

Urban property in Qing Beijing: administrative and legal aspects

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This paper will propose a preliminary inquiry into the question of urban property in Chinese cities under the Qing dynasty. It will draw upon the case of Beijing. Regimes of landed property in rural China have been the focus of attention from scholars of China's late imperial history for some time, most notably because of the importance of agricultural land taxation in the state's revenues up until the middle of the nineteenth century. Land disputes and the way they were resolved by the judicial authorities have also been studied. Urban landed property on the other hand has only received scant attention. Being exempted of taxation, it did not constitute a major source of financial resources for the state. But, as the example of the imperial capital makes clear, it did receive close attention from the administrative apparatus, if only because of its value as an asset for the owners.

Focus will first be put on the mechanisms of the urban property market. Relying on archival and published sources, its actors and the degree of its management by the local authorities will be described. We will then turn to the legal framework set up to deal with urban landed property and follow its developments in time. Finally, we will investigate up to what point specific types of urban property – like that of the city's numerous temples or scholar-official lodges – were legally defined.