

The Imperial Viceroy: Reflections on an Historical Type

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Empires are spatially extended polities of a composite and hierarchical nature. They have a monarch at the top or, in exceptional instances, a collective body such as an oligarchical senate, a politburo, or an elected republican government. In any possible case they require agents, subordinate representatives, and 'imperial intermediaries'.¹ Their composite parts, be they 'provinces', 'colonies', or 'protectorates', are invariably headed by elevated functionaries whose duty it is to project the centre's authority into the periphery. The chief of the province or the colony, all-powerful as he may seem in the eyes of his subjects and staff, is himself inevitably a servant. His power is ultimately derived from an even higher source of sovereignty, and he is always liable to instant demotion, recall, and sometimes punishment. But he usually is the true master of his realm. His scope of action is enormous. He is able to develop and implement strategies of his own. The following remarks focus on that top echelon of peripheral governance which is indispensable for the running of empire and which is more visible than any other part of a regional apparatus of power. They attempt to portray a very special functional position which might succinctly be called that of an 'imperial viceroy'.

I

It is difficult—and would be arbitrary—to confine the present observations to an 'early modern' period which, for purposes of comparison, may be said to begin somewhere in the fourteenth century and end in the decades around 1800. Whatever their effective power, dynasties did not disappear with the end of what we have come to call the early modern age.² The basic functional requirements of empire and imperial rule remained the same across the conventional historiographical divide around 1800. This is why evidence presented

1 Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2010), 13–14.

2 Helmut Neuhaus, ed., *Die Frühe Neuzeit als Epoche* (Munich, 2009).

in this chapter is taken from the entire sweep of imperial history right up to decolonisation in the middle of the twentieth century.

During and after the ‘age of revolution’ monarchies and imperial systems continued to exist in a wide variety of different contexts.³ In China, the Qing carried on until 1911, surviving imperialist aggression and internal rebellion. No general history of monarchical court societies in Eurasia can ignore the amazing scene of the Empress Dowager Cixi during the Boxer Rebellion in full flight from her capital, taking parts of her court along. Cixi and the Emperor returned to Beijing in January 1902, and during the following couple of years the Qing government proved capable of launching a reform programme that impressively addressed many of China’s weaknesses.

Elsewhere in non-colonised Asia, monarchies gained in strength during the second half of the nineteenth century. The Meiji Renovation put the imperial institution at the centre of a revamped political system and invented a cult around the sacralised Tennō. His palace in Tokyo remained an important focus of power right up to the breakdown of imperial Japan in the summer of 1945. In Siam, two generations of reforming kings pushed the country towards modernity. Non-constitutional absolutism in present-day Thailand lasted until a *coup d’état* in 1932—just about as long as colonial absolutism in British India, where more than a modicum of Indian political participation was permitted only in the early 1930s.

In Europe, monarchs and more or less sovereign princes prevailed throughout the nineteenth century. Napoleon I was more powerful than any of his predecessors among French monarchs and unsurpassed in the speed with which he scattered the members of his own extended family across the thrones of Europe. His nephew, styling himself Emperor Napoleon III, resuscitated the elder Bonaparte’s political recipes under new circumstances. In Prussia and the Habsburg Monarchy, some kind of *ancien régime* weathered the revolutions of 1848–49. Even under constitutional conditions, especially in the time of William II (that is, from 1888), the Hohenzollern court offered the public spectacle of courtly performance and display, and the same is true for the more than thirty courts *en miniature* that dotted the German landscape from Munich in the south to Schwerin near the Baltic Sea. Between Lisbon and St Petersburg, Stockholm and Istanbul, Europe, right up to the First World War, remained a continent of dynasties and their courts. When, in 1851, Giuseppe Verdi and his librettist Francesco Maria Piave brought *Rigoletto* on to the stage,

3 Historians are beginning to take a broader view of the crucial period of transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. See David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (Basingstoke, 2010).

an opera complete with a dissolute prince, courtiers, and a court jester, they knew that their audiences would not merely think of the past. Eurasian monarchy in the nineteenth century was more than just a 'legacy' of bygone ages. It deserves a full chapter in the history of dynastic power. Contemporary observers had no premonition that it would be the final one.

II

The focus of most contributions to this volume is more restricted than that of monarchy *tout court*. The authors are interested in dynastic power only as long as that power is wielded—or at least projected—over territory. That territory should be more than just the agrarian hinterland of a princely residence, as one finds it so often in the fragmented political landscapes of eighteenth-century Germany, Italy, Japan, Malaya, or southern India. In other words, the type of polity to be considered is something different from a city-state. It covers a space large enough for the existence of a network of cities, some of which serve as secondary or subordinate centres of power while still acknowledging the sovereignty of the centre. Our model state is thus endowed with an urban hierarchy and, in addition, with internal lines of communication long enough to require care and protection. This criterion distinguishes, for instance, France around 1700 from any of the numerous semi-autonomous duchies and margraviates across the 'German' border.

If a territorial power-structure of this kind shows two additional features, it is usually called an 'empire': First, the original core expanded through military conquest and/or peaceful colonisation, and memories of those centrifugal movements are preserved in the *imaginaire* at least of the elite. Second, the polity includes communities whose customs and worldviews differ recognisably from those of the core territorial unit. For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one is tempted to speak of 'ethnic differences', a concept more problematic for earlier times.⁴

It is perhaps unwise to get caught up, more deeply than in the brief observation at the beginning of this chapter, in the perennial question of how to define an 'empire'. Definitions are either so general as to be almost meaningless or too restricted to cover all or most of the prominent cases one wants to see included. Thus, the well-organised domain of the Yongzheng emperor around 1730, the

4 Samuel E. Finer, *The History of Government from the Earliest Times*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1997), vol. I, 8–9; Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 31.

jumble of places on four continents where, at the same time, subjects of King George II pursued some sort of 'British' interests, and the flimsy remnants of the Portuguese trading network shared very few common features. Moreover, there are empires without courts as in the case of early modern Venice⁵ or post-1870 France, and, of course, even major courts without empire.⁶

Still, we need a general idea of a basic constellation where four structural elements come together:

- (1) The court, seen as the fulcrum of power and the fountain of honour, prosperity, and worldly wisdom.
- (2) The periphery, consisting both of home-country provinces and of colonies, the latter being less tightly integrated into central administrative structures than provinces.
- (3) The frontier—a region of untamed volatility, irregular administrative institutionalisation, and often uncommon violence.⁷
- (4) The wider, as it were 'international', environment—a sometimes neglected aspect but a crucial one since no court was ever unaware of what took place outside its own jurisdiction.

Structural considerations of this kind are now less an end in themselves than they were half a century ago when S.N. Eisenstadt published his classic study *The Political Systems of Empires*.⁸ They are mere preliminary preparations of a field where an interest in processes predominates, so dear to that other supreme historical sociologist, Norbert Elias. In the theory of empire, those processes are often connected in a functionalist way to the question of the stability of empire. While some authors continue to be puzzled by the Polybian theme of the rise, decline, and fall of empires, other historians point to the intriguing durability of many of them. In any case, the central question is that about imperial coherence, about the integration and disintegration of empire. This concern with forces of coherence has not been entirely superseded by new imperial history's focus on identity and hybridity, contestation,

5 The central institution was the Grand Council. See Monique O'Connell, *Men of Empire: Power and Negotiation in Venice's Maritime State* (Baltimore, 2009), 39 seq.

6 For example the Tokugawa court, cf. Eva-Maria Meyer, *Japans Kaiserhof in der Edo-Zeit. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Jahre 1846 bis 1867* (Münster, 1999).

7 David Ludden, 'The Process of Empire: Frontiers and Borderlands', in Peter Fibiger Bang and C.A. Bayly, eds., *Tributary Empires in Global History* (Basingstoke, 2011), 132–50: 'Frontiers are places and time where empire strives to incorporate people into orderly peripheries.' (147).

8 S.N. Eisenstadt, *Political Systems of Empires* (New York, 1963).

and negotiation. For comparative purposes, some kind of common framework and vocabulary beyond the close description of individual cases in a culturalist language remains indispensable.

The court and the provinces are connected through the circulation of personnel and resources. The suggestive term 'circulation' should not obscure the fact that those flows are rarely balanced and symmetrical, the specific kind and degree of asymmetry being a prime target for research and comparison. The court as an exporter of symbolic surplus is at the same time an importer and consumer of taxable wealth. Manpower is often channelled through the centre towards the periphery rather than recycled between them. Sometimes one periphery feeds into another, as in the case of the numerous Scots and Irishmen employed in the British overseas colonies. An exceptional level of genuine circulation seems to have been achieved in Qing China with its fairly open elite where the local gentry families, the hierarchy of titled degree-holders, the territorial bureaucracy, and the officials in the capital formed an integrated system with a less-than-absolute cleavage between Manchu and Han and between the civil and the military wings of the state apparatus. Almost invariably, circulation also occurs through spatial hierarchies. Formal positions of power are connected to different amounts of prestige and symbolic capital, similar to present-day diplomatic services. The perceived value of postings, including in terms of remuneration, ranged across a wide scale between hopeless imperial backwaters and prized 'jewels of the crown'.

Empires differ according to the degree to which members of peripheral elites are incorporated into the central power structure. The extreme case of the Roman empire, where this kind of promotion was easy, found no imitation in modern European empires.⁹ Articulated ranking systems as they existed in China or Rome seem to facilitate vertical mobility through a regulated passage of offices. A crucial variable is the manner of making appointments to offices: through competitive examinations, monarchical decisions, or patronage by other powerholders outside the sovereign's innermost circle, for instance high nobles. If a political order leaves room for competition, degrees of regulation have to be differentiated. Competition can strengthen a given order but can also tear it apart.

