

Chinese Business History

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Chongqing Municipal Archives Republican Business Records

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To those who are interested in the business history of China's interior cities, the Chongqing Municipal Archives is really worth a visit. Chongqing Municipal Archives possesses a huge collection of Republican materials about Chongqing and Sichuan province. Founded in 1959 and open to the public in 1960, it is one of the most important archives on Republican history in mainland China. As of 1988, the archives contained more than 700,000 *juan* (files) related to modern Chongqing history dating from late Qing to the 1980s, with more than 500,000 *juan* from the Republican period. As for business history, there are 81,137 *juan* on national and local industrial institutions and enterprises, many of which came from the eastern parts of China during the Sino-Japanese War. There are 9504 *juan* on Chongqing's communications and post services; 67434 *juan* on a variety of banking institutions; and 5913 *juan* on trading and commercial institutions. In 1996, Chongqing municipal archives was designated as one of China's first class archives.

In addition to the archival materials, the Chongqing Municipal Archives holds 36,910 volumes of historical books and journals, including government internal publications such as the National Government Gazette, Sichuan Province Government Gazette, the Chongqing Municipal Government Gazette, the National Resource

Council Gazette, and compilations of a variety of annual reports and documents from the Republican period. The Archives has published a brief guidebook which provides scholars with information about the records held in each collection. The Archives also publishes a journal, *Dang'an shiliao yu yanjiu* (Archives materials and research) containing selections from original archives which are open to public. Thus far, forty issues have been published and include many valuable business records such as a survey on the largest businesses in Chongqing during 1920s and 1930s, an investment report on Minsheng Company (April 29, 1946), a report by the Bank of Communications, and reports on Sichuan's salt industry (1944) and Sichuan's silk industry.

After Chongqing was opened as a treaty port in the late Qing period, it became the largest commercial and trading center on the upper Yangtze. Chongqing is also

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the crucial "non-Shanghai model" for understanding the different kinds of treaty ports in modern China. The business and economic materials concerning Chongqing and the interior are very rich. The greater part of the materials are from the post-1935 period and materials on wartime Chongqing are especially rich. The archives also holds some personal papers related to national business affairs in the wartime Chongqing – for example, records of Liu Hongsheng's original correspondence in wartime Chongqing.

Generally, the available business and commercial archives are from several of Chongqing's local commercial bank institutions, such as the Yang Brothers Banks Corporation (*Juxingcheng Yinhang*). There are 4952 *juan* of materials in these collections which relate to Chongqing business history under the warlord Liu Xiang's regime in the 1920 and 1930s. The 11,802 *juan* of records from the Bank of China's Chongqing branch (1915-1951) and are helpful for understanding certain issues in Chongqing's business history dating back to the early years of Republic. Collections on "Sichuan" banking institutions, such as the Mei Feng Commercial Bank (1921-1956), the Sichuan Salt Industry Bank (1930-1954), the Chuan Kang Commercial Bank (1931-1954), and Hecheng Bank Corporation (1934-1953), are excellent and provide valuable information on finance in Chongqing's during the warlord period.

There are also large holdings of materials related to wartime industrial enterprises. These include 1620 *juan* on the Minsheng Machinery Factory (1933-1952), the first modern industry in Chongqing; 414 *juan* on the Chongqing Electrical Power Company Corporation (1938-1950), and 296 *juan* on the Minsheng Steamship Corporation (1943-1949). The last company, held by Lu Zuofu, was the largest national capital steamship business during the Republic period and its records contain some significant information on business relations between Chongqing and down-river provinces during the 1930s and 1940s. Other available business records are those of local government agencies, such as the Chongqing Municipal Government (1929-1949), the Bei Bei Management Bureau (1942-1949), the Chongqing Municipal Financial Bureau (1929-1949) as well as the Chongqing Municipal Chamber of Commerce (1938-1949).

Some compilations published by and available at the Archives are very important business history materials. They include a three volume collection, *Silian Zong Chu*

Shiliao (Selected materials on the United Office in war Time Chongqing of the Central Bank, the Bank of China the Bank of Communications, and the Chinese Farmers' Bank); *Kangzhan shiqi Guomin Zhengfu jingji fagui* (The economic laws of the Nationalist Government during the War of Resistance); *Qiandu Chongqing de Guomin Zhengfu* (Historical materials on the transfer of the National Government to Chongqing); *Wu Yunchu yu Tianzi Huagong Qiye* (A collection on Wu Yunchu and the Tian Chemical Enterprises); *Kangzhan houfang yejin gongye shiliao* (Historical materials on the metallurgical industry in the rear area during the War of Resistance.) There are two forthcoming compilations of archival materials on business history: one is eleven volumes of materials on Chongqing as the wartime capital; the other is a collection on the industrial enterprises that moved to Chongqing during the war.

