

# Seminar on Environmental and Agricultural History

December 2, 2022

2:30- 4:30 PM

Virtual, [Register in advance](#)



## “How Sustainable is Plantation Agriculture? A Perspective from the History of Rubber in Vietnam”

Presented by: Michitake Aso

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Plantation agriculture in the tropics has come under criticism for years. Even after the end of the widespread use of slave labor in the nineteenth century, activists pointed to inhumane working conditions and exploitative practices on European- and American-controlled plantations. More recently, critics have developed terms such as the plantationocene to highlight the ways that plantations shape societies and environments, often in destructive ways. Yet, the plantation form for the production of industrial crops has proved sustainable. This talk considers what the history of rubber production in Vietnam can tell us about this sustainability, and its limits. This talk draws on my book, *Rubber and the Making of Vietnam*, which adopts the lens of ecological history to examine the role of rubber in shaping a modern Vietnamese society and environment. Through this lens, I examine how the evolving relationships between humans and non-humans contributed to both the projects of empire and nation building. I argue that those responsible for producing rubber helped restructure the bodies and landscapes of the postcolonial nation of Vietnam in order to maintain plantations.

The question is, at what cost?

This event is part of the MIT Seminar on Environmental and Agricultural History sponsored by the History Faculty and the Program in Science, Technology and Society. For more information contact [kalopes@mit.edu](mailto:kalopes@mit.edu)