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INTRODUCTION

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Citizenship in Asian history

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces a special issue of *Citizenship Studies* in which historians of East, South and Southeast Asia continue the project of globalizing citizenship by analyzing practices and conceptions of citizenship in pre-colonial China, India and Indonesia. Building on the recent global turn in citizenship studies as well as historicizing this turn, we shift the conceptual focus from formal membership and contracts to practices and acts of citizenship. Against citizenship essentialism, conceptual room is created for different ways in which people across Asia have participated in ruling and being ruled, employing different vocabularies, institutions and practices that showed they had agency in the polities they lived in. The main conclusion is that forms of citizenship participation can be found everywhere in Asian history, and were often anchored in practices which were both structural and effective.

1. Introduction

This issue of *Citizenship Studies* presents the results of a collaborative project on citizenship in Asian history. It makes a connection that on first sight may seem problematic, but which has excited us with its possibilities. In recent years, the study of citizenship has made a global turn. It examined citizenship beyond the West – in Asia, Africa and Latin-America – and criticized the Orientalist roots of conventional conceptions of citizenship. Engin Isin and Peter Nyers write: 'If orientalism in the nineteenth century was at pains to describe why the East did not develop, and in the twentieth century it was used to explain why the bright future decolonization promised was seemingly not delivered, in its twenty-first century form orientalism sets the East on the path to the West's development' (2014, 7). In fact, the Orientalist idea that Eastern and Southern societies do not understand what citizenship is goes back much further than two centuries of colonialism. In *Politics*, Aristotle (1885 [orig 350 BCE]) wrote:

> Having spoken of the number of the citizens, we will proceed to speak of what should be their character. . . .. Those who live in a cold climate and in Europe are full of spirit, but wanting in intelligence and skill; and therefore they retain comparative freedom, but have no political organization, and are incapable of ruling over others. Whereas the natives of Asia are intelligent and inventive, but they are wanting in spirit, and therefore they are always in a state of subjection and slavery. But the Hellenic race, which is situated between

them, is likewise intermediate in character, being high-spirited and also intelligent. Hence it continues free, and is the best-governed of any nation, and, if it could be formed into one state, would be able to rule the world. (Book 7)

Aristotle's 'Asia' stopped at Persia, yet his generalization had a colossal influence. Montesquieu (*The Spirit of the Laws*) depicted Asia as uniformly subject to a religiously inspired despotism, by contrast with Europe's liberal diversity. Edward Gibbon blamed the fall of the Roman Empire in part on the adoption of oriental despotism by the emperors. The oriental despot, unlike the absolute monarch of Europe, does not need to engage in law-making or even the use of force because his people are happy to accept his exercise of power in a personal capacity. Karl Marx gave an economic basis to oriental despotism (Asiatic mode of production, based on agriculture and royal prerogative). And Max Weber discovered that only in the medieval European city did citizenship emerge as the special legal contractual status that developed into modern citizenship (Weber 1981 [orig. Germ. 1923]: 233f).

At the same time, counter-narratives to these generalizations also have a long history. Herodotus never accepted the meta-geography of 'continents' with special characteristics. The first French Indologist Anquetil-Duperron wrote explicitly against Montesquieu's Asian generalizations. This alternative discourse has fed into the more recent turn that focuses on citizenship in the colonial and contemporary periods (Jayal 2013; Fogel and Zarrow 1997). To date, however, what is lacking is an investigation of citizenship which reaches back to earlier times.

As the individual contributions to this journal issue make abundantly clear, there is no lack of scholarly knowledge on histories of rulers, subjects and social contracts in Asian history. This knowledge, however, has not entered the field of citizenship studies, nor has it been in dialogue with recent theoretical developments in the concept of citizenship (but see, recently, Prak (2018) on China and the Middle East). The fault has been as much on the part of the sociologists, who have been loath to grapple with unfamiliar histories. As Sheldon Pollock wrote in relation to South Asian premodernity: 'Especially sociological thinkers (for whom, as one wry observer has put it, 'History tends to be the mildly annoying stuff which happens between one sociological model and another'), are far more inclined simply to imagine premodernity than to bother with the boring task of excavating it' (Pollock 2004, 19).

This journal issue sets out to remedy the situation by investigating political life in Asia's history through the lens of citizenship with the help of specialized area historians. Bringing together the fields of critical citizenship studies and Asian political, legal and social history, we present the research results of a group of scholars working on Asian histories stretching across East-, Southeast- and South-Asia and spanning many centuries. We are aware, of course, of the danger of generalization. As John Steadman (1969) pointed out years ago, Europeans have always over-estimated the unity of Asia when imagining it as a counterpart to Europe. The cultural traditions of Confucian East Asia, Indic South Asia, Islamic West Asia and (arguably) Austronesian Southeast Asia should not be imagined as an undivided unity. As we are dealing with an enormous field of research, covering vast areas and periods of time, this issue can be no more than agenda-setting. We see this project as part of critical citizenship studies' response to contemporary crises in citizenship around the world. Building on earlier work and

hopefully inspiring new directions, this issue seeks to establish fruitful connections between Asian history and contemporary thinking about citizenship.

