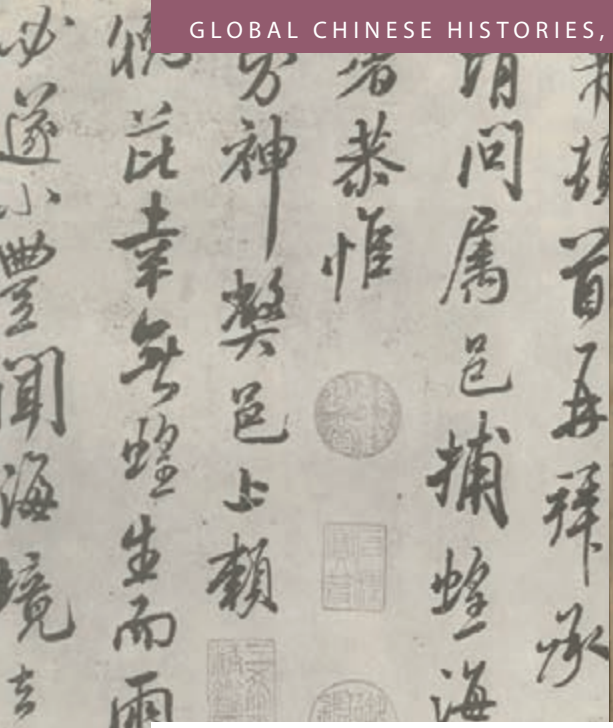
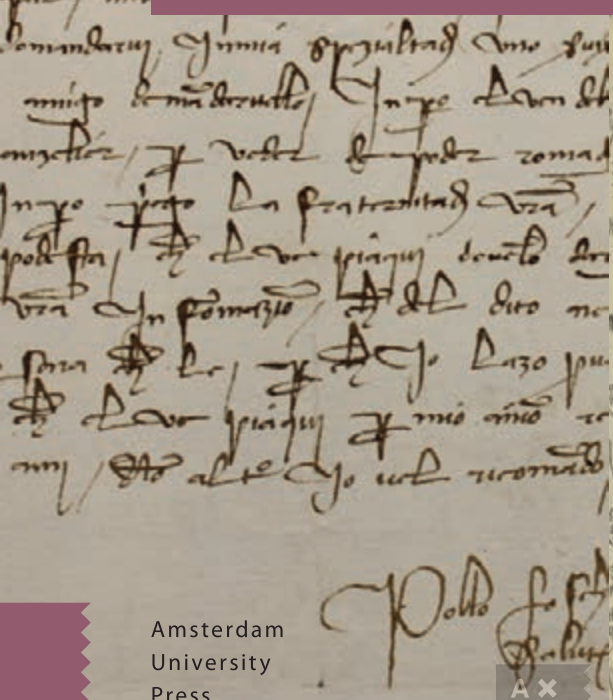
GLOBAL CHINESE HISTORIES, 250-1650



Edited by Hilde De Weerdt and Franz-Julius Morche

Political Communication in Chinese and European History, 800-1600



Amsterdam University Press

Political Communication in Chinese and European History, 800–1600

Amsterdam University Press

Global Chinese Histories, 250-1650

Global Chinese Histories, 250-1650 focuses on new research that locates Chinese histories within their wider regional contexts including cross-border and/or comparative perspectives. We are interested in manuscripts in a broad range of fields including humanities and social-science based approaches to politics and society, art and architecture, literature and intellectual developments, gender and family, religious text and practice, landscape and environment, war and peace, trade and exchange, and urban and rural life. We encourage innovative approaches and welcome work all along the theoretical-evidential spectrum. Our interest also extends to books that analyze historical changes to the meaning and geography of sovereignty in the Chinese territories, the complexity of interchange on the cultural and political peripheries in Chinese history, and the ways in which Chinese polities have historically been situated in a wider Afro-Eurasian world.

The editorial board of Global Chinese Histories 250–1650 welcomes submission of manuscripts on Chinese history in the 1400 years from the early medieval period through the Ming Dynasty. We invite scholars at any stage of their careers to share their book proposals and draft manuscripts with us.

Amsterdam
University
Press

Political Communication in Chinese and European History, 800–1600

Edited by
Hilde De Weerdt and
Franz-Julius Morche

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: Adapted from (clockwise from top left): Letter from Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107) to the prefect of Chuzhou, in *Song Yuan chidu* 宋元尺牘 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2000), p. 239; Map of Europe, from *Liber Floridus* (early twelfth century), Ghent University Library, Ms. 92, f. 241r; Map of the Chinese and Non-Chinese Territories (c.1130s), in *Song ben Lidai dili zhizhang tu* 宋本歷代地理指掌圖 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989); Letter from Polo Foscari to Lorenzo Dolfin (23 April 1422), Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, b. 282, fasc. 3.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 003 8
e-ISBN 978 90 4855 100 2 (pdf)
DOI 10.5117/9789463720038
NUR 684

Amsterdam University Press

In memoriam

Glen Dudbridge
(*1938–2017*)

Mark Whittow
(*1957–2017*)

Amsterdam
University
Press

Amsterdam
University
Press

Table of Contents

Epilogues

List of Figures and Tables by Chapter

Acknowledgments

This volume results from the sustained collaboration facilitated by the European Research Council project 'Communication and Empire: Chinese Empires in Comparative Perspectives' based first at King's College London (2012–2013) and later at Leiden University (2013–2017).[1] It grew out of an international workshop 'Political Communication in the Medieval World, 800–1600' organised by the Communication and Empire research group and held at the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome on 27–29 May 2015. We are grateful to the Royal Netherlands Institute, and especially to Harald Hendrix, Agnieszka Konkol, Corine Tetteroo, and Arthur Weststeijn, for hosting the event. The Rome workshop was preceded by a smaller event focused on collaboration and method in comparative history ('New Perspectives on Comparative Medieval History: China and Europe, 800–1600') held at Pembroke College, Oxford on 30 September–1 October 2013. We gratefully acknowledge the support of Pembroke College and its dedicated staff.[2]

