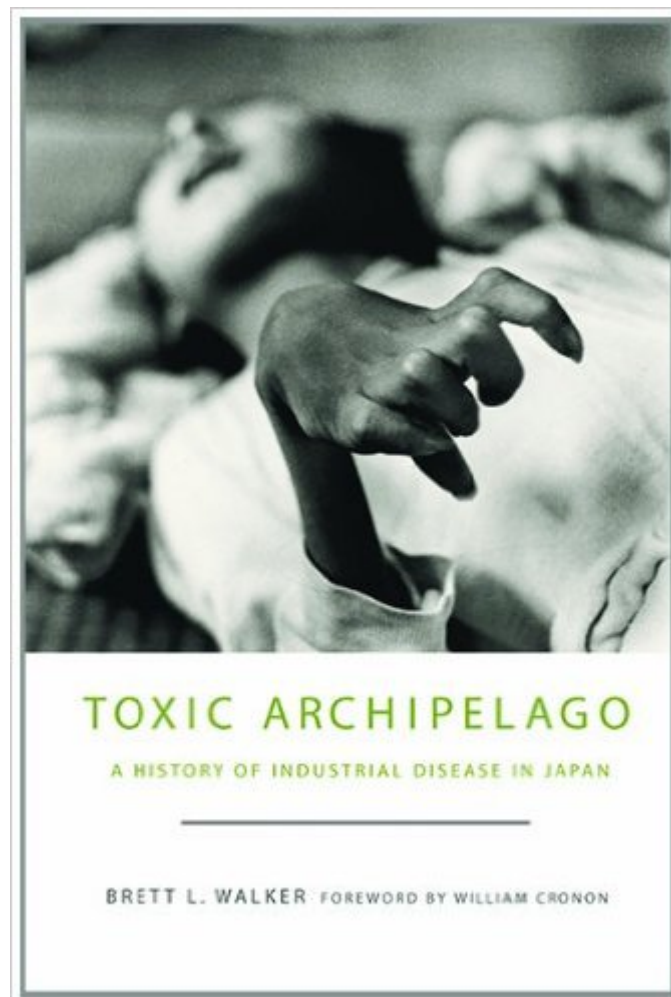


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Toxic Archipelago: A History Of Industrial Disease In Japan (Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books)



Synopsis

Every person on the planet is entangled in a web of ecological relationships that link farms and factories with human consumers. Our lives depend on these relationships -- and are imperiled by them as well. Nowhere is this truer than on the Japanese archipelago. During the nineteenth century, Japan saw the rise of *Homo sapiens industrialis*, a new breed of human transformed by an engineered, industrialized, and poisonous environment. Toxins moved freely from mines, factory sites, and rice paddies into human bodies. *Toxic Archipelago* explores how toxic pollution works its way into porous human bodies and brings unimaginable pain to some of them. Brett Walker examines startling case studies of industrial toxins that know no boundaries: deaths from insecticide contaminations; poisonings from copper, zinc, and lead mining; congenital deformities from methylmercury factory effluents; and lung diseases from sulfur dioxide and asbestos. This powerful, probing book demonstrates how the Japanese archipelago has become industrialized over the last two hundred years -- and how people and the environment have suffered as a consequence.

Book Information

Series: Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: University of Washington Press (May 2, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0295991380

ISBN-13: 978-0295991382

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #603,866 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #153 in [Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Civil & Environmental > Environmental > Pollution](#) #286 in [Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Historical Geography](#) #431 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Medicine](#)

Customer Reviews

Overall, the book was a pleasure to read, and the main message Walker wants to communicate to his audience is a worthy cause. Basically, in the pursuit of modernization/industrialization/empire-building, the Japanese state caused pain for some of its citizens and did harm to the environment. Walker presents several examples to illustrate that

humans are always going to be affected by their natural environment, and any harm we do to that environment will hurt us in the long run. The point is well illustrated, but my problem with the book is that this point was made obvious with just the introduction and the first chapter. In other words, I think this work should have been condensed for an article, and the book felt repetitive after the first 100 pages or so. Walker does a nice job connecting local developments (human pain and environmental damage) to broader developments within Japan and its broader empire between the late 19th-20th century, but those connections are too obvious and require little explanation. For example, war required more resources, such as mining, and this increase in mining activities caused greater environmental damage, which caused more physical pain for inhabitants of local communities near these operations. There it is. I just don't think this requires an entire chapter to explain. The message is important, and this specific topic is not covered by many other scholars in the U.S., so the book is significant in that regard, but it felt like a broken record for most of the second half.

While Walker tends to hammer the point home, this is a pretty good read. I got this book for an environmental studies class, and I found myself enjoying it, well as much as I could with such a grim subject matter. I'm not really one who likes reading for class, but this was interesting enough to make me really think and not just skim through it like I do most books needed for class.

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