Introduction

Jeroen Duindam

Throughout global history empires have been expanding and contracting, rising and declining. New dynasties challenged their predecessors, only to be ousted in their turn. Conquerors stunned their contemporaries by overrunning huge landmasses, but their successors frequently proved unable to maintain even a semblance of unity. Chinese history, at first glance the epitome of continuity, hides repeated and protracted phases of violent contestation and sweeping geographical reconfiguration. Many dynasties, moreover, show a pattern of alternation between centralising and regionalising phases. In Europe, never unified under one single political or religious authority, the same patterns can be observed on the smaller-scale level of its dynastic mosaic.

Traditionally, Europe and China were seen as opposites, with China standing for unity, harmony, and continuity, Europe for division, competition and dynamism. Echoes of this view can still be found in debates on the 'rise of the West' and to some extent they reflect real differences.¹ However, such essentialist perspectives on European and Asian history tend to be self-confirmatory; they can be re-examined only by adopting a radically different approach based on focused comparison of well-defined themes. Comparative history has been practiced largely at the level of secondary sources within a restricted field of languages: it almost inevitably reproduces clichés of the older literature. Mastering the languages and research traditions of Chinese as well as European history reaches beyond the lifespan and capabilities of most individual scholars. By bringing together specialists studying the connections between dynastic centres and the territories formally under their sway, mostly in Late Imperial China and Early Modern Europe, this volume explores the uncharted path towards comparison at a different level. The concentrated and detailed chapters are not themselves comparative in nature, but they powerfully suggest the intellectual potential of combining a global scope with a keen awareness of the complications of local sources. This introduction outlines the

¹ See the elegant synthesis of discontinuous and continuous representations of Chinese history in Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire. The Political Culture of Ancient China and its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton and Oxford, 2012), underlining the unchallenged persistence of unity, imperial power, literati leadership and hegemony over local life in a setting in practice repeatedly characterised by conflict and disunity.

themes under scrutiny; an epilogue elaborates some of the consequences of the contributions assembled here for further comparative research in this field.

Powers wax and wane—not only in terms of territorial scope but also in the degree to which the centre can control the provinces. Imperial centres can command respect and extract tribute without actively governing outlying regions; as soon as the authority of the centre wanes, however, tributaries tend to drift away. Loss of control and political cohesion threatens even modern states supported by a technology of communication and infrastructures beyond the wildest imagination of any pre-modern ruler. How could leaders hope to secure the acquiescence of populations they ruled, particularly in remote areas?²

This classic question, examined at length in Max Weber's influential typology of power,³ can be answered in many ways. Three different ingredients figure in most durable political arrangements, albeit in variously proportioned combinations: coercion, interests, and ideals. It is difficult to conceive of any political constellation binding together a variety of groups and territories without 1) the threat of violent retribution, 2) the promise of material rewards, and 3) the appeal to shared values and ideas. The French Revolution expanded greatly the potential of states in each of these respects, a development enhanced by a sequence of technological breakthroughs. Not only did the revolution entail a sharp polarisation of political ideas and an upsurge of popular political action; it also caused an explosion of the repressive apparatus, adopted voluntarily by restoration monarchs. The growth of state power throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries went hand in hand with a differentiating and expanding agenda of state activities, and—in democratic regimes—with a rise in the numbers of voters and stakeholders.

The protracted phase of change from the final decades of the *ancien régime* into our contemporary world powerfully suggested a more linear view of history; it has also shaped our perception of pre-revolutionary forms of power. Post-revolutionary critique underlined the omnipotence and arbitrariness of monarchical government as well as its disregard for the interest of its peoples.

2 See David Cannadine, 'Introduction' in David Cannadine and Simon Price, eds., *Rituals of Royalty. Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987) 1–19, 19: 'Yet for any society, in any age, the study of politics ultimately comes down to one elemental question: how are people persuaded to acquiesce in a polity where the distribution of power is manifestly unequal and unjust, as it invariably is?' Please note that for this brief general introduction references have been kept to a minimum.

3 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen, 1922).

