

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20082]

Proposed title of the session

Long-term trends in China's economy

Abstract

Long-term Trends in China's Economy

In surprising contrast to studies of Japan, Taiwan and Korea, economists and historians have devoted little effort to exploring the long-term dynamics underpinning China's immense 20th-century growth spurt. Instead we see an unfortunate division of labor in which historians analyze the causes of China's failure to embrace new opportunities arising from the British industrial revolution, while economists chronicle China's recent advances.

Mounting evidence that China's reform-era growth has offset substantial institutional deficits through reliance on historic legacies of widely dispersed literacy, numeracy, entrepreneurship, and organizational capabilities highlights the need to bridge the long-standing gap separating research on China's historical and contemporary economies. New questions arise: if historic legacies are major contributors to China's current boom, what prevented them from supporting rapid growth long before the reform initiatives of the late 1970s? Why did the creation of special economic zones, expansion of international trade, and arrival of foreign direct investment accelerate Chinese growth in the late 20th century but not 100 years earlier? In short, how can economists and historians explain the multiple transformations of China's economy from near-stagnation to modest growth, wartime disruption, socialist mediocrity, and, unexpectedly, explosive growth?

This session seeks to expedite efforts to develop an integrated picture of China's long-term economic processes that can explain both the varying pace of growth and the underlying mechanisms driving and constraining economic change.

The panel presentations will focus on new work that examines long-term economic processes.

Kenneth Pomeranz and Thomas Rawski will report on separate projects that address the central issue: how to devise a consistent story to explain multiple outcomes: how the underperforming economy of the late 19th century evolved into the economic juggernaut of recent decades.

James Kung and Richard von Glahn will describe their efforts to illuminate the long-term dynamics of China's imperial economy.

A diverse group of discussants will evaluate these presentations from multiple perspectives:

Peter Lindert is an incisive critic who can draw on a lifetime of research in many dimensions of global economic history.

Mio Kishimoto will provide deep knowledge of China's imperial economy.

Tuan-Hwee Sng has produced important work on the political economy of imperial China and contributed to a new generation of comparative study linking Qing China with Tokugawa Japan

Madeleine Zelin is an historian whose work spans a broad range of sectors and institutions, and extends beyond imperial China into the 20th century.

We expect this group to attract substantial attention. We anticipate that the resulting discussion will update the audience about emerging conclusions and perspectives in the China field, sharpen the thinking of both presenters and discussants, advance the linkage of China-oriented research with the expanding body of comparative historical work, and encourage members of the audience to consider adding a China dimension to their own research agendas.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Prof. Thomas G. Rawski (University of Pittsburgh [United States of America])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.

III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Kenneth Pomeranz (University of Chicago [United States of America])
3. James Kai-sing Kung (Hong Kong University of Science & Technology [China])
4. Richard von Glahn (University of California - Los Angeles [United States of America])
5. Peter H. Lindert (University of California Davis [United States of America])
6. Mio Kishimoto (Ochanomizu University [Japan])
7. Tuan-Hwee Sng (National University of Singapore [Singapore])
8. Madeleine Zelin (Columbia University [United States of America])