

Beyond control: agricultural heritage and the Anthropocene

Daniel Niles

Research Institute for Humanity and Nature
Kyoto Japan

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Anthropocene: human agency has achieved geological scale

1

Affects our sense of ourselves: who we are and how we relate to other species, our places, and to the planet as a whole

Promethean humankind

We can alter the structure and functioning of the biosphere

Proposes this fact as determinant of the current period of Earth history: oceans, atmosphere, land cover, biodiversity, technological infrastructures...

Anthropocene *appears* as objective statement, but it emerges from a particular intellectual tradition

One in which humanity is a unique agent, standing slightly outside of nature, and whose remarkable achievements are due precisely to that separation, and specifically our ability to 'control' nature

Especially through increasingly sophisticated scientific description of fundamental natural units (e.g. genes) and belief in their consistent behavior in different contexts and scales : mechanical imaginary dependent on ideals of reproducibility and predictability

If taken at face value, Anthropocene easily enables a technologically-driven managerial approach to the planet → geo-engineer from nano- to macro-scales

2

Anthropocene in Asia

Find that the A-word has surprisingly little resonance. Why?

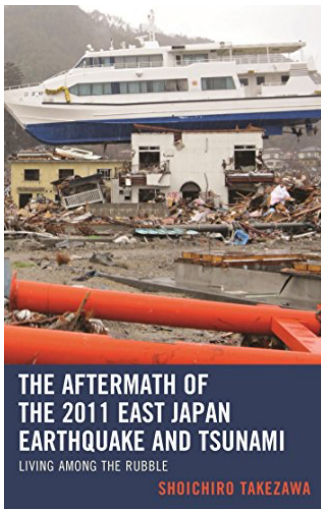
Perhaps the conventional narrative and imaginary are not, in the end, so universally shared?

“Rise over nature” does not correspond to many very long histories of habitation and settlement

Asia, less dramatically impacted by recent glaciation than W. Europe + N. America →

- longer continuous histories of ecology and human habitation
- Frequent disturbance
- Very dynamic environments: tectonic, volcanic, climatic, marine, topographic conditions underlie immense native ecological productivity

Longstanding patterns of human activity based already on perception of active nature, as changing and yet changeable: relevant to Anthropocene



