

Momentum of its own. Inherent Dynamism in Pre-Modern Societies

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Datum, Ort: 28.01.2021–30.01.2021, digital (Bielefeld)

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Historians, literary scholars and sociologists working on Europe, Africa and East Asia discussed the potential and limits of the concept of inherent dynamism to describe social change in pre-modern societies. Inherent dynamism, as proposed by the organizers, was defined as a change from within society itself, arising from a bundle of processes which are subsequently reproduced. Among other elements, they identified three basic structures of pre-modern societies worldwide that might shape inherent dynamism and make its historicization possible: segmental group formation in an estate-based order, a culture of presence and consensus orientation. Thus, the concept aimed at pointing out particular pre-modern driving forces for change and at highlighting these changes as genuinely pre-modern phenomena which increased complexity (e.g., growing number of groups, associations, ranks) but did not necessarily lead to modernity.

The online conference hosted by the Center of Interdisciplinary Research in Bielefeld and financed by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, was opened by JEROEN DUINDAM (Leiden). By comparing dynastic power globally at the levels of rulers, dynasties, courts and elites between 1300 and 1800, he identified several embedded tensions around kings. These tensions could lead to recurring phases of turmoil as well as to longer-term change, such as the development of succession from acclamation to heredity. The narrative of the rise and fall of dynasties, familiar from the works of Ibn Khaldun, but present in advice literature throughout Eurasia, reflected a moral injunction rather than a description of actual practice. Reaching beyond the narrative, however,

one can fruitfully identify a number of repeating patterns related to life cycles, succession strife, courtly inner-outer divisions, and center-periphery balances. These patterns can perhaps be seen as examples of inherent dynamism.

CHRIS WICKHAM (Oxford) continued the discussion on modernity narratives by elaborating on the limits of pre-capitalist economies with a particular focus on medieval northern Italy in the 12th and 13th century. A modern metanarrative of failure about pre-capitalist economies not developing further in the direction of modern capitalism still appears prevalent. Wickham criticized that this narrative ignores the economy's complexity before 1700. He highlighted that recent studies showed how peasant demand and market access shaped the specific feudal economy. A large majority, rich and poor, had access to all goods before industrialization. Overall, it was a specific feudal economic dynamic, based on peasant production, with its own internal rules – like lords profiting from peasants, securing resources and thereby reducing the scale of local demand and weakening the rural market. These limits to demand limited investment and indicate how these economies differed functionally from capitalist ones.

Turning to China, MICHAEL PUETT (Harvard) investigated the tensions between local aristocratic power and forms of statecraft in the Northern China plain (3rd ct. BC–12th ct.), where a Qin-Han model was continued by creating centralized state institutions for gaining control over the plain and building a mass infantry. Gaining control meant undermining aristocratic control over resources in the region. There were attempts to secure attachment to the state over the interest of aristocratic lineage by using a form of meritocratic selection. Puett emphasized the specific historical notion of meritocracy, which was not intended to create a kind of universal world of meritocratic justice, but which aimed at ensuring that the centralized state institutions were run by members of the elite, willing to undermine the power of hereditary control over resources. Constant tensions between the aristocrats and the centralised state institutes followed, depending on the latter's weakness.

Opening the session on lordship and estates, KIYOSHI JINNO (Tokyo) focused on the transition from lord-vassal to sovereign rule in the dynamism of law and litigation around the enactment of the *Goseibai shikimoku*, the legal code of the Japanese Kamakura shogunate, in 1232. Judicial proceedings shifted from decisions based on the shoguns choosing to the principle of „fairness“ under the Hojo, who began judging cases as a third party. A similar transition could be seen in the writing of judgement documents, showing that the shogunal regent did not simply serve as a substitute for the shogun’s orders. Although judgments of the Kamakura shogunate were not enforced, initially the shogun’s charismatic word of power may have contributed to a de facto coercive power. Jinno also saw this active in the „fairness“/impartiality jurisdiction under the shogunal regents, through writing and a forum in which the involved parties’ arguments were based on established rules.