The King's College Department of History and the Leiden Institute for Area Studies (LIAS) provided conducive environments for this experimental work. During our time at King's, we benefitted greatly from stimulating discussions with colleagues and students. We are especially grateful to Stephen Baxter, Julia Crick, Serena Ferente, Bernard Gowers, Peter Heather, Dame Janet Nelson, Tassos Papacostas, Andrew Prescott, Alice Rio, Dionysios Stathakopoulos, Alice Taylor, and participants of our fortnightly reading seminar 'Comparative Approaches to Medieval History: Europe and China' (ac. year 2012/ 2013). At Leiden, numerous colleagues and students from LIAS and the Institute of History supported our work by providing critical input as well as practical help during workshops, seminars, and personal conversations. In particular, we wish to thank Maghiel van Crevel (LIAS Academic Director, 2009–2016), Jeroen Duindam, Jos Gommans, and members of the NWO-Horizon programme 'Eurasian Empires'.

1 European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/ 2007-2013)/ ERC grant agreement no. 283525. Hilde De Weerdt (PI), Chu Ming Kin, Brent Ho, Franz-Julius Morche, et al.

2 For full descriptions, programs, and reports on both workshops see Hilde De Weerdt, Chu Ming Kin, Franz-Julius Morche, Brent Ho et al., 'Communication and Empire: Chinese Empires in Comparative Perspective', 2012–, http://chinese-empires.eu/events/conferences/international-workshop-new-perspectives-on-comparative-medieval-history-china-and-europe-800-1600/ and http://chinese-empires.eu/events/conferences/international-conference-political-communication-in-the-medieval-world-800-1600/ (both accessed 21 May 2020).

We are also grateful to numerous external collaborators. In addition to the participants of the aforementioned workshops, particular thanks are due to Georg Christ, Filippo de Vivo, Jean-Philippe Genet, Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, and members of the AHRC Research Network 'Defining the Global Middle Ages', especially Glen Dudbridge (†), Ian Forrest, Catherine Holmes, Conrad Leyser, R.I. Moore, Jonathan Shepard, Naomi Standen, Alan Strathern, John Watts, Mark Whittow (†), Chris Wickham, and Simon Yarrow.

We fondly remember Glen and Mark, who did not live to see the completion of this book; may it be a small tribute to their scholarship, kindness, and wit, which we will continue to cherish.

Leiden/London, February 2020
Hilde De Weerdt
Franz-Julius Morche

Introduction

Hilde De Weerdt and Franz-Julius Morche

In this collection of essays, we examine the significance of political communication in the comparative study of medieval polities. The workshop out of which this collection grew was initially intended to work towards an explanation of the divergent courses that Chinese and European history have taken in the second millennium through extended conversations about the role of political communication in the formation, maintenance, or fragmentation of empires and other kinds of polities. We abandoned the paradigm of Sino-European divergence in favour of a more open-ended investigation of the significance of communication processes and the politics of mediators and communicators in the histories of medieval Chinese and European polities. In the introduction we outline the analytical benefits of and the historiographical need for the micro- or meso-historical comparative case studies included in this volume. We first turn to the question of why and how historians have turned to political communication. Then we discuss the questions of why and how the authors employed comparative approaches. Lastly, we will also underscore the need for comparative histories of medieval polities, those included in this volume as well as those that are not.

Political Communication

Two factors in particular motivated the focus on political communication, which we broadly define as 'the circulation of information and ideas concerning political institutions and events'[1] or 'the exchange of political knowledge and values among both state- and non-state actors' (De Weerdt and Watts, Chapter 1).

1 F. de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

De Weerdt, Hilde, and Franz-Julius Morche (eds), *Political Communication in Chinese and European History, 800-1600*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2021
DOI: 10.5117/9789463720038_INTRO

First, twentieth-century literatures on the comparative history of empires and state formation tend to focus on state institutions, social organization, and ideologies which are typically understood as well-defined traditions with fixed characteristics (texts, rituals, and values whose meanings remain constant over time). In this literature, political communication appears irrelevant; ideological or cultural factors are reduced to broad cultural orientations that are more or less automatically shared by ruling elites and the governed. In his seminal macro-sociological study, *The Political Systems of Empires* (1963), Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, for example, sees the cultural orientations of imperial elites as the primary reason for successive Chinese regimes' ability to accommodate change within pre-established political frameworks. The key historical question that this and similar work leave unanswered is how literate Chinese interacted with the court, what communication practices allowed them to play an intermediary role that ensured that 'the rulers and the bureaucracy never exerted pressure on the country's supply of resources strong enough to demolish the bases of the limited free-floating resources necessary for maintaining the centralized bureaucratic polity'.[2] In the mind of Song Dynasty (960–1279) scholar-officials, history had shown that regimes fell time and again because ruling elites exerted too much pressure. Here we do not take the impact of the goals of ruling elites or classical traditions for granted, but ask how and to what extent the literate and illiterate had access to political information; how administrative elites, intermediaries, and subjects reproduced, avoided, redirected, or generated it; and how political communication in formal institutions as well as informal social networks shaped political imaginaries and generated formal political power.