9 Eckhard Meyer-Zwiffelhofer, *Imperium Romanum. Geschichte der römischen Provinzen* (Munich, 2009), 118. On the governor in the Imperium Romanum see Andrew W. Lintott, *Imperium Romanum: Politics and Administration* (London and New York, 1993), 43–69; see also Raimund Schulz, *Herrschaft und Regierung. Roms Regiment in den Provinzen in der Zeit der Republik* (Paderborn, 1997); Werner Eck, ed., *Lokale Autonomie und römische Ordnungsmacht in den kaiserzeitlichen Provinzen vom 1. bis 3. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1999).

The spatial equations of power are variable and change over time. No political order is completely centralised; rarely is power projected unilaterally from the centre alone. Territorial polities go through cycles of centralisation and decentralisation. They always tap local resources of power, but they do it in characteristically different ways. They recruit soldiers and lower administrative staff on the spot and strike bargains with local elites, whether or not we call that 'collaboration', as in the older theory of empire. In the process, local knowledge may be used for imperial or dynastic strategies. Centres and peripheries are linked through such flows of knowledge. The management of information is among the most crucial and most difficult challenges for imperial headquarters. Archives in Seville or The Hague, London or Beijing testify to the enormous efforts undertaken to collect and process data. A lack of knowledge about conditions in the provinces and colonies can put a centre at a serious disadvantage, while an overabundance of information may drive a system beyond the limits of its processing capacity.¹⁰

Imperial systems differ in the degree to which connections are allowed to bypass the centre. Almost by definition, an empire is a radial configuration, the centre functioning like the hub of a wheel. The various peripheries are deliberately isolated from each other. The metropolis attempts to monopolise information, commodity flows, political agency, and distributive capacity. In rare cases of elevated complexity (and easiest to achieve in compact and contiguous realms), empires form two-dimensional networks.

Finally, one should pay attention to the finer sentiments that hold empires together and keep them going in addition to the permanent and always indispensable threat of coercion. 'Trust' has made a remarkable career as a key concept of social sciences, turning away from the arid abstractions of rational-choice theory. It certainly contributes to imperial cohesion, yet it should perhaps not be overrated. At least as important is legitimacy. Dynastic power draws on the sources of Max Weber's famous three types of legitimate authority. While it is closest to Weber's 'traditional authority', it can, under special circumstances, also partake of 'rational-legal authority' and even of 'charismatic authority', for example that of a warrior-king. The extraordinary success of Manchu imperial governance in the high Qing period is partly due to a combination of all these forms of authority. Peripheral elites maintain their bonds with the centre out of fear, self-interest, habit, and a basic feeling that the given order conforms to some idea of justice. Trust or loyalty is added

10 C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996); idem, 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India', *Modern Asian Studies* 27 (1993), 3–43.

as a further component, as is the idea of divine sanction. The shrewd monarch on his or her part knows that trustworthy agents are needed while unconditional trust is unrealistic to expect. The prince prizes loyalty but is aware of the need to nurture, buy, and manipulate it. Trust is a volatile medium of exchange rather than a fundamental anthropological underpinning of political order.

III

Centres are linked to peripheries through a rich repertoire of interaction. Interaction is shaped by groups and individuals occupying various positions both in social hierarchies and in systems of a functional division of labour. These two dimensions do not necessarily correspond. In European terms, a non-noble councillor or a medium-rank aristocrat can exercise more influence than someone higher up in the formal hierarchy. As late as the nineteenth century, the greatest defenders of dynastic rule were men such as Metternich and Bismarck, who came from lower or middle-ranking aristocratic families.

The most important functional position mediating between the ruler and his commoner subjects is the viceroy, loosely defined as the head of the political hierarchy in a given territorial unit at the periphery. In the context of a general discussion, there is no need for being fastidious about terminology. There were 'viceroys' under this designation in the Portuguese (*vice-rei*), Spanish (*virrey*), and Russian (*namestnik*) empires, in British India after 1858, in Ireland (where the Lord Lieutenant was styled viceroy from the 1870s onwards),¹¹ in nineteenth-century Egypt under nominal Ottoman overlordship (the *khedive*, more than a simple *wali*),¹² in the Japanese empire after 1895 and in Qing China (*zongdu*). Under different circumstances, the term 'governor-general' meant almost the same thing, as in Dutch Batavia since 1610 (*gouverneur-generaal*), in South Asia under the East India Company between 1774 and 1858, and, under modern republican auspices, in the Philippines under US rule, or in French

11 Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Britain's Imperial Administrators, 1858–1966* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000), 203.

12 See Felix Konrad, *Der Hof der Khediven von Ägypten. Herrscherhaushalt, Hofgesellschaft und Hofhaltung 1840–1880* (Würzburg, 2008). The term 'viceroy' is deceptive in the Egyptian case since the incumbent of that office was in effect the head of his own dynasty, in other words: a reigning monarch, as confirmed by the sultan's granting of hereditary governorship to Mehmed Ali in 1841 (168). See also Khaled Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt* (Oxford, 2009), 97. The khedive's representational relationship with the sultan was a purely nominal one.

