Ec101 Selected Topics in Economics: The Economy and the State in Late Imperial China, 1600-1911

T, Th 1—2.30

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Course Description:
The rapid economic development in China after 1978 and particularly the high-speed economic growth after the mid-1990s have attracted increasing attention to the historical background of this great economic transformation. Scholarship in recent decades has demonstrated the development of a vibrant market economy in China in between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries with many key characteristics similar to the market economy in pre-Industrial Revolution Western Europe. Why, then, didn’t an industrial breakthrough occur in late imperial China?

This course focuses on the interactions between the state and economy in late imperial China from comparative and social science perspectives. In the first two weeks of the course, we will introduce some basic historical background and critically examine the causal structure of “growth without development”. Upon this basis, we will explore specific topics in agrarian economy, city and market, merchant ethics, state-market interactions in famine relief, industrial development and capital formation, and monetary system and public finance. Beyond observing parallels between pre-Industrial Revolution Western Europe and late imperial China, we will also examine some of the institutional defects of the Chinese economy (state?) and how they affected the transformation of China into a modern economy in the late nineteenth century.

Organization and Method of Evaluation:
We will meet twice a week; each week will have a lecture and a one-hour seminar. The lecture will present the Chinese case from comparative and analytic perspectives. In the seminar, we will discuss the readings and the connections between empirical materials and theoretical arguments.

From week 2 on, students are required to submit a one-paragraph response to the assigned reading before coming to the class.

Student evaluations will be based upon three factors:
Participation in class discussion and weekly responses: 20 percent

Final exam (some factual and short analytic questions): 20 percent

A short analytic essay at the end of the term: 60 percent

Readings:
**Week 1: Introduction: State and economy in late imperial China**

**Week 2: Growth without development? (1500-1842)**


**Week 3: The agrarian economy**


Recommended:

**Week 4: Merchant ethics**


**Week 5: City and market**

**Week 6: Famine relief: The perspective from the state bureaucracy**


Recommended:

**Week 7: Famine relief: the perspective from state’s interactions with the markets**


**Week 8: A revisionist view of the Chinese economic history**


**Week 9: The state and money**


Recommended:

**Week 10: The state’s fiscal institution**


Recommended: