Citizenship in Pre-modern Eurasia:
A Comparison between China, the Near East and Europe

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Abstract

'Good' institutions are now often portrayed as a precondition for economic development and growth. This paper revisits an old thesis, first articulated by Max Weber, that citizenship explains why Europe managed to modernise and Asian societies did not. Like Weber, the paper focuses on urban citizenship, but uses a broader definition than he did. The paper finds that although Asian towns did not have legal citizenship, they displayed many more characteristics of citizenship-as-practice than Weber and his followers allowed for. It also finds that European towns often were less autonomous than Weber assumed. Economic development and growth in the pre-modern era were not so much determined by citizenship per se, but by the way towns and urban interests could be articulated at state level.

The Argument

In works on the economic development of the pre-modern world, institutions have come to occupy an increasingly important place. The towering figure in this development is, of course, Douglass North. His main argument has been to underline the commitment (or lack of it) by states to private property as a prerequisite for economic growth.[1] Other authors have emphasised the importance of aggressive economic policies by European states, and its absence in other parts of Eurasia. Much of this has turned the traditional wisdoms upside down: where pre-modern states were once seen as predators, trying to scoop up as much rents as they could, it is now suggested that China and India might actually have been suffering from too little state, rather than too much.[2] Some of these arguments, not least those of North himself, sit somewhat uncomfortably with the recent research on pre-modern European state formation, which has tended to emphasise that the late medieval and early modern state was first and foremost a war-machine. 'States made war, and war made states', as American sociologist Charles Tilly succinctly summarised the debate.[3] 'Good institutions' are thus narrowed down to institutions that increased state revenue and supported state borrowing.

Political scientists and sociologist, in the meantime, have in recent years been emphasising, once again, the importance of civic institutions for the success of societies in terms of delivering prosperity and well-being for their members. How can we square this with the tough diet of war, destruction and taxation that pre-modern European states were delivering instead? In the book that will eventually include this paper as a final chapter, I want to focus attention on the towns and cities that were by common consent the incubators of the dynamic of European societies in the run-up to the Industrial Revolution and Modern Economic Growth. This is, in itself, not exactly a novel idea. After all, Max Weber made precisely the same point almost a century ago. I will, however, amend his thesis in two significant ways. First of all, contrary to Weber's argument, these presumably unique features of European cities failed to deliver economic dynamism and social well-being in large parts of Europe itself. Secondly, the book will

[1] E.g. North and Weingast (1989).
[2] Vries (2003), &&; Rosenthal and Wong (2011), ch. 6; Parthasarathi (2011), ch. 5.
[3] Tilly (1992).

try to demonstrate that much of what Weber saw as unique features of European cities can also be found in the cities of the Near East and Asia. Clearly, another factor than just citizenship, or civil society, was at play. This factor, I will argue, was the particular relationship between local—i.e. urban—and national governance. Only where states were so organised that urban institutions could impact significantly on state policies, did the effects that Weber—or for that matter Douglass North—predicted in fact materialise.

Recent research on pre-modern towns, within and outside Europe, has been dominated by the social history of elites. Historians of these urban elites have time and again made the point that small oligarchies monopolised urban politics.[4] I want to argue, however, that the role of 'ordinary people' in urban politics has been systematically under-estimated, and that civic institutions directly or indirectly helped shape local politics in most pre-modern towns. There was, in other words, more 'democracy' before the French Revolution than has usually been acknowledged by historians, fixated as they are on national politics. Popular influence was, moreover, greatest where it mattered most: in local institutions where public services were shaped and delivered. I have called these 'common people' citizens. Citizenship is a slippery concept. Suffice it to say at this point that I have chosen to employ Charles Tilly's definition of citizenship as 'a continuous series of transactions between persons and agents of a given state in which each has enforceable rights and obligations uniquely by virtue of (1) the person's membership in an exclusive category and (2) the agent's relation to the state rather than any authority the agent may enjoy'.[5] This definition implies that formal citizen status is seen as one, but in no way the only form of relationship between a state (or in the period covered here more often a town) and its inhabitants. Models of citizenship, I will argue, made the difference between more and less successful societies. Successful societies, incidentally, are those societies, that produce the greatest amount of prosperity and well-being for their citizens, within the limitations imposed by the available resources and technology. It is assumed—which at this point is not exactly a minor point—that these conditions were roughly equal throughout Eurasia during the period under consideration.[6]

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[4] Friedrichs (2000), 17.
[5] Tilly (1995), 8.
[6] Pomeranz (2001).

To talk about more and less successful societies implies comparison. To demonstrate the validity of the book's argument, three different types of comparisons will be deployed. The first part will be looking at the ways in which European towns were ruled, how their citizens were organised, and at some of the public services that were delivered to them. The main point here will be that there were no fundamental differences in local models of citizenship and urban governance across pre-modern Europe. The second part of the book will compare the various European models of state-city relationships. Special attention will be paid to those polities which experimented with novel forms of that relationship, especially Italy, the Low Countries and England. The argument will be that these three regions were quite exceptional, and therefore in no way representative of European developments. In many European countries states increasingly controlled urban communities in ways that are reminiscent of what Weber described as the Asian model. The third part will focus on Asia and the Near East,[7] in an attempt to tease out the specificity of what was happening in Europe. In this part I will argue that the other regions of Eurasia in many ways resembled on a local level the patterns found in pre-modern Europe, and on a national level the models of rule that prevailed in the majority of European countries. The remainder of the paper is concerned with this last comparison and investigates how Europe's citizenship model—that is, in so far as it had one—measured up against those in other regions of Eurasia.

In doing so, we return to the ideas first developed by Max Weber (1864-1920) in the early twentieth century, ideas which have maintained a powerful hold over histories of non-European areas, and likewise over interpretations of the varying trajectories of economic and social development experienced by these areas. In a nutshell Weber's argument is that the emergence of modern society in Europe was the result of this unique feature of Western society: citizenship.[8] In Weber's definition, towns distinguished themselves from the countryside in five aspects. They had 1. fortifications, 2. markets, 3. their own courts of justice, 4. associations of inhabitants, and finally 5. (partial) self-governance.[9] Weber did not claim that all aspects were always found in all European towns. Nor did he claim that these features were unique to Western towns. Indeed, he

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[7] I hope to include Japan and South Asia at some later point as well.
[8] Weber (1978), 1240.
[9] Weber (1978), 1226

acknowledged that Asiatic towns shared many features with their European counterparts. They had, for instance, professional organisations that looked very much like guilds. The same was true for the towns of the Near East. However, these organisations were not bound together in that super-guild that was the European corporate town.[10]

Corporate status permitted the citizens to develop common policies of their own. They were not, or only to limited extent, subject to the directives of a central government. The corporation or commune in the West was a substitute for the empires, castes and tribes, as they existed in non-Western societies.[11] These over-arching social structures prohibited the emergence of communes in the non-Western world; their absence was a precondition for the rise of the commune in medieval Italy and subsequently in the rest of Europe.[12] In the original commune all citizens were equal, but that did not last very long. The well-to-do were the only citizens with sufficient leisure time to devote to public affairs, and quite rapidly they monopolised municipal offices. In some cases this was formalised by the creation of patrician guild with an exclusive claim to municipal offices.[13]

