

**Entanglement of Histories, Circulation of Knowledge, and Transfer of Technologies: Dimensions of Transcultural Statehood? (1500-1900)**

**Veranstalter:** Antje Flüchter / Rudolph Ng / Barend Noordam / Gauri Parasher, Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“, Heidelberg University

**Datum, Ort:** 10.05.2012-12.05.2012,

**Bericht von:** Simon Cubelic, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University; Milinda Banerjee, Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“, Heidelberg University

The conference under review focused on transcultural aspects of early modern and modern state formation through flows of legal, religious-ritual, military and diplomatic norms between non-European (and particularly, but not exclusively, Asian) and European societies. In the process, it aimed at countering hegemonic narratives which emphasize the exclusively European origins and historicity of modern state formation. In contrast to such narratives, the conference offered a broad meta-argument that modern state formation has evolved through extensive cultural-institutional flows between European and non-European societies. In doing this, the conference aligns itself with powerful emerging historiographic trends – as outlined, among others, by Christopher Bayly, Jack Goody, Victor Lieberman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam – which underscore the entangled and connected histories of early modern regions as they came into dialogue and conflict in shaping the global history of modern politics. The distinctive contribution of the present conference has been to empirically focus on specific contact zones between non-European and European cultures, where some of the key elements of this broader process were initially configured.

In her introductory remarks, ANTJE FLÜCHTER (Heidelberg) outlined the theoretical and methodological implications of the concept of transcultural statehood. Flüchter described the process of state-formation as part of a shared and entangled history between Asia and Europe since the early-modern period, and proposed a multi-layered

model of state-building, one that has to take account of the transfer of knowledge and technologies of governance through interaction in contact-zones in matters such as law, religion, diplomacy, and state-building from below.

The two papers of the first panel „Law and Governance“ chaired by MORITZ BAUMSTARK (Heidelberg) concentrated on the relationship between law and state-building in colonial South Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries. GAURI PARASHER (Heidelberg) discussed the evolution of Indo-French law and the changing approaches of the French authorities in the judicial administration of 18th century Pondicherry. Based on inheritance cases, Parasher showed how, in the second half of the 18th century, newly emerging social groups like the Malabar Christians began prevailing upon French administrators to adjudicate disputes between them in accordance with French rather than regional legal norms, as had been the practice earlier. Parasher explains her findings through the transcultural determinants in the early modern state-building process, which encompassed an interaction of initiatives from below and above. VERENA STELLER (Frankfurt/Main) focused on the domain of rule of law as an arena of transcultural encounter as well as contestation in British India. In contrast to existing historiography which often conceptualizes law as mainly an instrument of colonial hegemony, Steller argued that Indian lawyers played a crucial role in de-provincializing colonial British ideas about legal authority. Early modern Anglo-British debates on law were invoked and transformed by Indian lawyers to suit the specificities of the colonial condition.

PHILIP STERN (Durham) delivered the keynote address of the conference. He argued that early modern concepts of sovereignty are better understood in their complexity when studied in contact zones of Asian and European societies. While traditional scholarship has focused on the state as the exclusive locus of sovereignty, Stern argued that in reality, concepts of sovereignty were much more plural and fluid in the early modern period, when different types of corporate bodies could all claim some measure and aspect of

---

sovereignty. In particular, the distinction between a company or corporate firm and a state was never absolutely clear, and there were frequent overlaps between the two, as seen most classically from the case of 'company-states' such as the English East India Company. Concepts of sovereignty accordingly were not bounded by the limits of the nation-state but stretched in a complicated pattern between different types of corporate bodies, each enjoying varying levels of economic, military, ideological and political dominance.

The second Panel „Rituals and Religions“ was chaired by RUDOLPH NG (Heidelberg). Both papers of the panel focused on intellectuals and missionaries in the early-modern world, and their strategies of coping with foreign cultural practices and transcultural exchange. In their joint presentation SUNGSHIN KIM (Dahlonaga) and KURT GULDENTOPS (Los Angeles) explored the influence of the Ming-Qing-transition on 17th and 18th century European and Korean representations of China. Their case studies comprised controversies on rituals and rites among Korean and European *literati* as well as their attempts to rework the boundaries between civilization and barbarism. Kim studied the impact of the Manchu-transition on the state-ideology of the Korean *yangban*-elite. On the basis of the debates on mourning rituals for the king and the king's wife, Kim showed that representatives of the Sŏin faction, such as Song Siyŏl, referred to the Chosŏn state as the last redoubt of the classical Confucian civilization. According to Guldentops, the Ming-Qing-transition reshaped the Jesuit mission in China. This resulted in the formulation of the doctrine of *prisca theologia* ('ancient theology'). Guldentops traced the impact of this doctrine on French discourses of the 17th and 18th centuries and the critique of *prisca theologia* and its image of China in the universalist historiography of Voltaire. ANA CAROLINA HOSNE (San Martín) explored the role of mnemonic techniques of the Jesuit mission in Peru and China in the late 16th century. According to Hosne, the Jesuits regarded memory as an effective tool for conversion and Christianization, but the strategies employed in Peru and China differed strongly: Whereas in Peru José de Acosta allowed the local me-

