

Magnus Marsden Welcome Remarks

Respected Officials, Dear Friends and Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

My name is Magnus Marsden and I am a Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex. I am also the Director of the University of Sussex Asia Centre.

It is an enormous pleasure to welcome you to the launch meeting of the project Yiwu: Trust, Commodities and Global Traders in a Chinese International Trade City.

The project is funded by a grant from the European Research Council. The European Research Council was established in 2007 by the European Commission in order to fund scientific and technological research in the European Union. Researchers from any field can compete for the grants that support pioneering projects. The aim is to recognise the best ideas, and confer status and visibility to the best research in Europe, while also attracting talent to the European Union from abroad. The fact that the ERC was willing to fund a project on Yiwu is testament to the city's global significance.

The project's principal host is the School of Global Studies at the University of Sussex in the UK. The University of Sussex is a research-intensive university situated in Brighton in the south of the United Kingdom. The university received its Royal Charter in August 1961, and is now one of the UK's most well-known and respected universities. It also has a growing presence in Asia and in 2015 launched the University of Sussex Asia Centre.

The project also enjoys partnerships with the University of Copenhagen (Denmark), the University of Cambridge (UK), and the Royal Holloway College, University of London (UK).

Before handing the floor to the other eminent speakers in this panel, whom I am delighted are able to spare some of their precious time to be with us today, let me present a few words of introduction about the project and its relevance to the city of Yiwu.

1) THE PROJECT

The project is an integrated comparative programme of research that will provide new empirical data and comparative analysis on the global trade in Chinese-made commodities. The importance of Yiwu to the international trade of small commodities is well known in China. Unfortunately, however, while there has been journalistic interest in the West about the city, fewer Western scholars have recognised Yiwu's significance to the world's economy.

This project will fill that gap in the scholarship and bring Yiwu to the attention of scholars working in the fields of economics, business studies, history and anthropology.

The project's research has two dimensions.

First, its focus will be on the ways in which transnational trading activities are conducted in the dynamic city of Yiwu. Second, the project will also explore the markets to which Yiwu commodities are exported, and the role that traders play in connecting Yiwu to the world. Researchers will investigate the major markets in which Yiwu commodities are sold, including those in East Asia (South Korea), South Asia (India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan), Southeast Asia (Vietnam), Central Asia (Tajikistan and Kazakhstan), the Middle East (Turkey and Saudi Arabia), Eastern Europe (Russia and Ukraine), and the European Union.

The team members will conduct intensive research both in Yiwu and in the countries to which Yiwu commodities are exported. As a result they will develop a multi-dimensional and empirically in-depth understanding of Yiwu's global connections.

The reason that this team of researchers will be able to conduct this research is because they have experience of working in the countries to which Yiwu commodities are exported. In addition, the team members collectively speak over ten languages, including Chinese, English, Russian, Ukrainian, Spanish, Mongolian, Farsi, Urdu, Arabic, Kazakh, Pashto, Hindi, and Vietnamese. As a result, they are able to interview and interact with traders in their own languages revealing details about trade that are otherwise invisible.

On the basis of long-term research and the ability to communicate with traders in multiple languages, the project will deliver a unique and detailed understanding of how Yiwu is connected to the world through the movement of both commodities and of traders.

2) RELEVANCE TO YIWU

Let me now outline some of the ways in which the research will directly contribute to the future prospects of Yiwu.

First, the project's findings will be of great significance to the development of Yiwu as a trading hub within China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative.

Our research will contribute to understanding the actual connections between Yiwu and countries along the 'One Belt, One Road'. There is excellent statistical data available concerning the destination points of Yiwu commodities. Yet statistics are unable to tell the whole story.

We have already discovered that Yiwu commodities are often re-exported from the markets to which they are initially delivered. Just as importantly, particular groups of traders are of special significance to such forms of trade. Countries with apparently small economies and populations are therefore often of especial importance. For example, while Afghanistan's economy is small, the country's geographical location makes it an important element of the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative.

