

Aaron S. Moore. *Constructing East Asia: Technology, Ideology, and Empire in Japan's Wartime Era, 1931-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013. 314 pp. (ISBN 9780804785396)

Aaron Moore's *Constructing East Asia: Technology, Ideology, and Empire in Japan's Wartime Era, 1931-1945* explores the rise of technology in twentieth-century Japan and its extension into Japan's colonial possessions in East Asia. Moore traces the development of technology both as physical artifacts and as ideologies of social and political relationships in Japan and its colonial holdings, arguing that whereas this "technological imaginary" promised an individually-driven, creative, and harmonious society, in reality it produced a "domestic and colonial fascism that instead created a dystopian order that thoroughly exploited Asia's land, resources, and people" (19). *Constructing East Asia* presents an intellectual history of technology in wartime Japan and the diverse ways in which it manifested and was put to use in development projects, social theory and practice, and narratives of Japanese history.

Chapter One examines how Marxist social scientists, exemplified here by technology theorist Aikawa Haruki, adopted the technological imaginary in order to envision a rational, efficient, and harmonious nation that integrated all aspects of society from individual workers to large-scale hydropower projects. Moore argues against the accepted narrative that wartime thought fueled only right-wing, irrational, fascist ideologies, showing instead that Japanese elites believed in the ability of technology to furnish a democratic and individualistic culture. Moore follows this with an analysis of "comprehensive technology" as embodied by Miyamoto Takenosuke; such "technology bureaucrats" operated on the belief that a development project such as a large hydropower dam had the potential not only to control floods and provide electricity, but also to engineer social uplift through "an ethic of self-sufficiency and rational self-discipline among the population" (77). However, as Moore shows in both the third and fourth chapters, the implementation of projects based on comprehensive technology exploited people and landscapes; for instance, in the Liao River Improvement Project in Manchuria, urban planning in Beijing, the Fengman Dam (China) and the Sup'ung Dam (China-Korea border), what was promoted as a rational and efficient implementation of empire proved to be violent, racist, and awfully messy in reality. In his final chapter, Moore offers Mori Hideoto as an avatar for the reform bureaucrats who used comprehensive technology to argue for Japanese domestic and colonial society as an "integrated social mechanism" working in support of total war (189). By tracing the wartime roots of technology ideology, Moore masterfully shows that a technological Japan arose much earlier than traditional narratives would have one believe.

In this study of the intellectual power of technology ideologies, Moore shows just how elastic a force technology can be. Because it may be defined in so many different ways—as a dam, a theory of social betterment, a planned city, a strategy for imperial control—"technology" can function in and be used for a myriad of purposes. However, as Moore skillfully illustrates, these uses often have unexpected, unintended, and disastrous results for both the human and natural world. Take, for example, the Sup'ung Dam, located on the Yalu River and the border between China and Japan's Korean colony. Promoted as an economic miracle born of comprehensive technology planning for the region, which would work with existing local business interests including the region's established logging industry, in reality the dam destroyed small-time timber companies, depressed the local economy, and sparked local protest against Japanese development. As Moore argues, such consequences are often silenced in

official narratives, but understanding the power of technological ideologies exposes “an instability that is often not captured in narratives of colonial development except as bumps on the road to inevitable progress” (176). The seminal contribution of this book, then, is to force us to rethink the ways in which theories and practices of technology function in the times and places we study, as well as the consequences of such technologies.

Such a framework for technological analysis has the potential for a global application to understand the role technology plays in the creation of discourses of power, social relationships, and natural resource development. However, Moore’s language is needlessly jargon-filled and dense, and a clearer explanation of the complex subjects he tackles would make the text much more accessible and applicable to other locations. Since the lack of context for wartime/imperial Japan can seem disorienting, especially to the non-specialist, the addition of the occasional paragraph of basic context would have gone a long way toward making this fascinating and useful framework more accessible to a wider range of scholars. Overall, Moore’s detailed research and masterful analysis guarantees that anyone who reads *Constructing East Asia* will rethink the role of technology, both physical artifacts and its ideologies, in his or her field of study.

Reviewed by
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