Against the background of European thinking about citizenship, we ask whether citizenship is a Western conception, as many have concluded since Aristotle. Is it a cluster of ideas and practices that have been learned in Asia only as part of the package of nineteenth and twentieth century modernity? When we come to examine oriental societies in distant times, we often do not find a language that smoothly translates modern terms such as citizenship, rights and the state. But does this also mean that people in Asian history have not acted as political subjects, claimed rights and contested ways in which they were ruled?

Building on recent theoretical developments in critical citizenship studies, we hold that most quests to discover non-western citizenship bedevil themselves by adhering to Weber's exacting sociological conditions. They only look for citizens as an autonomous and autocephalous group, possessing a corporate organization, linked to a dominant patrician group, and issuing in the legal contract. Weber thought these conditions occurred all together as a complete package only once, starting in Medieval cities in Europe. This led one leading author on citizenship to state that 'the idea of citizenship is modern, [and] it is also Western...' (Turner 1993, vii).

In contrast, we argue for a more open definition of citizenship in which we focus on practices, whether they are facilitated by a contract and rights or not. Attention to performativity opens our eyes to look at those moments when people behaved as citizens without having a formal status or vocabulary to characterize themselves as such. This focus on practices not only brings to light the ways in which people acted in their everyday lives, but also calls attention to those acts through which people worked towards or tried to expand citizenship, for instance through forms of protest, critical writing, uprisings or voting with their feet. Citizenship, we argue, is always 'citizenship work'.

Can this more open concept bring to light practices in Asian history that have remained invisible to citizenship studies? If so, are we looking at isolated acts, or at enduring constellations in which we can even speak of structural reciprocity and the rotation of power? How inclusive and durable were these practices? And what was their geographical scale and the scope of rights they offered?

By adopting a more open definition, we hold that differences between Asian and European citizenship practices should be depicted as separations on a continuum instead of polar opposites in a dichotomous model. Several of our Asianist authors describe practices that worked with collective memories, the duties of 'good princes', and traditions that ought to be respected. These were (mostly) not 'contracts' laid down in legal texts, but certainly 'conventions' and rules of 'moral economy' that were assumed to be binding on princes as well as their subjects. For Europe, on the other hand, the package as described by Weber was in reality neither a 'system', nor an evolutionary trend, nor coeval with the geographic space known as 'Europe.' Even Western Europe was not homogeneous in this respect. As in Asia, citizenship in Europe has always been, and remains today, a contingent historical result that could face backlashes and reversals, and thus has continually to be reasserted. In these and other perspectives, the differences between Europe or the West and Asia are graded rather than essential.

In exploring citizenship in Asian history, we are not looking for some imagined form of 'pure' indigeneity, nor for 'outside' influences, but for citizenship practices, from

whichever origin, that have resonated with different communities in Asia. Our goal is to investigate whether people in Asia had such practices and, if so, what they were, no matter if they developed them autonomously or through participating in global exchange. Many ideas travelled the world's great trade routes and pilgrimage trajectories long before Europeans came to dominate them (Bentley 1993). As David Kelly writes in *Asian Freedoms* (1998, 8): 'cross-fertilisation is all. Neither origins (African music; Asian culture) nor later influences (classical music, Western culture) are sufficient to determine outcomes (jazz, Asian freedoms). Nor are origins obliterated by such influences'. As scholars have conceptualized the world as an integrated economic system since the sixteenth or thirteenth century CE, or even earlier, we hold that political and social ideas and practices, perhaps also of citizenship, have circulated and been appropriated, next to being invented, by the wide variety of Asian societies since ancient times.

In this introductory article, we first flesh out our theoretical understanding of citizenship and address methodological issues concerning the availability of vocabularies and sources. We then offer an account of the kinds of polities in relation to which Asian citizenship practices took place. Third, we give an overview of the most important findings of the essays in this issue. We close with suggestions for further research.

2. Citizenship in Asian history: how would we recognize it?

In this issue of *Citizenship Studies*, we open up the concept of citizenship with the goal of seeing as citizens not only those who through the social contract were holders of rights, but anybody who acted like a citizen. Conventional citizenship studies have been mainly concerned with the rights of formal members. They have examined the social contract between state or rulers and citizens, and the associated norms, rights and obligations. The recently emerging field of 'critical citizenship studies' considers the social contract the outcome of a political struggle. It has argued that shifting the focus towards the contestation itself – which includes contestation by outsiders – offers much greater explanatory power than did the concern with contract (Butenschøn, Davis, and Hassassian 2000; Isin 2002; Meijer 2014).

In the edited volume *Acts of Citizenship*, Isin and Nielsen (2008, 2) introduce the concept of 'acts of citizenship' to shift attention from the doer (the rights-bearing citizen) to the deed by focusing on 'those acts when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due.' Instead of adopting a strictly contractual model of citizenship, then, we will try to recapture the great insight of Aristotle, which was that citizenship is less a matter of legal contract than of political action. In Book 3 of his *Politics* he defined the citizen as: 'one who shares in governing and being governed.' Governing is an open-ended, discursive, political process; but also one with outcomes to which even the rulers are obliged to submit. Building on the work of Lazar (2008, 5) we see citizenship as a 'bundle of practices that constitute encounters between the state and citizens.' This practice-oriented interpretation of citizenship draws attention to both formal and informal processes and brings into view a much wider diversity of forms of civic engagement than the purely legal one.

