

Institutions, Infrastructure and Geopolitics in Eurasian Connectivity: A global trade hub Yiwu

Date: Monday, 27 January 2020 15.00-18.30

Location: Webb Library, West Court, Jesus College, Cambridge

Sponsors: China Centre, Jesus College, Cambridge; Sussex Asia Centre, University of Sussex; Cambridge Central Asia Forum, Jesus College, Cambridge; Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge; and School of Business and Management, Royal Holloway, University of London.

Presenters:



Professor Magnus Marsden is Professor of Social Anthropology and Director of the Sussex Asia Centre at the University of Sussex. His research focuses on the Asia's Muslim societies, especially on intersections of religion, ethics, and economic life. He has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in South and Central Asia (especially in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan) and, with traders from these countries, in China, Ukraine, Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula. He is currently the PI of ERC Advanced research project exploring the role played by the city of Yiwu in the global trade in low-grade Chinese commodities.



Dr. Paul Anderson is a Senior Lecturer in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge. He trained as a social anthropologist and his research focuses on the articulation of economic, social and political life. He has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Syria and China, and is currently part of an ERC-funded research project studying the global trade in low-grade Chinese commodities.



Professor Huaichuan Rui is Professor of International Business at School of Business and Management, Royal Holloway, University of London. She has been leading the project of “Chinese outward investment and multinational enterprises (MNEs)” since 2005, conducting over 800 interviews around the world and gauging local views and reactions on Chinese MNEs. She is currently part of the ERC Advanced research project led by Professor Magnus Marsden, exploring the role played by the city of Yiwu in the global trade in low-grade Chinese commodities.

Presentations:

Professor Rui will identify historical and contemporary factors that enabled Yiwu to transform from a poor rural county in the 1970s to a rich and modern global trade hub since the 2000s. She will analyse how entrepreneurs (both local and international), institutions (both formal and informal) and infrastructure (both domestic and international) leverage trade to development in Yiwu while connecting China to the European countries.

Professor Marsden will identify two human-commercial corridors of activity that connect Yiwu - a 'Eurasian' corridor that links China to the formerly Soviet countries, and a 'Western Asian corridor' that connects it to the Arabian Peninsula and Turkey. He will identify the traders active along these two corridors of connectivity and document the forms of navigational agency they deploy in order to mediate between multiple and competing geopolitical projects of Eurasian connectivity.

Dr. Anderson will offer an ethnographic account and theorisation of some of the commercial geographies and economic networks that have connected the market city of Yiwu in south-eastern China to the Middle East over the past two decades. Analysts have also often highlighted the Muslim and Arab ethnic nature of the transnational economic networks which connect Yiwu to markets across the Middle East. But rather than adopting a network governance approach which sees these networks as embedded in a shared culture or ethnicity which furnishes the possibility of trust, Dr. Anderson adopts a structural analysis approach in which traders act as brokers, moving and mediating between different geographies.