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In the Name of the State: Interactions between local administrators and citizens

Luca Gabbiani, *Pékin à l'ombre du Mandat Céleste. Vie quotidienne et gouvernement urbain sous la dynastie Qing (1644-1911)*

(Peking in the Shade of the Mandate of Heaven. Daily life and urban government under the Qing Dynasty [1644-1911]), Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 2011, 288 pp.

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Book reviews

Luca Gabbiani, *Pékin à l'ombre du Mandat Céleste. Vie quotidienne et gouvernement urbain sous la dynastie Qing (1644-1911) (Peking in the Shade of the Mandate of Heaven. Daily life and urban government under the Qing Dynasty [1644-1911])*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 2011, 288 pp.

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The study consists of two parts divided into eight chapters with an introduction and a short appendix sketching the main characters involved in the reforms, especially urban reforms, in the last years of the Qing. The introduction contains some remarks on the uniqueness of Beijing compared with other important traditional Chinese cities by virtue of its being the capital, where more than anywhere else the tension between the central and local authorities becomes tangible, and where in addition to this the non-Chinese Qing dynasty created a division into an inner city, peopled by the mainly non-Chinese members of the banners, and an outer city, where the indigenous Chinese worked and lived, a division that was only experienced – and even then to a much lesser degree – in other cities with a banner garrison. We find the common but important knowledge that Chinese cities lacked the charters of freedom and urban autonomy familiar to medieval European cities.

As many before him have noted, Luca Gabbiani points out that we have problems finding enough sources to gain a genuine grasp of Chinese daily life in history, an exception being Jacques Gernet's admirable and still exciting short study of Hangzhou in the late Song, *La vie quotidienne en Chine à la veille de l'invasion Mongole 1250-1276* (Daily Life in China: On the eve of the mongol invasion, 1250-1276), from 1959, which benefits from exceptional sources and the ingeniousness of the author. Gabbiani mentions the use of the local archives as a potential source for understanding daily life. Until now only those from Baxian in Sichuan, Shuntian in Beijing, and Shexian in Anhui Province have been available to and used by researchers, but they deal predominantly with matters of property, taxes, and lawsuits, and only the rich sources from Shexian, not mentioned by Gabbiani, allow us to learn more about local conditions. But in the main, his complaints concerning the contents of the local archives seem justified. The same holds true for local histories. To fill the lacunae he makes use of archival material from the central government and texts of the *biji* genre, but of course, these normally only give glimpses of special circumstances that are difficult to evaluate quantitatively.

Since the administrative organisation is better documented than anything else, and since Luca Gabbiani previously carried out research on ad-

ministrative reforms during the period of "new politics" (*xinzheng*), the second part, "Le gouvernement urbain, xvii^e – xx^e siècles" (The urban government, 17th – 20th centuries, pp. 123-232), provides new insights allowing comparisons between the administrative organisation of Beijing at the end of Qing and that of other Chinese cities for which we have earlier studies by Bergère, Buck, Rowe, and others. Among these earlier studies cited by Gabbiani, I missed only James H. Cole's *Shaohsing: Competition and cooperation in nineteenth-century China*,⁽¹⁾ a study that is arguably relevant to Beijing given that Shaoxing craftsmen left their specific imprint on Beijing during the Qing.

The first part, "Portrait historique d'une capitale d'empire" (Historical portrait of an imperial capital), tries to name the presuppositions on which the reorganisation and changes were initiated. It is divided into chapters covering the different imperial acts necessary to found the capital where it is now, the urban space and its inhabitants, the local economy, and glimpses of the metropolitan community. These chapters are based mostly on earlier research, both Chinese and foreign, on traditional local histories and some statistical matter for the latter period. Gabbiani draws such a consistent picture that it is not quite fair to complain of possible lacunae. Even so, I miss a stronger focus on *la vie quotidienne*, the craftsmen from Shaoxing mentioned by Cole, the Zhili and Shandong people, the influx from the fringes of the Chinese empire, the invasion by *juren* and *jinshi* candidates and their examiners every three years (I find the description by Rui Magone⁽²⁾ very instructive), the members of "tribute missions" – would they perhaps have been received by the people in Beijing as Ronald P. Toby describes it for Edo in his article "Carnival of the Aliens: Korean Embassies in Edo-Period Art and Popular Culture,"⁽³⁾ which the diaries of members of Korean embassies seem to corroborate to a certain degree? – and last but not least, the ruling Manchus. Of course, it is quite sensible to refer to Mark Elliot's *The Manchu Way* when describing them, but I think other texts may give a more authentic and immediate picture, for example, Shi-Jyuan Huang-Deiwiks, "Die kaiserlichen Wachoffiziere *shiwei* der Qing-Dynastie in der *zidishu*-Literatur"⁽⁴⁾ and *Emu tanggû orin sakda-i gisun sarkiyān: Erzählungen der 120 Alten*,⁽⁵⁾ though I must admit that the translations and annotations of both are in German, not really an international language.

