

ECON 1630

The Economic Development of China

(China Economic History)

Summer 2025 · 25 June –5 August

Course Information

Meeting Times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 6:00 PM - 9:15 PM ET

Break Time: Two 15-minute breaks (7:00 to 7:15 PM & 8:15 to 8:30 PM)

Location: Microsoft Teams

Instructor: Zhiwen Wang (Steve)

Office Hours: Wed 9:30 - 11:00 PM ET (Available by appointment if no one appears by 10:00 PM)

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1 Introduction

Science involves three fundamental steps: 1) **Observation** –learn facts (e.g. an apple falls toward Earth in absence of human intervention); 2) **Pattern recognition from facts** –(e.g. a force may exist between the apple and Earth whose strength rises with mass and falls with distance); 3) **Experimental verification**.

Once such laws are validated, we can use them to predict future outcomes and better prepare ourselves.

The scientific method revolutionized physics and biology; in past decades, it was doing the same in economics. Specifically, economists exploit exogenous shocks —policy reforms, institutional changes, and social or environmental evolution —that split population into more- and less-affected groups. These quasi-experiments allow us to pin down causality just as biologists determine treatment effects by comparing treated and untreated specimens. Such “causal-inference revolution” earned the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2021.

What We Will Do in This Course

- 1) **Examine** pivotal events in China’s history and economic development.
- 2) **Distill** possible socioeconomic “laws” from those events.
- 3) **Evaluate** (or learn from economists’ design tests for) these frameworks.
- 4) **Apply** the resulting insights to anticipate China’s future economic path.

These analytical skills offer conceptual frameworks for interpreting the long-term socioeconomic evolution of Chinese society and, more importantly, **cultivate evidence-based reasoning that supports sound independent judgment.**

2 Topics

First-Class Topic Poll:

We will concentrate on the 5–8 most-voted topics from the 18 listed below.

Pace-Adaptive Coverage:

Final coverage may be adjusted based on the lecture pace.

Part One: Pivotal Events in China's History and Economic Development

(1) Introduction to Historical Economic Development of China

- Class participant introductions
- Course overview and Key themes
- Syllabus walkthrough

(2) Three Major Changes in Early Modern China

- Territorial expansion and its consequences
- Population explosion and resource pressures
- Europe's presence: trade, technology, and ideas

(3) Migration in China History and its Economic impacts

- Population geography of China
- Three major migration waves and the rise of southern China
- The Chinese diaspora and global linkages

(4) Premodern Southern China Economy

- Energy crisis and the forest economy
- The South China Sea as the “Asian Mediterranean”

(5) The Great Divergence: China and Western Europe

- Comparative development trajectories
- Resource endowments: Mineral constraints vs. New World land
- Institutional and cultural determinants: impact and missed opportunities

(6) Late Imperial China: Economic Transitions and Crises

- Fiscal fragility and the opium trade's socioeconomic disruption
- Financial institutions and state capacity
- Late-Qing modernization reforms and the 1911 Revolution

(7) Early P.R. China Economic Foundations

- Land reform and China Civil War
- Industrial establishment: Korean War & Soviet technical aid

- Who controls the sea controls the trade: Taiwan's continental blockade
- Introduction to the planned economy

(8) Contemporary Chinese Economy

- Tournament competition model for cadre promotion
- "Winner-picking" industrial policy
- China-U.S. trade relations

Part Two: Socioeconomic Factors Contributing to China Economic Development

(1) Premature Ideology: From God to Godless

- Shang-Zhou transition (c. 1000 BCE): a pivotal civilizational shift

(2) Civilizational Paradigms: Eastern vs. Western Ideologies

- Western: Syncretism of Christian theology and Greek rationalism
- Eastern: Confucian governance and Daoist naturalism
- Comparative influence on governance, innovation, and economic development

(3) Geographical Determinants: China and Europe

- Close to the Mongols: Nomadic-Agricultural Interactions and their impact on state formation and absolutism
- Distance from early "world heartlands": enduring civilizational legacies
- Divided Europe & United China: Great North Plain in China & Great Britain in Europe