If we look in Asia's history for these fluid kinds of politics, for this specific kind of political subject, rather than only for sociological forms tending towards a legal resolution that puts an end to fluidity, we are perhaps somewhere near the aspirational arena of desire that Aristotle named 'spirit' (*thumos*). An example might be the stone edicts erected by Emperor Ashoka of India in the third century BCE. They expressed regret for war violence, told of building welfare facilities such as wells and fruit trees to hold the empire together, and urged tolerance between religions. Precolonial Bugis aristocrats valued freedom from slavery (*merdeka*) as their highest good and deployed it to resist autocracy by their king (Lombard 1990, vol.2). Nonstate peoples in parts of Papua and Borneo valued egalitarianism and achievement in battle more highly than ascription through descent.

A methodological issue that all our contributors encountered was formed by a seeming lack of language and sources. Arendt (1968, 296) famously defined citizenship as 'the right to have rights'. Any attempt to trace that bundle of ideas backwards into Asian history, however, runs into several difficulties. The first and most obvious problem is that there may be no equivalent terms for citizenship or rights, nor for other key terms essential to today's citizenship discourse such as equality. The reason may be fundamental – the institutions that give those terms meaning today may be missing altogether. Often in Asian history, political relations were personalized and not translated into legally enforceable rights. None of our contributors, moreover, found a universal ideology of human rights, citizenship or equality. On the contrary, Hilde De Weerdt, writing in this edition on imperial China, found an explicit ideology of the 'organic' body politic that appears to rule out such conceptions. According to David Washbrook in our discussions leading to this edition, the idea of equal (human) rights was absent in precolonial South Asia and would have been regarded as counter-intuitive.

In Europe, ideology as a concept is a peculiarly modern invention, going back only as far as the French Revolution, though the practice of bringing definite ideas and adversarial discourse to great masses goes back further, to the invention of the printing press and the sixteenth century wars of religion. Ideology offers a limited number of precise and universally applicable normative categories. What is the history of ideology in Asia? Did the invention of the printing press in Tang China lead to the introduction of ideological politics? In any case, even if our contributors did not find an explicit ideology of equality, in Asian history we do find many cases of behaviour that we can conceptualize as citizenship. Often the underlying thought is the defence of one's or one's group's autonomy.

A related problem is that we do not have access to some of the most important things that were said in the past. Documentary evidence tends to record what James Scott has called 'public transcripts', that is, ways of talking about power in the presence of the powerholder themselves. 'Hidden transcripts' – spoken in the absence of the powerholder – are much rarer and perhaps entirely unavailable to us today. An example from the Malay archipelago concerns the term *merdeka*, 'freedom' (Reid 1998). This authentically Malay idea originates with the desire among freed people not to be a slave. In the rather free publishing environment of the 1920s we can see it acquiring an anarchical exhilaration of freedom from all controls and interference in the personal life of any young person. Such merdeka talk is largely a hidden transcript. We know about it in the 1920s because the hidden

transcript remains available to us in newspaper reports, novels, memoirs, and interviews. But only hints are found of it in the royal scriptoria, which existed mainly to glorify the king (David Henley and Ian Caldwell excavate such hints in this issue). It contradicts elite Asian assertions today that Asians are culturally averse to 'Western' ideas of individual autonomy. Bali has probably the most extensive manuscript archive in the entire Malay archipelago. If they ever contained hidden transcripts revealing aspirations to citizenship, they are lost to us today. We often do not know what ordinary people thought. Yet, frequent references in surviving public transcripts to the threat of revolt within the polity make us suspect that the desire for freedom, so basic to citizenship, was not absent even in Bali.

In the cases of both the lack of language and transcripts, we will proceed as suggested above. We will largely strip the citizenship idea of its institutional, juridical accretions as well as its precise deliberative categories. Instead, we look for practices, discourses, and desires connected with participating in ruling and being ruled.

