中國商業史

Zhongguo Shangye Shi

Chinese Business History

Spring 2005, Volume 15, Number 1

ISSN 1090-834X

Don't Tread on Me: Land, Officials, and Archival Work on a Qing Dynasty Mining Enterprise

BY JEFF HORNIBROOK

Recent studies of late imperial Chinese land contracts have extended our understanding of Chinese business and social history, pointing to an active market of commoners trading properties for cash or kind.[1] Most of these studies examined sales in which the state was peripheral to the purchasing process. So it was fortuitous that, when scavenging the archives in Pingxiang County, Jiangxi Province, I came upon a collection of land contracts describing sales by commoner landholders to Qing officials. I went to the county in hopes of finding something—anything—that would expand my research. What I found was both a collection of documents that point to new issues in Chinese landholding patterns and a lesson in archival research.

My research focuses on the early years of the mechanization of the Pingxiang Coal mines in this western county of Jiangxi Province. Beginning in 1896, Sheng Xuanhuai, acting as the Director of the Hanyang Ironworks and Director of the Imperial Railway Bureau, along with the Huguang Governor-General Zhang Zhidong, established a mine bureau in Pingxiang County. To this end, they sent several officials into the county to begin purchasing lands needed to construct a large modern coal mine and railway that would become part of the Hanyeping Coal and Iron Company, Incorporated.

Building on my previous work, I recently traveled to Pingxiang County, Jiangxi with two members of the Jiangxi Provincial Bureau of the Academy of Social Sciences in search of archived documents regarding the coal mines. We went to the archives in the county government building and to the impressive museum in the mining town of Anyuan. The archivists were very polite and always ready with more tea and water than I could possibly drink. However, while they appeared ready to give me as many documents as they had, their collections of mining in late Qing China were virtually nonexistent. Then, at the Pingxiang Mining Affairs Bureau Headquarters, my colleagues and I were shown a rich collection of Pingxiang Mine Bureau land contracts. The contracts—there were approximately 200 or so—were originally written in the late Qing era (1898-1906) but were all apparently recently rewritten on good paper by a single individual with a clear hand.

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Given that I was sitting next to a photocopy machine and had a digital camera and a hand-held tape recorder with me, all that was needed was to begin the process of reproducing these contracts. Unfortunately, the clerk in the office said she did not want me to have the contracts she had just laid out on the table. After a day's wrangling at several bureaucratic levels I was told that I could copy about five of the contracts by hand if I was willing to pay a fee. Seeing no alternative, I paid the money and my two colleagues and I went about copying as many contracts as we could. The documents I have—we copied 10 contracts in all—came from different files and are in no particular order and have irregular numbering that I cannot now resolve. They do have dates and provide enough information to determine the key components of the agreements, but there are too few contracts to fully detail the breadth of the Pingxiang Mine Bureau's land purchases.

The contracts were all written—probably with the help of a member of the literati—by the original landholders as sales to the Pingxiang County Mine Bureau and were primarily described as properties that either included coal mines or were lands adjacent to coal mines near what was to be the central mining town of Anyuan. While they contain the names of the sellers they do not provide the names of the bureau officials who agreed to the contracts. Some data indicate that these officials were subordinates of Zhang Zanchen, who was the manager of the mine; a *tongxiang* of Sheng Xuanhuai (in this case two men from Wujin County, Jiangsu Province); and a wealthy merchant with a purchased degree. I presume that most of the members of the Mine Bureau had backgrounds similar to Zhang's and were people from outside Pingxiang County whose interests and backgrounds were more securely footed in business than in imperial administration.

