

CALL FOR PAPERS

Locality and Geographical Knowledge in Imperial China

Workshop at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG), Department III, Berlin, Germany

14-15 May 2020

Conveners: Shih-Pei Chen, Masato Hasegawa, and Alexis Lycas

For over two millennia of Chinese imperial history, geography played an integral role not only in local and state administration, but also in literary and visual representations. As officials and literati collected and organized geographical data and knowledge, such efforts at local levels demonstrated both proximity to and distance from the centers of imperial authority. Why and how did officials and literati represent localities? How did they structure spatial information? Where do we find the "imperial" in the "local" and the "local" in the "imperial"?

This workshop proposes a diachronic and place-based approach to examining the processes of producing and organizing geographical knowledge in imperial China. Our aim is to bring to light the structural and epistemological tensions between the standardization and localization of geographical knowledge beyond the temporal bounds of each dynasty and expand the view to the wide array of source materials that describe "things" according to their spatial configurations, such as local gazetteers, poetry, empire-wide geographical compilations, geographical treatises from standard histories, and any form of visual representations. These sources draw the boundaries of localities in divergent ways, and this workshop will probe the manner in which the boundaries were drawn, negotiated, and redefined in geographical representations.

We invite contributions that question the organizational principles of local representations of place and address the ways in which social, political, and material factors shaped and were influenced by the production of geographical knowledge. We also welcome contributions examining different periods of imperial China to assess continuity and change in such structures of geographical knowledge.

Topics to be discussed include:

- Values: How was the value of geographical knowledge produced? What was the literary
 and social status of local representations? Were they considered to be of value on their
 own or as part of larger projects? Did they possess economic, religious, or other values?
- Production and Organization: What methods and practices were used to collect local data? What roles did text borrowing and the cumulative nature of geographical information play? How did the structures of organizing and presenting geographical knowledge change over time? Do they show consistency across space and genres? How do we assess the processes, and their non-linear nature, of consumption, appropriation, and extraction in documenting the local?

- Materiality: What constitutes a local geographical work? How do illustrations, or lack thereof, engage with text and shape the structures of geographical information? How do we gauge the distance between physical landforms and their representations in text? How do we distinguish observations from other forms of knowledge acquisition?
- Politics of Geographical Knowledge: Was geographical knowledge seen at local levels as a tool to challenge central authority? How did local officials and literati negotiate with the imperial court in recording and sharing geographical knowledge?
- Legacies: Did the production of geographical knowledge in imperial China lead to standardization of geographical data and ultimately pave the way to making geography "scientific"?

Submission:

Applications should consist of a project abstract (ca. 500 words) and a brief biographical note of the author (ca. 100 words), to be submitted to Alexis Lycas (alycas@mpiwgberlin.mpg.de) by 15 May 2019. Successful applicants will be notified by 30 June 2019. Papers will be circulated among participants prior to the workshop. The workshop is funded by Department III, MPIWG.