3. The state (and its absence) in Asian history

The most important determinant of the kinds of powers rulers and ruled enjoy is the nature of the prevailing political regime. Here, however, we have another analytical problem. The very notion 'state' is hardly applicable to many parts of Asian history. Instead of institutionalized legal orders, many societies in Asian history knew highly personalized forms of rulership. This is particularly true of Asia's upland peoples and forest nomads. Subsistence clans occupying a stretch of river or a mountain valley were often egalitarian. Theirs has been called 'campfire democracy' (Glassman 2017). James Scott (2009) saw their egalitarian, almost anarchist philosophy of rule as the product of deliberate evasion from the oppressive power of the more centralized regimes of the lowlands. Scott was inspired by Owen Lattimore´s provocative thesis (1962) that frontier societies like the Mongols owed their identity to their evasion of Chinese imperial power. The structures of power in these societies did not conform to the institutionalized character of what we call a state, but they certainly formed some kind of political community. Many no doubt resembled the kinship-based, rural community that Tönnies (1963 [orig German 1887]) heuristically called *Gemeinschaft*, in which order was based on concord, law on custom, and morality on religion. Citizenship is conventionally said to appear only in the more urban *Gesellschaft*, in which convention, legislation and the common interest determine these things. Research on historic forms of citizenship in Asia will have to consider the value of this distinction, where the dividing line lies exactly, and how sharp it is. We would hold that the concept of citizenship is just as relevant to pre-state communities as to more institutionalized ones. Non-state political communities not only encapsulate certain forms of the everyday practices of citizenship, but, in the way envisaged by Scott and Lattimore, were also the products of acts of citizenship and represented citizens performing or constituting themselves. The question of weakly institutionalized local communities retains its urgency today, in view of the persistence (indeed, florescence under conditions of decentralized democracy as in Indonesia), of family-like, communitarian political relations in so many reaches of Asian political life in the present day.

When settled agriculture and trade did emerge and produced stable, non-personalistic regimes that resembled what we today would call states, they remained low-capacity affairs, especially in island Southeast Asia. More basic than the usual distinctions between democratic versus despotic regimes is simply to ask what these regimes were capable of accomplishing. Stephen Druce (2017), reviewing some classic work on indigenous Southeast Asian states, dismisses the commonly held idea that they were personalistic and therefore chronically unstable. Quoting examples from South Sulawesi, he describes them instead as 'statelike', with institutions that ensured continuity lasting centuries. Royal succession was by inheritance, and relations between kings were based on 'oaths and treaties that invoked each other's ancestors.' However, South Sulawesi may have been more stable than most, and even there the substantial evidence does not go back much beyond the seventeenth century. Helen Creese in the present edition finds Bali was much more volatile. She doubts that even the cautious word 'statelike' applies to Bali and makes do with the term 'polity.'

Whatever their succession practices may have been like, the Southeast Asian regimes we know of had only the most minimal bureaucratic apparatus to enforce compliance for corvee labour or warfare. Even applying extreme terror would have resulted in the remaining subjects decamping altogether. Instead, rulers were forced to negotiate. In many ways, negotiation is the essence of citizenship. This is what the Canadian political philosopher Tully (2014, 31) had in mind when he described the spontaneous, bottom-up and non-deliberative form of citizenship that he called 'civic' citizenship as 'negotiated practices all the way down.' Even in the highly developed and quite impersonal state of imperial China, according to Hilde De Weerdt, officials at the coalface of daily interaction with commoners found themselves treading carefully. The Chinese expected the state to deliver famine relief, community granaries, local infrastructure projects, public health, religious spaces and practice, as well as education. Under-performing officials feared being pelted with stones during the ritual around their departure at the end of their tour of duty.

Scale: the local versus the regional

Scale refers to the geographical reach of networks of social power (Mann 1993). As states developed, they centralized (Flannery 1972). Citizen rights were first formalized in city-states (Hansen 2000). Empires bound together or overrode smaller units such as cities, regions, or nations. Many modern nation-states are as large as empires. But people living within empires invariably belonged also to a lower-order political community such as a city or village. Political negotiation between rulers and ruled was often more real at those local levels than at the top of the polity. The South Sulawesian polities were highly decentralized (Druce 2017). Even the Chinese empires, for all their authoritarian philosophy of rule and their centralized bureaucracy, had to negotiate at local levels with their commoners, as Hilde De Weerdt shows in this journal issue.

The question of urbanization remains largely open in our research. Hansen's (2000) evocative thesis on the basis of thirty city-states around world history is that they everywhere functioned in similar, more or less republican ways. There were city-states in Asia too – Sriwijaya, Makassar, Melaka, Aceh, Brunei, the Chinese cities of the Spring and Autumn Period. They ran much as Weber had depicted them to have done in

ancient Greece and medieval Europe – as functionally diverse, nuclearized settlements based on trade, with some degree of rather republican self-government. They were 'ruled by councils and assemblies in which decisions were made by vote and after debate…. [E]ven in monarchic city-states there is not infrequently evidence' of such bodies and practices (p. 612). Even within much larger empires, cities are generally found to be self-governing units; taxation and foreign policy is taken away from them, but for the rest they are self-governing (Hansen 2000).

However, the city-state model does not work as convincingly in Asia (and in Mesoamerica for the same reason) as it does in Europe. Historical Asian cities are far less dense than European ones. Asian political power often seems to develop in ways not directly linked to significant urbanization. While De Weerdt's paper on China implies an urban setting, the politically sophisticated Wajo federation described by Henley and Caldwell is not urban. Nor is Washbrooks supra-village corporation, which is institutionally complex but somewhere between urban and rural ('rurban'), while the equally corporatist Balinese irrigation networks of which they remind us are even more rural. Indeed, the Indian mahajanapadas, which covered large territories yet were not apparently built around a city, are mentioned as an exception in Hansen´s encyclopedic study. Our findings thus place a question mark over the presumed deterministic arrow pointing from urbanism to citizenship.

