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Havens/Parkscapes

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W}riting in 1894 at the dawn of his country’s Asian empire, the Japanese geographer Shiga Shigetaka (1863–1927) declared that his fellow citizens, “in order to continue improving Japanese culture in the future, must make every effort to protect Japan’s natural landscape.” In this pithy call to action Shiga interwove the Japanese people and their surroundings into an unbroken fabric stretching from their past environmental inheritance to their future greatness as a distinct national culture. Exhortations by Shiga, Mori Ōgai (Rintarō, 1862–1922), Abe Isoo (1865–1949), and many other activists during the Meiji era (1868–1912) emboldened Japan’s fledgling central government to convert sizable open spaces into parklands for the people. These advocates witnessed the Meiji state performing the power of display to instill Western cultural practices in the public, and they were gratified to see parks included with museums, exhibitions, zoological gardens, and other unifying institutions. A chief aim of this book is to explain how and why public parks—both national and urban—have served as key agents of state formation, signifiers of modern culture and national distinctiveness, instruments of military mobilization and disaster prevention, and sites of public assembly during Japan’s experience of spatial and ecological modernity from 1868 to today.

Dissatisfied with conventional accounts extolling Japanese love or awe of their natural surroundings, I began this book by asking how public space in modern times has been constructed and consumed in a country where open land is scarce and the main islands have been populated since prehistoric times. Until now most writings on Japan’s open spaces have focused
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on urban land use or on agriculture. So far as I can tell, this is the first book in any language to examine urban and national parks together, in an effort to discover how Japan’s experience of spatial modernity challenges current thinking about protection and use of the nonhuman environment globally. Although city and national parks might each merit separate treatment, in Japan they have many points in common: the creation of public spaces for state purposes, adaptation of Western prototypes, similar human interactions with the nonhuman, shared engagement with enterprise capitalism, roles in developing international tourism, and sites for promoting health, hygiene, and recreation. Although Japanese public parks resemble their Western forebears in some respects, they differ considerably in scale, design, and interactions between users and government administrators. Moreover, with a large population occupying a relatively narrow territory, Japan in the historical era has had diminished awareness of wilderness; the frontier as a modern concept existed only in Hokkaido in the late nineteenth century. As a result, the history of public space as a constructed environment forming a simulacrum of “nature” points to significant differences from how parks were produced in Europe and North America—even as Japan drew from Western models to create an alternative modernity partly symbolized by its new urban and national parklands.

Parkscapes: Green Spaces in Modern Japan shows how Meiji leaders appropriated previously private landholdings—both secular and religious—and canonized them as national spaces for managing a newly constituted public to be governed directly by an emperor-sanctioned state. Both urban and mountain spaces were turned into public parklands in emulation of state practices in Europe and America, models that continued to affect park development in Japan from the 1870s to the twenty-first century, but without necessarily embracing Western teleological rationales. Some early supporters of parks also touted quality-of-life benefits for individuals such as health, relaxation, clean air, appreciation of the outdoors, recreation, and self-uplift, but the prevailing goals were collective: mustering public adherence to the norms of the national state via socialization, public health, communal morality, and the economic stimuli of civic beautification and tourism in remote scenery.²

This book reveals how modern Japanese debates about preservation or exploitation of the nonhuman (natural) environment, in parks and private
holdings alike, have taken place across a highly nuanced discursive spectrum with surprisingly little polarization. Nearly all parties have freely acknowledged that the day tourist or backpacker uses a forest tract very differently from a mining firm or timber company. Nonetheless the most common rhetorical outcome has been a doctrine of sustainable development of natural resources for national diplomatic, military, and economic advantage. Although the country’s priorities shifted and introspections about national identity surfaced periodically after the mid-twentieth century, defining the best uses of public space remained a constant of civic consciousness and government policy throughout. Political parties weighed in on issues affecting parks, notably during the environmental crises of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the debates over the resort law of 1987, and criticisms of Construction Ministry priorities in the 1990s, but conflicts among administrative agencies, not politicians, sparked most of the discourse over park policies. The 1990s were marked by an increasing environmental consciousness and greater involvement of citizens in quality-of-life decisions, including the design and operation of parks, realms once considered the exclusive province of bureaucrats. Public-private partnerships increasingly became the norm for managing city parks and, to a lesser extent, natural parks (national, quasi-national, and prefectural nature reserves). Today the near-total urbanization of Japanese society, ubiquitous electronic simulations of natural reality, and budgetary belt-tightening all suggest that public concern for environmental protection may have plateaued vis-à-vis the claims of sustainable use.

