Ferdinand von Richthofen's journeys in the name of science took him from Tyrol, to California, Nevada, and China. The practical applications of geology in mining natural resources underlined his work in these disparate regions of the world. In the West and in China coal had long been mined and used. What changed in the nineteenth century, then, was the crafting of a global discourse of energy and industrialization, which prominently featured coal. Geologists like James Dwight Dana and of course, Ferdinand von Richthofen viewed coal not just as a mineral but also as fuel for industrialization. In turn, their ideas filtered into societies at large.

Richthofen loomed large in the late-Qing / early Republican discussion about industrialization and the need to retain control over the country's mineral resources. The ubiquitous mentions of Richthofen in China far surpassed the number of people who might have plausibly read his works, either in English or, far less likely, in the original German. Instead, his renown and the curious difference between the reception of his work in the West and in China reveal the role of imperialism in disseminating a pervasive discourse of energy and fashioning a global age reliant upon fossil fuels.

The seminar will be conducted in English

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