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Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences

Chinese Business History Webinar

An American Salesman in China: Local Markets, Global Business, and Competition in Marketing Cigarettes during the 1920s

Professor Elisabeth Köll
University of Notre Dame

Date and Time: December 10, 2021 (Fri), 9:00-10:00 am (HKT) / December 9, 2021 (Thu), 8:00-9:00 pm (EST)

Abstract
This talk is based on a current book project and discusses the competition between foreign and Chinese firms trying to capture the local cigarette markets in Northern China during the early Republican period. Using archival records generated by Frank Canaday, a marketing agent working for British American Tobacco (BAT) in China at the time, my presentation will explore the business and broader socio-economic aspects of wholesale distribution and consumer-oriented marketing of cigarettes in the countryside. Whereas we know quite a bit about the business and consumption of tobacco in urban areas, my analysis focuses on the business of advertising and selling cigarettes in the countryside of Shandong and Hebei provinces during the 1920s. The talk will discuss the Western and Chinese agents' considerable efforts to incorporate local venues and popular customs into their work which was not always aligned with the headquarters' strategies back in Shanghai. Canaday's field-based observations help us to understand the business strategies and dynamics of BAT at a time when the company moved towards reducing its foreign salesforce while strengthening its Chinese wholesale and distribution networks in order to secure long-term success of their products in the rural marketplace.
About the Speaker
Elisabeth Köll is Professor of History, William Payden Collegiate Chair and Chair of the Department of History at the University of Notre Dame. She pursued her undergraduate education at the University of Bonn in Germany and at Fudan University, Shanghai. She received her Ph.D. in Chinese Business History from Oxford University where she was a Rhodes Scholar. She is the author of *From Cotton Mill to Business Empire: The Emergence of Regional Enterprises in Modern China* (Harvard East Asian Monograph Series, 2003) and *Railroads and the Transformation of China* (Harvard University Press, 2019).

This monthly webinar series features the newest research on the history of Chinese business and entrepreneurship.

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