

The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854–1949: An Introduction

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For almost a century, the Chinese Maritime Customs Service played a central role in the relationship between China and the global economy. The Customs was part of the Chinese Government, but it was led by foreigners. Technically, its role was limited to insuring the accurate assessment of Customs duties (taxes on imports and exports). However, over time, it became involved in many activities including the maintenance of harbors and lighthouses, the payment of foreign loans, the preparation of a very wide range of published reports, and the provision of technical assistance to the Chinese Government. Customs officials were often involved in diplomatic discussions and served as informal intermediaries between Chinese officials and foreign representatives.

Customs archives are uniquely valuable sources for understanding China and the Chinese economy in this period. At a time when relatively few foreigners cared to

learn Chinese, the Customs commissioners were required to be proficient. Because they had constant contact with Chinese officials, foreign diplomats, and businessmen of all nationalities, Customs commissioners were often exceptionally well informed.

To understand the materials in this database—*China from Empire to Republic: Records of the Maritime Customs Service of China (1854–1949)*, a certain amount of background will be very helpful. This essay introduces the history of the Customs Service from its origins in the 1850s to the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war in 1949.

The Origins of the Customs Service

The roots of the Customs Service lay in Shanghai in the tumultuous 1850s, a time when China was rocked by the massive Taiping rebellion and many smaller uprisings.

In 1854, a triad-connected group called the Small Swords seized control of the Chinese city of Shanghai, driving out the Chinese Customs collectors. Foreign diplomats were hopeful that the ruling Qing Dynasty would put down this rebellion, and feared that if taxes were not collected in the meantime, this might lead to the breakdown of the treaty system created at the end of the Opium War in the early 1840s. Foreign Customs inspectors were appointed to collect taxes agreed to in the treaties as a temporary measure. This worked well, and continued to operate with the approval of Qing local officials after the Small Swords uprising collapsed. Several years later, after the British and French had seized control of Canton during the Second Opium War, the Shanghai system was extended to Canton. A former British consular official and interpreter, Horatio Nelson Lay became the first Inspector General of this organization, which continued to be run under foreign auspices until the war was finally settled by the signing of the Convention of Beijing in 1860.¹

After the war, as part of an effort to establish a more cooperative relationship with the foreign powers, Qing officials in the new Zongli Yamen (Tsungli Yamen in the spelling of the day), the new foreign office created in 1861, decided to take on Inspector General H.N. Lay and his Customs Service. Over the next few years, customs houses were opened in each of the treaty ports, and the Customs reported directly to the Zongli Yamen in Beijing.

Initially uncertain about the idea, the Zongli Yamen quickly realized that the Customs Service was a valuable asset. The Customs assessed the taxes owed on imports and exports carried on foreign ships, but did not actually collect the taxes, which were instead paid to Chinese customs banks. This separation of the role of assessment and collection of customs revenues helped to minimize opportunities for corruption. The Customs Service reported actual assessments to the Zongli Yamen in Beijing, insuring that the central government had a stronger control over customs revenues than over other taxes.

But leadership was a problem. The first Inspector General (I.G.) H.N. Lay took an aggressive attitude toward his Chinese employers. In 1862, with the approval of the Zongli Yamen, he purchased a flotilla of steam gunboats for use in the war against the Taiping rebels. He hired a British

Naval Officer named Sherard Osborn to lead the flotilla, but on his return to China, it was revealed that by written agreement, Osborn would only accept orders from Lay, not from the Qing officials, a situation that was unacceptable to officials in both the provinces and Beijing. Moreover, Lay proceeded to make a series of outrageous demands for power and status within the Qing Government, and threatened to take over the collection of Customs dues. After a brief discussion with foreign diplomats, Lay was dismissed and the flotilla was returned to Britain. Lay's deputy, Robert Hart, was selected to be the new Inspector General, a role he would remain in until his death in 1911.²

