Early Modern State (Building) in Asia and Europe – Comparison, Transfer and Entanglement

Veranstalter: Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context', Junior Research Group A9 (Antje Flüchter) in Cooperation with Junior Research Group A4 (Susan Richter)
Datum, Ort: 26.10.2009–28.10.2009, Heidelberg
Bericht von: Barend Noordam, Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context', University of Heidelberg

Global interactions and entanglements between the West and Asia are at present more and more at the forefront of scholarly attention and the Heidelberg Cluster of Excellence, aptly named 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context', is an initiative to facilitate academic endeavors in this promising area of research. Under the auspices of this Cluster a conference was organized in which the participants looked at the phenomenon of the state, and related processes of state building, in early modern Asia and Europe.

The goal of the conference, organized at the Cluster of Excellence Asia and Europe in a Global Context (Heidelberg) by Antje Flüchter in cooperation with Susan Richter, was to look at the state not as an exclusively European phenomenon isolated from developments in the rest of the world, but as an entity which was the result of a global process of entanglement in which non-European influences also played their part. Considering methodologies, concepts, and their application to concrete examples to analyze the nature of this process of mutual influencing formed an important part of the conference's content. The conference also served as the starting point for the Junior Research Group „Cultural Transfer as a Factor of State Building in Europe and Asia" at the Cluster of Excellence Asia and Europe in a Global Context. In her opening speech, ANTJE FLÜCHTER (Heidelberg) stated that she wanted to stretch the heuristic concept of state beyond the (European) national state by letting go of the exclusively European character of the concept of the state as it evolved in the Westphalian system and redefine the premodern state with reference to the general structures and institutions which developed according to the necessities of „social governance". This would make comparisons with developments outside of Europe much more feasible, especially since the early modern period was a time of change for both Asia and Europe. Furthermore, the early modern period was a time when European-Asian encounters increased significantly, creating opportunities for transcultural exchanges of ideas in the field of governance and administration.

The focus of the conference was on methods and theories of state building, which made use of a transcultural perspective and also included other preexisting concepts and methodologies, for example transfer history, comparative history, histoire croisée and global history. Amongst these there was a special focus on the concept of „state building from below", which understands state formation as a result of negotiation and appropriation by different social groups and actors and not simply as a top-down-process. The applicability of this methodology on European interactions with Asia, and thus in a transcultural context, in the early modern period, was one of the important questions posed during the conference.

The conference was divided into five panels. The first panel, „The Early Modern State: Concepts and Theories" was chaired by JOACHIM KURTZ (Heidelberg). PEER VRIES (Vienna) used a comparative approach and analyzed the differences between the systems of public finance and the economic policies of early modern England and Qing China in the period 1680-1840. Vries also focused on the ideologies which brought about these differences and in this way tried to give an impression of the different ways in which state building took place in both polities. He linked this line of argumentation with the observation that the intensive wars between European states precipitated a more active state in the domains of taxation and the military, eventually leading to the so-called „great divergence" between Great Britain and China. STEFAN BRAKENSIEK (Essen) proposed to interpret rulership in early modern Europe as a process of communication between rulers

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

and ruled. According to Brakensiek, monarchies were not autocratic institutions opposed from above. Subjects also shaped the political structures in a context of mutual exchange between rulers and ruled and this interaction can be best understood as a process of „trial and error". This perspective, which was in line with the „state building from below"-approach, was also propagated by FARHAT HASAN (Delhi), who gave a lecture on the formation of the early modern state in Mughal India. Farhat Hassan posited that the Mughal state had a very homogenous and centralized character at the top, but was shaped at the regional level by manifold local interests. He also highlighted the discursive practices involved with the functioning of state institutions. Hasan's use of the concept "state" in the context of Mughal India provoked a discussion on the appropriateness of the term when studying non-European systems of governance, a controversial topic which would be resurrected multiple times during the conference.

The first day of the conference ended with the evening lecture delivered by BARBARA STOLLBERG-RILINGER (Münster), who assessed the importance of the „cultural turn" for the history of early modern state building. Taking the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) as an example, she went on to show that symbolic forms of representation were essential for the constitution of rulership and were even inextricably bound together. The mutual attribution and recognition of sovereignty by states carried enormous significance for their constitution, within Europe and later also between European states and the rest of the world.