Like many other domestic projects under official sponsorship, the countrywide effort to produce public parks began slowly, gathered momentum in the 1920s and 1930s, then sped forward during good economic times from the 1950s through the 1980s. Even today, amid deep ecological anxieties and economic uncertainties, Japan by some measures continues to guard its urban and mountain parks reasonably effectively from overuse by visitors and rank exploitation by developers. Forests cover two thirds of the country’s land area, a figure little changed since antiquity. As of 2009, a total of 394 natural parks of various sizes occupied one seventh of the country’s land surface, a high proportion by international norms. City parks, in contrast, were numerous (91,491 nationwide) but small (on average about 1 hectare or 2.47 acres each), providing just nine square
meters of park area for each urban resident—half New York’s per capita space and a third of London’s.5

Sometimes maligned for its monotonous stretches of concrete apartment blocks and lack of large countryside parks in its central districts, Tokyo actually may be “the greenest of Japan’s big cities,”6 with its many trees, parks, gardens, plazas, cemeteries, schoolyards, and plantings around stores, offices, and individual residences of its 13 million citizens (2010 figure). Tokyo displays surprising biodiversity, reflecting in cameo the exceptional range of plant and animal species found throughout the country.7 As bullet-speed elevators whisk sightseers to observation decks atop Tokyo’s skyscrapers, visitors immediately realize how green the capital is, in every direction and every season: 37 percent of Tokyo’s 2,200 square kilometers consist of natural parks, a higher proportion than any other prefecture.8 Parklands and other green spaces help to explain why the London-based magazine Monocle in June 2008 rated the Tokyo region, with its 35 million residents, the world’s third most-livable megalopolis after Copenhagen and Munich, each with a population of 1.2 million.9

The history of public spaces in Japan, like the story of the ecosystem writ large, is neither monolithic, static, nor entirely coherent. Instead it is vibrant, dynamic, complex—an imbricated cluster of multiple narratives in constant motion across time and space.10 These narratives are best understood from the vantage of spatial history, as developed by the sociologists Henri Lefebvre and Saskia Sassen, geographer David Harvey, political scientist James Scott, literary critic Paul Carter, and various historians.11 Spatial history, as distinct from environmental history, posits that space is politically and culturally constructed (“produced,” in Lefebvre’s terms) and that it is a product of history, not an inert backdrop for it. Space, like time, is constituted by social practices that differ from culture to culture. Tracing their intellectual origins to Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), modern constructions of space (e.g., the imperial, the global) often are thought to struggle against deeply rooted ideas of place (the local, the colonized), but actually the space/place dichotomy is a distinction without much difference. As one critic writes, “our notions of place are retroactive fantasy constructs determined precisely by the corrosive effects of modernity.”12

When the Meiji leaders seized power in 1868, they established institutions to guarantee their own permanency; the new government resembled
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high-modernist states elsewhere in promoting progress, using new technology to exploit environmental resources, colonizing spaces for political ends, and ordering society according to rationalist principles. What Timothy Mitchell says of colonial Egypt applies to Japan as well: Meiji modernity meant “the spread of a political order that inscribes in the social world a new conception of space” and “new means of manufacturing the experience of the real.”¹³ The state used its power to measure and map social practices via institutions of law and administration, producing spaces that became “territories of control and surveillance,”¹⁴ in Harvey’s phrase. One element of the government’s sociospatial engineering was the creation of public open areas in the form of urban parks, followed several decades later by national parks. As in other countries, parks became landscapes of power where human culture and the nonhuman environment interacted, but starting with the Hibiya demonstrations of 1905 some city parks also served as “spaces of representation,” in Lefebvre’s terms, where commoners aired views on public affairs and reconfigured parklands to create geographies of opposition to officialdom. Eventually certain parks and other public areas, such as Yoyogi Park today, transcended a power/resistance binary to become space shared by citizens and their rulers, land neither official nor popular yet both, a middle ground of collaboration, acquiescence, refusal, and renegotiation all at once.¹⁵

