HSEA 4884--China’s “Sprouts of Capitalism”: Early Modern Chinese Economic History in Comparative Perspective

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Prerequisites  
Students without a background in modern Chinese history should consult with the instructor.

Course Objectives  
A close examination of China's early modern economic development set against the background of major debates in the field of world economic history and within the field of modern Chinese history. The time frame for this course is approximately the late 18th to the early 20th century.

Method of Instruction  
We will meet once a week for two hours in a seminar setting. Each week we will deal with a major issue of importance to understanding China's economic development and the interaction between environmental, political, legal and cultural factors in the development process. Students will prepare a set of readings for each session and classes will consist of discussions of those readings and other material of relevance raised by students and by the instructor. Each class session will end with a brief introduction to the following weeks readings by the instructor.

Method of Evaluation  
Student evaluation will be based on three elements:

1) participation in class discussions.

2) two critiques of approximately 5 pages each based on the readings assigned for two separate class sessions.

3) a final paper of approximately 15 pages in which each student will develop further one of the issues raised by the class or a related issue in the study of China's modern economy. Students wishing to work in areas of comparative economic history or who wish to extend themes raised in this class to an examination of contemporary China may be allowed to do so in consultation with the instructor. Students will present their papers for discussion during the last two weeks of the course. Students wishing to work collaboratively may do so with permission of the instructor. In such cases the 15 page guideline will not apply.
Grade weighting:

1. class participation (20%)
2. critiques (30%)
3. final paper (50%)

Suggested Books to Buy

Syllabus

January 21: Introduction
Review of course goals and requirements. Discussion of the historical background to China’s early modern economic history

January 28: Narratives of Modernization
A discussion of some of the main Western narratives of modernization, including those of Marx, Weber, World Systems theorists and Neo-institutional economists. How does China fare within these large narratives of world economic history? Do they suggest areas for investigation and possible modification of theory?

Required Readings—

Recommended Readings—

February 4: Property and the Family in China
How do economic historians think about property? Is this approach relevant to China? What were the political, social and economic implications of China’s early modern property regime? How were women in particular affected by this property regime?

Required Readings—
February 11: Approaches to the Agrarian Economy

Required Readings:
- Eastman, “Agriculture: An Overview”

Recommended Readings:

February 18: The City and the Market Economy

The structure of the market in early modern China and its influence on economic development.

Required Readings:
- Eastman, “Commerce in the Late Imperial Period” (link)

February 25: Pomeranz—*The Great Divergence*

How different were the advanced sectors of Britain and China in 1800 in terms of key indicators such as labor productivity and standards of living?

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:
- Note also Pomeranz’ response to Huang—Pomeranz, Kenneth. "Beyond the East-West Binary: Resituating Development Paths in the Eighteenth
March 3: The State and the Economy in the Late Imperial Period

What positive and negative roles does the state play in early economic development? What can we say about the role of the late imperial state’s role in the economy.

Required Readings:
- Zelin, “Economic Freedom in Later Imperial China,” (forthcoming) (link)

March 10: Imperialism

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

March 17: Spring Break

March 24: Institutions of Capital

How did China’s institutional framework (including property rights discussed earlier) influence economic development—an examination of early modern banking, investment and information transfer

Required Readings:
Zelin, "Capital Accumulation and Investment Strategies in Early Modern China: The Case of the Furong Salt Yard" *Late Imperial China*, June 1988. [Pak 8]


**Recommended Readings:**


Robert Gardella, “Contracting Business Partnerships in Late Qing and Republican China: Paradigms and Patterns” (forthcoming) (link)

**March 31: The Making of a Modern Labor Force**

*An examination of gender, native place, and organizational issues in the making of China’s early twentieth century urban labor force.*

**Required Readings:**


**April 7: Networks or Corporations—A Chinese-style of Business?**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**
Susan Greenhalgh, “Families and Networks in Taiwan’s Economic Development” in Winckler and Greenhalgh, ed. *Contending Approaches to the Political Economy of Taiwan*. [on reserve]

**April 14: Growth or Stagnation in the Early Twentieth Century**

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

**April 21: Student Presentations**

**April 28: Student Presentations**