Weber's discussion of the rise of the patriciate already casts a huge question mark over his concept of citizenship. If ordinary citizens had so little to say in the public affairs of their hometowns, what then did it mean to be a citizen? What was the fundamental difference between being subject to a prince or to a patriciate? Or did he want to say that only the patricians were genuine citizens? It has also been suggested that his discussion of the European town was in several dimensions an idealisation. Weber emphasised that citizens defended their own towns, but this was not quite true after the Middle Ages, when professional armies became more prominent.[14] He has been criticised for creating too much of a uniform picture of the Western as well as of the Oriental city.[15] More importantly perhaps, our knowledge of European urban history has increased massively

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[10] Weber (1978), 1226-33.
[11] Nippel, (2000), 25-26.
[12] Weber (1978), 1241, 1248-49.
[13] Weber (1978), 1281-82.
[14] Nippel (1991), 27-28.
[15] Isin (2005).

since Weber wrote his work, which was a development of the argument of his PhD-thesis from 1889.[16]

Setting up such a comparison, requires us to steer clear of the formal definitions of citizenship as the documented membership of an urban commune as it was used by Weber himself. There can be no doubt that such a form of citizenship was not available elsewhere, and if this would be the benchmark, we could wrap up the paper at this point and move on to a more fruitful use of our time. However, as Bin Wong already pointed out in 1997, this type of comparisons inevitably leads to conclusions of European superiority, because they employ culturally embedded concepts from the European experience as if they were generally applicable.[17] This is precisely the reason why I have applied a more open definition of citizenship as a set of political, economic and social practices. We will focus on four dimensions of citizenship-as-practice: local politics, guild organisations, poor relief and urban defence.

One event that, at least initially, passed by almost all of the non-European areas—Egypt being the main exception—was the French Revolution. Whereas this marked a clear break in the political history of continental Europe, with major implications for the development of its citizenship regimes, no such rupture happened in the regions discussed in this paper. For that reason I have accepted evidence from the nineteenth century for the history of pre-modern citizenship in these areas. This is important, because especially in China, the sources and by implication the historical literature tends to become more haphazard the further we go back in time. Obviously, we cannot assume China or the Near East to have been static (another mistake often made by neo-Weberian authors), and have to be alert to the possibility that nineteenth-century observations were the outcome of recent changes.

1. Europe (very briefly)
Somewhere around AD 1000 an urban revival got underway in much of Europe. In the process European towns acquired extensive rights (often called 'freedoms') which allowed them, among other things, to set up their own local government. These privileges

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[16] Nippel (1991), 20.
[17] Wong (1997).

were granted by the sovereign and almost everywhere subject to revocation. Throughout the period sovereigns would exercise their right to withdraw or amend urban privileges, not just in East-Central Europe, but also in seventeenth-century France and England.[18]

Urban governance: European towns were governed in a variety of ways, but almost without exception by a collective of people with formal citizen status.[19] Next to a small executive (called 'magistrate' in many towns, combining judicial and administrative tasks) there would be a council, and often also a second, broader council with representatives of the community that had to approve for example new taxation. A surprising number of towns held annual elections for the most significant municipal offices. Next to the core institutions of municipal governance a host of other, semi-private order institutions were involved in running the towns. These included foundations (mainly in welfare and health care), craft guilds, and neighbourhood institutions. The latter would be charged with fire-fighting, maintenance of public order, the resolution of minor conflicts, and the setting of tax rates.

Guilds: European urban economies of this period were dominated by guilds. Merchant guilds regulated the world of trade, craft guilds the urban industries. Merchant guilds emerged before craft guilds, and also began to disappear earlier. The craft guilds started to appear in serious numbers during the fourteenth century and were abolished in most continental European countries during the revolutionary era around 1800; in England they were never formally abolished, of course. The economic role of guilds remains a much contested issue,[20] but there can be no doubt that these institutions integrated vast numbers of native and migrant inhabitants into urban society, through apprenticeships that encompassed not just economic skills, but also a training in public behaviour. Guilds, moreover, might provide welfare provisions and political influence, as in more than a few towns (including London) they were directly involved in municipal government. To become a member of a guild, formal citizen status was a requirement almost everywhere, but this did not apply to the masters' journeymen and apprentices.

Welfare: Whereas the urban poor would be excluded from municipal office or the guilds, they were tied into the urban community through the welfare provisions supplied

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[18] Miller (2008), 181-85; Halliday (1998), ch's 6-7; Dee (2009), 51-59, 76-82, 98-101.
[19] Friedrichs (2000), 13.
[20] Epstein and Prak (2008); Ogilvie (2010).

by a host of local institutions.[21] Many of these institutions were set up by the church, and even in areas where they became secularised later on, they were normally not operated by local governments, but as foundations. While local authorities might subsidise such foundations, and supervise and coordinate their actions, the majority of welfare provisioning remained privately operated.

Civic militias: European towns were institutionally defined by their privileges, but geographically by their walls, and later ramparts. During the Middle Ages urbanites were expected to defend their town, and also to accompany their lord on military campaigns. Urban troops were usually raised through the guilds or by neighbourhood. From the 16th century onwards, professional troops took over many of the military tasks, but civic militias remained significant as police forces. They were also seen as an important element of civic identity, and were the focal point of urban protest, especially in towns where other political channels were absent.

European citizenship was thus defined by a variety of institutional settings that provided a significant proportion of urbanites with agency and a stake in the local community. Even though the details varied, such arrangements could be found throughout pre-modern Europe. Two significant variations can be observed in time and space, however. Generally speaking, the later Middle Ages saw probably the largest extension of urban autonomy. Expanding states started to clamp down on urban freedoms from the sixteenth century onwards in many parts of Europe. This points to another pattern of variation: in some regions of Europe towns were directly or indirectly involved in the formulation of state policies—most obviously, of course, in Renaissance Italy, where cities and states tended to coincide, later also in the Low Countries, and later still in the British Isles; in others they were not.

2. China

The single most striking aspect of China's institutional history is no doubt the longevity of its system of rule. There may have been interruptions, there were changes in ruling dynasties, the borders changed and were at times overrun by invaders, but when all is

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[21] The best survey remains Lis and Soly (1979)

said and done, China's imperial structure survived in its basic form from 220 BC to the overthrow of the last Qing Emperor in 1911, i.e. for more than 2,000 years. No European polity comes even close to that. China's emperors were themselves convinced that this was the result of their benevolent attitude towards their subjects, an opinion recently given a new lease of life by Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and Bin Wong, who in their analyses of the different developmental trajectories of Europe and China have portrayed the light and usually peaceful touch of China's system of governance, with the high levels of military spending and related low levels of taxation as, paradoxically, perhaps the main reason why the Industrial Revolution was more likely to take off in Europe.[22] However, most historians, including those whose work Weber had so carefully studied one hundred years ago, saw China's Emperors as brutal oppressors, determined to nip the emergence of any potential rivals in the bud. Such potential rivals included independent local authorities as well as commercials social classes. As a result, according to these authors, China remained an agrarian and bureaucratic empire, the fate of which was very much determined by policies developed in the capital and the imperial court.

Two shifts in the historiography of late Imperial China have started to cast doubt on this interpretation. The first is an increasing realization that, if the Kings of England, France and Spain were having massive problems controlling the outer regions of their domains because of the logistical problems they faced in an era of slow communications, how on earth would the Chinese have been able to overcome the handicaps of distance?[23] And as it turns out, like their European counterparts they could not, and were thus in the same position of having to allow regional and local authorities substantial freedom of action, provided these observed certain basic elements of the deal with the political centre. Those included loyalty to the imperial system and resistance against attempts at devolution, maintenance of public order, and the procurement of revenue to support the central military and bureaucratic apparatus.