Nature and nation were close partners in building the Meiji regime, but nature in all its multiple meanings increasingly became subordinated to the patriotic demands of an expanding economy and empire. Because of the problematic meanings attributed to “nature”—sometimes including humans, sometimes excluding them, often privileging humans as dominant—it may be more accurate to refer to “the nonhuman” (biotic and abiotic) when everything in ecosystems except for people is meant. Japan’s nonhuman and developed environments can be read as parallel, often intersecting texts to illuminate the state-building process, in that parks and the choice of flora and fauna featured in them were constructed through social practices and given meaning through cultural representations.¹⁶ When Japan established its first national parks in 1934, they resembled their larger American counterparts, which were not untamed but instead were “produced environments in every conceivable sense. From the management of wildlife to the alteration of the landscape by human
occupancy, the material environment bears the stamp of human labor. . . . [they] are neatly packaged experiences of environment on which substantial profits are recorded each year.”17 Yet more recently—without overlooking the ability of bureaucrats, rangers, maps, and exhibits to script public space—ecologists and environmental historians since the 1970s have taken pains to reinsert humans into their natural surroundings, rather than regarding the environment as extrinsic and readily manipulable.18 This approach has gradually won respect, even a degree of acceptance, among officials responsible for environmental policy in Japan.

Urban Green Spaces

When the Japanese began opening city parklands to the general public in the 1870s, they did so against a deep historical background of green spaces for human enjoyment throughout the world. The forerunners of modern public parks were private gardens and royal hunting grounds in antiquity, including a kind of Sumerian game park recorded in the Epic of Gilgamesh (1200 B.C.E.).19 To writers as diverse as Aristotle, Virgil, Confucius, and the Japanese philosopher Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728), plants and animals comprised a symbolic landscape distinct from humanity, one where the power of leaders and the might of their soldiers were manifested through imposing the sophistication of culture over the putative peace and simplicity of the nonhuman, which they often labeled “nature.”20 In his studies of cultural modernity, the Japanese critic Maeda Ai (1931–1987) perceptively emphasized visuality, a core value of both the city and the country park.21 Landscape as a painterly topic traces to the fourteenth-century Italian Renaissance and came into full flower four centuries later, nurtured by followers of the French artist Claude Lorrain (1600–1682).22 By separating the viewer from the viewed, landscape art afforded the outsider visual control over picturesque aspects of the nonhuman, much as the camera today gives even the least ambitious tourist command of the Azusa River valley from the celebrated Kappa Bridge at Kamikochi in the Japanese Alps. In the same way, English designers such as William Kent (1685–1748) and Capability Brown (1716–1783) created unkempt landscape gardens, less manicured but no less confected than their more formal Italian and French counterparts, to mimic the irregular arcadian qualities
prized in the outdoors by their wealthy patrons. In some respects the English landscape park resembled Japanese garden art of the same era; although more scissored and punctilious, gardens in Japan consciously rejected the formalism of continental Asia and contrived to reproduce in miniature a nonhuman of the imagination as much as of the senses. In both countries the waning of landed aristocracies in the nineteenth century imperiled the future of private landscaped grounds.

The public park, an artifact of the nineteenth century, offers the spatial historian an instrument for measuring technological progress, the dynamics of everyday living, the new state-society nexus, and an urban modernity expressed in taxonomies of spaces constituting the city. An early example was Regent’s Park in London, planned in 1811 by John Nash (1752–1835) and partly opened to commoners in 1835. Soon the world’s first publicly funded park built for general use was established in 1843 at Birkenhead, which the young American journalist and antislavery activist Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) visited in 1850–1851. He absorbed its principles of intervention to convert private pasture into public parkland, ideas adapted in his designs for New York’s Central and Prospect Parks, Boston’s Emerald Necklace, and many other public parks and college campuses throughout the United States. The British parks and their American cousins excited much interest among Japanese leaders when the first delegates from Edo began traveling to Europe and the United States in 1860 to investigate the secrets of capitalist modernity. Germany’s Bismarckian open spaces also stirred much admiration among Japanese visitors, as did the efforts of Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891) to reconfigure the medieval city of Paris as an imperial capital of light, air, and broad boulevards. Japanese designers eventually adapted these European models to include trees, shrubs, and waterways, as well as some local landscaping elements, without sacrificing regulation and order.

Throughout American city parks, Olmsted’s vision of taking quiet pleasure in trees and lakes gave way by the end of the nineteenth century to new facilities for golf, tennis, cycling, skating, music, art, and observing exotic animals. Yet social control, an American term first used in 1901, became a key theme for the elite stewards of public spaces; the city park in Japan, as in North America, turned into something of “an outdoor reform school, with morality taught through the innovative medium of
leisure.” Japanese park design, increasingly in the hands of municipal bureaucrats, became hard-surfaced and functionalist, with cookie-cutter layouts and standardized equipment, and remained so for much of the twentieth century.