The second panel on „Models" was chaired by THOMAS SIMON (Vienna). SUSAN RICHTER (Heidelberg) opened the panel with short and general observations on the significance of models for governance and the state. According to Richter the constructed „other" (the new world) increasingly replaced the constructed „ancient" (the world of antiquity) as a reference for legitimization. In his juridical-historical lecture dealing with the relationship between law and the state in the Holy Roman Empire, Thomas Simon formulated basic questions which could facilitate a comparison between the German and Chinese culture of law. He emphasized how different the relationship between law and politics in imperial China was, where law was much less intensively used as an instrument of political supervision in comparison with the Holy Roman Empire. REINHARD BLÄNKER (Frankfurt an der Oder) proposed the concept of the „provincialization of the early modern state" in which state formation was seen from a perspective of global political-economic entanglement. Since „state" as a European concept can't easily be transferred to other parts of the world, Blänker argued that a comparative approach to history would not be valid.

Whilst both previous lectures dealt with concepts and theories, the next two lectures focused on the reception of different models of state governance and technology in the Holy Roman Empire and China. Susan Richter showed that the interpretation of the role of the Chinese emperor in the 17th century influenced the European state theories expounding the views of the ideal and just ruler. NICOLAS SCHILLINGER (Heidelberg) described how statistics, developed in early modern Europe, was adapted for use in Chinese governance and administration in the early 20th century. GUIDO MÜHLEMANN (Zürich) considered the reception of European ideas of state (theocracy, constitutional monarchy, nationalism, Marxism-Leninism, fascism and democracy) in China against the backdrop of traditional Chinese philosophy.

The third panel, „Concepts of Transcultural Studies", chaired by JÖRG GENGNAGEL (Heidelberg), was opened by ANGELIKA EPPLE (Bielefeld) who argued for a „global history from below", which could be realized by combining the new global history with insights derived from subaltern studies. ULRIKE LINDNER (Munich/Bieldefeld) illustrated the basic methodology of her work on British and German colonies in Africa, which made use of the approach of entangled history. Contrary to the usual way, her research is not directed towards the entanglement between colony and its metropolitan government, but between neighboring English and German colonies and between the metropolitan governments in London and Berlin. SVEN

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

TRAKULHUN (Zürich) compared the position of the king in Siam and Europe, especially the Holy Roman Empire, between the 16th and the 18th centuries. He showed that, despite intensive contacts, mutual reception and similarities, there were also limits to exchange. The final lecture of the day was given by SUSANNA BURGHARTZ (Basel), in which she showed the value of early modern travelogues as a source of information for transcultural perceptions. Using the travelogues collected by Theodor de Bry, she described the way in which the rivalries between the Dutch, English, French and Spanish influenced the construction of their own European identity in relation to the „other", in this case the indigenous inhabitants of America.

The fourth panel „State Building as Entangled Histories – Case Studies", chaired by ISABELLE DEFLERS (Heidelberg), combined a number of case studies of entangled state building in Asia and Europe. BAREND NOORDAM (Heidelberg) presented his Ph.D. project, in which he will elucidate the nature and extent of the processes of transfer in the military field between early modern Europe, Mughal India and Qing China. PETER TRUMMER (Heidelberg), also focusing on the military field, argued that the conflict between Prussia and France in the 18th century was an important factor stimulating the professionalization of the Prussian army and the interrelated changes in civil-military relations. GAURI PARASHER (Heidelberg) elaborated on the cultural elements guiding the relations between French and Indians in the 18th century and their role in the formation of the state in the French areas of southern India. SEBASTIAN MEURER (Heidelberg) showed how the British East India Company tried to adapt the colonial administration to local conditions and how these influenced the governmental reforms in Great Britain. DOROTHEE LINNEMANN (Münster) posited that images of diplomatic missions of Europeans to the Ottoman court held a special significance for the development of court ceremonies as a dominant form of constitution and reproduction of early modern political and social orders and identities.

The fifth and last panel of the conference, entitled „Court and Diplomacy", was chaired by GEORG CHRIST (Heidelberg). CORINNE LÉFEVRE (Paris) described how in the Mughal empire knowledge of Europe and its political culture was acquired through the mediation of Jesuits and to what extent this knowledge influenced the perception of the Indian rulers and elite of Europe. JAN-PETER HARTUNG (London) showed that the Tipu sultan (1750-1799), a South Indian ruler usually seen as a modernizer, legitimated his rulership against the Mughal overlords by using traditional symbolic strategies. According to Hartung, the Tipu sultan portrayed himself explicitly as an Islamic ruler.

The concluding discussion was led by THOMAS MAISSEN (Heidelberg) and in the beginning focused on the difficulty of using concepts like „state" in transcultural contexts. „Empire" was discussed as a useful category to describe Asian polities like Qing China, whilst some participants understood the European state to be a special case. Maissen concluded that the discussion showed that using concepts like „state" revealed their historicity and their lingual and cultural embedding and that these were important factors to keep in mind when researching a transnational and transcultural history of state formation. In general the consensus was that entangled history was a useful approach to understand the history of European and Asian state formation as a whole. One intensely discussed topic was how much importance should be attached to transcultural state formation, be it from above or from below, and how much significance the exchange of ideas between Asia and Europe had in these processes. This question also fed into the matter of who the actors and agents were in this entangled transcultural state formation process, but also in the processes of transcultural transfer of ideas and technologies.