I subsequently compared these contracts with a collection of letters and memorials describing similar land purchases by the Pingxiang County Magistrate Gu Jiaxiang. While Mine Bureau officials were purchasing property around Anyuan for Sheng Xuanhuai, who was the Director of the Hanyang Ironworks, Sheng—who was also the Director of the Imperial Railway—deputed Magistrate Gu to purchase lands for the laying of a new railway line. These tracks were to stretch from the mines in central Pingxiang County to the county's western border. In a published collection of documents dated from 1896 to 1900, Gu provided descriptions of his purchases and included letters from landholders with their comments on the magistrate's handling of these purchase agreements.[2]

Using these two sources I put together a sketch of the overall policies of the state in land purchases for late imperial industrialization schemes. At the same time I began to see variations in these policies among government agencies. To begin with, both sources indicate that these sales were a form of forced sale akin to western notions of eminent domain or government "taking" procedures. One letter to Magistrate Gu complained that his officials were simply forcing the landholders to draw up contracts of sale on those lands they needed. At first glance, the Mine Bureau contracts appear to contradict this appearance of official stiff-arming: most of the contracts contain clauses indicating that the seller wished to sell the land simply because he or she needed the money. However, given that I found this clause on one contract written by a well-endowed landholder as well as on those with lesser holdings I suspect that this language may be little more than a bureaucratic formality. Moreover, while most Chinese land contracts were deemed conditional sales (*dian*)—that is, they contained a clause that provided the seller with an option to repurchase the land at a later date—the Pingxiang County contracts clearly state that they were to be irrevocable sales (in these contracts written as *dumai*) and that repurchase of these properties was not possible.

Not only were the landholders reluctant to sell but they also employed a surveying system that did not follow the imperial-sanctioned *mu* measurements and thus hindered easy bureaucratic acquisition. Gu wrote his superiors that whenever he tried to purchase lands from the local population the fields were usually described as being a given number of *ba* (hands) in size rather than a quantity of *mu*. To determine the conversion ratio for *ba* to *mu*, Gu and Zhang Zanchen sent officials into the countryside to investigate. These appointees found that the standard *mu* of land was about the same as 20 *ba* as calculated by local methods. It appears, based on the Mine Bureau contracts, that the officials at the mines simply accepted this measurement system and purchased

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Banking in Guangdong, 1949-1951: "Three Years to Recovery, then Ten Years of Development"

BY PERRY RITENOUR

On October 14, 1949, units of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered Guangzhou, the capitol of Guangdong Province and one of the last major urban areas to be conquered by communist forces in the long Chinese civil war. Guangzhou's citizens were less than enthusiastic about this arrival and did not turn out in large numbers to welcome their liberators. Therefore, Marshall Yeh Jianying, commander of the arriving PLA troops (Yeh's family came from this area), scheduled a new Liberation Day parade on October 21, 1949. This second parade of troops was met by 150,000 locals who lined the streets and cheered as PLA troops marched by and the new communist leaders assumed control of China's traditional "window to the West."

A new People's government in Guangdong was established in 1949 by the Military Affairs Central Commission of the PLA (the Commission) which had overall responsibility for Guangdong (and Guanxxi) province from its headquarters in Guangzhou. The Commission served as a high-level executive body which provided oversight to local government and Party officials and economic enterprises. The new regime was faced with the challenge of taking control of a province that had a long history of commercial contacts with the outside world and an established tradition of independence from the central government created by its centuries of contact with foreigners from Baghdad to London. During the previous 100 years, the British-controlled island of Hong Kong had become an entrepot and protected enclave through which western and Chinese goods passed to and from China through neighboring Guangdong. The Chinese province's capital city of Guangzhou became a natural financial center supporting Chinese trade with the West. Capital flows through private Chinese-owned banks in Guangzhou and Hong Kong greatly facilitated commercial trade between Chinese and western merchants in the two respective cities.

In one of its first actions, the Commission formed a task force to manage finance and trade in Guangdong. However, communist leaders found few incumbents remaining on the job in local government offices to carry out the task force's directives. Official government records had been stolen or destroyed by the retreating Nationalist forces. The decision facing communist authorities in 1949 was whether to liquidate Guangdong's private commercial and financial trade network with the outside world (seen by the Communists as another symbol of western capitalism in China), or to preserve and protect its value for the new People's Republic of China. Fortunately for China, Marshall Yeh Jianying and Lai Zhuanzhu, leaders on the Commission, chose the latter course, and for several critical years largely preserved the existing Guangdong economic trade infrastructure centered around local private banks while the Party pursued political and ideological control over the population of the region. Their pragmatic techniques and approaches to economic stability were captured in the popular slogan of the day: "three years of recovery, then ten years of development." This article highlights some of those unique approaches toward the banking industry in Guangdong from 1949-1951.

