

**Migrating Ideas of Governance and Bureaucracy in Asia and Europe since the Early Modern Era**

**Veranstalter:** University of Heidelberg, Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context', Junior Research Group A4 (Susan Richter); Historical Department of Tsinghua University (Zhang Guogang)

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**Bericht von:** Sebastian Meurer / Nicolas Schilling, University of Heidelberg

At the conference „Migrating Ideas of Governance and Bureaucracy in Asia and Europe since the Early Modern Era“, held at Tsinghua University in Beijing, scholars from various parts of Asia and Europe presented and discussed papers on the adaptation and implementation of foreign concepts of government and administrative institutions in Asian and European polities in a historical dimension.

As a starting point, the organizers of the conference assumed that governmental activity in Early Modern Europe, Mughal India and Qing China increased constantly. The aim of the conference was to examine the trans-cultural migration of notions of bureaucratic ethos and efficient governance during that period in a variety of fields, for instance, rulership, taxation, the judiciary, and administrative and military organization. In particular, the conference sought to trace the effects foreign role models, agents, and discourses had on Western Europe and South- and East Asia, roughly since the beginning of the 16th Century.

SUSAN RICHTER (Heidelberg) started the conference by introducing the thematic field of public administration. She tentatively defined administration in the European context as a system of production, processing and application of task-specific knowledge relevant for a given corporation, and emphasized corporate organization and the metaphor of the body as pan-European foundations of administrative structures.

The first panel, chaired by GUIDO MÜHLEMANN (Zürich), focused on specific cases of government and administration in Ming and Qing China, and on the changes of practices that were largely influenced by

the presence of Europeans or notions from Europe. ELISABETH KASKE (Pittsburgh) showed that the selling of offices in Late Qing China was common until the end of the dynasty - though increasingly criticized and despite the fact that new means of fiscal administration from the West were available. A strong aversion against tax increases, a demand for socially high valued official positions, institutional obstacles as well as the need to sell offices to amortize debts contributed to the continuing popularity of office purchase. WANG SHUO (Freiburg) discussed the so-called Canton System, the institutionalized trade between Western merchants and the Chinese mainland that took place in the southern Chinese metropolis of Guangzhou. She especially concentrated on the relations between foreigners, the local administration of Guangdong province, and the central government in Beijing. WU LIWEI (Beijing) offered an insight into the perspective of both Ming officials and literati on how to deal and administrate foreign religions, i.e. European Catholicism, by taking a closer look at two events (Nanjing 1616, Fujian 1637) that led to the expulsion of Jesuits from China. By taking into account various strongly different perspectives on these events, she examined the effects of cross-cultural misunderstandings on Chinese political thought and showed how the Ming government constructed religious groups as conspiring and heretic parties. YANG NIANQUN (Beijing) analyzed the increase of government activities during the Qing period, particularly with a focus on the reign of the Qianlong Emperor, and the connection between education and bureaucracy. The early and high Qing emperors reused the older concept of „teaching“ or „educating“ (jiao) and made it the basic ideology of government. In contrast to preceding dynasties, they emphasized the practical meaning and implementation of this concept in order to give central political action and the education of low- and mid-level officials the same importance for state government.

The second panel was chaired by Elisabeth Kaske and dealt with perceptions of (East) Asian Statecraft in Early Modern Europe. According to WALTER DEMEL (Munich), with reference to the existence of a general land

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tax, both China and Japan were categorized as despotic monarchies in the 16th century. In the 17th century the perceptions began to diverge. While European savants continued to view the secluded Tokugawa-Japan as a despotic system based on military power, there was a growing interest in China, which was seen as a positive model for enlightened absolutist rule. Chinese administration was seen as a meritocratic, efficient and centralized system regulated by checks and balances. While China was increasingly criticized in the second half of the 18th century, certain institutions continued to be viewed as models, for instance, in the sphere of agriculture. As STEFAN JACOBSEN (Aarhus) showed, European savants, who were concerned with the compatibility of efficiency and morality, perceived China as a country where the governmental principle of „nourish and educate“ was implemented, for instance, through public granaries. The impact of morally formulated goals in the field of administration were also tackled in the paper of ARMIN KOHNLE (Leipzig), who described how the arrival of the Danish-Hallean missionaries in Tranquebar (South-East India), after a period of struggle, forced the administration of the Danish East India Company to abandon its principle of separation and non-intervention into the affairs of the locals. A consistory of the missionaries increasingly took over administrative and even judicial functions, leading to a state-church collaboration that mirrored the European model of efficient government.

