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160 years of occupational structure: Late Imperial China and its regions

Despite extensive debates around West-East divergence in economic developments before and during the Industrial Revolution, empirical evidence of China remains thin. Using Xingke Tiben (judicial records of Chinese homicide trials), a hitherto unused source for occupational data, a new occupational database has been created that comprises individual-level occupational data and other key variables; over 31,000 individuals in 8,000 randomly sampled Xingke Tiben from the Qing Empire's 320 prefectures in 1736-1898 are recorded. This paper discusses the core methodology (assessment of the inherent biases; reweighting) and key results of reconstructing the occupational structure of China and its regions from this database.