

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20073]

Proposed title of the session

Special Economic Zones: Treaty Ports and Port Cities of Maritime Asia, 1842-1942

Abstract

The question of "diversity in development" leads us to consider some sources of novelty and innovation from the perspective of social space. The early development of capitalist practices, preeminently credit creation and banking, and the early development of capitalistically oriented legal and political microenvironments happened at the interactive nexus between long-distance trade and mercantile city-states (Braudel; Abu-Lughod). These enclave environments, preeminently port cities, formed key nodes and organizing centers, providing protected spaces for shops, fairs, great markets and exchanges, oriented toward wide-region and later worldwide networks. The "speciation" of new social forms was easier, and perhaps only possible, in these enclave environments, where countless micro-innovations ultimately added up to the systemic innovation known as capitalism.

In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century maritime Asia, treaty ports and Western-administered port cities played a similar role. This was a matter of incursions by globalized political formations--chiefly the British Empire--and simultaneously a provision of new trading infrastructures (so-called "public goods") that in turn fostered the semi-autonomous surge of Intra-Asian trade, which grew to surpass Asian-European trade (Sugihara; Kagotani). Treaty ports and port cities became special economic zones that were highly successful in attracting people from afar, including long-distance merchants and local traders, shippers, bankers, architects and engineers, missionaries, civil/military servants, and workers. They not only provided channels for the connection and regulation of flows of people, commodities, monies, and information; they also provided new kinds of social and economic spaces that served as sites of innovation in their own right.

Thinking about these port-city environments themselves provides unusually fertile ground for connecting the micro-level history of personal networks, commercial diasporas, individual business firms, and urban governance with the macro-level history of wide-region commodity and monetary flows. Attention to conjunctural boom-bust cycles across this inter-communicating space helps us to understand both day-to-day functioning at the micro-level and the macro-level character of long-run development. Furthermore, in the context of modern globalization, historians and literary scholars have recently rediscovered the significance of port-city and especially treaty-port environments as contained zones of intensive cross-cultural interaction and experimentation, which provided spaces for the creation of new social and cultural forms and frequently offered havens for political opposition movements. Our focus thus offers exceptional promise for cross-disciplinary research involving economic history and other disciplines.

In connection with these ideas, panel members examine the connected themes of trade-opening shocks (Bytheway/Chaiklin); monetary and credit flows (Horesh; Bytheway/Chaiklin); the development of banking networks (Kawamura; Horesh); the legal and organizational infrastructure of trade (Fuess; Kagotani); the social infrastructure of trade (Ishikawa; Ichikawa); the physical infrastructure of trade and navigation (Tanigawa); the inter-port transmission of commercial and financial crises (Metzler); and the built environment of treaty ports themselves (Bickers). Our time span is the treaty-port century, from 1842 to 1942, and our macro-spatial focus is on the zone of maritime Asia stretching from India to Northeast Asia. Presentations will follow a round-table format, in which summaries of the research results presented in pre-circulated papers will be followed by open discussion including the audience.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Prof. Naoto KAGOTANI (Kyoto University [Japan])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

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2. Prof. Mark METZLER (University of Texas at Austin [United States of America])
3. Prof. Robert BICKERS (University of Bristol [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])

III. Expected Participant(s)

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4. Harald FUESS (University of Heidelberg [Germany])
5. Martha CHAIKLIN (American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) Fellow, Goa [United States of America])
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