For foreign scholars, getting access to a large amount of archival materials in Chongqing is much easier than before. All the catalogues of the archival collection have been recently "open to the public." These catalogues are very useful and valuable since they provide readers with nearly all of the tables of contents for every file. There is no restriction on using these catalogues; they are self-service and free of charge. This service is quite different from that of the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing. However, the catalogues of the personnel record collections (*quanzong*) are still "closed", but it is possible to get into them. The staff are very friendly, cooperative and helpful too.

The Archives are open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.—5:30 p.m but closed for one and a half hours during lunch. For every user, a formal introduction letter is needed. To photocopy, researchers must complete a request form listing the materials to be copied, and the request must be approved by the head of the Archives. Now foreigners are allowed to photocopy fairly large amounts of archival materials. As far as I know, the service fee here is much cheaper than at the Second Historical Archives. A daily reading fee is 4 RMB; photocopying one pages costs 1.5–2 RMB. However the charges for foreigners are to 3 to 5 times more than those for Chinese scholars. To take notes, one must use special paper obtained at the Archives. In my experience, the Chongqing Municipal Archives is a relatively easy place to do research. The only inconvenient thing is that the Archives is located quite far away from the downtown area and it is time consuming to get there everyday, unless scholars stay in the district of Sha Ping Ba.

Conference Report

**The Asian Business History
Centre
History Department,
The University of Queensland
Brisbane, Queensland
Australia**

was established in November 1996 within the Department of History in recognition of the growing scholarly interest in the business traditions of Asia. Its primary aim is to strengthen links with international research centres as well as with the business community in both Australia and Asia. The Centre sponsors lecture series and conferences and supports an Occasional Paper Series and a Monograph Series.

The Occasional Paper Series

was established in 1998 to publish some of the papers presented at the University of Queensland Public Lecture Series on Asian Business History. Occasional papers published to date are

- #1: **Overcoming Risk: A Chinese Mining Company during the Nanjing Decade**
Tim Wright, Murdoch University
 - #2: **Gambling Operations in Late Qing Guangdong**
Ho Hon-wei,
Institute of History and Philology,
Academia Sinica
 - #3: **The Chinese Bourgeoisie Reconsidered: business structure, political status and the emergence of social class**
David Faure, Oxford University
-

**International Symposium on
The Chamber of Commerce
and Modern China
July 21-25, 1998, Tianjin, China**

**Brett Sheehan,
University of Wisconsin-Madison**

Scholars from the History Institute of the Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences (TASS) and from the Tianjin Municipal Archives have finally finished their ten year project to catalog the Tianjin Chamber of Commerce archives and make a selection of texts for publication. Completion of this massive project provided the occasion for this international conference in Tianjin last summer. Scholars from all over China and several foreign countries gathered in Tianjin to congratulate those involved and to present papers on the general theme of "The Chamber of Commerce and Modern China."

Although the published collection of documents from the Tianjin Chamber of Commerce (*Tianjin shanghai dangan huibian*) includes less than ten percent of the total number of documents in the archive, it still makes up ten thick volumes: two for the period 1903-1911, four for 1912-1928, two for 1928-1937 and two for 1937-1945. This is truly a monumental work, useful to scholars of business history, economics, urban history and Tianjin local history. In addition to providing invaluable documents in published form for those unable to travel to Tianjin, the catalog numbers printed for each selection provide an essential guide for any scholars wishing to go to Tianjin and read from the other ninety percent of the holdings. Alas, the catalog itself has not yet been opened to the public, so the published volumes provide researchers the only convenient means of identifying relevant folder numbers. Professor Hu Guangmin from TASS directed the project over its many years, and he should be congratulated on seeing through such an important work.

All in all nearly 90 Chinese scholars and about 20 scholars from the United States, Europe, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong spent four days in Tianjin discussing the nature and impact of Chambers of Commerce. Space does not permit an exhaustive catalog of the range of papers presented at the conference. Instead, I shall first summarize briefly some of the most salient topics around which discussion seemed to coalesce; then I will outline some important ideas for the agenda for research as it emerged over the course of the conference.

Salient Topics of Discussion and Research

For much of the conference, the participants were divided into three smaller groups for the presentation of papers and discussion. General topics were assigned to the groups as follows: "The Development and Evolution of Chamber of Commerce Organizations," "Urban Development, Market Growth and Chambers of Commerce," and "The Relationship between Chambers and the Government." In practice, the first and third groups merged into one, leaving only two. At the final joint meeting Professor Qiu Jie, Department of History, Zhongshan University in Guangdong, and Professor Yu Heping, History Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, summarized the topics of discussion in these groups. Below I present a summary of their ideas combined with my own impressions *in italics*.