Stressing economic continuity and stability, the Commission issued on December 7, 1949, its seventeen-article directive for on-going operations in the local Guangdong banking community called: "The South China Privately-Owned Banking Provisional Regulations."[1] All private banks in Guangdong now came under the supervision of the People's Bank but were permitted to continue independent operations, making loans to local merchants and collecting deposits from Chinese citizens and businesses. Particular emphasis was placed on local bank support for commercial trading activity with Hong Kong and for handling incoming money remittances sent by overseas Chinese back to relatives in war-torn China. Speculative banking activities, such as stock and land purchases, were proscribed. A broad-based clause "forbidding any banking activity not specifically approved" allowed authorities to punish local banks that failed to properly participate in the new emerging socialist economy according to regulations.

In order to prevent capital flight, new banking regulations required private bank owners to maintain bank capital levels at a minimum of 600 million yuan. Other requirements specified the appropriate composition of bank assets, the maximum ratio of loans to deposits, a limitation on total loans to 50 percent of total bank income, and minimum levels and types of bank liquidity (cash and bills of exchange which represented trade financing activity). There were guidelines on the maintenance of required local bank reserves (12 percent for short-term deposits and 5 percent on term savings) to be maintained with the People's Bank in proportion to the local bank's deposits from Chinese citizens and companies. Underlying these rules was still a basic ideological distrust of local Guangdong bank owners that were seen as capitalist speculators who stole people's deposits and corrupted the economy with risky loans for securities trading and for land speculation. The "Three Anti- and Five Anti-" political campaigns in 1954-1955 heavily targeted banking staff because of their western education and exposure to western bankers and merchants. And yet the Chinese government authorities continued to follow a pragmatic policy in Guangdong for several years after 1949 in order to preserve the vital trade links through Hong Kong to the West. This critical link allowed the import of critical capital goods as well as the collection of financial capital from exports and overseas remittances after 1949. Western bankers in the years after 1949 frequently remarked that Chinese bankers in the People's Republic were often more reliable and professional in their banking practices and financial commitments with the outside world than many of their capitalist counterparts. This trade link with the West became even more vital to China during the Korean War and the subsequent American embargo against China after the War.

New banking regulations using conventional financial risk management controls strongly suggested the continued participation of former Nationalist banking officials in the post-1949 banking world in south China. After 1955, there were few new regulatory and administrative rules published on banking in the People's Republic, which made many of the original regulations emanating from Guangdong in 1949 the foundation for Chinese banking activity up to 1979. Such inertia in the socialist banking bureaucracy after 1955 might also suggest that successors to those banking professionals who remained behind in China after 1949 to help draft new banking regulations were largely junior staff members without much prior exposure to western banking practices. And yet the staff of the Bank of China in Guangdong remained highly professional and aware of western banking practices for the next 30 years and beyond, attesting to the importance which the People's government attached to maintaining professional banking standards in support of China's continued trade with the West through Guangdong to Hong Kong.

Another key challenge facing Chinese officials in 1949 was the monetary situation in Guangdong. South China's active trade with the West brought many foreign currencies into the provincial economy. Guangdong's proximity to Hong Kong and its relationship with British trading firms brought large amounts of European and American currencies into the local Guangdong economy. As the political fortunes of the Nationalist government faltered after 1945, many Chinese abandoned the Chinese gold yuan in favor of foreign currencies and precious metals (gold and silver) as a hedge against ruinous inflation and political uncertainty. Communist officials in Guangdong faced a daunting challenge in 1949 to restore popular confidence in the new Chinese currency, RMB (*renmin bi*), while also gaining control of the wealth represented by foreign currency deposits in banks and precious metals held by local citizens. The Bank of China (BOC) had long had a reputation for professionalism and financial sophistication among Chinese banks, so the People's Bank declared that the BOC (now under government control with minority non-communist shareholders) would be the only legal institution in Guangdong for holding foreign currency deposits. This action forced local Chinese banks to discontinue currency trading and speculation (a major source of income), and mandated that private foreign currency deposits in local banks be transferred to the BOC. A few local banks were still authorized to act as foreign currency dealers by the BOC but were severely restricted from trading foreign currencies outside of BOC oversight.