TAKEMITSU MORIKAWA (Tokyo) addressed the question of whether the Tokugawa regime (1603-1867) was a stratified society. Drawing on sociological theory, he stated that book printing, by overcoming spatial distances and social barriers, paved the way for modern society’s emergence. Although limited in number, the territory of booksellers expanded throughout the period; commercial booksellers and market-oriented authors developed. The decentralized production of knowledge thereby drove early modern Japanese society to transition from a pre-modern to a modern society, although weakened by the dominance of politics since the Meiji-Restoration. Morikawa noted that identifying book production as an essential driver of change, in virtue of being an external factor, might not capture the inherent dynamism in the organizers’ sense.

Perpetuating the view on dynamism in Tokugawa Japan, WOLFGANG SCHWENKER (Osaka) discussed the culture of presence and the duty of alternate attendance established in 1635. Depending on how close they were to the Tokugawa regime or on their special duties (e.g., border protection), daimyos had to serve in Edo every year or two. Outer daimyos who were former ene-

mies had to spend a year at court and leave their wives and male heirs as hostages behind when they returned to their lands. The system thereby not only strengthened the feudal ties between those who ruled and those who followed, but also weakened the military power of former enemies and their ties to their native fiefdoms. The system helped stabilize the political order and embed political dynamism, but also unintendedly created an inherent dynamism in society, in particular in the cultural sphere and economy: The processions required a network of roads and post stations, thus the exchange of goods and money sometimes turned smaller villages into towns.

MARION EGGERT (Bochum) shed light onto inherent dynamism of petitioning in the context of dissent and the concept of *kongnon* (public discourse) in Korea during the Chosŏn dynasty between the 16th and 18th century. Group petitions directed at the throne appeared in the 16th century, mainly as a political instrument used by students of the National Academy (Sŏnggyungwan). This instrument was then taken over by the landed gentry and developed into mass petitions in the 18th century. Eggert emphasized that petitions were not the beginning of modernity, but a specifically pre-modern phenomenon that must be understood in the context, not only of an estate-based hierarchy, but especially of consensus orientation and a culture of presence. Here she identified potential sources of inherent dynamism that, in the case of consensus orientation, arose from the tensions between ideological commitment to consensus and the practical-political fact that the division of learned officials at court into several factions created a need for dissent. Although there was no legal institutionalization of dissent, it was so interwoven with the processes of court politics that legitimate spheres of dissent developed.

The session on kinship and descent was opened by SIMON TEUSCHER (Zürich). He detected a form of inherent dynamism in the processes of conceptualizing kinship to determine incest in relationships, in the field of prohibitions of incest, in the field of defining elites and in defining belonging in medieval and early modern Europe. Scholars in

canon law were not describing a pre-existing system of kinship in the 11th century but were inventing one which turned descent into an epistemic object. The set of criteria and methods for investigating consanguinity was later applied to other areas as well, ranging from admissions committees of chapters and tournaments to the appearance of *limpieza* tests (proving that one is of „pure Christian blood“) in its various forms. The recurring pattern or its dynamism lied in its application to new fields (descent, nobility, race).

Similar concepts of descent were presented by SUN JOO KIM (Harvard), who elaborated on inherent dynamism in the process of identifying (apical) ancestors in 15th to 19th century Korea. Focusing on the example of the Kigye Yu family, Kim showed how they invented their apical ancestor out of the desire to establish a deep pedigree, and that the methods entailed an inherent dynamism. The elites' reliance on malleable empiricism left many loopholes in the genealogies, enabling fabrication of genealogical records as well as leading to opportunities for marginal elites or even non-elites to claim their place in the elite genealogies. This elasticity ultimately diluted the exclusive value of genealogy in modern times. While textual evidence was valuable in illuminating ancestry, it also worked to loosen the requirements of textual proof and even to forge evidence.

Opening the session on inherent dynamism and elite formations, DUNCAN HARDY (Orlando/Florida) shed light on how political change and order in the Holy Roman Empire, Lithuania, Hungary and Poland between 1250 and 1550 could be explained by reference to inherent dynamics. Although there was continuity of a multilateral order, two clusters of normative inherent dynamics in the negotiation through feuding and arbitration and the formation of contracts and treaties can be identified. For example, Hardy pointed out the interplay of the intensification and institutionalization of multiparty negotiation and arbitration at assemblies, such as the Sejm or the Imperial Diet, and the ban on feuding. The latter was accompanied by the appearance of the *Reichskammergericht*, which itself was based on multilateral principles. He also stressed how inherent dynamism of treaty-

making shaped options for political change, ensuring that it took place within a multilateral framework.

