

Max Weber Lecture

17 November 2010 at 17.00, Max Weber Programme, Villa La Fonte

“Development with Chinese Characteristics? Convergence and Divergence in Long-run and Comparative Perspective”

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Looked at in comparative perspective, among the most striking features of Qing political economy are the combination of highly commercialized agriculture with the strength of peasant land use rights -- both through smallholding and through various forms of secure tenancy -- and the very small share of the population dependent on wage-earning. This paper begins by analyzing some reasons for this pattern, focusing on the intersection of customary land rights, agricultural practices and family formation in China's wealthiest regions. Most of the paper then traces its long-run consequences -- for urbanization, internal trade, migration, environmental change, and fiscal policy -- and compares them with those in other parts of the world. It argues that the intersection of these institutions with China's resource endowments created a distinct political economy which produced considerable agricultural and commercial dynamism, but not industrialization. It then shows that, though severely disrupted in the 19th and early 20th century, patterns derived from these basic conditions continued to shape Chinese economic development thereafter, and even into the present era of post-Mao reform.