Each day, the BOC announced an approved opening exchange rate between the RMB and various major foreign currencies in order to soak up the supply of foreign money in Guangdong (since market forces of supply and demand for trading such currencies no longer applied to their daily exchange rates). Chinese citizens who deposited foreign currencies into BOC were only able to withdraw those funds in RMB at the BOC's daily exchange rate. Private citizens could also receive foreign currency deposit receipts or overseas remittance receipts (for monies received from overseas relatives). To encourage citizens to deposit foreign currency into BOC, the government also issued coupons in lieu of remittance receipts which made the holder eligible to buy valuable goods like bicycles, cooking oil, and other consumer products in state-run stores usually reserved for Party officials and foreign visitors.

Remittance receipts were privately bought and sold at freely negotiated prices on unofficial exchanges in Guangzhou. They were also sold to foreign banks in Hong Kong, who used them to try to speculate in RMB. But the receipts had a validity date of only 40 days from their date of issue, by which time they had to be exchanged for RMB at BOC.

Interestingly, the BOC still granted specific authority for 120 private firms in Guangdong to retain up to $46 million in existing foreign currency deposits in

Perry Ritenour

foreign banks overseas to facilitate receipt of payments from Chinese export trade. For Chinese importers who needed foreign currency to pay for the purchase of western goods, the BOC required an official import license to buy the necessary foreign exchange to pay for such goods. Any foreign currency remaining at the conclusion of the import transaction had to be returned to BOC at the original exchange rate at which it was purchased from BOC, leaving Chinese importers at risk of currency losses. Only state-run enterprises which had no profit requirements could continue to import goods under these conditions. By 1951, the RMB had successfully supplanted major foreign currencies circulating throughout Guangdong Province.

To address the widespread accumulation of precious metals throughout Guangdong, the People's government made a concerted effort to gain control of such non-monetary resources. For centuries, the people of Guangdong had used gold and silver as a medium of exchange, as well as a source of private wealth in the form of jewelry and bullion, in lieu of paper currency. Capturing this wealth and monetizing it into RMB would constitute one of the more successful efforts by the new People's government. Provisional regulations regarding the administration of gold and silver forced private citizens to turn in gold and silver to the People's Bank in exchange for RMB. No other forms of trading in these metals were authorized, and no one was permitted to transfer these metals to other parties without specific authorization. For personal jewelry, the regulations permitted citizens to hold only two ounces of gold and four ounces of silver ornamentation. Once again, however, an exception was granted to export commodity traders who traditionally received payment in such metals. Private precious metal traders were encouraged to seek other forms of employment. Merchants could continue to sell finished products made of gold and silver but had to report such activity daily to the People's Bank. Penalties for violating these provisions on precious metals were severe. Forfeiture of holdings at a discounted rate of up to 30 percent of the market value of the metals was a common practice. Smuggling of precious metals was considered financial espionage and subject to criminal prosecution. Violators could be sentenced to up to 15 years in prison. Rewards for reporting violators were used as incentives to aid in enforcement.

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Book Review:

Wang Ju. ***Jindai Shanghai mianfang ye de zuihou huihuang, 1945-1949***
(The final flourishing of the modern Shanghai cotton textile industry).
Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue yuan, 2004. 303 pp. ISBN 7-80681-395-0/K.094

BY PARKS M. COBLE

The Civil War era (1945-1949) is one of the most pivotal yet least studied of any in the history of modern China. Indeed, most Western scholarship on this period has focused on diplomatic history or on the Chinese Communist movement. Political historians have Suzanne Pepper's[1] now classic study of the period, while military historians can profit from recent studies by Steven Levine[2] and Odd Arne Westad.[3] In the field of business history, however, the bookshelf is mostly empty. And perhaps the reasons are obvious; the end of the Second World War brought turbulence and chaos to China which gave way to the Communist revolution and reorganization of China's economy under state control. The brevity and instability of the civil war period would seem to have little temptation for the business historian.

