

[\[Sci-Tech Asia Virtual Seminar\] "Industrial Automation and Workers' Reaction in South China" by HUANG Yu \(Minzu University of China\)](#)

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Seminar

Date:

January 11, 2023

Subject Fields:

Anthropology, Asian History / Studies, Chinese History / Studies, Labor History / Studies, Social Sciences

We're happy to announce the third webinar of our [Innovation, Automation, and the Digital Economy](#) Webinar Series! All welcome!

Industrial Automation and Workers' Reaction in South China

HUANG Yu (Minzu University of China)

January 11nd 2023, 11:00am - 12:30pm (Lisbon time, WET, GMT, UTC+0)

Chair: ZHANG Jun (City University of Hong Kong)

Abstract

Whether automation technologies are labour-substituting or labour-augmenting has sustained academic interests for decades. Arguing against the notion of technological determinism, previous researches have demonstrated how workers' action played an instrumental role in helping them gain a larger share of the benefits associated with technological upgrading. Based on fieldwork in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong, China, this talk focuses on how industrial automation affects migrant workers and how the latter react to the process. We have found an overwhelmingly labor-substituting effect on all workers, but frontline workers and skilled workers manifested different attitudes. Frontline workers, due to their high mobility and exit path to service industry, tended to be less proactive in response to substitution. In contrast, skilled workers, given their seniority and stronger base of solidarity, did occasionally organize collective actions to voice their concerns. However, these were rather 'defensive' actions as skilled workers' bargaining power has been largely reduced by robots' deskilling effect. Still, the 'failure' of these cases speaks less to the futility of collective action, but more to the necessity of building up wider solidarity to regain workers' control.

About the Speaker

Yu Huang is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the Minzu University of China. Her research

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interests include: Science and Technology Studies (STS), robotization and industrial automation, labor studies, environmental anthropology, and agrarian change. She has published in the journals of *The China Journal*, *Globalizations*, *Science, Technology and Society*, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, and *Modern China*.

Registration:

This webinar will take place online via Zoom.

Please register [HERE](#).

After registering, a separate Zoom registration link will be emailed to you.

This webinar series is supported by the research cluster "[Technoscience, Society, and Environment](#)" of the Research Center for Anthropology and Health (CIAS) at the University of Coimbra.

Webinar Convenors: Gonçalo SANTOS (University of Coimbra), Loretta LOU (Durham University), Yichen RAO (University of Michigan), James WRIGHT (Alan Turing Institute) and Jun ZHANG (City University of Hong Kong).

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