Second, including political communication in comparative political history has become more feasible than ever before. Historians working on various parts of the late medieval and early modern world have recently begun to explore state formation, imperial integration, and the formation and transformation of political imaginaries from the perspective of social and political communication. East Asian and European historians have examined how not only state structures but also social alliances and political imaginaries at various levels and scales were built through the production, dissemination, and control of political information. As Filippo de Vivo's work shows in the case of early modern Venice, communication was politics in the very concrete sense that it was an arena in which the government's attempts

2 S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1993 [1963]), p. 331.

to preserve secrecy clashed with various social actors' need for information and alliance-building. Moments of crisis in particular, such as military and diplomatic defeat, led to an outpouring of publications about current affairs with implications for domestic politics as well as external relations.[3] Hilde De Weerdt similarly demonstrated that in the wake of military defeat a structural transformation took place in the production and dissemination of information relating to the polity in twelfth-century Song China; political communication then expressed a new and broad involvement on the part of cultural elites in the Song imperial project.[4] As shown in Levine's chapter, in twelfth-century Song China and in Byzantium, military crises inspired the production of memoirs of the capital that reconstructed and thus preserved political imaginaries (Levine, Chapter 12).

In earlier work Jean-Philippe Genet, Wim Blockmans, and others have shown that medieval European secular governments began to adopt the communicative practices of the Catholic Church in order to strengthen their hold over their populations.[5] Despite and perhaps as a consequence of efforts to centralize administration, the very genres and channels of official communication became sites of negotiation with different outcomes, as shown in Genet's comparison of the vernacularization of political culture in medieval England and France (Genet, Chapter 3). Some of this work links communication and publishing to the formation of nationhood. Mary Berry, for example, argued that early modern Japanese print archives created 'a sense of nationhood: an integral conception of territory, an assumption of political union under a paramount state, and a prevailing agreement about the cultural knowledge and social intercourse that bound "our people"'.[6] This connection between print technology and nationalism is controversial but such work raises important questions about the effects of enduring transformations in political communication on social and political identities in pre-modern times.

In the workshops that led to the present work, we discussed methodological questions on comparison and collaboration; theoretical and conceptual questions regarding divergence, institutions, and networks; and historical

3 de Vivo, *Information and Communication*.

4 H. De Weerdt, *Information, Territory, and Networks: The Crisis and Maintenance of Empire in Song China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015).

5 W. Blockmans and J.-P. Genet, eds., *The Origins of the Modern State in Europe: 13th to 18th Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995–1998). See also Chapter 3 in this volume.

6 M. Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 248.

questions on the sources and historiographies of political communication. The resulting essays, half of which were co-authored following the workshop, focus on processes of political communication such as the inclusion and exclusion of intermediaries in official communication and decision making (De Weerdt/ Watts, Lamouroux/ Ronconi, Chapters 1 and 2); the tensions between and long-term impact of the use of classicizing and vernacular languages in political communication (Genet, Bossler/ Grévin, Chapters 3 and 5); networking and alliance building through the sharing of political information in private communication genres such as letters (Haseldine, Chen, Bossler, Chapters 4, 6, and 10); the bonding and fragmentation of empires through political communication and its social and spatial limits in pre-industrial empires (Whittow, Chapter 7); the posting of public notices (Ebrey/ Meserve, Chapter 8); the commemoration of major political and military events (Gowers/ Tsui, Levine, Chapters 11 and 12); and ex-ante and post-facto control over political communication (Chu/ Morche, Chapter 9).

The authors have paid special attention to the mediators and communicators in such processes, taking into account the institutional contexts within which they were operating (church organizations, regional polities, or large imperial formations) without letting such contexts determine the interpretation of communicative actions and their outcomes. The micro-historical approach taken by several authors is particularly effective in uncovering parallels in the agency and reach of individual mediators and communicators in different institutional contexts. This 'bottom-up' perspective frames the language and inter-personal relations of individual actors as fundamental components of the body politic. This is vividly shown, for example, in Chen's analysis of Zhang Yu's political alliance-building inside and outside the Song capital Kaifeng. Similarly, Bossler's account of Yao Mian's epistolary networks illustrates the political weight of individuals who, despite operating outside the bureaucratic mainstream, succeeded in creating politically significant networks that eventually became institutionally relevant because they challenged and altered established modes of political discourse and action. Haseldine's transaction approach in turn proposes a concrete method for identifying and measuring such politically relevant interactions even for contexts where the remaining body of epistolary evidence is thinner than for Song China.

Intermediaries connecting courts, councils, and bureaucracies to larger populations were particularly important in the different kinds of political communication processes discussed here. The commercialization and urbanization of the early centuries of the first millennium produced a wider variety and growing number of mediators in European and Chinese polities

including legal, religious, secretarial, and accounting experts and teachers (De Weerdt/ Watts, Chapter 1). These intermediaries were critical nodes linking, or in some instances breaking, the connections between horizontal and vertical communication channels. The printers Chen Qi (1186–1256) and Robert Estienne (1503–1559), the protagonists of the chapter by Chu and Morche, were political outsiders who succeeded in establishing self-beneficial power relations through the effective use of their communication capital. Through the pioneering of a new societal role, that of the independent scholar–publisher, they also contributed to a more general political development and challenged established structures of power. Whittow posits a direct link between an effective, comprehensive communication system and the stability of the polity: the late Roman Empire needed to be politically narrated, its authority transported from the centre to the utmost periphery through a long chain of jurists, tax collectors, office-buyers, civil servants, and letter-writers. Such communication strengthened the polity socially, and hence also politically and institutionally through the gradual formalization of relationships, social norms, and communicative practices. As Grévin and Bossler demonstrate, the search for, and development of, standardized forms of written communication is independently observable in different linguistic cultures. In their account, the formalization of informal communication networks and their modes of exchange strengthened political rule. Levine's chapter identifies a collective experience of loss as a source for new political ideals. The fallen imperial capitals of Kaifeng and Constantinople re-emerge as idealized political bodies, which the disgraced political elite are called upon to recreate despite having shown themselves individually unworthy of their idealized community.

