

Monarchs of the world 1850-1914: the invention of tradition?

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William Purdue discussed whether the phrase 'invented tradition' could be applied to the nineteenth-century monarchies in Thailand, Japan and the Ottoman Empire. Were they passive and reactive, or innovatory and creative? The emergence of Japan as the only non-European great power was due to the restoration of the Emperor's power: the only comparatively smooth transition in these monarchies. Japan experienced a revolution from above. The image of the emperor was westernised, as nobles took control. In Thailand also monarchs were extremely active in the re-fashioning of the monarchy. The Thai monarchy identified with the nation. This was not an invented, but a constantly evolving tradition. Clarissa Campbell Orr stressed that there was a general re-modelling of monarchy on a world scale. There was a rehabilitation of old festivals in the nineteenth century.