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Boston University Center for the Study of Asia & Center for the Study of Europe

'Courts as Contact Zones' Series

“Imperial Circulations. Ideologies of Empire and Diplomatic Practices between Asia and Europe”



TIME:

Tuesday, March 5, 2013, 4:30-6:30 pm

LOCATION:

**Boston University, College of Arts and Sciences, Seminar Room 132
675 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215**

PRESENTERS

- **Mark Elliott** (Professor of Chinese and Inner Asian History, Dept. of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University)

TOPIC: “Conceptualizing Empire: Qing China and European Notions of *Imperium*, 17th-18th centuries.”

ABSTRACT: The habit in the West is to speak of the Chinese empire, but the absence of any such word as “empire” in the Chinese language ought to give us pause. Why, exactly, do we in the West speak of China historically as an “empire,” and when did this habit begin? Through an examination of early modern Sinological discourse, this paper makes the argument that the European discovery of empire in China coincided with the Manchu conquest of China in the mid-17th century.

Bio

Mark Elliott is the Mark Schwartz Professor of Chinese and Inner Asian History at Harvard, where he has taught since 2003. He is the author of two books, *The Manchu Way* (Stanford, 2001), and *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (Longman, 2009), along with numerous articles. The *Asian Wall Street Journal* praised his second book, *Emperor Qianlong*, as “a slim, yet comprehensive, [and] highly readable study.” He is now at work on a new book examining the connections between the Manchu empire and modern China. Apart from Qing history and Manchu studies, Elliott’s teaching interests focus on the long relationship between the Chinese heartland and the peoples living in the northern frontier.

- **Gregory Afinogenov** (Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History, Harvard University):

TOPIC: “The Ambassador and his Audience: Performance and Knowledge in Early Modern Russian Diplomacy”

ABSTRACT: The Qing empire’s diplomatic relationship with Russia, like its encounter with the British Macartney embassy (1793), has often been depicted as an exotic farce in which the efforts of earnest ambassadors were derailed by the intricacies of imperial court protocol. But it would be a mistake to assume that Qing procedures were any more formalized and convoluted than those of most European courts. Drawing on the records of Russian embassies to Europe as well as China, my paper will attempt a deeper analysis of the significance of court ceremonies. By probing what these elaborately staged set-pieces were meant to convey to the diplomat, and what the

diplomat learned from them and transmitted to his superiors at home, it will raise the question of the link between power, performance, and information in the context of court culture.

Bio

Gregory Afinogenov is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of History, Harvard University. He is interested in eighteenth-century Russia and its place in the intellectual world of the eighteenth century. His dissertation, "The Noblest Commerce," deals with the travel of books and correspondence between Beijing and St. Petersburg in the 18th century, and more broadly, with the Jesuit attempt to create a connection between Europe and China through Russia. He is also interested in the history of Soviet computing and the history of information in general.

DISCUSSANT

- **Malcolm Smuts** (Professor Emeritus, Department of History, University of Massachusetts Boston)

Bio

Malcolm Smuts is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Massachusetts Boston, where he taught from 1976 until 2012. His publications include *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987; paperback edition 1998), *Culture and Power in England 1585-1685* (Palsgrave, 1998) and two edited collections, *The Stuart Court and Europe: Essays in Politics and Political Culture* (Cambridge, 1996) and (with Marcello Fantoni and George Gorse), *The Politics of Space: European Courts c. 1500-1750* (Bulzoni, 2009). He has served since 1998 as the North American head of the London-based *Society for Court Studies*, in which capacity he has organized several court studies conferences, and since 2010 as the North American representative on the steering committee of the *Court Studies Forum*, an umbrella group of court studies societies in various European countries.