Algeria and Indochina. The types of political system at home differed widely while the functional attributes of the office of governor-general showed a much greater similarity over time and space. He was always a peripheral autocrat, possessing virtually unchallenged authority.¹³ Without a king or emperor at home there could, of course, be no ‘viceroy’—a diplomatic problem for Dutch missions to the court of China.¹⁴

The British, who were fond of casting themselves in the role of latter-day Romans, preferred to speak of imperial ‘proconsuls’, a term of wider application than the rare title of ‘viceroy’ that was reserved for the crown’s chief official in India. The proconsul, according to nineteenth-century parlance, was the person at the top of a province or colony.¹⁵ Ironically, the man who was perhaps the most powerful representative of that species anywhere bore the modest title of a ‘Consul-General of Egypt’—Lord Cromer (formerly Evelyn Baring), who was Egypt’s near-absolute ruler between 1882 and 1907. It may be useful to sketch a simple portrait of a vice-regal office-holder. Such a conglomerate image owes much to sociological methodology and is far removed from the individual cases which historians carefully extract from their sources, and there is no single example in history to which the constructed ideal type ‘applies’ in a perfect fit. The concrete manifestations of the type vary in time and space and according to circumstances. Yet, it should be possible to pinpoint the typical viceroy’s peculiar location at the meeting-point of vertical hierarchy and horizontal functional differentiation and to identify a number of parameters apposite to comparing dynastic orders in this particular perspective. Imagining an empire or any large composite or federal polity *without* viceroys, proconsuls or governors will instantly illuminate their indispensability at crucial nodes in spatial networks of power.

13 For the quintessentially democratic system of modern times, the United States, see Robert M. Spector, ‘W. Cameron Forbes in the Philippines: A Study in Proconsular Power’, *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 7 (1966), 74–92; and, discussing more recent examples, Carnes Lord, *Proconsuls: Delegated Political-Military Leadership from Rome to America Today* (Cambridge, 2012).

14 John E. Wills, Jr., *Pepper, Guns and Parleys: The Dutch East India Company and China, 1662–1687* (Cambridge, MA, 1974).

15 John Benyon suggests a narrower concept: A proconsul in the British Empire is someone who controls one of the six or seven ‘strategic satellites’ in the British world system: India, South Africa, the Straits of Malacca, etc. He also is able to exert a measure of influence in British politics unavailable to ordinary governors. See John Benyon, ‘Overlords of Empire: British “Proconsular Imperialism” in Comparative Perspective’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19 (1991), 164–202, at 168–71.

The Latin term *proconsul* clarifies the position: from the second century BCE, a proconsul was an official appointed to exert political authority outside the city of Rome, which he did *pro consule*, that is, as a representative of the consul.¹⁶ Later, he was an agent of the emperor charged with governing a province outside Italy. The right to nominate proconsuls was an important instrument in the power portfolio of the emperors whose dynastic credentials in Rome often were not all that strong. The important point to note is that a proconsul always is an appointee. The office rarely devolves by way of hereditary succession to a junior member of a royal house. The reason for that seems to be that imperial systems cannot afford to risk incompetence, indolence, or even malfeasance at positions of high strategic significance. The proconsul must be liable to recall or impeachment, following the famous precedent of the Roman magistrate Marcus Tullius Cicero, who took successful legal action against the proconsul Gaius Verres, a man who had plundered Sicily for the benefit of his own pocket.¹⁷ It is much more difficult to remove a prince of the blood than to get rid of an unwanted or unsuitable functionary whose tenure is insecure. Where appointments were guided by patronage, proconsular positions also had to be left available to be distributed as sinecures.

Another rule widely observed is not to select the chief officer from among local society or to promote him from the service on the spot. The Roman and the Chinese empires, and also Bourbon as well as Napoleonic France, operated extensive rotation and laws of avoidance. Of the thirty-three governor-generals of India since Lord Cornwallis in the 1780s, only two rose from the ranks of the colonial administration, and neither of them was considered a success.¹⁸ In monarchies, at least early-modern ones, delegated regional power tended to turn dynastic and sink roots into peripheral power bases. Imperial centres were constantly struggling against such centrifugal tendencies. A brief tenure of office and a continuous reshuffling of appointments kept the empire from settling down into structures of 'feudal' entrenchment, bureaucratic ossification, and territorial fragmentation.

16 See 'Proconsul', in *Brill's New Pauly*, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/proconsul-e1009260> (accessed 16 May 2012).

17 Wolfgang Schuller, *Cicero oder der letzte Kampf um die Republik. Eine Biographie* (Munich, 2013), 43–47.

18 Sir John Shore (1793–98) and Sir John Lawrence (1864–69), whose reputation rested on earlier stages of his career. The number 33 does not include *acting* governor-generals who usually came from the local political establishment. Lord Curzon himself saw it as a sign of rising esteem that from Lord Cornwallis on only 'statesmen' and 'men of public fame' were considered for the top office in India. George N. Curzon, *British Government in India: The Story of the Viceroys and Government Houses*, 2 vols. (London, 1925), vol. II, 167.

