SEMINAR TITLE: An institution-based view of global IPR history

ABSTRACT: Leveraging the use of history to advance international business (IB) research, this article focuses on the crucial debate over intellectual property rights (IPR) between the United States and China. Ironically, during the 19th century the United States was not a leading IPR advocate as it is today, but was a leading IPR violator. Developing an institution-based view of IPR history, we identify three underlying theoretical mechanisms that help to explain IPR in the two countries—path dependence, long-term processes, and institutional transitions. We argue that both the U.S. refusal to protect foreign IPR in the 19th century and the current Chinese lack of enthusiasm to meet U.S. IPR demands embody rational responses to their respective situations. However, given long-term processes with intensifying isomorphic pressures, institutional transitions in favor of better IPR protection are quite possible. Finally, going above and beyond these two countries, we draw on the IPR history in over ten other countries to develop a more globally generalizable framework, which in turns contributes to the key question of how history matters.