State actors interacted dynamically with growing bodies of intermediaries, co-opting them, adapting communication strategies and media, and diffusing statist modes of communication; repression and indoctrination were also part of the repertoire but certainly not the sole means to confront challenges. State institutions and bureaucratic structures in medieval times were not static legacies of the early imperial past; the state regularly acted as an innovator in communication, shaping the formation of political or civic identities and related norms. As shown, for example, by Ebrey and Meserve in their comparison of public notices in Renaissance Rome and Song China, a public arena raising individual or collective awareness developed in city states and large territorial polities alike. Lamouroux argues that the Southern Song court increased fiscal efficiency through the introduction of the General Commands, which helped muster local knowledge obtained through informal networks on behalf of the state. Ronconi's and Genet's

contributions also portray different types of states as innovators in political communication. The introduction of the bureaucratic minuscule script in the production of literary and scientific works represents a downward movement of a communication technology from the governmental level to intellectual and artistic circles. The increasing use of French in late medieval Western European bureaucracies opened the political sphere to participants beyond the traditional elites. The promotion of the vernacular not only strengthened the political loyalties of lower-rank public servants, but also helped strengthen political identification with the polity. This in turn emboldened developing state structures to synchronize political with cultural frontiers.

In sum, our joint research has led us away from the divergence paradigm. We abandoned the premises about shared points of departure in divergence theories and the teleological endpoints from which divergence was to be measured. Neither did we look for single variables to explain the long-term development (or stagnation) of entire polities and societies across a trajectory spanning centuries all the way to the present. We could not reconcile such an approach with initial differences in scale and socio-economic conditions, the different kinds of structural transformations in political communication that punctuated the histories of Chinese and European polities throughout time, nor, most importantly, with the historical insights we were gaining through different types of comparison.[7]

Comparing Histories

We opted for a comparative approach for two reasons.[8] First, as Charles Tilly and others reflecting on the analytical affordances of comparison have explained in detail, the benefits of historical comparison are various and depend on the kind of comparison undertaken.[9] Instead of reaching for

7 For a more detailed critique of divergence theories, see H. De Weerdt, 'Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and the Comparative Political History of Pre-Eighteenth-Century Empires', *The Asian Review of World Histories* 4, no. 1 (2016): pp. 156–163.

8 The following observations are based on a brief discussion of these chapters in H. De Weerdt, 'The Future of Medieval Studies: A Chinese Historian's Perspective' [keynote lecture], *6th European Congress of Medieval Studies — Past and Future: Medieval Studies Today*, University of Basel, 3 September 2018 (to be included in the forthcoming conference proceedings).

9 C. Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984); J. Mahoney and D. Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); D. Cohen and M. O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

universalizing types of comparison, which attempt to derive universal rules and patterns for all of human history, we have sought to connect histories separated by national and regional historiographies and the structural boundaries imposed by modern academia. Such work is experimental and open-ended, and requires collaboration, even though this kind of collaboration is not what our jobs and our training were designed for. Despite the discomfort that comes with stepping outside the assumptions and expectations of one's area of expertise, the benefits are tangible. We will discuss these here in both general and typological terms; in his epilogue Robert Hymes discusses the comparative strategies and assumptions of the individual chapters.

First, juxtaposing and comparing the histories of different places is the best antidote for the kinds of large-scale universalizing comparisons that still dominate the field and public discourse. Comparisons that are built up from regional historiographies help us to question and un-learn the macro-scale comparative assumptions about civilizational differences and divergences on which the organization of professional history is based. It is also these kinds of universalizing comparisons that have given comparative history a bad reputation.

Second, a more inclusive medieval history, or the co-existence of a plurality of medieval histories, may also help undo the blind spots of regional fields and national(ist) historiographies. By crossing the divide between area studies and (European) medieval history, or, in the case of East Asian universities, between Chinese history and world history (understood as the history of world civilizations or societies surveyed sequentially), one hopes that unfounded assumptions such as the notion that 'China did not have Mirrors for Princes as such but only commentaries on the classic works of Confucius and Mencius'[10] or, a commonplace observation among Chinese historians that 'China did not have empires, it was unique in having dynasties', will be readily identified; an inclusive approach should lead us to a better understanding of imperial polities, dynasties, or political advice literature in human history, and highlight the areas of research that deserve more sustained attention.[11]

10 L.T. Darling, 'Mirrors for Princes in Europe and the Middle East: A Case of Historiographical Incommensurability', in *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World*, ed. by A. Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 223–242, here p. 234.

11 One excellent example is J. Duindam, *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Third, comparison helps us to identify and understand the significance of distinctive aspects of regional historical developments. These kinds of individualizing comparisons are perhaps those in which we are most often, and often implicitly, engaged. Most historians think comparatively, but due to the national frameworks within which history is often taught and written, few engage explicitly with the comparators with which they implicitly work.[12] Rendering them more explicit is then only an effort to critically reflect on and test unspoken assumptions.