The legacies of dynastic power, in the form of palaces, images, and texts, likewise suggested strength, inflated self-importance, and detachment from public needs. With the demise of the moral underpinning of monarchical rule, it became difficult to differentiate its religious-hierarchical mandate from blatant abuse and self-enrichment. Amidst mostly negative associations one appreciative note remained: monarchy had triumphed over feudal anarchy and baronial power. In the national historiographies of Europe, particularly of France, monarchy appeared as an intermediate stage, with rulers laying the groundwork for the modern state by subduing their overmighty noble subjects.

This overstated and one-sided view of royal power firmly dominated European history textbooks until recently. A gradual revision of European 'absolutism' took shape in the last decades of the twentieth century largely on the basis of research in archives that added regional and elite perspectives to the top-down monarchical view.⁴ The language of fidelity and subservience went together with a keen defence of local corporate interests. While the monarchical state harshly punished open defiance, it accepted regional elites as necessary partners in government, as a rule accommodating local interests and rights. At the heart of the monarchical state a similar pattern predominated: open challenges were never tolerated, but loyal supporters were granted extensive rights. The household, long understood as a gilded cage where once-powerful nobles were captured in a contest for vain honours, was never wholly detached from governance. Louis XIV's successful attempt to attach the highest nobles to his court by rewarding them with prestigious offices and privileges created an aristocratic stronghold that would persist until the revolution. The rulers themselves, whether strong or weak, relied at least a part of their lives on the support and advice of confidants in their domestic environment. In addition to the qualification of the reach and force of royal power, it has become clearer that dynastic rulers, too, cherished a moral view of their responsibilities, even if in practice they often ignored the dictates of their mandate. The tension between the practices outlined in Machiavelli's

4 See e.g. R.J.W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550–1700. An Interpretation* (Oxford 1979); William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France. State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge, 1985); Roger C. Mettam, *Power and Faction in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford and New York, 1988); Julian Swann, *Provincial power and absolute monarchy: the Estates General of Burgundy, 1661–1790* (Cambridge, 2003); a critical note on 'revisionism' in John J. Hurt, *Louis XIV and the Parlements. The Assertion of Royal Authority* (Manchester, 2002); on the court see e.g. Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles. The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals* (Cambridge, 2003); Leonhard Horowski, *Die Belagerung des Thrones. Machtstrukturen und Karrieremechanismen am Hof von Frankreich 1661–1789* (Stuttgart, 2012) Beihefte der Francia 74.

The Prince and the moral code voiced in numerous princely mirrors reflects the Janus-faced nature of political action in general.

Can this process of revision profitably be extended to Chinese dynastic power? The European perception of Asian dynastic constellations was encumbered not only by the generic legacies of revolution and dynastic propaganda: in addition it has been plagued by the clichés of ‘Oriental despotism’. While omnipotence, arbitrariness, luxury, and decadence can be found among the negative connotations of European dynastic rule, they have dominated the European view of Asian rulers from Montesquieu to Wittfogel.⁵ Montesquieu’s typology of the leading principles of despotism (fear), monarchy (honour), and republic (virtue), to some extent reflect the three categories outlined above: coercion, interests, and ideals. His understanding of monarchy, based on the distribution of ‘honours’ in the sense of advantages and titles as much as on the *principle* of honour, comes close to material interests. Montesquieu located the republican principle of virtue in antiquity and actually could no longer trace it in the republics of eighteenth-century Europe. The empires of Asia, finally, served as his main example of despotic rule based on fear. Montesquieu did not accept his Jesuit contemporaries’ appreciative view of China’s government and failed to see honour and virtue among the Chinese, ‘à qui’, he stressed, ‘on ne fait rien faire qu’à coups de baton’.⁶ Traditional Chinese dynastic histories, written from the perspective of the scholarly elite of officials, gave pride of place to wise advisers admonishing the emperor—their ideal role. On the whole, however, they too have underlined the unchallengeable powers of the emperor, corrupted only under weaker emperors by the malicious influence of eunuchs and dowagers—the scholars’ inner-court rivals. Will different sources, at court or in the regions, bring to light different perspectives? An abundant harvest of recent literature tends to answer affirmatively. The relatively small imperial magistracy ruling over huge and populous territories forcefully suggests that power necessarily was based on local co-operation and

