

Mapping Fossil Colonialism in Asia, c. 1810–1914

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership PhD Studentship

University of Warwick and the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), London

Applications are invited for a fully funded PhD studentship (fees and maintenance) to be held at the Department of History, University of Warwick and the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), London. The studentship is funded through the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Science Museums and Archives Consortium Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme. The project will be jointly supervised by Dr Tom Simpson (Warwick), Dr Sarah Evans (RGS-IBG), Dr James Poskett (Warwick), and Dr Catherine Souch (RGS-IBG).

Project outline

Across various locales in Asia during the long nineteenth century, maps and other visual materials played a major role in establishing fossil fuels as exploitable resources. Although put to work primarily in the service of imperial power and profit, fossil fuels were often extracted, understood, and employed differently in Asia. This PhD project advances the innovative hypothesis that 'fossil colonialism' in Asia was inspired by, but also crucially departed from, 'fossil capitalism' in the Euro-Western world. A major focus here will be the influence of Asian knowledges and practices on colonial representations and assessments of fossil fuels.

As well as addressing a radically under-studied component of the history of anthropogenic environmental change, this project contributes to cutting-edge calls for Asia to be foregrounded in critical studies of climate and the Anthropocene. This includes considering, in outputs including talks to science policy forums and working papers, how understanding the dynamics of colonial fossil fuel exploitation in Asia can inform pressing discussions of an equitable and just transition away from fossil fuels during the coming decades—discussions in which Asian superpowers have always played a key role and are becoming ever more central.

The following research questions will guide the project, but will be adapted and supplemented in line with the successful applicant's specific interests, findings, and expertise.

1. What roles did maps and other images play in making Asia's fossil fuels valuable and exploitable resources during the long nineteenth century?
2. Whose knowledge of fossil fuels contributed to their extraction and combustion in Asia, and how did different ways of knowing and using these substances impact each other?
3. How can colonial representations of fossil fuels and their uses be employed to inform and engage public audiences in an age of environmental crises?

Source material for this project is held by various institutions within and beyond SMAC. Cartographic and image collections at the Royal Geographical Society form the primary focal point. They encompass a wide spatial range—including Persia, Central Asia, British India and

Burma, Indochina, and China—straddling area studies boundaries and formal and informal imperial domains. They include various formats— including maps, geological sections, photographs, and sketches—that collectively constructed fossil fuels as accessible and valuable.

The successful applicant will also undertake an archival research trip to India and another location in Southeast or East Asia, depending on their particular interests and the results of preliminary research in the UK; possible sites include Hong Kong or Singapore. Key Indian archives are the cartographic collections of the National Archives of India in New Delhi, the Asiatic Society's archive in Kolkata, and regional archives in key regions of fossil fuel extraction, including West Bengal, Odisha, and Assam. Important material in the UK beyond SMAC includes maps, photographs, sketches, and manuscripts in the Oriental and India Office Collections at the British Library, and the British Petroleum archive at Warwick. Extending across the long nineteenth century and covering personnel trained and employed in diverse domains—from mine owners to engineers, and military surveyors to geologists—these diverse collections will highlight nuances, debates, and variations in fossil colonialism.

Although the successful applicant will be supported in developing their own additional fields of interest and expertise, the project is framed by, and will provide substantial interventions in, three core historiographical areas:

1. *History of (environmental) cartography and images.*
Maps and other visual genres have long been recognised as instruments of imperial power. Recent historiography suggests more convoluted power dynamics in the production and reception of these images. Despite a growing literature stressing that visual material both reveals and conceals anthropogenic environmental impacts, historical studies of the iconography of climate change and of fossil fuel extraction remain scarce. This project represents a major step forward within a nascent but urgent subfield.
2. *Histories and critical studies of fossil fuels and resource extraction*
Against a backdrop of conspicuous environmental crises, the past decade has seen critical scholarship identify European empire as a motor of Anthropocene damage. However, fossil fuels are often erroneously seen as the preserve of the Euro-Western world and, substantially, of the twentieth century. Attempts to complicate this narrative are only just beginning, making 'Mapping fossil colonialism' a timely and important intervention.
3. *History of science, technology and colonialism*
In place of earlier accounts of unilateral impositions and unidirectional flows of information and influence, recent histories of science present more nuanced models of the mutual remaking of Euro-Western and non-Western knowledge systems. Critical histories of steam technologies and fossil fuel usages that discuss their deployment in Asia as more than simply a Western imposition are only just beginning to be written. This project takes forward such work by examining how Asian ways of imagining and working with coal and oil were disparaged by, but had a lasting impact upon, imperial personnel concerned with extracting and employing these materials.