The Customs Under the Leadership of Sir Robert Hart, 1863–1908

Lay's ignominious dismissal established the terms of the relationship between the Qing Government and the Inspector General. Hart was perfect for the role: he had been in Beijing for extended periods the preceding three years, and had developed good relationships with the officials in the Zongli Yamen. Within two years of his appointment, the Yamen ministers asked him to establish his headquarters in the capital permanently, one of the privileges that Lay demanded. Hart built an efficient organization that was respected by both Chinese and foreigners. However, he understood, first and foremost, that he was an employee of the government of China. He was always sensitive to the concerns of his Zongli Yamen overseers. He was similarly solicitous of powerful officials like Li Hongzhang. In perhaps his most famous instruction to the Customs organization, he declared, "It is to be distinctly and constantly kept in mind that the Inspectorate of [the] Customs is a Chinese, and not a foreign Service, and as such, it is the duty of each of its members to conduct himself towards Chinese, people as well as officials, in such a way as to avoid all cause of offence and ill-feeling."

¹ On the background to the Customs, see John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast; the Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842–1854*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953). On Lay, see Jack Gerson, *Horatio Nelson Lay and Sino-British Relations, 1854–1864*. (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1972).

The only comprehensive treatment of the history of the Maritime Customs is Hans J. van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

² On this episode, see Richard S. Horowitz, "Mandarins and Customs Inspectors: Western Imperialism in Nineteenth Century China Reconsidered." *Papers on Chinese History* 7 (January 1998): 41–57.

Hart's consistent message to the foreign officials in the Inspectorate was that while they could and should suggest areas of modernization and improvement, they must respect the authority of the Qing officials.³

Hart was an able institution builder, but his Customs was a study in contrasts. With a carefully structured hierarchical organization, functionally defined roles, and published rules, it was in many ways a classic administrative bureaucracy. There were customs houses in every treaty port, a headquarters in Beijing, and a London office. In Shanghai, in addition to the customs house, Hart created a statistical department, with an in-house printing and publication establishment. The Customs published extensive reports, mostly on commerce and taxation, but on other areas as well, including medical reports and weather reports, and numerous reports relating to the activities of the Customs Service. The Inspector General's circulars, found in this database, embodied the rules and standards that Hart and his successors as the IG expected all customs staff to follow. Through these documents, he also sought to develop a culture of professionalism, integrity, and loyalty to the organization. This institutional framework was perpetuated by subsequent Inspectors General.

Hart, who came from a middle-class protestant family from Northern Ireland, and who had come to China to serve in the British consular service, tended to recruit men like himself: educated, able, and ambitious men looking for opportunities they were unlikely to find at home. Realizing that he couldn't depend on finding quality foreign candidates in China, Hart began to recruit young men in Europe and the United States. The London Office of the Customs Service developed an examination to weed out unsuitable applicants. While most of the Customs officers were British, Hart took care to encourage other foreign nationals to apply, and promoted many to prominent roles, to ensure that the Customs was not seen as being too closely aligned with British interests. Chinese language training began on arrival in China. Some mastery in spoken and written Chinese was expected for retention and promotion, and higher levels of proficiency were encouraged.⁴

While much of this fits the patterns of modern civil service organization, the structure of the Customs Service was

extraordinary. Hart gave himself essentially unfettered power—while he as Inspector General reported to the Zongli Yamen, everyone else in the customs reported to him. He made all decisions about promotions and transfer. In the eyes of his subordinates, he was prone to play favorites, and showed an infuriating inclination to nepotism. He recruited his brother James Hart, and his brother-in-law, Robert Bredon, into the service and rapidly promoted them to advanced positions, and at different times suggested both as possible successors. Francis Aglen, Hart's eventual successor, was the son of a friend of Hart's from Ireland. Another future Inspector General, whose rapid ascent infuriated other Customs officers in the 1880s and 1890s was Hart's nephew, Frederick Maze.⁵

Nevertheless, in many respects, the decades from 1863 to 1895 represented a high point in the history of the Customs. Qing Government officials looked upon Hart and many of the senior customs officers as dependable advisors. At a time when few Chinese had high-level skills in Western languages, or any familiarity with Western customs and practices, Hart's Customs provided badly needed linguistic and technical assistance. Customs officers accompanied Qing missions abroad, including investigations of the coolie traffic in Peru and Cuba, and organized Qing exhibits at world fairs. Hart made a number of diplomatic interventions that helped resolve crises, and was widely considered to be the most influential foreigner in China. The head of the London Office of the Service, James Duncan Campbell, at times functioned as an informal conduit on diplomatic and financial issues.