The second shift concerns the socio-economic character of the Chinese Empire. There is no doubt that China was still overwhelmingly rural in the late eighteenth century. However, it is easy to overlook that Europe too was in that position. Even in

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[22] Rosenthal and Wong (2011).
[23] Skinner (1977b), 19-21

1800, less than ten per cent of European lived in an urban community of 10,000 or more inhabitants. In some countries that percentage, as we saw, was substantially higher, but many other parts of Europe were distinctly less urbanised. For late nineteenth-century China, an urban percentage of 5-6 has been proposed.[24] Clearly, this is lower than the European average, but not completely out of range. Some regions, most notably the Lower Yangtze delta, may have come close to ten per cent, a figure comparable to Germany's in the mid-nineteenth century.[25] It could, moreover, have been higher in earlier times. Skinner estimates that in the thirteenth century, after what has been termed China's 'urban revolution', levels of urbanisation in the Lower Yangtze delta were two percentage points higher than in the middle of the nineteenth century—and possibly more.[26] We should, moreover, never forget that during the pre-modern era perhaps as much as half of the world's urban population lived in Chinese towns and cities.[27]

Urban governance

Chinese towns did not have the same type of formal status as was created by urban privileges in Europe. They were and remained formally part of a hierarchical structure of public administration. As a result, the highest authority in towns was exercised by officials appointed by the Emperor and his government. In practice, however, this small group of outsiders depended heavily on the cooperation of, and self-organisation by, local inhabitants. In the nineteenth century 'many, if not most of the urban services were provided by nongovernmental corporate groups and financed through assessments and dues [levied by these groups] or the income from corporate property', according to William Skinner. Urban leadership developed out of the local gentry and merchants, who used these organisations as a power base, but were also constrained by the membership's aspirations and expectations, and the organisations' *modus operandi*.[28] Three distinct but at the same time overlapping forms of self-organisation were especially important in the towns and cities of Ming and Qing China: the guilds and benevolent societies, to be

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[24] Rozman (1973), 279-85.
[25] de Vries (1984), 45.
[26] Skinner (1977b), 23, 28; Skinner (1977c), 226, 229; also Fei (2009), 1, 9.
[27] Rozman (1973), 6; See also Skinner (1977d), 345; Cartier (2002).
[28] Skinner (1977e), 548(quote)-49.

discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter, and the neighbourhood organisations that will be the focus of this section.

In nineteenth-century Hankou neighbourhoods could be sealed off by special gates or doors, creating a domain of communal safety. The identity of the neighbourhood was reinforced by the common worship at the neighbourhood temple. Already in the eighteenth century, neighbourhood officials (*pao-chia*) had been introduced in Hankou to register the inhabitants and distribute communal tasks among them. The head of the ward (*pao-cheng*) was made responsible for public order, and for assessing inhabitants for tax purposes. The same official was also involved in the provisioning of social welfare and other public services. Officially the appointment was for one year only, probably to prevent abuses, but already in the eighteenth century a limited number of families seems to have cornered most of the appointments, suggesting that the position was one of real influence.[29]

The ward officials were in a delicate position as intermediaries between the local authorities and their neighbourhood constituents, as is demonstrated by protests in seventeenth-century Nanjing. In 1609 petitions were submitted against labour services, including the nightwatch, enforced by neighbourhood captains. Protesters were also unhappy with the fact that gentry families were not included in this type of duty. They demanded a conversion into monetary contributions, and at the same time insisted on the introduction of financial budgets that would be open to public scrutiny. Such petitions were a customary channel of communication between citizens and authorities at the time. Flyers, folk songs and theatre performances were also utilised to mobilise public opinion in seventeenth-century Chinese towns. Citizens' opinions were sought, for example about the introduction of new local taxes. When Ding Bin, an important official in Nanjing, was confronted with the protests against the nightwatch, he consulted delegations of rich and poor representatives from the city's neighbourhoods, convened a meeting of all ward censors, another with government representatives, and finally paid visits to householders in various parts of the city. Clearly, he tried to create a platform of consensus before introducing new legislation.[30]

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[29] Rowe (1989), 81-82, 297, 301-03, 313.
[30] Fei (2009), 29-62, 95.

Although historians of pre-modern China tend to insist on the absence of much public unrest[31] compared to the rebelliousness of European towns, protest did occur in China too. As in Nanjing, the citizens of Hangzhou were dissatisfied by the labour services they were supposed to provide and wanted them converted into money payments. A large-scale uprising, mobilising over 2,000 people in 1582, had to be put down with military force.[32] In seventeenth-century Suzhou, merchants tried to prevent an expansion of the city walls because that would mean the tearing down of their properties. Inhabitants of Gaochun organised five petition campaigns in protest against the building of new walls. Such campaigns were well-organised, by people who were aware of the relevant legislation and tried to use that to their advantage.[33]

The existence of urban citizen organisations—and Skinner has pointed out that even in overseas Chinese communities self-governance was the norm[34]—has given rise to an intense debate about the existence of a 'public sphere' in pre-modern China, similar to what Jürgen Habermas saw as the foundation of democracy in Europe. The problem is the slipperiness of the concept itself. Even in Europe itself there have been widely diverging interpretations, and by implication different dates of its emergence have been proposed, contesting Habermas' own claim that it happened only in the second half of the eighteenth century.[35] However, the essence of Habermas' idea was that at some point the conditions for a genuine public debate about public policies had emerged that the authorities could not ignore and that thus helped to shape those policies. Did such a thing exist in China. Well, 'yes and no' seems to be the best answer.[36] No, because some elements of the concept were clearly missing in China, such as a national press that could address issues of national concern, the natural rights that many eighteenth-century reformers invoked to make their case, or the social contract that had been so dear to reformers of an earlier era.[37] At the same time, other features were available in China,

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[31] E.g. Rowe (1989), 207-15.
[32] Fuma (1993), 65-70.
[33] Fei (2009), 94, 101, 112.
[34] Skinner (1977e), 551.
[35] Calhoun (1992), ch's 8-13.
[36] The most important contributions, by Huang, Rankin, Rowe, and Wakeman, were published in a special issue of *Modern China* 19 (1993), and later published as a separate volume, edited by Timothy Brook and Michael Frolic (1997).
[37] Rowe (1993), 149, 153.

including some of the most important such as 'social associations not dominated by the state' that could act as intermediaries between the state and its citizens.[38] Ultimately, we have to decide what are the most significant elements, while reminding ourselves that the 'public sphere' in nineteenth-century Europe was confined to a quite narrow group of people in most countries. Taking everything into account, the difference between China and Europe seems one of degree rather than of principle. The most important problem at this point, given the paucity of research on pre-modern Chinese urban history, is to gauge the weight of these self-governing organisations in the governance of Chinese towns. This will therefore leave room for disagreements about the precise role of citizens.

Guilds

One such type of institutions was the guild. Guilds were a prominent feature of urban life in China in the Late Imperial period. Information about their nineteenth-century incarnations provides a rich picture of their role in urban life and this suggests that they were late-blossomers compared to European guilds. On the basis of a survey made after the fall of the last emperor in 1911 but proclaiming to start in 1655, Christine Moll-Murata, in the most thorough review of the evidence to date, has concluded that Chinese guilds were mainly a phenomenon of the nineteenth century, albeit with early roots in the sixteenth. Other evidence also shows that the nineteenth century saw a massive expansion of the guild system in China, usually ascribed to the combined effects of economic opportunities of trade expansion and the political and military insecurities of the late Qing period. There is, however, the possibility that her source seriously underestimates earlier guild numbers. Her graph indicates fewer than forty for all of China between 1644 and 1720, while William Rowe has counted fifteen guild foundations in Hankou alone during that same period. And let's not forget that Hankou was basically a new town, established not long before 1644.[39] Beijing, which of course was very much older, already had seventy guilds before the end of the Ming. Subsequently, the number increased to 220 by the end of the eighteenth century, when Moll-Murata's data still

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[38] Rankin (1993), 159 (quote); Huang (1993).
[39] Moll-Murata (2008), 247; Rowe (1984), 277.

show a weak guild presence.[40] Early references to guilds go back to the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.[41] All of this seems to suggest that the numbers of Chinese guilds may have become substantial possibly two centuries after the European guild revolutions of the fourteenth century, while in China they also continued for a century and a half longer than in Europe.

