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## Dreaming of “Human-Uninhabited” Areas? National Park Debates in Modern Germany and Japan

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### Abstract

Pioneered in the United States, national parks as less human-inhabited large-scale protected areas have become one of the most influential tools for nature conservation in the modern world. Germany and Japan are among the industrialized countries that have been motivated by the national park concept, although the related debates in the two nations have proceeded differently. Japan created its first 12 national parks in the mid-1930s, and its interest at the national and regional policy levels in attracting foreign tourists has dominated the national park debate to this day. National parks have certainly played a role as the last bastion of nature lovers, especially in conflicts with infrastructure projects, but conservation in national parks has been a less popular topic among the Japanese public. Germany, by contrast, began its national park history with the establishment of the Society for Nature Protection Park in 1909, and park creation started to accelerate only in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the German debate has changed its focus from conservation to recreation and then to ecology; one can also hear critical voices against a recent national park project to rethink the national park concept per se in a broader environmental context. The German case may indicate the desirability of having a more flexible debate around conservation practices.

### 1. Introduction

Looking at the interaction between human-inhabited areas and the natural environment in history, no one can deny that the last two centuries have been a period of fundamental transformation. Industrialization, urbanization, mass transportation, and suburbanization—all changed landscape patterns in both the Eastern and Western world, and a significant part of the global population now enjoys city life.

Needless to say, this development has increased burdens on the natural environment, but modern environmental history has also witnessed sensitive reactions to these changes. By the early twentieth century, nature conservation movements had gained strength in most countries, which laid the foundations for environmentalism today. Experts and activists in this field have often idealized less human-inhabited, or “human-uninhabited” natural landscapes, contrasting them with densely populated or industrialized areas. One of their achievements was the creation of nature reserves, where flora and fauna are protected from human impact.

This paper will give a brief history of nature conservation in Germany and Japan from the early twentieth century to the present. The focus will be on national parks, the most generally recognized category of large-scale protected areas. In the case of Germany, other types of protected areas, namely nature parks and nature protection parks, will also be discussed, because these concepts are derived from the debate over national parks. I will try to clarify what motivated people to discuss these parks in chronological order; accordingly, the essay is divided into three parts. It first addresses the early stages of the national park debates, up to the mid-twentieth century. Second, it looks at the decades from 1945 to 1980, a period of economic growth and the rise of environmentalism. Finally, it reviews the national park projects undertaken in recent years.

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Germany and Japan are often compared to each other in historical and environmental studies.<sup>1</sup> Issues such as air pollution and nuclear power draw attention beyond academic circles, and Japanese people tend to see Germany as the model of an eco-friendly nation. However, nature conservation is a less popular topic, while many scholars have engaged in comparative studies on the history of national parks and equivalent natural parks in other countries.<sup>2</sup> Although the approaches are many and varied, most of them avoid writing success stories of park creation at the national conservation policy level and seek lessons for the future development of conservation. In this context, the following essay may make another critical contribution to the actual environmental debate.

## 2. Creating Traditions

The beginning of the nature park and national park debates in Germany dates back to the decades before World War I. During this period, amid rapid industrialization and urbanization, numerous private local, regional, and national conservation associations were established by educated middle-class Germans who articulated anxieties about damage to natural scenery. Many nature lovers were impressed by conservation practices in the United States, where the world's first national park, Yellowstone National Park, was founded in 1872.

Of course, most of them found it unrealistic for Germany to have its own national parks. They recognized that no “wilderness” or “untouched” nature remained in their densely populated homeland. Even in rural areas, the creation of national parks seemed impossible because of conflicts with landowners who defended their interests in agriculture and forestry production. The mainstream of the German conservation movement, therefore, concentrated their attention on notable individual trees, bushes, or rocks, to protect them as “natural monuments” (*Naturdenkmal*).

However, the U.S. model continued to motivate some German conservationists. In 1909, over 30 nature lovers from Germany and Austria established the Society for Nature Protection Park (*Verein Naturschutzpark*). One of the leading members of the society, Kurt Floericke, a naturalist and writer, criticized the concept of natural monuments, arguing that they did not deal with landscapes as whole entities. To address the problem, the society aimed to create large-scale reserves called “nature protection parks.” The society saw three types of landscape in particular as characteristic of Central Europe and worthy of protection: high mountain ranges, low mountain ranges, and lowland areas.