There are borderline cases. Members of a royal family sometimes find themselves installed on a throne in a subordinate part of the empire where they can do little harm. Depending on the incumbent, this may or may not have fortunate consequences. Thus, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, with its capital at Florence, was ruled, very ably, by Peter Leopold, the third son of Empress Maria Theresa. From 1764 to 1790, he turned his small principality, meant to be a playground for a younger son of the Habsburg sovereign, into a showcase for enlightened improvement. After his brother's death, he went on to become Holy Roman Emperor Leopold II (1790–92).¹⁹ By contrast, in the British empire no overseas appointment ever went to a member of the royal family, with the sole exception of the very last viceroy of India in 1947, Viscount Mountbatten, a great-grandson of Queen Victoria who owed this vice-regal office to the fact that he was an experienced military commander.²⁰ The Chinese case, with its dual power elite of Manchu and Han, was unique in its own sense and raises a challenging problem for comparative analysis.

Whatever else he may be, the proconsul is a working official, a man in charge, though not always the effective head of his administration. The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, residing in Dublin Castle, was assisted by a chief secretary, not appointed by himself but by the British government. By the 1770s, the chief secretary had become the central executive agent of the government of Ireland.²¹

Being a very lofty office, the proconsularship frequently was the penultimate or final stage of a career. There was little more to achieve, which coloured the ambition attached to the job. Paul Doumer, the famous governor-general of French Indochina around 1900, later became president of the French Republic—only to be assassinated after less than twelve months in office.²² Spanish viceroys could hope for a seat on the council of state. A few viceroys of India continued their careers as cabinet ministers or ambassadors, but none of them rose to be prime minister. Usually, the proconsul can entertain little hope of further reward and promotion. His aims are to discharge his duties honourably, to

19 Adam Wandruszka, *Leopold II. Erzherzog von Österreich, Großherzog von Toskana, König von Ungarn und Böhmen, Römischer Kaiser*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1963–65), on the Tuscan reforms especially vol. II, 173–85. A splendid description of the Leopoldine court is Orsola Gori, 'Una corte dimezzata. La reggia di Pietro Leopoldo', in Sergio Bertelli and Renato Pasta, eds., *Vivere a Pitti. Una Reggia dai Medici ai Savoia* (Florence, 2003), 291–349.

20 Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten: The Official Biography* (London, 1985).

21 S.J. Connolly, *Divided Kingdom: Ireland, 1630–1800* (Oxford, 2008), 307.

22 Cf. Amaury Lorin, *Paul Doumer, Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine (1897–1902): Le tremplin colonial* (Paris, 2004).

avoid censure by the sovereign, to preserve his health under sometimes taxing tropical conditions, and, perhaps, to enter the historical record as standing out from among a crowd of more or less mediocre colleagues.

Regardless of the kind and amount of his effective power, the proconsul represents the monarch in a highly personal way not shared by anyone further down the hierarchy. He is alone in literally embodying the political centre. The Roman proconsul was the *alter ego* of the original consul; the Spanish viceroy was seen as ‘the king’s living image’ and even expected to re-enact his master’s body language;²³ and the Qianlong emperor, as quoted by Kent Guy, called his governor-generals and governors ‘Our arms and legs.’²⁴ The proconsul partakes of the royal aura and conveys it to a local audience. Under conditions of authoritarian rationalisation, he is, like the French prefect under Napoleon, an omnipotent commissioner, an emperor *en miniature*.²⁵ In less well-articulated autocratic systems he may be a specially empowered personal envoy of the ruler, communicating with the monarch on a more intimate footing than the ordinary governor. In such cases, the vice-regal mandate is likely to be tied to a particular individual charged with special tasks of imperial crisis management; authority is not delegated on a regular and institutional basis.²⁶

In his own court—a shadow of the central court, intended to provide a focus for local high society and to soften the mundane business of government—the viceroy and (if applicable) his wife²⁷ were the hub around which

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- 23 ‘Viva imagen del Rey’: Horst Pietschmann, *Die Einführung des Intendantensystems in Neu-Spanien im Rahmen der allgemeinen Verwaltungsreform der spanischen Monarchie im 18. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 1972), 65; Alejandro Cañeque, *The King’s Living Image: The Culture and Politics of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico* (London and New York, 2004), strongly emphasising bodily representation; on the plurality of royal images see idem, ‘Imaging the Spanish Empire: The Visual Construction of Imperial Authority in Habsburg New Spain’, *Colonial Latin American Review* 19 (2010), 29–68.
- 24 R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle and London, 2010), 96.
- 25 Vivien A. Schmidt, *Democratizing France: The Political and Administrative History of Decentralization* (Cambridge, 1990), 22; Jacques Godechot, *Les institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l’Empire* (2nd ed., Paris, 1968), 586–92; Stuart J. Woolf, *Napoleon’s Integration of Europe* (London and New York, 1991), 74–82, 100–1; Isser Woloch, *Napoleon and His Collaborators: The Making of a Dictatorship* (New York, 2001), 52–55; idem, *The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789–1820s* (New York and London, 1994), 54–59.
- 26 An example from the Tsarist Empire in the 1840s: Anthony L. Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov: Viceroy to the Tsar* (Montreal, 1990), 143.
- 27 That subject is still in the hands of purveyors of anecdotes, cf. Penny Beaumont and Roger A. Beaumont, *Imperial Divas: The Vicereines of India* (London, 2010).

