S-23 – Society and Science in Late Imperial China

East Asia Commission ISHEASTM

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Abstract: Research into the development of science in late Imperial China has become a rather hot topic in research and especially the question of the reception and appropriation of Western scientific knowledge – including especially the question of terminology – has become a very prominent issue for historians of science. Up to now, however, the question of how scientific knowledge was embedded into the society, and especially how the Chinese society during the late Imperial era dealt with Western knowledge, influenced the appropriation of scientific knowledge and was influenced by it, has not played the role in the scientific discourse, which it would deserve.

The proposed panel will provide new findings on the relationship between science and society during a period, which was crucial for China’s modern development. It on one hand aims to fill glaring lacunae in recent historiographical debates, such as the “Great divergence” debate, in which science (and technology) is largely ignored. It on the other hand will show, to what extent science actually was a part of social life during the period in question. One goal is to close the gap between general historiography and history of science and technology.

It is hoped, that in the panel will offer new perspectives on questions such as popularisation of scientific and new knowledge, application of scientific ideas in everyday life, Women and science, different forms of publication of scientific texts as well, science and mantic practices as well as science as part of late Ming and Qing dynasty cultures of knowledge. We are also interested into the question of “hybrid” practices - hybrid here not only understood as an amalgam of Chinese and Western scientific knowledge, but also as a knowledge, which transgresses – and in this way transforms – different registers of knowledge production and application.

Keywords: Society and Science – China – Late-Imperial period – Popularization.

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