mory device of the *quipu* (knotted-string device) for memorizing the doctrine and for confession practices, Matteo Ricci tried to import a Western type of *ars memorativa* by composing the mnemonic treatise *Xiguo Jifa* (1596) in order to gain influence on the Chinese *literati*. Whereas Acosta's appropriation was successful, Ricci's attempt largely failed.

The papers in the third Panel „Military“, chaired by BAREND NOORDAM (Leiden) included presentations about the relationship between state-building and military organization, the flows of military technology, and the role of images in warfare in Eurasia from the 17th to the end of the 19th century. MICHAEL AXWORTHY (Exeter) analyzed the reign of the Persian ruler Nader Shah (r. 1736–1747) from the perspective of the theory of 'military revolution'. Axworthy attributed the military and political success of Nader Shah to his radical innovations in army structures, organization and training. Even though this process was not due to European influence, these innovations are comparable to the phenomenon of 'military revolution'. Besides military reforms, Axworthy stressed the importance of the incorporation of popular demands from below for a strong leadership as another crucial factor in Nader Shah's state-building project. ULRICH THEOBALD (Tübingen) showed that muskets and cannons had been adopted and integrated into Chinese armies from the 16th century onwards, but they were not given the preeminent position they had in Western armies. Theobald explained this by a multi-causal approach emphasizing, among other factors, the integration of the army into the state bureaucracy, the unwillingness of the state to accrue debts and the lack of private foundries. Therefore, Theobald argued that 'military revolution' is not only an outcome of technological change, but depends largely on the role of the state and the integration of the armies into society. JUDITH FRÖHLICH (Zürich) explored the history of the 'Picture War' of 1894–1895 between China and Japan. Fröhlich analyzed the depiction of military equipment as well as the expressions of political, legal and humanitarian ideas on Chinese and Japanese war prints. Fröhlich argued that even though prints on both sides were influenced by Western pictorial know-

ledge, Japanese artists adopted Western concepts to a higher degree. Thus, Japanese war prints used elements from the emerging Western discourse on humanitarianism. This legitimized Japan's civilizing mission in Asia and was meant to give a Western audience the impression that Japan was a civilized nation.

The forth panel „Diplomacy“ was chaired by GAURI PARASHER (Heidelberg) and assembled case-studies from the 18th and 19th centuries. The geographical horizon of the panel transcended Eurasia and stretched to West Africa and Latin America. CHRISTINA BRAUNER (Münster) talked about Western representations of audiences at the court of Dahomey in West Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries. Brauner argued that one can speak of a transculturalization of the audience ceremonial since new commodities and practices like gun salutes or flags were integrated into the ceremonial. Although the European visitors were confronted with elements that they perceived as strange, there are evidences that they assessed the audience ceremonial within an early-modern 'monarchical world view'. However, from the end of the 18th century on, the discourse on despotism dominated the European representation of the court of Dahomey. RUDOLPH NG (Heidelberg) gave an account of the Chinese commission that was sent to Cuba in order to investigate the condition of Chinese coolies recruited by Spanish conglomerates in 1874. As a result of the report of this international commission, Spain was isolated on the issue on coolie trade. Ng drew the following conclusions from this early Sino-Spanish diplomatic entanglement: First, the Sino-Spanish diplomatic encounters are heavily influenced by bottom-up processes, since the riots and local disputes in southern China preceded the official protest of the Chinese government. Second, the Sino-Spanish diplomatic constellation cannot be described as the interaction of two unitary actors, since other Western powers played a great role in the formation of the commission. INES EBEN VON RACKNITZ (Nanjing) explained the transcultural negotiations during the China War of 1860. Racknitz analyzed how the different diplomatic 'cosmologies' (i. e. self-perception, images of statehood, cultural norms and practices determining foreign

affairs) on the Chinese and the British and French side shaped political and military actions in the course of this war. Racknitz emphasized the existence of both, moments of misunderstanding of the 'other' cosmology of foreign affairs, preventing negotiations and causing military actions, as well as moments of understanding, for example in concessions made to foreign diplomatic customs or explanations of norms.

