

# CHINESE BUSINESS HISTORY

Zhongguo Shangye Lishi

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Fall 1993

## Nanyang Perspectives on Chinese Business

Michael R. Godley  
Monash University

It was once thought that the Chinese in Southeast Asia, like their relatives on the mainland, were unlikely entrepreneurs, despite their mercantile success and pioneering role in the development of the mining industry and plantation economies. Allegedly held back by Confucianism and restrained by the small size -- if not also by the limited imagination -- of the traditional family company, they were said to have been slow to grasp the benefits of corporate structure and modern management. Even exceptions such as Penang's Khaw Concern or Oei Tiong Ham's Kian Gwan conglomerate only served to prove the general rule. But now perceptions have changed, to keep up with the phenomenal success enjoyed by the Nanyang Chinese since the late 1960's.

Turning Max Weber on his head, many writers now praise aspects of Confucian culture: including the importance assigned to family-style institutions and intangibles such as the value placed on duty, education, diligence and thrift. Others suggest that traditional forms of socio-economic "networking" have provided significant advantages by facilitating access to labor, markets and credit information. Several even go so far as to argue that ethnicity and commercial success must therefore be related. While sociologists often emphasize the Chinese position as a "middleman" or "pariah" minority, political economists have stressed the continuing patronage of the state. If there has been controversy, it has been over whether Southeast Asia's Chinese have ever been

entrepreneurial in a classical Western sense. However, Ruth McVey was right to begin her recent book with the intentionally ironic lines: "the spectre of capitalism is haunting Southeast Asia".

This is not the place to document the critical role played by the overseas Chinese in Asian economic history. Readers of this newsletter should, however, be aware that a number of relevant issues -- particularly those concerning the changing relationship between culture, business structure and the state -- are now frequently discussed at international gatherings. Interest has also been shown in the survival of the traditional family firm, although there have not been all that many attempts at business history as such. Most scholars have concentrated on the emergence, over the past few decades, of very large "groups" -- especially those with strong political and/or international connections.

Much less is being written about the careers of the early twentieth-century capitalists (remarkable men such as Oei Tiong Ham [Huang Zhonghan], Foo Choo Choon [Hu Zichun], Loke Yew [Lu You], the Tjang brothers [Zhang Yunan and Zhang Hongnan] and Thio Thiau Siat [Zhang Bishi] or Tan Kah Kee [Chen Jiageng], with their extensive ties to China. However, we are beginning to learn more about initial capital accumulation, particularly the critical importance of tax-farming monopolies.

More research still needs to be done on the extent of the Nanyang involvement in China's modernization from the late-Qing period to the present. Undoubtedly some of the most innovative business ventures were started by returned overseas Chinese. Indeed, I have told the story of the Chang Yu Wine Company but there was also considerable interest in banks, shipping, railways, and treaty-port enterprises. Not all that much has been written specifically about

economic investment during the Kuomintang (Guomintang) era; however Beijing's recent effort to attract capital and managerial talent has already received considerable attention, not all of it positive in Southeast Asia where talk of a "Greater China" could yet cause a backlash.

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*Dr. Godley is presently collaborating with Emeritus Professor J.A.C. Mackie on a volume on entrepreneurship, ca. 1800-1990, for the Economic History of Southeast Asia Project, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University. Monash University is in Clayton, Victoria 3168, Australia.*

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## Combining Business History and Cultural Studies

*The authors of the papers summarized in the following abstracts are among the first to combine business history with Chinese cultural studies. Each has selected a topic--the family, storytelling, printing--that might have been explored without reference to business history, and each has chosen to cross the boundary between cultural studies and business history by focussing on entrepreneurs and by showing how businesses turned cultural ideals and cultural media to economic advantage.*

*The papers were given at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences recent conference (described elsewhere in this issue). Fortunately, all three authors are currently completing doctoral dissertations which will treat their subjects in much greater detail and will provide some of the first amply documented findings ever presented on the interplay between Chinese business history and cultural studies. Their imaginative research bears upon the history of China's consumer society--a neglected topic which has almost entirely escaped the notice of business historians and deserves close attention. Sherman Cochran.*