In the beginning, guilds in China were temple associations.[42] Temples would provide meeting space, and common worship acted as a focus for activities and solidarity. The basis for the organisation, especially in the early stages of guild foundations, was almost always the common origin of the membership from a particular region, possibly combined with a shared profession. In Hankou, out of 28 guilds created before 1795 just six were purely professional, the others either based in shared origins, or a combination of origin and profession. Only in the second half of the nineteenth century did purely professional organisations gain the upper hand.[43] Their roots are usually associated with the importance attached by the Chinese to be buried with their relatives, and the organisations have therefore also been called 'native place lodges.[44] This led Weber to conclude that Chinese guilds reinforced what he saw as a backward attachment to the lineage.[45] Returning the corpses of deceased members to their native places was and remained indeed an important feature of these guilds, but it is an unacceptable reduction of their function to focus on just this aspect.

Next to the maintenance of ties with the region of origin, their single most important goal seems to have been to create stability for their trade. They regulated weights and measures, set prices (usually in conjunction with the local authorities), maintained codes of professional conduct, and lobbied local government to promote the interests of the membership. For those familiar with European guilds, the most notable difference is the absence of 'monopolies'. There is no hint of an exclusive access to particular trades for the members of this or that guild. Membership was anyway available

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[40] Belsky (2005), 41-42.
[41] Moll-Murata (2008), 218.
[42] Goodman (1995), 91-92.
[43] Rowe (1984), 277; Goodman (1995), 119-21, 137-38.
[44] Belsky (2005), 6.
[45] Weber &&

to everyone who fitted the membership profile, i.e. originated from the region, or was active in the profession covered by the guild.[46]

Guilds would hold meetings where members could discuss issues of common concern. Inevitably, some families would become prominent as guild officers and occupy more than what was perhaps their fair share of appointments. There are, however, recorded examples of ordinary members exposing to the local authorities abuses in their guild, suggesting that the dominance of such prominent members was constrained by an outside authority. Common worship of patron deities helped reinforce the bonds of solidarity within the guild community, as did the extensive building programmes that many guilds undertook. Usually starting off with a temple *cum* meeting place, guilds would ultimately own huge compounds that included hostels for itinerant merchants and artisans, and a stage for the performance of plays and operas. The *Hui-chan* guild of Hankou, for example, owned a small temple complex in the suburbs, when in 1694 twenty-four of the most prominent members decided to raise money for a new and more conspicuous set of buildings located within the town walls. The compound would consist of around one hundred different rooms. In 1717 a new West Hall was added, in 1721 another lecture hall. The complex came to occupy a substantial part of a new street, Hsin-an Street that was maintained by the guild and leading to a pier in the river also built and maintained by the guild. When the pier was destroyed by floods in 1796, members could supply funds for its reconstruction in exchange for bonds.[47] As will be discussed shortly, guilds were also important providers of social assistance.

These guilds were initiated by the members themselves, and could expect to be sanctioned by the government,[48] either in writing or otherwise in practice. As we already saw, they became an increasingly important feature of urban governance. Surveying the evidence, it seems fair to say that Chinese guilds were first and foremost civic organisations that sought to integrate their mobile membership into the framework of the urban community, while at the same time allowing the urban authorities a channel into the worlds of migrants, businessmen, and the crafts.

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[46] Rowe (1984), 294-97.
[47] Rowe (1984), 303-06.
[48] Fewsmith (1983), 622.

Poor relief

China had a rudimentary system of social welfare that swung into action especially in times of food scarcity but also during other major catastrophes. This was the well-known granary system, maintained by the government throughout the empire.[49] On top of that, the authorities tried to control prices, to provide ordinary people access to food at all times. As in other pre-modern societies, price controls only had a limited effect, and there was much demand for routine welfare, not least in China's large urban centres.[50] This type of welfare was left almost completely to private initiative, albeit with the active support of the local authorities.

Important providers of welfare were once again the guilds. Their compounds would often include hostels providing shelter to mobile workers and merchants.[51] More importantly, they paid for funerals, sometimes in the guild burial grounds, but also for the return of members' corpses to their native region to be buried there together with their forebears.[52] Next to the guilds, so-called benevolent societies (*shan-t'ang*) emerged in the late sixteenth century. The first two were set up in 1590 in Yucheng, in the Lower Yangzhi delta, but the model then quickly spread to other towns and cities. The original source of inspiration were societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals; the poor were portrayed as similarly hapless creatures, who had to be rescued from the worst excesses of their dependence on more powerful humans. The benevolent societies had limited membership, with each member pledging to contribute a certain amount of money and time to the cause. They were almost exclusively urban organisations. The division of labour with the guilds remained quite unclear. In some instances the benevolent society seems to have been a subdivision of the guild, in other cases it was a parallel organisation, and in still others it was completely separate from the guild. Benevolent societies did, however, employ the guild model for their own organisation. They also owned property and kept written records of their financial transactions. Beside food, they provided medical assistance, in an attempt to prevent outbreaks of epidemic diseases.[53] To be eligible for charity, poor people had to be recommended. Familiarity with

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[49] Will and Wong (1991).
[50] Rowe (1989), 94, 99.
[51] Rowe (1984), 317; Johnson (1995), 132; Belsky (2005), 138.
[52] Goodman (1995), 90; Johnson (1995), 136; Belsky (2005), 121.
[53] Smith (2009), 36, 46, 48, 50, 56, 98, 120, 220-21; Rowe (1989), 105-07, 112.

benefactors, and therefore patronage, was an important element of the system. Paupers who were caught drinking or gambling could expect to be excluded.[54]

There were strong incentives for charity in pre-modern China. Benefactors would advertise their acts in pamphlets, in the expectation that it would enhance their social status. Promoting the welfare of society as a whole was promoted by Confucianism as a goal worth pursuing and the rich were encouraged to shoulder this type of responsibility. It was suggested that members of benevolent societies would hand over as much as ten percent of their income. Obviously, charity was also perceived as a prop of the existing social order, a vital element in the maintenance of public order, as well as a means to gain influence, or at least wax popular with local authorities. During times of crisis, the authorities actively supported the work of benevolent societies, as happened for example in 1641 in the towns of the Yangzhi delta.[55] In the nineteenth century such support became more regular, and sometimes even took the form of specific taxes being designated to support the work of the benevolent societies.[56] Beside poor relief, guilds and benevolent societies took on the provisioning of other public services; these included fire-fighting, the maintenance of streets—and in the nineteenth century also street lighting, bridges, and public parks, as well as ferries, all of them accessible to the general public.[57]

Charitable trusts had no legal status and in this formal sense Max Weber was correct in his observation that they were different from their European equivalents. In practice, however, they owned property, were self-governing, and worked in close cooperation with the civic administration.[58] As in Europe, they provided a range of services to people in need who could make a moral but not a legal claim to be assisted. For its beneficiaries, this dimension of citizenship was therefore precarious.