Yet this path-breaking new work in Chinese by Wang Ju would suggest that there is much to be learned. When business leaders resurfaced in China after the Japanese occupation, they did so with the hope of a new, prosperous, postwar world. They did not know that within four years Guomindang China would be in retreat to Taiwan and that their private businesses would become state enterprises by 1952. There seemed reason for optimism. Mao traveled to Chongqing to meet with Chiang Kai-shek; America dispatched General George Marshall, perhaps the most prestigious military man of his day, to aid in the talks. Peace and prosperity seemed possible, indeed likely. Wang Ju's examination of the plans and actions of China's textile industrialists during the immediate postwar period demonstrates the vitality of Chinese entrepreneurs. Their clash with the Guomindang government and the collapse of their economic plans suggest reasons why the Nationalist government lost the support of the business community, which undoubtedly contributed to victory in the civil war by the Communists. By examining the history of the cotton textile industry during this pivotal period, therefore, Wang Ju has made a major contribution not simply to business history, but to a broader understanding of the course of events in modern China.

Wang Ju graduated from Fudan University in Shanghai, following which she was affiliated with the Economics Institute of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. In 1987 she began graduate studies in France with the well-known scholar Marie Claire Bergere. The work under review is a revised, Chinese translation of her dissertation, and contains a foreword by Professor Bergere. In her preface, Wang Ju notes the central importance of the textile industry within the modern economy of China. Yet academic studies of the Republican textile industry virtually end with the Japanese invasion of 1937. Using a wide range of archival and published sources, as well as memoir literature and oral histories, Wang Ju has plunged into one of the least understood eras in modern Chinese history.

When the war ended, the Shanghai textile industry was at a standstill. Factories had been damaged both by the fighting of 1937 and by Allied bombing late in the war. Many mills had been confiscated by the Japanese and were in poor condition. Shortages of power, capital, and equipment made the start-up of production difficult. Yet within a short period production by private textile firms began to expand rapidly. Wang Ju, in fact, labels 1946-1947 a "golden age" of economic revival for China's textile industrialists. After eight years of deprivation, Chinese were eager for consumer goods, especially textiles. Ample supplies of cotton became available, including imports from the United States, India and Brazil. Prices of raw cotton stayed low for a time, relative to the market price for cotton cloth and yarn, yielding profits during the "golden age." Although railway transportation was slow to revive to prewar levels, river boat traffic recovered quickly, easing transportation in and out of Shanghai. By 1947 Chinese textile mills in

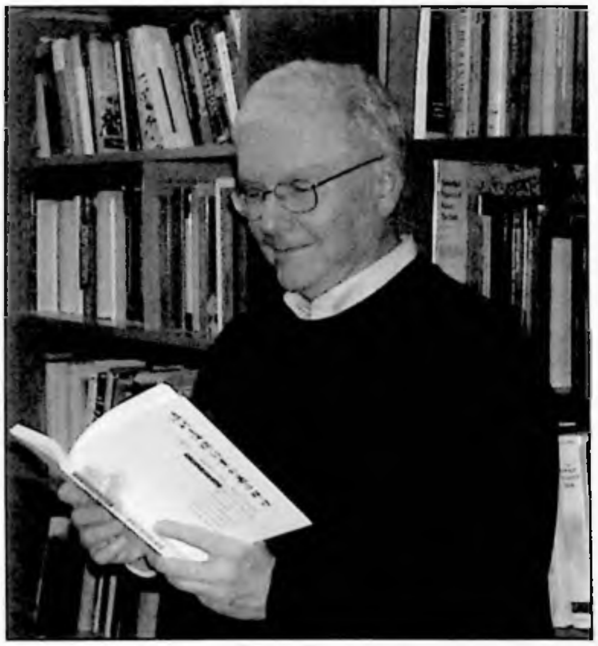
Shanghai had actually surpassed their 1936 level of yarn production.

