The role of guilds in European history is well established. They had a vital importance in medieval economies,[[1]](#footnote-1) governments,[[2]](#footnote-2) societal life and structures.[[3]](#footnote-3) Marteen Prak in his work *Citzenship without Nations* goes on to analyze methods of political power for citizens in the medieval world, one of the main methods was guilds.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Great Divergence debate has led historians to look at various aspects of Chinese society and history, one of these has been guilds.[[5]](#footnote-5) Prak ambitiously adds to the discussion of the Great Divergence by discussing Asia and the Americas in his work. However, Prak dedicates little time to China, generalizes and his framework for analysis of Chinese guilds is framed through Western criteria. This essay wants to address that gap and examine Chinese guilds in their own right. Therefore, this paper will firstly look answer to questions *i)* What are some general characteristics found within Chinese guilds *ii)* Is the criteria used by Prak suitable?

Discussing common characteristics among Chinese guilds requires two caveats. Firstly, there was two types of Chinese guilds. *Huiguan* and *Gongsuo*. The term to refer to guilds, *hanghui,* which is used by Prak, is an external imposition; the term was not used contemporaneously.[[6]](#footnote-6) *Huiguan’*s western equivalent were merchant guilds and *Gongsuo* was trade guilds. *Huiguan* and their membership were tied to places of origin. Merchants who left their hometowns in search of better fortune would band together with merchants from their same province in the new city.[[7]](#footnote-7) By contrast *Gongsuo* was linked to trade.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, differentiating them clearly is somewhat difficult because sometimes *Gongsuo* would be found within *Huiguan*.[[9]](#footnote-9) Secondly, their characteristics vary regarding location.

1. (Lucassen, De Moor, and Van Zanden 2008, 170) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Prak 2018, 73) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (Prak 2018, 109) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (Prak 2018, 5) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (Lucassen, De Moor, and Van Zanden 2008, 7) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. (Moll-Murata 2008, 214) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. (Liu 1988, 9) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. (Liu 1988, 16; Moll-Murata 2008, 215) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. (Moll-Murata 2018, 322) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)