

China and the West

The Maritime Customs Service Archive
from the Second Historical Archives of
China, Nanjing

Part One: Inspector General's Circulars

Reels 1-62

General Editors

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The Maritime Customs Service Archive from the Second Historical Archives of China, Nanjing

Dr Robert Bickers and Dr Hans van de Ven, Editors

First published in 2004 by Primary Source Microfilm and the Second Historical Archives of China, Nanjing.

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50 Milford Road

Reading
Berkshire RG1 8LJ
United Kingdom
<http://www.gale.com/psm>

THOMSON GALE
12 Lunar Drive
Woodbridge
Connecticut 06525
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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

Primary Source Microfilm is proud to present **China and the West: The Maritime Customs Service Archive from the Second Historical Archives of China, Nanjing**. This microfilm collection draws on the rich archives of the Maritime Customs Service (MCS) from 1854, when it was established, until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The MCS was the only bureaucracy in modern China which functioned uninterrupted throughout all the upheavals between 1854 and the Communist takeover in 1949. Its records and reports give invaluable and often unique evidence of Chinese life, trade and politics through the Boxer Rebellion, the 1911 Revolution, the May Thirtieth Movement, the Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese Occupation and the Nationalist period.

The microfilm collection is accompanied by a printed guide and the first-ever electronic catalogue to the complete archive, which will open the contents of the Maritime Customs Service Archive to closer inspection, making this extraordinary historical material available to a wider public.

A special thank you is due to Dr Robert Bickers and Dr Hans van de Ven whose comprehensive knowledge and generous advice have very substantially contributed to the preparation of the collection for publication.

Justine Williams
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Primary Source Microfilm
Reading, UK

TECHNICAL NOTE

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Attention should be drawn to the nature of the printed material within the collection. This sometimes consists of documents printed or written with a variety of inks and on paper that has become severely discoloured or stained rendering the original difficult to read. Occasionally volumes have been tightly bound and this leads to text loss. Such inherent characteristics present difficulties of image and contrast which stringent tests and camera alterations cannot entirely overcome. Every effort has been made to minimise

these difficulties though there are occasional pages which have proved impossible to reproduce satisfactorily. Conscious of this we have chosen to include these pages in order to make available the complete volume.

INTRODUCTION

Maritime Customs Service Archive: Inspector General's Circulars 总税司通令

This set of microfilms draws on the rich archives of the Maritime Customs Service of China (中国海关) and collects its Circulars (通令) from 1854, when the Maritime Customs Service was established, until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Circulars were issued by the Service's head, the Inspector General (总税务司). They were confidential documents to which only senior Customs officials such as Customs Commissioners (税务司) had access. Like Imperial Edicts, they were law until explicitly superseded by a new Circular. They were the key texts of the Customs Service.

The activities of the Customs Service were wide ranging. It assessed duties on Chinese trade, established and maintained China's lighthouses, mapped China's coast and major rivers, and ran a Preventive Service that combated smuggling. It policed rivers, harbours, and railroad lines. It published not just monthly, quarterly and annual *Returns of Trade*, but also a regular series of *Aids to Navigation* and less regular reports on meteorological conditions and medical phenomena. The Service further involved itself in China's diplomacy, organised its representation at nearly 30 world fairs and exhibitions, and ran various educational establishments.

Circulars tell us how the Customs Service organised itself, discharged its routines and responded to events. More than 7,000 Circulars were issued in the course of the Customs Service's pre-1949 existence. Only some have been made public before, and then only in a strictly limited edition. Therefore, this microfilm collection is the first time that all are made public. Given the centrality of Circulars in the Customs Service and the Service's importance to China as it struggled with foreign invasion, civil warfare, modernisation, globalisation and revolution, the publication of this set of Circulars is critical to the effective exploration of the 55,000 files of the Maritime Customs Service Archive held in Nanjing at the Second Historical Archives of China. This is an invaluable new resource for the study of China and the publication of the Circulars will help historians make effective use of it.

As a foreign-staffed service, the Imperial Chinese Maritime Customs originated in the establishment at Shanghai on 12 July 1854 of a Board of Inspectors to oversee the re-establishment of trade after months of disruption caused by the Taiping rebellion. Other aims were to break up existing patterns of taxation in which personal connections had been important and to prevent countries without treaty relations with China, and hence no obligation to pay duty, from driving the British,

French and Americans from the China trade. In 1858, the Tianjin treaties extended the Shanghai system to all treaty ports. Horatio Nelson Lay was the first Inspector General (IG), but it was his successor, Robert Hart, appointed in 1863, who oversaw the development of the service until the first decade of the twentieth century. He was followed by Francis Aglen (1911-29), Frederick Maze (1929-43) and Lester Knox Little (1943-50). Acting and Officiating IGs had full authority to issue Circulars.¹

