

Introduction to the conference

The International Research Network in Comparative Economic History (henceforth referred to as GDRI, after the French ‘Groupe de Recherche International’) proposes to undertake the first large-scale investigation on a variety of economic institutions which have been crucial to the achievement of economic development in Asia and in Europe: business partnerships, share-holding companies, maritime insurance, the bill of exchange and accounting methods, among others. The main purpose of this study is to conduct a systematic comparison of the trajectories of peculiar economic institutions and business practices in different environments: Europe and Asia. It will draw on the analysis of an unpublished collection of private documents, local gazettes, stone inscriptions, prescriptive narratives and legal archives relating to economic development and merchants’ memoirs and genealogies over a period of five centuries, from the 16th to the 20th.

Our objective is to detect the extent of exchange and borrowing by traders established in various trading areas of the Eurasian continent with economic institutions outside this geographic area. The trajectories of economic institutions will be treated as different layers within a comprehensive analysis of a single process of economic development that links historical and comparative dimensions. This framework will provide a firm foundation for diverse interactions between scholars involved in economic history, historical geography, legal studies, and anthropology, in Western Europe, the Near East and East Asia.

The GDRI started on January 1, 2013. The CNRS and various Asian and European academic institutions will finance it for four years. The first GDRI conference will be held in Paris, November 29 and 30, 2013, hosted by the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS).

Researchers from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East are invited. This first conference will provide us with an opportunity for intellectual exchange between scholars from different areas of the Eurasian continent. The idea is to create some topics for discussion on sources, methodology, and the hypothesis regarding comparative economic history. It aims to promote comparative economic history – history, economics, business history, legal standing, anthropology – and to introduce a strong comparative dimension.

In addition, the GDRI and the blog are now online*. It will include recent articles, newly published books that are related to the objective of our project, interviews with historians, which will be presented through videos or by printed texts, the announcement of conference, news, etc.

We do hope that this project can serve as a forum for scholars and PhD students in this field of study to share their research, perspectives and to promote further exchanges.

* <http://www.eurasiatrajeco.cnrs.fr/?lang=en> (website) - <http://gdri.hypotheses.org/> (blog)