The postwar period also changed the nature of the business environment. In prewar China, the Chinese cotton mills faced a powerful competitor in the Japanese owned mills in China. Now these were gone. Following Japan's surrender, Japanese-owned property in China was confiscated by Guomindang authorities. The only other foreign presence in prewar China, British-owned mills, played little role. The Japanese had seized these mills in December 1941, after the outbreak of the Pacific War. Negotiations were begun following Japanese surrender to return these to their British owners, but the process was slow. In effect, Chinese mill owners no longer faced the keen competition from foreign-owned mills operating in Shanghai. Moreover, Wang notes, many of the Japanese Shanghai mills were very active in southeast Asia in the prewar era. Now the Japanese were shut out of this market as well. In sum, Chinese mills quickly expanded and garnered significant profits.

Yet even in this "golden age" there were harbingers of major conflicts between the government and the private entrepreneurs. Indeed, disagreements had surfaced during the last months of the war, when Chongqing, sensing an Allied victory, began planning for the postwar period. In December 1944, states Wang, Guomindang defense authorities promulgated the "Principles for the First Period of Economic Reconstruction." This postulated that some areas of the economy would be state monopolies, including postal and telegraph services, major railways, and mines. This plan left room for private enterprises in light industry such as textiles. The immediate issue was disposition of Japanese-owned mills in the occupied areas. In prewar China, nearly half of China's textile capacity was held by Japanese companies; now these were to be confiscated as enemy property. On September 7, 1945, the Chinese mill owners wrote to T.V. Soong, then head of the Executive Yuan (and Chiang Kaishek's brother-in-law), asking the government to use these mills to compensate Chinese mill owners who had suffered extensive losses during the war from the Japanese occupation and the Allied bombing. Rong Er'ren of Rong enterprises, China's largest textile group, wrote Soong as well in October 1945, asking for Japanese mills as specific compensation for his family's losses.

In January 1946, however, Soong rejected these requests, telling a press conference that the private Chinese manufacturers did not have the capital to operate the confiscated mills and that the government was eager to get them back into production to restore China's economy and produce revenue. The government established a state-owned enterprise, the China Textile Development Company (*Zhongguo fangzhi jianshe gongsi*), headed by Shu Yunchang, a former official of the Bank of China with close ties to T.V. Soong. This company was entrusted with the old Japanese mills, operating eighteen in Shanghai, eight in Qingdao, seven in Jinan, and five in Manchuria. By 1947, the company would have almost as many spindles in operation as the Japanese had in 1936. For a time, through 1947, the economic boom sustained both the private mills and the government operation. The latter was never quite as profitable as the private firms. Too many demands, such as cloth for military needs, were placed upon it.

The "golden age" of the private textile industry came to an end in 1948, and Wang Ju attributes this to the many new control policies implemented by the Guomindang government. Faced with disastrous hyperinflation, the government tried both to control foreign exchange and to fix market prices. To deal with the foreign ex-



Parks Coble

change issue, Nanjing tried to restrict the purchase of foreign cotton. When yarn prices soared in April 1947, the government turned to the police to limit hoarding and speculation. Part of the difficulty facing the private industrialists was the frequently changing government policies. The organizations designed to control the textile industry were reorganized four times in the civil war era.

These problems reached crisis proportions in 1948, ending the boom in the textile industry. Nanjing required private mills to apply for allotments of imported cotton; the state-run China Cotton Textile Development Company received priority. Despite restrictions on foreign cotton, the domestic supply did not fill the void created by restrictions on foreign trade. Energy supplies never fully revived, forcing mills to shut down periodically for lack of power. Production by private mills began to fall in 1948. Desperate for revenue, the government increased the consumption tax on textiles in April 1948 from 7 to 10 percent. Yet hyperinflation continued to worsen. As the year progressed, more and more textile industrialists invested in Hong Kong; often evading government regulation and trading textile products for foreign exchange in order to export capital. Even the state-owned firm began to deteriorate during the year.

