

**Call for Papers
to Session 57**

on the XVIth World Economic History Congress, Stellenbosch, 9-13 July, 2012:

MERCANTILISM AND ACCOUNTING RECORDS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PERIPHERY-CORE STRUCTURE AND ITS IMPACTS ON INDIGENOUS MARKET PLAYERS

The sixteenth to eighteenth centuries saw the creation of a number of major merchant trading firms (e.g., the Dutch East India Company, la Compagnie des Indes, the Dutch West India Company, the Hudson's Bay Company and the Russian American Company) granted charters to explore, trade, raise taxes, enlist private armies, and importantly generate profits for their shareholders. As quasi-states, they played key roles in colonial expansion. Arriving in distant territories, agents of these trading firms came into contact with Indigenous peoples whose systems of property assets and whose market models did not align with economic concepts grounded in western views of rational behaviour. In significant ways, these entities are early examples of the multi-national enterprise. As such the analysis of their accounting records, control systems and profits offers insights into the long-term outcomes of their operating decisions and actions, especially in terms of Indigenous relations. Given parallels with present-day enterprise, these analyses are an important mechanism to examine comparatively current models of international markets, trade and development.

This panel will examine this periphery-core relationship in two ways. First, we are interested in the outcomes for those situated at the periphery, as opposed to the usual research emphasis on the returns to the centre/empire. Second, we focus on the means by which non-European trade actors reacted to the mercantilist system and control system, especially in spatially-extended trade networks. Importantly, we reverse prevalent thinking that non-European players did not act rationally. We highlight the dominance and mediation of non-economic factors that motivated the conduct of these actors. Inadequate attention to and frequent misinterpretation of these factors have led to the simplistic view that these players 'failed' to respond in a manner aligned with economic concepts of rational market behaviour. Third, we are interested in the outcomes of these mercantilist enterprises in different economic, political, cultural and spatial contexts, including the effects of changing political and economic policies established at the core which affected the profitability and stability of operations in far-flung settings.

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