Two developments during the 1960s redefined city parks globally: the open-space movement, which posited that “the city is an art form worth saving,” and the construction of mini-parks (in New York, “vest-pocket” parks) to mitigate crime in thickly settled neighborhoods and to alleviate the sameness of corporate and commercial structures in city centers. In the open-space approach, public citizens partially reclaimed the parks from bureaucrats through negotiation, forcing municipalities to respond to the needs of the times. The neighborhood mini-park, in contrast, brought snippets of greenery to vacant lots in densely populated housing blocks whose residents often lived far from a full-scale district park. The downtown mini-park faced fewer obstacles; many were built on donated land and maintained by subsidies from corporations eager to provide spots of relaxation for their employees and customers. At length the private model of management was extended to publicly owned spaces such as Bryant Park in Manhattan and to certain city parks in Tokyo; today private funds cover most of the costs of operating New York’s Central Park, effectively smudging the borders between public and private originally staked out by British designers in the 1840s. The same blurring of boundaries has slowly taken hold in a number of Japan’s neighborhood parks and, more recently, even in the management of some of its national parklands.

Nations’ Parks

The idea of the national public park, in mountains or seascapes far from city populations, arose in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century and today has spread to most of the world’s 204 countries. It is a truism that ever since the agricultural revolution, most ancient peoples regarded wild lands as lacking inherent value, if not downright evil, something to be conquered and freely put to human use. It is also axiomatic that “civilization created wilderness,” insofar as city people in the early nineteenth century, building on ideas from the European Enlightenment, romanticized and aestheticized the unruly state of nature that their forebears had sought to
subdue. They began to champion an idealized conception of the wilderness as something Other, endangered, in need of appreciation if not outright preservation—an antidote to growing urban ills. To urbanites, seemingly pristine landscapes such as the Yosemite Valley evoked the primeval, but actually Native Americans had lived there for centuries and many had to be resettled on reservations before parks could be built. Likewise, the Amazon was never uninhabited primeval forest, despite the expectations of European explorers seeking an uncharted El Dorado. In Tanzania’s Arusha National Park, European settlers narrated their conquest of native peoples in terms of the nonhuman: “National parks, as representations of a harmonious, untouched space of nature, mask the colonial dislocations and obliterate the history of those dislocations, along with the history of the spaces that existed previously.” The American movement to create national parks took root in these reconfigurations of the pastoral into the primitive, ideas expressed a generation later in Japanese thinking about parks in Hokkaido. But the early twentieth-century founders of Japan’s national parks confronted no removal of peoples because the Ainu in Hokkaido had already been sequestered in the early Meiji years.

Japanese philosophers since antiquity have pondered people’s relationships with the natural, but ideas of wilderness similar to those in Europe and the Americas arose mainly in the later twentieth century, particularly after the United States Congress enacted the Wilderness Act of 1964. Nonetheless, early advocates such as Shiga Shigetaka resembled the founders of Yellowstone (1872) and Yosemite (1890) National Parks in embracing a romantic nationalism about the grandness of nature. In Japan, as in the United States but not in Europe, enhancing national distinctiveness, rather than protecting the environment, was central to early ideas of the national park. Even though many proposed parks lay in remote areas of limited economic value, the controlled development of timber, mining, and wildlife resources by private parties was another less widely recognized motive in both the United States and Japan, especially before preservationist discourses became prominent in the twentieth century.

Conservation in the sense of sustainable use of material resources for human benefit underlay the drive to establish national parks and forest reserves in the United States from the beginning—and usually guided public policy in both the United States and Japan throughout the twentieth
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century.\textsuperscript{40} Japan was predisposed by two centuries’ experience to favor selective use of natural resources. The country’s timber stock had periodically been ravaged for constructing impressive shrines, temples, and villas for successive governing regimes since at least the Nara period (710–784), eventually leading to a form of conservation through carefully managed silviculture during the Edo period (1600–1868). The Meiji government approved the country’s first comprehensive forest law in 1897, based on principles of scientific conservation, and designated the first national forests two years later. As in Europe and North America, conservation laws favoring regulated use had the virtue of restraining loggers from overusing natural resources in protected forests and, after 1931, national parks.

