Clan, Kongsi and Credit: The Moral Economy of Chinese Commerce: summary

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Singapore's counterpart to the Calvinist ethic of Geneva was an institutional economy of trust built by Chinese migrants from families, dialect and district associations, temples, sworn brotherhoods and partnerships. Weber's thesis that Confucian values hindered capitalism, and the later claim that "Asian values" explained East Asian growth, both explain less than the institutions through which Chinese merchants shared information, enforced obligations and punished default. The associations founded from 1819 onwards and the secret societies recorded from 1820 provided mutual aid, arbitration and private order until the colonial state registered the societies in 1869, created the Chinese Protectorate in 1877 and banned the societies from 1890. The ethic of *xinyong* turned reputation into collateral within these networks, while the remittance firms, 49 in 1887 and some 200 at their peak, made Singapore the hub through which migrants across Southeast Asia sent money to southern China. The gradual transition from personal to institutional trust,

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completed by the Chinese banks and the modern regulatory state, left a legacy of family business, long-term relationships and informal channels that bankers, advisers and compliance officers in Singapore still encounter today.

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