State and Crafts in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)

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Acknowledgements

This book has been developed over a span of time and at several academic institutions where I had the opportunity to pursue my research. The idea originated from a DFG (German Research Council) project that I coordinated under the direction of Professor Hans Ulrich Vogel at the Institute of Chinese and Korean Studies of Tübingen University between 2000 and 2003. Our research focused on handicraft regulations (jiangzuo zeli 匠作則例), a type of source defined by the art historian and connoisseur Wang Shixiang 王世襄 (1914-2009). These regulations are made up of texts and lists of the parts of buildings and the products for official use, often with specifications and prices, sometimes with norms on the working times for objects or services. The project ended in a large workshop and the publication of a collected volume of articles that explored handicraft regulations for the issues of technical, monetary, administrative, and financial history, with comparative perspectives on the history of European craft production.1

Personally, this was a most inspiring initiation into the world of technical administration from the seventeenth through the early twentieth centuries and into the scholarly company of technical and craft historians within China and abroad. In the course of that project, I was lucky enough to be introduced to the important Beijing groups of the Qinghua University Institute for Ancient Technical Texts (Qinghua daxue Kejishi ji gu wenxian yanjiusuo 清华大学科技史暨古文献研究所, ‘Kegusuo’) and to the Institute for the History of Natural Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the (Zhongguo kexueyuan Ziran kexueshi yanjiusuo 中国科学院自然科学史研究所 ‘Keshisuo’). I learned a lot from the members of these groups of scholars, who also attended the Tübingen workshop in 2003.

Yet, as instructive as the explorations of handicraft regulations were, these sources require great effort to draw out a historical narrative. As tools for contemporary Qing administrators and technical supervisors of building or production projects, they were more often lists of ingredients rather than recipes, intended to serve the purposes of informed people and therefore rarely opening up a wider frame of knowledge on the objects they describe. What was their purpose? Who constructed or produced them, and under what conditions? Together with Song Jianze and Liu Qiang from the Qinghua University Kegusuo, and on the basis of Wang Shixiang’s first

1 Moll-Murata, Song Jianze, Hans Ulrich Vogel (eds.), Chinese Handicraft Regulations of the Qing Dynasty.
survey, I collected the titles of some two hundred handicraft regulations.² I used some of them for my research on imperial building projects and became curious about the larger frameworks, the institutions that employed the craftspeople, and about the craftspeople themselves.

My next research appointment led me to Utrecht University in the Netherlands, where Jan Luiten van Zanden and members of the Research Group Economic and Social History within the History Department are conducting global comparative research on issues of economic and social history. This unfolded a new academic field for me and enabled me to place Chinese craft history in a wider context. Not only were the regulations and precedents put to good use, since information on wage levels and the cost of transportation and materials could be gleaned from them, but I also had the chance to explore the field of private craft production from the perspective of the Chinese guilds in comparison to their European counterparts. My stay at Utrecht consisted of two years full of intellectual stimulation and challenges which initiated my turn towards comparative Eurasian history. Together with Jan Luiten van Zanden, I visited the eminent economic historian Li Bozhong 李伯重 at Qinghua University and the Department of Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 中国社会科学院经济研究所, where I had the chance to meet Xu Jianqing 徐建青, to whose research on Chinese crafts in the Qing dynasty this study owes much inspiration and insight.

This study was thereafter accepted as a habilitation thesis by the Faculty of Cultural Studies at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen. Meanwhile, a further engagement in the Netherlands had opened the doors of the International Institute of Social History (IISH) for me, where I coordinated its newly founded research group known as the Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations, 1500-2000 (the ‘Collab’) for one year. The then research director of the IISH, Marcel van der Linden, kindly suggested including this thesis in one of the Institute’s series, Social Histories of Work in Asia, and I found a sharp-sighted and circumspect editor in Ulbe Bosma, who patiently steered me through the rewriting process. Harriet Zurndorfer from Leiden University read the entire manuscript and gave valuable advice on how to polish the arguments and restructure the presentation. My research at the IISH, in the framework of the methodical approach of the Collab, made me recalibrate and take a wider perspective on work and labour in the Ming and Qing, the Republic, and the People’s Republic of China. From the Collab’s steering group – which consists of Jan Lucassen, Marcel van der Linden,

² ‘Union List of Handicraft Regulations of the Qing Dynasty’.
and Karin Hofmeester – and from its many participants, I learned much about the world of labour in space and time.3

Heiner Roetz gave me the opportunity to take up the position of Academic Reader at the Faculty of East Asian Studies at Ruhr-Universität Bochum. A period of intensive teaching ensued, with an interruption of a three-month respite for research in the summer of 2016 which enabled me to work on the manuscript in a concentrated manner. For this opportunity, I am grateful to the IISH’s present research director, Leo Lucassen, and the vice research director, Karin Hofmeester, and for the support in Bochum by Jörn-Carsten Gottwald and Andrea Halbmeyer. At last, this book can be presented to the general public, edited under the guidance of Saskia Gieling from Amsterdam University Press.

I would like to thank the mentors who created the intellectual, institutional, and economic framework that made work on this study possible: Hans Ulrich Vogel (Tübingen), Jan Luiten van Zanden (Utrecht), Jan Lucassen and Marcel van der Linden (Amsterdam), and Heiner Roetz (Bochum). Furthermore, I am indebted to the habilitation committee, Hans Ulrich Vogel, Achim Mittag, and Robert Horres from Tübingen University, Jan Lucassen (Vrije Universiteit and IISH, Amsterdam), and Iwo Amelung (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt) for their critical reading and their encouragement to publish this manuscript.

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3 See the list of participants, as of 2012: https://collab.iisg.nl/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=273223&folderId=277142&name=DLFE-144108.pdf
for introducing me to Wang Shixiang and his wife Yuan Quanyou 袁荃猷 (1920-2003) in their Beijing home. I greatly cherish the discussions with these fine scholars, both in Beijing and in Germany.

Among the several occasions I had for presenting aspects of my research, I would like to point out in particular the 2010 workshop at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin conducted by Dagmar Schäfer in her Workshop Discussion Series ‘Technological Cultures: Themes and Methods in the History of Technology’. In a more intimate setting, I had a long and enlightening conversation with the technical and social historians of Japan, Erich Pauer and Regine Mathias, about the Japanese government shipyards at Yokosuka in the Meiji period and the feasibility and usefulness of China-Japan comparisons. Moreover, Wolfgang Behr’s erudite explanations about the etymology of terms relating to crafts and craftspeople were extremely useful to me.

During the editorial process, Harriet Zurndorfer generously provided me with treasures from her storehouse of knowledge to structure, amend, and prune the text. Ulbe Bosma was a formidable editorial helmsman who helped me stay the course. Aad Blok gave good advice about the reproduction of tables and illustrations.

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Cheers and praise to all my companions in research and in life who saw the growth of this study and accompanied me for parts – or the entire process – of its development. Any errors that might remain in the book are my own.
Map 1  The territory of the Qing dynasty, ca. 1820: Provinces

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