

It is impossible to find a sense of something, would it be a human, a biological or physical phenomenon, if we do not know the force which appropriates that thing, which exploits it, which is expressed in it.

G. Deleuze in "Nietzsche and Philosophy"

There are 62.3 million acres of forest in Japan, covering two-thirds of the country's mountainous land area. Most of the existing forests have been altered or artificially planted, and 40% of the reforested area is covered with commercial plantations of *sugi* cedars or *hinoki* cypresses. These plantations, when not taken care of properly, become ecologically unstable and cause hay fever to a grotesque number of the Japanese. The sheer scale, grandeur and monumental presence of the *sugi* plantations in the landscape is astonishing. The circumstances of these plantations' establishment deserve clarification. After massive forest clearings, performed during the World War II, the approach to reforestation took economy rather than ecology as its premise. Japanese economic growth commenced with the beginning of Korean War while the US military campaign injected much of the sought-after USD currency in Japanese market through American Special Procurement programme. This has continued during the Vietnam War. Covering the needs of economic growth with the steady supply of labour from the countryside has led to a peak demand on construction timber. Implementing aggressive industrial policies government financed not only the reforestation of the barren land, but also a further replacement of what they saw as commercially useless natural forests with more economically productive trees - the Japanese *sugi* cedar, because of the usefulness of its wood and the speed of its growth.*

Although a *sugi* cedar grows fast and can be harvested already in 50 to 70 years, the tempo of the economic growth had outpaced the maturation of the trees. With the expansion of industrial economy, demand for wood rose together with its costs. The choice between preserving national wood industry (e.g. hindering industrial growth) or switching to the oversea extractivism was made swiftly around mid 1960s. The tariffs on the import of cheaper wood were dropped and the national wood production with its declining rate of profit was sacrificed for the industrialisation. After liberalising timber import in 1960, the Japanese wood self-sufficiency rate has consistently decreased from 86.7% to around 18% in 2000's. The Japanese forest industry has been traded for the "cheap" wood shipped from overseas tropics.**

Looking at the photographs over and over again, I wonder what kind of sense do these straight graphic lines, randomly scattered around the surface of an image, make? Is it a scenery of nature, of industry, is it a forest at all? Maybe these scenes shall be compared to industrial ruins like abandoned factories, coal mines, unfinished bridges and train tracks in to nowhere, which populate post-industrial countrysides? All of them are typically summarised under the rubric of the "ruins of progress".

Typhoon "Ran" (Oct. 2017) and typhoon "Jebi" (Sep. 2018) were reportedly the strongest to hit Japan in the last 25 years. Just in one night whole forests

were knocked down with torrential rains and angry wind blasts. Super-typhoons became a new powerful force that claimed abandoned *sugi* forests. On the one hand, they helped to attract attention to the economic and social forces responsible for the creation of these plantations. On the other hand, one may ask, did the typhoons give a new sense to these forests?

The wind, which knocked down thousands of trees, created openings in the canopy, resulting in bright patches in the otherwise overgrown and overcrowded plantations. Now other plants and trees can use the opportunity and colonise these spots. Through this process some new, more biodiverse and ecologically sound environments could establish themselves.

It is not easy to thinking about *sugi* cedar plantations, and it is hard to reach even a tentative conclusion, because their phenomenon has a multiple sense to it. Established in the after war years, desired and welcomed during the early period of economic growth in the late 1950s and early 1960s, nowadays these forests remind abandoned coal mines and other industrial ruins: a shipwreck left behind by the economic growth..

