

Japan Sinks: Floods, Drainage, and the Impact of Modern Civil Engineering in the Echigo Plain

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A variety of data is now widely available that permits historians to explore long-term environmental changes and their impact on Japan. Available data includes freely downloadable digital elevation data that formerly was available only at fairly high cost. In addition, 1:50,000 land classification maps are also freely available for download from public web sites. Government agencies, such as the Ministry of Transport and some of its regional subdivisions now publish freely available geological studies that are accompanied by CDs with very useful digital data that can assist scholars in analyzing the degree and nature of certain environmental changes over recent millennia. Finally, recent emphasis on providing publicly available hazard maps to assist in emergency preparation and evacuation provide an additional source of geographic data that can help historians explore land-man relations. Using these data, this paper explores ways in which Japanese have re-constructed the lower Shinano river basin in order to reduce flood risk and increase economic output with results that, while reducing some flood hazards, generated paradoxical outcomes.