

Transnational Asia

Speaker Series

Carbon Technocracy: Energy Regimes in Modern East Asia



Thursday, September 15, 2022 @ 4 PM CDT

Kraft Hall, Room 110

Also online via Zoom (limited to attendees with rice.edu email addresses, [registration required](#))

How does energy relate to power? What might an examination of the interplay between the two reveal about the workings of industrial society? In this talk, I introduce my recent book, *Carbon Technocracy* (2021), which delves into these issues through the history of what was once the largest coal mine in East Asia—the Fushun colliery. In the history of this extractive site, which changed hands between various Chinese and Japanese regimes in the first half of the twentieth century, one is confronted with hubristic attempts to tame and transform nature through technology, the misplaced valorization of machines over human beings, and productivist pursuits that strained both the environment from which coal was extracted and the many workers on whom that extractive process so deeply depended. These were all defining features of the energy regime that I call “carbon technocracy” and of the wider industrial world that it helped create.



Victor Seow is a historian of technology, science, and industry. He specializes in China and Japan and in histories of energy and work. His first book, *Carbon Technocracy: Energy Regimes in Modern East Asia* (University of Chicago, 2021), explores the relationship between energy and power through the history of East Asia’s onetime largest coal mine. At present, he is writing a new book that uses the history of industrial psychology in China to examine how work functions as a subject of scientific inquiry.

FACULTY HOST: Sidney Lu



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