

# Boxiao ZHANG

University of California, Los Angeles  
9372 Bunche Hall, 315 Portola Plaza, Los Angeles, CA 90095  
Email: boxiaozhang@ucla.edu  
Home Page: www.boxiaozhang.com

## EDUCATION

---

**Ph.D. in Economics**, University of California, Los Angeles, expected in June 2022  
**M.A. in Economics**, University of California, Los Angeles, March 2018  
**M.A. in Economics**, Peking University (Beijing, China), June 2016  
**B.A. in Economics**, Peking University (Beijing, China), June 2014  
**B.A. in History (Minor)**, Peking University (Beijing, China), June 2014

## RESEARCH INTERESTS

---

*Primary*: Economic History, Political Economy  
*Secondary*: Labor Economics, Regional Economics

## WORKING PAPERS

---

**“Newspaper, Post Office, and Protest: How Do Political Information Diffusion and Social Interactions Affect Collective Action in Late Imperial China”** (Job Market Paper)

This paper exploits a novel historical natural experiment to investigate how advances in communication infrastructure lead to collective actions (protests) through the channels of information diffusion in news media and social interactions. The postal system’s rapid construction in 1903-1910 in China let newspapers spread information directly to an increasing portion of the population for the first time. The change in information diffusion coincided with intensive media attention on revolutionary activities before the Revolution of 1911. The major newspapers in large cities intensively reported revolutionary activities, and the reports were diffused to villages nationwide through the postal system. I find that the construction of more post offices in a place led to more protests in the years with more reports about revolutionary activities in newspapers. I further disentangle the roles of direct information diffusion and social interactions. I define a village network based on the village’s location, the walking time between villages, and the village’s dialect group. I build and estimate a game-theoretical model based on the village network. As political information directly changed the villages which had post offices nearby and could receive information, I also find a strong peer effect: a village was affected by its expectation of its neighbors’ actions. The peer effect spread the direct impact of political information through social interactions.

**“The Long-term Effect of Wartime Social Networks: Evidence from African American Civil War Veterans, 1870-1900”**, Revise and Resubmit at *Journal of Population Economics*

Temporary social networks could have long-term impacts on economic outcomes. This paper focuses on social networks formed during the American Civil War (1861-1865) among African American veterans. I find that wartime social networks (veterans from the same company) persistently affected veterans’ location choice in the post-Civil War period. By estimating discrete choice migration models, I quantify that veterans were more likely to move to a county where men from their military war company lived. The wartime social network’s effect is sizable compared to other county characteristics. With robustness checks, I find that the selection problem in data, and the common military experience could hardly bias the main findings. By focusing on heterogeneous military companies and using the instrument of “weak” social networks, I further rule out the competing explanation that veterans having similar location preferences drives the effect. The paper finds long-term benefits of living together as well. The quality instead of the quantity of the network mattered. Veterans earned higher incomes after the war, if they ended up living in the same county with wartime friends who had higher income after the war.

**“Buddha’s Grace Illuminates All: Temple Destruction, School Construction, and Modernization in 20th Century China”**, with *Shaoda Wang*

This paper studies how modern human capital emerged in early 20th century China. We document a novel historical episode known as the “Temple Destruction Movement” (TDM), in which Chinese local governments appropriated huge amounts of Buddhist and Taoist temple assets to support the modernization of local schooling. We find that before the TDM, the initial stock of temple assets was uncorrelated with the levels and trends of human capital development; after the TDM started, regions with higher initial stocks of temple assets suddenly constructed more modern schools, enrolled more students in modern educational programs, and produced more modern elites. A back of the envelope calculation suggests that the TDM could account for nearly 70% of China’s modern school construction in the early 20th century, which is consistent with historical records collected from numerous county gazetteers. Further analysis shows that the TDM was most effective in the presence of both a strong government and a powerful civil society, as the former made it easier to appropriate assets from the religious sector, while the latter helped prevent the confiscated religious assets from being captured by local officials.