The final blow was the gold yuan currency reform implemented by Chiang Kaishek's son, Jiang Jingguo [Chiang Ching-kuo] who arrived in Shanghai to supervise this change in currency. In Wang Ju's view, this new "reform" was not simply a grave economic matter for the capitalists, but caused a sharp decline in morale. Jiang Jingguo undertook a ruthless program to force the capitalists to accept the fixed prices and severe restrictions on foreign exchange. Most attempted to evade the limits, and Jiang responded with arrests and intimidation. In the most famous case, Rong Hongyuan, then a key leader of the Rong group, was arrested. Fear spread among the businessmen, many of whom now began to flee China for Hong Kong or overseas. Months before the Chinese Communists arrived in Shanghai on May 25, 1949, China's textile industrialists had already moved their capital and even themselves overseas.

In her conclusion, Wang Ju argues that the Guomindang authorities alienated the textile industrialists during the course of the postwar era. When the war ended most of the businessmen were hopeful for a profitable postwar era. By 1948, despair had set in; production was declining; many looked to a future elsewhere. This brief review cannot do justice to this rich work. Wang Ju's study is essential for those working on the economy and politics of the civil war era. It demonstrates the significance of this pivotal period in understanding the history of modern China.

1. Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

2. Steven I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945-1948*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

3. Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. ❑

Banking in Guangdong
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All of these measures eventually brought Guangdong Province under the full political and economic control of the new Communist authorities by 1951, but they did not destroy the valuable economic infrastructure that supported China's historical trade links with the outside world through Hong Kong. Later political campaigns, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, brought great destruction and turmoil to overall Chinese economy. But Guangdong Province never felt the full burden of these tumultuous events because Chinese authorities continued to preserve and protect Guangdong's outlet to the West and the state banking system that inherited it. The rise of the Guangzhou Trade Fair, as well as the expansion of Guangdong's formerly private banks into Hong Kong as "sister banks" attest to this continued practice of official preferential treatment for Guangdong under communism after 1949.

[1]*Huanan qu jinrong maoyi shouce* (Hand book on finance and trade in the South China region), Guangzhou: Military Affairs Central Commission, 1949. ❑

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the land accordingly, as nearly every contract I collected describes the land in a number of *ba* rather than *mu* in size. However, Magistrate Gu was told by his superiors to force the local population to re-measure the land in official *mu*. Gu insisted that making the local landholders re-measure their fields might lead to unrest in the county, but he was rebuked by his superiors and apparently relented. Thus, when Qing officials were called upon to purchase these lands, one branch of the bureaucracy accepted local customs and purchased the land accordingly while another was told to force the county landholders to alter their methods of land configuration to fit the empire's norms. We can speculate that, as the county magistrate, Gu Jiaxiang's superiors were part of the official bureaucracy that required strict observance of imperial standards. Alternatively, the officials of the Mine Bureau, which was an ad hoc agency and more likely to be comprised of merchants rather than literati, simply made the investments as it saw fit without the need for adherence to the court's mandates.

Another topic of analysis when looking at these contracts centered on the prices paid for the land. The late Qing government was aware of the need for a policy regarding eminent domain purchases of lands and, to this end, after the Boxer Rebellion they established a policy calling for a single fixed price for all land purchases by officials. However, neither the land contracts that I have collected nor the writings found in Gu's collection indicate that a fixed price was paid for the land. For example, the contracts point to different types of properties, including bamboo groves, graves, mines, and irrigated fields, and these features likely altered the value of the properties. The contracts made by the officials of the Mine Bureau paid as little as 10 yuan per *mu* (I made the conversion from *ba* to *mu* here for the sake of analysis) but some of the properties were apparently as high as 20-40 yuan per *mu*. Magistrate Gu, however, believed that the price for some of the highest quality farmland he needed to purchase should be about 50-60 yuan per *mu* and some of the landholders argued that even that price was too low for their best fields. In one study that might help us put these numbers into perspective, Jerome Ch'en suggests that fields in the highlands of western Hunan and Hubei, and eastern Sichuan provinces in the early twentieth century were valued at rates between 6.8 yuan per *mu* for the worst lands and 120 yuan per *mu* for the best.[3] Anyone who has tried to determine with any certainty the price of goods and services using the many forms of currency being used in late imperial China knows that these calculations are only suggestive. Also, I must assume that accuracy of spatial measurements regarding field sizes was more indicative than real.

