

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20088]

Proposed title of the session

Changes and Continuities in a Bustling Time: Chinese Long-distance Merchants and Their Business World, 1700-1900

Abstract

Recent studies on world historical long-distance trade have demonstrated that there was no single set of business practices that could apply universally; rather, the effective business strategies and institutional arrangement corresponded to the nature of the trade and the larger political, social, and cultural conditions (Greif 2006; Trivellato 2009; Lydon 2009; Rosenthal and Wong 2011; Aslanian 2011; Goldberg 2012). Understanding on how business operated in different settings will contribute to our appreciation of the variety and complexity of long-distance trade mechanisms. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century China, regional variations within the empire, differentiated frontier management, and increasing impact of imperialism since the late nineteenth century defined different endowments (both benefits and problems) for long-distance merchants activating on different trade routes and shaped the contour of their commercial activities. At the same time, we do see significant consistencies in certain practices of these Chinese merchants despite their geographic spread, which might be synthesized as the basis for further comparisons with trade networks in other world regions.

The panel brings together scholars specialized in domestic or international trade networks of several Chinese merchant groups, covering soybean trade in Manchuria, Sino-Mongolian trade networks, Huizhou merchants in lower Yangzi, Shanxi native banks and their connection to the treaty-port economy, the Fujianese diaspora in Southeast Asia, as well as Taiwan-Japanese trade. The panel discusses the development and function of a number of essential institutions in the business world of Chinese merchants: native-place associations, trade guilds, business houses, and native banks. Collectively, the panel aims at 1) drawing common features as well as regional or trade specific aspects of the business practices of these merchant groups, comparing domestic and international, overland and maritime, inland and treaty port/colonies; 2) investigating the interactions between merchants, commercial organizations, and the state regarding market control and dispute resolution, mitigating boundaries between formal adjudication and informal solutions within networks; 3) examining the influences of treaty-port economy and imperialism in the nineteenth century on market structure, trade commodities, and competition, and how Chinese merchants reacted to these changes strategically and developed new business opportunities.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Ms. Meng Zhang (University of California, Los Angeles [United States of America])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
2. Dr. Luman Wang (Virginia Military Institute [United States of America])

III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Bin Wong (University of California, Los Angeles [United States of America])
3. Luman Wang (Virginia Military Institute [United States of America])
4. Hongzhong Yan (Shanghai University of Finance and Economics [China])
5. Zhijian Qiao (Stanford University [United States of America])
6. John D. Wong (Hong Kong University [China])
7. Miriam Kamanishi (Singapore National University [Singapore])
8. Guillermo Ruiz Stovel (University of California, Los Angeles [United States of America])
9. Peichen Li (National Taiwan University [Taiwan])