

Spring 2025

EALC 1701 / 5701: Chinese Economic History before 1900

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Seminar meetings: Mondays, 5:15-8:15pm, in the Willoughby East Asia Seminar Room (Van Pelt Library, Room 526).

Office Hours: Mondays, 10:30-11:30am; Thursdays, 2:00-3:00 pm.

This seminar explores evolving understandings of the Chinese economy from ancient times to the nineteenth century. We will read and discuss important work in Chinese economic history both to understand the trajectory that has led to China's contemporary economic position and to situate China's economic development within world history. Discussions will focus on how China emerged as the world's leading economy by the year 1000 and how changes in agriculture, industry, markets, and money led the Chinese economy into the modern age. The course will proceed chronologically, and the sources for discussion will include scholarly articles and monographs, and primary materials—texts, images, and archeological excavations. Graduate students will engage with the principal scholarly debates in the field and finish the seminar with a nuanced understanding of the field's historiography. Knowledge of Chinese is not necessary.

The course will be conducted entirely as a seminar, with no lectures. All students are required to attend class and to do the reading on time. The weekly assignments combine required readings, for which the whole seminar is responsible, and supplemental readings that will be assigned to individual graduate students. Graduate students will present their assigned readings to the seminar for discussion.

There are two assignments:

1. Over the course of the semester, each student will write two (graduate students) or one (undergraduate students) short reviews of books from the syllabus (or other titles in consultation with the instructor). The first book review is due by class session no. 5 (Feb. 17); the second book review from graduate students is due May 13. The reviews should be about 750-1000 words and follow the style of those in the *Journal of Asian Studies*.
2. Students will also write a final paper. Graduate students may write a research paper or a historiographical review (approx. 10,000 words). Undergraduates will write a shorter historiographical paper (approx. 4,000-5,000 words). I will discuss prospective paper topics with each of you over the course of the semester. A preliminary title and abstract are due on Feb. 24. An annotated bibliography will be due Mar. 17. The final paper is due by May 13.

Final grades will be calculated from: in-class performance (40%), one/two short book reviews (15%), final paper (45%).

## Readings

**Note that the readings are currently tentative and will be adjusted further.**

Throughout the course, we will draw on two general economic histories. Both offer a wealth of context, bibliographic references, and scholarly synthesis.

Richard von Glahn. *The Economic History of China: From Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. (Library e-book: <http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017.12/2243969>)

*The Cambridge Economic History of China*, edited by Richard von Glahn and Debin Ma. Cambridge University Press, 2022. (Library e-book)

### 1 Jan. 15. Course Introduction

Because of a shift in our class meeting time, this session will be abbreviated and online. [The Zoom link is here.](#)

We will discuss the general plan for the semester, address any questions that you have, and assign supplemental readings for Week 2.

**Note that there is no class on January 20, during the celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr., Day.**

### 2 Jan. 27. Economic Thought in Early China

#### Required

Tamara T. Chin. *Savage Exchange: Han Imperialism, Chinese Literary Style, and the Economic Imagination*. Harvard University Asia Center, 2014.

--Introduction (1-27), Chapter 1, "Abstraction: Qingzhong Economics, Literary Fiction, and Masters Dialogue" (31-68).

Paul R. Goldin. "Economic Cycles and Price Theory in Early Chinese Texts." In *Between Command and Market: Economic Thought and Practice in Early China*, edited by Elisa Levi Sabattini and Christian Schwermann, pp. 43-77. Brill, 2021.

Maxim Korolkov, "Between Command and Market: Credit, Labour, and Accounting in the Qin Empire (221–207 B.C.E.)." In *Between Command and Market: Economic Thought and Practice in Early China*, edited by Elisa Levi Sabattini and Christian Schwermann, pp. 162-243. Brill, 2021.

#### Supplemental

Esson M. Gale. *Discourses on Salt and Iron: A Debate on the State Control of Commerce and Industry in Ancient China, chapters I-XIX*. Brill, 1931.

Olivia Milburn. "The Book of the Young Master of Accountancy: An Ancient Chinese

Economics Text." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50.1 (2007): 19–40.

Nancy Lee Swann. *Food & Money in Ancient China: The Earliest Economic History of China to A.D. 25*. Princeton University Press, 1950.