Fourth, as the comparative history of processes of mediation and communication illustrates, these tentative explorations have broader methodological implications. We started out from processes and cases, sought out how intermediaries faced common challenges in order to better understand parallel developments, shared responses, differences, and the impact of such differences. Such explorations thus also move in the direction of generalizing comparisons that can narrate and explain variation in both short-term social action and longer-term social organization.[13]

Fifth, several contributors use an encompassing model of comparison, attributing differences in processes and outcomes to broader structural differences between the cultures or polities under examination. Gowers and Tsui place the commemoration of Yue Fei (1103–1142) and Thomas Becket (1120–1170) within a context of cultural difference regarding the valuation of civil and martial qualities and the balance of power between civil and military authority. Chu and Morche similarly interpret the contrasting processes of censorship affecting the businesses of Chen Qi and Robert Estienne as elements within distinct 'aspects of political development in China and Europe', with repressive censorship fitting within the late imperial Chinese unitary state and preventive censorship within a polycentric European world of rival powers.

Besides the methodological affordances, cross-regional comparative history is also of critical importance for the discipline of history. Our educational and research institutions are not set up to facilitate research and teaching across the globe. The administrative and financial structures of our universities often obstruct a more global dimension to student learning. History departments in most European universities where area studies (or

12 R. Grew, 'The Case for Comparing Histories', *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (Oct. 1980): pp. 763–778.

13 One example is R.I. Moore, 'The Eleventh Century in Eurasian History: Comparative Approach to the Convergence and Divergence of Medieval Civilizations', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 1 (2003): pp. 1–21. On universalizing, individualizing, generalizing, and encompassing comparisons, see Tilly, *Big Structures*.

what used to be called Oriental studies in the case of Asian or East Asian Studies) has been taught for some time are mostly focused on European history or the history of European expansion. This holds especially true for pre-nineteenth-century history. This means that the pre-modern histories of Asia, Africa, or the Americas are treated as negligible parts of the history curriculum, if at all.

We propose to go further and argue that the institutionalization of area studies has over time perpetuated structural inequalities in the academy that have had mostly negative repercussions for the development of the teaching and research of (non-European) history. Chinese historians do not teach history students and Chinese Studies students do not benefit from sitting in the same classrooms as students in history. This means that Chinese historians get far fewer opportunities to develop their disciplinary profiles in history and that the potential of their contribution to historical debates often remains unacknowledged. Even though Chinese history has grown tremendously over the past fifty years, most of this growth has taken place in the United States; the authorship of the chapters included and the scholarship cited in the present volume, mostly coming out of American universities, reflects this state of affairs.

Comparing Medieval Histories

Why read the histories of Song and Yuan (1279–1368) China next to histories of medieval Byzantium, Rome, or the English and French kingdoms? Does the difference in scale and organization not immediately render this a futile operation? The modes of comparison that we propose and adopt do not take entire polities, civilizations, or fixed institutions as their object. In his epilogue, Hymes illustrates that comparability, or better, similarity, at this level is not necessary for illuminating comparisons to go ahead. As outlined above, we find that much is to be gained by analyzing processes, responses to shared challenges, and the actions of those in structurally equivalent positions within distinct communities. In this respect, the research reflected in these pages shares much in common with the goals of those globalizing 'the Middle Ages', especially as articulated by Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen,[14] as well as with recent efforts to establish microhistory

14 C. Holmes and N. Standen, 'Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages', in *The Global Middle Ages*, ed. by eaed., *Past & Present* 238, supplement 13 (2018): pp. 1–44; eaed., 'Defining the Global Middle Ages', *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015): pp. 106–117.

within global frameworks.[15] Before turning to the place of this volume within a globalizing medieval history, let's first discuss another reason to engage in comparative historical analysis of medieval polities, namely, the substantial gap within the chronological coverage of the broader subfield of Sino-European comparative history.[16]

Comparative analyses of Chinese and European history have become commonplace. The similarities and differences between the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) and Roman Empires have been debated in a series of comparative studies, and early modern Chinese and European historians have mainly sought to explain the different paths taken by Chinese and West European economies.[17] From a political historical point of view, Sino-European comparative history has most frequently been explored with respect to the early empires that dominated the opposite ends of Eurasia at the beginning of the first millennium.[18] In this literature the Qin (221–206 BCE) and Han Empires and the Roman Empire represent successful attempts to subject large territories to a common political, legal, and military framework. In both cases, the ensuing political theology of universal rulership, claiming principality over the cosmos, added a transcendental component to their legitimization of imperial authority.[19] Han-Rome comparisons have proven useful in explaining political development from the perspective of state

15 J.-P. Ghobrial, ed., *Global History and Microhistory*, *Past & Present* 242, supplement 14 (2019).

16 There are exceptions to this rule, especially J.P. Arnason and B. Wittrock, eds., *Eurasian Transformations, Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries: Crystallizations, Divergences, Renaissances* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004); also M. Borgolte, ed., *Das europäische Mittelalter im Spannungsbogen des Vergleichs* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001); more recently, J. Preiser-Kapeller, *Jenseits von Rom und Karl dem Großen: Aspekte der globalen Verflechtung in der langen Spätantike, 300–800 n. Chr.* (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2018).