The fifth panel „Concepts“ was chaired by SEBASTIAN MEURER (Heidelberg) and focused on flows of political discourses between China and Europe. STEFAN GAARSMAND JACOBSEN (Aarhus) focused on the changing understanding of 'Chinese' tribunal system in European political discourse. In the 18th century, some Enlightenment philosophers (such as Voltaire) and Enlightenment-influenced rulers (such as the Russian empress Catherine the Great) were inspired by what they considered to be the Chinese example of benevolent rulership. To some Enlightenment minds, Chinese authority seemed to be a mixed political system, where the power of the emperor was checked and controlled by those of the *literati*. In the course of the 19th century, admiration for Chinese administration was to become influential in the emergence of meritocratic systems of bureaucratic recruitment in the British political system. YUE ZHUANG (Zürich) proposed that Chinese notions of gardening and landscape designing had a deep and contested influence on British political culture in the 18th century. While China had a wide resonance as the repository of political values, Chinese landscape designs came to denote not merely enlightened politics, but also new values of commerce and consumption. The post-Glorious Revolution Anglo-British bourgeoisie sought validation of its commercialized values by adopting Chinese gardening culture. Simultaneously, however, Chinese gardens also presented non-martial values of luxury and sensuality, and these negative associations – together with growing British self-confidence – also served gradually to marginalize China as an aesthetic-moral exemplar for British elites.

From gardens to companies, and law courts to military regimes – taking the concept of transculturality as a vantage point, the con-

---

ference provided valuable and fresh insights into the topic of state-building, bringing into communication scholars of different world regions, time-frames and approaches. The presentations showed that aspects of entanglement, transfer and exchange are inevitable for the study of processes of state-building in Eurasia. Moreover, case studies discussing concepts like 'military revolution' or 'state-building from below' in Asian contexts demonstrated that the application of those concepts in non-European contexts is of great importance for their evaluation and reassessment. The focus of the conference on law, military, diplomacy, and political-aesthetic concepts offered a reasonable starting point. Further research based on the concept of 'transculturality' can explore the connections between state-building and issues of collective identity, economy, and the power dynamics of specific socio-economic groups inflected by categories such as gender and class.

### **Conference Overview**

*Welcome and Introductory Remarks by Antje Flüchter*

#### *Panel One: Law and Governance*

Chair: Moritz Baumstark (Heidelberg)

Gauri Parasher (Heidelberg): (Trans)Culture of Law: The Practice of Indo-French Law during the 18th Century

Verena Steller (Frankfurt/Main): Law and Empire: The Rule of Law in British India – the Rule of Lawyer?

#### *Evening Lecture*

Philip Stern (Durham): The Company-State: Institutions, Ideologies, and Practices

#### *Panel Two: Rituals and Religions*

Chair: Rudolph Ng (Heidelberg)

Sungshin Kim (Dahlongga) & Kurt Gulden-tops (Los Angeles): Ritual Controversies and the Emergence of Modern Universalism in France & Korea, 17th-18th Century

Ana Carolina Hosne (San Martín): Circulation of the Art of Memory in the Jesuit Missions in Peru and China in Late 16th Century

#### *Panel Three: Military*

Chair: Barend Noordam (Leiden)

Michael Axworthy (Exeter): The Awkwardness of Nader Shah

Ulrich Theobald (Tübingen): European Weapons in China: Muskets and Cannons in the Late Ming and Early Qing Periods

Judith Fröhlich (Zürich): The „Picture War“ of 1894-1895 and Western Knowledge in China and Japan

#### *Panel Four: Diplomacy*

Chair: Gauri Parasher (Heidelberg)

Christina Brauner (Münster): At the Court of Dahomey: Transcultural Diplomacy and Discourse of Despotism

Rudolph Ng (Heidelberg): Early Sino-Spanish Diplomatic Encounters in the 19th Century

Ines Eben von Racknitz (Nanjing): The Political Negotiations during the China War of 1860: Transcultural Dimensions of Early Chinese and Western Diplomacy

#### *Panel Five: Concepts*

Chair: Sebastian Meurer (Heidelberg)

Stefan Gaarsmand Jacobsen (Aarhus): 18th Century European „Tribunals“ between Rome and Beijing

Yue Zhuang (Zürich): „Luxury “ and the Sublime in Sir William Chamber's Dissertation on Oriental Gardening (1772): Commercial Society and Burke's Sublime Effect

#### *Final Discussion*

Tagungsbericht *Entanglement of Histories, Circulation of Knowledge, and Transfer of Technologies: Dimensions of Transcultural Statehood? (1500-1900)*. 10.05.2012-12.05.2012, in: H-Soz-Kult 30.07.2012.