Partly in reaction to the public’s appetite for recreation in the parks, ecological concerns grew more evident in Japan during the 1960s, especially the desire to safeguard native plants, birds, fish, and terrestrial animals. Numerous reform environmentalists showed flexibility by joining in a biocentric approach to the outdoors, using science to address how humans relate to their surroundings—or, as many ecologists assumed, form a part of it.\textsuperscript{41} Biocentrism did not stanch the flood of park visitors; officials were powerless to forestall the emergence of water-resistant, lightweight camping equipment, the proliferation of maps and guides to the outdoors, and the new phenomenon of ecotours that arose in Japan and many other countries from the revolution in youth culture that started in the late 1960s. The doctrine of pure preservation has enjoyed only narrow if articulate support in Japan, mainly among the educated and well-born, embracing little alternative ecological vision other than protecting the pristine by leaving it alone—sometimes forgetting that the pristine is far from static and always in flux. In recent decades the world’s dominant environmental discourses have drawn on the science of ecology to argue that human survival depends on the health of the earth’s ecosystems, of which people are a part.\textsuperscript{42} Japanese ecologists have protested the heavy use of national parks and forests ever since the noted botanist Numata Makoto (1917–2001) published the 1967 edition of his \textit{Seitaigaku hōhōron} (Ecological methods).\textsuperscript{43}

Dissatisfied with the compromises reached by reform environmentalists, a radical advocacy known as deep ecology emerged in the 1970s seeking not merely to preserve whatever remained untrammeled but also to
restore the global ecosystem by minimizing the human bootprint on it. Deep ecologists in Japan and elsewhere regarded humans as merely one species, urging people to visit the outdoors but leave no trace behind, and they saw moral value in wilderness as a guide to reforming contemporary society. Parallel movements such as environmental justice and ecofeminism began to draw scattered support in Japan in the 1970s as well. Two decades later government officials, acknowledging that the concept of endangered species was now well established, began to recognize that ecologists could help the parks by assessing threats to indigenous flora and fauna from exotic ones, and that scientists could evaluate the natural dynamics of park resources with a view to protecting them more effectively.

Today in Japan, where sustainable use is taken for granted, nongovernmental organizations mobilize cash and volunteers to help verify that environmental laws are being obeyed. Park managers often welcome the volunteers while bewailing the lack of revenues to meet their obligations to the public, maintain the parklands, and protect the environment against unceasing pressures from developers. Few groups seriously challenge sustainable development as the dominant narrative of Japan’s national parks and forests, but still the clash of contending interests—bureaucratic, economic, ecological—is particularly sharp in that country’s natural parks, despite a dip in attendance since its peak in the early 1990s.

A New Public, New Public Spaces

The idea of public spaces, especially green public spaces, at first must have perplexed city people in nineteenth-century Japan, because their country’s numerous urban gardens, temple and shrine woodlots, and well-planted warrior residences were in the private hands of the elite and the wealthy before the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Amusement areas for commoners dotted the most populous city districts during the Edo period, but these tightly controlled, quasi-public spaces were given over to social pleasures with little connection to the nonhuman environment. Public and nonpublic were indistinct terms of discourse in nineteenth-century Japan. Like their counterparts in China and Korea, political thinkers in Japan had long pondered differences between the realm of public rule (ōyake) and the ambit of the people as the emperor’s subjects (tami, the general public of the governed).
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With industrial and political modernity came a sharpened awareness of the private (shi, watakushi), both in the sense of private property and as something personal or even selfish, in contrast with the great public power of the new Meiji state and the emerging self-awareness of both former samurai and ordinary people as a newly unified national citizenry, now that the finely graded social statuses of the Edo period had been dissolved by fiat in the 1870s. Unlike customary local privileges to use common lands or seek redress in premodern times, this new collective self-identity of citizen-subjects was nationwide in scope, most often expressed as kōkyō, “public society,” “community,” or “common weal.”45 The idea of public society was nurtured by government authorities (okami) as a tool of social mobilization; to a considerable degree, modern urban spatiality, including the creation of parklands to build nationhood and social consciousness, was part of the state system rather than a modality arising spontaneously from below. Nonetheless, by the late Meiji period open areas in the biggest cities sometimes became contested grounds for the production of space by public authorities on the one hand and the performance of space by an assertive public on the other.

