

### Rulers, Palaces, Wider Worlds: Ritual and Cultural Connections

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**Datum, Ort:** 16.03.2011-18.03.2011, Wolfenbüttel

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Ritual connections between rulers and their subjects played an important role in early modern Europe and Late Imperial China. At a workshop in Wolfenbüttel from 16 to 18 March 2011, historians with different geographical specializations engaged in a comparative dialogue on European and Chinese rituals of power, with additional contributions on the Ottoman and Russian Romanov empires. The first and second of three panel discussions focused on rituals at court and in urban centers; the third addressed distant clients and envoys and moveable courts.

The hosting scholar SABINE DABRINGHAUS (Freiburg im Breisgau) launched the workshop by observing that, while there are important differences between the European and Chinese political orders of the early modern age, many structural similarities make comparison a promising enterprise. Both European and Chinese rulers successfully tamed military power; and courts played an important role as power centers in both arenas. Furthermore, Jesuit connections between China and Europe also open possibilities in connected histories for historians working in these fields. CRAIG CLUNAS (Oxford) reflected, in the opening lecture, on the role spaces and objects played in ritual connections at the expanded imperial court of Ming China. In his discussion of the courts of the Ming dynasty's „appanage kings“ (*fanwang*), he pointed out that their processions and building projects in provincial cities effectively marked kingly presence far from the center of power. He also noted that, while the culture of the Ming courts has recently become a thriving area of empirical research on China, the vast literature on the European courts remains little read by China scholars.

The focus of the first panel discussion was ritual connections „at the center“. Several papers rejected the concept of inaccessible „absolute“ monarchs, in the Chinese, Ottoman, and European contexts. In his presentation on the accessibility of the Ottoman ruler in the early modern age, RHOADS MURPHEY (Birmingham) pointed out that it is a widespread Western misconception that the Ottoman Sultan lived in his palace in absolute seclusion. The Sultan had to be accessible to rule effectively, although access was measured: For some of his subjects, access was purely aural (drums announcing the sultan's arrival); for others it was visual (processions); while others had physical access to the Sultan. Selective interaction was also a crucial aspect of ritual connections in the courts of seventeenth-century Vienna and Versailles. JEROEN DUINDAM (Leiden) contended that, far from withdrawing during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the rulers of this period in fact stayed connected with their subjects via three dimensions of cultural interaction: the household, ceremonies, and representations of the ruler. At the Habsburg court, the extended household played an important role, while the household of Louis XIV was smaller and more exclusive. In Versailles, court ceremonies were important links between ruler and subject.

In one of the two following papers on the Chinese courts, ZHU JIANFEI (Melbourne) presented on the connections between spatiality and rule in Ming China, reflecting on Chinese specificities of architecture. WANG SHUO (Turlock, Cal.) discussed the Qing princes system as a specific feature of Manchu rule in China, making the point that, unlike their Han predecessors, the Manchu emperors included their kinsmen in the structure of governance. Manchu princes stayed at court and were educated in martial arts and the Manchu language. Wang argued that, apart from being an instrument of government, this was also an important means of building Manchu identity. In the response to the first panel discussion, NADINE AMSLER (Bern/Freiburg im Breisgau) observed that these case studies all presented courts as dynamic entities, allowing more or less restricted access to the ruler. Rituals were an important means of regula-

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ting connections between rulers and subjects and not only represented but also constituted power relations.

The second panel discussion presented cities as stages for, and actors in, interactions between rulers and subjects. The first two papers examined the negotiation of relations through the enactment and description of princely rituals within cities. MARGRIT THØFNER (Norwich) emphasized the unstable character of the ritual of the Joyous Entry in sixteenth century Habsburg Netherlands. Because cities funded the Entries, they were important actors in these rituals, with considerable agency, and each Joyous Entry was an opportunity for cities and rulers to renegotiate their privileges. HELEN WATANABE-O'KELLY (Oxford) focused on the source genre of printed festival books that proliferated in early modern Europe. While the festival books claimed to be factual, they in fact presented events from the standpoint of whoever commissioned the book and were tailored for an intended readership. As such, these sources should be re-read as integral to rather than merely descriptive of festivals.

PATRICIA EBREY (Seattle/Münster) also advocated re-lecture of source in her paper on the building projects of the last Song emperor Huizong. Huizong, a passionate calligrapher and Daoist, undertook numerous building projects in the Song capital Kaifeng, many of them temples outside the palace which staged important rituals. Ebrey argued that the challenge for historians now is to extricate these projects from the Confucian historiographic reading, which ties the end of Huizong's reign (by the Jurchen invasion) to the building program, and place them back into the context of Song rule. In his paper on Mongolian music at the Qing court, YU SIU WAH (Hong Kong) brought music into play as a means of connecting rulers and subjects. According to the classification made in Chinese classical texts, Mongolian music belonged not to proper ritual music (*yayue*) but to secular (*si*) or barbarian (*hu*) music. However, it played an important role at the Qing court because the Manchu had strong marital and other political ties to the Mongolians. In her response to the second panel discussion, ANTJE FLÜCHTER (Heidelberg) obser-

ved that meaning can be codified in very different ways – through buildings, music, or rituals. She raised the question whether different codifications could have comparable vocabularies.