From the European high middle ages onwards, representative institutions appear also at that higher level (estates, diets, parliaments etc.) in which the estates of the realm were represented. Such institutions do not occur in any of our case studies. Yet this did not necessarily imply despotism. Even when empires emerge covering territories much larger than the individual city-state and requiring extensive bureaucratic systems, we find surveillance and policing capacities far weaker than those with which we have become familiar since the nineteenth century. This left room for negotiation, particularly at the local level.

The papers in our issue appear to see more content and greater depth of citizenship at local scales than at more regional ones. All the political relations in this issue, whether in Sulawesi, Bali, the Indian irrigation corporations, or the Chinese magistracies, were relatively participatory. Even the Chinese emperor, the Son of Heaven, did not achieve direct control over local polities, nor did the divine Roman emperor. Though Bali was deeply hierarchical at a regional level, strong egalitarian notions prevailed at the local level.

4. How participative?

We now move to analyse our discoveries. What were the practices of rule in different Asian settings? Did they at all resemble those long imagined with the phrase 'oriental despotism'? This can only be an exploratory, heuristic exercise. The state of our knowledge remains far too fragmentary to permit more definitive conclusions. We hope they will stimulate further work. As outlined above, we pursue the political dynamics underlying citizenship in Asian history, and not merely static conditions of membership in a community. This means we look for (possibly contentious) repertoires of practices and discourses.

Stuurman introduced into our discussions an 'ultra-minimalist' definition of citizen participation, and asked if anyone had observed it in their case studies. His definition simply pointed to some people beyond the supreme ruler having some agency in the ongoing reproduction and transformation of social routines. The unanimous answer to Stuurman's question in the present issue is that at least ultra-minimalist participation is found everywhere we looked. The only alternative to a government in which such ultra-minimalist participation was possible, Stuurman argued, would be one in which silence was imposed by means of threats and terror. But while the despotist impulse was common in parts of Asia, it was also widely seen as a weak form of government. Confucius wrote that to punish evildoers was certainly needful, but to rely exclusively on punishment would be misguided and, ultimately, highly dangerous. Consequently, legitimacy was an issue for all political regimes. Confucius was writing during China´s Spring and Autumn period (eighth to the fifth centuries BCE), just as the first city-states emerged. His ideas remained orthodox into imperial China and up to the present day. Thus we see Chinese commoners freely blaming officials for under-performing, and, at another end of Asia, Balinese villagers openly claiming property rights.

Others who have ventured there before us have made the same observation. *The Secret History of Democracy* (Isakhan and Stockwell 2011) reveals, for example, democratic practices in ancient India (the mahajanapadas), in Chinese city-states of the Spring and Autumn period, within the precolonial Baganda Kingdom (present-day Uganda), and among Australian aborigines. Apparently, in every time and place where a political structure exists identifying rulers and ruled, some of the ruled also share in ruling. Isakhan and Stockwell write that 'the evidence has continued to mount concerning the use of non-hierarchical, egalitarian and inclusive models of power among peoples as diverse as the ancient Phoenicians and the Australian aborigines' (p.4). Similar discoveries were made by the authors of the edited volume *Asian Freedoms: The Idea of Freedom in East and Southeast Asia*. Kelly and Reid (1998, 3) writes in his introductory essay that they again and again found evidence that the idea of freedom in Asia was 'a source of legal, ethical and political practices – human rights, the rule of law, civil society, democracy and so on.' Maarten Prak (2018) writes that although 'Asian cities had no formal citizenship' (249), 'there was a lot going on in China and the Middle East that could be defined as "citizenship", i.e. established mutual claims and expectations between inhabitant and authorities' (271).

These are significant conclusions. They speak against those who think of citizenship in essentially cultural terms, applicable only to Periclean Athens, republican Rome, and the post-1789 modern world. It does not depend on the notion of 'citizenship' being recognized in the discourse of the day, nor on the need to communicate such notions from one culture to another. It leads us rather to think of general traits of human nature such as the desire for personal autonomy, or of generally applicable sociological solutions to collective action problems under certain constraints.

Of course, we only see it everywhere because we have defined citizenship in an 'ultra-minimalist' way. Our authors use qualifying terms such as 'proto-' (Henley and Caldwell, Creese) or 'quasi-citizenship' (Washbrook). Counter-examples abound where denizens have no rights to participate. Creese in the present issue also describes Balinese debt slaves, who had no rights and could be sold to European military recruiters as disposable goods. '[F]or every Chinese liberal,' write Isakhan and

Stockwell [p. 221], 'there were a thousand peasants starving to death as war lords fought their forgotten battles.' Faulks (2000, 7) usefully distinguished three criteria by which we may analyze particular citizenship regimes. First, the extent of citizenship, or membership: who belongs to the political community? Second, its content: what legitimate rights, duties and obligations do citizens have? And third, depth: how much energy is the citizen expected to invest in participating in ruling and being ruled? The answer is likely to vary for different groups within a given society. These will prove useful guides.