The Society for Nature Protection Park identified the Lüneburg Heath, near the city of Hamburg, as a typical lowland area. Heathland, a landscape characteristic of northern Germany formed by long-term grazing, was in danger of losing its natural beauty because of the spread of holiday houses. From 1910 onwards, the society bought several pieces of land in the Lüneburg Heath with direct and indirect financial support from the state of Prussia and local communities. In the early 1920s, the society's Lüneburg Heath Nature Protection Park covered about 4,000 hectares, and the state government of Prussia recognized the core area of the park as an official nature reserve (*Naturschutzgebiet*). The society created the other nature protection park in the Austrian Alps near Salzburg in the same way; this park is now part of the High Tauern National Park.<sup>3</sup>

While the society achieved success as a private association, state and regional conservation authorities would not take the initiative in the national park debate. After all, negotiating with property owners to buy private land was a time-consuming and expensive process that could not be recognized as a usual conservation practice. Of course, nationalistic discourse in the era of world wars and economic crises seems to have emphasized national parks as cultural tools to propagate patriotic sentiments, but park creation did not take priority over other policies. During the second half of the 1930s, under the Nazi dictatorship, national and regional conservation officers considered establishing national parks, and the plan in the Bavarian-Bohemian forests was discussed in detail. However, its

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1. See, for instance, Schreurs (2007); Uekötter (2014b: iii–xxii).

2. See, for instance, the contributions to *Environment and History* 18 (2012), no. 4 (special issue on non-national parks); Gissibl et al. (2012); Howkins et al. (2016).

3. On the first years of the Society for Nature Protection Park see Verein Naturschutzpark (1925); Schmoll (2004: 212–224).

realization was postponed in 1943 until the end of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Compared to Germany, Japan gained more momentum to create national parks during the same period.<sup>5</sup> In 1911, the town of Nikko presented the first petition to create a national park to the Japanese Imperial Diet, and a proposal for a Mount Fuji national park was also discussed. Although these plans fizzled out due to the Japanese government's concerns about land-use conflict and financial burden, many educated people published their opinions in the following two decades. In 1927, supporters of the creation of national parks—members of the Imperial Diet, officials of government offices, business elites, and academic experts—established the National Parks Association, aiming to extend their circle at the highest political level. Their lobbying and publishing activities pushed the minister of home affairs to establish a research committee, where a national park bill was discussed. The Imperial Diet passed the bill in 1931, and the first 12 national parks were created between 1934 and 1936.<sup>6</sup>

Although the Japanese national park debate was inspired by the model of the United States, its mainstream was more open-minded about recreational land use. This can be easily observed through the discourses of leading national park supporters such as the forest scientist Seiroku Honda and his former student Tsuyoshi Tamura. Both Honda and Tamura were pioneers in the field of landscape architecture, and they did not always advocate the preservation of untouched natural landscapes. Rather, they saw national parks as an extension of urban recreational parks, arguing that national park projects should include the development of tourism infrastructure such as car roads, accommodation, cable cars, tennis courts, or golf courses. Another distinctive feature of Japanese national park protagonists was their focus on visitors from abroad. Honda, for example, suggested in his 1924 article that foreign tourists were relevant in stimulating the rural economy, and that national parks could multiply the number of foreign tourists.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, the Japanese conservation debate did not lack diversity entirely. A certain part of the conservationist circle opposed tourism-oriented national parks because they gave priority to the strict protection of natural monuments (*tennen kinenbutsu*) from economic activities. National park supporters nevertheless managed to achieve their goal, and one reason seems to be the economic crises during the first years of the Showa period: the Japanese government recognized the creation of national parks as a tool to attract foreign visitors and recover from the crises. Although selecting the first national parks at the administrative level was a complicated process, most of them were created in mountain ranges with panoramic landscapes, reflecting the growing popularity of climbing and hiking. Needless to say, the Japanese government did not have enough financial resources to buy vast amounts of land; these parks included private lands where sufficient conservation measures could not always be taken.