17 For the early empires, see especially F.-H. Mutschler and A. Mittag, eds., *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); W. Scheidel, ed., *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); id., ed., *State Power in Ancient China and Rome* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Key works on the large comparative early modern economic history include K. Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); J.-L. Rosenthal and R. Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); P. Vries, *State, Economy and the Great Divergence: Great Britain and China, 1680s–1850s* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

18 In addition to the literature mentioned above, see also V. Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

19 A. Mittag and F.-H. Mutschler, 'Empire and Humankind: Historical Universalism in Ancient China and Rome', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37, no. 4 (December 2010): pp. 527–555; P. Fibiger Bang and D. Kolodziejczyk, '"Elephant of India": Universal Empire through Time and across Cultures', in *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and*

formation, that is, the attempt to understand the emergence and structural evolution of polities largely in terms of formal institutions — such as legal and monetary systems, means of military organization, courtly cultures — and the related means of justifying political rule. Seen as a means to enlarge and objectify area-specific research, comparison has here revived the quest to explain historical developments in terms of universal patterns.[20]

Yet, the focus on the macro-parameters of state structures also carries the risk of alienating political histories from their social and cultural contexts.[21] These appear ever more relevant the further we move away from the early world empires. Middle-period Chinese and medieval European history are characterized by multi-state rule and political and territorial fragmentation. As dynastic turns and the emergence of different, competing centres of power created a need to negotiate or renegotiate political and social hierarchies, the development of the political space became a multi-directional process involving a wider variety of official and non-state actors. In both Chinese and European history, the increasing significance of communication as a key element of all political activity — from basic forms of social interaction on a local level to the creation of large-scale, pan-regional political imaginaries — is evidenced by expanding archives of written sources from the seventh century onwards. Their survival — which includes official pronouncements as well as the unofficial exchange of news and developments between lower-rank elites and political outsiders — is a defining feature of the medieval world as well as a tangible indicator of political dynamics both within state structures and in wider society. These diverse and expanding archives allow historians of Chinese and European political history beyond the first empires to adopt a bottom-up perspective in which political cultures emerge from the written interaction between individuals and networks at both the core and the periphery of political power.

Departing from comparative historiographies of empire and state formation whose principal aim is 'to recognise broad patterns obscured by a preoccupation with "local" details',[22] this volume therefore sets out to trace

Representation in Eurasian History, ed. by id. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1–42.

20 Beginning with Eisenstadt, *Political Systems*. More recently, A. Monson and W. Scheidel, eds., *Fiscal Regimes and the Political Economy of Premodern States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); I. Morris and W. Scheidel, eds., *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

21 Also see De Weerdt, 'Eisenstadt and Comparative Political History'.

22 W. Scheidel, 'Introduction', in *State Power*, ed. by id., pp. 3–10, here p. 7.

forms and scopes of political communication in middle-period Chinese history and the European 'long' Middle Ages by placing local and regional observations in a framework of cross-regional comparison. Many of the contributions in this collection engage with seldom-used source materials including announcements, posters, letters, and memoirs, and zoom into small-scale, micro-historical circumstances and interactions. The resulting micro-comparative approach accounts for the experiences of specific individuals from a variety of social backgrounds (officials, clerics, soldiers, scholars, merchants), while addressing the interplay between individuals, their networks, and emerging political structures and imaginaries over time.

In this way this volume partakes in the global turn in medieval history. This turn towards global medieval history is in our view not about the geographic extent of one's investigations or about a new kind of universal periodization, it is first and foremost about method. The points of departure for global medieval history can therefore be summarized as follows: first, we can make medieval history more global by bringing in regions typically excluded from study and by drawing on perspectives from other regions to think about cross-regional processes. Second, we can make medieval history more global by building on regional expertise, and by identifying themes, questions, and sources from regional historiographies. Third, the practice of the 'Global Middle Ages' as outlined in the above points also brings with it a focus on processes such as mediation, communication, mobility, or building trust rather than on fixed and immutable institutions or canonical traditions, on informal networks and connections rather than on economic or political centres, on interventions in global history by scaling up from the bottom, and on a critical engagement with modern global history as well as with subfields that are still prone to Eurocentrism as well as Sinocentrism.[23] Fourth, global medieval historians should welcome radical critiques of the field itself and those critiques should become more inclusive of the practice of history beyond the Western world or Anglophone academia. Fifth, and not included in this volume, we can make medieval history more global by

23 For a more elaborate statement of these goals and an explanation of the Global Middle Ages as method, see Holmes and Standen, 'Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages', and eaed., 'Defining the Global Middle Ages'. We have some reservations about presenting the Global Middle Ages as a period rather than as a plurality of different periods. Other areas for improvement include 1) the inclusion of non-anglophone scholarly literatures; 2) the elaboration of the proposed conceptual building blocks and critical vocabularies; 3) a critical reflection on the metanarratives embedded in methodologies that claim to approach sources on their own terms.

analysing the global as it was experienced.[24] This means engaging local, regional, and non-elite perspectives on cross-regional flows and exchanges, perspectives other than those privileged in the global histories that celebrate the positive effects of globalization. This reorientation towards a more global outlook in medieval studies will certainly remain a challenge for some time to come.

Chapter Overview

We have structured the essays into four parts. Part I outlines the contours of a comparative historiography of political communication in polity formation. In the opening chapter, Hilde De Weerdt and John Watts explain how communication and mediation have become central concerns in both Chinese and European political historiographies. In both cases, the centralizing growth of state power had to be translated and consented to on both a regional and local level, with mediating elites communicating political narratives between the centre and the peripheries. Chinese and European political history can thus be understood as a negotiation between centralized power and local and regional mediators, with the boundaries of the mediating class less clearly defined in Europe.

In the following chapter Christian Lamouroux and Filippo Ronconi illustrate the role of mediators in the development of bureaucratic language and writing. Through the juxtaposition of case studies from ninth-century Byzantium and Song China they find that significant boosts to state growth did not result from top-down institutional designs, but from the communicative practices of learned elites and their extension to governmental, ecclesiastical, and educational systems. Lamouroux investigates the establishment of the so-called General Command in four strategically significant Song circuits in the first half of the twelfth century, and assesses their role in improving fiscal efficiency through the application of new accounting methods and the institutionalization of informational flows between the periphery and the political centre. Ronconi highlights the role of learned ecclesiastical elites in the imperial administration of the Byzantine empress, Irene (r. 797–802). The eventual adoption of the bureaucratic cursive script — the minuscule — for the production of scientific and literary works allowed for a much swifter production and dispersion of learned insights during

24 For an excellent example, see G. Dudbridge, 'Reworking the World System Paradigm', in *The Global Middle Ages*, ed. by Holmes and Standen, pp. 297–316.

the so-called first Byzantine humanism. The tensions between traditional administrative and ecclesiastical elites also highlight the potential for political conflict between different authorities in this case.

