# Producing difference through tax and tribute.

Comparing the Ottoman, Chinese and Spanish empire in the early modern era.

## **Introduction: Empires and difference**

The accommodation of difference, the importance of legal categorizations of subjects' privileges, and the "ongoing tension between universalizing, homogenizing ends and pragmatic differentiated practices" are key issues that empires beyond Europe bring into relief.<sup>1</sup>

Stoler and McGranahan, in the introduction to their book, highlight that "Imperial Formations" constructed and consolidated difference. However, they emphasize that these "practiced tolerance and discrimination to different degrees" and that the ruling mechanisms especially of non-European empires rested often not only on exclusion but also on tolerance. Also Burbank and Cooper, in their definition of empire, stress the importance of hierarchies and difference. They state that empires always dominated different people which were ruled in dissimilar ways. They further argue that the aim of distinctions lay not in the ordering itself but in ascertaining the spectrum of political possibilities, tensions and conflicts. These studies are but two examples of publications since the "imperial turn" which deal with the question of how modern and premodern empires dealt with difference – according to von Hirschhausen and Leonhard inspired by seeking alternative models to the nation state and its models of handling diversity. According to these same authors, many of these more recent studies on empires have overcome a European perspective, and focus on global contexts, being especially convincing when focusing on the antiquity and the early modern period. A

The proposed project inscribes itself in this line, in the research about colonialism,<sup>5</sup> and also in the growing field of global history and dependency studies. But contrary to most studies in global history,<sup>6</sup> it focuses not so much on entanglements and connections, but rather has a comparative approach. The aim is to compare the Ottoman and the Spanish empire in the early modern period as well as the Chinese empire in the Ming and Manchu-Qing dynasty.<sup>7</sup> The project asks how these empires constructed, modified and protected differences through their tax and tribute system. Thereby it tackles the meso level, a largely neglected field between all-embracing syntheses and case studies on the micro level.<sup>8</sup> The taxation and imposition of tribute and often coerced labor service on the subject population by the state was – and is – never homogeneous. There has always been an array of different fiscal and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Stoler and McGranahan 2007, 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Stoler and McGranahan 2007, 21–2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Burbank et al. 2012, 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Hirschhausen and Leonhard 2011, 401–2. As Osterhammel 2006, 4 correctly points out, the research on empires stretches back much further than the fairly recent imperial turn and has often been comparative in nature.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Cf. e.g. Osterhammel 2003; Epple 2007.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Cf. Some prominent examples are: Beckert 2014; Conrad 2016; Conrad and Osterhammel 2016; cf. also Adelman 2017; Duindam 2016; Schäbler 2007.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> There existed also contact between these three empires. Examples for such comprise the Chinese merchants called *sangley/shenli* in Manila in the Spanish dominated Philippines and the animosities between Spain and the Ottomans in the Mediterranean. Albeit this is not a focus of the project, I will keep an eye open towards possible connections, entanglements or direct rivalries, such as analyzed for other topics by: Burbank et al. 2012, chapter 5; Blumi 2016 and Darling 1996, 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Hirschhausen and Leonhard 2011, 403.

tribute categories, being the exemption from tax and/or tribute payment an especially desirable privilege. It seems particularly fruitful to analyze this field because on the one hand, these kinds of categorizations concerned every subject and had a direct impact on their life as their fiscal categorization determined how much of their work and the fruits (outcome, products) one had to dispense of in favor of the state. On the other hand, the existent categorizations tell a lot about how the state conceived of itself and of its population. In short, they are the essential expression of the relationship between the state (be it an empire or not) and its subjects. Fiscal/tribute categories often overlap and refer to other social categorizations, such as religious, ethnicized/racialized or linguistic ones, or those based on class/rank, gender and age. These imbrications shall also be partly addressed.