5 See Montesquieu’s [Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu] classic view on ‘oriental despotism’ and the rule of fear in *De l’Esprit des Lois* (many editions), and the remarkable combination of lucid analysis and lopsided interpretations in Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, 1957), reviewed very critically by Arnold Toynbee in the *American Political Science Review* 52 (1958) 195–198. For more recent and balanced studies of European depictions of the Orient: e.g. Thomas Kaiser, ‘The Evil Empire? The Debate on Turkish Despotism in Eighteenth-Century French Political Culture’, *Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 1 (2000), 6–34, or the book-length study by Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1998).

6 Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des Lois*, in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris 1964), 576–577.

co-optation. At court, strong emperors wielding power actively and weaklings reigning without ruling can both be expected to have been influenced by their confidants and restrained by the accumulation of ritual responsibilities. No emperor escaped entirely from the pressures and restrictions dictated by his office and its socio-cultural embedding.

This preliminary discussion outlines some of the issues behind the initiative culminating in this volume:

- 1) One of the key questions of government can be found in the changing relationship between a political centre and the provinces under its authority.
- 2) The post-revolutionary stress on coercion as the key element in pre-modern dynastic states or empires needs to be re-examined, allowing more room for the interplay of coercion, interests and ideals.
- 3) The revision of 'absolutism' in the European context and the reconfiguration of the history of European dynastic states on the basis partly of new source materials raise the question to what extent these changing interpretations are relevant for Asian dynastic states and empires, notably Late Imperial China.
- 4) Recent publications on dynastic power in Late Imperial Chinese history likewise suggest a revision of traditional images of dynastic power—can they be understood as converging with European revisionism?

Only by bringing together specialists on European and Chinese history can we hope to effectively start answering such questions. Our effort took shape in two meetings, the first concentrating on *occasions* where rulers visited the regions or met regional representatives, the second focusing on *persons* representing the ruler in the provinces. These two poles form the sections of the current book: *agents & interactions*. While this introduction outlines the general themes of this volume, a more extensive and probing opening chapter by Jürgen Osterhammel examines the patterns recurring in the history of the ruler's most eminent representatives.

For some rulers travelling could substitute for the appointment of local agents. Dynastic rule long retained a mobile character, following a seasonal-liturgical-political calendar of movement. Most Early Modern European courts developed a single prominent winter residence but usually travelled to a sequence of hunting lodges in spring, summer, and early autumn. No Early Modern European court refrained from travel altogether—even the French court after its installation in Versailles moved to Fontainebleau for a six-week

sojourn every autumn and undertook shorter trips to various other palaces. These patterns echoed the tradition of *Reisekönigtum*, in which the ruler himself moved from province to province, being hosted by his various regional stalwarts who at the same time confirmed their loyalty. From the later seventeenth century onwards, however, most European monarchies could rely on a more developed system of regional government, reducing the political necessity for travel—or placing it on the shoulders of regional representatives, who in turn were expected to report to the centre. Chinese emperors had long since established a sedentary court in their various capitals, but this did not prevent them from moving on hunting expeditions, inspection tours, or visits to dynastic tombs and important shrines. The late Ming emperors were notorious homebodies, hiding behind the moat and walls of the Forbidden City, some to the point of refusing to face their outer-court officials.⁷ Conversely, their Qing successors proved more mobile, sometimes to the point of provoking the classic admonitions of their Confucian advisers.