The nature of trade guilds and their relation to Chambers of Commerce

Now that the organizational structures and functions of Chambers of Commerce have come into focus through the efforts of a number of Chinese and foreign scholars, it is time to turn attention to the constituent elements of the Chambers: trade guilds. In many cases these trade guilds existed before the formation of Chambers, and they continued to function throughout the republican period. *Several papers commented on the relations between powerful guilds, such as the Tianjin Changlu Salt Guild, and the Chambers. Although these individual studies are useful, it is still much too early to be able to make general conclusions in this area.*

Chambers outside of major cities

In my view, one of the most interesting results of the conference was the proposition that Chambers in small towns and county seats functioned very differently than those in big cities. Since most research to date has focused on the latter, inclusion of the former is essential

to understanding Chinese business practices, local elite structures and state-society relations in the first half of the twentieth century. It was suggested that in small towns Chambers could act very much as a booster club, promoting economic growth and putting aside, at least sometimes, intra-Chamber conflicts. Many market towns were primarily market centers, without government offices. In these cases, the Chambers were not only more important than the government in local affairs, there was no government outside of the Chambers.

Chamber roles in economic development and the regulation of markets

Many scholars pointed out that Chambers played important roles in developing new industries and markets. Chambers also settled disputes when individual businesspeople or trade guilds were in conflict and regulated product quality on a number of occasions.

Relations between the Chambers and the state

The role of Chambers in state-society relations remained a hot topic at the conference, though there was no real consensus. Many scholars spoke about emerging forms of civil society or the public sphere, variously defined, but others noted a close relationship between Chambers and the government. In many cases, the Chambers were formed at government demand, though they often took on a life of their own.

Relations between the Chambers and the socialist state

As a general corollary to the whole question of state-society relations, it was suggested that the role of Chambers in the Republic and the very early PRC period may be used as a model to help guide policy makers dealing with the increasingly privatized Chinese economy.

Agenda for Future Research

Professor Ma Min, head of the Institute and Culture, Huazhong Teachers University in Wuhan discussed the future of Chamber studies at the final general meeting of the conference. I summarize his comments below, with a few added comments of my own *in italics*.

-- Need to advocate for the increased openness of Chamber materials, especially at the county level --

As with most historical materials in China, there has

been increased openness in recent years, facilitating study and making conferences such as this one possible. In many places, however, Chamber archives are not open or not cataloged, limiting the potential for research. It is important that the publishing project at the Suzhou archives restart and that Chamber archives everywhere are opened to researchers. *This is especially important given the new trends of researching Chambers in out-of-the-way places, and of researching trade guilds.*

-- Need to examine the relationship between overseas Chinese and the Chambers --

More work needs to be done to study the relationships and networks among Chinese business people inside and outside China, such as the overseas Chinese in Hawaii. Analysis of the networks of Chinese business people that stretched beyond China to Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Americas was a small but interesting part of the conference.

-- Need to plan the next meeting --

Professor Ma Min bravely agreed to take the main role in planning the next international conference on Chambers of Commerce, perhaps in two years time. The conference will be held in either Wuhan or Suzhou, keeping the latter in mind as a means of encouraging them to restart their Chamber publication project. *A proposal that the next conference be held abroad, perhaps in Japan, was shelved because of the costs and difficulties involved.*

Concluding Remarks

Not very many years ago Republican Period Chambers of Commerce were an enigma to most Chinese and foreign scholars. Scattered works referred to their significance, but details of organization and function were few and far between. Now there is a significant body of scholars working in this area and it seems almost impossible to imagine a Republican Period urban landscape without Chambers as an important component. Last year's conference in Tianjin marked and celebrated the exponential growth of this field in recent years. The lack of general conclusions and models, as well as the remaining areas of potentially fruitful research, show, however, that the field is at most still in adolescence. Here's hoping that the next conference will mark even more growth toward maturity.

Enterprise in Society

Annual Meeting of the Business History Conference March 10-12, 2000 Palo Alto, California Host: The Prologue Group

The theme Enterprise in Society celebrates the launching of the Business History Conference's new journal, *Enterprise and Society: The International Journal of Business History* (see announcement in the fall 1998 issue of *Chinese Business History*).

Proposals are invited for papers that explicitly situate business enterprises within larger social, cultural, and political contexts. Individual paper or full panel proposals may be submitted. Graduate students writing their dissertations may apply for a special works-in-progress session. Dissertations completed in the previous three years (1997-1999) are eligible for the dissertation session. Some of the conference papers will be selected for inclusion in the annual proceedings issues of *Enterprise and Society*. A \$1000 prize will be awarded for the best conference paper published in the journal.

