

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20120]

Proposed title of the session

Chinese Enterprises under the Socialist Economic System in Comparative Perspective

Abstract

The construction and implementation of the socialist economic system, which originated in the Soviet Union and was exported to other countries, was one of the most significant phenomena in the global economy of the twentieth century. While it divided the global economy into the Eastern and Western blocs during the Cold War period, the socialist economy and planned, state-led industrialization decided the course of development of the countries that adopted it. For example, in East Asia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong realized rapid economic growth by connecting with the global economy in the latter half of the twentieth century while China achieved rapid industrialization and impressive growth in some sectors, but struggled to raise standards of living and improve agricultural production.

As a case study investigating the historical meaning and diverse consequences of state socialism, this session will explore how the introduction of the socialist economic system in China influenced its course of economic development from the perspective of business and economic history. Since the opening of treaty ports in the middle of the nineteenth century, China's foreign trade expanded and modern technologies and economic institutions were introduced from Western countries into China. As historical research has shown, Chinese merchants played important roles in foreign trade, established modern-style enterprises and promoted industrialization around treaty ports, both competing and cooperating with foreign companies. Although the Great Depression, Second Sino-Japanese War and Civil War after WW II prevented sustained economic growth and industrialization, it is common now to recognize certain developments in the Chinese economy before 1949.

In this context, the introduction of the socialist economic system, which included an attempt to introduce a planned economy and the transition of property rights from private ownership to public, and the rupture of economic relationships with Western countries in the 1950s greatly influenced the development of the Chinese economy in terms of industrialization, labor relations, markets, property rights and the role of the state in the nation's economy. This represents an important new element in the economic history of modern China because previous economic development in China had mainly depended on the expansion of the market economy and the private sector. It is, therefore, clear that Chinese merchants and enterprises were forced to change their business strategies and behaviors under the new regime.

To better understand the impact of structural changes in the Chinese economy, it is essential to explore the cases of such individual businesses. This session will present some significant cases of Chinese merchants and enterprises after 1949 and conduct a comparative examination through discussion, paying careful attention to comparison with other cases and continuities before and after 1949 because their strategies and behaviors exhibited great diversity based on specific historical backgrounds and networks. The papers and discussion will contribute to an overall picture of the impact of institutional change on the course of business and manufacturing in modern China and to explore the historical significance of the emergence of the socialist economic system in the global economy.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Mr. Jun Kajima (Yokohama National University [Japan])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
 2. Mr. Robert Cliver (Humboldt State University [United States of America])
 3. Ms. Juanjuan Peng (Georgia Southern University [United States of America])
 4. Mr. Carles Brasó Broggi (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya [Spain])
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III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Robert Cliver (Humboldt State University [United States of America])
3. Juanjuan Peng (Georgia Southern University [United States of America])
4. Carles Brasó Broggi (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya [Spain])
5. Xiaocai Feng (East China Normal University [China])
6. Fang Ren (Wuhan University [China])
7. Pui Tak Lee (The University of Hong Kong [China])
8. Toru Kubo (Shinshu University [Japan])