(4) Institutionalized Meritocracy: Imperial Keju Examination System

- Naito Konan's Tang-Song transition thesis
- Corruption, limitations, and eventual abolition
- Influence on modern civil-service systems, including the United States

(5) Political Institutions and Economic Development

- Diffusion of democratic ideas
- Interplay between political structures and economic growth
- Democracy vs. authoritarianism: comparative outcomes

(6) Governance and the Economy

- Governance model, wealth disparity, and anemic demand
- Policy self-enforcement and economic crises disaster

(7) Market Forces: Market Integration and Competition

- Philip C. Huang's concept of "Involution"
- Market competition and the demise of serfdom

(8) Economic Patterns and Dynastic Cycles

- Socioeconomic drivers of dynastic rise and collapse
- Cyclical theories of political unity and fragmentation

Part Three: Research Methodology in Economic History

(1) Advanced Approaches in Economic History

- Contemporary methodologies and central debates
- Interdisciplinary integration of economics, history, and anthropology

(2) Innovative Research Techniques

- Digital humanities and web scraping techniques
- AI and Large Language Models in quantitative history research

3 Group Projects (70%)

Three Reading Assignments (30%)

- Weekly presentation of one academic paper
(For each presentation, at least three papers will be provided beforehand as options)
- Analyze key findings, discuss insights, examine weaknesses, and suggest improvements
- Share personal reflections and learnings
- Presentation format:
 - 15 minutes for each presentation and 5 minutes for Q&A
 - Maximum 15 slides per presentation
 - All group members must participate in the presentation

Note:

These papers or assigned readings may contain technical elements, such as econometric or mathematical models, **comprehension of these technical components is not required.**

Short Video on Any Topic related (15%)

- Create an engaging short video (like some on TikTok or Youtube Shorts) related to Chinese Economic History for class discussion.
- Video requirements:
 - Duration: 2-5 minutes

- Face-showing optional; the use of AI technology is encouraged.
- Both your voice and AI-generated one are acceptable

Final Presentation (25%)

- Comprehensive group presentation on a chosen topic
- 30-minute presentation with 10-minute Q&A

Note:

Two guidance meetings will be provided (See Section 5 Final Project Guidance for details).

4 Individual Components (30%)

Class Participation (20%)

- Questions and comments made during group presentations
- Active participation in class discussions

Bā Duàn Jīn 八段锦 Exercise (10%)

A traditional Chinese exercise (a simplified tai chi-like routine):

- Eight simple movements to enhance energy (“qi”) and overall health
- Integrates gentle physical activity with controlled breathing and mental focus
- Note:
 - Video tutorial will be provided for guidance
 - There are **no requirement on movement accuracy**.
 - **Full marks** will be awarded upon simply providing visual proof of your practice through a photo or video submission.
 - **The paramount consideration is your personal well-being, peace, and joy derived from the practice.**

Fact-Checking Bonus (5 - 10 extra bonus points)

I often make mistakes. Students are encouraged to actively engage in fact-checking by:

- Identify factual mistakes in the course material or in my impromptu remarks.
- Email me with your fact-checks, including:

- a) The statement of my flaw.
- b) Your evidence supporting your fact-check.
- c) Note to use supporting materials from credible sources (e.g., peer-reviewed journals, respected academic books, or archives, etc.).

Note: Excellent fact-checks may be discussed in class to foster a mutual learning environment.

5 Evaluation on Group Project

- The class will be divided into 3 groups, each comprising 3-5 members.
- Brainstorm a short, easy-to-remember name for your group.

Inter-group Evaluation

- Use a four-level rating scale: So-so, Good, Great, and Awesome.
- Each group may assign each rating level (e.g., "Awesome") to only one other group.
- I will participate as an additional evaluator.

Intra-group Evaluation

- Outline each member's contribution in the last slide of presentation.