Deadline for submissions:

October 15, 1999

Notification by November 30, 1999.

For full details, contact
Colleen Dunlavy

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phone, 608-257-4206 (after July 2).

Conference Report

Second Chinese Business History Conference University of Hong Kong, July 2-3, 1998

Kelvin K. Chow
University of Hong Kong

After a successful first conference in 1996, the Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, convened a second "Chinese Business History Conference" over the two days July 2-3, 1998. The 1998 conference focused on the history of business corporations and had two main themes: 1) the role of Chinese merchants in a period of historical transition; and 2) the role of commerce and the merchant class in history. Twenty local and overseas scholars attended the Conference with thirteen papers being presented. Roundtable discussions were held on the second day of the event.

The conference was divided into five sessions, one in the afternoon of the first day and four on the second day. Three papers were presented on the first day after Professor Wong Siu-lun, Director of the Centre of Asian Studies, made his welcoming speech to the participants. The first presenter, Ye Xian-en, Guangdong Academy of Social Sciences, discussed the relationship between Confucianism and merchants, and used Huizhou merchants as an example to explain the advantages and disadvantages of this relationship. Wei Qing-yuan, People's University of China, then discussed the government's pro-merchant and anti-merchant policies in the late Ming period and concluded that commercial expansion led to the failure of the anti-merchant policy. The first day of the conference ended with a paper presented by Wu Hui, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in which he used a great deal of archival evidence to demonstrate the error of earlier estimates of food consumption during the Song, Ming and Qing periods.

On the second day of the event, local scholar So Kee-long, Chinese University of Hong Kong, using a new method of estimation, discussed the relationship between overseas trade and coastal economic expansion during the Song Dynasty. Making use of recently opened archives in the First Historical Archives of China in Beijing, Deng Kaisong, Guangdong Academy of Social Sciences, pointed out the contribution of Macau's Cantonese merchants in the context of the social and economic development of Guangdong. Speaking on the development of canal and coastal trade, Cheung Sui-wai, Oxford University, explained the development in different time periods and pointed to the fact that throughout history, political interests have always overridden commercial interests.

The second session of the second day began with a paper by Kong Xiangyi, Shanxi University of Finance. He noted that the merchant class in Shanxi had already developed a financial system in the late Ming-early Qing period, and he argued that the Chinese banking system was not imported from the western world. Using the rice shortages in Guangzhou as his example, Qiu Jie, Zhongshan University, demonstrated the relationship between political authorities and the merchants. This rice shortage phenomenon also revealed how the merchant class reduced the sale price of rice to below the market price when selling to poverty-stricken people in order to gain influence in the society.

In the following session, Ma Min, Huazhong Normal University, explained the term "gentry-merchant" (*shen shang*) and the use of the term in the late Qing archives. He also used an array of archival materials to prove that "gentry-merchant" could have different meanings in different situations. Lee Pui-tak, University of Hong Kong, used Sheng Xuan-huai's takeover of the Han-yang Ironworks as a case study by which to illustrate the relationship between the Qing government and Chinese merchants. He also pointed out how Sheng Xuan-hui used his influence and political relationships to build up his commercial enterprise and protect it from other competitors.

The last section began with a paper presented by Hamashita Takeshi, Tokyo University. In his paper, he used the triangular commercial relationship between Inch'on, Shanghai and Kobe as an example in discussing the financial networks in the late 19th century. He also discussed the role of Chinese

merchants in the development of such commercial networks. Lin Man-houng, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, raised the issue of the Taiwanese merchants' activities in Southeast Asia during the pre-WWII period. Her paper emphasized the particular role they played as a vanguard during Japanese expansion in Southeast Asia. Hui Po-keung, Lingnan College in Hong Kong, used a socio-historical approach to define Chinese trading networks in Southeast Asia between the 16th and the 18th centuries and explained how the Chinese made use of European expansion in this area to gain advantage for themselves.

The Conference ended with summaries by several scholars and they pointed out various issues which need further research. These included: 1) the relationship between changing merchant status and the expansion of overseas trade; 2) the role in and the reactions of the merchant class to social change; 3) the contribution of the merchant class to nationalism and 4) frameworks and theories for studying Chinese merchants. They also looked at issues such as the availability of archival materials and regional trading networks.

With a roundtable meeting in the evening of the second day of the Conference, each scholar was able to discuss and exchange points of view on their current research projects in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. They also reviewed the results of other related conferences and workshops held over the last few years.

Contributors

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