

English summaries

Modern China and Sinology

P.-E. WILL

This essay, which was first presented as the inaugural lecture of the chair of History of Modern China at the Collège de France, deals with the inadequacies of the tradition/modernity paradigm still prevalent in much of Chinese studies. Recent research on the history of East and South Asian societies and economies suggests that a thorough reconsideration of what is thought of as "modern" and "traditional" is needed for a better understanding of Chinese developments in the late imperial period and in the twentieth century. Particular attention is given to the process of state building in China since the seventeenth century, which reveals more similarities with trends in modern Europe that might perhaps be thought. But a command of traditional sinological skills and an awareness of the specificities of Chinese sources remain indispensable if a comparative approach is to yield reliable conclusions.

A Date with The Agricultural Revolution in 18th Century France

J.-M. MORICEAU

In order to reject the idea of an Agricultural Revolution in the 18th century, this new historical vulgate tends to neglect the major transformations which occurred after 1750. For large farms alone, yields increased noticeably, fallow land decreased and there is demonstrable progress with regard to the preservation of grains and plant selection. The distribution of agronomic programs and the role played by innovators such as the big farmers and postmasters have barely been touched upon. In the areas around major cities, considerable progress can be noted with respect to fertilization, forage and work productivity in general. Such a convergence of transformations implies a break with preceding periods. There is a process of modernization at work the results of which must be analysed in terms of the different types of agriculture.

Economics and Politics: Credit Markets in Paris, 1750-1840

PH. HOFFMAN, G. POSTEL-VINAY AND J.-L. ROSENTHAL

Using a new data set on public and private credit markets in Paris from 1750 to 1840, we argue that they were very sophisticated. Before 1789, these markets evolved in response to the competition between the state and private borrowers. We find that a livre of long-term government borrowing crowded out about 1/3 livre of long-term private credit and that the long-term Paris market was only partially integrated with other capital markets. The Revolution devastated notarial credit. Despite some

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recovery between 1797 and 1826, Paris, unlike the provinces, did not regain its Old-Regime levels of activity. Notaries had lost their preminence in the credit system to banks. Overall the early nineteenth century appears as a financial nadir between eighteenth-century notaries and post-1850 bankers. This nadir was the result of historical circumstances like the inflation of the assignat rather than the product of archaic credit structures.

The Fiscal Bases of the Mughal State. Problems of Structure and Evolution, 1550-1750

M. ALAM AND S. SUBRAHMANYAM

The historiography of the last half-century on the Mughal state has been excessively pre-occupied with identifying the “essential” institutions that characterized it. This paper offers a reconstruction of the principal trends in the historiography, and a new synthesis which poses the evolution of the Mughal state in comparative perspective. The neglected role of the seventeenth century as a period of fiscal centralisation, leading to revolts by regional and local elites in the eighteenth century is emphasized. The lack of uniformity in the historical experiences of different regions (the North Indian heartland, Bengal, South India) is brought out, and parallels with the Ottoman empire are noted. The “wall-to-wall carpet” metaphor is rejected in favour of the “patchwork quilt” one.

State Centralization and Local Power in 19th Century Sicily

E. IACHELLO

This article analyses the administrative centralization in Sicily in 1818, emphasizing the question of encounter/confrontation between the State apparatus and the local power structure. The point of departure for the study is the administrative reform of 1817. It demonstrates its “bureaucratic utopian” character and examines its application in Catania during the early years of its introduction there. The example demonstrates that the only way the model of centralization can take root in the reality of the periphery is by negotiating a contract with the local elite. The peripheral State apparatus becomes a stake in the battle for power which opposes different groups. Thus the protagonists adopt new practices and political language and accept the mediation of the Superintendent. The latter becomes an active element in the process: he enters the local political arena and cuts off a bit of power for himself. We are faced with a situation of precarious equilibrium in which there is a constant tension centered around a resource whose availability depends increasingly upon the results of the battle for local power.