Moreover, Afghan traders play a particularly important role in the trading of Yiwu commodities not only in Afghanistan but in countries along the length and breadth of the New Silk Road, especially in Russia, Ukraine, and Western Europe. This map shows a selection of the ports to which traders of Afghan origin export goods.

Over the past 10 years I have conducted research in Europe that has allowed me to trace how these commodities are moved within Eastern Europe. This map – based on data that I have gathered – shows some of the routes along which commodities travel in Yiwu once they have been imported from China. It is only possible to gather such type of data by embarking on detailed and long-term fieldwork-based research.

We will also explore infrastructure developments connecting Yiwu to Eurasia and ask how these are affecting the nature of trading practices in Yiwu and in connected trading nodes. In this regard, the Yiwu-Xinjiang-Europe/Tehran rail freight line will be a key concern of the project's investigators. We are interested in exploring the ways in which traders (international and Chinese) are responding to this new infrastructural development, and the affect that it is having on the distribution of trading centres in which goods purchased in Yiwu are sold. We are also keen to explore how the freight train could be better used by countries along its route to export commodities to Yiwu. What are the barriers to the use of the freight train in this manner and how can they be overcome? We will

investigate these issues through research in the countries through which the train travels in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe.

(2) Another key way in which the project will contribute to the development of Yiwu relates to the field of e-commerce. E business is leading to changes in the trading practices important in Yiwu. The project will ask the following questions: has the rise of E business led to changes in the significance of Yiwu as a site of international migration for global commodity traders? In what ways do traditional trading practices and those of e-commerce interact – can they complement one another? We are delighted today to have been able to invite Professor Wang from the University of International Business and Economics who is a renowned scholar of developments in E business, to offer us advice on this most important issue. In order to ensure our findings about e-commerce are robust and as directly relevant to Yiwu as possible we have also developed a partnership with the China International Electronic Commerce Centre.

(3) The project recognises that the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative is multi-dimensional: it seeks to promote trade and commerce between countries along the New Silk Road, but also to forge exchanges in the fields of culture and education. Our project will make a long-lasting contribution to Yiwu's integration with other settings along the New Silk Road.

The project is made-up of a team of scholars that have long-established connections with educational institutions in countries across the length and breadth of the 'One Belt, One Road' region. Our team members have collaborated with universities in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Spain, Mexico, and many other contexts. Project members have already taken steps to play a role in building relationships between Yiwu and educational institutes along the New Silk Road in countries such as Spain that are of critical importance to Yiwu's economy. By facilitating the exchange of knowledge and culture between countries along the New Silk Road the project stands to contribute to the realisation of the upgrading of Yiwu's position in the One Belt, One Road area.

Fourthly, the project will contribute to the educational environment and thus community development of Yiwu and of our partners. We are very pleased that we have established collaborative relationship with Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College, which will enhance our ability to improve local educational environment. The team of scholars are committed to contributing to the academic environment of Yiwu by presenting lectures and seminars to audiences of all ages and backgrounds. We are also seeking to foster relationships between universities and college in UK and Yiwu.

Fifthly, the project will produce outputs of direct relevance to Yiwu. The outputs of the project will take the form of articles published in scholarly journals. This serious and balanced scholarship will lead to a greater recognition of Yiwu's significance to the global economy in Western countries, thereby facilitating interactions between the city and states and institutions in Europe and beyond. In addition, the project will produce a series of documents written directly with the interests of policy makers in mind. This type of document will be specifically designed to facilitate the work of policy makers in various fields seeking to contribute to Yiwu's development as a sustainable site of international trade and commerce.

This project's in-depth investigation of Yiwu, and its connections to the world through networks and flows of people, commodities, and knowledge, will yield ground-breaking perspectives on Yiwu. It will forge an understanding of how trade facilitates not only the exchange of commodities but also

of ideas and cultures. And it will contribute in significant ways to Yiwu's integration with the countries along the New Silk Road.

I wish you a most enjoyable conference and hope very much that you are able to leave the event with fresh insights and ideas. We also look forward to hearing as many constructive suggestions as possible about the project, and look forward to receiving your advice. The entire project will benefit greatly from your collective insights and contributions.

Thanks once again to you all for your attendance.