³ On Hart's relationship with the Zongli Yamen, see Richard Horowitz, "Politics, Power and the Chinese Maritime Customs: The Qing Restoration and the Ascent of Robert Hart." *Modern Asian Studies* 40, no. 3 (July 2006): 549–81. The quote is from Hart's famous Circular No. 8 of 1864. Two published volumes of Hart's diaries are extremely insightful. Katherine Frost Bruner, John King Fairbank, and Richard J. Smith, eds. *Entering China's Service: Robert Hart's Journals, 1854–1863*. (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1986), and Richard J. Smith, John King Fairbank, and Katherine Frost Bruner eds., *Robert Hart and China's Early Modernization: His Journals, 1863–1866*. (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1991).

⁴ Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, ch. 2. See also Stanley Fowler Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*. (Belfast: Published for the Queen's University by W. Mullan, 1950), a detailed and admiring account of Hart's management of the Customs in this period.

⁵ Richard S. Horowitz, "Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution: Crisis and Transition in an Imperial Institution, 1895–1911." *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36.2(2008): 283–5.

Moreover, revenues from the Customs financed much of the Qing's self-strengthening effort. Customs revenues were also used to guarantee foreign loans, which were limited in size and used judiciously, for example, to support Zuo Zongtang's campaign to reconquer Xinjiang from the Muslim rebels.

The Customs reached a point of transition between the end of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and the 1911 revolution. First and foremost, the Sino-Japanese war and the Boxer Rebellion ended in disaster for the Qing Government, which was forced to seek large foreign loans to pay for indemnities. These debts were secured against Customs revenues. This meant that foreign governments' interest in China and their influence in the Customs Service were rising. Second, in this period, the scope of activities for the Customs expanded, including the development of a Chinese postal service, and later taking over the collection of "Native Customs" duties charged on Chinese shipping. These expansions of administrative authority further stressed the already strained resources of the Customs Service.⁶ Third, the Boxer War in 1900 provoked a crisis in the Customs, when Hart and Deputy I.G. Robert Bredon were among the foreigners besieged in the Beijing legations. While both survived, the customs archives in Beijing were destroyed. During the siege, when it was assumed that Hart was dead, there was wild politicking over control of the service. Fourth, Hart was aging and in declining health. Among Customs officers, there were deep frustrations with his management of the organization, and growing concerns about whether he was up to the job. The questions of who would be his replacement became a subject of widespread gossip and speculation. Foreign diplomats began to pressure the Qing Government on the issue. The British Minister in Beijing extracted a commitment that the next IG would be a Briton, and identified preferred candidates. Hart, unhappy with all of this, actively undermined potential successors.

The relationship with the Chinese Government was changing, as well. In the aftermath of the terrible humiliations by foreign powers, nationalism in China was on the rise, and critics were increasingly suspicious of the role of the Customs. Qing officials expressed dissatisfaction that after 40 years, Hart had made no serious effort to integrate Chinese into the "indoor staff," the organization's managerial elite. In 1906, in the midst

of a major reorganization of the government in Beijing, the Customs, which since its inception had reported to the Zongli Yamen (renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the Boxer Rebellion), was shifted to a new agency, the Bureau of Revenue (*shuiwuchu*). While ostensibly this was simply about administrative rationalization, it was clearly a political move aimed at diminishing the influence of the Customs. When foreign diplomats protested this change, the government held firm. Hart wisely kept quiet, and the transition was relatively seamless.⁷

Hart went on leave in 1908, never to return. His Deputy, Robert Bredon, served briefly as an officiating Inspector General. In 1910, the Bureau of Revenue appointed Francis Aglen, a Briton, Hart's protégé, as Officiating Inspector General, and a year later, he was promoted to Acting Inspector General pending Hart's formal retirement. Hart died in September 1911, and Aglen became the I.G.⁸

