

**Call for Papers:** “On the Natural History of Destruction: Technology, Politics and Material Transformation in Asia’s Long World War II”

Columbia University, Friday, October 5, 2018

Deadline for Abstract Submissions: Friday, April 6, 2018

This one-day workshop aims to illuminate the complicated relationship between political possibilities and material transformation in Asia during the catastrophe of the continent's long World War II (1931-1954). The workshop will bridge the artificial divide between East and Southeast Asia by bringing together scholars from across the field of Asian studies to discuss the ways that the experience of war altered the complex relationships between politics, culture and technology, not least as a consequence of the violent alteration of physical landscapes and social relations by fighting, colonialism, mobilization, industrialization, resource extraction and disaster. In doing so, the workshop will add towards an understanding of the war and its attendance conflicts as global and regional events rather than ones contained within limited geographical boundaries of nation-states. At the same time, it will create opportunities for discussion across disciplines, including history, literature, cultural studies, human geography and anthropology, around the common rubric of the wartime history of technology, broadly defined.

Specific themes and approaches include but are not limited to:

*The Transformation of City and Country:* Remaking urban landscapes in response to bombing, siege, occupation and retrocession; expansion, reduction and adaptation of agriculture; changes to environments, waterways and biomes from planning, conflict, disaster and resource extraction; building “home fronts.”

*The Transformation of the State:* Reinvention of state competencies such as intelligence, demography and political economy; reorganization of technical knowledge within the state; construction of material infrastructure networks; changes in colonial regimes and evolution of state institutions under different governments.

*The Transformation of Industry and Labor:* New labor practices and modes of production; industrial organization and maintenance of supply chains; adaptation of vernacular technologies and rehabilitation of old labor techniques; organizing production and consumption for “total war”; conceptual transformations of commodities, “natural” resources and the “economic.”

*The Transformation of Politics:* production of new subjectivities and subject-positions; formation of new modes of insurgent anti-colonial governance such as “People’s War” as a practice of military and political strategy; cultural responses to technological warfare such as the fetishization of technology through new aesthetic practices.

**Discussants**

Maggie Clinton, Middlebury College  
Sheldon Garon, Princeton University  
Christopher Goscha, Université du Québec à Montréal  
Rudolph Mrázek, University of Michigan

**Workshop Organization**

The workshop is intended to improve advanced work in progress. The workshop will take the form of four transnational panels, each organized around a common theme, with a faculty discussant for each panel. Papers will be pre-circulated among panelists and available to all presenters and discussants.

**Submission**

Early-career scholars and advanced PhD students are invited to submit 300-word abstracts online at [www.columbiawartimeasia.com](http://www.columbiawartimeasia.com) by **April 6, 2018**. Email submissions should include the applicant's name, email address, institutional affiliation, paper title and abstract, together with a short academic biography (no more than 100 words).

Selected participants will be notified by April 20, 2018.

**Further information**

Travel reimbursements (up to \$200) are available to graduate student presenters. Breakfast (Continental), lunch and dinner will be provided for all discussants and presenters.

For more information, please write to [columbiawartimeasia@gmail.com](mailto:columbiawartimeasia@gmail.com) or visit [www.columbiawartimeasia.com](http://www.columbiawartimeasia.com)

Organizers: Sau-yi Fong, Benjamin Kindler, Tristan Revells, John B. Thompson