The third chapter offers a further illustration of how changing means of communication affected the composition and identities of mediating elites. Jean-Philippe Genet explores the use of languages including vernaculars and *linguae francae* in shaping political narratives and articulating distinct ways of belonging, showing how the adoption of French as an administrative language by the French royal bureaucracy from the fourteenth century onwards led to a faster territorial and institutional integration of the French state, as opposed to England, where Latin remained the primary language of the royal chanceries. The ever more extensive use of the vernacular as a written means of communication across the whole of the French territories allowed for the inclusion of the lesser-learned into officialdom and helped sustain a specific kind of French identity by fostering loyalty to the French Crown.

In Part II, we examine the micro-dimensions of political communication on the basis of letter collections. The three chapters address questions about the mobilizing effects of language and political networks in medieval letters and provide methodological guidelines for and concrete illustrations of how the analysis of political languages can illuminate the social and political positioning of mediators within peer networks and their larger political environments. Julian Haseldine proposes a new method for extracting the nature and strength of social relationships from epistolary collections. With his 'transaction approach' he analyses different types of exchanges in letters — business and monetary transactions, exchanges of gifts, expressions of friendship and caritative love, intentions of prayer — to uncover broad expressions of political and spiritual community as opposed to merely temporary and context-specific interests. The transaction approach originates in Haseldine's own study of eleventh-century monastic letter collections in Western Europe, but can easily be applied to other contexts.

Benoît Grévin and Beverly Bossler cast doubt on the traditional view of a strict separation between literary and non-literary writing in Chinese and Latin epistolary cultures and argue that official letters as well as unofficial elite communication contain highly structured, standardized forms of rhetoric and style. They propose that the formation of politically significant norms and etiquette was the result of innovations in communication among the literati, who then transported these to the political realm through their involvement in the administration of the state.

Beverly Bossler's analysis of a Song-era epistolary collection, the letters of Yao Mian (1216–1262), further confirms that communicative and rhetorical skills carried substantial political weight in their own right. Yao Mian did not enjoy a distinguished career in officialdom, but, nevertheless, succeeded in spinning an extensive web of politically relevant connections, comprising his own students as well as acquaintances among high-ranking officials. He was able to influence real political decisions from the appointment of officials to the formulation of policy.

The chapters in Part III examine the impact of political communication on political authority. They cover both the need for communication in the exercise of political control and state representation, as well as the deliberate restriction of communication. Mark Whittow (†) shows that the territorial decline of the Byzantine Empire strongly correlates with a decline in long-distance communication and argues that functioning communicative channels were critical in the maintenance of the Byzantine state. He proposes that despite significant differences between the Byzantine and Song Empires — most visibly in terms of territory and population size — it is possible to identify a number of domains in which communication was critical in enabling institutional development and political cohesion in both 'empires of communication'. These include the fiscal bureaucracies, the legal system, the administrative and socio-cultural links between core and periphery, as well as a thriving epistolary tradition (of which, in the case of Byzantium, only indirect evidence survives).

Patricia Ebrey and Margaret Meserve investigate the public communication of political news, legal amendments, and bureaucratic or judicial announcements in Song China and sixteenth-century Rome. They uncover several commonalities regarding the enforcement of the law and the creation of a communal polity, regardless of the significant political differences between a city-state and a large territorial empire.

Conversely, the need to maintain political control could also lead to restrictions on communication. Censorship was practiced in both Song China and medieval Europe, but there are notable differences in the legal and political processes through which restrictions were imposed. Chu Ming Kin and Franz-Julius Morche explore such differences by juxtaposing the careers of the Song printer Chen Qi and the Parisian Renaissance printer Robert Estienne. Their fall from favour, their exile from the capitals of Hangzhou and Paris respectively, and the circumstances through which both succeeded in eventually re-establishing themselves as leading scholar–publishers, highlight the crucial role of informal networks and personal relationships in alleviating the negative ramifications of state censorship. On the other

hand, the abrupt and seemingly arbitrary accusation and banishment of Chen Qi stands in stark contrast to the decade-long legal process that resulted in Robert Estienne's self-exile. Chu and Morche thus contrast pre-publication censorship in early modern France and elsewhere in Europe with post-publication censorship in the Chinese case.

Finally, the authors of the chapters in Part IV examine the communication of individual and collective memory in the creation of communal ties of belonging. Chen Song uses the oeuvre of the Sichuanese literatus Zhang Yu (1001–1064) — letters, valedictions, and commemorations — as a window into the communication practices of a Song-era scholar without official rank seeking to weigh in on local policies. The emerging picture of a system of state power that critically depended on the cooperation of, and successful negotiation with, local literati within empire-wide social networks, questions a common historical narrative of Chinese centralism (as opposed to the largely decentralized nature of European feudalism and the medieval notion of empire). In addition, Zhang Yu exemplifies the adoption of regional elite identities, in which political loyalties were based on geographical proximity.