The Customs as a Foreign Imperial Instrument

On October 10, 1911, less than a month after Hart's death, an uprising in Wuchang initiated the overthrow of the Qing empire. The revolution posed an immediate challenge to the Customs. Many of the customs houses were in treaty ports in provinces that had declared independence, which posed an immediate dilemma: to whom should the Customs report? At the same time, China's debts to foreign entities were guaranteed against the customs revenues. As the crisis progressed, Aglen, supported by a now desperate Beijing Government, worked out an agreement with the foreign representatives. The Customs Service would continue to function as a unified organization, irrespective of the political situation.

⁶ Weipin Tsai, "The Qing Empire's Last Flowering: The Expansion of China's Post Office at the Turn of the Twentieth Century" *Modern Asian Studies* 49.3 (2015): 895–930; Weipin Tsai, "The Inspector General's Last Prize: The Chinese Native Customs Service" *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36.2 (2008): 243–258.

⁷ The preceding two paragraphs summarize Horowitz, "Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution: Crisis and Transition in an Imperial Institution, 1895–1911."

⁸ For a view of this period sympathetic to Hart, see Wright, *Hart*, chs. 22–24. Horowitz, "Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution," offers a contrasting approach.

Moreover, it now took over the collection of customs revenues, and the funds were now held and distributed for the repayment of foreign debts.⁹ The customs, while still technically part of the Chinese Government, was now primarily functioning as a debt collector for foreign financial interests.

The revolution ended quickly, with the Qing emperor's abdication in the Spring of 1912, but the government of the early Republic was persistently unstable. Yuan Shikai, the Qing official who had negotiated the abdication, became the first president. Following a national election, however, Yuan launched a coup in 1913 against the elected parliament of Song Jiaoren and the Nationalist Party, the successor to the Revolutionary Alliance and the victor in the 1912 election. Yuan consolidated power into a dictatorship. Aglen became a strong supporter of Yuan Shikai, and worked to assist him by providing transitional financing to support his government.

In 1915, Yuan made a disastrous mistake in attempting to make himself emperor. Even his allies in the Northern (Beiyang) Army supporters rebelled, and with his authority collapsing, Yuan died suddenly in June 1916. For the next decade, while a central government existed in Beijing in name, in reality it could barely extend authority to the provinces. Nevertheless, following the pattern set during the revolution, Aglen continued to report to the Beijing Government. He made sure that the Customs was financially useful for the governing authority there, but through the warlord era (1916–1928), the primary focus of the activities of the Customs was the servicing of Chinese government debt.

In the early republic, under Francis Aglen, the Customs had moved markedly away from the framework that Hart had set up. Hart viewed the organization as a Chinese one and he resented growing efforts by imperial powers to influence the customs after 1895. But under Aglen, the shifting role of the Customs was obvious. He wrote that the service had gone through three stages: "At first it was a purely Chinese institution," but from 1895 on, "the loans came and we became a foreign interest with the Chinese Government's interest still predominant." However, indemnities, the direct collection of taxes, and the breakdown of central control had led to further changes. The Customs, wrote Aglen, "is now an *imperium in imperio*

[a sovereign organization within a government] practically independent in matters of government finance but resting in the last resort not on the Government but on the foreign powers."¹⁰

Aglen did confront some of the problems that the Customs faced. He raised salaries for indoor staff and withheld more funds to upgrade maintenance and facilities. While he was adamantly opposed to efforts that would unionize Customs staff, he did eventually respond to longstanding demands for a proper pension system. Yet he showed little interest in Chinese criticisms of the Customs. Far from responding to the criticisms that Hart had failed to train Chinese customs employees, Aglen elected not to recruit or promote Chinese to positions of authority. Where Hart in the 1860s and 1870s could plausibly argue that there were not sufficient Chinese with the necessary language skills or education, by the 1910s, this was simply not true. Likewise, the Customs continued to employ large numbers of foreign blue-collar employees in the "outdoor staff." The lines Aglen drew were explicitly racial and national; essentially supporting the claim that Chinese lacked the necessary skills or character to be Customs agents.¹¹