The project plans to analyze the relations of asymmetrical dependency between the state (and its various administrative levels) and it subjects in fiscal relationships which are, among others, reflected in fiscal legislation. Besides, these relations are often addressed in petitions which had the goal to change or defend one's tribute category and to obtain fiscal privileges. Thus, these petitions allow it to analyze negotiations of categorizations and the agency of the involved individuals. These fiscal categorizations were often tied to a certain labor category. The forms of labor involved ranged from slavery to free wage labor.

## State of the art and open questions

The Ottoman, Spanish and Chinese Empires in the early modern period have been chosen for comparison because they were roughly contemporaneous and because they were all huge, well established, long-lasting empires with a sophisticated bureaucratic administration which conquered and colonized people from a broad range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Spanning vast amounts of territory in the Americas and Asia and, to a lesser extent, in Europe and northern Africa, together they accounted for a big part of the population of the globe and englobed different kinds of empire, with and without overseas possessions. Therefore, when comparing their tackling of difference via the tax and tribute system, it is expected that we could advance significantly our knowledge on how early modern societies in general organized difference and diversity. As is to be expected, parts of these questions have already been addressed by scholars from the respecting fields and regions. This is also a necessary precondition to be able to operationalize and conduct a project as broad in scope as this one. However, albeit comparisons on pre- and early modern empires are on the rise, they are still scarce in comparison to those on 19th and 20th century ones, in the heyday of European imperialism, and sometimes the comparison consists only in assembling case studies from several empires in one single edited volume.9 Interestingly, the editors of one of these books, judge the comparison of the Ottoman and the Chinese (and the Moghul) to the Spanish Empire as desirable as they would "offer a usefully 'estranging frame'. 10 A comparison between the sixteenth century Spanish and the Ottoman Empire has been effectively carried out by Burbank and Cooper. After analyzing the models of rule carried out by Süleyman I and Charles V, they evaluated Charles' empire as rather based on a class hierarchy, and Süleyman's as more patrimonial in nature. 11

Most studies, of course, focus on one single empire, which is usually a task big enough. Besides, only very rarely, a single scholar has the capacity, let alone the linguistic knowledge to deeply delve into more than one empire.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Cf. for the 19th and 20th century: Aydin 2016; Berger and Miller 2015; Blumi 2016; Ther 2015 for pre- and early modern empires: Balla and Johnson 2009; Campos 2010; other compilations and comparisons have a broader time frame: Stoler et al. 2007; Schlee 2013; Burbank et al. 2012. 

10 Greer et al. 2010, 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Burbank et al. 2012, chapter 5.

### The Chinese empire: the Ming and Qing dynasty

For the Chinese empire in the Ming (1368-1644 AD) and Qing (1644-1911 AD) dynasty, the tribute system (*chao-gong*) constitutes at the same time an intensely researched and highly controversial field. The classical, still relevant model by Fairbank<sup>12</sup> has been contested and modified.<sup>13</sup> The tribute system has been assessed as a central pillar of Chinese foreign relations, institutionalized by the Ming Dynasty and replaced in 1911 by the treaty system.<sup>14</sup> It was inspired by Confucianism.<sup>15</sup> The system was an expression of the hierarchical relations between the Chinese/Manchu who via the tribute system acquired access to trade with the Chinese empire – albeit this did not necessarily preclude military interventions or relations of the tributary states to other political units; neither did fixed borders of the tributary system exist.<sup>16</sup> As some of these politics became integrated into the Chinese empire, the line between foreign and domestic politics was not always clear.