Methodologically, the successful applicant will be encouraged to combine their own areas of expertise and interest with approaches from global and colonial history, studies of material

and visual culture, and science and technology studies. In addition, they will be trained in cutting-edge critical approaches to cartographic and visual history, which involves problematising not just circumstances and technologies of production, but also modes and means of circulation, reception, reproduction, and adaptation of maps and images. These skills will enable them to interrogate specific sources as artefacts of processes on multiple temporal and spatial scales: for instance, a coalfield survey entangles the deep earth history of fossil fuel formation with the rapidly fluctuating contingencies of colonial frontier politics; while world maps of coal draw together laboriously constructed global data sets with the particular exigencies of print technologies and pricing policy at a specific publishing house. The student will be encouraged to follow the actors—which in this project means not just European colonialists, but Asian miners, printed images, hand-drafted manuscripts, and seams and lumps of coal.

The studentship

The studentship (which is governed by UKRI's terms and conditions) offers funding for 48 months (4 years) or part-time equivalent, with scope for additional funding for professional development opportunities.

The award pays tuition fees up to the value of the full-time home UKRI rate for PhD degrees. Research Councils UK Indicative Fee Level for 2024/25 is £4,786. The award pays full maintenance for 4 years for both home and international students. The UKRI minimum stipend rate for 2024/25 is £19,237, plus an additional CDP maintenance payment and London partner allowance stipend uplift of £1600 per year, and access to a Research Travel Support Grant of £750 per year.

International applicants

International applicants awarded funding through for this studentship will not be required to cover the difference between home and international fees. This will be met by the University of Warwick. International students are therefore very much encouraged to apply.

The applicant

The studentship is open to both home and international students. It may be taken up on either a full-time or part-time basis. Applicants should have a good undergraduate degree and a distinction-level Master's degree (or equivalent professional experience) in History, History of Science, Human Geography, Science and Technology Studies, Postcolonial Studies, or a cognate discipline. Applicants should have experience in the analysis of primary and secondary historical sources. Familiarity with environmental history, the history of science, the history of cartography, the history of Southwest, South, Southeast, East, and/or Central Asia would be an advantage. Proficiency in one or more of the languages used in these regions during the period of focus is not essential but may also be advantageous.

We encourage the widest range of potential applications. We particularly welcome applications from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic candidates as they are currently underrepresented in the sector at this level.

How to apply

Applications should be submitted by the normal postgraduate research application process. For full information, advice and access to the Warwick University application portal, please visit: <https://warwick.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/apply/research/>

In the research application section of your application, please list Dr Tom Simpson as proposed supervisor and the project description as 'Mapping Fossil Colonialism in Asia, c. 1810–1914'. In the funding information section, the source should be listed as 'SCHOLARSHIP- AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership PhD Studentship'.

As this award will be jointly managed in partnership with the Science Museums and Archives Consortium (SMAC), the University of Warwick will be required to share your application and supporting documents with external institutions. All applicants will therefore need to give permission to Warwick to share their personal information in order for their application to be considered. A privacy notice with further information will be circulated following application.

The following documents must be included in order for your application to be considered:

- A covering letter/research proposal (maximum two pages) outlining your qualifications and suitability for the studentship, and how you interpret and hope to develop the advertised project brief.
- A CV (maximum two pages).
- A sample of your academic written work (around 6,000 words maximum).

Applications should be submitted no later than Friday 31st May 2024 at 1700 (BST)

Please contact Kay Jones (PGHistoryOffice@warwick.ac.uk) if further application support is required.

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to attend an online interview with the project supervisors on Thursday 13th or Friday 14th June 2024. They will be expected to explain their own response to the project and the directions they might want to take it.

Full terms and conditions

For full terms and conditions, including UKRI and eligibility criteria, please see [here](#). For further guidance on the classification of 'home' and 'international' students, please see [here](#).

Enquiries

Informal enquiries may be directed to Dr Tom Simpson (tom.simpson@warwick.ac.uk)