Japan’s earliest public parks, dating to 1873, were established in urban districts by bureaucratic decree as a part of the new regime.46 Most city parks in the late nineteenth century were converted shrine or temple lands, deep inner spaces in what the contemporary architect Maki Fumihiko (1928– ) describes as “multi-centered” Tokyo. Maki sees the essence of Japan’s public architecture “in its space and territory . . . in spatial arrangements structured not by the idea of a center but by the idea of depth (oku),”47 places not immediately evident or mentally mappable as is Western public space. At no point did the Meiji government or its successors express a clear theory of public space; even today, Maki notwithstanding, there is little agreement on what public space means, who produces it, for whose benefit it exists, or how it should be managed and used. Japan is far from unique: its leaders share uncertainty on this point with European thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), Michel Foucault (1926–1984), Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), and Jürgen Habermas (1929– ), all of whom have struggled to conceptualize public space.48 With or without theoretical underpinnings, high-modernist states everywhere in the late nineteenth century asserted their spatial sovereignty over society by officially
designating public areas of various kinds including parks, symbolizing elite dominance while disciplining miscreants via police, courts, and prisons. Establishing such urban spaces was a part of legislative and cadastral standardization for governmentality—making society more “legible,” as Scott puts it.⁴⁹

At the same time the national park movement, which achieved its first formal success when Yellowstone Park was approved by the U.S. Congress in 1872, was driven partly by a need to assert the public interest against threats of monopolization by private developers in a new age of passenger railways. It is also true that, as in some European countries, privately owned holdings have long existed within America’s national parks. Today just five of the country’s fifty-eight official national parks consist of purely federal land, even though a third of the nation’s territory is publicly owned.⁵⁰ Japan’s national parks, first established in 1934, similarly blur public and private space: none of the country’s twenty-nine national parks is entirely publicly owned, and commercial logging, agricultural, and tourist businesses have made deep inroads by commodifying many of the portions that remain in public hands. Yet it is also the case, especially in quasi-national and prefectural natural parks, that regional and local identities have emerged in the past two decades to define space very differently from the outlooks of central authorities and their commercial allies.⁵¹

In city or countryside, a public park in Japan since the late nineteenth century has usually meant a set-aside area reflecting the spatial aesthetics of Western middle-class society, juxtaposed but seldom mixed with time-honored principles of Japanese landscapes. Two late-Meiji examples were Hibiya Park, mainly designed along French and German lines, and Shinjuku Imperial Garden, which largely honored French principles; each contained a Japanese-style garden in one corner. As with the notion of public space, officials found little sustained ideology abroad or at home to undergird the park movement. Instead modern Japanese parks were constructed interfaces of human culture and the nonhuman environment, enclosed yet open, bucolic yet vigorous, sometimes tranquil, sometimes dangerous, their vegetation and fauna preserved yet controlled. In many respects they were tools of internal colonization of the general public by authorities bent on social management; in Taiwan, and to a degree in Korea, parklands were spatial levers of Japan’s empire down to 1945. Unlike
their Western counterparts, urban and national parks in Japan seldom were seen as agents of cultural diversity, equality of opportunity, or a utopian “exploration of hope” and optimism.\textsuperscript{52}

The greatest public parks in Japan’s cities trace their sources to five related wellsprings, according to the landscape architect Shinji Isoya: (1) modeling on Western public parks as a part of the Meiji effort to “civilize” the country (Hibiya Park); (2) gifts from on high, such as converted daimyo gardens and temple and shrine grounds, as well as lands granted by the imperial family (Ueno, Inokashira, Kyoto Imperial Palace Outer Garden Parks); (3) national prestige and defense, including flagpole parks, small parks nationwide in 1904–1905 with ponds in an “attack-Russia” design (seiro), air defense green spaces from 1940 to 1945 converted to postwar parklands, and Olympic parks; (4) commemorations and celebrations, such as expositions, reign anniversaries, and imperial memorials (Meiji Shrine Outer Garden, Shōwa Memorial Park); and (5) lands acquired from private owners, either as donations from industrial barons such as the Iwasakis (Rikugien, Kiyosumi Garden Parks) and Yasudas (Yasuda Garden Park) and from imperial relatives (Prince Arisugawa Memorial Park) or by land use statutes mandating green spaces.\textsuperscript{53} Thousands of smaller playgrounds, neighborhood parks, sports fields, and district-wide public areas were added as municipal public works, starting with reconstruction after the Kanto earthquake and fires of September 1, 1923. Then as the country faced the crisis of World War Two, city parks took on new public roles: physical training, refuge from wartime air raids, food production, temporary graves, and emergency shelter after Japan’s defeat in 1945. Postwar land reform and the constitutional separation of religion and politics removed many parklands from public use. Government investment in urban parks soared in the 1970s because of heightened environmental consciousness and demands for recreation as Japan grew more affluent. Yet nearly all Japanese city parks until the 1990s were designed and administered by city planning or construction officials with little regard for how they might be used.\textsuperscript{54}