### 3. The Postwar Economic Miracle and the Rise of Environmentalism

The world after 1945 went through a period of great economic and environmental transformations, and West Germany and Japan were among the bellwether nations. West Germany's postwar economic miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*) started as early as 1950, and the rapid spread of cars was a symbol of the affluent society: the number of privately owned cars increased threefold to 4.5 million between 1950 and 1960 and then tripled to 13 million by the end of the 1960s. Commuting by car between home and workplace became an essential part of daily life, while suburbanization was changing the natural landscape around cities. On the other hand, more and more people wanted to enjoy recreational activities in the countryside to escape the noise and air pollution in downtown areas. Shorter working hours encouraged this trend: the average workweek for West Germany's male industrial workers declined from a high of around 50 hours in 1955 to 45 hours in 1969.<sup>8</sup>

4. On the national park plan under the Nazi regime see Sperber (2001: 67–70).

5. For an overview of the early stage of the Japanese national park debate, see Murakushi (2005).

6. The first 12 national parks were Akan, Daisetsuzan, Towada, Nikko, Fuji-Hakone, Chūbu-Sangaku, Yoshino-Kumano, Setonaikai, Daisen, Kirishima, Unzen, and Aso. At the end of 1937, three additional national parks were created in Taiwan (Daiton, Tsugitaka-Taroko, and Nitaka-Arisan).

7. Honda (1924: [2]).

8. Schildt (2000: 28).

The Society for Nature Protection Park responded to this growing public demand, intensifying its lobbying activities.<sup>9</sup> The person at the center of discussions was Alfred Toepfer, an entrepreneur and owner of a trading company in Hamburg, who became the chairman of the society in 1954. In April 1956, when Toepfer stayed in New York, he wrote to West German federal chancellor Konrad Adenauer about the popularity of national parks in the United States; he advocated creating comparable parks throughout West Germany to add to the Lüneburg Heath Nature Protection Park.<sup>10</sup> Toepfer officially announced his idea at the society's annual meeting in Bonn in that year. Then in 1957, the society published a monograph depicting the geological character of 25 regions seen as ideal park locations. Many of them were forested low mountain ranges such as the Harz, the Sauerland, and the Bavarian Forest.<sup>11</sup>

Although the society's campaign to create "oases of calm" for urban citizens faced opposition from rural landowners, the society managed to reach a compromise with landowners' interest groups. Both sides agreed on natural parks as less rigidly protected areas where landowners were allowed to continue the agricultural and forestry business. For the rural population, the concept of new parks also had merit: many regions were suffering from the continuous profit decline of the forest economy, and stimulating tourism with parks was expected to compensate for their loss. Potential recreation-oriented parks came to be called "nature parks" (*Naturpark*), distinguished from the nature protection park (*Naturschutzpark*) in the Lüneburg Heath and large-scale reserves in other countries. By the late 1960s, over 30 nature parks had been established throughout West Germany. These parks were managed mainly by local communities, and public money was spent on facilities such as car parks, hiking trails, restrooms, and campgrounds.

Although the majority of conservationists regarded nature parks as German alternatives to national parks, the nature park movement stimulated a broader discussion about conservation practices, and some activists dreamed of further success. In 1966, Bernhard Grzimek, the director of the Frankfurt Zoo, started to campaign for a national park in the Bavarian Forest. Bernhard Grzimek aimed to convert a piece of a state-owned forest in this region into an animal paradise by restricting economic land use and introducing certain rare species such as European bison and lynx. It is no wonder that, according to an opinion poll, 90 percent of West Germany's citizens supported his national park plan, primarily because Grzimek had been a popular television personality known for his films of wild animals in Africa. Local governments also expected that Germany's first national park would attract numerous tourists. Amid enthusiastic support from the public, the Bavarian state parliament approved the creation of the Bavarian Forest National Park in 1969; it officially opened in 1970. The Berchtesgaden National Park, also in the state of Bavaria, followed as the second one in 1978.<sup>12</sup>

While the 1950s and 1960s thus saw the rapid expansion of recreational areas, land-use conflict arose as a political and social issue in the 1970s, and each park became a bastion of environmental awareness in this process. To give just one example, the project to construct an autobahn through the Rothaar Mountains Nature Park caused a national controversy. The nature park was created in the low mountain range along the borders of the states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Hesse in 1963. During the same period, local governments and economic interest groups lobbied the federal and state governments to build an autobahn through the region, mainly for rapid commodity transportation and job creation, but also to create a more easily accessible route into the recreational area. The planned site covered less than 1 km<sup>2</sup>, while the entire nature park covered nearly 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>. However, in the second half of the 1970s, conservationists and citizens in the region campaigned against the autobahn project, arguing that it would spoil the natural beauty of the recreational area and break up the habitats of native animals. Although the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia persisted in carrying out the construction, the state minister responsible for forestry and landscape protection, Diether Deneke, resigned in 1979 to protest the government's policy. A leading opposition group had collected about 80,000 signatures by the end of the year, and finally, the state and federal