WORK IN PROGRESS

---

**“The Short- and Long-Run Effects of Affirmative Action: Evidence from Imperial China”,**  
with *Melanie Meng Xue*

China used an examination system to select government officials. The exams were demanding of cognitive skills such as the ability to read, remember and pay attention. We examine a policy reform in 1712 which allowed individuals from less developed provinces to pass the exam with lower scores. We find that this reform indeed led to more successful candidates in less developed provinces. Within provinces, however, such gains were concentrated in the very few prefectures that had the highest density of successful candidates prior to the reform. We propose several possible mechanisms responsible for the widening gap between prefectures. In addition, we examine the role of social organizations such as clans and funding agencies in the long-run impact of the 1712 reform.

**“Railways and Treaty Ports: How Does Transportation Infrastructure Affect International Trade and Economic Development?”**, with *Yuanzhe Li and Li-an Zhou*

This paper documents the historical construction of railways and uses archival data to investigate how transportation infrastructure increases international trade and facilitates local economic development. During the period of 1870-1920, the construction of railways in China helped economic integration across regions. In the meantime, as a group of cities were open to international trade by the treaties (treaty ports), the value of foreign trade increased more than ten times. First, by digitizing maps of railways and waterways and calculating the lowest-cost freight routes, we show that the railways decreased trade costs and reduce interregional price gaps. Second, we find that a higher level of market integration between treaty ports and other regions increased import and export through the treaty ports. Third, we define a measure of regions’ market access to foreign trade. The railways created the regional effect as some regions benefited more from foreign trade because of lower trade costs to treaty ports. The regions had a higher level of agricultural commercialization, more companies and manufacturing firms founded, if they benefited more from foreign trade.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

---

Research Assistant for Prof. Michela Giorcelli	2020-2021
Research Assistant for Prof. Dora Costa	2016-2017

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

---

Teaching Assistant: Principles of Macroeconomics (ECON 2)	2018, 2020
Teaching Assistant: Microeconomic Theory (ECON 11)	2018, 2019
Teaching Assistant: Macroeconomic Theory (ECON 102)	2017, 2021
Teaching Assistant: Statistics for Economists (ECON 41)	2020, 2021

AWARDS AND HONORS

---

Best Paper Award, Economic History Proseminar, UCLA (\$3,000)	2021
Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA (\$20,000)	2021-2022
Exploratory Travel and Data Grant, Economic History Association (\$2,500)	2021

Lewis L. Clarke Graduate Fellowship Fund, UCLA (\$2,450)	2020
Summer Fellowship, UCLA (\$4,250)	2020
Center for Economic History Graduate Fellowship, UCLA (\$6,000)	2020
Center for Economic History Graduate Fellowship, UCLA (\$10,000)	2016-2017
Outstanding Graduate Student, Peking University	2014
President's Undergraduate Research Fellowship, Peking University	2012-2014

## CONFERENCE

---

2021: USC Inaugural China Research Group Doctoral Symposium; Cliometrics Conference; NBER Summer Institute (poster); All-UC Group in Economic History Graduate Student Workshop  
2019: International Symposium on Quantitative History; Joint APEBH 2019 and All-UC Group in Economic History Conference

## PERSONAL INFORMATION

---

*Computer Skills:* Python, SQL, Stata, R, ArcGIS, Matlab

*Languages:* Fluent in English, Native in Chinese

*Citizenship/Visa Status:* Chinese/F1, STEM

## REFERENCES

---

**Dora Costa** (chair)

Professor

Economics Department

University of California, Los Angeles

costa@econ.ucla.edu

**Michela Giorcelli**

Assistant Professor

Economics Department

University of California, Los Angeles

mgiorcelli@econ.ucla.edu

**Bernardo S. Silveira**

Assistant Professor

Economics Department

University of California, Los Angeles

silveira@econ.ucla.edu

**Nico Voigtländer**

Professor

Anderson School of Management

University of California, Los Angeles

nico.v@anderson.ucla.edu