

## **An Imperial Late-Comer? The Habsburg Monarchy and the Global Web of Empire**

Western empires such as those of Great Britain, France, and Spain are traditionally held as the measure by which other European overseas activities are evaluated. By this comparison, states such as Belgium, the German Empire, or the kingdom of Italy have been regarded as ‘late-comers’ to the imperial scene. The Habsburg monarchy, long viewed as devoid of any overseas imperial or colonial manifestations, has received even less regard for its enterprising, but mostly unsuccessful or fanciful projects aimed at creating overseas influence. Due to their delayed inception, elites and experts developed new styles of imperial rule, blending existing models in pursuit of their own imperial projects. Scholarship of the past few decades has demonstrated the assiduousness of Habsburg subjects in attempting to emulate other European colonial powers—particularly through informal means of imperial power projection, in the creation of colonial fantasies, and in locating proximate colonial endeavours closer to home in the Balkans. Essential to all these undertakings was the circulation of expertise and the adoption of novel paradigms in an age of rapid social, scientific, and technological change between the late-eighteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In this period, stewards of the Habsburg monarchy (in all its incarnations as the Austrian Empire and, later, Austria-Hungary) accelerated the pursuit of becoming a major global power on par with the Western empires of Great Britain and France. Colonization projects, begun in the 1770s, secured footholds in the southern Atlantic, in East Africa (where the first non-Europeans swore allegiance to a Habsburg monarch), and in the Eastern Indian Ocean, which continued through the next century. Common to all initiatives was the utilization of foreigners and the appropriation of foreign expertise. This paper will focus attention on the realization of these worldwide ambitions by revisiting concepts of ‘late-comer’ empires and the solutions employed by Habsburg subjects in their quest for a role in the global web of empire.

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## **When Austria Entered China: Three Dimensions of the Localization of European Knowledge in Modern China**

The dissemination and diffusion of Austrian knowledge in China has undergone a complex process. As early as the 17th century, Austria was mentioned in the world maps and introductory works on geography written by Jesuit missionaries; in the 18th century, as Chinese travelers and elites took the initiative to contact the non-Chinese world, Austria's image gradually became clear; following the Opium War in the 19th century, direct exchanges between China and Europe expanded unprecedentedly and Chinese intellectual elites began to purposefully reproduce imported European knowledge. Throughout these three centuries, Austria, unlike other colonial powers, rarely drew significant attention from the Chinese. However at the same time, in the process of localization of European knowledge, Austria still found a place for herself. Taking Austria as the object of observation, this study argues that in the world history and geography texts of modern China, the process of localization of European knowledge unfolded across three dimensions: internationalization at the scientific level, hierarchization at the narrative level, and instrumentalization at the realpolitik level. These three dimensions witness how Austria gradually became an external factor deeply involved in Chinese politics in the mid-to-late 19th century from a little-known European region with multiple names. Based on discourse analysis and comparative research, it critically reflects on colonialism and Eurocentric narratives and attempts to establish a dialogue between the two subjectivities of Europe and East Asia using Austria as an example.

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**Proposal (of no more than 300 words):**

The Habsburg Monarchy in the 19th century was not a colonial power in the strict sense; nevertheless, as recent research has shown, it and its citizens participated in European imperialism in a variety of ways. To name just a few examples: It intervened militarily through its navy to protect interests; carried out scientifically legitimized voyages; promoted the Catholic mission. Apart from these state endeavors, individual military men, merchants or scientists were active on behalf of other empires. In our present day, however, the idea that Austria had no colonial past at all is hegemonic - but this was not always the case. Since the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, its colonial ambitions have been remembered in very different ways by different actors.

In my talk, I will ask how the imperialism of the Habsburg Empire was remembered throughout the 20th century. By analyzing sites, forms, and practices of Austria's memory cultures, I will examine how social actors managed to impose this strong idea of the Habsburg Empire as a non-colonial state as hegemonic narrative throughout the 20th century. I argue that the interpretation of Austria(-Hungary) as a global player and its imperialism as a "success story" was hegemonic in Austria's memory cultures until the 1940s, above all supported by the practices of the veterans' associations of the former Navy. After the Second World War, this narrative was marginalized by, for instance, political actors who – in the political context of decolonisation – imagined Austria(-Hungary) as a colonially harmless state in order to build new (economic) relationships with independent states in Africa. This interpretation consequently found its way into textbooks and other media of collective memory and is still hegemonic today. Nevertheless, competing narratives still exist today; they survive in niches, for example in little museums and still existing veterans' associations.