9. For details, see Engels (2006: 93–130); Chaney (2008: 118–126).

10. Alfred Toepfer to Federal Chancellor, April 23, 1956, Bundesarchiv B 116/5516.

11. Verein Naturschutzpark (1957).

12. On the development of the Bavarian Forest National Park see Chaney (2008: 213–242).

governments were forced to give up the autobahn project.<sup>13</sup>

Like West Germany, Japan was motivated to multiply the number of recreation-oriented parks. Certainly, the intention of luring foreign tourists faded out during World War II. In his 1943 monograph on regional planning and “space for public health” (*kenminchi*), Tamura also stressed the character of national parks as domestic tourist destinations for keeping the nation healthy in wartime.<sup>14</sup> However, the prewar trend revived during the postwar economic boom: the central authority responsible for national parks and local communities increasingly regarded national parks as tools to attract foreign visitors. From 1946 to 1974, 15 new national parks were erected, and road construction proceeded rapidly to improve accessibility to national parks. Especially in the years before the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, the Japanese government pushed ahead with its tourism-oriented policy, expecting a sharp increase in foreign tourists. In addition, the Natural Parks Law of 1957 not only replaced the National Park Law of 1931 but also added two other categories, quasi-national park (*kokutei kōen*) and prefectural natural park (*todōfukenritsu shizen kōen*), to the administrative park creation system.

It is therefore not surprising that the Japanese national park debate also sharpened the dilemma between nature conservation and mass tourism. The general trend can be observed through the case of the Minami Alps National Park, which was founded in the Akashi Mountains along the borders of Yamanashi, Nagano, and Shizuoka prefectures in 1964. Three years after the park’s creation, the Japanese government started constructing a special road to facilitate forestry and tourism, known as *super rindō*, within this national park.<sup>15</sup> The construction work soon harmed the road’s public image, largely because it caused landslides on steep slopes, and university researchers and nature lovers in the region began to study the associated environmental burdens. In 1971, the Environmental Agency was founded as the first central authority for pollution problems, and the agency director, Buichi Ōishi, who was responsible for national park issues as well, put a stop to the road construction. Nevertheless, mainly because of the recession after the oil crisis of 1973, the national and local governments were eager to continue with the road construction as a public works project.

Against this uncertain political background, almost 30 conservation groups at the national and regional levels formed the Association for the Conservation of the Minami Alps (*Minami Arupusu shizenhogo rengō*) in 1974. Seeing the *kitazawa* mountain pass on the border of Yamanashi and Nagano prefectures as the last bastion, they organized demonstrations, not only in the region but also in Tokyo, to protect the virgin forest ecosystem of the mountain range. The main focus was unique tree species (*Abies veitchii* and *Abies mariesii*), and the planned road construction was criticized for “overshadowing the destiny of endangered ‘Japanese nature’ per se.”<sup>16</sup> The conflict attracted attention beyond conservation circles, just as the autobahn debate in West Germany had. However, there was a crucial difference: much of the local population supported the *super rindō* project, expecting that it would bring economic opportunity to the rural area. Besides, the conservation movement in general could not gain enough momentum for a fundamental discussion at the national level, while Japanese environmentalism mainly targeted air and water pollution. Finally, in 1978, under pressure from the national and local governments, the Environmental Agency allowed road construction to resume. The work was completed the following year, although some changes (exclusion of private cars and road narrowing) from the original plan were accepted.

#### 4. National Park Projects in Recent Years

The framework of the conservation debate today seems to show two conflicting trends. On the one hand, the concept of biodiversity, which became a key issue at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, serves as a strong political argument for creating further national parks. On the other hand, ordinary people have come to recognize

13. On the Autobahn “A4” debate see Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen Abteilung Rheinland NW 549 no. 1208–1217.