1. James H. Cole, *Shaohsing: Competition and cooperation in nineteenth-century China*, Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1986 (Monographs of the Association for Asian Studies 44).
2. Rui Magone, *Once Every Three Years: People and Papers at the Metropolitan Examination of 1685*, PhD thesis, Freie Universität Berlin, 2002.
3. Ronald P. Toby, "Carnival of the Aliens: Korean Embassies in Edo-Period Art and Popular Culture," *Monumenta Nipponica*, No. 41, 1986, pp. 415-456.
4. Shi-Jyuan Huang-Deiwiks, "Die kaiserlichen Wachoffiziere *shiwei* der Qing-Dynastie in der *zidishu*-Literatur" (Officers [*shiwei*] of the imperial guard of the Qing as depicted in the *zidishu*), in Lutz Bieg, Erling von Mende and Martina Siebert (eds.), *Ad Seres et Tungusos. Festschrift für Martin Gimm zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 25. Mai 1995*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2000, pp. 55-85 (opera sinologica 11).
5. *Emu tanggû orin sakda-i gisun sarkiyān. Erzählungen der 120 Alten. Beiträge zur mandschurischen Kulturgeschichte* (Accounts of the 120 elders. Contributions to a Manchu cultural history), Introduced, translated, and annotated by Giovanni Stary, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1983 (Asiatische Forschungen 83).

The use of the German language may also be the reason for not consulting Emil Bretschneider's study,⁽⁶⁾ still useful at least for historical geography, and Eva Sternfeld's book⁽⁷⁾ with a long first chapter on the history of the Beijing water supply, the best description of this problem in a Western language that I know of. But in covering the layout of the city, why not refer to Oswald Sirén's *The Walls and Gates of Peking*, illustrated with 109 photographs after photographs by the author and 50 architectural drawings made by Chinese artists?⁽⁸⁾

The second part, as briefly mentioned above, is the result of research based on primary sources, both printed and unprinted. It starts with the relevant institutions of the urban administrative system: first the police force, with more than 33,000 members probably the largest unit in any capital in the world at that time, responsible for the protection of public buildings (mainly the granaries), the registration of the population, and judicial affairs; then the censorate, divided into five districts, north, south, east, west, and centre, which seemed to work as a kind of control organ; and the prefectural institutions. Although the police force was urban in its character, quite a few of its officials were appointed in accordance with, for example, the directorate of public works. Maps contributed by Gabbiani are very instructive in depicting the distribution of different institutions throughout the city.

An important task of the administration was the supply of water, drainage, and sewage. Gabbiani seems to describe how this should have been done rather than how it was actually experienced by the inhabitants of Beijing, which was probably not very different from the "great stink of London" during the mid-nineteenth century. A good but perhaps too negative description is given by Eugène Vincent.⁽⁹⁾ Of course, some conclusions on which changes were effected can be drawn from the measures subsequently taken during the reform period, 1901-1911.