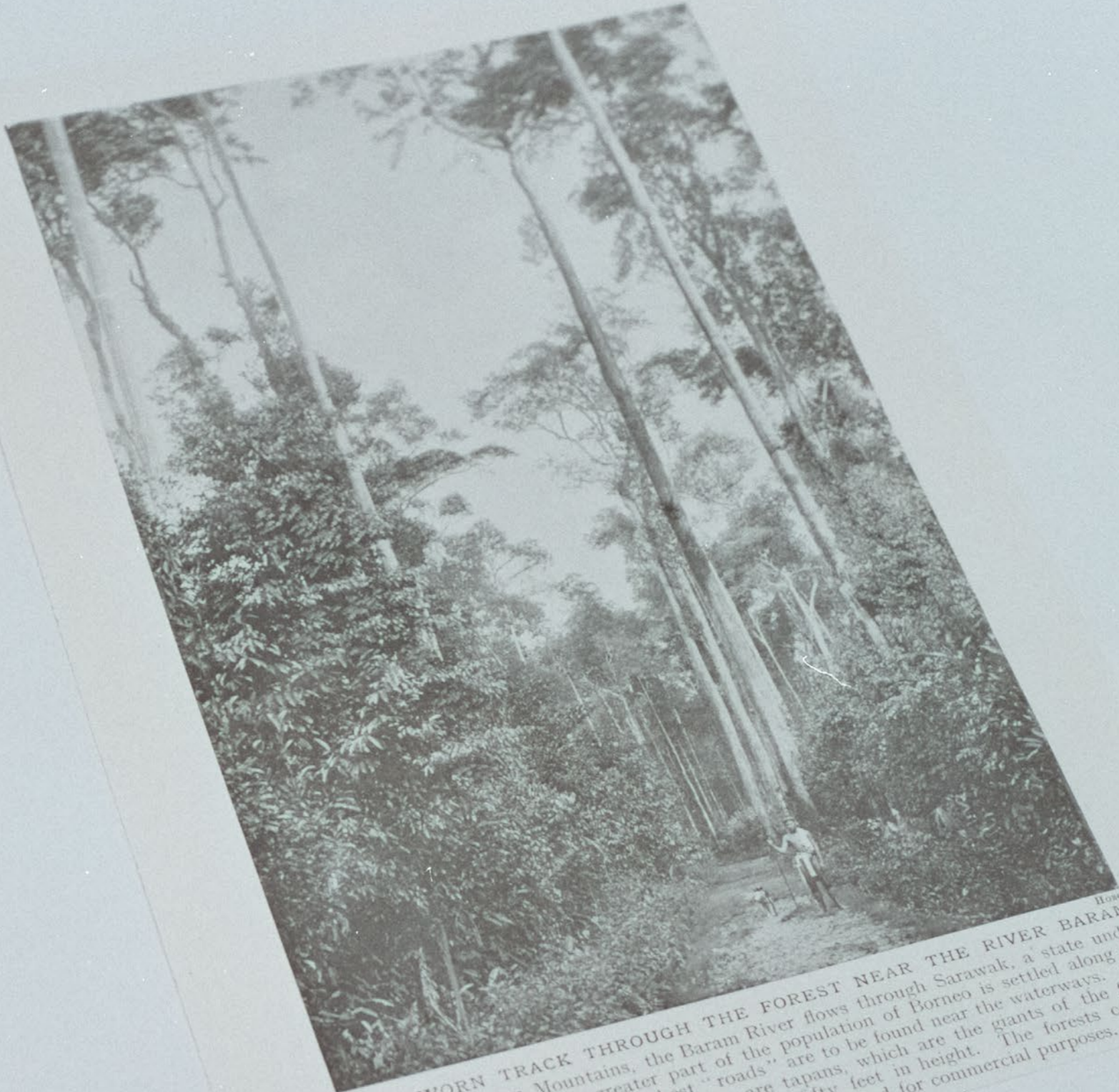
In the middle of the gloomy picture, sometimes one finds exceptions. But very often, the tree stands are overcrowded, because no thinning was done after the initial dense planting. Despite being overlooked these trees are living beings, they continue to struggle for their life against the plantation conditions imposed on them. Perhaps, we can see *sugi* cedars as monuments of resistance to the logic of the capital accumulation.

Yet, *sugi* plantations are monuments in another sense. When Japanese economy became frenzied by the industrial growth, the wood needed for construction industry was sourced in other countries of Southern Pacific region, rather than in Japan. So the reason why *sugi* forests became abandoned is the same reason why the primary forests in Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysian Sarawak were logged down for the Japanese market. While the *sugi* were grown by human for human needs, they were left to stand unharvested only to testify about the death of the forest that should have never been cut.***

*<https://thedelphinetwork.com/wasabi-farmer-battles-plague-japanese-pines/>
<https://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/17/science/japan-s-cedar-forests-are-man-made-disaster.html>
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2002/09/26/environment/trees-that-tower-over-the-past-and-present/>

** <http://www.jatan.org/eng/tropicaltimber.html>
<https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2018/10/22/prices-of-sarawak-logs-surge/>

*** William W. Bevis, *Borneo Log: The Struggle for Sarawak's Forests*, (University of Washington Press, 1995).



WELL-WORN TRACK THROUGH THE FOREST NEAR THE RIVER BARAM
Rising in the Iran Mountains, the Baram River flows through Sarawak, a state under British protection. The greater part of the population of Borneo is settled along the banks of the rivers, so that the best "roads" are to be found near the waterways. The trees with the straight, smooth trunks are tapans, which are the giants of the forest of Borneo, many of them being more than fifty feet in height. The forests contain about sixty kinds of timber which could be used for commercial purposes.

Hose