

The Transformation of Military Culture in Late Qing and Early Republican China

During the last years of dynastic reign in China the Qing-Government launched reforms in order to improve the administration and governance of the state. In the course of these reforms, the Chinese state not only established Western-modeled ministries and a Western-shaped education system but also reorganized the military from scratch.

The research project deals with Chinese elite discourse on military reforms, and especially with the influence of European notions of military organization and administration, as well as with militaristic thinking on that discourse. The project argues that, by the end of the 19th century, a specific European political rationality was transferred to China. This political rationality – which we understand as way of thinking about state governance, as mentality of rule or as the common perception of what the purpose, focus, and responsibilities of a state should be – can best be studied by examining the reform of the Chinese military system after the war lost against Japan in 1895. This defeat significantly changed the government's view on the necessity for reforms and resulted in the introduction of new practices.

The project also analyzes methods used by the Chinese government to translate modern (or say: Western/European) political rationality into the domain of social reality. The mechanisms and strategies, which we call technologies of government, to rebuild the military sector were based on European, especially German, military structures and militarism. Education in military theory, physical drill, esprit de corps, military hierarchy and obedience, self esteem and attitude of soldiers, mobilization and organization of troops as well as military bureaucracy, infrastructure and logistics were directly and indirectly shaped after the German role model. The thesis focuses on the Chinese adaption and development of these technologies of government and studies the ways of transfer from Europe/Germany to China between 1895 and the 1920s.

Although the implementation of many reform projects was unsuccessful or incomplete, a modern political rationality and modern technologies of government were introduced, which were fundamental for later periods of state-governance and outlived the failed reform programs of the Qing regime in its basic patterns. By examining the reform of the military administration and the reorganisation of the military system, the project wants to show how this rationality and these technologies which were adapted from the West spread out and how these reforms took a sustained and resounding effect on the future course of China's political and social development.