Graded membership

Is there a point below which 'ultra-minimalism' no longer satisfies any reasonable concept of popular participation, and we can only speak of despotism? For arguably there is a boundary beyond which some kind of segmentary citizenship – for the few – is no citizenship at all but elitism. The question is not trivial. Citizen participation is nowhere universal – not even in the most democratic of states, and certainly not in historic Asia. In all Asian societies, citizenship as membership was graded down some social ladder. Rights at any one moment in time decreased in a spectrum ranging from aristocrats to slaves. In between were a host of categories, from aged notables to warriors, landed lords, priests, free men and women, foreigners, and children. Which categories of people had agency and what their agency amounted to, are questions studies of historical Asian polities will have to deal with.

The extent of citizenship was often determined genealogically. David Washbrook describes large corporations in India – much larger than a village – that intervened to ensure all legitimate members had equal access to good irrigated land. Members were descended from ancestors who had originally opened up the land. Membership in various levels of assemblies in Wajo (Sulawesi), according to Henley and Caldwell, was based on status. Those born in the aristocracy had the most political rights. Between 20% and 30% of the population were slaves, who were excluded from citizenship (as they were in Periclean Athens).

What about all those who were excluded from any form of direct participation in politics? Women, for example, were excluded in many parts of Asia. But they did participate in religious and civil rituals and contributed indirectly to the democratic polis. Clearly the political cannot be divorced from the social. Social citizenship concerns practices that sustain religious, commemorative, economic or gendered communities and thus impinge on the 'political' without directly participating in political action. Social (or 'civic', or 'civilizational') citizenship can be recognized in imaginative literature expressing desires for inclusion, more readily than in explicitly political texts. Stuurman quoted a female Chinese poet from the 1780s who wrote: 'It is to my regret that I was not born a man and cannot head a household.' All political citizens are also social citizens, but the reverse is not true. Stuurman argued in his symposium presentation that 'in all premodern societies political citizenship was the province of male adults, and most of the time only a part of them. It follows that we need a concept of social or civic citizenship to account for the contributions made to the sustenance of societies by women and by men who were denied political citizenship'. By charting citizenship along a social dimension in addition to the political one, we wish to

emphasize that not all the recognition citizens may have pertained directly to participation in ruling and being ruled. The thousands of men and women who answered calls to participate in Balinese ritual, in Helen Creese's account, were mainly social citizens without political rights. They responded to calls to participate because they were getting protection in exchange.

Legitimate claims and depth

Notions of equality and inclusion did exist in many Asian societies, but they were entertained in forms preceding the development of a specific vocabulary for them. Bali knew no abstract and universally applicable word for 'justice'. But it did have a strict conception of obligations that a ruler must 'remember.' One who is said to 'forget' them is considered unjust by his people. A judge in civil cases had the obligation to listen, and then to bring the correct written law together with witnesses. Property rights were protected by law. Theft of land, women, and horses were most often the cause of litigation. Curses were the cosmic consequences for failing to meet one's obligations.

As we leave behind the 'statelike' polities of Southeast Asia and move to the more highly institutionalized true state of the Chinese empire, the discourse becomes correspondingly more deliberative, explicitly formulated, and indeed universal. Chinese statecraft has a well-developed 'organic' philosophy of state in terms of a hierarchically organized 'body'. Common in other parts of the world too (including medieval Europe), it can be interpreted in liberal as well as authoritarian ways. Key to it, De Weerdt demonstrates, was the idea that the survival of a ruling dynasty was conditional on continual observance of the mandate granted by Heaven. Official texts recognized that the lifespan of a dynasty was always finite, because someone, somewhere, would be sure to fail the test. Legitimacy was thus an issue for all Chinese regimes, no matter how despotic. The representative idea is as old as human history – even if it is not formulated in terms of an individual franchise.

Members of the body politic often enjoyed a remarkable range of rights to protection. In the Balinese village, according to Creese, any villager could theoretically find redress at the village court. In Wajo a set of oral rules known as the Latoa protected many rights for the large group of free individuals below the level of the aristocrats. Their property could not be confiscated, they could travel freely, they were protected from neighbours taking the law into their own hands, and were free to conclude contracts with others provided there was a witness to authenticate it. The Indian corporations existed to periodically redistribute good land to those who had been living off poor land.

Not everyone enjoyed the same level of protection. Creese writes that 'fines paid to the state were heaviest for ordinary Balinese, thus forcing many into debt bondage. . . [O]ffenders could buy a commutation of their sentence, but in reality most lacked the means to do so.' We are entitled to wonder if a woman of average means could sue an aristocrat who wished to stop her from leaving Wajo. We do not have the case law to know the answer, but such a course of action would be practically assured of failure in today´s Indonesia. Yet, De Weerdt tells us, Chinese commoners did take corrupt or incompetent officials to court – even if the judges were themselves officials too and reluctant to take on their colleagues.