Clearly in Early Modern Europe and in Late Imperial China the rulers' travels were an addition to, rather than a replacement for, a system of regional administration. Apparently, a network of regional agents supported by a system of government by paper, highly developed in the Chinese case and rapidly gaining pace in most European countries, did not necessarily take away the need to meet in person. The feudal hierarchy of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation still expected vassals to perform an act of homage to the emperor, although this ritual was increasingly performed by proxies. The highest office-holders in France pledged their oath to the king in person, 'entre les mains de sa majesté'. All European dynastic rulers expected a share of their elites to attend ritual highlights and festive occasions, wherever these took place. Personal attendance and notably access into the ruler's direct proximity retained great importance for elites. The numerous honorary servitors of the European court cultivated their rights of access even if they served at court only haphazardly. The persistent importance of personal interaction, or '*Anwesenheitsgesellschaft*', around dynastic rulers was extended into distant territories by sending out representatives who could be seen as the ruler's *alter ego*. Ambassadors and viceroys personally performed royalty in the name of their ruler. High-placed personal representatives could operate as the head

7 See an interesting counter-image in the more outgoing early and middle Ming, most recently elaborated by David Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge Mass., 2013); on the Qing, Michael G. Chang, *A Court on Horseback. Imperial Touring & the Construction of Qing Rule, 1680–1785* (Cambridge Mass. and London, 2007) Harvard East Asian Monographs 287, as well as his contribution to this volume.

of a well-developed central administration in the region; often, however, they served first and foremost as a prestigious personal intermediary between the distant ruler and local elites. Most extended empires left room for various arrangements ranging from a closely monitored core territory, via outlying regions with more autonomy, to a frontier based mostly on tributary connections or alliances. The differentiated conditions shaped the forms of interaction and the status and functions of agents.

Did rulers distance themselves from the population at large in the course of the period under discussion here? There are major differences in this regard between Chinese and European traditions—but each also varied per period, per ruler, and in the European case also regionally. French kings cultivated and broadcast an accessible and familiar type of kingship, whereas their Habsburg rivals adopted a more distant posture. The image of royalty withdrawing from pageantry and processions in the urban context into the splendid isolation of their hunting lodges is surely overstated. Points of contact changed in place, format, and audiences, but remained important for all European dynasties. This argument cannot be elaborated here at length, but one example may clarify it. When from the 1760's onwards, the Habsburg court in Vienna reduced the dense sequence religious-ritual interaction with the city, it also invited unprecedented numbers of Viennese to its new-style festivities in the Hofburg, Belvedere, and Schönbrunn palaces. Joseph II, discontinuing the Maundy Thursday *pedilavium* or washing of the feet of elderly poor men as well as some other highly prized rituals, at the same time made a point of frequently chatting with 'lowly' people in the Hofburg's *Kontrolleurgang*, hearing their complaints and accusations.⁸ During his travels *al' incognito* he likewise cultivated connections with 'ordinary' people, on one celebrated occasion ploughing a furrow—mimicking a standard ritual of the Chinese court.

While petitioning was a recurring issue in Chinese imperial history as well,⁹ imperial Confucian rituals were not as a rule performed for popular audiences,

8 See Derek Beales, *Joseph II. In the shadow of Maria Theresa 1741–1780* (Cambridge, 1987); *Joseph II. Against the World, 1780–1790* (Cambridge, 2009), and more particularly his: 'Joseph II, petitions and the public sphere', in Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms, ed., *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2007) 249–268, mentioning the *Kontrolleurgang*—see *Anekdoten und Charakterzüge aus dem Leben Josephs des Zweiten, Römischen Kaisers* (Vienna, Neuwied, Leipzig, 1790), 143 for a contemporary account.

9 See e.g. the overview by Qian Fang, 'Hot potatoes: the Chinese complaint systems from early times to the late Qing (1898)', *Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 4 (2009), 1105–1135. Among numerous relevant publications on Chinese history not mentioned in the contributions following this introduction, Anita Chung, *Drawing Boundaries: Architectural Images in Qing China* (Honolulu, 2004); C. Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of*

and the ruler's mixing with urban or rural populations seems to have been minimal. Access even into the outer sections of the Forbidden City remained limited to the upper layers of scholar-officials. Did the aloofness of Chinese emperors reflect a less activist, more learned ideal of rulership than the ideals predominating in Europe? While this may well be the case, the dominant role of literati in redacting the documentary legacies of the Chinese court makes it difficult to ascertain to what extent they tailored the emperors' lives to fit their ideals. Memoirs, diaries, correspondences, and local views are necessary to complement and possibly correct the official histories. While such sources seem less abundant than in the Early Modern European setting, several of the contributions to this volume suggest there is a world to be discovered.