3

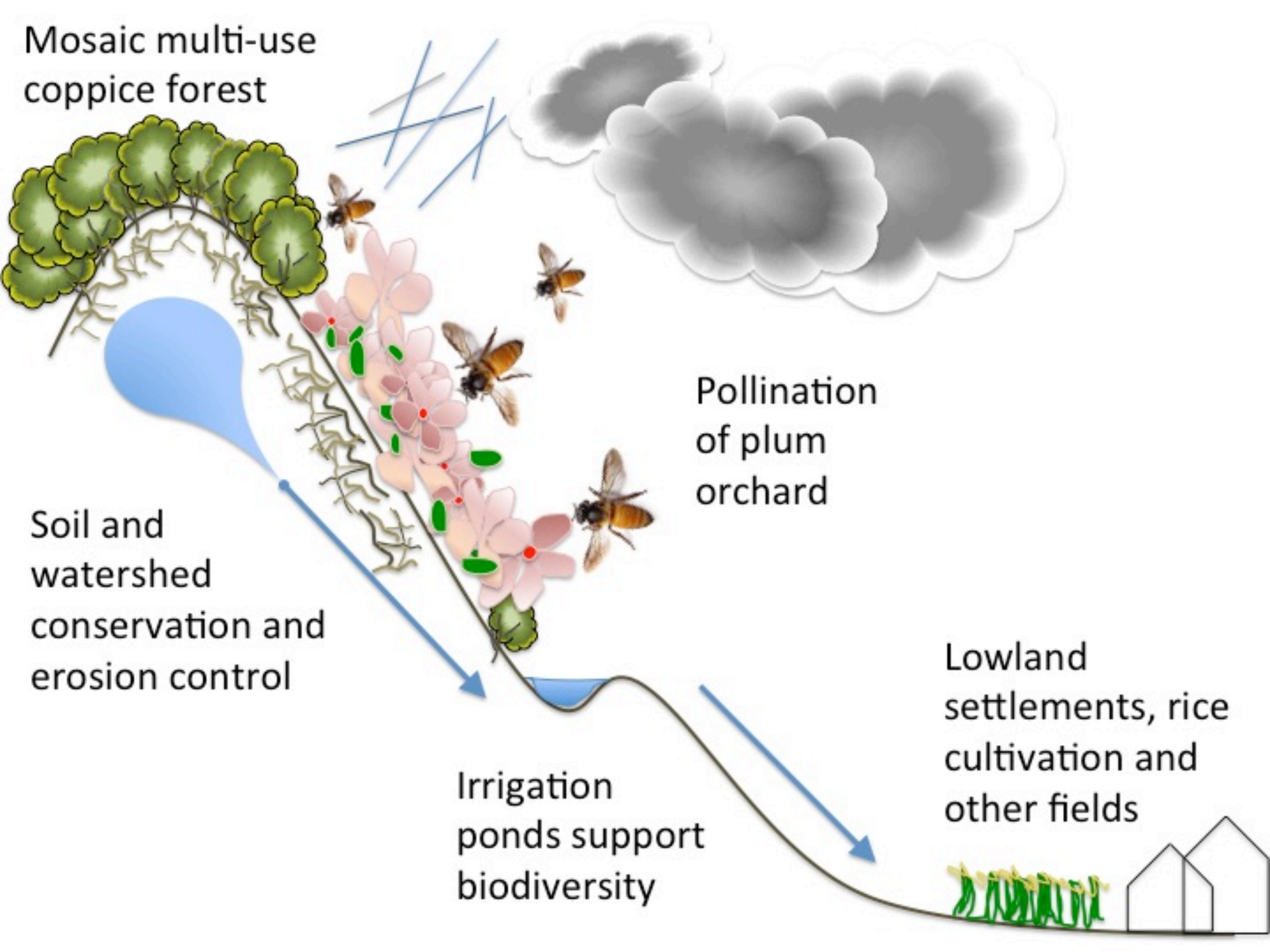
Anthropocene in Asia

Long-standing, diverse and complex cultural ecologies whose persistence (evolution) has been poorly studied and theorized, both in human and ecological dimensions

Persistence can be seen as evidence of successful transmission of knowledge to successive generations

Knowledge has not taken any “formal” form, but is instead embedded in social and cultural artifacts, practices, and patterns—such everyday material and sensory phenomena as pottery, tools, textiles, house forms, seeds, foods, tastes, plants, animals, sounds, and related social practices, beliefs, preferences and institutions—as well as in surrounding landscapes and biomes.

Draw attention to the “conceptual grammars”—the particular understandings of nature and its workings that correspond to certain patterns of social, ecological, and economic exchange—that have guided human interactions with nature in different historical circumstances







4

Overlapping of different ecologies, knowledge, practices, customs that maintain a whole through time, yet very little explanation of human “conceptual grammars”

What knowledge of relationships/interactions structured human behaviors toward nature?

What moral economies?

Units, quality of interactions, and structuring concepts should be quite different from the conventional (instrumental) ones

More attentive to history of encounters between organism and environment which seem to show
many environmental effects are passed on to offspring
many organisms develop only through interactions with other species (forest)

“development” is often “co-development”
Evolution is actually co-evolution

5

At community/societal level this is also a political task

The joint history of the Earth and of human societies as the co-evolution of metabolic (material-energetic) regimes and social orders. In each period, a set of world-views and social relations supports sociotechnical arrangements that organize the metabolisms of a given society ... and alter the functioning of the Earth system.

And reciprocally, the metabolisms thus constructed have also political agency; they make possible, robust and 'natural' a certain social order, a hierarchy between nations, a certain type of lifestyle and vision of the world → danger for A. and Sustainability!

Open up the official narrative of the Anthropocene: enable closer reflection of how we represent the world...

(The Shock of the Anthropocene, Bonneuil + Fressoz 2016: 37; 49)

Counter with a deeper contextualized history of human interactions with the planet: this is not just an historical project, but also epistemological and ontological one