The administration was also responsible for social welfare, but often relied on private initiatives to alleviate its burden. Gabbiani notices this especially for the late period, after about 1860, but a melange of public and private welfare was in fact evident since at least the Song period. An almost contemporary report on more than 30 private institutions for private welfare in Guangzhou was written by the German missionary Ernst Faber.⁽¹⁰⁾ Food distribution to the needy in Beijing was apparently performed according to established rules, and rather than being intended as a permanent measure it never continued beyond the next harvest. For this, see the classic monograph by Deng Yunte.⁽¹¹⁾ From soup kitchens – the early Qing *Yangsheng suibi* (Jottings on how to support life) by Cao Tingdong and late Qing *Zhoupu* (A monograph on gruels) by Huang Yunhu both describe the preparation of gruel for famine relief – to selling cheap grain, providing shelter for the homeless, orphanages, and rudimentary hospitals, the full range of welfare measures are listed and described. The needy were sometimes very numerous. During the great flood of 1801, about 70,000 persons in Beijing and its environs depended on public soup kitchens. By way of comparison, Deng Yunte records 34,750 people getting daily meals from soup kitchens in Henan in December 1931/January 1932, with a total of 4,250,000 meals served.⁽¹²⁾ In a much earlier example, in 1075 in Yue (today's Shaoxing), 21,900 needy people were fed for five months, consuming more than 52,000 hectolitres (*dan*) of grain, while in 1890 in Beijing about 250,000 *dan* of grain were issued, apparently mainly through the soup kitchens.

The distribution procedure is not mentioned by Gabbiani. It has been reported that in other cases of welfare issued during times of need, crowds trampled each other when grain was distributed. Several measures were taken to reduce the pressure; food was given to men and women on alter-

nating days, or separate groups were formed for old people and children, and enough kitchens were built that service could be limited to 200 persons at a time. Permits for frequenting a special kitchen were issued, and registers were kept to prevent abuse.

This rather traditional world haunted by crises during its last 50 years experienced reforms from the central government down to the local level beginning in the 1890s, and even more so in the last ten years of the Qing dynasty. Chapter Seven, "Réformer le gouvernement urbain" (Reforming the urban administration), notes changes and continuities, and the shifting responsibilities of the different institutions, while Chapter Eight, "Les grands chantiers de la modernisation locale" (The grand sites of local modernisation), describes improvement of the roads, but only documented by illustrations 2 and 3 (before the improvement measures) and 14 (during construction). When we look at photographs in memoirs from the first 20 years of the twentieth century we in fact notice genuine improvements. The demolition of buildings and creation of whole new areas may be compared with the present time, and public facilities, including welfare, seem to have become more "modern" and bureaucratic.

These two last chapters, and in fact the whole second part, make this book an indispensable tool for writing a comprehensive history of Beijing during the late Qing period. Using books of the Arlington-genre, which describe materialised Beijing, and of the Gabbiani-genre, analysing the workings of the urban administrative machinery, we may perhaps at last manage to liberate daily life in late traditional Beijing from the shadowy masses of archival and other sources.

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6. Emil Bretschneider, *Die Peking Ebene und das benachbarte Gebirgsland* (The Peking plain and the adjoining mountain areas), Gotha, Perthes, 1876 (Petermann's Geographische Mittheilungen. Ergänzungsheft No. 46).
7. Eva Sternfeld, *Beijing: Stadtentwicklung und Wasserwirtschaft. Sozioökonomische und ökologische Aspekte der Wasserkrise und Handlungsperspektiven* (Beijing: Urban development and water management. Socioeconomic and ecological aspects of the water crisis and possible remedies), Berliner Beiträge zu Umwelt und Entwicklung, Bd.15, TU Berlin, 1997.
8. Oswald Sirén, *The walls and gates of Peking / researches and impressions*, London, John Lane, 1924.
9. Eugène Vincent, *La médecine en Chine au XX^e siècle. La vieille médecine des Chinois, les climats de la Chine, l'hygiène en Chine et l'hygiène internationale* (Chinese medicine in the twentieth century: Traditional Chinese medicine, the climates of China, and Chinese and international hygiene), Paris, G. Steinheil, 1915, pp. 214-225.
10. Ernst Faber, "Literarische Missionsarbeit in China" (Literary mission work in China), in *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift, Monatshefte für geschichtliche und theoretische Missionskunde*, 9, 1882, pp. 49-66 (pp. 63-65).
11. Deng Yunte, *Zhongguo jiu Huangshi* (History of famine relief in China), Taipei, Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1987 [1937].
12. Deng Yunte, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-330.