### Susan Glosser, "The Business of Family"

This paper explores the ways in which an entrepreneurial elite manipulated the image of the *xiao jiating* (nuclear family) ideal developed in the May Fourth and New Culture movements in an effort to shape the social and economic behavior of potential consumers. These issues are examined through a close reading of the weekly periodical *Jiating xingqi* (Family Weekly) which began publication on 24 November 1935 and continued into 1937. The periodical's editor, You Huaigao, a graduate of Cornell University's College of Agriculture, distributed the magazine free of charge to anyone who subscribed to delivery of his farm's fresh milk. The paper identifies three major elements in the commercialization of what was originally an iconoclastic ideal of individual self-expression through free marriage choice and economic independence from the extended family. By the 1930's, the image of the *xiao jiating*

connoted a comfortable life style and the accumulation of various accouterments of "modern" urban life. As a result, the nuclear family ideal itself became a marketable "product," a development which businessmen recognized and encouraged. Finally, the reconfiguration of a prescriptive role for women as reproductive laborers and consumers was the keystone of this commercially oriented family ideal.

#### Carlton Benson, "The Manipulation of *Tanci* in Radio Shanghai"

*Tanci*, a traditional form of storytelling that blends narration and acting with music and song, originated in Suzhou. In the 1930's and 40's, however, Shanghai was the storyteller's mecca. There *tanci* could be heard on the radio from 8:30 in the morning until 3:00 at night, and in an expanding number and variety of public settings. Local entrepreneurs were quick to recognize its potential as a medium of propaganda, and shaped its performance to suit their ends.

The paper looks at pioneers in radio and advertising who manipulated *tanci* to promote two competing visions of modernity. On behalf of the city's retailers, they promoted a consumer society composed of indulgent shoppers. Women were encouraged to play the public role of consumer with special zest. On behalf of the regime, media brokers also promoted a spartan society composed of patriotic citizens. In especially strident language, women were urged to renounce their habits of consumption and help the nation. The paper highlights contention between merchants and the Guomindang, and shows how developments in Shanghai were mirrored in other cities of Jiangnan.

#### Christopher Reed, "Steam Whistles and Fire-Wheels: Lithographic Printing and the Origins of Shanghai's Printing Factory System, 1876-1898"

Machine culture was adopted by China, in part, in the form of the printing press, a machine which unites the industrial world of manufacturing with the cultural world of texts and editorship. However, the social and commercial meaning of this machine culture has eluded historians. Contrary to 19th century and present-day perceptions, it was not the use of the movable metal type which distinguished post-1842 Shanghai's printing industry. The Chinese

have used movable metal type repeatedly, if not extensively, for nearly one thousand years.

What distinguished Shanghai's early westernized printing industry was its use of photolithography and the conditions under which it was employed. The essay profiles Shanghai's three most important lithographic publishers of the late 1870's, 1880's, and 1890's. By sifting through the details of this lost episode in Shanghai's industrial and cultural history, one can get a sense not only of the process by which woodblock printing disappeared from Shanghai, but also of the means by which machine culture was adopted by the printing industry. In addition, these factories are significant because, unlike 19th century metal-type printing shops, they were largely Chinese-owned and Chinese-operated.

The litho-printers, although quite minor in the overall context of China's late 19th century industrialization, had a major impact on Shanghai's reading public, both in terms of their own printed output and in their displacement of the native woodblock industry. As printer Gilbert McIntosh and missionary Ernest Fabor commented in 1890, lithography was technology appropriate for use in the Chinese readership markets of examination candidates, rare book collectors, *wenjen* or self-styled *wenjen*, and readers of religious and moral works. It was this latter market which the American Presbyterian Missionary Press targeted when, in 1901, it belatedly entered the low-end of the lithographic market.

By underselling woodblock editions, by creating a new market for miniaturized editions, and by preserving the calligraphic component of original texts, the Chinese lithographers supplanted woodblock printer/publishers. In the meantime, they helped to lay the social, commercial, and industrial foundations for Shanghai's late Qing and early Republican printing and publishing industry.