The integration of "foreign", or "barbarian" people into the Chinese empire has been analyzed by several scholars, who often focus on a specific region or group, for example the Muslim population in Xinjiang/East Turkestan.<sup>17</sup> It seems promising to analyze the intersections of the tribute systems with the tax regimes and the differences produced by it. While European, and also Indigenous nobles in Spanish America were exempt from taxes, the Ming went one step further in provisioning its "clansmen" through stipends and other forms of support; <sup>18</sup> the Qing doing the same for the members of the eight banners but trying to reduce the number of the members of the imperial lineage. <sup>19</sup> At the same time, according to Myers, the Qing reduced the people's tax burden, introducing new fiscal laws which "induced people to take up farming and maintain a rural lifestyle." <sup>20</sup> Still, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, anti-tax-riots broke out. <sup>21</sup> Earlier on, the high tax burden according to Zeuske lead many people to sell themselves into slavery. <sup>22</sup> In contrast to the Spanish and the Ottoman Empire, migration and the change of the occupation was forbidden. It shall be analyzed, if these bans inhibited the change of categories and thereby furthered forms of slavery.

As to the sources, it is possible to draw on a wide array of (often published and even translated) sources about legislation, handbooks about statesmanship (*jingshiwen*) issued by the central government and other sources related to the fiscal system.<sup>23</sup> Whether relevant petitions existed remains to be determined.

### The Ottoman Empire

In the Ottoman Empire (~1300-1923 AD), tribute as a form of foreign relations also existed; for example in Southeastern Europe. According to Aydin, this system of indirect rule was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Fairbank and Ch'en 1968; Fairbank and Têng 1941. Other classical studies comprise Chun 1968; Metzger 1973; Twitchett 1970.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> E.g. by Millward 1998.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Kang 2010; Harders-Chen 1996, 388; Sprick 2017; Kauz 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Aydin 2016, 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Dabringhaus 2014; Kauz 2006; Kauz 2011; Lam 1968; Mancall 1968; Stuart-Fox 2003; Wang 2011; Aydin 2016, 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Millward 1998. Elliott 2006 analyzes the subdivision of the military elite of the Qing, the eight banners. His article is part of a compilation of several other cases from the margins of the Chinese empire: Crossley and Crossley-Siu-Sutton 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Duindam 2015, 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Elliott 2006; Duindam 2015, 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Myers and Wang 2002, 641.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Perry 1985, 83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Zeuske, forthcoming, chapter entitled: "Versklavte und Sklavereien in der Geschichte Chinas aus global-historischer Sicht. Perspektiven und Probleme".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Schmidt-Glintzer 2010, 108-109.

replaced by a more direct rule in the region after 1711.<sup>24</sup> Since much earlier, similar to the Ming and the Qing, the Ottomans ruled over people with different religions. From this religious divide, an important tax was derived: The *cizye*, a head tax that was paid by all non-Muslims.<sup>25</sup> More generally, from the 16th, or maybe already 14th century onwards, the general revenue system was in place and the Ottoman subjects, except slaves, were divided into the taxpaying *reaya*, and the *askeri*, who were exempt from taxpaying and consisted of members of the Ottoman ruling house, military personnel, administrators and judges. Only limited mobility existed between the two groups.<sup>26</sup> Similar to the tribute payment of the Indigenous people in Spanish America, tax payment by the *reaya* was tied to a hereditarily held land tenure and thereby was executed partly via a tax farming system. According to Darling, land was granted as revenue in *dirliks*, the smallest ones being called *timar* which entailed a complex set of military, fiscal, administrative and personal relationships. This system of tax farming introduced another level of asymmetrical dependency between the sultan and its vassals. The *reaya* who lived and worked on *timar* lands paid the taxes to the *dirlik* holder. Darling further details that

at the beginning of the sixteenth century, about half the revenue of the empire was allocated under the timar system; the rest was retained by the central treasury as havass-i hümayun, "royal domains" or "crown lands. In the case of the havass-i hümayun, the royal domains, taxes were paid to agents of the central treasury.<sup>27</sup>

The taxpayers were neatly registered in surveys.<sup>28</sup> Like in the Spanish American, in the Ottoman Empire too, tax burden led to migration and made the village life unattractive to many peasants during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> Faroqhi points to the fact that every vassal of the sultan – men or woman – had the right to hand in petitions and that the inhabitants of the Ottoman empire made ample use of this privilege. Her analysis of petitions from the region around Kayseri from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century which resolved about fiscal questions and also involved the *timar*-system can serve as a starting point for the analysis.<sup>30</sup>

In the course of the Tanzimat-reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the system of tax farming came to an end and legal equality for Muslims and non-Muslims was decreed, albeit not always enforced.<sup>31</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed a turn of the Ottoman rulers towards a "European-emergent international society"<sup>32</sup> which, according to Wigen lead to the employment of a different political vocabulary, including the formerly insignificant concept of empire.