### 3 Feb. 3. Tang Fiscal Administration

#### **Required**

Denis Twitchett. "The T'ang Market System." *Asia Major*, n.s. 12.2 (1966): 202-248.

von Glahn. *The Economic History of China*.

--Chapter 5, "The Chinese-Nomad Synthesis and the Reunification of the Empire (485 to 755)" (168-207)

#### **Supplemental**

D. C. Twitchett. *Financial Administration under the T'ang dynasty*. 2d ed. Cambridge University Press, 1970.

### 4 Feb. 10. The Song Commercial Revolution.

#### **Required**

Mark Elvin. *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*. Stanford University Press, 1973. Part 2: pp. 113-99.

von Glahn. *The Economic History of China*.

--Chapter 6, "Economic Transformation in the Tang-Song Transition (755 to 1127)" (208-254)

#### **Supplemental**

Review of Elvin by Nathan Sivin, "Imperial China: Has Its Present Past a Future?" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38.2 (1978): 449-480.

Shiba Yoshinobu. *Commerce and Society in Sung China*. Translated by Mark Elvin. Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1970.

Richard von Glahn. "Imagining Pre-modern China." In *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*. Harvard University Press, 2003.

### 5 Feb. 17. The Song-dynasty Economy (**First Book Review Due**)

#### **Required**

Deng, Kent. "One-Off Capitalism in Song China, 960-1279 CE." In *Capitalisms*, ed. Kaveh Yazdani and Dilip M. Menon, pp. 227-250. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Valerie Hansen. *The Beijing Qingming Scroll and Its Significance for the Study of Chinese History*. Dept. of East Asian Studies, University at Albany, 1996.

<http://history.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Hansen-Beijing%20Qingming%20Scroll.pdf>

Also a color version online at: <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/song-scroll/song.html>

### Supplemental

Robert Hartwell. "A Revolution in the Chinese Iron and Coal Industries during the Northern Sung, 960-1126 A.D." *Journal of Asian Studies* 21.2 (Feb. 1962): 153-162.

Joseph McDermott and Shiba Yoshinobu. "Economic Change in China, 960-1279." In *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, part 2, *Sung China, 960-1279*, pp. 321-436. Edited by John W. Chaffee and Denis Twitchett. Cambridge University Press, 2015. (Library e-book)

Shiba Yoshinobu. *The Diversity of the Socio-Economy in Song China, 960-1279*. Toyo Bunko, 2011. Available at: [http://www.i-repository.net/il/meta\\_pub/G0000171kenkyu\\_2513](http://www.i-repository.net/il/meta_pub/G0000171kenkyu_2513)

Chapter I, "The Lower Yangzi Region"

Chapter II, "Song Urbanism Revisited"

Chapter III, "The Business Nucleus of the Southern Song Capital of Hangzhou"

6 Feb 24. Economy and Environment in the Song Dynasty (**Paper Title and Abstract Due**)

### Required

Mostern. *The Yellow River: A Natural and Unnatural History*. Yale University Press, 2021 --Chapter 3: Loess Is More: The Middle Period Tipping Point, 750-1350 CE (121-178)

Ling Zhang. *The River, the Plain, and the State: An Environmental Drama in Northern Song China, 1048-1128*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. (Library e-book)

--Prologue (1-19); Chapter 4, "Creating a Delta Landscape" (107-138); Chapter 7, "Agriculture: A Subsistence-Oriented Economy" (216-247); Epilogue (280-290)

### Supplemental

Shiba Yoshinobu. *The Diversity of the Socio-Economy in Song China, 960-1279*. Toyo Bunko, 2011. Available at: [http://www.i-repository.net/il/meta\\_pub/G0000171kenkyu\\_2513](http://www.i-repository.net/il/meta_pub/G0000171kenkyu_2513)

--Chapter VI, "Environment versus Water Control: The Case of the Southern Hangzhou Bay Area from the Mid-Tang through the Qing Period"

7 Mar. 3. Money

### Required

Kuroda Akinobu. "Copper Coins Chosen and Silver Differentiated: Another Aspect of the 'Silver Century' in East Asia." *Acta Asiatica* 88 (2005): 65-86.

