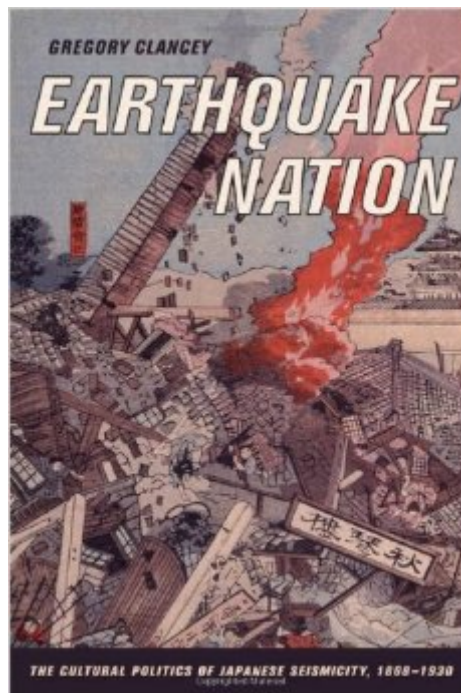


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Earthquake Nation: The Cultural Politics Of Japanese Seismicity, 1868-1930



Synopsis

Accelerating seismic activity in late Meiji Japan climaxed in the legendary Great Nobi Earthquake of 1891, which rocked the main island from Tokyo to Osaka, killing thousands. Ironically, the earthquake brought down many modern structures built on the advice of foreign architects and engineers, while leaving certain traditional, wooden ones standing. This book, the first English-language history of modern Japanese earthquakes and earthquake science, considers the cultural and political ramifications of this and other catastrophic events on Japan's relationship with the West, with modern science, and with itself. Gregory Clancey argues that seismicity was both the Achilles heel of Japan's nation-building project; revealing the state's western-style infrastructure to be surprisingly fragile; and a new focus for nativizing discourses which credited traditional Japanese architecture with unique abilities to ride out seismic waves. Tracing his subject from the Meiji Restoration to the Great Kant Earthquake of 1923 (which destroyed Tokyo), Clancey shows earthquakes to have been a continual though mercurial agent in Japan's self-fashioning; a catastrophic undercurrent to Japanese modernity. This innovative and absorbing study not only moves earthquakes nearer the center of modern Japan change; both materially and symbolically; but shows how fundamentally Japan shaped the global art, science, and culture of natural disaster.

Book Information

Hardcover: 346 pages

Publisher: University of California Press (May 1, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520246071

ISBN-13: 978-0520246072

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars See all reviews (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,281,866 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #175 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Seismology #271 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Earthquakes & Volcanoes #1918 in Books > History > Asia > Japan

Customer Reviews

Excellent! I'd give this book more than five stars if I could! Nominally about the entangled development of the brand new professions of architecture and seismology in Japan, the author goes

far beyond offering just a simple historical synopsis. Instead he gets into tactics and agendas, individual and societal. Very clearly portrayed, this aspect of the book alone is worthwhile, changing how I read other books. Also excellent was the discussion of how things as basic as the earth and building materials are viewed by different cultures and how that in turn fundamentally influences our biases (and again agendas). This is not a fast read, there's a lot packed into a relatively small space, like Japan itself. But take your time and you'll be surprised at what you find as the buildings are built up and then come crashing down into a heap of bricks.

Although starts a little slow with a lot of detail on Architecture, moves on to a great account of the birth of Seismology, the conflicts between respected men of the day as to whether flexible wood or solid Stone was more earthquake proof, as well as the conflict among the emerging Japanese seismologist. The historical characters are presented well and is a story truly worth telling and reading.

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