*Glosser, Benson, and Reed are doctoral candidates in history at the University of California, Berkeley. Those attending the 1994 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Boston Marriott, will have an opportunity to hear papers based on their doctoral research at the panel entitled "New Perspectives on the Media and Modernity in Shanghai, 1895-1949," Saturday, March 26, 1:30 p.m. Check the program for the place.*

## Conferences

*In 1992-1993, with support from a Luce Foundation Collaborative Grant to Cornell University and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences [SASS], two conferences on Chinese business history were held two at Cornell University. A third conference at SASS received support from the Cornell-SASS grant and from another Luce Foundation Collaborative Grant to the University of California, Berkeley, and SASS. In addition, a new archive in Shanghai has been opened. (See under Archives in this issue.) What follows is a report on the two conferences in which I participated: "Urban Progress, Business Development, and China's Modernization, 1843-1949", SASS, August 17-21, 1993 and "Shanghai's Business under Japanese Occupation, 1937-1945", Cornell University, September 17-18, 1993. I have also included some information about two panels on Chinese business history organized by K.C. Fok for the International Congress of Asian and North African Studies, Hong Kong, August 24, 1993. For a full listing of all of the participants and their papers, write to me at the address on the back of the bulletin.*  
Andrea McElderry

Reflecting on the conferences and panels, two words, "urban" and "network", come to mind. All of the papers were concerned with the history of urban China. But significantly, cities were not viewed in isolation but as part of regional and international economic networks. Relationships between cities and their hinterlands, among cities in China, and between Chinese and overseas cities were explored in various ways. And research on networks among businessmen was also presented.

At the Shanghai conference, the focus was on southeastern Chinese cities, more specifically on the modern history (1840-1949) of the five original treaty ports, Shanghai, Ningpo, Xiamen, Fuzhou, and Guangzhou. The foreign presence in these cities was viewed as part of a continuum of economic and cultural development. As Zhang Zhongli, SASS president, pointed out in his keynote paper, foreign trade in Shanghai led to the early development of a modern infrastructure and of modern shipping facilities. These developments laid the basis for Shang-

hai's emergence as a financial, communications, and industrial center in the twentieth century. The same was true for other ports as well. According to Chen Meilong (Ningpo Normal College), Western capital and foreign trade stimulated modernization in Ningpo which, in turn, promoted modernization in the surrounding countryside and along the coast. A number of papers compared the history of the five cities, such as Du Xuncheng (SASS) on finance and Chen Zhengshu (SASS) on communications.

Overseas Chinese contributions and the role of Hong Kong also received attention. Dai Yifeng (Xiamen University) examined the role of Nanyang emigrants in the modernization of Xiamen. In a study comparing overseas Chinese investment in the five port cities, Huang Hanmin (SASS) found that, contrary to expectations, such investment was greater in Shanghai than in Guangzhou and Xiamen. K.C. Fok (Centre for Asian Pacific Studies, Lingnan College) discussed historical sources for examining Hong Kong as a trade and cultural entrepot between China and the West and the role of Hong Kong businessmen in the development of Chinese modern enterprises.

The chain effect of modernization from the port cities to the hinterland was the main topic of some papers. Zhang Zhongmin (SASS) explored the link between development in the southeastern ports and the spread of rural industry. The chain effect was regional as well as local. In their paper, Kui Yingtao and Xie Fang (Sichuan University) explored how the development of trade, shipping, finance, and industry in Shanghai promoted modernization along the Yangzi. Pan Junxiang, in his study of the National Goods Movement, concluded that the movement not only contributed to the development of modern production in China but promoted links between the coast and the interior and between China and Southeast Asia.

Hamashita Takeshi (Tokyo University) pointed out that Shanghai's ties with northeast Asia also needed attention. Kazuko Furuta (Toyo Eiwa Women's University), in her Hong Kong paper "Chinese Merchants Bring Lancashire Textiles to Japan", examined how Kobe was part of the Shanghai trade network.

