

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20020]

Proposed title of the session

The City and the World – Spatial and Temporal Connectivities in the pre-Modern World

Abstract

Cities, it has been said, are a microcosm of the world. Equally, cities are said to be the ‘windows’ to the world (Allen, Massey and Pryke, 2005), in which ‘different things can be seen through different windows’. Cities have always fascinated people, even if urban studies specifically are a comparatively new branch of economic and social history. However, as V. Gordon Chile pointed out in 1950, the concept of ‘city is notoriously hard to define’.

Studies of the city have range from labels such as ‘orthogenetic’ and ‘heterogenetic’ (Robert Redfield and Singer), with the former being found only in ‘primary’ civilizations like India and China. Often linked with the production of a stable supply of the surplus, they may not have had markets, or a significant money economy. Heterogenetic cities, on the other hand, saw the destruction of traditions, and were therefore characterised by conflict. Rather than inland towns, they were more often located at frontiers or along coastlines, and were characterised by the presence of entrepreneurs in many fields.

Other theories such as those of Paul Wheatley (1983) and Wicks (1992) argued that urbanisation in Asia was the result of outside factors.

Can Asian cities of the pre-modern world be understood in such terms alone? Were Asian cities ‘primary’ or ‘orthogenetic’? What kind of networks – formal and informal – existed within a city, or connected two cities across space (for example, the links between the financial structures of the port of Surat and the Sultanate of Yemen which influenced the discounts on bills of exchange). Different cities operate over different distances, and each city would organise its own relationships in a different way. As Allen, Massey and Pryke point out, each city “fits into the various frameworks which organize cultural process in its own way, has its own place in a partly hierarchically ordered, partly competitive network of urban places, and is a product of its own evolving history.”

In order to understand the networks of cities (rather than the ‘network city’), it would also be pertinent to examine the nature of pre-modern networks – of migration, of trade diasporas, of religion, of ethnicity, of language and culture (for example, the Armenian trade networks, or the ‘Persianized world’ that Sanjay Subrahmanyam talks about). These cross-cultural and often city-based networks continued, in various ways, well into modern times (one indication could be the number of people from the Malabar region of India who have sought work in West Asia).

This panel seeks to study cities through the following broad themes, which have rarely been examined for the pre-modern Asian world:

- Patterns of migration – rural to urban
- Constructing Hierarchies – Social space and cities
- Social capital and informal networks in developing cities
- Money markets – banking houses, bills of exchange, money changing
- Merchant groups and networks across cities – inter-connectivity, or merchants Diasporas
- Artisans and production in cities
- Trends of money economy in pre-modern India/Asia
- Convergence vs. divergence – cities in/and the debate

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Dr. Radhika Seshan (University of Pune [India])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
2. Dr. Ruby Maloni (University of Mumbai [India])

III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Ruby maloni (University of Mumbai [India])
3. Ishrat Alam (Aligarh Muslim University [India])
4. Sumitra Kulkarni (University of Pune [India])
5. Michihiro Ogawa (Tokyo University [Japan])
6. Shizuo Katakura (Tokyo University [Japan])
7. Abha Singh (Indira Gandhi National Open University [India])
8. Ryuto Shimada (University of Tokyo [Japan])