

Call for Papers

***Standing on a Cliff:
War and Peace in
Environmental History***

An international workshop to be held in Beijing

at Renmin University of China

May 16-18, 2024

Organized and sponsored by the Center for Ecological History, Renmin University of China, Beijing, and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Munich.

War, defined as armed conflict, is a form of violence uniquely practiced by nations or states, ancient or modern, and is quite different from territorial skirmishes among foraging peoples. According to some scholars, the violence of war has diminished over time as a common, personal experience, affecting fewer and fewer people in their daily lives. Ancient hunters and gatherers, they say, suffered more bodily harm from skirmishes than most modern citizens do from wars. We seek to understand and evaluate that claim, and the changes of scale and scope it may have entailed. We want to examine an alternative environmental and ecological perspective in the study of “civilized” warfare and peace.

Particularly, we seek papers that address the following issues:

Can wars be explained simply by cultural factors-- religious conflict, racial discrimination, national or personal ambition--or have there been ecological causes—food and water shortages, climate changes?

What have been the intended or unintended effects of battles or military campaigns on the environment? Conversely, what long-term ecological effects has a condition of peace had?

Have land and natural resources become over time deliberate targets (as suggested in the phrase “total war”)?

Have wars increased, or has peace diminished, our consumption of nature?

Have new technologies spawned by war become threats to the environment (the atomic bomb, DDT)? Is peace less or more apt to spawn destructive technology? Is “peace” always better for the environment than “war”?

The conference will be open to all scholarly ranks, from graduate students to senior professors, and to all who will address the conference themes in praxis or in theory. Participants will be selected competitively. Those interested in attending should send a one-page proposal (or about 300 words) and include a title and a one- or two-page CV.

The deadline for consideration is 1 January 2024.

Accepted proposals will be announced around 1 February 2024, and complete drafts of papers (minimum of 5,000 words in English or the equivalent in Chinese characters) will be required by 25 April 2024. All papers will be circulated to the participants in advance and will not be presented in full during the conference.

Travel expenses for scholars living outside China will be paid by the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. Scholars living within China should depend on their own universities for covering travel expenses. For all participants, hotel expenses for three nights will be covered by Renmin University. Travel support for multi-authored proposals selected for inclusion will be limited to one person only.

The last day of the conference will be devoted to a field trip to the Great Wall of China. Participants are also encouraged to use this travel opportunity to explore the magnificent capital city and other parts of the People’s Republic of China.

Send proposals in English to this email address at the Rachel Carson:
conferences@rcc.lmu.de. Copies should also be sent to each member of the program committee:

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