The last panel discussion focused on ritual connections between the court and the periphery. MICHAEL CHANG (Fairfax, Virginia) presented a paper on the first Southern Tour of the Kangxi emperor in 1684. He showed how the emperor's visit to the Jiangnan region, a stronghold of Ming dynasty loyalty, was important to the formation of the Manchu identity during this first period of Qing reign. For example, while an official account, „Notes on a Southern Tour“, stressed the fact of the emperor's warm reception in the city of Suzhou, the document at the same time compares that city's merchant culture unfavorably with the „plain customs of the Northeast“, the homeland of the Manchu. NEIL MURPHY (Winchester) pointed out that, in sixteenth century France, rituals of royal pardon and punishment were a fundamental attribute of kingship. The royal families were able to largely monopolize this highly symbolic act in the sixteenth century. Whereas bishops had possessed the right to make pardon from the early Middle ages, the king started to confirm pardons issued by them by the late fifteenth century.

The last two papers concentrated on connections between political entities commonly perceived to belong to different cultural spheres. CHRISTIAN WINDLER (Bern) considered diplomatic relations between European powers and the Ottoman regencies in the Maghreb. In the early modern period, gift giving between the Ottoman *beys* and European powers, interpreted in different ways by the participants, was an important yet unstable factor in diplomatic relations. Windler pointed out that, although it has been widely promoted that Europe developed the idea of a European civilizing mission during the period of the Atlantic revolutions, in fact European powers only abolished the practice of gift giving in Tunis and Tripolis in 1830, after the French conquest of Algiers. JAN HENNINGS (Oxford) compared Russian-European and Russian-Qing diplomatic relations. Hennings first observed that

European discourses of Russian „barbarism“ distract attention from the fact that a long-term history of face-to-face contact meant that European and Russian diplomats actually shared a common symbolic vocabulary. Hennings then went on to say that the same seems to be true for Chinese-Russian diplomatic relations. Diplomatic quarrels were not the result of cultural difference, but rather arose out of a shared diplomatic practice understood by both parties. In his response, CRAIG CLUNAS concluded that no „first contacts“ were actually taking place in early modern Eurasia. Research must not only consider the possibilities in historical comparison but also in connected histories. Clunas suggested that a comparative focus on language and narrative could be a fruitful approach to further studies of ritual.

HELVIG SCHMIDT-GLINZER (Wolfenbüttel) commenced the closing discussion with some general remarks, observing that more research has to be done for comparison to be possible. At the same time, comparison helps to identify questions for further research in the different fields. The workshop participants agreed that further research can be done on the reception of foreign envoys at the Chinese courts and the role of members of the imperial family. Furthermore, effective studies of processes of negotiation depend on China research „going local“. Similar work with local sources in European court history has resulted in the paradigm of absolutism being abandoned. However, it must be acknowledged that in China local archives are mainly only available for the nineteenth century. As for European research, further work should not draw a clear line between the courts and local society.

The Wolfenbüttel workshop provoked a stimulating dialogue on Chinese, European, Ottoman, and Russian rituals of power. Although comparative work can, until now, only prompt tentative conclusions, the workshop has made clear that negotiation and representations of power are a key to understanding all the political entities in question. The workshop also suggested the need to revise narratives of absolute rule and despotism in the different traditions of historiography. Further dialogue will necessitate reflection on a

common theoretical vocabulary and will also require further engagement with empirical, locally based case studies. The Wolfenbüttel dialogue will be resumed in autumn in Leiden at a comparative workshop addressing the social structures of courts in the early modern era.

#### **Conference overview:**

##### *Introductions*

Sabine Dabrinhaus: Introduction

Craig Clunas: Ritual, Connection and Objects in the Greater Chinese Court 1400-1600

##### *Section I: At the Centre*

Chair: Wu Boya

Rhoads Murphey: The „Accessibility“ of the Ottoman Ruler

Jeroen Duindam: Inclusion and Exclusion: Social and Cultural Interaction around the Courts of Vienna and Versailles

Zhu Jianfei: Scale, Statehood and a Chinese Modernity: Beijing of the 1420s

Wang Shuo: The Qing Princes and Manchu Empire

Response: Nadine Amsler

##### *Section II: Urban Contexts*

Chair: Susan Naquin

Margit Thøfner: „Willingly we follow a gentle leader...“: Joyous Entries in the Habsburg Netherlands

Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly: True and Historical Descriptions? European Festivals and the Printed Record

Patricia Ebrey: Creating Royal Magnificence in Song China (960-1276): The Building Projects of Emperor Huizong

Yu Siu Wah: Mongolian Music, Autumn Hunt and Governance of the Qing dynasty

Response: Antje Flüchter

##### *Section III: Distant Clients and Envoys / The Court on the Move*

Chair: Zhao Zifu

Michael Chang (Fairfax, Virginia): On Historical Narratives of the Kangxi Emperor’s First

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Imperial Tour to Suzhou, 1684

Neil Murphy: Royal Grace, Royal Punishment: Ceremonial Entries and the Pardoning of Criminals in Renaissance France

Christian Windler: European Diplomacy and the Ritual Aspects of Unequal Relations around 1800: A Comparative Perspective on the Mediterranean Area

Jan Hennings: Ritual Asymmetries and Cultural Perception: European Diplomats on Russia and Russian Diplomats on China

Response: Craig Clunas

*Final comment*

Helwig Schmidt-Glinzer

Final discussion

Tagungsbericht *Rulers, Palaces, Wider Worlds: Ritual and Cultural Connections*. 16.03.2011-18.03.2011, Wolfenbüttel, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 18.06.2011.