By the mid-1920s, it was apparent that the Customs Service was on a collision course with rising nationalistic fervor in China. At the same time, the rise of the Guomindang (GMD, Nationalist Party) presented a new threat. In the early 1920s, Sun Yat-sen, while organizing the party and its army in Canton, pressed hard for a share of the customs revenues, in the same way as the previous provincial government had received them. The foreign powers, with tacit support from the Customs, resisted, but beginning in 1926, led by the new leader Chiang Kai-shek, the GMD began the process of military reunification of China. Surprisingly, it was the Beijing Government that unceremoniously fired Aglen in 1927.

⁹ Stanley Fowler Wright, *The collection and disposal of the maritime and native customs revenue since the Revolution of 1911: with an account of the loan services administered by the Inspector General of Customs*. Second Edition (Shanghai: Statistical Dept. of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1927), 1–24.

¹⁰ Cited in van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, 172.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 186–195.

The Customs under Sir Frederick Maze

It would take two years before Aglen's replacement was appointed. By this time, the GMD had gained control over most of China proper, and had established its capital at Nanjing. In 1929, the new government decided to bypass Acting Inspector General Arthur Edwardes, Aglen's hand-picked successor and the choice of the Foreign Office, and ignore Japanese pressure to appoint Japanese Customs Commissioner Hirokichi Kishimoto. Instead, they selected Sir Frederick Maze, a Briton, a senior member of the service, and Hart's nephew. Where Edwardes as Canton Commissioner had gotten along poorly with the GMD, Maze had been more flexible, and had established good relations with GMD officials in a similar role in Shanghai. When British diplomats pressed Maze to withdraw from consideration, he refused. Among Britons, Maze's appointment was deeply controversial, and after his appointment, Maze was shunned by some in the foreign community, who believed that the new IG had put personal ambition ahead of principle.¹²

In truth, though, the GMD was simply reasserting the government's authority over an agency that was legally supposed to be a part of the Chinese government. By any standards, the demands of the GMD Government for a responsive customs agency and the promotion of more Chinese Customs officers to key indoor staff positions were perfectly reasonable. The proponents of Edwardes embodied what critics called the "Shanghai mind," Britons who were fighting tooth and nail to preserve foreign privilege in China. But this ignored two realities: the rising tide of Chinese nationalism, which sought to undo foreign privilege, and a weakened post-Great War Britain, which no longer had the capacity or the desire to project power in Asia as it had a few decades earlier. In truth, Japan had supplanted Britain as the major imperial power in China.

Maze looked to his uncle for a model of a Customs Service that understood itself to be a Chinese agency. He actively promoted the myth of Hart as a great friend of China, by supporting historians within the Customs, notably Stanley Wright. His publication projects included a multivolume documentary history of the service. As historian Robert Bickers has pointed out, he also assiduously associated himself with it, and carefully pruned his archives to fit this

view.¹³ Therefore, what makes the archival material in this database particularly valuable is that these records are not the products of the editorial choices made under Maze's influence.

Maze worked closely with the GMD, providing an important source of revenue for Chiang Kai-shek's perpetually resource-starved regime. He moved the Customs headquarters from Beijing to Shanghai (interestingly *not* the GMD capital) and worked well with T.V. Soong, Chiang's brother-in-law and the key financial official in the GMD Government. He was also responsive to pressures to promote qualified Chinese officials to positions of authority. On the other hand, in places where local militarists controlled the territory in which a customs house was located, he was quite willing to make deals in which once foreign debts were paid, the remainder was turned over to local authorities.

The War Years

In July 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China. Throughout his career, Maze was a man of considerable moral flexibility, willing to deal with political forces in order to maintain his own authority, and maintain the Customs Service. In this situation, however, his lack of backbone was a disaster. As the war between Japan and China progressed in 1937 and 1938, he kept the Customs running even in occupied areas. He ignored orders to move his headquarters to the wartime capital Chongqing, and instead continued to lead the Customs from occupied Shanghai. It was only after Pearl Harbor that the puppet Wang Jingwei regime sacked Maze, and appointed Hirokichi Kishimoto as Inspector General.

