

# **River Improvement History in Japan: Rethinking Human-nature Interactions**

Ryoji Soda

Graduate School of Literature and Human Science, Osaka City University

The aim of this paper is to examine human-nature interactions from the aspect of river improvement history in Japan. The Japanese landscape is mainly composed of precipitous mountains with soft erosive ground, which causes active changes of fluvial morphology. The population in Japan, concentrated in alluvial plains, have historically suffered constant disasters from flood, and therefore, built up local knowledge and elaborated social systems to co-exist with river disasters. However, the centralization of river administration since the establishment of modern state in 1868 (Meiji restoration) have gradually undermined the interactive relations between local residents and rivers. In the 1960s and 1970s rivers in Japan were not regarded as 'nature' as a result of excessive government-led river management after the WWII, and even floods have become considered to be human-made disasters (government mismanagement), not natural ones. In the late 1980s, however, the government realized that 'perfect management' is impossible and introduced environment-conscious river improvement, adopting the nature restoration projects in Europe. However, European construction methods were introduced ad hoc to make 'quasi-/pseudo-' nature. In other words, the Japanese government abstracted only functional/technical aspects from the European projects, and failed in the holistic examination of differences between European and Japanese environmental thoughts.