

Steve Zhiwen Wang

PhD Candidate in Economics
University of Pittsburgh

Email: zhw94@pitt.edu
Website: www.zhiwen-wang.com

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Primary Fields: Economic History, Development Economics, Political Economy

Secondary Fields: Institutional Economics, Comparative Political Economy

My research examines how exposure to foreign institutions shapes elite ideology and domestic political and economic outcomes. I use novel datasets, computational methods including large language models, and quasi-experimental variation to analyze historical institutional change, with particular focus on late imperial China and contemporary developing economies.

EDUCATION

University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA **2020–2026 (Expected)**

Ph.D. in Economics

- Advisors: Daniel Berkowitz, Richard Van Weelden
- PhD Qualification Exam Passed with Honor, 2021

National University of Singapore, Singapore **2013–2018**

M.Res. in Management

M.Sc. in Quantitative Finance

- President's Graduate Fellowship recipient

Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, China **2009–2013**

B.A. in Economics

1st Year in Clinical Medicine

WORKING IN PROCESS

“Democratic Exposure and Elite Ideology: Evidence from Treaty Ports in Imperial China”

This study examines how early exposure to Western democratic institutions shaped the political ideology of Chinese government officials during the late Qing Dynasty. Using a novel dataset of 296 central officials' responses to democratic reform proposals in 1898, I analyze the relationship between institutional exposure and pro-democracy sentiment through large language model evaluation of historical documents. The research leverages variation in the establishment of Electoral Municipal Councils (EMCs) in Chinese treaty ports as a natural experiment. Results show that a one standard deviation increase in democratic treaty port exposure increases pro-democracy preference by 8% of a standard deviation, while traditional Chinese governance exposure shows negative effects.

Presentations: International Conference on State Capacity in Comparative Perspective (Hong Kong, 2025)

“The Reformist Winds From the West: Trade Exposure, Magistrate Governance, and the Downfall of Imperial China”

This paper investigates the impact of Western influence on magistrate governance and the 1911 Revolution in late Qing China. Exploiting lottery-based assignment of magistrates, we find evidence of two distinct channels through which Western-influenced magistrates shaped the revolution: reduced resistance to revolutionary uprising and governance approaches that incited higher revolutionary propensity.

Presentations: Pitt Development & Labor Brown Bag (2022, 2025); Pitt Applied Micro Brown Bag (2025)

WORKING PAPER **“Religious Practice and Worker Performance: Evidence from Ramadan Observance in a Large Retail Chain”**

with Zihan Hu

We examine the effects of religious practices on labor supply and productivity using high-frequency administrative data from a large retail chain in Indonesia. Utilizing an event-study approach, we find that Muslim salespersons leave work 22 minutes earlier and their productivity decreases by 21% around sunset during Ramadan. However, they reallocate effort earlier in the day, resulting in no significant change in aggregate daily productivity.

Presentations: IRES Religion Graduate Student Workshop (Los Angeles, 2022); Pacific Conference for Development Economics (San Francisco, 2022); Pitt Development & Labor Brown Bag (2021)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Conference:

International Conference on State Capacity in Comparative Perspective (Hong Kong, 2025)
IRES Annual Graduate Student Workshop (Los Angeles, 2022)
Pacific Conference for Development Economics (San Francisco, 2022)
Asian and Australasian Society of Labour Economics (Singapore, 2019)

Workshops:

Academia Sinica Workshop on China Modern Political & Diplomatic History (Taiwan, 2025)
IMNU Young Scholars Workshop in Anthropology (Inner Mongolia, 2025)
Harvard-XMU Workshop in Chinese Rural History (Fuzhou, 2024)
9th Quantitative History Workshop (Shanghai, 2023)

Brown Bags & Seminars:

Pitt Applied Micro Brown Bag (Pittsburgh, 2025)
Pitt Development & Labor Brown Bag (Pittsburgh, 2021, 2022, 2025)

Pitt Behavioral/Experiment Brown Bag (Pittsburgh, 2022)

TEACHING
EXPERIENCE

University of Pittsburgh

Instructor

- Economic Development of China Summer 2025
- China Economic History Summer 2024

Tutorial Instructor

- Introduction to Macroeconomics Spring 2025
- Introduction to Microeconomics Spring 2022

National University of Singapore

Tutorial Instructor

- Business Analytics Spring 2017

RESEARCH
EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant (Full-time)

2018–2020

Centre for Family and Population Research, National University of Singapore

HONORS AND
AWARDS

PhD Qualification Exam Passed with Honor, University of Pittsburgh

2021

President's Graduate Fellowship, National University of Singapore

2015–2017

REFEREEING

Management Science

LANGUAGE

Chinese (Native), English (Fluent)

Updated Jul 8, 2025