Urban defence

In spite of Rosenthal and Wong's claim that, compared to Europe, China was a relatively peaceful society, Chinese towns were heavily fortified. As a matter of fact, the Chinese

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[54] Smith (2009), 84, 143-47.
[55] Smith (2009), 5, 60, 114, 121, 234, 248-78; also Rowe (1989), 92; Goodman (1995), 110.
[56] Johnson (1995), 108.
[57] Rowe (1984), 318-19; Rowe (1989), 139-41,169; Johnson (1995), 144
[58] Rowe (1989), 123-24.

character *cheng* can mean 'wall' as well as 'city'. In modern Chinese the word for town is *chengshi*, a combination of 'wall' and 'market'. It is therefore fair to say that urban defences were an integral part of the whole urban concept. Although precise figures are lacking, the number of walled towns in pre-modern China is reckoned to have numbered several thousand. Especially during the Ming, town walls were constructed and reconstructed on a scale unprecedented in world history.[59] This was not always popular. As we saw, Nanjing citizens whose houses would be destroyed by the new ramparts protested vehemently.[60]

These towns were guarded by permanent garrisons, and I found no traces of a parallel organisation of civic militias recruited from the ranks of the inhabitants. However, in 1799 during the White Lotus rebellion, and again in 1853 during the Taiping, the guilds of Hankou helped organise local defence.[61] This also happened in other towns during the Taiping, such as Shanghai where 500 'braves' were recruited in 1860.[62] In seventeenth-century Nanjing there are hints of a (controversial) nightwatch recruited from among the inhabitants, but it is impossible to say with any certainty that this was an equivalent of the European militia system.[63] It seems that medieval Chinese towns did have a system of watches (*huofu*), manned by towns' inhabitants. They were to patrol the walled cities and their suburbs at night. During the sixteenth century participation in the nightwatch was converted into a cash payment, and thus became part of the fiscal system instead of the system of labour services. In Hangzhou this happened after protests by citizens who were fed up with this and other forced labour contributions.[64] In 1641 it was suggested in Taicang that the members of the local benevolent society would take up archery practice, but nothing seems to have happened.[65]

This absence might be related to the claim that China was a relatively peaceful society. The fact is, however, that China was plagued, at intervals, by large-scale and destructive domestic conflict, for example during the Ming-Qing transition of the seventeenth century, the White Lotus rebellion of the late eighteenth century, and the

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[59] Farmer (2000), 463, 467-68, 486.
[60] Goodman (1995), 77-83
[61] Rowe (1984), 319-20
[62] Goodman (1995), 126.
[63] Fei (2009), 29.
[64] Fuma (1993), 48-49.
[65] Smith (2009), 141.

Taiping rebellion of the nineteenth. The elaborate fortification of Chinese towns also seems to contradict the idea that peace was the default situation in China. It was, to say the least, not taken for granted by Chinese towns themselves. It is possible, however, that the pattern of domestic violence in China was different: instead of relatively small incidents separated by short intervals, China may have suffered from a pattern of rare, but extraordinarily intense domestic conflict that made a militia system less practical.

China's pre-modern citizenship regime
In a recent paper Debin Ma has argued that Europe's advance over China should be explained as a result of principal-agent flaws in the Chinese state—in other words as a problem of citizenship. The preceding survey adds ammunition to that argument, but with a twist. Rather than the oppressive nature highlighted by previous generations of scholars, Ma sees the weakness of the central government as its major flaw. Yes, it was remarkably stable compared to its European counterparts, and also managed to make do with low levels of taxation. The result, however, according to Ma's argument, was that local levels of government had hardly any money to spend. Therefore, they had to raise revenue informally, creating a system that was riddled by corruption. The quickest way to get rich in China, it seems, was by exploiting ordinary folk.[66] That is not quite the way it looks from the bottom up. Our investigation strongly suggests an urban society with substantial autonomy, a robust civil society, significant levels of citizen organisation with active craft and merchant guilds, as well as social welfare provisions cutting across lineage solidarities. We found few traces, however, of military forms of citizenship.

3. Near East
Although it has a different shape, for example because of an important French strand, the historiography of the Near East[67] has gone through a trajectory not unlike the Chinese. Weber's picture of the region's social make-up as atomistic and clan-based—a structure that he saw reflected in the shape of its towns with their narrow winding alleys and courtyards hidden from view—dominated historians' portrayals of the past for much of

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[66] Ma (2011); also Zelin (1985).
[67] I have disregarded the North-African and Iberian parts of the Mamluk and Ottoman Empires, apart from Egypt.

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the twentieth century. The indigenous people, in this version of their history, were oppressed by an empire whose elites were pastoralists with a strong military outlook. Urban interests were merely tolerated, and only encouraged for fiscal reasons. The central government took little notice, and urban pressure groups were no match for bureaucrats. The region's economic underdevelopment was an almost inevitable result of this fixated socio-political structure.

Two things have changed in recent decades. Scholars have stopped taking at face value the self-portrait provided by documents from the central archives. Instead, the Ottoman Empire in particular, has come to be portrayed as a remarkably flexible organisation. As Şevket Pamuk put it: 'The Ottomans were flexible and pragmatic from the start'.[68] While the picture of the top of the pyramid was changing, new perspectives also emerged on its foundations. Scholars called into question the idea of a powerless society.[69] A range of arguments was put forward to question Weber's portrayal. It was, for example, pointed out that the cities of the Near East had been among the most populous and most advanced of Eurasia during the 9th—11th centuries, when Europeans were still trying to come to terms with the trauma's of the collapse of the Roman Empire.[70] Also during the Ottoman period (early 16th to early 20th centuries) did the major cities of the region, after a period of decay, grow to sizes in the same range as Europe's metropolises; not exactly a sign of stunted development.[71] More importantly still, in the context of this paper, scholars began to uncover a rich communal life in these cities that seemed to contradict the claim that society was constrained by family and clan structures.[72] These shifts have rejuvenated the debate about 'the Islamic city'. The whole concept is now very much in doubt, even in the revised version that was launched by Ira Lapidus in his famous 1967 book *Muslim cities in the later Middle Ages*. In that book Lapidus questioned Weber's portrait of the Middle East, but then sought to replace it by a superior version, informed by a deep knowledge of the available sources in Arabic that had been inaccessible to Weber himself. Lapidus demonstrated persuasively that the cities he concentrated on, Aleppo in Syria and Cairo, had communal structures,

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[68] Pamuk (2004), 228. See also Eldem, Goffman, Masters (1999), 11; Barkey (2008), 12.
[69] E.g. Faroqhi (1986); Raymond (1995); Raymond (2002); Adanir (2006), 158.
[70] Abu-Lughod (1989), 357.
[71] Raymond (1984), 5-8.
[72] This will be discussed in detail below.

specifically neighbourhoods, religious communities, and brotherhoods and youth associations, all of which shaped the lives of urbanites. However, none of these had the kind of independence allotted to European corporations he insisted, as urban governance remained the purview of bureaucrats appointed by the central government.[73] Recent voices in the debate object that the whole concept suggests that religion was somehow the defining characteristic of these societies, that many of the generalisations were using one or two examples to characterise a huge area stretching from Morocco to the Iranian border and beyond, and that the whole idea of using the European experience as a template made it impossible to think about the Near East on its own terms.[74]

This critique has not managed to put the 'essentialist' approach to the urban life in the Near East completely to rest.[75] Nonetheless, in what follows we will want to trace the details of local organisation in the towns and the cities of the Near East, without assuming beforehand that they were inferior to those of the West, or that they were completely dominated by the central government institutions. At the same time, we will want to avoid the pitfall of assuming that the presence of identical elements somehow imply that the structures they made together must therefore have been identical as well. For reasons that will become clear in due course, the military and economic dimensions of citizenship (militias and guilds) will be discussed together rather than separately in this section.