¹² Donna Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854–1949*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2006): 86–98, and van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, 211–216.

¹³ Robert Bickers, "Purloined Letters: History and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service." *Modern Asian Studies* 40, no. 3 (July 2006): 691–723.

Maze's motives were several: he was committed to the role of the Customs paying bondholders; he wished to maintain the integrity of a single Customs Service and avoid having it divided up regionally, at the same time protecting the many Customs men in occupied China from being accused of collaboration. But this required major compromises, such as acceding to Japanese demands that he appoint a Japanese Customs commissioner in Shanghai. Remarkably, considering the course of events, he also made no contingency plans for a move to Chongqing in the event of an expansion of the war. When the inevitable happened, Maze and other British and allied nationals in the Customs were dismissed and interned. Maze was lucky to be exchanged in 1942, and astonishingly made his way to Chongqing in an effort to reclaim his position. He was curtly dismissed.¹⁴

From late 1941 to the end of the war in 1945, there were two Maritime Customs services. In areas occupied by the Japanese, Hirokichi Kishimoto, a senior customs official of long standing, led the Customs. While Kishimoto tried to support existing Japanese and Chinese customs officials, other nationals were purged and interned. Numerous additional Japanese appointments were necessary. In areas controlled by the GMD, the remains of the Customs staff were reassembled under the leadership of a new American Inspector General, L.K. Little and his deputy IG, Ding Guitang (Ting Kwei-tang), the first Chinese to assume a leadership role in the organization. The Customs, largely sealed off from the major ports, was made responsible for overseeing an emergency excise tax.

When Japan surrendered in 1945, the GMD, with American support, rushed forces in to reoccupy the coastal ports. Little and Ding hurried to reestablish the customs system. By now the foreign-manned Customs was an anachronism. The major elements of the unequal treaties were gone: China had reestablished control of its tariffs, free of foreign interference from the end of the 1920s. Extraterritoriality had been relinquished by the Americans and the British during the Second World War, and was taken from the Japanese at war's end. The government had likewise reasserted administrative control over foreign concessions in the treaty ports. Unlike the British who thought that having a Briton as Inspector General was important to sustaining their influence in China, the Americans had

little interest in the Customs, and gave L.K. Little limited support. In the chaos, Ding Guitang, Little's deputy, was arguably the more important figure.

As the Chinese civil war progressed, dogged by inflation and corruption, the GMD collapsed with shocking speed. Underfunded and badly underpaid, the Customs, long known for being a clean and well organized administrative unit, was dogged by allegations of corruption. Little tried to make contingency plans, determining that if ordered, he would move to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek's government, but also planning for the continuity of Customs administration on the mainland. Little moved to Taiwan in 1949 and finally resigned in 1950. Chinese officers of the Customs Service would succeed him. Meanwhile, Ding Guitang reached out to the communists in 1949, and encouraged by Zhou Enlai that they would be allowed to stay in place after the Communist victory, he would continue to serve in the Customs for a time after the revolution.¹⁵

Why Research the Chinese Maritime Customs?

In concluding this brief account of the political history of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, it is worth reflecting why the Customs was an important institution, and why using the customs archives is rewarding, and what are the research topics that can benefit from this primary source database.

First, as many scholars have emphasized, the politics around the Customs leadership was a kind of barometer for the relationship between the foreign imperial powers and China. For Britain especially, the involvement of British nationals in the Customs was a way to influence China, and Japan attempted something similar in the 1930s and 1940s. By the same token, many of the dramas of Chinese nationalism and resistance were played out in the politics surrounding the Customs.

¹⁴ Robert Bickers, "The Chinese Maritime Customs at War, 1941–45." *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 36, no. 2 (June 2008): 295–311. For a contrasting view, see van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, 260–286.