The importance of personal networks in successful modern enterprises received in depth treatment in two papers. Wellington Chan (Occidental College, Los Angeles) compared the personal management styles of

the owners of Wing On and Sincere Department Stores. He concluded that Wing On was more successful than Sincere because its owners, the Guo brothers, were better able to balance cultural supports, like family solidarity, staff networking, and team work between brothers, with modern values. Sherman Cochran (Cornell University), examined how, in their operation of the Shen Xin Cotton Mills, the Rong brother's used personal networks to train managers, to control labor, and to influence official decisions. He concluded by saying that perhaps Shen Xin represents a model of a Chinese-style modern enterprise distinct from Western-style modern enterprise.

Cochran's suggestion that reliance on personal networks was compatible with "modern" was the most controversial issue at the Shanghai conference. To paraphrase Cochran, in Western business history (Alfred Chandler et al.), family firms and personal management are viewed as "traditional" whereas large-scale enterprises run by management hierarchies are defined as "modern". However, successful contemporary enterprises in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia continue to rely on personal networks and should inform our view of Rong brothers' management style. The commentator on Cochran's paper, Wang Xi (Fudan University) argued that personal networking was a feudal relationship whereas bureaucratic was modern. He also said that the Rong family's connection with the Nationalist government was a "social relation" which is different from a personal network. Debate among Chinese scholars about how to view and how to define personal networking occupied the entire audience discussion period. And the topic was brought up a number of times throughout the rest of the conference.

The papers at the Cornell conference considered how Shanghai business fared during the war years. Between 1937-1941, although largely cut off from the Chinese hinterland, business benefitted from Shanghai's international connections. Many Chinese businessmen moved their enterprises to the unoccupied foreign concessions, where various factors, including access to necessary commodities through international markets made this the period of the "flourishing isolated island". Some in the occupied areas were able to register their companies under foreign governments. The situation changed dramati

cally when the Japanese occupied the foreign concessions after Pearl Harbor. Survival, not growth, became the main concern. Pan Junxiang's case study of Yong'an Company (which coincidentally picked up where Wellington Chan's left off) and the Xiedaxiang Fabric Shop examined the management tactics which allowed these two companies to grow between 1937-41 and to minimize their losses between 1941-1945. Parks Coble documented the various tactics which Chinese businessmen in the occupied lower Yangzi, including Shanghai, used to regain or retain control of their enterprises. After Pearl Harbor, survival usually meant some kind of arrangement with Japanese authorities or with the Wang Jingwei government. Poshek Fu's case study of the film industry, 1941-1945, likewise, illustrated the necessity of economic and political accommodation with Japanese.

Huang Hanmin examined the development of so-called "industrial companies" (*qiye gongsi*). These companies absorbed large amounts of capital which, between 1937-1941, they invested in production, distribution, and some real estate. After 1941, production declined, and the companies used their surplus capital to speculate in commercial goods, real estate, and stocks. Zhang Zhongmin's paper detailed how black market transactions (*anpan jiaoyu*), ad hoc groups of peddlers (*danbang maoyi*) who smuggled food from the hinterland, and other "sub rosa dealings" supplemented Shanghai's food supply under increasingly strict rationing.

In his summary, Sherman Cochran suggested that the papers implied that reliance on personal networks was as important if not more important than before the war -- personal networks to raise capital (Coble), to cope with speculation, to fix prices and form cartels (Huang Hanmin), and to distribute rice (Zhang Zhongmin). However, as Coble's paper demonstrated, the war also placed strains on personal networks. For example, the Rong family members divided into a Shanghai and Chongqing branch, a breach which did not "fully heal" at the end of the war.

Taken together, the five papers illustrated how the destruction and dislocation of the war skewed business development and underscored the need for scholarly attention to this neglected area of Chinese business history.

# Directory

*In the last issue, the editors asked for information about research by our members, about important issues in Chinese business history, and for suggestions for Chinese Business History. One of the recurrent suggestions was that we provide more information about research in progress and recently completed. Below is a listing of some of our members with notes on their research. It reflects the international character of our readership and that CBH is not just for historians. The editors are discussing putting together a directory of the membership. In the meantime, we will publish such information as we have about research in progress and recently completed.*

Brown, Raj, S.O.A.S. (School of Oriental and African Studies), University of London, London. *Capital and Entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia* (forthcoming, Macmillan). Some of her research will appear in the spring 1994 issue.