6 Deadlines and Submission

Date	Assignment
July 2nd (Week 2 Wed)	1st Paper Presentation
July 9th (Week 3 Wed)	2nd Paper Presentation
July 16th (Week 4 Wed)	Short Video
July 23rd (Week 5 Wed)	3rd Paper Presentation
August 4th (Week 7 Mon) (Final Class)	Final Project Presentation
August 6th (Week 7 Wed)	Bā Duàn Jīn Practice Video or Photo

Submission:

- Upload presentation slides and short video as a group to Canvas
- Submit Bā Duàn Jīn practice video or photo individually to Canvas

7 Reading List

Listed chronologically by the period focused.

Encouraged Academic Readings

- Chen, Zhiwu, & Wang, Wanda. (2024). Persistence, Shocks, and Reversal: Evidence from China since the Neolithic Revolution, 5000 BCE–2000CE. Working Paper.
- Chen, Joy. (2024). State Formation and Bureaucratization: Evidence from Pre-Imperial China. *Journal of Economic History*.
- Chen, Ting, & Ma, Debin. (2022). States and Wars: China’s Long March towards Unity and Its Consequences, 221 BC –1911 AD. Working Paper.
- Wang, Yuhua. (2022). Blood Is Thicker than Water: Elite Kinship Networks and State Building in Imperial China. *American Political Science Review*.
- Chen, Ting, & Kung, James Kai-sing. (2023). Commercial Revolution in Medieval China. Working Paper.
- Dell, Melissa, Lane, Nathan, & Querubin, Pablo. (2018). The Historical State, Local Collective Action, and Economic Development in Vietnam. *Econometrica*.
- Xue, Melanie Meng. (2023). High-Value Work and the Rise of Women: The Cotton Revolution and Gender Equality in China. Working Paper.
- Shuie, Carol H. (2025). Social Mobility in the Long Run: An Analysis of Tongcheng, China, 1300 to 1900. *Journal of Economic History*
- Chen, Shuo, & Kung, James Kai-sing. (2016). Of Maize and Men: The Effect of a New World Crop on Population and Economic Growth in China. *Journal of Economic Growth*.
- Kobayashi, Atsushi. (2022). Asia’s Silver Absorption through the Triangular Settlement System, 1846–1870. *Journal of Economic History*.
- Bai, Ying, & Jia, Ruixue. (2016). Elite Recruitment and Political Stability: The Impact of the Abolition of China’s Civil Service Exam. *Econometrica*.
- Liu, Cong. (2020). The Effects of World War I on the Chinese Textile Industry: Was the World’s Trouble China’s Opportunity?. *Journal of Economic History*.
- Li, Peiyuan. (2023). The Economics of Mobilizing Free-riders: Evidence from the Chinese Civil War 1945-1949. Working Paper.
- Giorcelli, Michela, & Li, Bo. (2023). Technology Transfer and Early Industrial Development: Evidence from the Sino-Soviet Alliance. Working Paper.
- Berkowitz, Daniel, Ma, Hong, & Nishioka, Shuichiro. (2017). Recasting the Iron Rice Bowl: The Reform of China’s State-Owned Enterprises. *Review of Economics and Statistics*.

- Li, Hongbin, & Zhou, Li-An. (2005). Political Turnover and Economic Performance: The Incentive Role of Personnel Control in China. *Journal of Public Economics*.
- Rawski, Thomas G. (2001). What Is Happening to China's GDP Statistics?. *China Economic Review*.
- Caliendo, Lorenzo, Dvorkin, Maximiliano, & Parro, Fernando. (2019). Trade and Labor Market Dynamics: General Equilibrium Analysis of the China Trade Shock. *Econometrica*.
- Beraja, Martin, Yang, David, & Yuchtman, Noam. (2023). Data-intensive Innovation and the State-Evidence from AI Firms in China. *Review of Economic Studies*.
- Colonnelli, Emanuele, Li, Bo, & Liu, Ernest. (2024). Investing with the Government: A Field Experiment in China. *Journal of Political Economy*.

