

Ian Jared Miller, *The Nature of the Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press (Asia: Local Studies/Global Themes; 27), 2013.

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Ian Jared Miller's *The Nature of the Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo* presents a history of the Ueno Zoo, Japan, from its inception in 1882 to the present. This engaging and theoretically sophisticated book accomplishes a lot more than one might expect from an institutional history: the zoo serves as a focal point for a comprehensive exploration of Japan's natural, imperial, and national history during what Miller terms "ecological modernity."

In Chapter 1, Miller designates Udagawa Yōan's *Botany Sūtra* (1822) as the beginning of Japan's ecological modernity. In this text, Udagawa, a scholar of natural history, coined what was to become the modern Japanese term for animal (J. *dōbutsu*). Udagawa shifted Japanese nomenclature from earlier Chinese taxonomies to new terminologies that reflected Linnean taxonomies—though premodern views of animals arguably did not completely disappear from Japan, at least on a popular level. The modern transformation of Japanese views of the natural world serves as the backdrop for the establishment of the Ueno Zoo. The zoo's closest forerunner was the Animal Hall of the Yamashita Museum, founded in 1873, which merged early modern exhibition practices—such as sideshows and *materia medica* collections—with modern scientific study of the natural world. Shortly after the museum's closure 1881, the Ueno Zoo was founded in 1882 within the new National Museum in Ueno Park. This was a period of colonial expansion when racial discourses employed social Darwinism and often bestialized non-Western human populations. Japanese leaders and scientist saw the zoo as a means to demonstrate Japan's status as a modern, civilized nation. By exhibiting animals as representations of nature, the Japanese could position themselves on the side of civilized

humanity and modern science. The zoo thus concretized the human-animal divide.

As Japan transformed into an imperial power, the Ueno Zoo embodied Japan's exploitation of the natural resources of its colonies, a process detailed in Chapter 2. According to the zoo's directors Kurokawa Gitarō (1867-1935) and Koga Tadamichi (1903-1986), the zoo and its exotic and wild animals gave modern Japanese citizens the opportunity to engage with the natural world thus staving off the alienation that accompanied industrialization and urbanization. In Koga's view, the zoo served as means to allow people to emotionally satisfy the human longing for nature and to provide a moral education for boys who would eventually administer the empire. Human-animal encounters at the zoo were carefully curated to allow maximum visibility by means of glass enclosures and displays that gave the illusion of barrier-free access. Living animal trophies obtained during Japan's military expansion through Asia were proudly displayed at the zoo, as were military animals. Rather than thinking in strong binary terms, Koga saw zoo animals as a useful means to manage human animals by means of affect.

Chapter 3 discusses how, as Japan mobilized its natural resources for the war effort during the 1930s and 1940s, the zoo became an important locus for celebrating Japan's control over the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere and a place that glorified the military service and sacrifice of animals. Chapter 4 continues this theme. As Japan's military fortunes took a turn for the worse, many of the zoo's animals were gruesomely sacrificed by order of Tokyo Governor Odachi Shigeo (1892-1955)—against the protests of the zoo's personnel. While killing large and potentially dangerous zoo animals during wartime was commonplace in other industrialized countries, Japan's case stands out because many of the animals died slow, agonizing, and particularly brutal deaths, and their demise was later ritually memorialized with great fanfare at the zoo. The commemoration served to as a means to inspire acceptance of the ultimate sacrifice for the empire among the human population. After the war, the sacrifice of the zoo animals became one piece in a narrative that portrayed the Japanese as victims of the war rather than as aggressors.

In the postwar era, the topic of Chapter 5, the Ueno Zoo slowly rebuilt its collection of animals. As the Ueno Zoo's director, Koga skillfully marshaled the voices of Japanese children in order to transcend the opposition of the allied forces and to overcome competition from other zoos while gaining access to desirable animal species. Emblematic of postwar Japan, the zoo was demilitarized and decolonized. Rather than being able to import animals from colonial territories, which had been lost with the war, the zoo had to rely on trading animals with foreign zoos as a means of diplomatic gift exchange. Though Miller does not explicitly

mention this, the tributary exchange and gifting of exotic animals has a long history in Japanese foreign and domestic relations. In pre-modern Japan, the tributary exchange of animals is documented from antiquity through the early modern period (Kajishima 2002, 32–36; Chaiklin 2005).

Chapter 6 continues the theme of the political exchange of zoo animals. The chapter focuses on pandas, the most popular species on display at the Ueno Zoo from the late twentieth through the early twenty-first centuries, in order to illustrate how contemporary zoo animals' bodies have been commodified for political and economic objectives. Miller deftly analyzes how pandas were first gifted, and later loaned, by the Chinese government to various international zoos, including the one in Tokyo. Since the pandas were a major attraction in a culture that prioritizes the aesthetics of cuteness, the rights to the sale of panda-related goods was jealously guarded. The Ueno Zoo also went to great lengths to surgically manipulate the pandas' bodies in order to make the animals reproduce, even though several of the attempts proved fatal to the cubs and the mother bear.