Richard von Glahn. *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000-1700*. University of California Press, 1996. (Library e-book)

--Introduction; Chapters 2-4

### Supplemental

Robert Hartwell. "The Evolution of the Early Northern Sung Monetary System, A.D. 960-1025." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87.3 (July-Sept. 1967): 280-289.

Man-houng Lin. *China Upside Down: Currency, Society, and Ideologies, 1808-1856*. Harvard University Asia Center, 2007.

Spring Break—Mar. 10-14

8 Mar. 17. Commerce—Foreign and Domestic (Paper Bibliography Due)

Skinner, G. William. "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China." *Journal of Asian Studies* 24.1 (1964): 3-44; 24.2 (1965): 195-228; 24.3 (1965): 363-400.

Richard von Glahn. "The Ningbo-Hakata Merchant Network and the Reorientation of East Asian Maritime Trade, 1150–1350." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 74.2 (2014): 249-279.

**Supplemental**

Billy K. L. So. *Prosperity, Region, and Institutions in Maritime China: The South Fukien Pattern, 946-1368*. Harvard University Asia Center, 2000. (Library e-book)

--Selected chapters.

9 Mar. 24. Land and Labor in Late Imperial China

**Required**

Li Bozhong. "Was There a 'Fourteenth-Century Turning Point?' Population, Land, Technology, and Farm Management." In *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*. Harvard University Press, 2003.

Bozhong Li. "An Early Modern Economy in China: A Study of the GDP of the Huating-Lou Area, 1823-1829." In *The Economy of Lower Yangzi Delta in Late Imperial China: Connecting Money, Markets, and Institutions*, pp. 133-145. Routledge, 2013.

von Glahn. *The Economic History of China*.

--Chapters 7, "The Heyday of the Jiangnan Economy (1127 to 1550)" (255-294)

**Supplemental**

Li Bozhong. *Agricultural Development in Jiangnan, 1620-1850*. St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Shiba Yoshinobu. "On the Emergence and Intensification of the Pattern of Rural-Urban Continuum in Late Imperial Jiangnan Society." In *The Economy of Lower Yangzi Delta in Late Imperial China: Connecting Money, Markets, and Institutions*, pp. 149-207. Routledge, 2013.

William T. Rowe. "Approaches to Modern Chinese Social History." In *Reliving the Past: The Worlds of Social History*, ed. Olivier Kunz, pp. 236-296. University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

10 Mar. 31. Enterprise and Industry

**Required**

Madeleine Zelin. *The Merchants of Zigong: Industrial Entrepreneurship in Early Modern China*. Columbia University Press, 2005.

--Selected Chapters

Madeleine Zelin. "A Deep History of Chinese Shareholding." *Law and History Review* 37.2 (2019): 325-351.

11 Apr. 7. The Fiscal State in China

He Wenkai. *Paths toward the Fiscal State*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

--Chapters 5 & 6.

Richard von Glahn. "Modalities of the Fiscal State in Imperial China." *Journal of Chinese History* 4 (2020): 1-29.

12 Apr. 14. Political Economy and Industrialization in the Early Twentieth Century  
**With Special Guest, Stephen Halsey**

**Required**

Stephen R. Halsey. *Quest for Power: European Imperialism and the Making of Chinese Statecraft*. Harvard University Press, 2015.

--Introduction, Chapters 2, 3, 5, epilogue.

13 Apr. 21. Gender and Economy in Late Imperial China

**Required**

Francesca Bray. *Technology, Gender, and History in Imperial China*. Routledge, 2013.

--Chapter 3, "Women's Work and Women's Place: Textiles and Gender" (93-120)

**Supplemental**

Francesca Bray. *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*. University of California Press, 1997. (Library e-book).

14 Apr. 28. The Great Divergence

**Required**

Kenneth Pomeranz. *The Great Divergence: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton University Press, 2000. (Library e-book)

**Supplemental**

Peter C. Perdue. *Exhausting the Earth: State and Peasant in Hunan, 1500-1850*. Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987. (Library e-book)

**Supplemental**  
Debating the Great Divergence

Debate:

*Journal of Asian Studies* 61.2 (May 2002): 501-662.

*Journal of Asian Studies* 62.1 (Feb. 2003): 157-187.

Philip C. C. Huang. *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China*. Stanford University Press, 1985. (Library e-book)

Philip C. C. Huang. *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988*. Stanford University Press, 1990. (Library e-book)