The poorer part of the population likely lived habitually in clientelistic dependence on powerful patrons, who provided them with protection and minimal welfare in exchange for labour and loyalty. This had implications both for the everyday practices of citizenship, as for the intermittent transgressive acts of citizenship that characterized clientelistic regimes. Anthropological observations of citizenship practices in today´s Asia are shot through with personalistic ways in which both everyday practices and acts of citizenship play out in the absence of an impersonal rule of law. These observations chime with the little we can surmise about precolonial citizen relations, and we suspect one may throw considerable light on the other. Henley and Caldwell argue here that the clientelistic relation in precolonial South Sulawesi shaped a benign social contract that underlay a relatively participatory citizenship regime. At the same time, clientelism may explain why protests are so often muted, evasive and indirect, even when conditions appear intolerable. On an everyday basis, clients rarely have the luxury of putting those dependency relations at risk by demanding rights (Berenschot and van Klinken 2018). Dissatisfaction may then emerge only at moments of regime instability. An example in our present theme issue is the silent protest by peasants and known in Bali as *matilas* and in South Sulawesi as *mallekke' dapureng* – moving one´s allegiance to a neighbouring ruler.

Modern liberal and republican citizenship ideas privilege the rights and participation by individuals, regardless of their 'race, creed, colour or sex.' In historical Asia, by contrast, citizenship practices tended to be communal. Again, the notion of graded citizenship seems helpful. Membership of the Indian corporation was determined by one´s lineage linking back to the pioneers. Rights were allocated not to individuals but to communities – 'left' castes represented resident agriculturalists, 'right' castes itinerant traders. Participation rights in the various levels of Wajo´s assemblies were determined on the basis of social rank. Even though collective rights had the priority, nothing prevented individuals from laying a claim in Sulawesi. Membership in the Indian corporation was on the basis of households. It is a matter for debate whether the range of protections offered to different collectivities constitutes citizenship or undermines it.

We have little information on the depth of citizenship as practised in the places we have studied. How much energy were non-elites able to invest in their active participation? The clearest indication comes from Wajo, where a decision to go to war could only be taken by an elected assembly of free men not of noble birth. On extraordinary occasions, an even larger council could be called together composed of heads of villages and all respectable free men to give advice to the chief magistrate. As in Periclean Athens, these assemblies were compulsory and attendance would have required a non-trivial amount of energy. Everyone was expected to know their customary law. Precisely how open the debate was on these occasions remains a question. Wajo may not have been 'typical' though, even in island Southeast Asia.

Acts of citizenship

The distinction between legal-formal citizenship and citizenship as a practice, including insurrectionary acts of citizenship, is not as sharp as it appears at first sight. Everyday acts that on the surface look compliant may secretly be intended to challenge a despotic regime, to actualize promised rights, to expand a discourse of rights, or to change rules

in perhaps minor ways. They can be 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1987). On the other hand, many practices widely considered 'normal' hold within them the memory of extraordinary acts of citizenship in the past. They are kept within the existing social contract precisely to prevent things from turning nasty again. Legal practices in the Balinese village that Creese describes prevent transgressive action by angry peasants. Hilde De Weerdt quotes an eighth century CE text on governance that warns rulers not to stir up the wrath of the people by bad behaviour: 'With the Son of Heaven, if he has the Way, then the people will support him as their ruler; if he lacks the Way, then the people will abandon and discard him – something truly to be feared!' Presumably the author of this text was aware of precisely such an abandonment. The normal is designed to appease possibly transgressive acts of citizenship. Conversely, such acts of citizenship are invariably predicated on the salience of practices until that point considered 'normal.' Some have aimed to recover a lost 'normal' from the past.

Most of the transgressive acts of citizenship described in this theme issue are occasional. They occurred at moments of crisis, but usually did not immediately result in a new way of ruling. City-state assemblies in China´s Spring and Autumn period often deposed a failing king, but they then appointed another monarch (Lewis, in Hansen 2000, 369–370). Creese describes villagers who decamp to the neighbouring ruler when dissatisfied with their own (*matilas*), but who do nothing to help those who live in a place (far from the border) who cannot decamp. Stuurman helpfully calls such acts 'punctual', meaning they were incidental rather than durable. Punctual acts of citizenship characterize political cultures without an institutionalized frame of political 'rights' and obligations (Isin and Nielsen 2008, 1–12). They are not deliberative, but 'negotiated practices all the way down.' These moments usually fail again, as Isakhan and Stockwell also point out, but they do change the calculus of the rulers, who need always to consider the possibility that people might revolt or flee. These acts of citizenship do not need to be revolutionary or permanently efficacious to be significant. If such insurrectionary puncturing takes place repeatedly, of course, it may well lead to a change in the rules. The iterative articulation of grievances and representations of interests can have a lasting impact on the political regime, even if government remains in the hands of a 'prince' or tightly knit aristocracy. They upset balances, disrupt existing practices, and open windows of opportunity to further challengers to come.

5. More questions than answers

What gains can we identify from thinking about citizenship in historic Asia? And what implications does such thinking have for contemporary Asian citizenship? Does it support a developmental notion, in which 'ultra-minimalist' historical citizenship eventually produces fuller forms of modern citizenship? Or, on the contrary, do historical citizenship practices actually undermine citizenship today? We still have more questions than answers at this stage.

Our most important discovery is that citizenship in Asian history does exist. It is no oxymoron. The term 'oriental despotism' has – to be honest, and Wittfogel (1957) notwithstanding – long been seen among academics as inaccurate. Yet despots in the region continue to promote the same idea as being authentically Asian, and western

policy not infrequently agrees that democracy does not come naturally to Asia. It is time to challenge those ideas with themes from Asia's own history of citizenship.