### The Spanish Empire: expanding to the Philippines

A similar conceptual shift can be observed one century earlier in the Spanish American colonies (1492-1898 AD) in the context of Spain's political crisis in 1808 and in the antecedents of their independence from Spain between 1810 and 1824.<sup>33</sup> As Burkholder has

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Avdin 2016, 55. Cf. also Kármán and Kunčević 2013; Panaite 2000; Królikowska 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Darling 1996; Balla and Johnson 2009, 813.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Faroqhi 2015, 23; Faroqhi 1992, 1–3. Faroqhi proposes the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 1996, 22–3 speaks about the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Darling 1996, 24–5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Greene 2005, 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Faroqhi 1992, 27, 38. Already before, the (broken) promise of obtaining houses had motivated migration to the "old" Ottoman provinces and its capital Faroqhi 2015, 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Faroqhi 1992.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Greene 2005, 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Wigen 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Not all Spanish colonies won their independence at that time; Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines were lost to Spain only after the Spanish-American war of 1898; the domination over other territories, e.g. in Northern Africa lasted even longer Núñez 2015, 196.

shown, only then the Spanish dominions in the Americas came to be widely coined as "colonies", while before the 1760s they had been generally addressed as integral part of the Spanish monarchy, being referred to as "kingdoms" or similar equivalents.<sup>34</sup> However, scholars don't doubt the essentially colonial nature of the relationship between the Castilian crown and its colonies in the Americas. The tribute system has even been coined as "colonial pact".<sup>35</sup>

While non-noble Spaniards had to pay a head tax called pecho in Spain, all Spaniards and their offspring conceived with Indigenous women were exempt from a payment called tribute (tributo) in Spanish America.<sup>36</sup> This tribute had to be paid by Indigenous people, free Afrodescendants and the mixed descendants of these groups, including the offspring of Spaniards and Africans. This tribute obligation was legitimized as a compensation for receiving the benefits of Spanish civilization and Christianity. Legitimations also referred to the fact that Indigenous and Africans – or rather their ancestors – had been paying tribute to their prehispanic or African native lords before.<sup>37</sup> A part of the colonial tribute was paid directly to the crown, another part to Spanish particulars who had received grants called encomienda, which in some respects paralleled the Ottoman dirliks. The dependency from the encomenderos importantly shaped labor and fiscal relations among a large part of the indigenous population, especially in the early colonial period. A part of the Indigenous nobility, office-bearers, sick and old people were exempt from tribute payment. The full tribute rate had to be liquidated by married couples; singles were considered half tribute payers. Migrant Indians had a special fiscal status and were exempt from coerced labor services other Indigenous people had to perform. However, especially these migrants who wanted to escape the rotative coerced labor system often ended up working on haciendas and in textile and sugar mills working as indentured laborers, where they shared a fate with Afrodescendants. The tribute categories partly overlapped with the social categorizations of the so-called *casta* system, which combined religious, ethnic, legal and corporative elements. The differences in categorizations between the two biggest viceroyalties, Peru and New Spain, have been intensely studied by me. Apart from the tribute legislation, I have been focusing mostly on the negotiation of categorizations in petitions.<sup>38</sup>