Urban governance

Under Ottoman rule, cities had no independent statute. The highest local authority was the governor, or *pasha*, and he would always be appointed by the central government. The same applied to other high offices. This was most obviously so in the capital Istanbul, where the imperial and local governments were almost indistinguishable, but it applied equally in major towns such as Aleppo, Cairo or Damascus.[76] When looking at systems of local governance from a formal point of view, there is no denying that it was a mere branch of the central executive. Still, in day to day practice the situation was not

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[73] Lapidus (1967); and for a summary Lapidus (1969).
[74] Abu-Lughod (1987), 155-56, 159, 162; Feldbauer (2002), 81-83; Işin (2005), 39, 45-46.
[75] Kuran (2011) displays elements of this approach.
[76] Mantran (1962), 124-25; Khoury (2008), 78.

exactly so black-and-white, as we can see from local politics in eighteenth-century Aleppo.

Located in the north of what is now Syria, Aleppo at the time had c. 100,000 inhabitants, and was of course best known for its international trade.[77] Due to this long-distance commerce, Aleppo was a city with an ethnically as well as religiously mixed population. Such mixtures were characteristic of all major cities in the Ottoman Empire. As everywhere else, the highest official was the *pasha*, who was appointed for one year only, and then moved on to a similar posting somewhere else in the Empire. The first was appointed in 1520, shortly after the arrival of the Ottomans. Their invasion had been welcomed by Aleppo's inhabitants, who had suffered from many abuses under the preceding Mamluk regime.[78] The governor was primarily responsible for the military security of the city and its hinterland, and had to ensure the transfer of tax revenues to Istanbul. He was in charge of the Janissary garrison, but also had his own forces which were mainly used for controlling the countryside and ensuring the regular flow of revenue.

The governor was theoretically in complete charge of Aleppo; in practice he enlisted the help of many others. For one, he was advised by a council, or *divan*, composed of important local officials and notables; it was 'the most important formal setting for local participation in policymaking'. Its membership included the qadi, who was the highest judicial official and like the pasha appointed by Istanbul, a variable number of *a'yan*, or local notables, the leading *ulama* (religious leader), the head of the *asharaf*, who were families that claimed direct descent from the Prophet, and finally the commanding officer of the Janissary corps. This council met regularly, but no minutes were taken.[79] The *a'yan* have been characterised as 'local gentry'. They owned landed properties in the region, but their power came mainly from their hereditary control over tax farms. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these families were in the ascendant. Their dominance was, however, checked by other groups in the city.

On the one hand there were the *asharaf*, an especially coherent sub-set of the Muslim community. The Muslims were about eighty per cent of the population,

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[77] Abdel-Nour (1982), 69 and other works cited in the following footnotes.
[78] Masters (1999), 21-22.
[79] Marcus (1989), 82; Bodman (1963), 34.

Christians another fifteen per cent, with Jews making up most of the remaining five per cent.[80] On the other hand were the Janissaries, the garrison of professional soldiers who became increasingly integrated in the local artisan and working class community. The Janissaries, who were 5-10,000 strong, were a particularly active political force. They fought pitched battles with the governor's own *dali* troops, for example in 1775 when the Janissaries refused to accompany the governor on a military campaign and managed to oust him from the city. They were supported in their protests by a large file of complaints, collected by the *qadi* from various sections of the local population. In 1784 the Janissaries again removed a *pasha* from office and from the city itself, and in the early years of the nineteenth century they were effectively masters of the city.[81] The Janissaries relied on support from the guilds and neighbourhoods, as well as on their own weapons.

Neighbourhoods and guilds were equally important in Cairo. The Egyptian capital, like Aleppo, was governed by a *pasha* and *qadi*, both appointed by the central government. At the same time, it showed 'a high level of popular dissent'.[82] The city was subdivided into 53 neighbourhoods, each headed by a neighbourhood leader, or *shaykh al-hārah*.[83] Their responsibilities were to maintain public order, and help collect local taxes.[84] Next to the neighbourhoods, a large number of guilds organised the local population on a professional basis. Janisseries were active participants in Cairo's local politics, much as they were in Aleppo. In other words, the city had a plethora of community organisations, endorsed by the government but not completely controlled by it.[85] This was true of Ottoman cities more generally.[86] The balance might vary from one town to another, but local community organisations were found everywhere as active participants in urban governance.[87] In times of crisis, they provided the contexts for articulating grievances, and mobilising the forces of opposition.[88]

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[80] Marcus (1989), 40.
[81] Bodman (1963), 55-69; Marcus (1989), 73, 83-92; Raymond (2002), 67-74.
[82] Zubaida (2008), 230.
[83] Abu-Lughod (1971), 71.
[84] Raymond (1995), 38-39.
[85] Raymond (1995); Raymond (2002).
[86] Compare Barbir (1980), 89-90; Schatkowski Schilcher (1983), 107-10; Khoury (1997), 2;
[87] Raymond (1984), 5-19; Adanis (2006), 161.
[88] Raymond (2002).

The Medieval period, i.e. the centuries before the arrival of the Ottomans, is unfortunately poorly documented. The most authoritative work by far on the period, Lapidus' 1967 book, displays a strong emphasis on the dominance of the Mamluk conquerors that must strike the twenty-first-century reader as out of balance.[89] Other evidence is hard to come by. In Cairo, we are told, the Ottomans preserved much of the institutional structure as they found it when conquering the city in 1517.[90] The level of public services in medieval Cairo was, moreover, unheard of in Western Europe with its presumably superior urban institutions. Cairo had street lighting in the Mamluk period, whereas Amsterdam was the first Western European city to introduce this—in the late seventeenth century. Cairo's Great Hospital, built in the late thirteenth century, provided patients with their own beds and bed clothes, as well as private chamber pots, despite its capacity of 6,000.[91] Were these fruits of superior centralised power, or the results of a deep commitment to the local community? We simply do not know at this point.

Economic and military protection

Craft and merchant guilds were a common phenomenon in Ottoman towns and cities. Especially those of Istanbul, Aleppo, Jerusalem and Cairo—all among the larger cities of the Empire and Istanbul and Cairo indeed of the pre-modern world more generally—have been studied in such detail that we can discuss them with confidence. One thing that the modern scholarship on Ottoman guilds has achieved is to dispel the idea that these were mere instruments in the hands of the authorities to oversee and control the mass of the population.[92] Instead, a much richer picture has emerged.[93] As in Europe, the organisational form of the guild was not clearly distinguished from other community organisations, but for purposes of comparison we are focusing here on professional guilds, whose membership consisted of people with similar professions, either as craftsmen, or as shopkeepers and merchants, or working in the service sector. This would therefore include the water carriers, for instance, a profession unknown to the best of my

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[89] Lapidus (1967); Cahen (1959), 76 strikes a more balanced note.
[90] Raymond (2000), 195; also Raymond (1984), 19, and Raymond (1985), 130.
[91] Raymond (2000), 121, 244.
[92] This was the position defended by Gabriel Baer in various articles that opened up the topic: see Baer (1970), and part III 'The Turkish guilds' in Baer (1982).
[93] As in Europe, the modern historiography of Ottoman guilds emphasises their 'flexibility': Yi (2004), 112; Faroqhi (2005), 18; Yildirim (2008), 80.