Chang, Jui-te, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. The fashion industry of modern China.

Chen, Jiang, Dept of History, Fudan University, Shanghai. Modern Chinese economic history, especially the late 19th century modernization movement, and Sino-American relations, especially economic and cultural relations. Particular interest in the Western influence in modern Chinese history.

Chia, Oai Peng, Dept of Chinese Studies, Universiti Malaya, 59100 Kuala Lumpur. Anthropological and sociological studies of contemporary Chinese business in Southeast Asia.

Faure, David, Oriental Institute, Oxford University. Lineage in the Pearl River Delta.

Grove, Linda, Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan. Completing a book manuscript on the Gaoyang weaving district from 1900-1990's, organization of tradition firms and how they develop into small industrial systems. In progress, Trade and development of modern Tianjin and its hinterland.

Lee, Pui-tak, University of Tokyo (#15 Kagawaso, 6-5-10 Hongo, Bunkyo, Tokyo 113). Chinese entrepreneurs and enterprises in late Qing/ early Republic, e.g. Sheng Xuanhuai, Hanyehp'ing Company.

McElderry, Andrea, History, University of Louisville. The Shanghai banker and entrepreneur, Chen Guangfu (K.P. Chen); the use of guarantors in Qing\Republic as a means of reducing risk in Chinese business.

Morgan, Maria, Dept of Politics, Earlham College, Earlham, Indiana. The politics involved in the development of the Chinese auto industry. Has visited a number of Chinese auto and auto parts factories.

Sinn, Elizabeth, History Dept, Univ. of Hong Kong. Recently finished a history of the Bank of East Asia, the oldest surviving local Chinese bank in Hong Kong. In progress: the role of *tongxianghui* (native place associations) in finding investments and donations for home villages in the 1970's and 1980's. Also work on emigration from Hong Kong before 1941.

Zurndorfer, Sinologisch Institut, Leiden University, P.B. 9515, Leiden, The Netherlands 2300 RA. The "business history" of Huizhou merchants in the late Ming/early Qing.

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## The Question of Becoming a Journal

At various times, including on the responses to the questionnaires, it has been suggested that *Chinese Business History* become a journal. As we have discovered the interest in Chinese business could probably sustain a journal. Certainly, a journal on Asian business history and culture is sustainable. However, becoming a journal requires additional resources. At present, *Chinese Business History* is a desktop publishing effort which can be handled primarily by two people. Not so for a journal. First, we would need institutional sponsorship. Second, we would need an editorial board. And who knows what else would be involved. I am certainly open to possibilities and would appreciate any leads with regard to possible sponsorship and any volunteers with regard to the added personnel who would be necessary.

## At the AAS

Association for Asian Studies annual meeting will be in Boston, Massachusetts, at the Boston Marriott Hotel, March 24-27.

The Chinese Business History Research Group is not planning any formal activities but look for announcements of informal activities. Or contact Robert Gardella, through AAS

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## Economic History Conference

6-10 July, 1994

at the University of New England,  
Armidale NSW 2351, Australia

Papers are invited in any area of economic history. Sessions are planned on Australasia, East and south-east Asia, Australian-Asian relations, and Pacific Rim. Deadlines: paper proposals with 200-word abstract: 18 March 1994; receipt of completed papers: 31 May 1994. Send to: Dr. Chris Lloyd, Department of Economic History, University of New England, Armidale NSW 2351, Australia.

