

The dual role of climatology in German colonialism

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ABSTRACT

Climatology played an important dual role for European colonialism in the 19th century.

One aspect was the documentation of the climatic conditions, colonialists would meet overseas, and the related challenges. Thus, collecting meteorological data was an important task in preparing and managing colonies – a mostly technical-meteorological task.

In addition, climatology shaped and influenced politics and ideology during the colonial period. According to the doctrine of climatic determinism, the emergence of “civilizations” depended on favorable climatic conditions. A favorable climate was marked by considerably day-to-variations and by moderate annual variations. Generally, these favorable regions were located in the mid-latitudes of the globe, particularly in Northwestern and Central Europe and in a belt crossing the North American continent. From this alleged natural superiority followed – in the thinking of the time – the moral obligations to support the less favored regions by introducing western ideas about statehood, religion, education, and science - commonly referred to as colonialism.

This paper discusses the role of colonial climatology in the example of the German colony of Tsingtao (Qingdao) in China and the work of the Colonial Institute in Hamburg (which later turned into the University of Hamburg).

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Hans von Storch is a climate and coastal researcher, dealing with global and regional climate change, and the social dimension of change. He retired from the position of a director of the institute of Coastal Research in Geesthacht in 2015, and is now active as an independent researcher without administrative responsibilities. He is a member of the faculties of natural sciences and of social sciences at University of Hamburg, as well as guest professor at the Ocean University of China, in Qingdao. He participated actively in the IPCC efforts. He has published more than 200 peer-reviewed papers and books, among them on the history of climate, the social dimension of climate, the competition of differently constructed knowledge claims and the history of ideas of climate and climate change. More information on his web-page <http://www.hvonstorch.de/klima>, and on his long-standing links to China <http://hvonstorch.de/klima/china/Hans%20von%20Storch.china.htm>.

Carsten Gräbel is a German geographer and historian whose research focuses on development studies and the history of science with particular emphasis on colonialism. He currently works at the University of Hamburg where he researches the history of the popular and academic geographies. After studies in geography at the Universities of Berlin (Humboldt), Rio de Janeiro (Federal) and Tübingen, he moved to the department of modern history at the University of Konstanz, where he received his PhD in 2012. His most important work is *Die Erforschung der Kolonien: Expeditionen und koloniale Wissenskultur deutscher Geographen, 1884-1919* (Exploring the Colonies: The Epistemic Culture and Expeditions of German Geographers, 1884-1919) published in 2015 by Transcript publishing house in Bielefeld.