Kohnle also chaired the third panel, which focused on South- and South East Asia. AN-TJE FLUECHTER (Heidelberg) depicted perceptions of the judiciary in Mughal India by European (esp. German) authors in the 17th Century. On the one hand, for instance, the Europeans praised the promptness and low costs of trials as well as the personal liability of judges. On the other hand they criticized the dangers of corruption and arbitrary judgments. This led to the rather balanced contemporary analysis that justice as well as the approachability of the ruler appeared as strategies for stabilizing power. The case study presented by GAURI PARASHER (Heidelberg) revealed the complexity of the colonial situation in the case of judicial pro-

cesses. As a consequence of Jesuit pressure, the Indian chief merchant of the French East India Company in Pondicherry (South India) was tried and sentenced for anti-Christian actions. As he appealed to the king of France instead of local authorities, the merchant was able to achieve a re-trial in which he was eventually acquitted. SEBASTIAN MEURER (Heidelberg) demonstrated that Cornwallis' fundamental administrative reforms in colonial British Bengal (East India) were not based on established European practices but on untried ideas developed only in the British reform discourse of the preceding years. Meurer described this process as the migration of administrative ideas within the British Empire, in which coping with the local difficulties in India was the most important factor. The last contribution of the panel dealt with British overseas administration a hundred years later. Although the Federated Malay States were founded as a sovereign state, the British Resident managed to accumulate administrative functions and effectively marginalize the formally sovereign Malay State Council. According to AHMAD KAMAL ARIFFIN BIN MOHD RUS (Kuala Lumpur) British power in the protectorate was based on prestige and the self-styling of the British as a superior race rather than on military strength.

The evening lecture, chaired by XU ZHANGRUN (Beijing), dealt with policies of restraining corruption in Singapore. According to Transparency International, Singapore today is one of the three least corrupt countries in the world. JON S.T. QUAH (Singapore) traced the roots of this success back to the establishment of two independent institutions by British authorities in 1951/52, the Public Service Commission and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, which assure that appointments are only based on meritocracy and which persecute corrupt officials. Quah described the successive restructuring of these institutions in independent Singapore up to the present day, and emphasized that extensive resources were necessary to keep the institutions efficient.

The final panel, hosted by WANG HUI (Beijing), focused on cross-cultural encounters in the military sphere. Concentrating on

the agents of transfer, ISABELLE DEFLERS (Freiburg) examined the mutual, regular exchange between Prussian and French modes of military organization. Deflers emphasized the special relation of knowledge and power, as the adaptation of new modes of organization in France was accompanied by power struggles between established military institutions and a new, rising military elite that supported the introduction of Prussian models. BAREND NOORDAM (Heidelberg) looked at the perceptions of the military capabilities of Ming China in the 17th century by the Dutch and the Portuguese. These perceptions were not only shaped by the European's understanding of Chinese weapons technology but were also based on cultural or „ethnographic“ stereotypes. The final paper by NICOLAS SCHILLINGER (Heidelberg) analyzed how military reform contributed to the change of body perception and the emergence of the physical body as a major focus of government in the final years of Qing China. In the course of military reforms, European, and particularly German, notions of drill, physical exercise, posture and close formation drill were introduced to Qing China. Through educational reforms, these new concepts of bodily discipline later found their way into broader segments of society.

Furthermore, ZHANG GUOGANG (Beijing), who was not able to present his paper, contributed with an essay on the German engineer Heinrich Hildebrand. From 1891 to 1901, Hildebrand advised Chinese officials on a variety of matters such as railway construction, military reforms, and the administration of mines, factories, and fortifications. Zhang takes a closer look at the gifts Hildebrand received from Chinese officials, interpreting them as attempts to overcome cultural gaps and provide a deeper understanding of Chinese traditional customs.

During the final discussion, Susan Richter and Walter Demel highlighted some important aspects and commonalities of the papers. As most presentations dealt with the various responsibilities and tasks of the state, Richter emphasized the question of how different elements of statecraft changed function due to the migration of ideas, and highlighted the importance of economic thinking on the one

hand and state security and the judiciary on the other hand. Reception processes were often triggered by a sense of crisis: an awareness of inner defects in Early Modern Europe, or the threat of European imperialism in Modern East and Southeast Asia. Additionally, in the light of entangled history, Richter emphasized the central importance of the colonial legacy and pointed out that colonialism did not exclusively have negative impacts on certain societies.