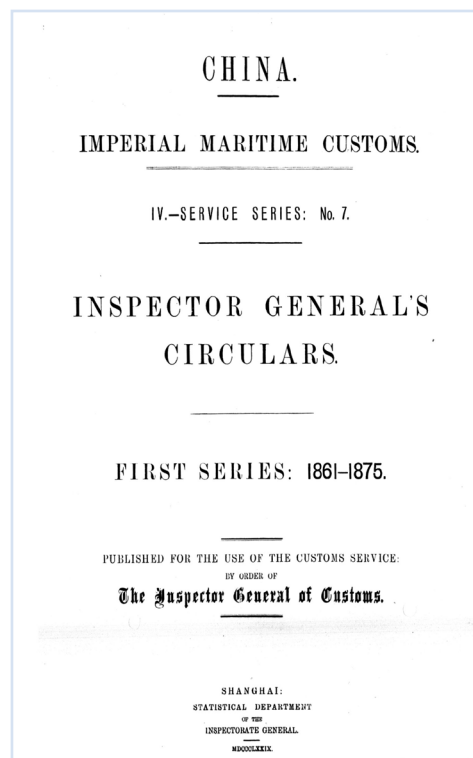
¹⁵ van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, 296–301.

Second, a far less studied area to date is that the Customs served as a kind of interface between the global economy and China throughout the century of its existence. This included trade, and, in the guise of foreign loans and bond issues that were guaranteed against Customs revenues, the world of finance. Customs publications and confidential reports offer a rich treasure trove of data for exploring China's economic history.

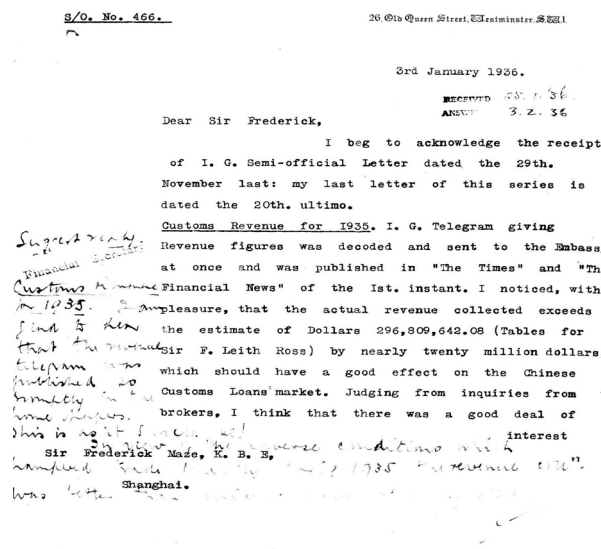
Third, the Customs introduced many modern administrative methods to China. To take a particularly important example, the Customs, as Andrea Breard has argued, introduced the modern practices of collection and publication of statistics. In other areas as well, from the relatively minor, like the introduction of the typewriter, to the management of a system of lighthouses that facilitated international trade, the Customs brought to China global practices that facilitated economic integration.¹⁶

Fourth, Customs commissioners were acute observers of Chinese politics with access to both Chinese officials and foreign representatives, and by the twentieth century they were located in treaty ports and trading stations through much of the country. Hart and his successors recognized early on the importance of keeping track of political developments in China. The semi-official letters that Customs commissioners were expected to write every two weeks are outstanding sources of information on provincial and local politics around the treaty ports.

Finally, Customs sources offer invaluable information on the social history of foreigners in China. The Customs Service employed a wide range of foreign employees, from highly trained professional staff to boatswains and tidewaiters. We can learn much about their lives, their economic situations, and their worldviews from the rich resources of Customs archives.



Inspector General's Circulars, Vol. 1, First Series. 1861-1875. Inspector General's Circulars: Official Circulars Classmark: 679 (1); Call number: 26890. The Second Historical Archives of China.



Letters to and from Inspector General, Semi-official. 1936-1937. London Office Files: Semi-Official Correspondence Classmark: 679 (1); Call number: 31848. The Second Historical Archives of China.

¹⁶ Andrea Eberhard-Bréard. "Robert Hart and China's Statistical Revolution." *Modern Asian Studies* 40, no. 3 (July 2006): 605-629; Robert Bickers, "Infrastructural Globalization: Lighting the China Coast, 1860s-1930s" *The Historical Journal* 56.2(2013): 431-58.