The emotionally charged nature of the concluding discussion proved that the research topic of entangled state formation is beset by many problems and a lot of work will need to be done. The statement that the European state is perhaps a special case shouldn't deter us from investigating its possibly entangled nature. Therefore the task at hand is to research how and why different concepts and technologies of state in different periods were

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

adapted and adopted in different regions and how they were changed in the process, and this conference was a good starting point for this long overdue endeavor.

Conference Overview:

Antje Flüchter (Heidelberg):
Introduction: State Building as Entangled History

Panel I: The Early Modern State: Concepts and Theories
Chair: Joachim Kurtz (Heidelberg)

Peer Vries (Vienna):
State Building in Eastern Asia and Western Europe

Stefan Brakensiek (Essen):
New Perspectives on State Building and the Implementation of Rulership in Early Modern Monarchies

Farhat Hasan (Delhi):
Ideas, Institutions and Development of the Early Modern State in the Indian Mughal Empire

Evening Lecture

Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (Münster):
State and Political History in a Culturalist Perpective

Panel II: Models
Chair: Thomas Simon (Vienna)

Susan Richter (Heidelberg):
Einführung

Thomas Simon (Vienna):
Konzepte normativer Durchdringung des Staates im deutch-chinesischen Vergleich (Normative Penetration of Concepts of State in the Comparison between Germany and China)

Reinhard Blänker (Frankfurt an der Oder):
Provincializing the „Early Modern State". Überlegungen über Staatenformierung im globalen Kontext der frühen Neuzeit (Considerations on Early Modern State Formation in a Global Context)

Susan Richter:
Fremdes Vorbild und Gegenentwurf – Konstrukte staatlicher Erfolgsmodelle in der europäischen Staatstheorie (Foreign Examples and Alternative Models – The Construction of Successful State Models in the European Theories of State)

Nicolas Schillinger (Heidelberg):
Statistik als staatliches Instrument – Der Transfer einer europäischen Regierungstechnologie nach China im frühen 20. Jahrhundert (Statistics as an Instrument of State – The Transfer of a European Technology of Governance to China in the Early 20th Century)

Guido Mühlemann (Zürich):
Die Rezeption europäischer Staatsvorstellungen in China seit dem Ersten Opiumkrieg (1839-1842) (The Reception of European Theories of State in China after the First Opium War)

Panel III: Concepts for Transcultural Studies
Chair: Jörg Gengnagel (Heidelberg)

Angelika Epple (Bielefeld):
Who Speaks? New Global History and (Old) Historiographical Problems

Ulrike Lindner (München/Bielefeld):
Entangled Histories. Comparison and Transnational/Transcolonial Approaches in the History of Colonialism

Sven Trakulhun (Zürich):
Comparing Conceptions of Absolute Rule: The Figure of the 'Monarch' in Siam and Europe, 16-18 c.

Susanna Burghartz (Basel):
Sampling Identities between Survival and Supriority. Travel Accounts into New Worlds about 1600

Panel IV: State and State Building as Entangled History – Case Studies
Chair: Isabelle Deflers (Heidelberg)

Barend Noordam (Heidelberg):
Processes of Transfer in the Military Field. Europe and the Post-Nomadic States of Mughal India and Manchu China

Peter Trummer (Heidelberg):
Theories on Civil-Military Relations and Military Professionalization at the Turn from the 18th to the 19th Century

Gauri Parasher (Heidelberg):
Indo-French Relations during the Early Modern Period. Cultural Asymmetries in the

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

Fields of Politics and Government

Sebastian Meurer (Heidelberg):
At the Junction of Local and Global Conceptions of Government: Fort William (Calcutta) in the 18th Century

Dorothee Linnemann (Münster):
Strategies of Eye-Witnessing: Visual Ceremonial Descriptions and Conflicting Concepts of Governance in European-Ottoman Court Relations in the 17th and 18th Century

Panel V: Court and Diplomacy
Chair: Georg Christ (Heidelberg)

Corinne Léfevre (Paris):
Knowledge of Europe and European Political Culture and History in 17th Century Mughal India

Jan-Peter Hartung (London):
The Islamization of the Tiger – On Strategies of Legitimization of the Tipu Sultan

Concluding Discussion
Chair and Introduction: Thomas Maissen (Heidelberg)

Tagungsbericht *Early Modern State (Building) in Asia and Europe – Comparison, Transfer and Entanglement*. 26.10.2009–28.10.2009, Heidelberg, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 30.01.2010.

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.