all courtly activity revolved. It was a lasting source of irritation when, as in Dublin, the town houses of the richest nobles easily outshone the austerity of the vice-regal residence.²⁸ Sometimes, proconsular pomp eclipsed the ostentation at the centre. There were governor-generals in Batavia who revelled in an opulence unknown in the metropolis, including the luxury of slaves—the familiar theme of ‘nabob’ profligacy.²⁹ Around 1800, the Marquess of Wellesley decided to build a palace in Calcutta, modestly called Government House, much bigger than any abode of the British monarchs.³⁰ In China, no *yamen* could remotely compete with the Forbidden City, but it was generally assumed that the governor’s residence would symbolically replicate the Imperial Palace.³¹

Proconsuls could literally wear the mantle of royalty. In 1903, Lord Curzon organised a huge ceremony for 150,000 people and with hundreds of maharajas and other Indian dignitaries in quasi-feudal attendance, on the occasion of the crowning of Edward VII and Queen Alexandra as Emperor and Empress of India. Since Queen Victoria’s successor refused to travel to India,³² Curzon himself assumed the role of the protagonist, the king’s brother taking second place to the viceroy.³³ Whether ritual and pageantry really managed to impress the locals anywhere in the world is open to question.³⁴ They were *meant* to

28 Connolly, *Divided Kingdom*, 307.

29 See Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison, WI, 1984), 69–71.

30 Jeremiah P. Losty, *Calcutta: City of Palaces. A Survey of the City in the Days of the East India Company 1690–1858* (London, 1990), 71–80.

31 On the functions of the *yamen* see John R. Watt, ‘The Yamen and Urban Administration’, in G. William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA, 1977), 353–90.

32 No senior member of the Spanish royal family ever travelled to Spanish America. The first globetrotting member of the British royal family was Queen Victoria’s second son, Alfred Duke of Edinburgh. In the years 1867 to 1868 he visited many British colonies including South Africa, India, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand. See Brian McKinlay, *The First Royal Tour, 1867–1868* (Adelaide, 1970). The first reigning monarchs to visit India were George V and Queen Mary in 1911.

33 David Gilmour, *Curzon: Imperial Statesman* (London, 1994), 239–40. There were two other of those ‘Imperial Durbars’, in 1877 and 1911. See Julie Codell, ed., *Power and Resistance: Photography and the Delhi Coronation Durbars* (Ahmedabad, 2011); see also the famous article by Bernard S. Cohn, ‘Representing Authority in Victorian India’, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 165–209, and Alan Trevithick, ‘Some Structural and Sequential Aspects of the British Imperial Assemblages at Delhi, 1877–1911’, *Modern Asian Studies* 24 (1990), 561–78.

34 For a brief introduction to imperial ritual see Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Empires und Nationalstaaten im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2009), 19–50.

impress and to highlight the vice-regal presence as the source of a superior civilisation. Empires everywhere pursued civilising missions, and their senior representatives in the midst of barbarians and heathens were regarded as the foremost promoters of justice, progress, and refinement.³⁵

Empires and large states differed as to their degree of bureaucratisation. In the eighteenth century, the Sino-Manchurian empire possessed the most elaborate territorial administration in the world, while the British empire, apart from the East India Company, was somewhat undergoverned. In the same period, the Tsarist empire, according to one modern historian, ‘gave an appearance of almost total lawlessness’,³⁶ and found it difficult to fill the few posts available in the civil administration with men of the right calibre. The proconsuls differed in the degree of their formal and legal subordination to the centre. Were they allowed to make laws for their own domains? Did they command their own troops, or did they have to defer to an autonomous military wing of the government? Did they possess the authority to impose new taxes? Were they under pressure from the centre to raise revenue for the metropolitan treasury—as Spanish viceroys were for much of the time?³⁷

Communications were of crucial importance. The advent of the telegraph in the early 1870s marked a vital change. It made a huge difference whether it took several months, several days, or a couple of hours to receive an answer to a vice-regal query.³⁸ Until the 1830s, a letter from England arrived in India after five months at best. Railways and the Suez Canal later speeded up postal traffic. Even then a letter from London to Bombay was in transit for about a month. After the opening of cable communication, a telegram got there in as

35 Cañeque, *The King’s Living Image*, 192–201; Jürgen Osterhammel, *Europe, the ‘West’ and the Civilizing Mission* (London, 2006); idem, ‘“The Great Work of Uplifting Mankind”: Zivilisierungsmission und Moderne’, in Boris Barth and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *Zivilisierungsmissionen. Imperiale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Konstanz, 2005), 363–425.

36 Janet M. Hartley, *A Social History of the Russian Empire 1650–1825* (London and New York, 1999), 124.

37 Cayetana Alvarez de Toledo, *Politics and Reform in Spain and Viceregal Mexico: The Life and Thought of Juan de Palafox, 1600–1659* (Oxford, 2004), 163.