We think we also have an explanation for the neglect into which the theme of citizenship in Asian history has fallen. It is a more immediate one than the persistent western cultural prejudices at work here. It is that citizenship studies themselves have defined their subject in static terms of membership, institutionally guaranteed. This is not only a recipe for misunderstanding the dynamism of citizenship struggles in today's OECD world. It completely occludes any recognition of citizenship in settings where no such institutions appear to exist. That is in fact 'most of the world,' as Partha Chatterjee (2004) put it. Instead, by dynamizing our concept of citizenship as 'a bundle of practices that constitute encounters' between ruler and ruled (Lazar 2008, 5), we have recognized forms of it everywhere in Asian history. The many examples we have uncovered of Asians participating in ruling and being ruled show how untenable it is to imagine that citizenship does not exist in their history.

We would close with six questions that should prove fruitful for further research. The first concerns state capacity. What are the political consequences for citizenship of the comparatively limited bureaucratic capacity states in Asian history possess? How do rulers achieve legitimacy when they are preoccupied with fears of citizens revolting or absconding? Comparative studies in contemporary citizenship warn that overestimating a state´s practical sovereignty means underestimating the centrality of political negotiations between rulers and ruled, even while rulers engage in despotic rhetoric. The same warning holds even more acutely for historians of citizenship in Asia, who face greater difficulty finding the 'hidden transcripts' of political encounters.

The second question concerns scale. Contemporary anthropologies of the state have learned to disaggregate states into units operating at different geographical scales (Migdal 2001). Doing the same for historical states in Asia should lead to a fresh appraisal of local politics in Asian states that cover considerable areas. To what extent are the dynamics of citizenship encounters constrained by the spatial reach of face-to-face interaction? Why and how do political relations within a village, city or district manage to maintain a degree of autonomy even within a larger political realm such as an empire? How much protection can citizens negotiate with local rulers even within a larger realm that notionally adheres to an authoritarian philosophy of rule? We suspect, for example, that a village-level egalitarianism has left its legacy in the Gandhian concept of the self-governing local community. It is the antithesis of the nineteenth century idea of oriental despotism that keeps on being quoted by authoritarian Asian elites today as the culturally authentic ideal.

Related to this, thirdly, is the question of citizenship and urbanism. Are cities in Asian history functionally like cities elsewhere in world history – namely quasi-republican entities, even if they are part of a larger realm with a different philosophy of rule (Hansen 2000)? If not, why not?

A fourth question concerns clientelism. This deeply rooted pattern of social, economic and political dependency is often seen as inimical to citizenship. North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009) have called polities in which patron-client relations trump the rule of law 'natural states.' We know from contemporary studies of poor, weakly institutionalized states in the global south that citizenship there is highly stratified. We used the term graded citizenship above. But we still have little idea how they work in Asian history, where economies were less capitalist and state capacities more constrained than

they are today. Can we recognize citizenship encounters in the 'hybrid' situations we often see in such states, in which people serially adopt repertoires of clientship and autonomy? Can we recognize citizenship encounters also in the more communitarian social contracts prevailing in clientelist societies? Why, for that matter, do the 'organic' political ideas so commonly encountered in Asian history, such as the family principle, sometimes suppress but at other times sustain insurrectionary acts of citizenship? Can we look from below at the insurrectionary movements that often accompany political crises in natural states (such as a succession) and see genuine 'acts of citizenship'?

Fifthly, what gains can be made by adopting a concept of social citizenship, as suggested above? Literary studies seem particularly promising in this regard, as are studies of religious ritual. They reveal the aspirations and strategies adopted by women, children, migrants, slaves, and others excluded from direct citizen participation but possibly indirectly active.

Sixthly, will a sustained focus on moments of crisis produce insights into acts of citizenship? Most of the time, people live out their lives within the existing social contract as widely understood. We call this routinized, everyday behaviour 'being a citizen.' Disruptive moments of contestation, on the contrary, are crises rich with possibilities for people to 'become a citizen.' They create themselves as subject of power. Are the frequent succession crises, wars, insurrections, and natural disasters in Asian history 'punctual' incidents, or have they led to new citizenship regimes? We suspect, for example, that contemporary Asian talk opposing authoritarian elite 'Asian values' discourse can often be traced back to some moment of crisis in the past where existing rules were suddenly exposed as unfair. David Washbrook writes of South Indian resistance to Mughal 'tyranny' as an act of 'quasi-citizenship.' Such moments of contestation were often focused on legitimation through performance. Rulers with limited means to enforce their will, afraid of a popular reaction, were forced to make concessions if only for a moment.

We have found rewards in the collaboration between historians with rich case files on the one hand, and social scientists interested in contemporary citizenship studies on the other. We do feel confident that any such inquiry no longer needs to start from the uncomfortable suspicion that Asians never knew what citizenship was until Westerners told them about it. To that extent, the study of citizenship in Asian history holds out genuine emancipative promise.

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