

The Eighteenth-century Qing State: Fantasies and Fallacies of the “Early Modern”

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The “early modern” is a temporal marker for an era before the “modern.” Scholars have invested considerable energy and effort into plotting the connections among places that makes for an early modern era and shown their evolution into the connections making the modern era. A second set of issues concerns the traits of units, be they economies, societies, or polities in the early modern and modern eras and how we identify those that we think of as ‘early modern’ or ‘modern’. This presentation argues that one way to clean up the conceptual clutter that litters some of these discussions is to consider the ranges of variation among states in the two eras and begin a search for the reasons for differences in the early modern and modern eras in order better to understand the transitions from one to the other. The eighteenth-century Qing state is used as an example of how such an approach can work.