In her paper on the diplomacy of Solomonid Ethiopia in the 15th to 16th centuries, VERENA KREBS (Bochum) examined the link between local elite church building and the dispatch of numerous Solomonid diplomatic missions to Latin Europe in the 15th century. She showed that the embassies were by-products of local developments in religious reforms. Particularly, the Solomonid construction of royal churches to mark the Christian domain in the dominion and the sending of embassies was modelled on the temple building of the biblical King Solomon, narrated as sending envoys to King Hiram of Tyre to obtain master craftsmen. The Ethiopian kings considered themselves the true heirs of Solomon and affirmed their dynastic lineage through the building of monumental religious architecture. Diplomacy thus served as a ritual act that produced and reaffirmed local kingship and was not, as older research suggested, motivated by an Ethiopian need for „European“ art and technology.

Throughout the conference it was discussed how inherent dynamism and its specific pre-modern form could be a cause for change of certain phenomena without totally transforming them or paving a path to modernity. The extent to which the concept involved modernity and the concept's range were quite debated. It was stressed that inherent dynamism isn't specific to pre-modern societies, but its quality differs based on different elements in pre-modern and modern times. The organizers also clarified that „inside“ and „outside“ did not refer to groups or geographical units, but rather to bundles of processes, which could contain parts of entangled history. Thus, inherent dynamism is not understood as a counter-concept to the history of entanglement. Other points of discussion concerned the intersection of socio-political dynamics with knowledge, media and religion; how the term „pre-modern“ needs to be problematized as it presupposes a definition about modernity; how inherent dynamism can and must be historicized; and whether there are societies that do not know any form of inherent dynamism.

Overall, the participating researchers provided a fruitful discussion and evaluation of the concept proposed by the organizers, highlighting its heuristic potential and rejecting dominant modernity narratives. Particularly, the concept's potential in understanding change in pre-modernity as driven by specifically pre-modern forms of societies, and not in constant reference to modernity, was stressed.

Conference overview:

Session 1: Comparisons, Changes and Momentums of its Own: General Considerations I

Chair: Daniel Schley (Bonn)

Jeroen Duindam (Leiden): Rulers and Courts: Structures, Cyclical Change, and Development

General Discussion: The Concept of „Inherent Dynamism“

Session 2: Comparisons, Changes and Momentums of its Own: General Considerations II

Chair: Peter Kramper (Bielefeld)

Chris Wickham (Oxford): The Limits of Pre-capitalist Economic Change

Michael Puett (Harvard): The Dynamics of Change: Re-thinking Comparative History

Session 3: Lordship, Estates and Inherent Dynamism I

Chair: Achim Mittag (Tübingen)

Kiyoshi Jinno (Tokyo): The Dynamism of Kamakura Shogunate Litigation: Power, Choice, and Fairness

Takemitsu Morikawa (Tokyo): Communication Structure in Early Modern Japan. Openness and Closeness of Social Systems

Session 4: Lordship, Estates and Inherent Dynamism II

Chair: Ulla Kypka (Hamburg)

Wolfgang Schwentker (Osaka): Lords in Motion: The Duty of Alternate Residence in Tokugawa Japan

Marion Eggert (Bochum): Consensus Orienta-

tion and Culture of Presence: An Assessment of Evidence from Korean Court Culture (16th to 18th ct.)

Session 5: Kinship and Social Distinction: Inherent Dynamism?

Chair: Eleonora Rohland (Bielefeld)

Simon Teuscher (Zürich): The Rise of Privileges and Discrimination based on Descent in Western Europe

Sun Joo Kim (Harvard): Inventing Ancestors in Pre-Modern Korea

Session 6: Inherent Dynamism and Status Formation of Elites

Chair: Stefan Gorißen (Bielefeld)

Duncan Hardy (Orland, Florida): Inherent Dynamism in a Pre-modern Multilateral Order: Horizontal Ties between. Elites and Political Change in Central Europe, c. 1250-1550

Verena Krebs (Bochum): All the King's Treasures: Religious Reforms, Material Culture and Power Consolidation in Late Medieval Ethiopia

Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Momentum of its own. Inherent Dynamism in Pre-Modern Societies*. 28.01.2021–30.01.2021, digital (Bielefeld), in: H-Soz-Kult 11.06.2021.