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## Fifth Southeast Asia Business Research Conference

May 21-22, 1994

at The University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

Paper proposals are welcome on any topic related to business in or from Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, or Vietnam. Papers selected will be considered for publication in the *Journal of Asian Business*. Deadline for paper proposals: March 18, 1994. Send to Prof. Linda Lim, Research Director, Southeast Asia Business Program, 130 Lane Hall, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

## Yangzhou Conference Held in October

The Chinese Commercial History Society (*Zhongguo shangye lishi hui*) in conjunction with the Jiangsu Commercial Department and the Yangzhou Municipal Commercial Bureau and the Social Science Alliance held a conference in Yangzhou, October 20-23, 1993. The areas emphasized were (1) war preparations and the development of modern markets; (2) characteristics and development of a commodity economy in Jiangsu during Ming/Qing times; (3) the culture of Shanxi and Huizhou merchants. For information about the society and about membership in the society, write to Wu Hui, 1108 Sheke yuan sushe, Shenggu nan lu, Anzhe qiao wai, Beijing 100029, China.

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## *The Journal of Asian Business*

a quarterly journal, published by the Association for Asian Studies, provides analysis of current events relevant to business the region and publishes scholarly articles, book reviews, and field reports.

For subscriptions, write Southeast Asia Business Program, 130 Lane Hall, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290, USA. Individual subscriptions rates are U.S.\$25/year (4 issues); U.S. \$31 for overseas. Checks should be made out to the University of Michigan.

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## Correction

In the April 1993 issue (3.2), in the piece by Chen Zhennian "Shanghai Finance: an Integrated Approach," the first word at the top of page 4 should be "merchants" not "modern banks." The sentence should have read "After the treaty port era began, *qianzhuang* improved their services and expanded their role to become the middleman between foreign banks and Chinese merchants ...." Also the biographical data should have said that Chen Zengnian left the People's Bank of China in 1979 to become a researcher at the Economics Institute of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.



# Archives

## CHINESE BUSINESS HISTORY RESOURCE CENTER

*Zhongguo qiye shi ziliao zhongxin* at the Institute of Economics, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

The Center is in the process of cataloguing its rich collection of materials on business history, altogether around 10,000 published and unpublished volumes. When I was there at its opening in May 1992, papers of Shanghai entrepreneur, Liu Hongsheng, the Rong family enterprises and Butterfield and Swire were catalogued. Uncatalogued materials are available through the efforts of the very helpful director and staff. I explained my research topic, and the staff did their best to furnish me with relevant materials. These included law and accountant office records, guild records, and Swire company records. The Center also has copies of some business related materials from the Shanghai Municipal Archives.

Doing research at the Center is highly recommended. I have already mentioned the helpfulness of the staff. The fact that the director, Huang Hanmin, is himself a researcher and familiar with the materials is another plus. Located on the fifth floor of one of the SASS

buildings, the reading room is light and airy; it is a comfortable place to spend a day poring through Chinese archives.

For a fuller description of the archive as of May 1992, see Sherman Cochran's note in *Republican China* (November 1992) or write to Professor Huang Hanmin, Director, Chinese Business History Resource Center, Institute of Economics, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 7/622 Huai Hai Zhong Lu, Shanghai 200020, China.

## WILLARD STRAIGHT PAPERS at Cornell University.

Willard Straight first went to China as an employee of the Imperial Maritime Customs service, 1897-1904. He was a correspondent for Reuters and the Associated Press, during the Russo-Japanese War and then U.S. vice-consul in Korea, 1905. He returned to China in 1906 as consul in Mukden but left the service in 1909 to become the Beijing representative of the American group in the banking consortium. Of the twelve reels of his papers at Cornell, eight contain letters, reports, manuscripts or diaries related to his years in China. Contact the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, John M. Olin Library, Ithaca, New York 14853 USA.

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### ***Chinese Business History***

is the bulletin of the Chinese Business History Research Group, an affiliate of the Association for Asian Studies. Executive Committee: Wellington Chan, Robert Gardella, and Andrea McElderry.

The bulletin seeks to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese business history and practices. We welcome submission of research notes, "thought" pieces, information on research materials, and conference reports. Manuscripts should be no more than 1200 words. Editors: Robert Gardella and Andrea McElderry.

**Deadlines for announcements for next issue:**

**February 15, 1994**

### ***In the next issue:***

***Raj Brown - historical perspective on Chinese financial development in Southeast Asia***

***Zhang Xiaobo - research in the Tianjin Chamber of Commerce Archives***

***And more***

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