Rather than settling on a single theoretical approach throughout all the chapters, Miller's monograph draws on a variety of thinkers from Bruno Latour and disciplinary separation in Chapter 1 to Giorgio Agamben in Chapters 3 and 4, and to John Berger in Chapters 2 and 6. Miller is also in conversation with post-colonial theory, animal geography, and – to a lesser extent – zoology. Miller's narrative is at its most powerful in Chapters 4 and 6 when individual zoo animals – the elephants John, Tonky and Wanri and the pandas Kang Kang, Lan Lan, Fei Fei, and Huan Huan – return our gaze as Miller examines the power that humans have over non-human animal bodies in life and death. The story of Tonky and Wanri hurling poisoned potatoes at military personnel and zoo officials is especially compelling. In Figure 19, Huan Huan's blank, anesthetized gaze is also haunting as she tilts her head toward the camera during surgical fertility treatment.

It is difficult to find fault with Miller's carefully researched, elegantly written, and convincingly argued monograph. My only points of criticism concern Miller's assertions about animal agency (or rather the lack thereof) in the introduction and the epilogue. In the introduction Miller explains that he considers animals capable of being historical actors but not "thoughtful agents." This choice, he argues, is part due to the nature of the available archival source materials; thus he wants to avoid engaging in "ventriloquism" by giving "voice to the animal other." (p. 14) Indeed, historical sources do not always yield all the information a historian would wish for, and speaking for animals without solid evidence is not productive.

Yet Miller's reluctance to acknowledge animal agency is not only grounded in the lack of evidence but is also in his acceptance of historian

Robin George Collingwood's statement that "man is regarded as the only animal that thinks, or thinks clearly enough, to render his actions expressions of his thoughts." (p. 14) Miller considers it flawed to "ascribe thoughtful agency to animals" and is only willing to grant them "physical presence and emotional influence." He acknowledges that cognition can far more complex in certain animal species than Collingwood stipulated in the 1940s but nevertheless stops short of deeming animals capable of agency (p. 14).

In addition to Collingwood's assumptions about non-human animal cognition being completely outdated, this construction of agency relies on a Cartesian definition of selfhood that categorically excludes animals. It is heir to a strand of Western philosophy that prioritizes rationality as an exclusively human prerogative. In *The Cat Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida successfully has confronted this sort of binary thinking as not particularly useful and could have provided Miller with a methodological alternative to Collingwood, but unfortunately, Derrida's essay is absent from Miller's otherwise diverse theoretical toolkit.

To suggest that non-human animals act only through their physical presence and their emotional influence on humans is to say that they are actors in the same way that lifeless objects are actors. In other words, this definition reifies the objectification of non-human animals. The assertion of a rigid divide between human and non-human animals ultimately contradicts Miller's own narrative, which demonstrates how porous and fluctuating this boundary was in Japan, even after the adoption of Western science.

Being open to animal agency might have allowed Miller to modulate his views about the Anthropocene, a concept that Miller uses synonymously with "modernity" in order to compel us to pay attention to the ecological impact of human actions. Miller closes his monograph with the suggestion that in the Anthropocene humans have become divorced from the natural world and live without the notion of nature as a threatening, with the exception of large natural catastrophes or miniscule pathogens. Zoo animals, he contends, are viewed as harmless victims as they "have become emblems of a precarious and destructive human sovereignty" (p. 238).

During the modern era human activity has led to the loss of habitat, a decline in biodiversity, and a record pace of species extinction. In this process, however, non-human animals—including zoo animals—are not only perceived as helpless victims but also, in some cases, as ominous transgressors. Over the past two decades, the concept of invasive species—living organisms that were introduced to non-native habitats by human action and negatively impact native species by predation, crossbreeding, competition for habitat, and transmission of disease—has raised considerable concern and anxiety among conservation biologists and has garnered much attention in the mass media.

In Japan, the Invasive Alien Species Act (2004) was enacted to control non-native species that have been introduced after 1868 (i.e., Miller's ecological modernity) and are considered especially harmful to native ecosystems and human interests.¹ The list of species includes animals such as North American raccoons and Taiwanese macaques that escaped from zoos—though apparently not the Ueno Zoo—and became established in the wild. In addition to being viewed as pests, the Taiwanese macaques, in particular, have been interbreeding with and thus “diluting” the genetic pool of native species—much to the consternation of Japanese wildlife biologists. This is to say that even in the Anthropocene, non-human animals, including former zoo animals that defied the constraints of human captivity, are still perceived as threats to human sovereignty.

My criticisms, however, only concern some of the monograph's framing. The substantive chapters of the book are excellent and do not reify the human-animal binary as much as one might expect as a result of Miller's opening comments. The monograph is of great interest to Japanese historians, as well as scholars in animal studies, history of science, and colonial studies. It is suitable for upper-level undergraduate and graduate seminars in these fields and constitutes a major scholarly contribution. I will definitely assign it in my undergraduate seminar on animals in Japan.

References

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¹ “Alien Species.” Website of the Ministry of the Environment. <http://www.env.go.jp/en/nature/as.html> (accessed March 22, 2016). The site contains various documents related to the law, including a full English translation and an updated list of species covered by the law.

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