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Peer reviewed

Review: The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada

By Liza Piper

Reviewed by Vineeth Mathoor

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Piper, Liza. *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2009. 424pp. ISBN 9780774815338. US\$85.00, cloth.

The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada by Liza Piper is an excellent work inspired by the industrial transformation of the region between the 1920s and 1960s. As a work on environmental history, the book presents the influence of human impacts upon the environment of the north, and examines the past relationship between man and nature by analyzing ecosystems, production, sustainable economy and culture.

The book focuses on natural boundaries such as lakes, rather than political geographies. Therefore, the large lakes of the region constitute the central focus of examination. The book is divided into three sections, attempting to examine chronologically the development and the impacts of industrialization upon the large lakes in the region. The first section examines the early-twentieth-century conditions which influenced the subarctic environment, industrial development and local communities. The second section deals with the time before the 1960s, and examines the major industrial developments-- mining, fishing and production. Finally, section three deals with the exploitation of large lakes by industrial developments, and the subsequent commodification, industrial networks and new relationships.

The incorporation of the northwest to the capitalist model of development since 1920s put the region into the economic mainstream of Canadian society, making a different sort of colonialism possible. The capitalist mode of development established transportation systems and large lakes were commercially exploited thereafter. As a result, mining and industrialization increased and the exploitation of natural resources continued. The development of capitalism provided the way for new relationships between humans and nature by replacing the old structure of human interaction with environment.

As the book shows, capitalism was developed in the region by 1920s and commodification of local resources took place. The development of an advanced industrial society on the large lakes of the region transformed human's attitudes towards nature and a new industrial community developed. Piper examines the three major industrial communities of mining, fishing and transportation to show that humans and nature co-adapted with each other. Drawing from Stephen Boyden's theoretical framework of "biohistory," the impact of industrialism in creating new forms of socio-ecological change is a major theme of enquiry. As the book demonstrates, the founding of major mine sites in the Canadian northwest was a landmark event in the early 20th century. Transportation through rail lines played major role but subsequently, transport through ice, water, etc., were also developed, bringing more systematization in transportation.

The book extensively uses archival materials to describe the pace and impact of industrial transformation in the subarctic region of Canada. The role of scientific development, technology and the human imagination of their interaction with the nature is examined. As Piper demonstrates, by exploiting natural resources with the help of technological advances, human society has drawn an important but new era in civilization. The book with its rich examination will be interesting to historians, environmentalists, geographers and scholars of urban studies.

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