Nation-driven imperatives, not functionality for visitors, likewise prevailed for many decades in conceptualizing Japan’s national parks. Both urban and national parks in Japan initially evolved to help establish a distinctive national culture, not primarily to fulfill environmental needs.\textsuperscript{55} During the 1910s legislative supporters for establishing national parks first
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cited both Western precedents and pride in Japanese landscapes, then in the 1920s they also emphasized physical fitness and, in the 1930s, the need to earn foreign exchange by attracting foreign tourists during the world depression. Wartime spending from 1937 to 1945, followed by budgetary restraint during the early postwar recovery, left few surplus monies for the national parks. Gradually, new ones were added, especially when the Natural Parks Law of 1957 replaced the original National Parks Act of 1931. As with city parks, government financial support for natural parks (national, quasi-national, and prefectural) rose substantially during the 1970s and 1980s, then flattened thereafter.

The environmental writers Suzuki Satoshi and Sawada Seiichirō identify four main discourses on Japanese national parks, all with nationalist implications: (1) extensive parks on the Yellowstone model, such as Daisetsuzan (in Hokkaido), that conserve distinctive ecological features and provide recreation; (2) commemorative parks featuring national symbols, such as Mount Fuji; (3) historical sites, such as Nikkō north of Tokyo, where the first Tokugawa leader is enshrined; and (4) somewhat later, parks to encourage international tourism, at some cost to strict preservation. Nonetheless, small sections of a few remote national parks are carefully protected for scholarly investigation, much like national scientific parks in Russia, Scandinavia, and Switzerland. Because natural parks in Japan include private and public lands, they usually mix forests, farming, hiking trails, and open country, as in many British parks.

Long regarded as the responsibility of bureaucrats, the operation of public parks was taken over partly by private citizens in the 1990s through nongovernmental organizations engaged in civic reconstruction and rural reclamation. Starting with the Basic Environmental Law of 1993 and Basic Environmental Plan of 1994, legal changes promoting local autonomy spawned uneasy coalitions of public officials and citizen volunteers who gradually began to manage many of Japan’s city parks, as well as portions of some natural parks. The natural parks paid increasing heed to ecological factors, especially environmental protection and ecological education, despite their straightened revenues and ceaseless pressures from the tourist industry.

Whatever the changing definition and purpose of the public park, both urban and national park leaders consistently say the benefits to users
are immeasurable—and thus subjective. So too with attendance: the figures are especially unreliable for Japan because few public parks of any type charge user fees or monitor comings and goings. Estimates tend to rise year after year, until it is clear that fewer visitors actually are appearing, whereupon the estimates ebb.\textsuperscript{59} As attendance numbers crested in the early 1990s, the city planning specialist Shirahata Yōzaburō asked rhetorically whether urban parks were still needed at all. He observed that fewer adults used parks as sites of sociability, except to view spring blossoms and autumn leaves, because they preferred coffee shops, restaurants, bars, and hotel lobbies as meeting places.\textsuperscript{60} It was clear even to their supporters in Japan and elsewhere that parks were not, as once claimed, the lungs of the city (trees absorbed relatively little carbon dioxide) or stabilizers of real estate values (some were, but shabby ones dragged prices down);\textsuperscript{61} national parks invited more auto travel once car ownership became the norm for Japanese in the 1970s, leading to overdevelopment of tourist facilities, intolerable air pollution, and gargantuan holiday traffic jams on the country’s web of expressways.

In the years since Shirahata’s skeptical rhetoric of 1991, city parks have re-engineered themselves to prioritize recreation, fire defense, natural preservation, and urban scenery.\textsuperscript{62} Governmental directives in the 1990s to create common social capital by encouraging a leisured and abundant lifestyle, especially for the elderly, gave renewed vigor, if little cash, to city parks that often had devolved into retreats for the socially weak—children, seniors, the homeless.\textsuperscript{63} Today, as has been true for many decades, green spaces such as Kinuta Family Park in western Tokyo continue to draw hundreds if not thousands of daily walkers, runners, mothers with strollers, picnickers, and athletes of all ages. Solitary musicians practice brass instruments and woodwinds along the banks of Kyoto’s Kamo River and in the woods of Tokyo’s Inokashira Park. Other less expansive parks host cyclists, rollerbladers and skateboarders, gateball and chess players, pet walkers, footsore shoppers, teenage smokers, and nighttime romantics. In these ways parks of all types have gradually changed functions but continue to be vital zones of contact between people and their nonhuman surroundings.