The bedrock of the Customs Service consisted of regular flows of information in tables, forms, reports and letters from Customs Stations to the Inspectorate in Peking, and of instructions from Peking to the ports. The intricate repertoire of different communications - among them Despatches (训令/申呈/详报), Semi-Official Letters (半官性函件) and Memoranda (节略) - was surmounted by the IG Circular, first issued by Hart in 1861. The Circular dealt with issues of relevance to all Customs Houses and Commissioners. Until it was withdrawn or explicitly superseded it remained in force. The corpus of IG Circulars therefore formed a working set of instructions covering all aspects of Customs work. Numbered in sequence, they were eventually issued in three series. Series 1 contained those issued between 1861-75, and these were numbered in sequence for each year. Series 2 was issued from the latter year, and numbered in one continuous sequence. At least 7,500 of them had been issued by 1949. Series 3 Circulars (Factory Products Circulars) passed on instructions about duty treatment of certain products from the Shuiwuchu (税处) (Bureau of Fiscal Affairs), to which the Customs Service was responsible from 1906, and its successor, the Guanwushu (处) (Bureau of Customs Affairs) (from 1928).

Circular 9 of 1875, announced that henceforward all Circulars would be printed and authenticated by the signature of the Statistical Secretary. About 100 Circulars were issued a year. They were reissued in bound form in batches of 200 by the Statistical Department's press about once every two or three years. These bound volumes formed the core of every Commissioner's library. They outlined the philosophy of the Service, signalled important changes in overall Customs policy or in political circumstances, introduced and regulated changes to the scope of the Service's activities, and circulated decisions about its administrative or taxation routines. Some are general and discursive in tone, while others are highly technical and specific. From 1911 onwards Semi-Official (半关性) Circulars were also issued. After 1944, a Chungking Inspectorate General Series (渝常字) was initiated to convey "instructions for general information only". This was continued until 1946 as the General Series (常字) with no change of sequence.

¹ The most prominent of these would be: Sir Robert Bredon (1908-10), A.H.F. Edwardes (1927-29), and C.H.B. Joly (1941-42).

War disrupted this system. After the onset of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, Frederick Maze maintained the Inspectorate in Shanghai's International Settlement, not occupied by the Japanese until after Pearl Harbour. The Wang Jingwei National Government sponsored by the Japanese dismissed Maze. Chiang Kaishek's National Government in response ordered C.H.B. Joly to establish the Inspectorate in Chongqing, the wartime capital, which he did on 16 December 1942. From 1942-45 two Inspector Generals - Horiuchi Kishimoto (岸本廣吉) in Shanghai, and successively Joly, Maze and Little in Chongqing - issued IG Circulars. To demonstrate the legitimacy of the Kishimoto regime (known in Chinese as the 'wei', or 'bogus') customs, the Circulars issued, starting with No.5769 on 11 December 1941 (announcing the appointment of the Japanese IG) maintained the existing sequence down to No.5918, 23 August 1945, which announced his resignation. In Chongqing, Joly began a Chungking Inspectorate Series (C.I.S., 渝字) in December 1941. In December 1945, precisely to demonstrate the *illegitimacy* of the Kishimoto customs, the Deputy Inspector General ordered the C.I.S. Circulars to be renumbered for future publication starting at No.5769. The 'bogus' Circulars were thereby removed from the record, although they were not removed from the archive and they can be found here as well.

Circulars were restricted documents. They formed part of the confidential archives of each Commissioner's office. They belonged to the Office Series of Customs publications, not to be sold, "retained privately or lent to others for perusal" (see Circular No.179 of 2 February 1882). Although confidential "several of them are intended for the information of a Commissioner's subordinates generally, and are to be dealt with as directed". However, the point was reiterated periodically that they were confidential, indeed more so than despatches (Circular No.902). Circular No.179 was quite clear about this: "unauthorised possession of copies of official documents will entail dismissal from the service". Documents leaked, of course. In 1919 Aglen noted that excerpts from Circulars were being printed in the treaty port press. He restated the 1882 injunction, and threat.

The archives of the Maritime Customs Service amount to nearly 55,000 titles. They are an unexplored resource for the study of modern China. Circulars were the texts that underpinned the Service, and all it did, from 1854 until 1949 (and beyond). Without a thorough knowledge of the Circulars, it will be difficult to develop an understanding of any depth of the Customs Service and consequently it will be difficult to make full use of the Customs Service archives themselves.

How to use the Circulars:

Reel 1 reproduces the latest index to the Circulars produced by the Customs Service itself. Although it was printed in 1936, subsequent circulars were issued with small slips for

pasting into the index. This copy has references to Circulars numbered into the 7000s. Part I of the *Index*, arranged by subject, provides the Circular number, which can then be traced to the relevant volume. Part II concerns individual and general staff matters. This is arranged following the hierarchy of the service, starting with the Inspector General, and then alphabetically by subject. The wartime Chongqing circulars can be approached through the *Index to Inspector General's Circulars, Nos 1-1012, Chungking Inspectorate Series* (Reel 2). This follows the same conventions. Reels 1 and 2 reproduce some other indexes and registers which also might be useful. Very late period circulars are less easy to trace, although each bound volume contains its own index to the circulars within.

Dr Robert Bickers
University of Bristol

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