Extended Reading

- Wen, Bo, Li, Hui, Lu, Daru, Song, Xiufeng, Zhang, Feng, He, Yungang, Li, Feng, et al. (2004). Genetic Evidence Supports Demic Diffusion of Han Culture. *Nature*.
- Fernández-Villaverde, Jesús, Koyama, Mark, Lin, Youhong, & Sng, Tuan-Hwee. (2023). The Fractured-Land Hypothesis. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*.
- Bai, Ying, & Kung, James Kai-sing. (2011). Climate Shocks and Sino-Nomadic Conflict. *Review of Economics and Statistics*.
- Wen, Fangqi, Wang, Erik H., & Hout, Michael. (2024). Social Mobility in the Tang Dynasty as the Imperial Examination Rose and Aristocratic Family Pedigree Declined, 618–907 CE. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.
- Cao, Yiming, & Chen, Shuo. (2022). Rebel on the Canal: Disrupted Trade Access and Social Conflict in China, 1650–1911. *American Economic Review*.
- Kung, James Kai-sing, & Ma, Chicheng. (2014). Can Cultural Norms Reduce Conflicts? Confucianism and Peasant Rebellions in Qing China. *Journal of Development Economics*.
- Kung, James Kai-sing, & Chen, Shuo. (2011). The Tragedy of the Nomenclatura: Career Incentives and Political Radicalism during China's Great Leap Famine. *American Political Science Review*.
- Fan, Jingting, & Zou, Ben. (2021). Industrialization from Scratch: The "Construction of Third Front" and Local Economic Development in China's Hinterland. *Journal of Development Economics*.
- Dell, Melissa, & Querubin, Pablo. (2018). Nation Building through Foreign Intervention: Evidence from Discontinuities in Military Strategies. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*.
- Kim, Jihee, Kim, Kyoochul, Park, Sangyoon, & Sun, Chang. (2023). The Economic Costs of Trade Sanctions: Evidence from North Korea. *Journal of International Economics*.
- Berkowitz, Daniel, Pistor, Katharina, & Richard, Jean-Francois. (2003). Economic Development, Legality, and the Transplant Effect. *European Economic Review*.
- Alesina, Alberto F., Seror, Marlon, Yang, David Y., You, Yang, & Zeng, Weihong. (2020). Persistence Despite Revolutions. NBER Working Paper.

- Chen, Yuyu, Ebenstein, Avraham, Greenstone, Michael, & Li, Hongbin. (2013). Evidence on the Impact of Sustained Exposure to Air Pollution on Life Expectancy from China's Huai River Policy. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.
- Talhelm, Thomas, Zhang, Xuemin, Oishi, Shigehiro, Shimin, Chen, Duan, Dajun, Lan, Xian, & Kitayama, Shinobu. (2014). Large-Scale Psychological Differences within China Explained by Rice versus Wheat Agriculture. *Science*.
- Cantoni, Davide, Chen, Yuyu, Yang, David Y., Yuchtman, Noam, & Zhang, Y. Jane. (2017). Curriculum and Ideology. *Journal of Political Economy*.
- Chen, Yuyu, & Yang, David Y. (2019). The Impact of Media Censorship: 1984 or Brave New World?. *American Economic Review*.
- Beraja, Martin, Kao, Andrew, Yang, David Y., & Yuchtman, Noam. (2023). AI-tocracy. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Suggested Reading Books

- Toynbee, Arnold J. (1987). *A Study of History*. Oxford University Press
- Ma, Debin, & Von Glahn, Richard. (Eds.) (2022). *The Cambridge Economic History of China*. Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, Ian Matthew. (2020). *Fir and Empire: The Transformation of Forests in Early Modern China*. University of Washington Press.
- Pomeranz, Kenneth. (2000). *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton University Press.
- Fairbank, John King. (Ed.) (1978). *The Cambridge History of China: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911. Volume 10, Part 1*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fairbank, John King, & Liu, Kwang-Ching. (Eds.) (1980). *The Cambridge History of China: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911. Volume 11, Part 2*. Cambridge University Press.
- Huang, Philip C. C. (1985). *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China*. Stanford University Press.
- Huang, Philip C. C. (1990). *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988*. Stanford University Press.
- Brandt, Loren, & Rawski, Thomas G. (Eds.) (2008). *China's Great Economic Transformation*. Cambridge University Press.

