

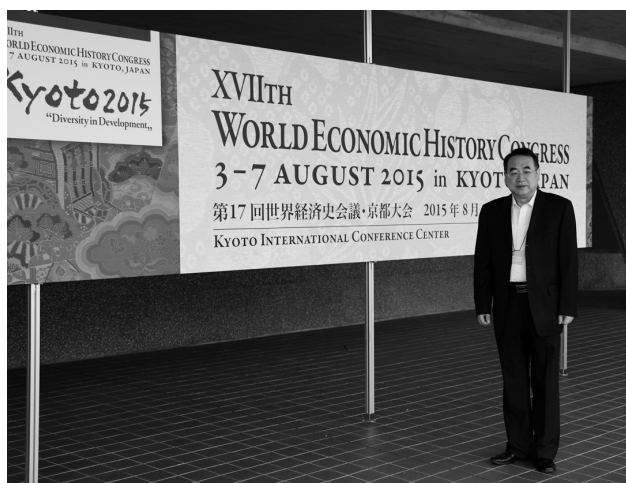
International Conferences in East Asia

Impressions of the Seventeenth World Economic History Congress in Kyoto

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From August 3 to 7, 2015, the seventeenth World Economic History Congress took place in Kyoto under the auspices of the International Economic History Association. Preliminary figures indicate that nearly a thousand scholars from fifty-eight countries and regions participated. In 2012 I succeeded Prof. Li Bozhong as the Chinese member of the executive committee for the congress, and in preparing for and carrying out the seventeenth congress, I participated in the activities of the executive committee. Here I would like to mention a few impressions gathered from my participation, to encourage my colleagues in the field of Chinese economic history to engage more with international scholars in order to accomplish greater results.

One of the most authoritative international scholarly organizations in the



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humanities and social sciences, the International Economic History Association, founded in 1960, is a large international scholarly organization covering economic history and other fields at the national, regional, and international levels. The association presently comprises forty-five member societies in Europe, the Americas, Asia, Oceania, and Africa, with the Chinese Economic History Society having joined the association in 2002. Since at least the fifteenth World Economic History Congress, held in 2009 in Utrecht, the Netherlands, under the guidance of the Chinese Economic History Society, such institutions as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Nankai University, Yunnan University, and Central China Normal University have organized sessions in the congress. In the sixteenth congress, held in 2012 in Stellenbosch, South Africa, and in the present congress, Chinese scholars have continued to achieve new highs in rates of participation, whether it be in terms of the number of scholars, the number of session topics, or the extent of international participation.

In terms of number of participants, according to the report of the congress's executive committee issued at the opening of the congress, nearly a hundred Chinese scholars (including those from the Mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) participated in the congress—the fourth highest number of participants after the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan.

In terms of session topics, the first call for and review of session topics yielded only one session from Mainland China: “Changes in the Market Economy in China: Mechanisms, Structure, and Integration, 17th–20th Centuries,” moderated by Prof. Wang Yuru of Nankai University and Prof. Kent G. Deng of the London School of Economics and Political Science. After participating in the first session review, I wrote up the situation regarding sessions and the procedure for organizing a session, and informed colleagues in China. With help from the Chinese Economic History Society, in the second call for session topics, we smoothly approved session topics proposed by such Mainland institutions as the Institute of Economics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Central China Normal University, Fudan University, Shandong University, Peking University, Sun Yat-sen University, East China Normal University, and Guangxi Normal University. In addition, we received and approved four session topics from Professors Li Zhongqing, Su Jilang, and He Wenkai of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and two session topics from Prof. Roy Bin Wong of the University of California at Los Angeles.

A broad range of topics interested scholars from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, as well as Chinese scholars residing abroad. In preliminary materials, their topics and the organizers are given as follows:

- “The Modernization of China in the Early Twentieth Century: Institutional Change and Economic Development,” Yan Se of Peking University, Zhao Xuejun of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Noam Yuchtman of the University of California at Berkeley
- “Opening of Treaty Ports Reconsidered: The Chinese Maritime Customs and Modern Chinese Economy,” Wu Songdi of Fudan University
- “Political Economy of China’s Modern Transition, 1840–1930,” Ma Chicheng of Shandong University
- “Contact, Conflicts, and Cooperation between Business and Businessmen in the Pacific Rim since 18th Century,” Fu Haiyan of Central China Normal University, Ma Min of Central China Normal University, Xiong Yuanbao of Waseda University
- “Demographic Differentials by Wealth and Status,” Dong Hao of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Tommy Bengtsson of Lund University
- “Wealth Inequality in East Asia from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century,” Chen Shuang of the University of Iowa, Matthew Noellert of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
- “Law and Custom for the Globalizing Maritime Business World in Modern China,” Billy K. L. So of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
- “The State and Economic Development in Early Modern Japan and China: Continuity and Discontinuity from the 17th Century to the 20th Century,” He Wenkai of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Chiu Peng-sheng of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Mark Metzler of the University of Texas at Austin
- “Chinese Public Finance: From Military-Fiscal State through the Issues of Common Pool Resources and Foreign Trade Taxation to the Emergence of Public Debt,” Roy Bin Wong of the University of California at Los Angeles
- “Changes and Continuities in a Bustling Time: Chinese Long-Distance Merchants and Their Business World, 1700–1900,” Zhang Meng of the University of California at Los Angeles, Wang Luman of Virginia Military Institute

An indication of the extent of international participation in the present congress is that in the sessions organized by Chinese scholars, nearly all papers were read in English, and discussions were for the most part conducted in English, thus giving the gatherings an international flavor. To attract scholars of other nations to participate, sessions organized by Chinese scholars invariably had foreign organizers as well, and they used multiple

channels to call for papers, meeting with considerable success. Chinese scholars, including those from Hong Kong, not only organized and participated in Mainland sessions, but also participated in sessions organized by scholars of other countries, whether as co-organizers, paper presenters, or commenters. For instance, Prof. Xu Yi of Guangxi Normal University presented a paper in the session “The Maddison Project: Measuring Economic Performance across Time and Space,” organized by Jutta Bolt of the University of Groningen and Ma Debin of the London School of Economics, and also co-organized and presented a paper in the session “The Quantitative History of China, ca. 1368–1949,” organized by Bas Van Leeuwen of the Utrecht University. And Prof. Lee Pui-Tak of the Chinese University of Hong Kong presented a paper in the presidential session “The State and Enterprise: Legacy and Future Strategy” and also presented a paper in a regular session and commented on a paper in another regular session.