38 Michael Wobring, *Die Globalisierung der Telekommunikation im 19. Jahrhundert. Pläne, Projekte und Kapazitätsausbauten zwischen Wirtschaft und Politik* (Frankfurt a.M., 2005), 260–65. On the speed of telegraphic transmission cf. Jorma Ahvenainen, ‘The Role of Telegraphs in the 19th Century Revolution of Communications’, in Michael North, ed., *Kommunikationsrevolutionen: Die neuen Medien des 16. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne, 1995), 73–80, at 75, and Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge, 2013), 123–27.

little as five hours. And in the mid-1920s a cable sent from London circled the globe in eighty seconds.³⁹ Whenever and wherever telegraphy was introduced, it changed the parameters of a viceroy's professional activities.

Regardless of constitutional constructions, a centre could be passive or obtrusive depending on the personalities in charge. In exceptional cases there was no guiding metropolis at all, for instance after the collapse of the Spanish monarchy in 1808 when American viceroys were left to fend for themselves.⁴⁰ At exactly the same time, the will of Emperor Napoleon, criss-crossing Europe with his military court on horseback, flowed through a tight chain of command down to ground-level administrators in every part of the occupied continent.

Indian viceroys had enormous latitude as long as the secretary of state for India in London was a weak figure—which was the case more often than not. Cromer in Egypt enjoyed a free hand to a degree that made him a modern version of the famed 'oriental despot'. By contrast, Portuguese viceroys in Brazil were hardly more than royal commissioners, 'charged with the execution of the king's commands, or rather those of his dominant ministers'.⁴¹ Tsarist governors in the late nineteenth century were simultaneously personal envoys of the Tsar and local agents of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which often landed them in situations that were hard to negotiate.⁴² Much bargaining took place between centres and peripheries but mostly within a framework of power relations that was shifting in the long run, although not generally negotiable.

In their peripheral arena of action, proconsuls had to deal with at least four different groups of people: first, their colleagues and immediate subordinates in the provincial or colonial establishment such as governors (in the case of governor-generals), captains-general, military commanders, council members, high judges, ecclesiastical dignitaries, etc.; second, their servants and administrative staff who were needed for the daily running of the government; third, the mass of the people, that is, the ordinary subjects of the sovereign;

39 Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1981), 130.

40 Patricia H. Marks, *Deconstructing Legitimacy: Viceroys, Merchants and the Military in Late Colonial Peru* (University Park, PA, 2007), 150 seq. One has also to think of the wholesale transfer of the Portuguese court under Maria I and the Prince Regent to Brazil in the winter of 1807 to 1808. Cf. Kirsten Schultz, *Tropical Versailles: Empire, Monarchy, and the Portuguese Royal Court in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1821* (New York and London, 2001).

41 Dauril Alden, *Royal Government in Colonial Brazil: With Special Reference to the Administration of the Marquis of Lavradio, Viceroy, 1769–1779* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, and London, 1968), 43. Royal government had been established in Brazil in 1549.

42 Richard G. Robbins, Jr., *The Tsar's Viceroys: Russian Provincial Governors in the Last Years of the Empire* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1987), 4.

and fourth, the local non-official elite: nobles, gentry, and notables who, in the case of 'non-white' overseas colonies, divided sharply between European expatriates and the indigenous upper class. When we speak of 'the periphery', we ought to have all those various groups in mind.⁴³

A structural problem for viceroys and governors-general was what might be called their dilemma of superiority. On the one hand, they enjoyed higher prestige and better remuneration than provincial governors on a level slightly below them. On the other, their hold on territorial resources was more tenuous. The more general their brief, the less entrenched their authority, unless they possessed full plenipotentiary power like the viceroys of India after 1858, with eleven provincial governments within their purview.⁴⁴ Quite often (as in seventeenth-century Spanish America), a governor-general ruled effectively over only that limited piece of country where he exercised jurisdiction on the ground, perhaps the province surrounding his capital city. Elsewhere, he was armed only with some sort of delegated royal prerogative.⁴⁵ In remote areas, as on Philippine or Indonesian outer islands, and frequently in frontier constellations where the normal rules of action tended to be attenuated, subordinates established their own autonomous fiefdoms and cared little about instructions from the seat of government.⁴⁶ Responsibilities seem to have been better demarcated in Qing China where the ten governors-general were imperial trouble-shooters with powers of command over the military forces. Still, when a governor-general and a governor resided in the same city, conflicts could not

43 A dense analysis of these relations in Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, chapters 4–7.

44 The viceroy appointed the heads of all those governments apart from the governors of Bombay and Madras. None of the other lieutenant-governors and chief commissioners in the provinces had the right of direct access to the secretary of state for India, having to correspond via the Viceroy. Cf. Hugh Tinker, *Viceroy: Curzon to Mountbatten* (Karachi, 1997), 2. On the central government of India see also David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (London, 2005), 229–40.

45 Horst Pietschmann, *Die staatliche Organisation des kolonialen Iberoamerika* (Stuttgart, 1980), 120–21; idem, *Einführung des Intendantensystems*, 64–77. In the Ottoman Empire (at least in the sixteenth century), the governor-general simultaneously possessed a regional power base as a *sancakbeyi*. See Metin Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550–1650* (New York, 1983), 27. See also Dina Rizk Khoury, 'The Ottoman Centre versus Provincial Power-holders: An Analysis of the Historiography', in Suraiya Faroqi, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. III: *The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839* (Cambridge, 2006), 135–56.