In fact, while I remain skeptical that I can determine government policies as they were enacted throughout the empire based on these few pieces of data, I would argue that these sources do tell us several things. First, the state engaged in eminent domain in the interest of industrialization projects that were part of the self-strengthening movement. Second, they forced landholders to sell their lands to deputed officials under less than desirable conditions of sale. Nevertheless, it does appear that the state was paying a price that was near or related to the true value of the land. What is significant with this data is that the county magistrate feared local unrest from these purchases far more than the Mine Bureau officials and was willing to pay landholders more money to satisfy their demands to maintain the peace. On the other hand, county magistrate Gu's superiors forced him to follow proper decorum by purchasing land using the officially sanctioned *mu* rather than the local methods of property transactions. These different actions and policies among various officials and bureaucratic bodies in the late Qing

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era point to one last issue: my recent experience in the archives shows that, even after more than 100 years of dynamic and revolutionary change, Chinese government agencies continue to work within individual parameters that may either support or hinder the needs of the people in their jurisdiction.

1. Thomas M. Buoye, *Manslaughter, Markets, and Moral Economy: Violent Disputes over Property Rights in Eighteenth-Century China*, Cambridge University Press, 2000; Philip C.C. Huang, *Code, Custom, and Legal Practice in China: the Qing and Republic Compare*, Stanford University Press, 2001; Christopher Isett, "Village Regulation of Property and the Social Basis for the Transformation of Qing Manchura," *Late Imperial China*, Vol. 25, No. 1, June 2004, pp. 124-186; Madeleine Zelin, Jonathan K. Ocko, and Robert Gardella, eds., *Contract and Property in Early Modern China*, Stanford University Press 2004.

2. Gu Jiaxiang, Chouban Pingxiang tielu gong du (Public documents on the preparation of the Pingxiang Railroad). Pingxiang: Pingxiang xian chubanshe, 1900.

3. Jerome Ch'en, *The Highlanders of Central China: A History, 1895-1937*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1992: 68. ❑

Coming Fall 2005 Special Issue on Manchuria

Yoshiki Enatsu: Japan's Land Policy in Manchuria in the Early Twentieth Century

Thomas Gottschang: Multiple Currencies and Free Banking in Early Twentieth-Century Manchuria

Patrick Shan: The City Emerged from the Northern Wilderness: Business and Harbin, 1898-1931

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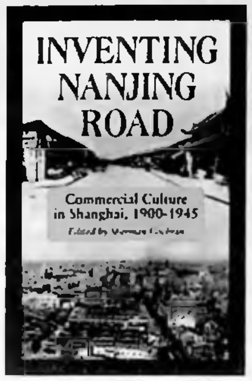

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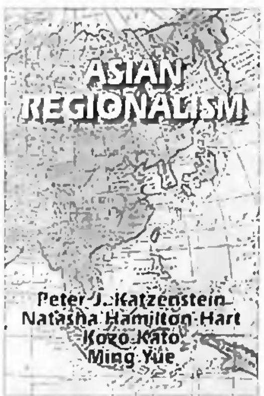

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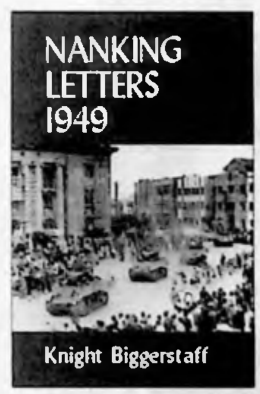

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