Whether Japan’s green consumerism of the 2000s benefited the environment in general or its public parks in particular is not yet clear. Perhaps the greater question is whether the nearly 80 percent of Japanese who live
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in cities, surrounded by a virtual world of electronic information, can still connect directly and meaningfully with their nonhuman environment. As the ornithologist Robert Askins puts it, “Japan is now so urbanized that two generations of people have grown up with almost no contact with nature. Will they devote themselves entirely to their urban world of artificial stimulation, or will they rebel against it? Probably a bit of each.”

This is a book about public space in modern Japan, the parks that were its most conspicuous and heavily used assets, and the changing historical environment in which green spaces were produced and reproduced through interactions between government officials and park users. A main task facing the historian of culture is to explain how and why the multiple meanings ascribed by human communities to parklands, their environments, and the ecosystem as a whole contended, comported, or conflicted with one another as these meanings altered across time. Japan, with its abundant ecological endowment, self-awareness as a distinct culture, and earnestness in exemplifying a new Asian modernity, is a rich source of insight into this process. The focus of this study is on parks, both urban and national, established by public authorities for the use of private citizens—the general public at large—to advance the central government’s project of social unification. Because it is Japan’s largest and greenest megalopolis with the greatest variety of public spaces, as well as a city constantly under reconstruction, Tokyo receives particular attention as the pacesetter for urban park development nationwide. Examining city parklands and natural parks (national, quasi-national, or prefectural) together provides a useful prism for refracting Japan’s modern experience of public space and the environment writ large. Other fascinating realms of public space such as plazas, squares, arcades, malls, museums, shrines, zoos, theaters, and athletic arenas, each of considerable interest and import, are omitted because they are much better known.

While respecting the individuality and diversity of park history, development, and use in modern Japan, this book emphasizes the dynamic, ever-shifting interactions of governments and citizens, humans and their nonhuman surroundings, and the nation with the outside world. Japan is the centerpiece, but comparative comments are offered when appropriate about transnational phenomena such as conservation, preservation, environmentalism, and ecology that swept the globe during the years
examined here, even though it should not be expected that these phenomena meant precisely the same things from one culture to another. Chapter 1 discusses public parks in Japanese cities from the initial enabling act in 1873 through early forms of urban planning, ending with the City Planning Law of 1919. Chapter 2 takes up Japan’s first efforts at designating forests, scenic monuments, and national parks as public reserves from the Meiji period to the late 1930s. Chapter 3 addresses visions of a new Tokyo from the earthquake and fires of September 1923 through the American occupation of 1945–1952, while chapter 4 treats urban and natural parks during the era of sustained economic growth from the 1950s through the 1980s. Chapter 5 examines new eco-regimes of volunteerism and ecological consciousness in both city and natural parks during the 1990s and early twenty-first century, followed by a brief afterword recapping the key themes of the book. Throughout, the focus is on the continual effort to re-invent modern Japan, a process at once thwarted by enterprise capitalism, with it demands for space and resources, but that also thwarts capitalist expansion via budgetary and environmental constraints. An important aim of this book is to encourage further research into how local ecosystems have been affected by human interventions, leading to a fuller cultural history of these spaces than is currently available.

Reconnoitering Japan’s experience with public green space is complicated by uneven documentation, scanty scholarly attention, and the low priority given to public amenities like parks, libraries, and the arts for much of the period treated here. This account relies partly on statistics and histories from official sources, chronicles of individual parks prepared by longtime visitors, and the recollections of certain key figures in park management. For information and insight about public uses of green areas, I’ve been aided by the scholarship of the small coterie of Japanese academic specialists on the topic, supplemented by my own rambles around many of Japan’s parks during research visits to that country. No single methodological approach or theoretical position can adequately interpret the multiple redefinitions of public space in modern Japan. Instead the reader can be reassured, as Victor Brombert writes, that “eschewing a dogmatic approach and stressing diversity and variation do not preclude a search for underlying patterns and common tendencies.”66 These patterns and tendencies form the matrix for the chapters that follow.