Extended Reading Books

- Hsu, Cho-yun. (2012). *China: A New Cultural History*. Columbia University Press.
- Chang, Kang-i Sun, & Owen, Stephen. (Eds.) (2010). *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*. Cambridge University Press.

- Anderson, Eugene Newton. (1988). *The Food of China*. Yale University Press.
- Hsu, Cho-yun, & Linduff, Katheryn M. (1988). *Western Chou Civilization*. Yale University Press.
- Schafer, Edward H. (1985). *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics*. University of California Press.
- Scott, James C. (2009). *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Yale University Press.
- Szonyi, Michael. (2018). *The Art of Being Governed: Everyday Politics in Late Imperial China*. Princeton University Press.
- Rawski, Evelyn S. (1998). *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions*. University of California Press.
- Johnson, David, Nathan, Andrew J., & Rawski, Evelyn S. (Eds.) (2023). *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. University of California Press.
- Guiral, Pierre. (Ed.) (1962). *The New Cambridge Modern History, XI: Material Progress and World-Wide Problems: 1870-1898*. Cambridge University Press.
- Esherick, Joseph W. (1976). *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei*. University of California Press.

Extended Reading Books (Chinese)

- 顾颉刚. (2002). *中国史学入门* (何启君 整理). 北京出版社.
- 严耕望. (2008). *治史三书*. 上海人民出版社.
- 钱穆. (2001). *中国历代政治得失*. 生活·读书·新知三联书店.
- 葛剑雄. (2000). *中国人口史*. 复旦大学出版社.
- 王明珂. (2008). *游牧者的抉择: 面对汉帝国的北亚游牧部族*. 广西师范大学出版社.
- 黄一农. (2006). *两头蛇: 明末清初的第一代天主教徒*. 上海古籍出版社.
- 方行, 经君健, 魏金玉. (2007). *中国经济通史: 清代经济卷*. 经济日报出版社.
- 李文杰. (2020). *辨色视朝: 晚清的朝会, 文书与政治决策*. 上海人民出版社.
- 常建华. (2024). *众生百态: 清代刑科题本里的“打工人”*. 中国工人出版社.
- 茅海建. (1997). *天朝的崩溃: 鸦片战争再研究*. 生活·读书·新知三联书店.
- 冯桂芬. (2002). *校邠庐抗议*. 上海书店出版社.
- 邱捷. (2021). *晚清官场镜像: 杜凤治日记研究*. 社会科学文献出版社.
- 张佩纶. (2015). *张佩纶日记*. 凤凰出版社.
- 刘大鹏. (2020). *退想斋日记*. 北京师范大学出版社.

- 伊藤博文. (2011). 日本帝国宪法义解 (牛仲君, 译). 中国法制出版社.
- 内田树. (2012). 日本边境论 (郭勇, 译). 上海文化出版社.
- 金冲及, 胡绳武. (1991). 辛亥革命史稿: 第三卷 1911 年的大起义. 上海人民出版社.
- 黄树民. (2002). 林村的故事: 一九四九年后的中国农村变革. 生活·读书·新知三联书店.
- 王明珂. (2008). 羌在汉藏之间. 中华书局.
- 丁捷. (2017). 追问. 中共中央党校出版社.

8 Additional Course Information

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity in accordance with the University of Pittsburgh's Academic Integrity Guidelines.

- Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are strictly prohibited.
- Violations may result in severe penalties, including but not limited to:
 - A failing grade for the assignment
 - A failing grade for the entire course
- Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the University's Academic Integrity Code: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html>

Accommodations and Support Services

The University of Pittsburgh is committed to providing equal opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities or special learning needs.

- If you require any accommodations to fully participate in this course, please:
 - Contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss your needs
 - Reach out to the Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS)
- All discussions and documentation will be kept confidential
- The instructor is committed to working with DRS to ensure appropriate accommodations are provided in a timely manner

Technology and Resource Access

To fully participate in this course, students will need:

- Reliable internet access
- A device capable of accessing Microsoft Teams and Canvas