46 David Joel Steinberg et al., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History* (Honolulu, HI, 1987), 87.

always be avoided.⁴⁷ From a different perspective, overlapping responsibilities were part of ‘an elaborate system of checks and balances designed to ensure effective central control over officials in the field’.⁴⁸

IV

Speaking of the proconsul in general, he is the classic intermediary bridging metropolis and periphery.⁴⁹ In structural terms, he functions as an instrument of elite integration, though an unpopular agent of the crown can also do a lot of damage to imperial cohesion.⁵⁰ A trustee of the centre and bearer of its values, once arrived at his outpost of empire, he nevertheless is largely left to his own devices. In his new world, he cannot expect much tangible help from a distant sovereign. If a court is a society of unmediated interaction (*Anwesenheitsgesellschaft*),⁵¹ an empire is its very opposite.

On the spot, however, the beleaguered proconsul is involved in all sorts of social relations. Local merchants lobby him for favours and privileges. The indigenous upper class wishes him to be a malleable ally while jealously

47 Guy, *Qing Governors*, 49–50; J.Y. Wong, *Yeh Ming-ch'ien: Viceroy of Liang Kuang 1852–8* (Cambridge, 1976), 38.

48 William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2009), 38.

49 Apart from theories of ‘collaboration’ and ‘cultural brokers’, there is surprisingly little in the theory of empire on the functional use of intermediaries. See, for example, Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 13–14.

50 The integrating function is brought out very well in Christian Büschges, ‘La corte virreinal en la America Hispanica durante la epoca colonial (periodo Habsburgo)’, in Eugenio dos Santos, ed., *Actas do XII Congresso Internacional de la Associação de Historiadores Latinoamericanistas Europeos* (Porto, 2001), vol. II, 131–40. A new kind of formal prosopographical analysis has been pioneered by Christoph Rosenmüller. See his article ‘The Power of Transatlantic Ties: A Game-Theoretical Analysis of Viceregal Social Networks in Colonial Mexico, 1700–1755’, *Latin American Research Review* 44 (2009), 7–36; see also idem, ‘Friends, Followers, Countrymen: Viceregal Patronage in Mid-Eighteenth Century New Spain’, *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* 34 (2006), 47–72; idem, *Patriots, Partisans and Palace Intrigues: The Court of Colonial Mexico, 1702–1710* (Calgary, 2008), a study of clientele politics in an age of expanding state power.

51 There is by now an extensive literature, e.g. Andreas Pečar, *Die Ökonomie der Ehre. Der höfische Adel am Kaiserhof Karls VI. (1711–1740)* (Darmstadt, 2003); see also Rudolf Schlögl, ‘Kommunikation und Vergesellschaftung unter Anwesenden: Formen des Sozialen und ihre Transformation in der Frühen Neuzeit’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 34 (2008), 155–224.

defending its own entrenched position. Ordinary people flock to his audience chamber seeking redress of wrongs or relief of their misery from someone whom they expect to take decisions on the spot.⁵² The proconsul, as an all-round decider, may not possess an undisputed 'monopoly of violence', but he should be able to punish effectively and to demonstrate the caring nature of imperial benevolence. He has to deal with rebels and refugees, capricious local potentates, and recalcitrant city councils or provincial assemblies.⁵³ Initially unfamiliar with the country, its people and its customs, he is a prisoner of his clerks, often frustrated by their indolence and incompetence. Inspection tours are the only moment during the administrative year when he gains a freedom hard to find in his ordinary cage of duties.⁵⁴ Only while on the road does he get a temporary reprieve from correspondence and reporting.

The proconsul is a powerful man, and yet he labours under many different kinds of pressures and constraints. Bureaucratic stamina and political shrewdness are as indispensable for him as are tact, the arts of persuasion, and even the talents of an actor. The inhabitants of the periphery are unlikely ever to set their eyes on the sovereign himself. What they see is 'the king's living image'.

52 Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, 48.

53 This is the story of British governors in North America. During the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the strong position of the governor came to be eroded: 'Colonial Assemblies became the centres of power and effective Governors became political managers more than vice-regal executives.' Ian K. Steele, 'The Anointed, the Appointed, and the Elected: Governance of the British Empire, 1689–1784', in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. III: The Eighteenth Century (Oxford, 1998), 105–27, at 118.

54 Cf. Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, 54–59; also Gilmour, *Curzon*, 211–15. Extended proconsular tours were no relic from a pre-modern past. In India, the Earl of Mayo (viceroy 1869–72) indulged 'in more frequent and longer tours, very often on horseback, than any of his predecessors had done; and thus in the short span of three years he created an impression of combined efficiency and power such as few of them have produced'. Curzon, *British Government in India*, vol. II, 236. Napoleon required his prefects to undertake an annual tour of their departments. See Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe*, 88.