14. Tamura (1943).

15. For an overview of the *super rindō* conflict, see Murakushi (2016: 357–399).

16. Minami Arupusu shizenhogo rengō (1975: unpag. [1]).

that environmental issues are more complicated than they thought in the 1970s and 1980s, when the idea of “one problem—one solution” dominated the environmental scene. Generally speaking, it is becoming more and more unlikely that one motivation alone will unite an entire society to work toward a common environmental goal.

A prime example in Germany is the debate over the Black Forest National Park. The Black Forest is Germany’s largest wooded mountain range, located in the southwestern German state of Baden-Württemberg. In the early 1990s, the Baden-Württemberg branch of the German Society for Conservation of Nature (*Naturschutzbund Deutschland*, or NABU) and responsible state ministries discussed a plan for creating a national park in the northern Black Forest, but it failed because of opposition from local communities. In May 2011, the formation of the Green-Social Democrat state government under Winfried Kretschmann, Germany’s first Green minister-president, marked a watershed. The government, formed partly under the influence of the anti-nuclear campaign prompted by the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan, announced in its coalition agreement that it aimed to create a national park. The national park was supposed to facilitate the expansion of *Natura 2000*, an ecological network of protected areas based on the 1992 Habitats Directive of the European Union.<sup>17</sup> The State Ministry of Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection (responsible for nature conservation and forestry) soon declared its intention to focus on the northern Black Forest. Apparently, the national park plan had a symbolic meaning: the state of Baden-Württemberg had no national park, although there were 14 national parks established throughout Germany by that time.

The state government’s scheme stimulated a much broader discussion than that of the early 1990s, and the contrast between positive and negative sentiments was striking. Although the potential national park, covering almost exclusively state-owned woodlands (about 100 km<sup>2</sup>), was planned to be smaller than the former one, the project faced unexpectedly strong opposition, from the local population. In the late summer of 2011, residents opposed to the national park formed the interest group “Our Northern Black Forest” (*Unser Nordschwarzwald*). In May 2013, newspapers reported the result of a non-binding survey of 50,000 residents carried out by seven local municipalities (with an average turnout rate of 60 percent), showing that between 64 and 87 percent of respondents rejected the plan.<sup>18</sup> By November 2013, when a state government bill to create the national park was discussed in the state parliament, “Our Northern Black Forest” had collected over 30,000 signatures against the bill.<sup>19</sup> Although the protest movement failed to prevent the creation of the Black Forest National Park in January 2014, it attracted considerable attention from the regional mass media.

Needless to say, one economic problem for the local population was the restrictions on cutting down trees for commercial purposes within the national park area, which could potentially have harmed the regional sawmill and wood industry. However, the park plan was also discussed from various environmental perspectives that had become increasingly important since the 1990s. Supporters of the planned national park idealized untouched ecosystems with the slogan “let nature be nature.” In their view, the spread of bark beetles in the landscape of dead trees, a situation that the Bavarian Forest National Park had partly illustrated, seemed a normal, even a positive future development of a natural forest. The residents who opposed the national park challenged this idea, arguing that unless the bark beetle population was controlled using artificial measures, they would ruin an unexpectedly large area of the Black Forest, degrading the recreation, water storage, and air filtration functions of the forest. They also criticized the restrictions the park would place on forest economy in the context of carbon footprint and climate change: if trees could not be used as an eco-friendly resource once the area was a national park, they argued, more decaying wood would release carbon into the atmosphere.<sup>20</sup> Overall, the national park debate proceeded not only along the traditional lines of “economy versus ecology” but also as a divide between two different ecological perspectives.

Although its political constellation is different from that of Germany, the Japanese government is now putting the issue of national parks high on the agenda. In February 2016, the Ministry of the Environment announced its

17. <https://www.gruene-bw.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Koalitionsvertrag-Der-Wechsel-beginnt.pdf> (accessed November 30, 2017).

18. *Schwarzwälder Bote*, May 13, 2011; *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, May 14, 2013.

19. *Schwarzwälder Bote*, November 29, 2013; *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, November 29, 2013.