Another important feature of this congress was that research on China garnered considerable attention from around the world. According to incomplete figures, nearly thirty sessions, including those organized by Chinese scholars, covered topics concerning China. In addition to the Chinese scholars mentioned above, scholars from the United States, Britain, Japan, and other countries organized sessions on topics concerning China. For example, Thomas G. Rawski of the University of Pittsburgh organized the session “Long-Term Trends in China’s Economy.” Bas Van Leeuwen organized two sessions directly related to China: “The Quantitative History of China, ca. 1368–1949” and “Government Finance and State Spending in China in Comparative Perspective, ca. 1500–1900.” And the well-known scholar Linda Grove of Sophia University organized the session “Discovering North China: Regional Diversity and Development from the 18th Century to the 20th Century.”

One noticeable characteristic of this congress was that many sessions covering topics with a global perspective or carrying out international comparisons featured papers covering China. For instance, papers in the session “Accounting for the Great Divergence,” organized by Stephen Broadberry of the University of Warwick, covered China, Europe, and Japan. Kajima Jun of Yokohama National University organized the session “Chinese Enterprises under the Socialist Economic System in Comparative Perspective.” Papers in the session “Revisiting the Role of Foreign Trade in Socialist Economies,” organized by Valeria Zanier of the London School of Economics, covered the Soviet Union, Italy, China, the United States, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The session “Environmental Foundations of Asian Capitalism,” organized by Sugihara Kaoru of the University of Tokyo, Kenneth Pomeranz of the University of Chicago, and Tirthankar Roy of the

London School of Economics and Political Science, covered China, India, and Japan. The session “The Development of Nuclear Energy: Economics, Financial and Business Origins,” organized by Maria del Mar Rubio of the Public University of Navarre, Duncan Connors of Durham University, and Joseba De la Torre of the Public University of Navarre, dealt with issues surrounding nuclear energy in the United States, Spain, Japan, China, Britain, Brazil, and Mexico. In one of the final sessions, the vice-presidential session “Historical and Comparative Institutional Analysis of East Asian Development,” organized by Okazaki Tetsuji of the University of Tokyo, Ma Debin of the London School of Economics and Political Science read the paper “Political Institution and Long-Run Economic Growth: The Case of China.” As in previous congresses, there was a plenary session in which two well-known scholars discussed a particular topic. This year Prof. Pranab Bardhan of the University of California at Berkeley and Prof. Roy Bin Wong, Director of the UCLA Asia Institute, contrasted two of the world’s largest economies, China and India, from the perspectives of economic history and economic development, with Linda Grove of Sophia University serving as moderator. The two speakers compared the two nations in terms of their different histories, industries, and models of the relation between state and capital, analyzing the problems and challenges that they face.

In addition to the sessions, two other segments of the congress that attracted attention were the doctoral-dissertation competition and the poster session. In the dissertation competition, eight dissertations were selected as finalists. These were then grouped by period, with three dissertations in the early-modern group, three dissertations in the nineteenth-century group, and two dissertations in the twentieth-century group. Selected as outstanding dissertations were four dissertations, including one from the nineteenth-century group, in which I served as judge. This was “Globalisation and the Ottoman Empire: A Study of Integration between Ottoman and World Cotton Markets,” by Laura Panza of the University of Melbourne. For the poster session, the congress set aside thirty-three spaces in the middle of the main thoroughfare and refreshment stands of the Kyoto International Convention Center for doctoral students and young scholars to advertise their dissertations. During breaks, young authors stood by their posters, ready to explain their theses or answer questions for all who showed interest.

The congress also provided booths for publishers to display journals and books in the field of economic history, accept subscriptions, and give out complementary copies of journals or books.

One special accommodation of the present congress is that it arranged for a lecture open to the public. To encourage interaction between scholarly research organizations and area residents, the organizing committee invited

five Japanese scholars from Doshisha University to engage in a discussion on the development of industry in Kyoto over the past 300 years and the future of industry in Kyoto.

As a member of the congress's executive committee, I participated in its meetings before and after the congress. In addition to selecting outstanding doctoral dissertations, the executive committee listened to reports by the local Kyoto organizing committee and by the executive committee of the previous World Economic History Congress. After the selection of the new executive committee, on which I continued to serve, we discussed how to proceed with the eighteenth World Economic History Congress, to be held in 2018, and we confirmed that English would be the only official language of the congress. We also decided that the next congress would be held from late July to early August in Boston at the two well-known schools Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. We hope that more scholars from Asia, and China in particular, will participate in this great gathering, and that we will achieve even greater success.

More Information

“XVIIth World Economic History Congress, 3–7 August 2015, Kyoto, Japan.” http://www.wehc2015.org/programme_overview.html.

“XVIIth World Economic History Congress, 3–7 August 2015, Kyoto, Japan: Second Call.” http://www.wehc2015.org/second_call.html.

