Comments and Questions on Papers by Maarten Prak, Luca Mocarelli, Josef Elmer

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Questions from an non-expert with a non-European perspective
• What is a guild? Are all minced pies the same everywhere? What about rice cakes?
  – The question seems to me far more difficult than it seems:
    – Chinese equivalent: Huigan, Gongsuo, Hang or Bang.
    – The formal Qing legal code has no definition on the status of such an organization or possibly any social organization.
    – Implication is that the boundary between formal organization and “secret societies” could be blurry.
• India’s early and pre-colonial commercial organization seem to bear little resemblance to the European case.
• For Japan, terms such as stock societies and brotherhoods were used rather than “guilds”.
• Much information on Chinese and Indian “guilds” came from the 19-20th centuries. Are these indigenous organization or under the Western influence?

Are Guilds similar all around the world, or do they fulfill similar functions? Yes and No.
• Reducing transaction costs, (weights, measures and so on)
• Quality control and reputation mechanism
• Offering welfare to members
• Collective action to protect property rights
• Human Capital
• Developing and transferring technology
• Monopoly price fixing
• Controlling quantity and market size
• Collusion with government
• Stifling or resisting innovation
• The problem of narrow interest versus public interest,
• Social control

Are all guilds equal? (question on Lucas’s paper)
Counting the number of guilds very important work
• What is the definition of those “guilds” counted? Legal, administrative, informal? (corporate charters, corporate entities and so on).
• Are other organizations (perhaps more informal) perhaps performing similar roles? If so, what does the count of guilds indicate? Is it a measure of social capital, human capital or technology?
• Are all guilds same and equal? Do size, duration matter, Is there a need for a more complicated measure?
• The same question goes for Christine’s paper.

Guilds and Political action: patterns in the East and West
• Is European guild unique? (Prak’s paper)
  – Corporate entity and legal charter
  – Political connection with the city, representation on the council or administering the city. Citizens of the city.
  – Implications: relatively stable tenure, formal organization and more importantly more likely to transcend the narrow interest. Or vice versa: more capable of resisting change when change is needed.
• The interesting case of rural guilds (Ehmer’s paper): seeking autonomy from the local rule, reputation effect (“honorable work”).

Is Guild relevant for “Great Divergence” debate?
• Who has the best or better “pie”?
• The importance of mutual perspective,
  – Institutional adaptation to different political and legal environment?
  – Similar functions but different institutional possibilities.
  – Which differences matter which do not?
• Efficiency implication of different institutions?
  – Can we find a test case where East and West meet?
  – Lessons from the 19-20th century East Asia.
  – Legal reform in China and Japan
  – Giving formal status to merchant communities
  – The case of treaty port esp. Shanghai
• A city dominated by Western merchants: mercantile representation
  – The provision of public goods, protection of property rights and security, the standardization of taxation.
• Chinese merchant community struggle for representation.
  – A contrast against merchants under warlord rule or under the “empire.”