Cooperative organizations, pictured in the metaphor of the „state body“, were very important in the European context, said Demel, who tried to specify and compare them to corresponding structures in Asia. Furthermore, in Europe, the spatial dimension of public meeting places like the forum, the agora, or the marketplace were crucial for the making of European discourses on the relation between state and society. In China, on the other hand, assemblies on public squares, like Tiananmen Square, were differently categorized and connoted. Finally, Demel juxtaposed the functions of European ceremonies and Asian rites, and stressed the different understanding of law, especially the relation between the abstract legal order and the assortment of individual rights.

The papers and discussions showed that the emergence of new paradigms of government rested upon idealized construction either of the past, or of foreign role models, like the Early Modern European normative perception of a pacifist, righteous, scholarly, and well-working bureaucratic system in Ming and Qing China.

Knowledge, that transgresses cultural borders, is always subject to code conversion and changing connotations. To understand specific conditions of adaptation, research on different „governmentalities“ and „administrative cultures“ has to emphasize the variety of discourses that accompanied processes of transfer, and the perceptions and reactions of local elites.

The presence of foreigners, Christian missionaries in China or India for instance, often provoked an adjustment of administrative practices, especially when the question of how to deal with alien groups came up. Foreigners and concepts from abroad not only

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might cause a reevaluation of one's own conception of governance and a reorganization of administrative institution but also the - assumed or real - rediscovery of ancient thoughts and techniques. Further case studies in the fields of a cultural and an intellectual history of government, which primarily should focus on aspects of intercultural contacts, can contribute to a more comprehensive evaluation of the transcultural diffusion of technologies of government.

**Conference overview:**

Greetings: Kang Feiyu (Vice-President of Tsinghua-University)

Welcome Adresse: Zhang Guogang (Beijing)

Introduction: Susan Richter (Heidelberg)

**Panel 1: Comparison and Flows of Administrative Ideas between Europe and China**

Chair: Guido Mühlemann (Zürich)

Elisabeth Kaske (Pittsburgh): Bureaucratic Efficiency and the Question of Office Selling in Late Qing China

Wang Shuo (Heidelberg/Freiburg): The Canton System. A Window, which didn't want to open?

Wu Liwei (Beijing): Rethinking the Political Mind of Traditional Chinese Government. A Case Study on two Anti-Christian Events in Late Ming Dynasty

Yang Nianqun (Beijing): „View of Education“ and „Scholar-Bureaucrats“ on the Local Administrative Level of the Qing Empire

**Panel 2: Perceptions and Impacts in Europe**

Chair: Elisabeth Kaske (Pittsburgh)

Walter Demel (München): Political Order, Administration and Jurisdiction in East Asia – European Views, 16th to 18th Centuries

Armin Kohnle (Leipzig): Protestant Mission and Public Administration. The Example of the Danish-Hallean Tranquebar-Mission in the 18th Century

Stefan G. Jacobsen (Aarhus): Inoculating European Administration with 'l'esprit Chinois'

**Panel 3: Changing Practices in South Asia and Southeast Asia**

Chair: Armin Kohnle (Leipzig)

Antje Flüchter (Heidelberg): Justice or Despotism? Shifting Perceptions of Judiciary in India between Archetype or Antipode

Gauri Parasher (Heidelberg): Dynamics of Governance. Administration of French Territories in India during the 18th Century

Sebastian Meurer (Heidelberg): Administrative Reform by Principles. The „Cornwallis-System“ of Colonial Rule in the British Imperial Context, 1786-1793

Ahmad Kamal Ariffin Bin Mohd Rus (Kuala Lumpur): The Consolidation of the British Control in the Administration of the Federated Malay States, 1896-1909

Public Lecture by Jon S.T. Quah (Singapore): Meritocracy and Corruption Control in Singapore: Enhancing the Legacy of British Administrative Reforms

Chair: Xu Zhangrun (Beijing)

**Panel 4: Governing the Military**

Chair: Wang Hui (Beijing)

Isabelle Deflers (Freiburg): The Prussian Military Constitution Revisited. Transfer of Knowledge from Prussia to France in the Aftermath of the Seven Year's War

Barend Noordam (Heidelberg): Sino-European Encounters. Mutual Perceptions of Military Capabilities in the Seventeenth Century

Nicolas Schillinger (Heidelberg): Micro-technologies of Governance. Soldierly Bodies in China around 1900

Zhang Guogang (Beijing): Die Geschenkliste aus den Dokumenten des Heinrich Hildebrand im Kreismuseum Bitbur-Prüm

**Comments and Final Discussion:** Chaired by Walter Demel (München) and Susan Richter (Heidelberg)

Administration of the Qing Court: Guided Tour of the Forbidden City

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