While some aspects of the tribute system in Spanish America are well researched for specific regions, there exist very few overviews on Spanish America as a whole<sup>39</sup>, let alone including other parts of the Spanish overseas empire (e.g. the Philippines<sup>40</sup>) or its European dominions (e.g. Naples, Sicily, the Netherlands). Therefore the already existing expertise of the author about Spanish America shall be expanded to the Philippines. There, in tribute categories as well as in forms of labor exploitation, a lot of overlapping with the legal situation in New Spain existed. In contrast to Spanish America, in the Philippines only an insignificant number of Afrodescendants were present. Instead, a considerable number of Chinese merchants, the so-called *sangleyes* suffered from a high tribute load. The descendants of *sangleyes* and *indios* (the Filipinos), called *mestizos sangleyes* constituted a separate fiscal category. As in New Spain, the local nobles, also called *principales* were exempt from tribute and helped

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Burkholder 2016. Burkholder notes that this contrasts sharply with English, French and Dutch dominions which from their beginnings had been labelled as colonies. 2015 argues partly in the same direction.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Guardino 2005, 25-26; Sánchez Silva, 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> The "miscegenation" happened only occasionally with inverted gender roles.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Gibson 2000, 171; Reyes García 1981, V; Grewe 2016, 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Albiez-Wieck forchcoming; Albiez-Wieck manuscript.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Some recent exceptions are: Pollack 2016; Albiez-Wieck manuscript.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Legally, the Philippines were considered part of New Spain in Middle America.

collecting tribute and organizing the coerced labor of the *polo*. Vagabonds, landless and dependent workers, were also exempt from the tribute payment but in a much less privileged position.<sup>41</sup> It is to be expected that in the Philippines, similar petitions than in Spanish America existed.

## Project design and methodology

To analyze the organization of difference in the tax and tribute system in the three empires, I would like to expand the methodology of my postdoc project about Indigenous migrants changing and challenging their tribute categorizations in colonial Spanish America. This allows me to examine the categorization of difference from above as well as contestations and flexibilizations from below. The perspective from above shall be addressed via the analysis of tribute/tax legislation for which sources in all three empires exist. The perspective from below, encompassing the agency of the empire's subjects, hopefully can be addressed via the analysis of petitions to the imperial authorities on several levels. I have already analyzed this kind of petitions for some regions in Spanish America<sup>42</sup> and hope that it is possible to find similar ones in other parts of the Spanish empire, as well as in the Ottoman and the Chinese imperial formations. Studies by Darling and Römer, but especially Faroqhi<sup>43</sup> point to the existence of resembling petitions in the Ottoman Empire. The fact that also in China royal legitimacy was tied to the provision of justice to the peasants, 44 and that petitions were most common in early modern Europe, 45 gives room to hope that similar sources might be found in Chinese archives. The analysis of all sources shall be inspired by conceptual history entangled with social history.<sup>46</sup>

The archival research and analysis of the sources in the Chinese and Ottoman Empires shall be carried out by one Phd student respectively. They would be co-supervised by scholars with a background on the respective region and time period and be fluent in Chinese or Ottoman Turkish/Arabic. I would amplify my research on tribute categories in the Spanish empire, widening to the Philippines. The three of us together, under my guidance and in continuous dialogue with other scholars of the respective fields and regions, would carry out the task of the comparison.

#### Conclusion

The selective and transversal comparison would contribute both to the understanding of a specific area of governance of each of the three empires and how it was embedded in the larger society, as well as to the comprehension of how early modern empires organized difference. The project will make it possible to delineate the different early modern systems of entangled forms of asymmetrical dependency based on fiscal and labor relations. These labor relations were located on a continuum between slavery and free wage labor. Hopefully, it would also add further case studies to the analysis of petitions and how through them the agency of subjects of early modern states was expressed and their membership and belonging negotiated.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Cf. Fradera 1999, Larkin 1982, Chu 2010, Fernández-Hortigüela 2008.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Albiez-Wieck forthcoming; Albiez-Wieck manuscript.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Römer 1995; Darling 1996; Faroqhi 1992, 1–3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Greene 2005, 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Nubola and Würgler 2005; Würgler 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Koselleck 2010.

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