knowledge in Western Europe; the membership of the Cairo water carriers' guild numbered over 3,000 in the eighteenth century.[94]

Guilds were numerous, as well as popular in the sense that they organised a very substantial part of urban populations in the Ottoman Empire.[95] Istanbul had 76 guilds in the beginning of the seventeenth century and possibly twice that number by the end of the century.[96] Eighteenth-century Cairo numbered 200-250 guilds, out of which 39 had a membership of 1,000 and more.[97] It is, unfortunately, very unclear how and especially when they originated. There can be no doubt that guilds existed in Byzantium as late as the twelfth century, if not necessarily in the provinces. Some of these guilds were initiated by the state, others by craftsmen themselves.[98] Some scholars claim that they disappeared afterwards and were only revived by the Ottoman authorities, which would then help explain their top-down mode of operation.[99] Cairo, however, had professional organisations before the arrival of the Ottomans.[100] Given the current state of scholarship, there is no way we will be able to decide here one way or another. The fact of the matter is that we only have information about the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

It is possible that some of these guilds were created on the authorities' initiative, but it is unlikely that this was always what happened.[101] It is therefore better to describe the guilds as an interface between the members and the authorities. The election of guild officials is a case in point. The headmen, usually known as *shaykh*, were officially appointed by a judge, or *qadi*, but their names were put forward by the members themselves. Moreover, a delegation of the members had to confirm before the *qadi* that they were willing to accept the *shaykh* as their headman. Even if they did, they might lose faith in the *shaykh* later on, and there are quite a few instances of guilds asking the court to dismiss their *shaykh*—and of the courts acting on such a proposal. Guilds in Cairo had such power over their own governors, but this was likewise true in Istanbul, despite the

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[94] Raymond (1973-4), 514.
[95] Baer (1970), 18-20.
[96] Yi (2004), 42, 128.
[97] Raymond (1973-4), 508-14.
[98] Maniatis (2001), 341-42; Yildirim (2008), 77.
[99] Baer (1970); Maniatis (2001), 351-57.
[100] Winter (1992), 248.
[101] Masters (1988), 201.

close control that the government imposed on its capital city.[102] Another indication of the guilds' relative autonomy were the membership meetings, where issues relating to the trade would be discussed.[103] There is no clear indication, however, that they had their own sources of income.

Ottoman guilds regulated the trade, in the sense that they might set quality controls and prices for both raw materials and final products. All of this would happen in consultation with the authorities, but not necessarily on the initiative of those authorities. Guilds regularly made their wishes known by petitioning the authorities, and it seems that their proposals were usually accepted and absorbed into the body of regulatory documents. The *shaykh* was the arbiter in trade disputes. Ottoman guilds also had an important role in the collection of taxes, possibly more significant than their European counterparts, although these too were sometimes made responsible for the collection of excises, depending on the trade. Like European craftsmen and shopkeepers, guilds in the Ottoman Empire were infused with an ideology of equality.

The Ottoman guilds provided only limited social assistance. They did not have funds set aside for that purpose, let alone separate institutions to take care of members in their old age or those falling ill. However, they did organise festivities that could reinforce ties of solidarity within the guild community, as well as common meals. Istanbul guilds were known to organise days out in the countryside, complete with picnic baskets to refresh the participants during the trip.[104] Those in Cairo would participate in public parades with their own float, drawn by two asses.[105]

Whereas in Europe the guilds, insofar as they had military functions, seem to have lost them in the Early Modern period, the opposite happened in the Ottoman Empire. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries members of the Janissary infantry troops increasingly joined the guilds. They did so for economic reasons. These troops would be stationed as permanent garrisons in particular towns, with little else on their hands than the occasional watch. Their pay scales reflected the low intensity of their military duties,

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[102] Raymond (1973-4), 552-57; Masters (1988), 201-03; Ghazaleh (1999), 36, 43-44, 47-48; Yi (2004), 72-74.
[103] Raymond (1973-4), 559-60; Yi (2004), 60.
[104] Yi (2004), 85.
[105] Raymond (1973-4), 568-74.

and this forced many Janissaries into civilian side-jobs. Because the Janissaries corps held various privileges, in taxation and otherwise, a reverse movement was simultaneously taking place: individual craftsmen and traders would join a corps to enjoy the privileges and also the protection such an armed organisation was offering. Clearly, there was a price to be paid, usually 5-10 percent of one's capital at death. But many considered it a price worth paying.

As a result of this double movement, the world of the guilds and the world of the military became intimately related. Guilds did not usually involve themselves in local politics, outside the realm of their professions.[106] This in itself may have contributed to the impression that they were somehow different and less effective than European guilds. Perhaps, however, historians have been looking in the wrong places. Even when the guilds were mostly quiet, their Janissary members were politically very active indeed. In Aleppo they became one of the most important political forces during the second half of the eighteenth century.[107]

Welfare

Provisioning for the poor (*zakat*) is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Together with the voluntary alms (*sadaqa*) it is mentioned explicitly in the Quran as a means to please God. Biographies of important figures would never fail to mention their contribution to such pious causes.[108] Islamic welfare was, at the same time, handicapped by the absence of a formal church organisation that could coordinate charity.[109] Having said that, the towns and cities of the Near East had their fair share of charities, including pensioners' homes, hospitals, caravanserais, funds for the release of prisoners of war, as well as the poor relief provided by religious organisations.[110] At in Europe it is difficult to detect a system in the variety of charities. Nonetheless, two types of welfare seem to have been especially common in the region.

The first of these systems was neighbourhood welfare. In eighteenth-century Aleppo, the headman of the neighbourhood collected funds for a range of public services.

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[106] For guild riots in Istanbul, however, Yi (2004), 213-32.
[107] Bodman (1963), 106-25; Masters (1989), 73, 83-93; Raymond (2002), 67-74.
[108] Lev (2005), 4, 21, 28.
[109] Lev (2005), 157; Marcus (1989), 212.
[110] Lev (2005), ch. 6.

These included the maintenance of public spaces, the removal of waste, as well as welfare for resident paupers.[111] The second system consisted of the well-known *waqfs*. These were usually urban institutions.[112] Technically, a *waqf* was 'an object which was endowed to a specific purpose for eternity'.[113] They were usually set up by well-off donors, and these could include the Sultan himself. Ottoman sultans created important institutions with a *waqf* governance structure in all important cities of their empire. These *waqf* foundations included mosques, madrassas (i.e. religious schools) and also welfare institutions. Other *waqfs* were set up by local elites, and might acquire additional funding in the course of time.

