

Book Reviews

The Social Learning Group. 2001. *Learning to Manage Global Environmental Risks, Volume 1: A Functional Analysis of Social Responses to Climate Change, Ozone Depletion, and Acid Rain*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

The Social Learning Group. 2001. *Learning to Manage Global Environmental Risks, Volume 2: A Comparative History of Social Responses to Climate Change, Ozone Depletion, and Acid Rain*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Reviewed by Ronald B. Mitchell
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This two-volume set identifies, explores, and maps an exciting new frontier in the social science of global environmental politics. It asks, how do human societies “perceive, evaluate, and respond to global environmental change” (I-xxi)? How do our ideas about—and understandings of—the impact of humans on the natural environment and our efforts to reduce those impacts develop over time? Most importantly, how can global society and the many national societies of which it is composed learn to manage large scale global environmental risks more effectively, i.e., get better at carrying out those functions necessary to managing the human-environment relationship?

The project is truly staggering in scope. The Social Learning Group—thirty-seven scholars working over a decade—studied the development of ideas and action regarding three major environmental issues (climate change, ozone depletion, and acid rain), across eleven “arenas” (eight countries, the former Soviet Union and its successor states, the European Union, and several international institutions), over 35 years (1957–1992). The introductory chapter in Volume 1 lays out research questions, definitions and taxonomies, and a framework for analyzing how ideas, interests, and institutions influence the skill of national and international society to manage the environmental impacts of their actions. The research agenda delineated in this introduction, the conclusion, and two cross-cutting chapters should become a starting point for scholars and graduate students interested in global environmental politics. Those chapters, best read first, identify a range of fascinating research questions to which the other chapters provide initial answers. Eleven “arena” studies—of Canada, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, the former Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and international institutions—provide rich descriptions of how the acid rain, ozone depletion,

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and climate change issues developed scientifically, moved onto the political agenda, and were addressed by policy makers. Each chapter identifies how science, beliefs, interests, norms, policies, and behavior changed over time, analyzing and explaining these by reference to such influences as the governmental, corporate, media, and non-governmental actors involved; policy culture; scientists and scientific progress; and the influence of international institutions. A cross-cutting chapter compares variation across the three issues and eleven arenas in the timing of political concern with the issues; the framing of the causes of, impacts of, and options for dealing with each environmental problem; and the roles of particular countries, actors, and institutions, in the development of management of these environmental risks.

Volume 2 looks across arenas and issues to examine how the functions of global environmental management have been carried out. Chapters evaluate progress made in risk assessment, environmental monitoring, option assessment, goal and strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation in terms of the adequacy, value, legitimacy, and effectiveness with which those functions were performed. A cross-cutting chapter looks at linkages and common features among these functions. The conclusion identifies patterns in how societies at the national and international level have improved and can improve in their ability to manage environmental risks. The interplay of ideas, interests, and institutions helps explain when and how environmental problems get onto the public agenda and the timing and type of policy responses that develop, and, most particularly, why learning over time and across-arenas occurred in some cases but not others.

What weaknesses there are stem, in large measure, from the project's ambitiousness. The book explores this new territory by developing an inductive model of social learning from the cases studied, rather than by using those cases to test the predictions of a deductive model. This produces claims and hypotheses that are conceptually rich but, at times, are insufficiently attentive to the need to generalize. For example, conclusions that environmental management discourses usually "focus on emissions and concentrations" (rather than on deeper human drivers of emissions or the consequences of those emissions) would be more valuable if framed in ways that could apply to environmental problems involving species loss and habitat protection, problems which have no obvious corollaries to "emissions" or "concentrations" (II-167). The diversity of the project's scholars allows these volumes to draw on an impressively diverse set of theoretical traditions but does so at some cost to comparability across chapters. The richness of the historical narratives often means analytic sections go somewhat underdeveloped. These objections are posed not as criticisms of the present, groundbreaking work but as challenges to future scholars to build on its impressive foundation.

"Learning to Manage Global Environmental Risks" identifies critical questions, interesting themes, provocative hypotheses, tantalizing parallels, and surprising contrasts regarding how national and international society make progress in global environmental management. It brings together compelling

analytic tools; provides rich accounts of development of both science and politics in ozone depletion, acid rain, and climate change; and develops useful insights into how and why these issues developed as they did. Most importantly, it focuses our attention not only on how we manage global environmental risks but on the higher level phenomena of social learning, i.e., how—at a societal level—we improve our ability to manage those risks.

Anny Wong. 2001. *The Roots of Japan's International Environmental Politics*. New York & London : Garland Publishing.

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In *The Roots of Japan's International Environmental Politics*, Wong examines three environmental issues: whaling, deforestation in the tropics, and acid deposition within Asia. The author applies Robert Putnam's two-level games approach in order to identify the domestic roots of foreign policy decisions. The reader, however, should be aware that the title and the method of this book are somewhat misleading in terms of game theory and roots of foreign policy decisions. Rather, the book should be understood as an attempt to reconstruct, on the basis of 105 interviews done in 1995, the rationality of domestic actors behind the irrational diplomacies. As for the roots of foreign policy decisions, the focus is on explaining foreign policy as a consequence of domestic struggles, with very limited analysis of the formation and changes of Japanese domestic policies. Therefore, bureaucrats are portrayed as major actors in the case studies. The marginal role of politicians and NGOs has been simply ascribed to the "lack of strong environmental consciousness amongst Japanese voters" (p. 62) or "underlying assumptions among government officials that NGOs are basically unauthorized organizations to promote public interest" (p. 69). The changing role of NGOs is partially described in the chapter on acid deposition. It is unfortunate that these nonstate roots of domestic discourse are omitted, and consequently that the interaction of national and international politics is described from a narrow perspective.

The three case studies constitute the core of the book, with a certain implication of progress over time. In the case of whaling, Japanese diplomacy was internally inconsistent. Fishery industries and the ministry in charge decided to launch their own "research whaling" against the will of the Prime Minister at the time. With their insensitive harping on the whale-eating habits of Japan, western NGOs found little support from domestic NGOs. The whaling issue became emotionally charged around questions of pride, culture and sovereignty.

Western and domestic NGOs, however, gained prominence when attention shifted to deforestation in the 1980s. While the interest of the ministries could not be unified over trading rules and eco-labeling, the NGOs "stirred public memory of Japan's own deforestation and their anger towards the government and big business for poor handling of domestic industrial pollution"