20. See statements of “Our Northern Black Forest” at <http://www.unser-nordschwarzwald.de/nein/> (accessed November 30, 2017).

plan to establish a national park in the Yanbaru area, the wooded northern part of Okinawa Island. The plan originally dates back to 1996, when Japan and the United States agreed on the return of a large part of the U.S. Marines training area in this region, which paved the way for the comprehensive protection of the native forest and coastal eco-diversity. In September 2016, the Yanbaru National Park was established as Japan's 33rd national park, and the process of returning the neighboring training area was completed in December of that year. The Ministry of the Environment and local governments informed the public that the twin purposes of this national park were to protect endangered species such as the Okinawa rail (*Yanbaru kuina*) and to promote eco-tourism in the region. The new national park is the pathway to a further ambitious plan: the Japanese government now intend to nominate its core protected areas as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The twin goals of ecology and tourism seem appropriate also from international perspectives. However, if we look at a parallel government action, it is not so hard to realize which one motivated the nation more strongly. The Ministry of the Environment is now propagating the "Project to Fully Enjoy National Parks" (*Kokuritsu kōen Mankitsu Project*), a project to appeal more strongly to foreign tourists to visit famous national parks. This is part of the government's tourism policy, which aims to double the number of foreign tourists per year to 40 million by 2020, the year of Tokyo's next Olympic Games.<sup>21</sup>

While the Japanese government has thus recently taken the initiative in the national park debate, some people have expressed concern about whether flora and fauna would be protected properly. After the announcement of the plan for the Yanbaru National Park, for example, several small conservation groups issued a joint statement against it: they pointed out that sufficient limitations on cutting down trees would be implemented in less than 6 percent (about 8 km<sup>2</sup>) of the entire land area within the national park (136 km<sup>2</sup>).<sup>22</sup> After the park's creation, a local nature lover interviewed by a newspaper also expressed his mixed feelings with the words "a national park is different from an amusement park."<sup>23</sup> However, such voices have not attracted enough attention from the Japanese public to produce strong counter-arguments against the government initiatives.

## 5. Conclusion

After the creation of the world's first national park in the United States in 1872, many industrialized countries began to dream of establishing their own national parks. In Germany and Japan, geological, economic, financial, and social circumstances did not allow the conservation authorities to copy the model of the United States, but conservationists formed their own alternative concepts. The Japanese national park debate focused on tourism, especially on attracting foreign visitors, and the economic motivation facilitated the creation of the first national parks as early as the 1930s. Germany followed this trend with its nature parks and its first national park in the 1950s and 1960s, although its focus was more on domestic recreational tourism. Both nations have inevitably shared similar dilemmas between nature conservation and infrastructure projects, as seen in the road construction controversies of the 1970s.

Germany and Japan here seem to be twin variations of a single trend. However, it is still remarkable that Japanese national parks have been much more affected by government tourism policies even to this day, except for the interruption during World War II. In other words, the Japanese national park debate appears to have suffered from a lack of diversity in terms of issues, bounded within a rigid framework. By contrast, the history of the German case reflects a relatively flexible character: from the two different initiatives of the Society for Nature Protection Park, through Bernhard Grzimek's unique national park plan, to the protest movement to rethink the concept of national parks in a broader environmental context. In his book on the history of German environmentalism, Frank Uekötter approached Germany "as a kind of laboratory for the future."<sup>24</sup> German society does indeed seem like a laboratory of environmentalism, where people have been ready to discuss their various ecological visions. If the Japanese public

21. <http://www.env.go.jp/en/nature/enjoy-project/index.html> (accessed November 30, 2017).

22. <http://okinawagodo.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2016.3.24意見書（国立公園）【完成版】.pdf> (accessed November 30, 2017).

23. *Okinawa Taimusu* [*Okinawa Times*], September 16, 2016.

24. Uekötter (2014a: 23).

beyond academic circles are to learn something from Germany, we should probably take a closer look at this aspect in particular rather than individual environmental policies.

Of course, we cannot ignore the possibility that this German tradition will be overwhelmed by the global national park boom in the near future. In spite of the importance of its natural environment, the Black Forest region kept its distance from the concept of national parks until the 1990s; the anti-national-park movement can be interpreted, from this perspective, as the last rise of regionalism on the German environmental scene. In this context, a more fundamental challenge may lie not in what we can learn from another nation, but how we can be sensitive to voices in the minority, which the Yanbaru case also reflected. And this challenge may include the creation of another tradition beyond the almost one-and-a-half century-long dream of “human-uninhabited” areas.

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