The *waqfs* have been criticised, most recently by Timur Kuran, as one of the institutions holding back the economic development of pre-modern Islamic societies. They compared unfavourably with European corporations because they were family rather than community-based, and because their governance structure was set in stone by the founders; Islamic law did not permit changes.[114] The comparison is unnecessarily critical of the *waqf* for two reasons. First, the appropriate counterpart in Europe was the foundation rather than the corporation.[115] Foundations were very common in the realm of welfare, often retained strong links with the family of the patron and could be as long-lasting and inflexible as a *waqf*.[116] Secondly, Islamic jurisprudence did acknowledge changing practices; for the *waqf*, this dynamic has recently been described as 'a dialectic between practice and legal theory'.[117]

Cities, citizenship and the state in the Ottoman Empire
The whole issue of citizenship in the Ottoman Empire hinges on one's evaluation of the power of the Ottoman state. Many scholars have argued that it was a strong state, because it managed to control local—and more specifically urban—authorities. Others have raised objections to this view, pointing out that Islam itself did not acknowledge the state as such, but also that the Ottomans were subject to the same technological constraints on

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[111] Marcus (1989), 214-15; 297-98.
[112] Lev (2005), 68; Gerber (2010), 75.
[113] van Leeuwen (1999), 11.
[114] Kuran (2011), 110-14.
[115] Auke Rijpma pointed this out to me; see also Işin (2008), 39.
[116] For a European example, see Cavallo (1995).
[117] van Leeuwen (1999), 65

communication that limited the effectiveness of other imperial governments seeking to dominate large territories.[118] The position of the pashas is a case in point. Their annual rotation prevented the development of local roots and 'going native', forcing them to nurture their relationship with the central government. At the same time, it made them more dependent on the information from, and collaboration with local elites, who were thus able to manipulate the government agents and promote their own agendas.[119] The stability of the Ottoman Empire has been ascribed by some to precisely this delicate balance between central control and local participation. There is general agreement that the central government was more in control in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century than later, and that particularly in the course of the eighteenth century it embarked on a course of decentralisation. Due to a dearth of local studies it is currently difficult to gauge how much local agency the early stages of Ottoman rule allowed for, not to mention the centuries preceding the arrival of the Ottomans.

With these caveats we can still say that within urban communities the Near East displayed various types of organisations that encompassed the inhabitants in passive, but also in all kinds of active ways. Neigbourhoods, religious organisations, *waqfs*, and guilds were very much in evidence in urban communities, and even if their role became more prominent over the course of time, they already existed in the earlier period. Again, it is very much an issue of interpretation how one compares these to their European counterparts. Much has been made of their dependence on official permission and regulation. There is, however, a strong tendency in the literature to put European corporations on a pedestal of complete autonomy, and find similar institutions elsewhere falling short of that ideal. The truth of the matter is that complete autonomy was rare in Europe itself. Corporations received their privileges from a superior authority and those privileges could be revoked. Authorities regularly interfered in the 'domestic' arrangements of corporations, and insisted on a say in their governance. If they did not directly appoint the directors of such corporations, they usually wanted to at least confirm the members' choice. In the Near East, neighbourhoods, guilds and so on were held

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[118] Gerber (2010), 68.
[119] Khoury (2008).

collectively responsible for their actions. Even if organisations had no legal personality, they were routinely treated by the authorities as if they had.[120]

Conclusion: Citizenship and agency in pre-modern Eurasia

This comparative history of citizenship-as-practice in late medieval and early modern Eurasia points up—as was to be expected—similarities as well as differences. Three major points do stand out, however.

The first is that there was a lot going on in China and the Middle East that could be defined as 'citizenship', i.e. established mutual claims and expectations between inhabitants and authorities. These claims and expectations were institutionalised in a variety of organisational forms that stood at the interface of government and society. Even if technically the authorities were ultimately in charge, it was almost impossible to determine who under routine circumstances had the final say: the members of various local organisations or the authorities. These organisations produced a mixture of public and club goods, helping to lubricate social and economic processes. No doubt such arrangements were beneficial to the membership of these organisations; otherwise they would have been extremely difficult to sustain. However, across Eurasia there seems to have been a general understanding that such benefits had a positive impact beyond the membership and worked simultaneously for the 'common good'. Everywhere is Eurasia three types of organisations especially created agency for citizens: professional guilds, neighbourhoods and religious fraternities. European towns, moreover, had their civic militias, not found in a similar form in either China or the Near East.

The second is the position of urban government. It is quite clear that as a separate institution this was present in Europe and absent elsewhere.[121] In both China and the Near East local governance was part of the national administrative structure, in Europe it had its own position, which was, moreover, articulated in a series of documents that were highly valued by European urban communities. Literally, because they were willing to spend substantial amounts of money on the obtaining—and later the preservation—of such 'privileges'. As is well known, these urban privileges emerged out of the feudal

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[120] Cohen (1984), 46.
[121] Cf. Friedrichs (2009) and (2010)

system in Europe, and other parts of Eurasia simply did not experience a similar prolonged period in which central authority was so weak that it had to parcel out its sovereign powers. Urban constitutions in Europe created a platform for a specific political ideology that we might call 'urban republicanism'.[122] Nothing similar seems to have emerged in other parts of Eurasia. Although it is tempting to see this urban republicanism as in some way connected to the emergence of capitalism, it has been pointed out that in actual fact it was quite opposed to capitalist practices, for example in its insistence on social egalitarianism. Urban republicanism was the ideology of the craftsman and shopkeeper, not of the merchant-entrepreneur.[123] In other words, Europe's urban ideology may have been different, but why it would contribute to a trajectory of social development and economic growth, whereas Confucianism and Islam presumably held back their respective societies, is not immediately obvious.

The third element might provide a solution to the conundrum. This is the position of towns and urban interests in the national domain. Because local government was seen as a part of the national executive, towns in China or the Near East had no direct representation in national policy institutions. They could petition the national government, as Istanbul's guilds used to do in the seventeenth century, or send delegations to the capital, as the inhabitants of Aleppo did in 1784 after ousting the governor from their city,[124] but they had no platform from which to articulate their particular demands and interests on a routine basis. In Europe such institutions were available to towns, in the form of regional and national parliaments. Having said that, an important caveat is in order. It is generally agreed among historians of the period that the zenith of urban autonomy was in the late Middle Ages. From the sixteenth century, 'voracious states'—I'm borrowing Wim Blockmans' felicitous phrase—were clamping down on urban 'freedoms' in much of Northern and Central Europe, but also in France, for example, under Louis XIV in the seventeenth century.[125] This is significant for two reasons. The first is that precisely in this respect there was no pattern that applied throughout Europe. French or Polish towns were not obviously more autonomous than

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[122] Schilling (1992).
[123] Friedrichs (1975); DuPlessis and Howell (1982), Blickle (1981).
[124] Bodman (1963), 115.
[125] Blockmans (1994).

those of China or the Near East. They too had to accept very detailed interference from the central government. All important officers were appointed by the government, or the government would insist on its candidates being 'elected'. The second reason why this matters is because this restriction of urban freedoms and independence, its citizenship if you will, was happening precisely during the period when Europe was making its economic leap forward. The implication is that contrasting 'Europe' against 'Asia' is a cultural red herring. Instead, what we need is a more specific understanding of the citizenship regimes in precisely those areas where Europe's economy was advancing most obviously, i.e. Italy in the late Middle Ages, the Low Countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and England in the eighteenth.

Three distinct stages can be distinguished in the emergence of that dynamic state-city interaction. First, in the city-states of Italy during the 11th-14th centuries. In many ways, city and state were identical during that stage. Due to their small sizes, however, city-states were vulnerable to outside threats. The second stage was the urban federation, as it emerged in the Low Countries during the sixteenth century, which in the long run again suffered from problems of scale, combined with internal sclerosis. The third stage was parliamentary rule as it was introduced in England during the Glorious Revolution in 1689. In all three systems, state policies were to an important extent determined by urban interests and their representatives.[126] This succession of city-and-state connections looks like a more promising explanation for how citizenship contributed to patterns of social change and economic growth. Rather than the property regimes highlighted by North c.s., which may have been less diverse throughout Europe than they suggest, this paper proposes that the combination of citizenship and urban agency in pre-modern states may have produced the effect that Weber predicted.

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[126] This is a specification of the thesis put forward by van Zanden, Buringh and Bosker (2011)

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