

Where is Central Asia in Long-Run Histories of Economic Development?

A session addressing this question has been scheduled by the International Economic History Association as part of the XVIth World Economic History Congress in Stellenbosch, South Africa, 9-13 July 2012.

Europe, the Americas, Asia, the Levant and Sub-Saharan Africa have all variously featured in the vast literature prompted by the work of eminent economic historians such as North, Greif, and Acemoglu *et al*, on institutions, exchange and economic development. Central Asia, however, has been conspicuously absent. The recent interest in the region has, instead, come from two sources which fail to locate the region in long-run analyses of economic development.

The first comes from global historians who position Central Asia as a crossroads for global commerce – although their narratives often end abruptly when the East-West Silk Routes declined. These histories have tended to relegate the economic importance of the region by positioning it as a global ‘thoroughfare’ rather than as a global ‘workshop’ that produced globally-consumed commodities vital to economic development amongst trading neighbours. The work of Jos Gommans (e.g. ‘Warhorse and Post-Nomadic Empires in Asia, c.1000-1800’ *Journal of Global History* (2007) 2, pp.1-21) is a singular but overlooked example to the contrary.

The second comes from historians of Central Asia who are determined to show that it did not become a ‘backwater’ after the development of direct maritime commercial links between Europe and Asia after c.1500. These important new histories have tended to focus on religious, cultural and social connections with other regions – or with merchant networks – rather than economic issues of growth, or institutional development, diffusion and evolution; in so doing, they have inadvertently placed Central Asia in a ‘backwater’ to the new economic histories.

This session thus hopes to bring together economic and social historians who can re-locate and re-position Central Asia within these historical narratives of long-run economic development (broadly understood) in the medieval to modern period. It is hoped that research examining the history of economic development in Central Asia and/or the ways in which Central Asian development was influenced by (or contributed to) global economic development will be presented. The following are illustrative (but not exhaustive) of the themes for discussion:

- (1) the role/significance of Central Asian goods to economies with which it traded (e.g. India, China, Persia, Russia);
- (2) assessing the success or failure of Central Asian socio-economic institutions in a global/comparative perspective;
- (3) the influence of Eurasian socio-economic institutions on institutional development and the path of economic development in neighbouring regions (e.g. the Durrani, Mughal, Safavid empires);
- (4) the role of Central Asian trade to Russian industrialisation from the eighteenth-century;
- (5) the effect of railroad connections on markets, commercialisation and the re-orientation of trade from the nineteenth-century.

The session organiser welcomes interest from all scholars (including graduate students and early career researchers). Abstracts of 250-300 words should be sent to jl621@cam.ac.uk no later than 1 March 2012 although early submissions are strongly recommended; a decision on papers will be made by 8 March 2012. Queries should also be sent to this email address and for further information on the WEHC please see: <http://www.wehc2012.org/>

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