The communication of memory and its effects in shaping identities and communal belonging were, however, not limited to peer networks. Memory also operated on a larger scale and at a trans-historical level. Bernard Gowers and Tsui Lik Hang discuss two prominent cases of stylized commemorations of exemplary individuals that came to be used for political ends. Their comparative investigation into the violent deaths and subsequent portrayals of Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, and the Southern Song warlord Yue Fei centres around rival conceptions of elite masculinities, which challenged the balance between rulers and subordinate elites. The comparison frames the plight of both individuals as the result of a politicized antagonism of *wu* and *wen* (that is, of military and scholarly masculinities), and reveals how the memorial cults of Becket and Yue Fei were adapted over time to fit the changing political theologies of posterity.

In the final chapter, Ari Levine explores the role of mediating elites in the creation of political imaginaries around an idealized past. His principal witnesses, the Southern Song literatus Ye Mengde (1077–1148) and the Byzantine chronicler Niketas (*c*.1155–1217), appear as more than merely skilled weavers of political and cultural belonging. Levine's comparative reading of their accounts of the fall of Kaifeng and Constantinople unravels a political critique of the elites who had failed in their duty towards the polity, and charts an alternative history in which the memory of the lost becomes encoded with a blueprint for the state's future reform.

In the following pages, we rethink the historical role of political communication between the early empires and the early modern period. In middle-period Chinese and medieval European history, old and new forms of communication served as means to manage new forms of political organization and to compose and disseminate political narratives, shaping the formation of polities on both practical and ideal-transcendental or imaginary levels. Old and new forms of political communication such as assemblies, the court gazette, the public announcement, or letters and letter collections drew in broader and more socially variegated constituencies, evincing to some extent the effects of the centralizing tendencies of polities at various scales, but also revealing, in different ways and with different effects, the fractures within centralizing polities. We have not dealt with the question of how non-verbal forms of political communication seen in custom, ritual, and material and visual cultures articulated with the written word. By limiting the geographical scope of the volume, we also left open the question of whether the dynamics identified here apply in contexts beyond Chinese and European medieval history. We hope, nevertheless, that the present discussion will provide a fertile basis for a global historiography of political culture that gives due attention to the medieval world.

References

Arnason, Johann P., and Björn Wittrock, eds. *Eurasian Transformations, Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries: Crystallizations, Divergences, Renaissances* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004).

Bang, Peter Fibiger, and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk. '"Elephant of India": Universal Empire through Time and across Cultures'. In *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, edited by id. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1–42.

Berry, Mary Elizabeth. *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Blockmans, Wim, and Jean-Philippe Genet, eds. *The Origins of the Modern State in Europe: 13th to 18th Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995–1998).

Borgolte, Michael, ed. *Das europäische Mittelalter im Spannungsbogen des Vergleichs* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001).

Cohen, Deborah, and Maura O'Connor, eds. *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Darling, Linda T. 'Mirrors for Princes in Europe and the Middle East: A Case of Historiographical Incommensurability'. In *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World*, edited by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 223–242.

de Vivo, Filippo. *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

De Weerdt, Hilde. *Information, Territory, and Networks: The Crisis and Maintenance of Empire in Song China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015).

De Weerdt, Hilde. 'Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and the Comparative Political History of Pre-Eighteenth-Century Empires'. *The Asian Review of World Histories* 4, no. 1 (2016): pp. 156–163.

De Weerdt, Hilde. 'The Future of Medieval Studies: A Chinese Historian's Perspective' [keynote lecture], *6th European Congress of Medieval Studies — Past and Future: Medieval Studies Today,* University of Basel, 3 September 2018 (to be included in the forthcoming conference proceedings).

Dudbridge, Glen. 'Reworking the World System Paradigm'. In *The Global Middle Ages*, edited by Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen. *Past & Present* 238, supplement 13 (2018): pp. 297–316.

Duindam, Jeroen. *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. *The Political Systems of Empires* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1993 [1963]).

Ghobrial, John-Paul A., ed. *Global History and Microhistory. Past & Present* 242, supplement 14 (2019).

Grew, Raymond. 'The Case for Comparing Histories'. *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (Oct. 1980): pp. 763–778.

Holmes, Catherine, and Naomi Standen. 'Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages'. In *The Global Middle Ages*, edited by eaed. *Past & Present* 238, supplement 13 (2018): pp. 1–44.

Holmes, Catherine, and Naomi Standen. 'Defining the Global Middle Ages'. *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015): pp. 106–117.

Hui, Victoria Tin-bor. *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Mahoney, James, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Mittag, Achim, and Fritz-Heiner Mutschler. 'Empire and Humankind: Historical Universalism in Ancient China and Rome'. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37, no. 4 (December 2010): pp. 527–555.

Monson, Andrew, and Walter Scheidel, eds. *Fiscal Regimes and the Political Economy of Premodern States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Moore, R.I. 'The Eleventh Century in Eurasian History: Comparative Approach to the Convergence and Divergence of Medieval Civilizations'. *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 1 (2003): pp. 1–21.

Morris, Ian, and Walter Scheidel, eds. *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Mutschler, Fritz-Heiner, and Achim Mittag, eds. *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Pomeranz, Kenneth. *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Preiser-Kapeller, Johannes. *Jenseits von Rom und Karl dem Großen: Aspekte der globalen Verflechtung in der langen Spätantike, 300–800 n. Chr.* (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2018).

Rosenthal, Jean-Laurent, and R. Bin Wong. *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Scheidel, Walter. 'Introduction'. In *State Power in Ancient China and Rome*, edited by id. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 3–10.

Scheidel, Walter, ed. *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Scheidel, Walter, ed. *State Power in Ancient China and Rome* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Tilly, Charles. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984).

Vries, Peer. *State, Economy and the Great Divergence: Great Britain and China, 1680s–1850s* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).