The contributions to this volume speak for themselves; each section has a strong internal consistency and starts with papers introducing some of the key issues. Some preliminary remarks suffice here.

Jürgen Osterhammel, choosing an encompassing framework in time and place, provides a magisterial overview and analysis of the viceroy as a 'type' recurring in very different settings. Metin Kunt, the single contributor dealing with West Asia in this volume, shows how the relations between centre and provinces in the Ottoman Empire changed shape over the long-term. He underlines unpremeditated *ad hoc* changes at the centre, partly under the pressure of war-time emergencies, which created opportunities for governors and local elites. Kent Guy provides a detailed example of one Chinese official's career, highlighting some of the key aspects of the Qing system of appreciating and rewarding governors' qualities by promotion. He demonstrates the relevance of regional differences for governors' careers and the central appreciation of a *cursus honorum* based on accumulated experience. Sabine Dabringhaus elaborates the Tibetan case, where the emperor's representative, even in the absence of a durable administrative system, could at times pursue an activist and successful policy. In the end, however, the personality of the governor or Amban was all-important, and under weaker personalities local elites surfaced as the dominant party. Yincong Dai explores another complication of the relations between the ruler and agents of power in the region: local trouble-shooting served as a testing ground and training school for the ruler's closest advisers. In this case, a failed regional mission led to important changes at the centre, with the Jiaqing emperor ending a long phase of implicit

Qing China's Yunnan Frontier (Cambridge, 2006); Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and Military under the Qing* (New York, 2006); Mark C. Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (New York etc., 2009) need to be mentioned here because of their relevance for the themes of this volume.

reliance on a favourite grand councillor. Christian Büschges' paper, discussing the intriguing ceremonial interactions between Spanish viceroys and regional institutions as well as dignitaries, provides a crucial bridge to the next section, by reminding us that ritual and cultural interactions with the personal representative of the ruler in the regions reflected many of the issues that recurred in the grand ceremonial occasions around the ruler himself.

Patricia Ebrey reconsiders the long tradition of scholar-officials remonstrating against royal extravagance in its multiple forms, reminding us that emperors frequently occupied a position differing markedly from that of their advisers—and thus warns us against an unquestioning reading of literati-sources. Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly traces the rapid expansion of printed descriptions of court festivals and ceremonies; she underlines that these texts, often printed before the occasion or commissioned afterwards to broadcast its conspicuous success to wider audiences, do not necessarily provide the 'wahrhafte Beschreibung' or true description they so unequivocally promised their readership. Michael Chang, focusing on the Kangxi emperor's inspection tour to Suzhou in 1684, reconsiders the event in the light of several descriptions, originating both at court and in the regions. His paper shows how we can try to move beyond the standard view of such events, using different sources suggesting more interaction than commonly found in the official descriptions. Neil Murphy explains in detail how the urban entries of French kings reflected not only a ritual show but entailed a renegotiation of urban privileges and royal rights. This point recurs in Margit Thøfner's careful analysis of the images of entries into late sixteenth-century Antwerp in different settings. These two papers underline how routes, dress, gesture, colours, allegories, gender, and many other details, reflect and to some extent even transform political relationships. They remind us, as did the paper by Christian Büschges, that the pragmatic layout of this volume should not be understood as a separation between 'political' actors and 'cultural' interactions: these domains, indeed, cannot effectively be separated. Nor is it easy to separate interests and ideals: ceremonial interaction, pervaded by the hierarchical conception of society, determined rules of access and had an immediate impact on the distribution of honours.

This collection of papers questions juxtapositions between pre-modern rulership as opposed to the modern world and between European and Asian rulership. It underlines some recurring patterns in the balance between rulers and regions, power wielders and populations, that deserve further focused comparative re-examination, crossing traditional period markers as well as cultural borders while relying on expert knowledge. We hope this starting point can help to bring together in a more lasting and productive way the results of scholarship in various regions looking at the same themes.